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MESSIAEN'S APPROACH TO TIME IN MUSIC

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Personal Motivation

Since first being introduced to the music of Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) while studying classical music at the University of Pretoria between 1999 and 2002, the writer has felt a strong affinity with the music of this composer, and a keen interest in his musical philosophies. After commencing studies at the Conservatory of Amsterdam under Håkon Austbø, a former student of both Messiaen and Messiaen's wife, Yvonne Loriod, this interest was further encouraged.

One facet of Messiaen's compositional philosophy which is of particular interest to the writer is his approach to time as an abstract factor in musical composition. Here an immediate distinction should be made between "time" as a musical concept, and "rhythm". Messiaen's use of rhythm in his compositions is unique, and has been and is currently the topic of several studies. However, his approach to time in music, and the role time has to play in his compositions, is a different discussion, which the writer also believes has academic merit as a topic of study.

1.2 Research question

Why and to what degree is time in music an important concept for Messiaen?

The research sub-question is:

Which techniques does Messiaen apply in order for the concept of time as an abstract factor to be embodied in his music?



1.3 Objective of the study

The objective of this study is to show how Messiaen applies time as an abstract concept in his music, and the implications that this has for his musical philosophy in general, as well as for certain technical aspects of his compositions.

Messiaen's approach to time in music is a very specific feature of his compositional style, and ties in closely with his devotion to the Catholic faith (a very important inspirational factor throughout his compositional career). This concept of time has philosophical as well as technical implications on a musical level.

The writer will therefore aim to demonstrate Messiaen's approach through thorough analyses of two major works written after 1941, the period when these concepts first took form. This will be coupled with a discussion of the philosophical reasons for this approach.

The writer considers a thorough understanding of this concept - the application of time in music - essential for a deeper understanding and appreciation of Messiaen's compositions.

1.4 Method of research

The study will be conducted by means of the scrutinizing of

1. Literature
2. Scores
3. Recorded Materials

Several articles from encyclopaedias and journals, written interviews and relevant books have been consulted to supply information for this study (for specific references, see Bibliography).

Apart from literature pertaining specifically to Messiaen, several sources have been consulted to supply background information concerning the nature of “time” as an abstract concept (Bergson 1922; Flaherty 1999; Hawking 1990). The writer believes this necessary, as this study will not only be conducted on an analytical musical level, but also on a philosophical level.

The scores of two important works will be studied and analysed: the *Visions de l’Amen* (1943), and the *Vingt Regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus* (1944). These analyses will demonstrate Messiaen’s application of time as an abstract concept in music, in works written after the *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*.

Recordings of the above-mentioned works will be used to assist the writer with the analyses of the works, and can also be used as reference materials by readers of the study.

1.5 Definition of Terms

The terms that require definition are:

- Time
- Catholicism
- Mysticism
- Theosophy
- Non-retrogradable rhythm

1.5.1 Time is defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* as:

The successive states of the universe regarded as a whole whose every part or moment is before or after any other ... this conceived as having begun and being destined to end, events in their course.

A further definition is found in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*:

(Time is) the unlimited, continued progress of existence and events in the past, present and future, regarded as a whole; "a time" refers to an indefinite period.

1.5.2 Catholicism as defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* is “Universal,

of interest or use to all, all-embracing, of wide sympathies”. The word’s etymological roots lie in the Greek word “holos” meaning “whole”.

In modern times, however, Catholicism has become a more extended concept than anything which can be defined in a few sentences or even really be traced to one etymological root.

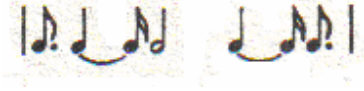
As a religious body, the Catholic Church has developed over centuries into the largest organized religious body within the Christian religious sector. Its rituals, traditions and doctrines will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, and are significant for the main purposes of this study.

1.5.3 *The Oxford Dictionary of Current English* defines mysticism as “that which is spiritually allegorical or symbolic, of hidden meaning, mysterious and awe-inspiring”. The term is further defined by Wilfred Mellers in his article *Mysticism and Theology* (Mellers 1995:220) as “that which specifically seeks by contemplation and self-surrender to obtain union with or absorption into the deity”.

1.5.4 Theosophy is defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* as “Any speculative system basing knowledge of nature on intuitional or traditional knowledge of God, and represented as the essential truth of which historic religions are imperfect expressions”.

1.5.5 Non-retrogradable rhythm is a term invented by Messiaen to describe symmetrical rhythms which when written backwards are identical to their forward statement (see Example 1.1).

Example 1.1



1.6 Delimitation of study

The study will be limited to Messiaen's approach to time as a compositional tool in music, and will include a discussion of the philosophical, aesthetic and practical implications of this approach.

A clear distinction will be made between “rhythm” and “time” as musical concepts. Messiaen's approach to rhythm will be included in background information concerning his compositional style, but will not form part of the main body of this study.

Although the *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* is the first work to significantly employ time as an abstract concept, the writer has decided not to include a thorough analysis of this work in the study. The *Quatuor* has been analysed from this point of view in the past (Austbø 2003; Griffiths 1985), and Messiaen himself wrote extensively about this aspect of the piece in the preface to the *Quatuor* (Messiaen 1941:II).

2. SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Olivier Messiaen's compositional career spans seven decades, during which time his compositional style had undergone countless changes, without ever losing the specific characteristics that made his voice so uniquely his own.

Messiaen was born in Avignon, France, on 10 December 1908. His father, Pierre Messiaen, was an English teacher and translator of Shakespeare; his mother, Cécile Sauvage, was a poet.

During the First World War (1914-1918), Messiaen and his mother lived in Grenoble while his father was in the army. It was in Grenoble that Messiaen first started studying music – he taught himself to play the piano. His first composition for this instrument was written in 1917: *The Lady of Shalott*, inspired by Tennyson's poem of the same name (Johnson 1975:9).

After the War, the family was reunited in Nantes, where Messiaen met his first teachers: Véron Arcouët and Gontran Arcouët for piano, and Jehan de Gibon for harmony. Even at this early age, Messiaen was clearly musically gifted, and was already studying operatic scores by Mozart, Berlioz and Wagner. During this time, de Gibon also introduced the young Messiaen to Debussy's opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, a piece of music that would have a profound influence on Messiaen throughout his career.

The family moved to Paris in 1919, where Messiaen enrolled in the Conservatoire National de Musique, at the remarkably early age of 11. Teachers at the "Conservatoire" included Jean Gallon for harmony, his brother Noël Gallon (from whom he received private lessons in harmony throughout his years at the Conservatoire), Georges Falkenberg for piano, Marcel Dupré for organ and improvisation, Paul Dukas for composition, and Maurice Emmanuel for music history (Griffiths 2001:491).

During his time at the Conservatoire Messiaen received his first exposure to many musical features that would greatly influence him in his later life. These include Greek verse, modal experiments, and rhythms from the South of India.

Maurice Emmanuel was an expert in the metres of Greek verse (later also a speciality of Messiaen) and on the modes of ancient Greece, of folk music and of Christian Liturgies. Dupré and Dukas both encouraged modal experimentation. Dupré also showed that the organ could be approached as a virtuoso instrument – significant especially for Messiaen, who would always consider himself a Catholic composer and therefore drawn to the organ as an instrument with liturgical importance (Griffiths 2001:491).

The table of 120 *deçî-tâlas* or rhythms of the South Indian provinces were also first discovered by Messiaen during this period. These rhythms were listed in Lavignac's *Encyclopédie de la Musique*, reproduced from the list made by Sharngadeva in his treatise *Salgîta-ratnâkara* (Johnson 1975:10).

Messiaen was rewarded first prizes during his time at the Conservatoire in fugue (1926), accompaniment (1928), organ and improvisation (1929) and composition (1930).

After leaving the Conservatoire in 1931, he was appointed as organist at the church of La Sainte Trinité in Paris, a position that he would keep for more than 40 years (Griffiths 2001:491). Most of the major works of this period are written for the organ: *L'Ascension* (1932-1934) (published for organ and for organ and orchestra), and *La Nativité du Seigneur* (1935) are the most important examples.

In 1932, he married the violinist Claire Delbos. His first major song-cycle, *Poèmes pour Mi*, is dedicated to her (Austbø 2003).

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Messiaen joined the army and was stationed as a hospital attendant. In 1941, he was taken prisoner, and interned at Görlitz in Silesia (Johnson 1975:11). It was while imprisoned that Messiaen composed the work that he is

probably best known for today: the *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*. Messiaen found among his fellow-prisoners three musicians: a clarinetist, a violinist and a cellist. The first section of the *Quatuor* to be composed was the fourth movement, *Intermède*, for clarinet, violin and cello. Later, Messiaen added four additional movements, and the work was first performed in the prison camp on 15 January 1941 (Austbø 2003).

This work is one of the earliest examples where Messiaen attaches special importance to the role of time in music, and where time is approached in a philosophical manner which relates it to divinity or theology. The “end of time” in the title refers to the Apocalypse as described by Saint John in the Book of Revelations (Chapter 10, verses 1-7), where an angel announces: “There shall be no more time”. The work is also dedicated to this angel of the Apocalypse.

The “end of time” – in other words the end of orderly, logical or progressive time – is conveyed by extremely slow tempi, non-retrogradable rhythms, non-developing textures of ostinatos (Griffiths 2001:492), and large symmetries and palindromes.

After his repatriation in 1941 Messiaen was appointed Professor of Harmony at the Paris Conservatoire. In 1943, he also started giving private composition lessons at the house of a close friend, Guy Delapierre. Yvonne Loriod, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenakis, Tristan Murail and Pierre Boulez all received instruction from Messiaen. He was later appointed as Professor of Analysis (1947) and Professor of Composition (1966) (Griffiths 2001:494). His book, *The Technique of My Musical Language*, was published in 1944, in which he outlines some of the major features of his composition technique.

Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod, who was a gifted pianist, became very close during this time, and practically all of his compositions for piano written after 1942 were written for her.

His wife, Claire Delbos, was taken ill and admitted to a sanatorium during the early 1940's - she remained there until her death in 1959 (Griffiths 2001:492).

The 1940's were a particularly fruitful time in Messiaen's compositional career. Works from this period include *Visions de l'Amen* (1943) for two pianos; *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (1944) for solo piano; *Trois Petit Liturgies* (1943-1944) for piano, orchestra and female choir; and the song cycle *Harawi* (1945) for soprano and piano. One of his best-known and most ambitious works was composed between 1946 and 1948: the *Turangalîla* Symphony. This was commissioned by Koussevitzky for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and premièred by them in Boston in 1949, under the baton of Leonard Bernstein (Griffiths 2001:492).

