

Cathedral-Basilica of St. Louis, King of France

proudly presents

Thierry Escaich, organ

The Art of Improvisation

Sunday, May 13, 2012, 6 pm

St. Louis Cathedral

Jackson Square

THIERRY ESCAICH

The internationally acclaimed composer, organist and improviser Thierry Escaich plays a prominent role in contemporary music. Born in 1965, Mr. Escaich received enthusiastic recognition in 1990 for his early compositions, such as the saxophone concerto *Le Chant des ténèbres* (*The Song of Darkness*), and *Ad ultimas laudes* for mixed choir. In both 2003 and 2006 he was the recipient of the Victoires de la Musique *Composer of the Year* award. Today, his work includes a hundred pieces known for their rejection of sterile experimentation, their hedonistic echo and their rhythmical fever. His music is internationally acknowledged by soloists such as organist Olivier Latry, the young French pianists Bertrand Chamayou and Éric Le Sage, the Ludwig String Quartet, violinist Emmanuel Pahud. His orchestral works have been performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Berlin Konzerthaus, and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France.

Composing largely for organ (solo pieces, chamber music, two concertos, *La Barque Solitaire* for organ and orchestra), Thierry Escaich is always investigating new universes of sound. His style ranges from the intimacy of *Choral's Dream* (2003) for piano and organ and *Scènes de bal* for string quartet to vast frescos such as the *Chaconne* (2000) and *Vertiges de la croix* (2004) for orchestra, *Les Nuits hallucinées* (*The Hallucinated Nights*) for mezzo-soprano and orchestra (2008), and *Le Dernier Évangile* (*The Last Gospel*), an oratorio for double choir, organ and orchestra (1999). The New York City Ballet him to compose the score for Benjamin Millepied's ballet *Why am I not where you are*.

Thierry Escaich has held the position of Professor of Composition and Improvisation at the Paris Conservatoire since 1992, where he has been awarded eight first prizes as a student. Since 1997 he has also been the organist for the St-Étienne-du-Mont church in Paris, succeeding Maurice Duruflé. He tours internationally as a concert organist, acclaimed everywhere for combining classic repertoire with his own compositions and improvisations. Recently he has appeared in Tokyo, New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Toronto, Berlin, Amsterdam, Birmingham, Budapest, Seville, and numerous French and international music festivals.

A former Composer in Residence with the Orchestre National de Lille, the Orchestre de Bretagne, and the Orchestre National de Lyon, he is now associate composer in residence of Ensemble orchestral de Paris. His passion for cinema has led him to improvise on the piano and the organ, and to compose accompaniments for silent films such as Frank Borzage's *L'Heure suprême*, commissioned by the Louvre in 1999.

His numerous recordings speak for themselves and have received numerous awards. He has recently distinguished himself as an organist with *Organ Spectacular* (concert improvisations, 2008, Universal) and *Tanz-Fantasie*, organ and trumpet with Éric Aubier (2009, Indésens), and as a composer with recordings of *Lettres mêlées* (Trio Wanderer, 2009, Universal) and *Exultet* (Sequenza 9.3, 2006, Universal).

Program

- Concerto in F major Op. 4 No. 5
Larghetto
Allegro
Alla Siciliana
Presto
George Frederick Händel
(1685-1759)
- Improvisation: Variations on a Lutheran Chorale theme
- Choral No 3 in A minor
César Franck
(1822-1890)
- Improvisation: Passacaglia and fugue improvised on a submitted theme
- Final from *Symphonie No 4, Op 32*
Louis Vierne
(1870-1937)
- Trois Poèmes Pour Orgue
1. Eaux natales
2. Le Masque
3. Vers l'Espérance
Thierry Escaich
(b. 1965)
- Verset sur la fête de la dédicace
Olivier Messiaen
(1908-1992)
- Improvisation on a submitted theme

The
Music Program
Of the
Cathedral-Basilica of
St. Louis, King of France

The Cathedral-Basilica of St. Louis, King of France, is home to one of the oldest continually operating music programs in the United States. Dating from the establishment of the parish in 1720, it has historically fostered great music. Among the earliest musicians was François Saucier, the great-grandson of Charles Saucier who was organist of St. Eustache in Paris a century earlier. When Spain began to rule the colony of Louisiana in 1768, Spanish musical traditions were brought to the Cathedral. It is notable that the first known composer to work in Louisiana, Vicente Llorca (c. 1750-1803), was brought to the cathedral in 1781 to compose music in the “Spanish style” by the Spanish Governor Bernardo de Gálvez (1746-1786).

In the first half of the nineteenth-century a series of distinguished musicians worked in the cathedral. Among these were Emile Johns (c. 1798-1860), who gave the first U.S. performance of a Beethoven piano concerto in New Orleans and to whom Frederic Chopin (1810-1849) dedicated his Opus 7 Mazurkas. Johns is also credited as being the first music publisher in New Orleans. The Spaniard Guillermo Curto (1805-1887), who had also achieved distinction in France, began his association with the Cathedral in 1834. While his name disappeared from the Cathedral rosters in 1841, he did write a special mass for the inauguration of the extensively renovated cathedral held on December 7, 1852. Georg Schmitt (1821-1900) was associated with the Cathedral from 1848 to 1850. During his tenure (1848-1849), he oversaw between the construction of a three manual organ undertaken by organ builder Matthias Schwab of Cincinnati. He departed New Orleans in 1850 to assume the post of Titular Organist of St. Sulpice in Paris. His 1857 publication, *Le musée de l'organiste (The Organists' Museum)* included works by him and his contemporaries, such as César Franck (1822-1890) and Camille Saint-Saens (1835-1921).

Also during the 19th-century, Ernest Guiraud (1837-1892) and Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869) were baptized in the St. Louis Cathedral and raised in the parish. Guiraud achieved fame in France, not only as a composer, but also as the teacher of composers such as Claude Debussy (1862-1918) and Paul Dukas (1865-1935). Gottschalk was the first concert pianist to enjoy a multi-continent career. As a composer, Gottschalk celebrated the tropical origins of New Orleans in his own musical compositions.

In the 20th-century, two notable musical figures were associated with the music program. The composer Dr. Miguel Bernal Jiménez (1910-1956), a graduate of the Pontificio Istituto di Musica Sacra in Rome, served as acting organist/choir director in the early 1950s. Dr. Elise M. Cambon (1917-2007), a disciple of the great Bach interpreter Helmut Walcha (1907-1991) served as music director for more than 60 years. In 2003, she commissioned and donated a new organ built by the Holtkamp Organ Company (2003). The organ is used for liturgical celebrations and in recitals given by world renowned organist. Upon death, she established the Elise M. Cambon Memorial Trust for the benefit of the Cathedral's music program.

In 2009, a Young Artist in Residence program was established in conjunction with the Paris Conservatory. Designed for students and recent graduates of the famed conservatory, these young organ virtuosi spend 6 months in residence enriching the liturgical celebrations and performing recitals.