

The Memorial Church of Harvard University
Music Notes for Sunday, October 1, 2023

William Mathias was one of the foremost Welsh composers of the twentieth century, and one of the very few to establish an international reputation. He composed fluently and prolifically in a wide variety of genres, but his popularity in the field of church music earned him a high reputation. The *Missa brevis* was written in 1973 for St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, an important church for arts patronage, whose commissions had included Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb*, and Finzi's *Lo, the Full, Final Sacrifice*. The perky *Gloria* and reflective *Agnus Dei* show two different colors in Mathias's compositional palette.

The French organist and composer Olivier Messiaen was the organist of La Trinité, Paris, for more than sixty years. His unswerving Catholic faith is the foundation of all his compositions, though this morning's offering—an early work—is his only liturgical motet: the composer believing plainsong to be the perfect liturgical music. Both this motet and this morning's prelude are slow-moving and static, transcending our traditional notion of time: paired with their chromatic harmonies, they seem entirely other-worldly.

Rhythmic drive, unusual harmonic juxtapositions, and the repetition of a catchy theme are trademarks of Mathias's compositional style—all of which are on display in one of his most popular organ works, *Recessional*.