Messiaen's interest in birds and birdsong dates back to his student years, but the first work which is entirely based on birdsong is *Le merle noir* for flute and piano, composed in 1951 (Hill 1995:8). Some other pieces directly inspired by birdsong are *Réveil des oiseaux* (1953) for piano and orchestra; *Oiseaux Exotiques* (1955-1956) for orchestra with piano; and the *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1956-1958) for solo piano.

From 1951 onwards, ornithology would play a very large part in Messiaen's life and compositional process. With the help of Yvonne Loriod, he would travel extensively across Europe, transcribing birdsong and recording various birdcalls. Messiaen would then proceed to adapt these calls to 12-tone temperament and to a human timescale, adjusting the birdcalls to the limitations of man-made instruments (Griffiths 2001:493).

After the composition of *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste* in 1963, Messiaen devoted himself mostly to the composition of large-scale works, for example *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum* (1964) for symphonic wind and percussion, *La Transfiguration de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (1965-1969) for seven instrumental soloists, choir and large orchestra and the grand-scale opera *Saint François d'Assise* (1975-1983).

Messiaen retired from the Paris Conservatoire in 1978. He continued to travel extensively, mainly to continue his research in ornithology. Olivier Messiaen died on 28 April 1992.

3. MESSIAEN'S FAITH: CATHOLICISM AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

Olivier Messiaen's life-long devotion to the Catholic faith is a well-documented fact – as was mentioned in Chapter 2, he testified in his later life that he had already had profound religious experiences at a young age, and even states “I've always been a believer, pure and simple” (Samuel 1986:16).

Messiaen writes that “[M]usic should be able to express some noble sentiments (and especially the most noble of all, the religious sentiments exalted by the theology and truths of our Catholic faith)” (Messiaen 1944c:13). It is clear that not only Messiaen's faith, but specifically his devotion to the religious doctrines of Catholicism is an important source of inspiration for him.

Messiaen refers to the importance the Catholic faith has for him in a conversation with Claude Samuel (Samuel 1967:11):

The first idea that I wished to express, the most important because it is laced above all else, is the existence of the truths of the Catholic faith. A certain number of my works are destined therefore to highlight the truths of the Catholic faith. This is the main aspect of my work, the most noble, without a doubt the most useful, the most valid, the sole aspect which I will not perhaps regret at the hour of my death.

In light of this quotation, it is clear that any examination of Messiaen's output has to relate his music to his faith, his main source of inspiration.

When having to delineate the actual aspects of the Catholic faith that can be related to music or mentioned as a source of inspiration, the focus falls mainly on ritualistic features and, by implication, mysticism. Mysticism is an aspect of Messiaen's faith which is of primary importance when discussing faith as a source of musical inspiration.

Wilfrid Mellers's definition of mysticism as was mentioned in Chapter 1 (Mellers 1995:220) contains a key phrase for this discussion: “to obtain union with ... the deity”.

If this is Messiaen's main purpose in composing music (as he himself states), then he can indeed be described as a mystical composer.

Humankind generally tends to approach any system of faith from two main perspectives. On the one hand, the main purpose of faith is considered to be to provide answers to existential problems and morally difficult situations. In this case, the ability to understand faith, divinity or the nature of whichever deity is involved, is the primary objective. In Messiaen's case, however, the opposite approach applies.

Mysticism is a part of Catholicism which was extremely significant for Messiaen. He seems to be attracted to this aspect of faith which in its nature is mysterious, i.e. things that are holy and divine specifically because it can not be explained, rather than approaching his faith as a system which can and is meant to provide answers or even guidance.

The unexplainable nature of God and the mysteries associated with creation and divinity are the cornerstones of Messiaen's belief. Against this background, it is clear that one of the main objectives of his compositions is to attempt to transcend human logic (logic being opposed to mysticism). One of the most important logical systems that Messiaen attempts to transcend is time (the specific ways in which he attempts to do this will be discussed in Chapter 4).

All human life is built on the concept of forward motion, change and development, which in turn rely on the passing of time, or progressive temporal development. However, on a spiritual level, that which is divine, eternal and free from human constraints is free of change, liberated from time and logical, worldly temporal progression. According to Bergson (Bergson 1922:44), "[t]ime is at first identical with the continuity of our inner life", therefore time is a supremely human attribute. Further, according to Heidegger (Heidegger 1927:42), "[h]umans are in their nature self-conscious, and thus always aware of their own endurance. This gives human existence an intrinsically temporal character".

The attempt to transcend time (and therefore logic) adds to the mystical nature of Messiaen's compositions.

Another aspect of Messiaen's faith which has an impact on his compositional philosophy is theosophy. The term "theosophy", as defined in Chapter 1 applies to Messiaen's methods of incorporating his beliefs into his compositions. Religious philosophy as a tool to understand or interpret everything humans are confronted with in the world is one of the cornerstones of Messiaen's belief system. In his music, one of Messiaen's main aims is to "seek truth" by injecting religious truths into his music in a variety of ways. The manipulation of time and logical temporal development is one very important example of this, and will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Messiaen is undoubtedly "theosophical in the dictionary sense of having sought a 'knowledge of God by spiritual ecstasy, direct intuition, or special individual relations'" (Mellers 1995:231). Attempting to free his music from human logic, and by implication from music's connection to human concepts of temporal dependency, forward motion and development, is a theosophical way to write music that aspires to a divine level.

When we acknowledge the extremely important role that the Catholic faith, and therefore by implication mysticism and theosophy, play in Messiaen's work, it becomes clear that the role of time in his compositions will be influenced by these facts.

4. MESSIAEN'S APPROACH TO TIME

As we have seen, Messiaen's approach to time in his music is mainly governed by his religious beliefs, which include his devotion to the rituals and doctrine of the Catholic faith, mysticism and theosophy. Matheson believes that "Messiaen, more than any other contemporary composer, has attempted to address specific biblical and theological concerns in his music" (Matheson 1995:234).

The first composition in which this approach to time plays a significant role in the creative conception of the work is the *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* or "Quartet for the end of time", composed in 1941. The text on which the *Quatuor* is based comes from the Revelations of St. John, the last book of the Christian bible, in which the Angel of the Apocalypse says: "There shall be no more time, but on the day the seventh angel sounds the trumpet, the hidden purpose of God will have been fulfilled".

Messiaen's interpretation of this text focuses mainly on the role of time as a theological issue. The Christian Bible presents humans as made in the image of God as creatures who are aware of time and history, the present, and also their own impending death somewhere in the future. The Bible's viewpoint is that time is also a creation of God, into which human life is made to fit. God therefore exists outside of time, seeing as time is also his creation.

The doctrine of eternal life preached by the Christian church is the nearest theology comes to expressing the human dependency on time and temporal progression. Eternal life, which is granted to believers, is the only way in which humans could exist "outside of time" (Matheson 1995:236). Messiaen's choice of text for the *Quatuor* points therefore to his main aim in composing music (especially in works written after the *Quatuor*): the dissolution of time in music as a means of coming closer to God through musical composition.

The influence of Christianity on our modern concept of time is significant. The central Christian doctrine of the Crucifixion is regarded as a unique event, never to be repeated. This implies that time according to Christian doctrine must be linear, and not cyclic. Time as humans characterize it is a continuous developmental process, with a starting point and final destination, which can never return to its original point of departure, and within which no events can be repeated. This is directly opposed to the cyclical characteristics most commonly associated with God and divinity.

In Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, which Messiaen studied (Samuel 1986:16), eternity is "characterized by the absence of consecutiveness" (Darbyshire 2004:38). This description further supports the idea that a linear concept of time is intrinsically human, as opposed to a divine or godly concept, which would have cyclical characteristics.

This linear aspect of time has significant implications for Messiaen. The eternal nature of God cannot, according to Messiaen, be reconciled with a linear time concept. In a conversation with Claude Samuel, Messiaen states (Samuel 1986:28):

When we say 'God is eternal', do we think about the significance of these words? 'God is eternal' signifies not only that he will never end, but that he never had any beginning. Here is where the temporal notions of 'before' and 'after' encumber us. To conceive of something without a beginning absolutely overwhelms us.

Music is arguably the art form most obviously associated with the passage of time – it has a beginning, middle and end, and ties in with the concept of temporal development so closely linked to human life and progress. The irreversibility of time is therefore the specific "subject" of almost all music (Matheson 1995:237).

An approach to time which has cyclical characteristics or uses palindromes as structural techniques would symbolically free the music from these human time constraints and its "irreversibility". This is the main feature of Messiaen's approach to time in his music.

Messiaen states (Samuel 1986:34):

Time has always been at the centre of my occupations. As a rhythmicist, I have endeavoured to divide this time up and to understand it better by dividing it.

Without musicians, time would be much less understood. ... as composers, we have the great power to chop up and 'retrograde' time.

Non-retrogradable rhythm was defined in Chapter 1 as "symmetrical rhythms which when written backwards are identical to their forward statement" (Darbyshire 1998:35). A non-retrogradable rhythm possesses bilateral symmetry. Intellectually, because time always flows in one direction in the human context, "no distinction can be made with a non-retrogradable rhythm between the forward and backward direction of time" (Darbyshire 2004:37). There is in this a clear aspiration to "overcome the unidirectional flow of time" (Fabbi 1998:60).

This feature of these types of rhythmical figures symbolically and intellectually negates time for Messiaen. It is a type of "intellectual victory" over space and time, deduced from musical principles (Darbyshire 1998:40).

According to Messiaen (Messiaen 1996:352),

regular time moves towards the future – it never goes backwards. Psychological time, or time of thought, goes in all directions: forward, backwards, cut in pieces, at will...In the life of the Resurrection we will live in a duration malleable and transformable. The power of the musician, who retrogrades and permutes his durations, prepares us, in a small way, for that state".

Time therefore becomes cyclical in these non-retrogradable figurations, and effectively free from the time constraints and logical linear temporal development normally associated with Western classical music. This approach to time, in turn, symbolically and intellectually relates Messiaen's music to theology and/or divinity.

The same philosophy that applies to non-retrogradable rhythm is often applied to larger sections and form. The use of symmetry as a formal tool has the same philosophical effect as non-retrogradable rhythm. When a section of music begins and ends with the same material, as for example when ternary form is used, again "no distinction can be made between the forward and backward direction of time" (Darbyshire 2004:37). When entire pieces of music are written as palindromes, the same philosophy applies yet again.

In such cases, the opening section of a piece and the coda will be made up of the same material, effectively negating logical temporal development.

The use of rigorous rhythmical procedures as a compositional tool is another significant factor in Messiaen's approach to time. Rhythmical augmentation and diminution and, to a lesser extent, symmetrical permutations, create a situation where rhythm (and by implication time, which on a musical level is governed by rhythmical flow) is not allowed to progress or develop in a natural way, and is given cyclical characteristics.

