

John Tavener's temple of the spirit

CLASSICAL The cellist Natalie Clein will perform in the ideal setting for the composer's 60th-birthday concert

The cellist Natalie Clein, 26, will be the soloist at the official 60th-birthday concert for Sir John Tavener at Temple Church, Fleet Street. It will be an appropriately atmospheric venue for Tavener, who writes music set within a profound spiritual context.

"The church has beautiful acoustics," says Clein. "Tavener at its best should be experienced, not just listened to. It is a form of meditation." Clein will perform Tavener's *Threnos*, a solemn lament for unaccompanied solo cellist, and *The Protecting Veil*, a work for cello and orchestra.

The Temple Church commissioned Tavener's most recent major work, *The Veil of the Temple*, a seven-hour piece that was played from dusk to dawn. Parts of it will be heard at the concert, along with his best-loved pieces *The Lamb* and *Song for Athene* and his new anthem, *Elizabeth Full of*

Grace, commissioned by Prince Charles in memory of the late Queen Mother. Stephen Layton will conduct the Temple Church choir, the Holst Singers, the soloist Patricia Rozario and the London Sinfonietta.

Clein first came to international attention in 1994 when she won the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition. "I won that when I was 16, and then the European part of it when I was 17," says Clein. "I just knew that I was not yet ready. I had a very clear vision of the kind of musician that I wanted to be, and I knew I needed to study more to become that. I focused on this vision, this wish."

So she didn't follow the normal prodigy route, choosing rather to study for five years with the cellist and conductor Heinrich Schiff in Vienna. Having played before Schiff at Manchester International Cello Festival in 1996, Clein says she recognised that he was the

right teacher. "I went straight up to him at the end of the master class and said, 'I want to study with you.'

"It's so much more than just cello lessons. It is a real apprenticeship," Clein continues. "It's about becoming a complete musician. I'm still finding my own voice, but I feel more confident sharing that discovery with an audience.

"It's a matter of reacting to the music. I suppose you can equate it to how an actor finds his voice within a part; everybody has a different Hamlet. But it is a very subtle and deep thing. How much of a part is you, and how much is the composer, is an impossible mixture to separate. It is synthesis, really. You are trying to express what the composer expressed, but it must be very close to your heart, otherwise you are not able to express it."

Clein says she has never actually met Tavener. "But so



Natalie Clein: "Tavener at its best is a form of meditation"

much creative expression comes out in the work," she says. "I think that one listens to this type of music on a different level of consciousness from Brahms or Schubert – but both

types of music are valid in their own settings."

CHARLOTTE CRIPPS

The Tavener concert, Temple Church, London EC4 (0845 1207543) 5 February