



Ambassador's Activities

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Speech by *HE* Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

Presentation of the insignia of
Chevalier in the *Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur* and
Officier in the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* to Jennifer Bate

Presentation of the insignia of
Chevalier in the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* to Philip Mansel

London, 24 May 2012

Chère Jennifer Bate,
Cher Philip Mansel,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It's a very great pleasure for me to welcome you to the French Residence today for the ceremony to present Jennifer Bate with the insignia of *Officier* in the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* and *Chevalier* in the *Ordre de la Légion d'honneur*, and to award Philip Mansel the insignia of *Chevalier* in the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*.

Thank you *chère* Jennifer, *cher* Philip, for having agreed to my proposal for you to receive your insignia at the same ceremony – one which is as egalitarian as our new government!

I see this as a sign of your open-mindedness and mutual esteem.

It is also in keeping with the spirit in which the French Republic grants these awards, going beyond the boundaries of disciplines.

Of course, egalitarianism should not preclude gallantry, and so I hope you will allow me, *cher* Philip Mansel, to begin with Jennifer Bate.

Chère Jennifer Bate,

The Minister of Culture expressed the wish for you to be promoted you to the rank of *Officier* in the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* in view of your dazzling efforts to promote French organ music.

Officier is a very high rank in a prestigious ministerial order, which recognizes outstanding artists and writers, and people who have made a special contribution to raising public awareness of the arts and literature in France and the world.

But this is an exceptional occasion, and a first for me, because the President of the Republic has also decided to appoint you to the *Ordre de la Légion d'honneur* in recognition of – and I

quote – “your immense talent and distinguished contribution to making Olivier Messiaen’s organ music known worldwide”.

So this is a particularly solemn occasion, since you are also being awarded the insignia of our most prestigious National Order, created by Napoleon Bonaparte in recognition of exceptional services rendered to the French nation.

Before presenting you with both insignia, I should like to go back over your remarkable career.

You were born in London, where your father was organist at St James’s Church, Muswell Hill. He taught both complete beginners and highly experienced players, but yours was his greatest success, Jennifer Bate, since your father was your first teacher and mentor. He, too, was a well-known recitalist, and much as in Johann Sebastian Bach’s family, the organ was very much at the heart of your family.

You were one of Bristol University Music Department’s most brilliant students, receiving your degree from there in 1963. Your studies deepened your knowledge of counterpoint, conducting, orchestration and harmony.

Armed with your degree, you went to London, where you became a librarian at the London School of Economics – not a very musical job, but decently paid – and it allowed you to pursue musical activities at the same time. You’ve told the story of how, thanks to the student protests which hit the LSE in January 1969, you were sent home, on full pay, and learned 16 major organ works in 14 days. You went on to give your first recital at Westminster Abbey in August of that year.

I see this as rather ironic because your time at the LSE couldn’t be more different from mine. Whenever I am invited to talk to LSE students, I have a very musical job of singing the virtues of France. And it is unpaid!

Your musical sensitivity and technical expertise quickly led to you interpreting the work of the greatest names in organ music, and in 1974, you were invited to perform a half-hour solo work by Franz Liszt at the BBC Proms in the Royal Albert Hall.

Nearly 40 years on, you have an impressive number of recordings to your name, covering the whole organ music repertoire, from Mendelssohn – with five CD volumes of his complete works, which include a large amount of hitherto unpublished material – to Samuel Wesley, César Franck, Liszt, Schumann and, of course, Olivier Messiaen.

You are, of course, an acknowledged world authority on the organ music of Olivier Messiaen, who is considered one of the 20th century's musical giants.

You have masterfully recorded his complete works at Beauvais Cathedral. And you were the first to record *Le livre du Saint Sacrement*, under the watchful eye of the maestro, a recording which received outstanding international acclaim and picked up the *Grand Prix du Disque*.

Long before you began playing his music, Olivier Messiaen himself already had a connection with the UK since, as a young man, he was profoundly influenced by the works of William Shakespeare, which his father used to translate. The young Olivier was fascinated by Shakespeare's fantasies, his magical and dark tales. He even tried his hand at staging the great playwright's works, in which he played all the parts himself, to entertain his brother, before settling on a career writing music.

You were Olivier Messiaen's organist of choice, the most faithful and inspired, when it came to interpreting his organ works. As he himself clearly and simply put it: "Jennifer Bate is an excellent organist, not only for her virtuosity, but for her musicianship and sensitivity in choosing her timbres. She is a really accomplished musician who loves what she plays and knows how to make others love it too."

Your friendship with Messiaen spanned 20 years, and the composer showed his trust in and respect for you by leaving you a number of his famous manuscripts. In tribute to the man and his work, in 1995 you opened a special "Messiaen Festival", during which his complete organ works were performed at the church of La Sainte Trinité in Paris, where Messiaen was organist for 61 years.

Incidentally, that this church is situated on a square named after Estienne d'Orves. He was a French naval officer who joined General de Gaulle here in London in September 1940 and subsequently became a hero of the struggle which united our two peoples through the Second World War.

Thanks to you, all his organ works have been performed and recorded, and to this day you continue travelling far and wide to make his music known and loved by very many people through concerts, masterclasses and conferences.

Such a remarkable career has, of course, already been publicly recognized in both France and the UK. In 1990, you received the *Personnalité de l'année* award from a French judging panel.

You were the first British woman and only the third British person to receive this distinction, after Sir Georg Solti and Lord Yehudi Menuhin.