The "chromatic scale of durations" (a phrase invented by Messiaen) for example has specific cyclical properties: a rhythmical pattern is alternately augmented and diminished by a specified value for every repetition, eventually resulting in the figure either reaching the original starting point (augmentation) or a point where no further diminution is possible (diminution). For specific examples of this, see Examples 7.27 and 7.28 in Chapter 7. The adherence of rhythmical figures to a specific rhythmic formula is a way of organizing time in music that does not allow for logical temporal progression. It therefore negates time in an intellectual sense.

A final musical factor that influences Messiaen's approach to time in music is the use of birdsong. While discussing birdsong with Claude Samuel, Messiaen states (Samuel 1986:85): "It's probable that in the artistic hierarchy, birds are the greatest musicians on our planet". One reason why Messiaen uses birdsong so often in especially works written after the *Quatuor* is that he imagines birds to be able to make music that comes closest to "heavenly" music, music which is uninhibited by time constraints and not dependant on logical linear temporal development as human music always is. Using birdsong therefore negates time by not allowing for any of the characteristics humans associate with time in music.

Further specific instances where time is applied in the above-mentioned ways will be shown in the analyses of *Visions de l'Amen* (1943) in Chapter 6 and *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* (1944) in Chapter 7.



5. TIME IN MESSIAEN'S MUSIC

Messiaen claimed to write theological music, as opposed to “mystical” music (Johnson 1975:45). This description of music as theological implies a scientific conception of the nature of music (Darbyshire 1998:33), since theology is defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* as the “science treating of God, his nature and attributes and His relation to man and the universe”.

The science of time and the science of music come together in a unique way in Messiaen's music. This approach to time is especially significant for the works composed between roughly 1940 and 1950. Two major works composed during these years where the influence of time is especially significant is *Visions de l'Amen* (1943) and *Vingt Regards sur l'enfant Jésus* (1944). These works will be analysed in Chapter 6 and 7 to determine the importance of time in the musical material. Apart from these works, several other works also rely on the role of time in music to bring across a specific message, namely the music's relation to divinity as discussed in Chapter 4.

The *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1941) is the first work where Messiaen attaches symbolic meaning to the role of time in music. The title, which literally means “Quartet for the end of time”, already indicates that time plays a significant role in terms of inspiration for and creative conception of the work.

Nichols regards the innovative approach to time as seen in the *Quatuor* as “revolutionary” (Nichols 1975:30). In terms of the reasons for writing the *Quatuor*, Messiaen states: “I did not in any sense want to comment on the Apocalypse. My only wish was to articulate my desire for the dissolution of time” (Matheson 1995:236).

The frequent use of non-retrogradable rhythm in especially the sixth movement, “Dans de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes”, has the effect of symbolically negating time completely. These palindromic rhythms, as was mentioned in Chapter 4, remain the same whether they are read from left to right or right to left. Therefore, intellectually no

development has taken place, even though the ear doesn't necessarily perceive it as such. These rhythms are used frequently in the sixth movement, but also occur in the other movements, and always have the same symbolic and intellectual function.

Another technique used for the same purpose of negating time is the extremely slow tempi specified for the third, fifth and eighth movements, and for the middle section of the third movement. At such an extremely slow tempo all sense of movement disappears, and aurally there seems to be no logical temporal development or sense of forward motion.

This approach to time in music begins in the *Quatuor*, and is a significant factor in many works written in the years following the première in 1941. A possible explanation for the prominent role that time plays in the period immediately after and including the Second World War is that Messiaen's faith, and particularly his own brand of theology, was confronted so directly when he was himself confronted with the grim realities of war.

The significance of the *Quatuor* as a piece of "theological" music can not be understated. The bulk of Messiaen's output after this work is in some way related to the role of time in music, and by implication to the role of religion or divinity in human life.

The two pieces written directly after the *Quatuor*, the *Visions de l'Amen* and *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus*, exhibit some of the most striking examples of the use of time in music. Some examples of other works that contain examples of this are *Harawi* for soprano and piano (1945), the *Turungalila* Symphony for large symphony orchestra (1946) and *Cinq rechants* for twelve voices (1949).

Harawi is a cycle of twelve love songs. At first glance, these pieces seem to be far removed from the theological themes of preceding works. However, it has been made clear that Messiaen seldom separates emotion from faith, and even in this secular work there are prominent instances where time is used for theological purposes. In the final song, "Dans le noir", a strict rhythmical procedure is applied to both the right hand and

left hand figures. A basic rhythmic pattern is applied to the right hand; the chords in the left hand follow the same sequence, but augmented with every duration by 25 percent (i.e. a demi-semiquaver added to an eighth note, etc.). This process results in a canon, or rather a “canon by augmentation”.

The symbolic significance of this type of rhythmical procedure was discussed in Chapter 4. When rhythm - which, by Messiaen’s own definition is the “division of time” (Samuel 1986:34) – is subjected to such rigid principles, the rhythms’ “natural” developmental properties are negated, which in turn negates their adherence to logical temporal principles and time constraints as understood in a human sense.

This example from “Dans le noir”, which occurs at the emotional climax of the cycle, proves that even a work of secular nature such as this cycle contains instances where the nature of time in music is used to reaffirm the theological nature of Messiaen’s music.

In the *Turangalila* Symphony there are several instances of time-negation on various levels. Unfortunately the scope of this study does not allow for a complete analysis.

One rhythmic technique which influences the role of time in the music is the use of *personnages rythmiques* or “rhythmic characters”. This technique is applied to three rhythmic groups that are repeated, whereby the first increases with every repetition (augmentation), the second decreases (diminution), and the third remains unchanged. This technique “imposes a fairly evident restriction” in that there is “an obligatory route along which enlargement, elimination and repetition intersect one another in accordance with a kind of ‘conceptual symmetry’” (Fabbi 1998:64).

This “conceptual symmetry” has implications for the role time plays in the music. As was discussed in Chapter 4, the linear nature of time (which is its most “human” aspect) is challenged by any form of symmetry, because of symmetry’s influence in overcoming the unidirectional flow of time. Time is thus negated on an intellectual and symbolic level through the use of this type of technique.

Composed in 1948, the *Cinq Rechants* for twelve voices is thematically related to both *Harawi* and *Turangalîla* in terms of subject matter: a secular work with love themes as its main focus, and the so-called “Tristan-theme” as its central inspiration. However, despite their non-sacred subject matter, Messiaen seems to be proclaiming that these pieces still “exist ... under the all-embracing *Vérité* of the Catholic faith” (Hayes 1995:191).

Messiaen makes ample use of the Indian rhythms described by Sharngadeva in his table of 120 *deçî- tâlas* in this work, as well as Greek metres (Johnson 1975:97). The Greek metre that opens the work, “Aristophanian”, is significant for its non-retrogradable outline, a type of rhythmical structure which symbolically and intellectually negates time as was discussed in Chapter 4. This non-retrogradable characteristic is found in a “number of other rhythmic patterns in the work (Johnson 1975:97).

These are only a few examples where Messiaen applies negating techniques to time in his music. The discussion of the *Visions de l’Amen* (1943) in Chapter 6 and *Vingt regards sur l’enfant Jèsus* (1944) in Chapter 7 will show more detailed and comprehensive examples of these same techniques.

6. *VISIONS DE L'AMEN* (1943)

6.1 Background

The work for two pianos, *Visions de l'Amen* (1943), is the first work Messiaen composed after being repatriated and being appointed Professor of Harmony at the Paris Conservatoire (Nichols 1975:31).

The set of seven pieces is dedicated to Yvonne Loriod, who was a student of Messiaen at the time. Messiaen and Loriod were also the performers at the première of the work on 10 May 1943 (Johnson 1975:64).

The central inspiration for *Visions* comes from a theological source, and not a biblical one. The work of Ernest Halo, whose writings had a profound effect on Messiaen, is the main influence of the work (Hill 1995:79).

The *Amen* of the title has a four-fold significance: the creative act (*Amen de la Création*), acceptance of the Divine will (*Amen de l'Agonie de Jésus*), the desire for union with God (*Amen de Désir*) and the expression of “that which will be”- the Divine judgement (*Amen de Jugement*) and the eternal consummation of Paradise (*Amen des Anges, Amen de la Consommation*) (Johnson 1975:65).

The cyclic *Thème de la Création* heard at the beginning of the work is used again in the final movement, as well as in the central movement, giving the work a symmetrical nature.

Messiaen uses the table of *déci-tâlas* in various places in this work, and the non-retrogradable nature of most of these rhythmical figures have a significant impact on the intellectual and symbolic role that time plays in the music.

The musical aspects that will be discussed in the analyses are tempo, rhythm, symmetry,

form, harmony and birdsong.

6.2 *Amen de la Création*

A striking feature of the first piano part is that it consists almost entirely of sequences of non-retrogradable rhythms. Messiaen indicates these rhythms by grouping them between square brackets (see Example 6.1).

Example 6.1



Très lent, mystérieux et solennel (♩ = 50)

1 2

pppp

Ped.

(garder la pédale forte jusqu'à la fin)

1^{er} PIANO

Combined with this rhythmical feature, the second piano plays the *Thème de la Création* in various transpositions. The rhythm here is very straightforward, and consists of four crotchets and a semibreve.

Although the non-retrogradable rhythms in the first piano part are hardly aurally discernible, the intellectual and symbolic implications of these types of rhythms are significant. As was discussed in Chapter 4, non-retrogradable rhythms possess a bilateral symmetry – they read exactly the same in either direction. The intellectual and symbolic result of this is that the music effectively ends where it began, thus negating temporal progression and development.

Although significant in itself, this is the only musical feature of the work which can be



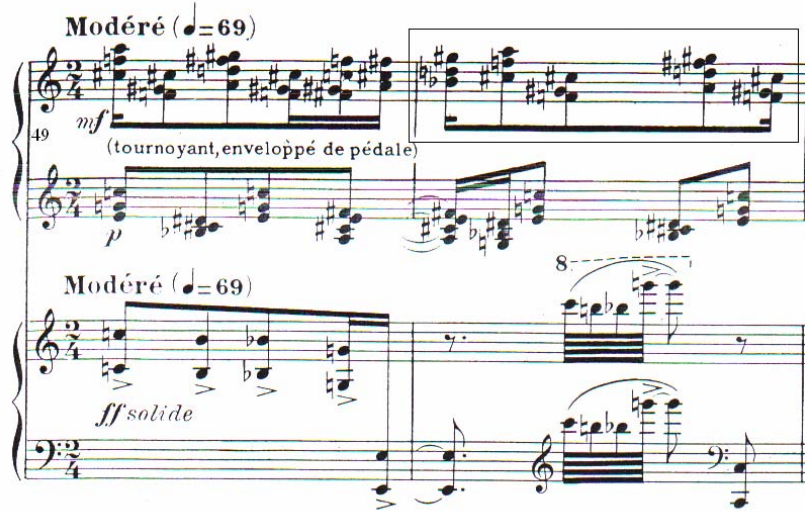
related to time. This can be explained by examining the formal structure of the piece, as well as its placing within the cycle. This opening piece is conceived as an enormous crescendo; the constant repetition of the *Thème de la Création* on rising dynamic levels is complemented by the rhythmic figures of the first piano, also on ever-increasing dynamic levels. Musically, the effect is meant to be a powerful rendition of the act of creation, and this is achieved through the rhythmic techniques already mentioned as well as the dynamic build-up. Other features related to time, such as birdsong or slow tempo, would not contribute to this effect, and are therefore not used.

