



Senior Recital

Saturday, April 25, 2026

7pm, Mixon Hall

Curtis Li, piano

Religious Ecstasy: The Pure and the Hedonistic

From “Vingt Regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus”
XV. Le baiser de l’Enfant-Jésus
Olivier Messiaen
(1908–1992)

Piano Sonata No. 4 in F-sharp Major, Op. 30
I. Andante
II. Prestissimo volando
Alexander Scriabin
(1872–1915)

From “Vingt Regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus”
XI. Prèmiere communion de la Vierge
Olivier Messiaen

Piano Sonata No. 9, Op. 68, “Black Mass”
Alexander Scriabin

From “Vingt Regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus”
XIX. Je dors, mais mon cœur veille
Olivier Messiaen

Piano Sonata No. 7, Op. 64, “White Mass”
Alexander Scriabin

Please refrain from applause until the end of the program to preserve the intended experience.

Curtis Li is a student of Kathryn Brown.

Special thanks to my dear professor Ms. Brown for guiding me through this artistic journey.

Religious Ecstasy: The Pure and the Hedonistic

A Recital-Experience by Curtis Li

The word “ecstasy” originates from the Ancient Greek word *ékstasis*, where the two parts of the word “*ék*” (out) and “*stasis*” (to place or stand) combine to roughly mean “standing outside oneself.” Tonight’s program is an exploration of the out-of-body experience that is ecstasy from two religious perspectives: Catholicism and mysticism. Instinctively, these are two separate ideas. However, through the lens of ecstasy, they are revealed to be two sides of the same coin.

Olivier Messiaen’s *Vingt Regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus* (Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus, 1944) is a set of twenty pieces which explores various perspectives of the Infant Jesus. Throughout the set, certain key themes recur, unifying the entire work. One of the most prevalent and prominent of these, the theme of God, establishes a sense of austerity and divine power. Messiaen’s unique harmonic language, paired with the extremely slow tempi of many of the movements, create an otherworldly sense of peace and meditation, which ultimately is a profound feeling of ecstasy. These movements represent the “pure.”

Mysticism in general refers to the belief that through self-surrender, one can be united with (or absorbed by) the Deity, or the absolute. Scriabin’s piano sonatas follow a mystical plot archetype: the Deity and the earthly self are presented, and over the course of each sonata, the self is absorbed into the Deity. The Deity is represented in various ways - for example, a short-long rhythm which imitates a divine trumpet call, and the “mystic” chord, a six-note chord consisting of stacked fourths of various qualities. The earthly self is often represented by lyrical, yearning, and chromatic melodies paired with fluidity of rhythm. There is undoubtedly an erotic and sensuous color in Scriabin’s depiction of the self: some of these sections are marked “*avec une céleste volupté*” (“with a celestial voluptuousness”), or “*avec une langueur naissante*” (“with an emerging languor”). Through the ritual of vertiginous dances (represented by quick rhythmic figures in two), the self succumbs to exhaustion and falls into a state of ecstasy, primed for divine influence. The themes of pleasure and absorption that permeate these works represent the “hedonistic.”

Each work on tonight's program seeks to explore a specific aspect of religious ecstasy. Here are brief ideas and suggested themes for each piece to guide your listening experience.

Le Baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus: The theme of God, presented as a lullaby. Later, we see the Infant Jesus in the garden, and he runs to meet us. Arms reaching out towards love. The Kiss of the Infant Jesus: an ecstatic outpouring of love.

Scriabin Sonata No. 4: A star gleaming softly in the distance, beckoning. Crazy, joyous, sharp desire. Mad dance, flight, forgetting in sheer caprice. Flamboyant Sun, sea of light, I engulf thee! (a poem of Scriabin, excerpted)

Première communion de la Vierge: The theme of God, *intérieur*. Mary, adoring the unborn Jesus in herself. *Magnificat* with panting enthusiasm. The heartbeat of the Infant Jesus. An inner embrace.

Scriabin Sonata No. 9: Legendary, in a vacuum. Permeating, profound evil. Intoxicating, sensual, reaching. Manic dancing, culminating in an explosion. Terrible, overwhelming absorption, leaving only a reflective pool.

Je dors, mais mon cœur veille: The ecstasy of sleep and oblivion. The theme of love. Pure repose, deepest peace. The role of silence.

Scriabin Sonata No. 7: Divine fury. Mysterious calls from above (or below), somber and imperial. Celestial voluptuousness, profound sweetness. Winged flight, sparkling. Flashes of lightning, overwhelming terror. Ecstatic radiance, vertigo, an exuberant, overflowing joy. Delirium, vanishing into the abyss.