Long Biography

LOUISE BESSETTE

Pianist

January 1986 marked a turning point in the career of Louise Bessette. Since winning the First Prize at the Concours International de Musique Contemporaine in Saint-Germain-en-Laye (France), she has gone on to become recognized as a leading light in the interpretation of twentieth-century music. Most notably, she has added to her list of accomplishments both the First Prize and the Special Prize for Piano at the Rotterdam 1989 International Gaudeamus Competition for Contemporary Music, and the 1991 Flandre-Québec Award in recognition of her contribution to contemporary music. The Conseil Québécois de la Musique awarded her the Prix Opus 1996-1997 in the category "conductor or soloist of the year" for her recital devoted to the *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* by Olivier Messiaen. An exceedingly appealing performer, Louise Bessette has made a personal hallmark of offering inspired, energetic interpretations of the finest in original music, whether in recital or as a soloist with orchestras or chamber formations.

Louise Bessette is seen regularly in concert halls throughout all of Europe, North and Central America. She has performed as soloist with conductor Pascal Verrot and the Orchestre National de Lyon, Diego Masson and Mauricio Kagel, both with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio-France, Michel Swierczewski and the Århus Symphony Orchestra (Denmark), Agnieszka Duczmal and the Amadeus Chamber Orchestra(Poznan, Poland), Linda Bouchard and the National Arts Centre Orchestra (Ottawa), Charles Bruck and the Orchestre symphonique de Québec, Lorraine Vaillancourt and the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne (Montréal), Raffi Armenian and the Kitchener-Waterloo (Ontario) Symphony, Charles Dutoit and the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and Gerard Schwarz and the New York Chamber Symphony.

Her eclectic repertoire has earned Louise Bessette numerous recital invitations at major music festivals, including the Festival de Musique Française de Laon (France), the Radio-France Festival Présences, the Festival Musica in Strasbourg (France), the Festival 38e Rugissants in Grenoble (France), the Festival Tivoli in Copenhagen, the Numus Festival in Århus, the Huddersfield (U.K.) Contemporary Music Festival, the Festival Nieuwe Muziek in Middelburg (Netherlands), the Festival International de Lanaudière (Québec) and the Festival International du Domaine Forget (Québec). Also to her credit are performances at the World Music Days, in Warsaw in 1992 and Mexico City in 1993.

Louise Bessette has made six recordings solo and an additional ten recordings in the company of other artists. In particular, her most recent solo CD *Tango Diablo!,* produced by her own label Sept Jardins, founded in 2003, and her double solo album for Atma Classique features her highly acclaimed performance of *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* by Messiaen. As well, on chamber music recordings, she has joined forces with such outstanding artists as Marc-André Hamelin, the Quatuor Alcan, and the London-based Arditti Quartet. As proof of her versatility, she recorded *Rhythm 'n flute,* in collaboration with flautist Lise Daoust; in addition to works by Joplin, Bartók-Arma, Muczynski, this CD compilation includes pieces drawn from Latin-American folklore and a sonata specially composed for the duo by jazzwoman Lorraine Desmarais. In Canada, Louise Bessettehas recorded with SNE, CBC Records, Doberman-Yppan, Analekta, Atma Classique, Riche Lieu and Fonovox, in France for the Disques Montaigne and Salabert/Actuels labels, and in United States for Mode Records.

Composers from all over the world send Louise Bessette their works, while others have created pieces especially for her, including Canadians Serge Provost, André Villeneuve, Raoul Sosa and Serge Arcuri, and French composers Philippe

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Boivin, Bruno Ducol, Jacques Lejeune et Claude Ballif.

Distinctions by music juries and the press have accompanied Louise Bessette throughout her career. In addition to the above-mentioned prizes, she also took top honours in the Eckhardt-Gramatté Canadian Music Competition in 1981. The Montréal daily La Presse named her Personality of the Week in February 1986. In 1989, the Montréal Salon de la Femme named her Woman of the Year in the Arts category. In October 2001, she was received as a Member of the Order of Canada and appointed, in June 2005, Officier of the Ordre national du Québec. The critics have commended her playing with unreserved enthusiasm. Writing for the Journal de Genève, Yves Allaz commented: "In Louise Bessette, Messiaen has found his most inspired modern-day interpreter, undoubtedly for many years to come." Reporting on a concert she gave in London's Purcell Room, Malcolm Hayes, critic for The Musical Times (London), wrote: "Her programme was striking [...] the sight of the captivatingly elegant Louise Bessette rampaging happily through Cowell's *Exultation and Tiger* was nothing if not appealing, and she responded to the glittering splendours of Olivier Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* with playing of genuine grandeur. All this was delivered faultlessly from memory and with astonishing reserves of controlled, relaxed virtuosity."

Born in Montréal, Louise Bessette began studying piano at the age of five. Admitted to the Montréal Conservatory in 1971, she studied with Georges Savaria and Raoul Sosa. She earned five first prizes, notably a First Prize in Chamber Music in 1979, and a First Prize for Piano in 1980. She subsequently perfected her skills with Eugene List in New York. In 1982, she set her sights on Paris, where her masters were Yvonne Loriod, Claude Helffer, Jay Gottlieb and Dominique Merlet.

In addition to performing and recording, Louise Bessette has contributed to the advancement and dissemination of music by participating in the juries of numerous musical competitions, and by offering master classes in both France and Canada. Furthermore, since fall 1996, she has been Professor of piano at the Montréal Conservatory of Music.

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