The combination of a regular pulse as found in the second piano part with the non-retrogradable rhythms in the first piano has another symbolic purpose. The regular pulse of the second piano part draws the attention of the listener to an awareness of time. The negating aspects of the non-retrogradable rhythms used with this regular pulse provide “contact between the listener and the eternal in order to illustrate theological concepts involved in Messiaen’s composition” (Johnson 1998:136). By superimposing regular temporal development on non-retrogradable rhythm, the difference between time and eternity, and by implication humanity and divinity is also further accentuated.

6.3 Amen des étoiles, de la planète à l’anneau

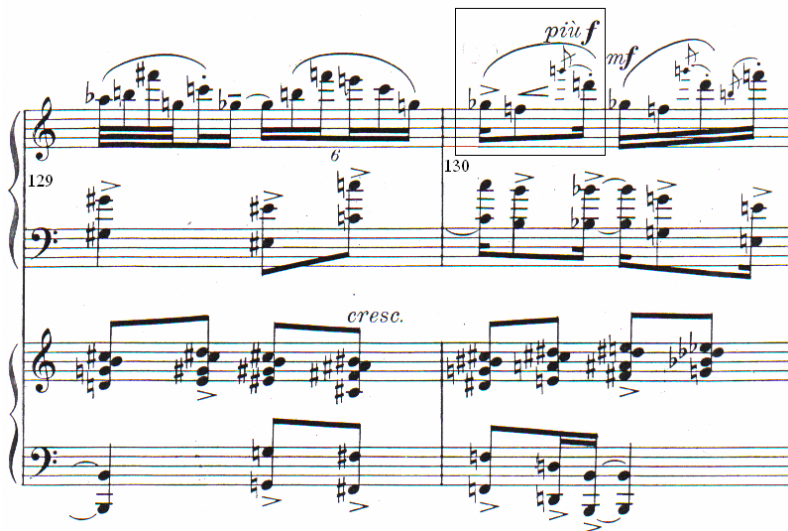
There are several instances in this piece where various types of non-retrogradable rhythms are used. Non-retrogradable rhythm is used once in the first section (bar 1-48) in bar 26. Further examples are found in bar 50 (see Example 6.2) and bar 130 (see Example 6.3), and again in the recapitulation of the first section.

Example 6.2



Example 6.2 shows two systems of musical notation. The first system is for the right hand, marked "Modéré (♩ = 69)" and "mf", with the instruction "(tournoyant, enveloppé de pédale)". It features a complex, swirling melodic line. The second system is for the left hand, also marked "Modéré (♩ = 69)" and "ff solide", featuring a more rhythmic accompaniment. Both systems are in 2/4 time and include dynamic markings and performance instructions.

Example 6.3



Example 6.3 shows two systems of musical notation. The first system is for the right hand, marked "più f" and "mf", with a measure number of 129. It features a complex, swirling melodic line. The second system is for the left hand, marked "cresc.", with a measure number of 130. It features a more rhythmic accompaniment. Both systems are in 2/4 time and include dynamic markings and performance instructions.

The intellectual impact of these types of rhythmic figures is that time is negated because of their symmetrical nature; because the figures have the same construction from

left to right and right to left, no temporal development can take place.

This symmetrical aspect is further exploited on a formal scale. The piece is constructed in ternary form – the second piano playing solo presents the main theme between bar 1-48. This returns accompanied by the first piano between bar 149-201. The middle section consists of a three-fold development of the main theme. The fact that the same material is used at the opening and closing of the piece intellectually and symbolically negates time similarly to non-retrogradable rhythm. No temporal development has taken place, the form becomes cyclical rather than linear, and time is thus negated on a formal level. The third development of the theme in the middle section (bar 108-148) impacts on time in the music in a number of ways.

The first five notes of the theme are presented in three different ways, superimposed on one another. The first connects the five-note theme fragment to a seventeen-note rhythm, a combination of Sharngadeva's *râgavardhana*, *candrakalâ* and *lackskmiça* rhythms (see Example 6.4). Because this rhythmical combination (or *tâla*) consists of seventeen durations, it follows that five repetitions of the *tâla* will coincide with seventeen repetitions of the melodic five-note figure.

Example 6.4



The implication of rhythmical procedures on time in music was discussed in Chapter 4: the effect of such a rigorous rhythmical process is that normal linear temporal development can not take place, and therefore time is negated on an intellectual level. Furthermore, the five-note theme is transposed down a semi-tone at every repetition, resulting in the first note of the first appearance being the same as the last note at the final appearance, namely B. This symmetry again has intellectual implications on the nature of

time in the music – the fact that the theme begins and ends with the same note negates time and logical temporal development, and supports a cyclical rather than a linear notion of time.

Although Messiaen does not specifically indicate it, some figurations seem to imitate birdsong, for example in the second piano in bar 84 (see Example 6.5).

Example 6.5



Messiaen connects the music of birds to divinity rather than humanity or worldliness – their music exists beyond the scope of human temporal dependency, and does not adhere to any time constraints as humans perceive it. Therefore, using birdsong further negates time on an aural and symbolic level.

6.4 *Amen de l'agonie de Jésus*

The same strict rhythmical procedures used in the previous two pieces are found again in the third *Amen*. Sharngadeva's seventeen-note rhythm called *râgavardhana* (which contains non-retrogradable cells) is used several times between bar 64 – 89. The first

occurrence is in the first piano part (see Example 6.6).

Example 6.6



The image displays two systems of musical notation for two pianos, labeled I and II. The first system (I) consists of three staves. The top staff is in 2/4 time and contains measures 63, 64, and 65. It features a complex rhythmic pattern of chords and eighth notes. The middle staff is in 2/4 time and contains measures 64 and 65, with a dynamic marking of *p* and a performance instruction "(percuté, en laissant résonner)". The bottom staff is in 2/4 time and contains measures 64 and 65, with a dynamic marking of *p* and a performance instruction "8^a bassa". The second system (II) consists of three staves. The top staff is in 2/4 time and contains measures 67, 68, 69, and 70. It features a complex rhythmic pattern of chords and eighth notes. The middle staff is in 2/4 time and contains measures 67, 68, 69, and 70, with a dynamic marking of *f* and a performance instruction "expressif". The bottom staff is in 2/4 time and contains measures 67, 68, 69, and 70, with a dynamic marking of *f* and a performance instruction "8^a bassa".

Superimposed on this, the right hand of the first piano repeats (with minor chordal modifications) the same material heard between bar 17- 28.

This is followed by two more statements of the rhythmical pattern (played by the second

piano) in bar 77-83, and again in bar 83-89.

The non-retrogradable cell found within the *râgavardhana* has the same intellectual and symbolic implication that was mentioned in the other pieces: the symmetrical nature of such a rhythm negates time and logical linear temporal development by reading the exactly the same in both directions. Furthermore, Johnson argues that “the self-contained nature of these rhythms renders them incapable of entering into organic relationship with other rhythms” (Johnson 1975:36).

This would mean that this type of rhythm exists outside of the natural requirements and restrictions of time, if time is viewed in a strictly intellectually musically related manner. Applying this type of rhythmical formula therefore impacts negatively on time in music, and logical temporal development is negated through its application.

This is the only feature of the piece that can be related to time in music. The subject matter of this piece leaves little room for the symbolism which Messiaen normally relates to time: the “agony” of Jesus is a rather static concept, which can be argued to already exist outside of time constraints and temporal dependency. Any extra references to the role of time might be superfluous and unnecessary.

6.5 IV *Amen du Désir*

The tempo indicated for the opening of this piece is very slow (*Très lent, avec amour*) with a metronome indication of a semi-quaver equal to 72. The same is true of the coda, where the tempo indication is again very slow (*Très lent, détendu, alangui*) with a metronome tempo of a semi-quaver sextuplet equal to 104 is indicated. This slow introduction and coda have the effect of freeing the first and last sections from any sense of forward motion, and create a static atmosphere that aurally negates time and temporal development.

There are several examples of non-retrogradable rhythms in this piece, specifically in the

reprise of the second section (bar 97-137). These rhythms are based on variations and augmentations of Greek rhythms. There are four rhythms that Messiaen specifies in this section, three of which are non-retrogradable. They are indicated between square brackets as a, b and c (see Example 6.7).

Example 6.7

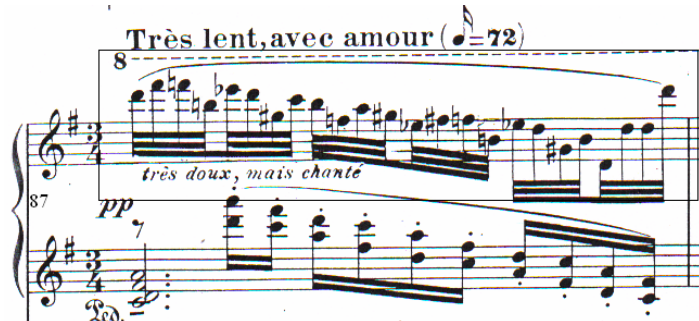


The musical score for Example 6.7 is in 2/4 time and consists of two staves. The top staff is for the piano, starting at bar 97, and the bottom staff is for the bassoon. The tempo is marked 'Modéré, presque vif' with a quarter note equal to 80 (♩ = 80). The piano part begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and features a rhythmic pattern enclosed in square brackets labeled 'a'. This pattern is repeated with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic and a bracket labeled 'b'. The bassoon part is marked *pp* and features a rhythmic pattern enclosed in square brackets labeled 'c'. The piano part is marked *8^a bassa* and *percuté, staccato*. The bassoon part is also marked *8^a bassa*.

These rhythms are used several times in this section. Their purpose and intellectual implications have already been discussed: because of their symmetrical nature, they symbolically and intellectually negate time by beginning and ending in the same way. This does not allow for natural temporal development or linear motion.