In your country, you were elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 2002, and in 2007 your Alma Mater, Bristol University, awarded you an honorary doctorate in music. And I know from a recent visit there just how great a university it is.

Last but not least, in 2008 you were made an OBE.

The French Republic wishes, in turn, to show you its gratitude for the outstanding role you have played in showcasing the great French organ repertoire and your commitment to Franco-British friendship.

Jennifer Bate, au nom du président de la République et en vertu des pouvoirs qui nous sont conférés, nous vous faisons Chevalier dans l'Ordre National de la Légion d'honneur. Jennifer Bate, au nom du Ministre de la Culture et de la Communication de la République française, nous vous faisons Officier dans l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

Cher Philip Mansel,

Thank you for your patience – a cardinal virtue for historians, if ever there was one!

Philip Mansel, you're a great historian of both France and the Ottoman Empire. What better reason for us to meet and become friends! Indeed, you have a double specialism which I myself particularly appreciate because, before I arrived in London, my career as French Ambassador took me exclusively to places that were once part of the Ottoman Empire: first Amman, then Beirut and finally the Empire's capital in Turkey!

Philip Mansel, the Ministry of Culture wished to appoint you to the rank of *Chevalier*, not in one of the Ottoman Empire's erstwhile orders of merit, such as the Order of Osmanieh or Medjidie, but in the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*. It's an order which, in the words of General de Gaulle's great Minister of Culture, André Malraux, is "respected and coveted by artists, writers and all creative professionals".

But before awarding you the fine insignia of this very prestigious French distinction, allow me to look back on your life. You were born in London in 1951 and went to one of Britain's most prestigious schools, Eton College, where you were a King's Scholar. And you were not ungrateful to the monarchist system, either: on the contrary, you dedicated the next part of your career to studying the European and Levantine courts!

After Eton, you studied at Balliol College, Oxford, where you chose history and modern languages. Your crowning achievement in this brilliant period was a doctorate from University College London on the French court between 1814 and 1830.

It was a pioneering work, because while the phenomenon of the court under the classical monarchy had been the subject of many studies, the court under the Bourbon Restoration – and the Restoration itself, moreover – seemed to be slightly neglected episodes in our national history. In a way, you placed yourself in the tradition of de Tocqueville, challenging the notion of a revolutionary break with the past, and this first work naturally led you into an original exploration of the first half of 19th-century France, from the Revolution to the Second Empire.

Your first book, published in 1981, was about Louis XVIII, but you also studied the court of Napoleon I (“The Eagle in Splendour: Napoleon I and his Court”), counter-revolutionary emigration (“The French Emigrés in Europe and the struggle against Revolution, 1789-1814”) and Paris’s role as cultural capital of Europe during the Restoration and the July Monarchy (“Paris Between Empires, 1814-1852”): “Not since imperial Rome”, you wrote, “has one city so dominated European life.” Such a sentence, of course, makes us a bit nostalgic, even though Paris is still one of the world’s cultural and intellectual capitals.

If your work is a reference point in the field of French political history, you’re also recognized as a passionate expert on the life of the court, with its pomp and etiquette, its costumes and artists.

You published a brilliant summary of this in 1988 (“The Court of France : 1789-1830”), but also a history of court dress that covered a far wider period encompassing even the clothes worn today in the Court of St James’s (“Dressed to Rule: Royal and Court Costume from Louis XIV to Elisabeth II”). I’ll know whom to ask for advice when my wife and I are afraid of making a faux pas, in a country where the rules of etiquette and correct dress are occasionally reminiscent of 17th-century France!

You’ve also collaborated on the cataloguing of many exhibitions, including that of the magnificent “Winterhalter and the Courts of Europe” at the National Gallery in London and then at the Petit-Palais in Paris in 1988.

In 1995, with David Starkey, Robert Oresko and Simon Thurley, you founded the Society for Court Studies. You’re the editor of that learned [prononcé “learnèd”] society’s journal, and every year you organize two international conferences on court history. In France, you’re a member of the scientific committee at the Château de Versailles’ research centre.

Was it the study of imperial courts, or just the curiosity of the great traveller you are, which attracted you to the Sublime Porte?

Indeed, the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East are the other facet of your work as a historian. “Sultans in Splendour” was published in 1988 and “Constantinople: City of the World's Desire 1453-1924” in 1995.

The latter is an extraordinary summary of five centuries, from Mehmed the Conqueror's triumphant entry to the city to the departure of the last Ottoman sovereign, Abdülmeçid. It's a fabulous, gripping book about that unique city – now Istanbul, of course – a global city, capital of that region of the world, which I was lucky enough to visit nearly every week when I was Ambassador in Ankara.

Finally, your latest book, “Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean”, was published in 2010 in the United Kingdom and in 2011 in the United States and Turkey. Your reflexions on the erstwhile roles of the three exceptional cities of Smyrna, Beirut and Alexandria and on their mixed fates in modern times should be most stimulating for all those of my compatriots and diplomatic colleagues who were struck by the rise of the Arab Spring and are wondering how the region will evolve.

Cher Philip Mansel,

On 1st May, you received the London Library Life in Literature Award. That prestigious prize was awarded to you by Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall at a dinner at the London Library hosted by its President, Sir Tom Stoppard.

It was only fair for France, in turn, to celebrate your work and talent as a great historian, because you've done so much to bring our own past alive for so many people, and to raise the profile of French culture by depicting some of its most glorious moments.

Philip Mansel, au nom du Ministre de la Culture et de la Communication de la République française, nous vous faisons Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres./.