Although Messiaen does not specifically indicate it, the figurations in bar 87-96 seem to imitate birdsong (see Example 6.8).

Example 6.8



Birdsong has the symbolic meaning for Messiaen of being related to divinity and godliness, by being music free from human time constraints and temporal dependency. Invoking birdsong therefore negates time in music for Messiaen.

6.6 V *Amen des anges, des saints, du chant des oiseaux*

Strict rhythmical procedures once again dominate the temporal characteristics of this piece. The first of these is the use of the second composite rhythmic pattern or *tâla*, which consists of seventeen values like the *râgavardhana* used in the fourth *Amen*. This pattern, however, is built exclusively from non-retrogradable rhythms, which are grouped in two cells of five and one cell of seven values (see Example 6.9).

Example 6.9



This *tâla* is used in bar 24 in both piano parts (see Example 6.10). The first cell is marked with square brackets.

Example 6.10



The image displays a musical score for Example 6.10, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line and two piano accompaniment staves. The vocal line begins at measure 23 with a *mf* dynamic and a crescendo leading to a *pp* (en laissant résonner) section. The piano accompaniment features complex rhythmic patterns, including a *mf* section and a *mf* *expressif* section. The second system continues the piano accompaniment from measure 26, showing further rhythmic complexity. The score is written in a key signature of two sharps (D major) and a time signature of 3/4.

The non-retrogradable nature of these rhythms means that they have the same construction whether they are read from left to right or right to left. This effectively negates time by not allowing for forward motion or natural temporal development.

In bar 160, the rhythmic organization becomes very complex. Two non-retrogradable rhythms are presented on three levels, each presentation in triple canon with itself at a semi-quaver's distance (marked with square brackets) (see Example 6.11).

Example 6.11

The musical score for Example 6.11 consists of two systems. The first system, starting at measure 159, features a piano part with a tempo marking of *Rall. molto* and a bassoon part. The second system, starting at measure 166, features a piano part with a tempo marking of *Un peu lent (♩=66)* and a bassoon part. The piano part in the second system includes dynamic markings of *pp* (percuté, en laissant résonner), *mf*, and *pp*. The bassoon part in the second system includes dynamic markings of *mf* and *pp*, and is marked *8^a bassa*. The score is written in G major and 3/8 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

These rhythms, apart from being non-retrogradable, contain a further inherent symmetry. When reduced to units of a demisemiquaver, the central value is the sum of its two predecessors: 3-5-8-5-3 and 4-3-7-3-4. This symmetry contained within the non-retrogradable rhythms further strengthens the role of these rhythms, and by implication their ability to negate time in the music.

The birds referred to in the title (*des oiseaux*) appear for the first time in bar 77 (see Example 6.12), and birdsong is used again in several instances during the course of the piece.

Example 6.12

The musical score for Example 6.12 consists of two systems. The first system, starting at measure 87, features a vocal part with the lyrics "clair, libre et gai, comme un oiseau" and a piano part. The second system, starting at measure 166, features a piano part. The vocal part in the first system includes dynamic markings of *ff* and *f*. The piano part in the first system includes dynamic markings of *ff* and *f*. The piano part in the second system includes dynamic markings of *pp* and *f*. The score is written in G major and 3/8 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, and as was discussed in detail in Chapter 4, birdsong symbolically negates time in music for Messiaen. Birds make music that is not dependant on human notions of temporal development, and that does not adhere to any human time constraints. Therefore, imitating birdsong in music frees the music from time dependency.

6.7 VI *Amen du Jugement*

This piece contains no features that can be related to time in music. It has a very simple formal construction, which consists of several repetitions of the same material (with minor modifications). These repetitions give the piece a stark, unyielding character, which can be related to the basic characteristics which would be associated with the Final Judgement. This event, which is a single occurrence and according to Christian doctrine the final act of all human life, can be argued to already exist outside the scope of time and temporal dependency. This is a possible explanation for the lack of features that can be related to time, such as non-retrogradable rhythm, formal symmetry and birdsong.

6.8 VII *Amen de la Consommation*

The *râgavardhana* that was used in previous pieces is used again at the opening of this final piece in the cycle in the first piano part (marked with square brackets) (see Example 6.13). This rhythm is repeated several times during the course of the piece.

Example 6.13



The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piece titled "Modéré, joyeux (♩=120)". The first system includes a piano part (treble and bass clefs) and a bassoon part (8^a bassa). The piano part features dynamic markings such as *f* (forte), *più f* (pizzicato forte), and *ff* (fortissimo), along with the instruction "carillonnant". The bassoon part includes dynamic markings like *p* (piano) and *ff*. The second system continues the piano and bassoon parts, with dynamic markings like *ff* and *p*. The score is marked with "8" at the beginning and end of the systems, indicating an eight-measure phrase. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

As was mentioned before, one cell within this rhythmical pattern is non-retrogradable, which has a negating influence on time in the music. Intellectually and symbolically, this type of figure does not allow for logical temporal progression, because it reads the same in both directions and begins and ends in the same position.

This rhythmical pattern, apart from containing a non-retrogradable rhythmical cell, is also an irregular rhythm which does not fit into traditional western time signatures. This

rhythm is superimposed on a very regular rhythm of quavers in the second piano, which provides a steady pulse for the entire piece. This combination of a steady pulse with a complex rhythmical procedure creates a type of juxtaposition between what can be labelled as forward moving time (pulsation) and rhythms that are free of time constraints and do not fit into a traditional western way of organising time (the *râgavardhana*). This highlights the role of time in the music, and on an intellectual level strengthens the temporal negating properties of the *râgavardhana*.

6.9 General Comments

Rigorous rhythmical procedures and the frequent use of non-retrogradable rhythm are the main features of this cycle that can be related to time, although birdsong also features strongly in some pieces.

This work was written shortly after the *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* (1941), and is one of the first works to be completed after Messiaen's repatriation. It builds forth on the time concepts that Messiaen experimented with in the *Quatuor*, with significant development in the use of Indian rhythms such as the *râgavardhana* and Messiaen's own derivatives thereof, as well as rhythmic canons and larger palindromes.

These techniques will be exploited on an even larger scale in the next major work to be composed for piano, the *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* (1944).

7. *VINGT REGARDS SUR L'ENFANT JÉSUS* (1944)

7.1 Background

Messiaen wrote the cycle *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* in only six months, between March and September 1944 (Hill 1995:88). The cycle is written for Yvonne Loriod, and is extremely demanding for the pianist, both technically and emotionally.

Lasting around two and a half hours, and ranging from movements with huge virtuosic demands to ones that are extremely slow and intimate, this work seems to exhibit nearly every technique and requirement possible on the piano.

As the title indicates, the twenty pieces of the cycle all portray a “regard” or vision of the infant Jesus – the first by the Father, and also by e.g. the Stars (no. 2), the Virgin (no. 4), the Angels, (no. 14), the Silence (no. 17) and the Church of Love (no. 20).

There is a numerical significance attached to the order of the pieces, described by Messiaen in the preface to the work, and quoted by Hill as (Hill 1995:89):

The *Regard de la Croix* bears the number 7, a perfect number, because the sufferings of Christ on the cross restored the order that was disturbed by sin, and the angels are confirmed in grace in no. 14 (two times 7). The *Regards du temps* bears the number 9, representing the nine months of maternity common to all children, and the *Regard de l'Onction terrible* has the number 18 (two times 9) – here, divinity is poured out over the humanity of Christ in the one person who is the son of God. The two pieces which speak of creation and the divine government of creation are no. 6 (because 6 is the number of days of creation) and no. 12 (two times 6).

A musical feature of Messiaen's numerical scheme is the recurrence of the *Thème de Dieu* (Theme of God), the principle cyclic theme (see Example 7.1).

Example 7.1



The image shows a musical score for 'Thème de Dieu' by Olivier Messiaen. It consists of three staves: a treble clef staff for the piano right hand, a bass clef staff for the piano left hand, and a bass clef staff for the bassoon. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/8. The piano part features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand, both marked *ppp*. The bassoon part features a sextuplet of eighth notes, marked *pp*. The score is labeled '(Thème de Dieu)' and '8^a bassa'.

It is heard in the first, fifth, tenth, fifteenth and twentieth piece, all the pieces concerned with divinity (regards of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, the Infant Jesus and the Holy Church) (Hill 1995:89). This suggests a ground plan of grouping the cycle into sections of five.

The musical features that are related to time that will be discussed in the analysis are: tempo, rhythm, symmetry, harmony, form and birdsong. It should be noted that not all the pieces are expected to exhibit examples of all these features - possible reasons for this will also be mentioned in the discussion of each piece.

7.2. *Regard du Père*

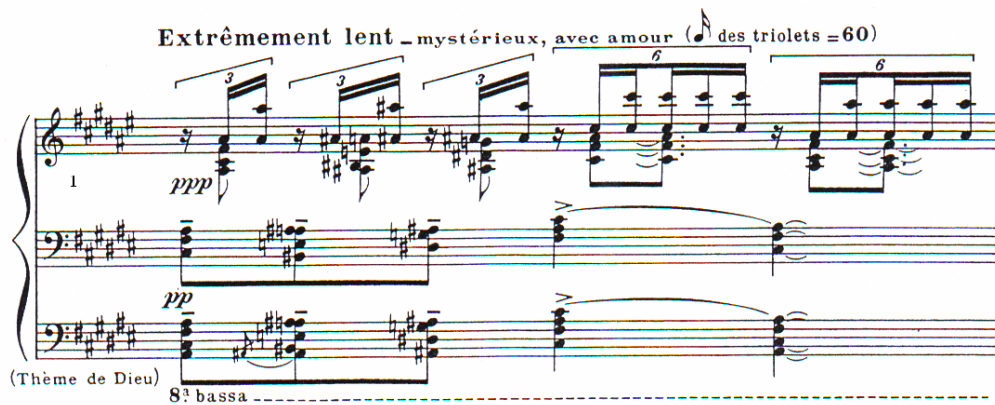
The tempo indication is *Extrêmement lent*. Messiaen indicates a metronome tempo where each semi-quaver within the triplet grouping is equal to 60. The extremely slow tempo which should be maintained throughout the piece creates a sense of “timelessness”, and separates the music from any sense of motion or logical temporal development.

A rhythmical feature of the piece is the continuous pulsation of semi-quavers heard through the entire movement, which creates a type of “expressive forward impulse” (Hill 1995:97). Coupled with the extremely slow tempo, this “tension between stillness and

expressive forward impulse, between, one might say, eternity and time” (Hill 1995:97) supports the importance Messiaen attaches to the intellectual and aural implications that the role of time fulfils in his music.

The five-chord grouping that constitutes the *Thème de Dieu* begins and ends with the same chord (see Example 7.2). The harmonic symmetry of the *Thème de Dieu* has the function of symbolically and intellectually negating forward motion or development by beginning and ending with the same chord.

Example 7.2



The symbolic significance of this symmetry is further supported by the similarity between the opening and final chord: the chords are placed in different registers, and the final chord contains an added sixth, but apart from these features the chords are virtually the same. This suggests that the entire piece ends where it began, thus further intellectually negating any form of development, specifically temporal development (see Example 7.3).

Example 7.3



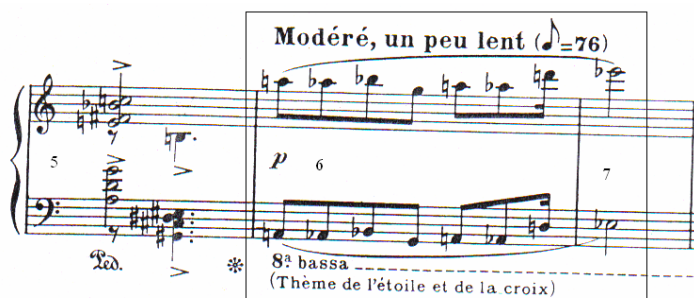
Bar 19

The main features of the piece that can be related to time in music are the slow tempo and harmonic symmetry. Neither non-retrogradable rhythms nor birdsong are used. A reason for this could be that the main characteristic of the piece is its stillness and absence of movement; it is a kind of “prologue to the whole journey” (Hill 1995:97), and the role of time in the piece mainly manifests itself in the “absence” of time and movement, not in any intellectual approach related to time.

7.3 *Regard de l'étoile*

The main musical feature of this piece is the *Thème de l'étoile et de la croix* (see Example 7.4), which will be used again in other parts of the cycle.

Example 7.4



Modéré, un peu lent (♩=76)

pp 6

7

Red.

* 8^a bassa
(Thème de l'étoile et de la croix)

This theme is melodically related to plainsong as practised by Gregorian monks in medieval times, and is heard first in unison four octaves apart, and later in combination with other musical material.

Messiaen often referred in his works to plainchant or plainsong as practised in medieval times (Johnson 1975:21). The free-flowing nature of this melodic style appealed to Messiaen specifically because of its apparent freedom from time constraints or logical temporal development (Austbø 2003), and its application here as the main feature of the *Thème de l'étoile et de la croix* significantly diminishes the entire work's dependency on temporal development.

The last three chords in the coda of this piece are significant (see Example 7.5).

Example 7.5



They are unrelated to any chords heard thus far in the cycle in terms of construction, and are not formally related to any of the motives in the rest of the piece. However, they will be used again in the ninth piece, *Regard du Temps*, and they are related to chords used in the thirteenth piece, *Noël*.

A possible symbolic attachment can be made to these chords, as is suggested by Bruhn (Bruhn 1998:260):

These chords ... are unrelated to anything heard in the main body of the expositional piece both tonally and with regard to tempo, gesture, or any other

parameter. ...[t]he impression they give in their original context is at best that of being “outside of” the regularly pacing, strophic piece. ... Only with the benefit of hindsight do we recognize the dimension of “divine time” in the coda of “The Star’s contemplation”...

Bruhn attaches thematic significance to these chords, and argues that they are representative of “divine time” as opposed to “human time” as will be portrayed in the ninth *Regard* (where these chords will appear again). In this piece, they have the function of merely anticipating this juxtaposition, but in the greater cyclical scheme of the entire work, their role is already being hinted at in this second piece.

Although no other features of this piece seem to be specifically related to time, this feature of the main theme significantly adds to the intellectual and aural negation of time in the piece.

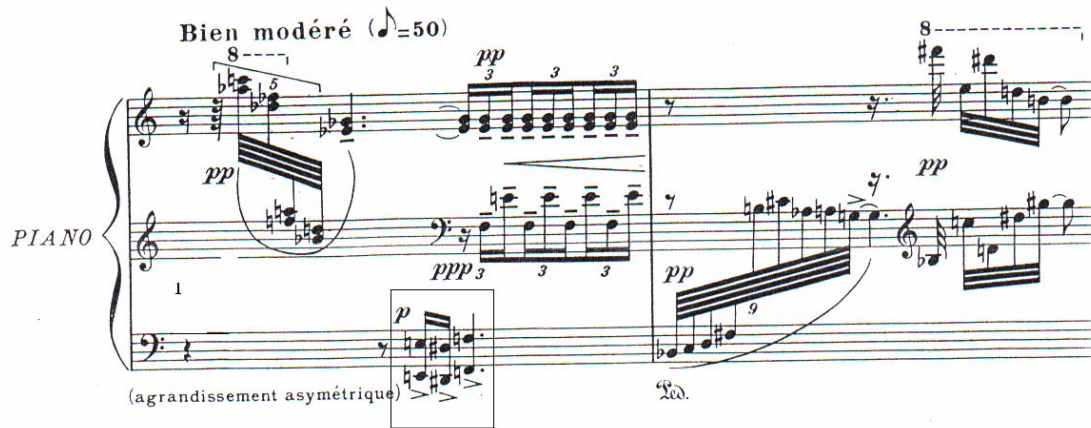
7.4 *L'échange*

Messiaen indicates a slow metronome tempo of a quaver equal to 50, which is maintained for the entire piece. This slow tempo has a similar effect to the tempo choice of the first piece: it creates the sense that the piece is musically motionless, and therefore free from direction and temporal development. Time as a concept related to forward motion is thus negated.

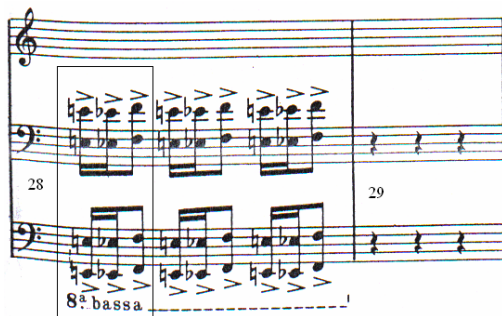
Formally, the piece is built up of two-bar units that are developed in various ways.

The melodic figure found in bar 1, bottom system (see Example 7.6) is heard again (notated enharmonically) towards the end of the piece, in bar 28 (see Example 7.7). Between the first bar and the end of the work, this figure is repeated in every odd-numbered bar, one semi-tone higher until the same pitch as the opening is reached in a different register.

Example 7.6



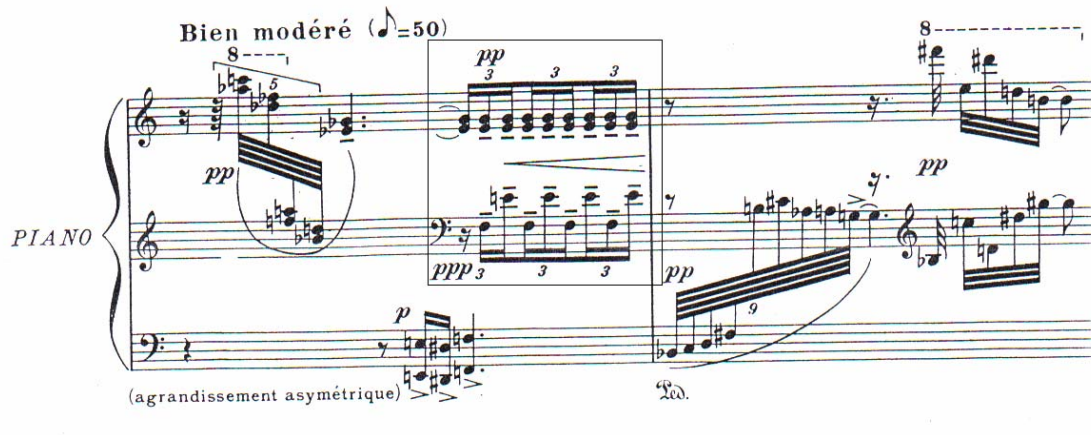
Example 7.7



The development of this figure therefore ends at the same point where it began. This symmetry symbolically negates time and logical temporal development.

The figure in the second half of the odd-numbered bars represent the divine (Hill 1995:97), and it remains unchanged throughout the piece (see Example 7.8). Messiaen writes in the Author's Note at the beginning of the cycle: "God is that which does not change" (Bruhn 1998:254) – it is therefore fitting that the only material that remains unchanged throughout the piece would be the representation of the divine. The material preceding and following this figure is continuously developed.

Example 7.8



This formal system of juxtaposing developing themes with unchanging material intellectually counteracts logical development and forward motion, by constantly returning the music to its first point of departure.

7.5 *Regard de la Vierge*

This piece consists of several sections that are repeated with minor modifications. The sections between bar 35 and 102 are symmetrical. The construction is as follows:

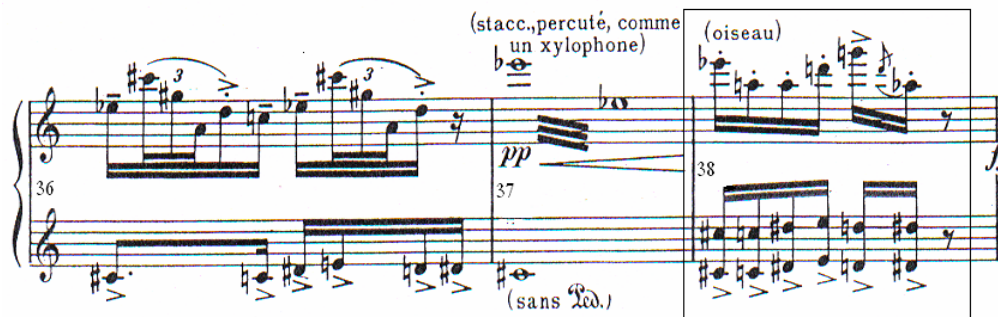
- Bar 35-62 *Modéré*
- Bar 63-75 *Très modéré*
- Bar 76-86 *Plus vif*
- Bar 87-94 *Très modéré*, minus one repetition of bar 63-67.
- Bar 95-102 *Modéré*, minus bars 40-58.

This type of palindrome has the purpose of intellectually and symbolically negating time, by having the piece end with the same musical material it started with.

A feature related to time in music which is heard for the first time in the cycle in this

piece is the use of birdsong (see Example 7.9).

Example 7.9



The image shows a musical score for Example 7.9, consisting of two staves. The upper staff is for the piano and the lower staff is for the xylophone. The piano part begins at measure 36 with a triplet of eighth notes. The xylophone part begins at measure 37 with a triplet of eighth notes. The score includes performance instructions: "(stacc., percuté, comme un xylophone)" above the xylophone staff, "(oiseau)" above the piano staff, and "(sans ped.)" below the piano staff. The score is marked with *pp* and *f*.

Messiaen uses birdsong in his music with the philosophical justification that birds make music which is completely free from human time constraints, and that exhibits none of the linear development characteristics typical to music made by human beings.

Birdsong therefore negates time by being completely free from traditional temporal limitations and time constraints.

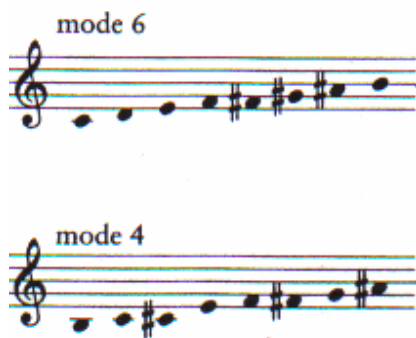
7.6 *Regard du Fils sur le Fils*

The fifth piece, which is thematically related to the first piece through the recurrence of the *Thème de Dieu*, also has a slow tempo indication: *Très lent*, with a metronome marking of a semi-quaver equal to 76. This tempo is the dominating tempo, and is varied only three times. Similarly to *Regard du Père*, the extremely slow tempo of the opening section creates the impression that this section is free of movement and/or temporal development.

As in the first piece, the *Thème de Dieu* (bars 2-5) begins and ends with the same chord. This once again has the effect of intellectually negating time by having the main theme begin and end in the same way.

A melodic feature of the upper lines of the opening section is that they are composed in the 6th mode of limited transposition (third transposition) and 4th mode of limited transposition (fourth transposition) (see Example 7.10).

Example 7.10



Messiaen compares these modes of limited transposition to the non-retrogradable rhythms in his *Technique of My Musical Language* (Messiaen 1944c):

These modes realise in the vertical direction (transposition) what non-retrogradable rhythms realise in the horizontal direction (retrogradation). ...[Th]ese modes cannot be transposed beyond a certain number of transpositions without falling into the same notes, enharmonically speaking; likewise, these rhythms cannot be read in a retrograde sense without one's finding again exactly the same order of values as in the right sense.

Using the modes, and especially the modes 4 and 6 (which are more complex), has the same intellectual and symbolical implication in terms of time as the use of non-retrogradable rhythm: the limits in terms of transposition of these modes limit their possibilities for development, and thus also the possibility for logical temporal development. This fact, while hardly discernible to the listener, nevertheless is symbolically significant in the implications it has on the role of time in the piece.

In a purely aural sense, the use of modes 4 and 6 make the opening chords sound “oddly muffled” (Hill 1995:98), and there is never any sense of logical possibilities for harmonic

resolution. This lack of harmonic resolution in its turn has a negating effect on any sense of forward motion (harmonically speaking), which also has implications for temporal motion and development: the effect created is one of harmonic stasis, which in turn counteracts a sense of logical temporal development.

The general formal scheme is: A (bar 1-21); B (bar 22-33); A (34-52); B (bar 53-65); A (bar 66-73), with a short coda that is thematically related to section B (bar 74-76). When analysed in this manner, the form appears to be a large palindrome. The piece therefore ends with the same material with which it began, thus not allowing for logical temporal development or forward motion. This symmetry symbolically negates time in the music.

The second instance where birdsong is used in the cycle is found in bar 23, where Messiaen indicates *comme un chant d'oiseau* at the beginning of the B-section (see Example 7.11). This is a musical translation of the call of the skylark (Hill 1995:98). As mentioned in the previous piece, birdsong carries the symbolic significance for Messiaen of containing music completely free from human time constraints and temporal limitations. The use of birdsong therefore symbolically negates time in the music.

Example 7.11



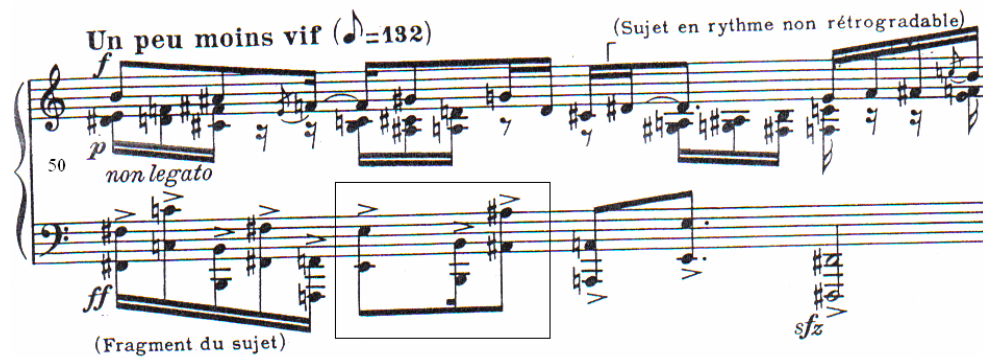
The image shows a musical score for a passage of birdsong. The title is "Un peu plus vif (♩=92)". The score is written for piano (p) and includes a dynamic marking of *cresc.* (crescendo). The music is in 3/4 time and features a melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand. The melodic line is characterized by a series of eighth notes, with some notes beamed together. The score is divided into two systems, with bar numbers 23 and 24 indicated. The first system (bars 23-24) is marked with a dynamic of *p* and includes the instruction "(comme un chant d'oiseau)". The second system (bars 25-26) is also marked with a dynamic of *p* and includes a crescendo marking. The score is annotated with various musical symbols, including slurs, accents, and fingerings.

7.7 Par Lui tout a été fait

A technique which Messiaen connects intrinsically with the negation of time is non-retrogradable rhythm, and this is found for the first time in this cycle in the sixth piece.

Examples of this type of rhythm are found in bar 50 (see Example 7.12). The same rhythm is repeated in bars 51-58. It is found again in bar 73 (see Example 7.13), and thereafter repeated in bars 74-77.

Example 7.12



Un peu moins vif (♩=132) (Sujet en rythme non rétrogradable)

50 *p* non legato

ff (Fragment du sujet) *sfz*

Detailed description: This musical score shows two staves, treble and bass clef. The treble staff begins with a dynamic marking of *f* and a tempo marking of 'Un peu moins vif (♩=132)'. The bass staff starts with a dynamic marking of *ff*. A box highlights a specific rhythmic pattern in the bass staff, labeled '(Fragment du sujet)'. The treble staff has a dynamic marking of *p* and the instruction 'non legato'. The piece concludes with a dynamic marking of *sfz*. The title '(Sujet en rythme non rétrogradable)' is written above the treble staff.

Example 7.13



73

Detailed description: This musical score shows two staves, treble and bass clef. The treble staff begins with a dynamic marking of *f*. The bass staff starts with a dynamic marking of *ff*. A box highlights a specific rhythmic pattern in the bass staff. The piece concludes with a dynamic marking of *sfz*.

These non-retrogradable rhythms contain a bilateral symmetry, as was mentioned in Chapter 4, a characteristic that intellectually negates time by causing the figure to read exactly the same in both forward and retrograde directions.

Another rhythmical feature of the piece is the section between bar 143 and bar 161 which consists of an uninterrupted sequence of semi-quavers. Such a long section which is effectively “without” rhythm, or at least free from any rhythmical development, creates an aural effect of absence of development or even, in a sense, movement. Anything which is free from change (in this case rhythmical change) is caught in an intellectual stasis, similarly to music written in an extremely slow tempo, such as is the case in the first piece.

Formally, the entire piece is conceived as a palindrome. All the material from bar 1 to bar 61 is heard in perfect retrograde after the central section between bar 62 – 68 (a free central unit) in bar 69 – 80, without any deviations. This creates a perfect palindrome (refer to Appendix B). This is followed by a canon (bar 130-160), which reaches a climax with an appearance of the *Thème de Dieu* in bar 161. The piece is rounded off with an extensive coda.

This formal scheme has extensive implications for the role time plays in the music. The palindrome created between bars 1-61 and 69-80 symbolically, intellectually and musically negates time by causing the musical material to arrive at the exact point of departure, therefore depriving the piece of any logical, linear temporal development.

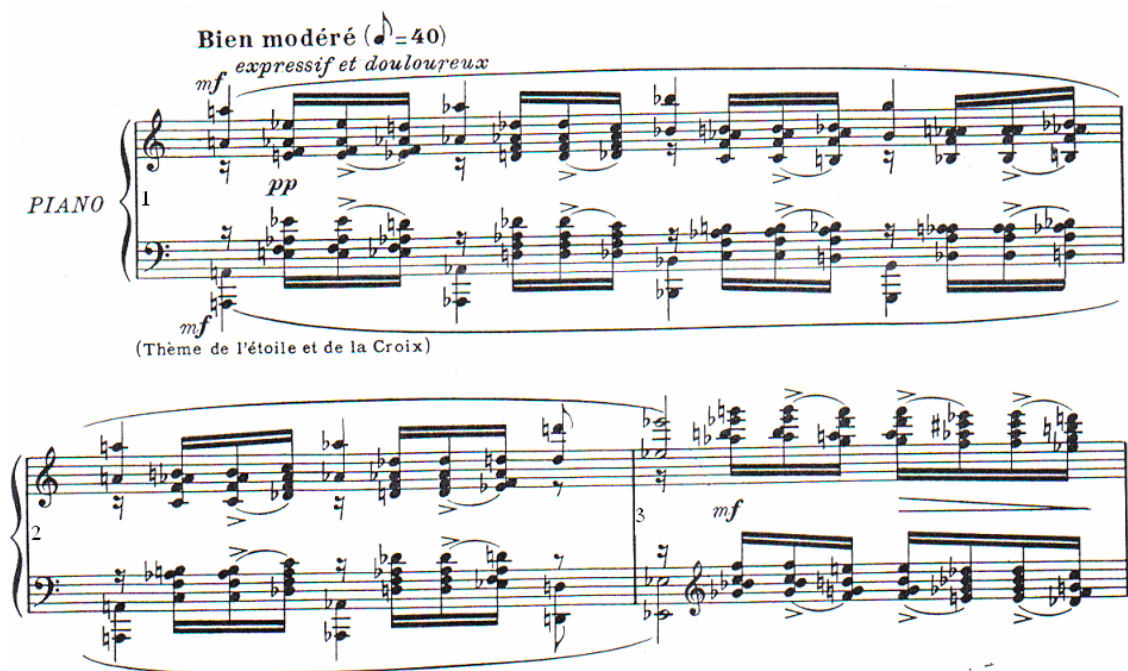
The absence of birdsong in this piece can be explained in terms of the piece’s theological-symbolic role within the cycle. The title, which translates as “Through Him all was made”, suggests that the piece is devoted specifically to creation, and thus “devoted to the exploration of past and future, the origin whence all life came and the goal whither the Child is to lead all Mankind” (Bruhn 1998:265).

Birds represent for Messiaen “a reality not touched by concerns of past and future” (Bruhn 1998:265). It is therefore fitting that they are absent from the first piece to deal specifically with creation, the symbolic “beginning” of everything that exists (a concept which in turn carries the implication that all will eventually cease to exist, a futuristic concern).

7.8 *Regard de la Croix*

A striking feature of this piece is that, with the exception of a few bars, a continuous rhythm of semi-quavers is heard (see Example 7.14)

Example 7.14



Bien modéré (♩ = 40)
expressif et douloureux

mf
pp

PIANO

1

mf

(Thème de l'étoile et de la Croix)

2

3

mf

A similar passage was referred to in the sixth piece, but while the long repetition of semi-quavers in that work has an intellectual implication, the effect in the seventh piece is more musical than intellectual. The absence of rhythmical development results in a static musical effect, which negates time by not allowing the music to develop in a typical

linear temporal progression.

The main theme of this piece, the *Thème de l'étoile et de la Croix*, first appeared in the second piece, *Regard de l'étoile*. As was mentioned in 7.3, this theme is related to plainsong as practised in medieval times. A characteristic of this type of music is its free-flowing nature, in which rhythm or at least rhythmical development plays almost no role. When used by Messiaen in this piece, it results in the music becoming free from time constraints and logical rhythmical or temporal development.

No other features related to time in music such as non-retrogradable rhythm or birdsong obviously manifest themselves in this piece. A possible reason for this could be the symbolic placement of the piece within the cycle – in contrast to the large-scale sixth *Regard*, this piece has a more contemplative atmosphere.

The Cross is an inanimate object, and therefore in itself free of movement and development (as opposed to the act of creation which is portrayed in the sixth piece). The static rhythm and sparse use material create a sufficient level of negation of time without other, more obvious features.

7.9 Regard des hauteurs

This piece is dedicated to the “glory of the heights”, and is essentially an imitation of the song of the lark (*L'allouette*) (see Example 7.15) as well as other unidentified birds.

Example 7.15



The musical score for 'Un peu vif' (L'alouette) is presented in three systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, marked 'Un peu vif' and 'mf stacc. (L'alouette)'. The second system includes markings for 'legato' and 'stacc. sempre'. The third system shows further musical notation, including a sixteenth-note figure in the left hand.

The use of birdsong is the only characteristic of the piece that can be related to time, but it has significant implications for all musical aspects of the piece. As was mentioned before, birdsong carries the deeper meaning for Messiaen as being the type of music most related to divinity. This means that the music of the birds is not limited by human time constraints, and is free from all temporal dependency.

Dedicating an entire piece to the “heights”, i.e. birds, reinforces the significant role of time in music for Messiaen. The piece is characterised by rhythmically complex figures (copies of the original birdcalls) and no traditional formal analysis is possible. However, the fact that the main feature of the piece is its relation to a type of music which is by

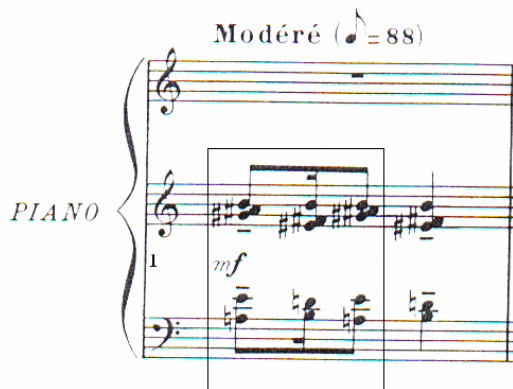
implication free from time constraints and temporal dependency makes other time-related features superfluous.

7.10 *Regard du temps*

The tempo indication for this piece is a slow metronomic tempo of a quaver equal to 88. This tempo is never varied. Just as in the other slow movements of the cycle (*Regard du Père, Regard du Fils sur le Fils*), this slow tempo has the effect of negating time by depriving the piece of a sense of forward motion, which implies a lack of adherence to temporal development within the piece.

Non-retrogradable rhythm is used frequently, and is the main feature of the opening theme. These figures are found in bar 1 (see Example 7.16), bar 7, bar 12, bar 19, bar 21, bar 33, bar 35 and bar 37.

Example 7.16



The symmetrical nature of non-retrogradable rhythm, which results in the rhythms having the same meaning when read in either direction, symbolically negates time by having the music begin and end at the same point.

A harmonic feature which relates to time is that the chords that make up the rhythmic canon which starts in bar 2 (see Example 7.17) are the same chords found in the last bar

of the second piece, *Regard de l'étoile* (see Example 7.18).

Example 7.17

Musical score for Example 7.17, Piano part, measures 1-3. The tempo is *Modéré* (♩ = 88). The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a piano introduction with a *mf* dynamic. The first measure is marked with a '1' and the second with a '2'. A boxed section labeled '16^a (Canc. a rythmique)' contains measures 3 and 4, with a *pp* dynamic and a *m. dr.* marking. The bass line is labeled '16^a bassa'.

Musical score for Example 7.17, Piano part, measures 5-8. The score continues with a *dr.* marking and a *m. g.* dynamic. The bass line is labeled '16^a bassa'.

Example 7.18

Musical score for Example 7.18, Piano part, measures 39-42. The tempo is *Modéré, un peu lent* (♩ = 76). The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a piano introduction with a *p* dynamic. The first measure is marked with a '39' and the second with an '8'. A boxed section labeled 'Poco rall.' contains measures 41 and 42, with a *ppp* dynamic. The bass line is labeled '16^a bassa'.

In the second piece, the chords were placed independently and were seemingly unrelated to any other musical material of that or the preceding piece. Now, however, these chords are juxtaposed with the non-retrogradable rhythmical figure heard at the opening of the piece.

According to Bruhn, the “amorphous, emotional centrally anchored features of the first theme” can be compared with the “abstract order, superhuman passionlessness and extreme range of the second theme”, which creates a stark contrast between what could be argued is “time as we humans know it” and “its [time’s] eternal dimension” (Bruhn 1998:260).

Whether such symbolic attachments to these themes are truly justified is a matter of opinion. However, the two themes do exhibit very different characteristics. Whereas the first theme contains a non-retrogradable rhythm, which by this point of the cycle has been clearly established to have negating possibilities for time as humans know it, the second theme contains a rhythmic canon, which is hardly perceptible to the human ear, and therefore has few capabilities of influencing a human time concept. Aurally, the impression created by the close range of the notes of the opening chords makes the first theme more accessible than the second theme to the human ear, which could be argued to further support the juxtaposition of the first theme which represents “human time” with the second theme which represents “divine time”.

7.11 *Regard de l’Esprit de joie*

This piece, another example of “jubilatory *Regards*”, has a fast tempo indication which is maintained for the whole piece. As a result of this, time as an abstract factor in the music is approached on an intellectual level rather than a purely aural one.

There are several occurrences of non-retrogradeable rhythm, for example in bar 60 (see Example 7.19), 66, 72, 74 and bar 84, 90, 96 and 98 (top system). As was previously mentioned, these rhythms symbolically and intellectually negate time through their

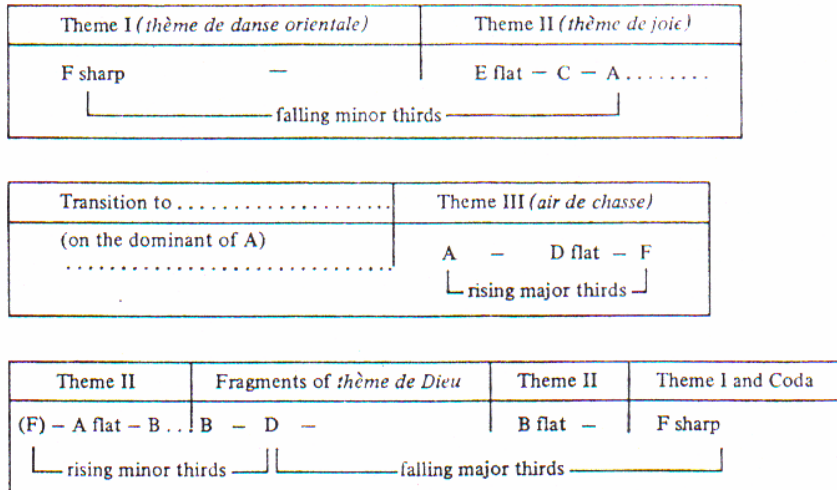
symmetrical nature. The figures are musically irreversible, and read the same in either direction. In contrast to this, one of the main features of time in the logical human sense is that time is always linear and dependant on forward motion for development.

Example 7.19



Tonally, a type of symmetry is created through the several modulations that occur in the piece. The following plan illustrates the modulation process (see Example 7.20) (Johnson 1975:74). This tonal symmetry, although a purely intellectual tool and not obviously aurally discernible, has the same symbolic effect as non-retrogradable rhythm – time is negated through the bilateral symmetry created by this modulation process.

Example 7.20



This piece exhibits relatively few characteristics that can be related to time. A possible explanation for this is that the role that this piece fulfils within the cycle is one of jubilation rather than an intellectual view of time ad eternity. The joyful spirit of God is represented, and although the several applications of non-retrogradable rhythm do support the negation of time, the primary function of this piece could be to characterise this joyful spirit, rather than comment on eternity and temporality, as is the case in most of the other pieces.

7.12 Première communion de la Vierge

In this piece, Messiaen again indicates a very slow tempo (*Très Lent*) with a metronome marking of a quaver equal to 50. The tempo is sped up in two sections: bar 21-42 (*Modéré, un peu vif*), and bar 43-72 (*Modéré*). Apart from these instances, the tempo is very slow throughout the piece.

As was the case in other slow movements such as *Regard du Père* and *Regard du Fils sur le Fils*, this slow tempo creates a static atmosphere which is uninfluenced by logical temporal development. The music seems to exist beyond the scope of human time

constraints.

Non-retrogradable rhythm is used in bar 21 (see Example 7.21), bars 23 and 25, as well as in bar 29 and bar 31, and again in bar 37.

Example 7.21



The image shows a musical score for two staves. The first staff is marked 'Au mouvement' and 'très rapide' with a tempo of 8. The second staff is marked 'Modéré, un peu vif' with a tempo of 138 and '(Magnificat - enthousiasme haletant)'. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'ppp' and 'f'. A specific rhythmic figure in bar 21 is highlighted with a box and labeled 'f 21'. Below the bass staff, there are notes 'g a b a' and a circled '2' with an asterisk, indicating a non-retrogradable rhythm.

These figures negate time on an intellectual as well as a symbolic level. Their symmetrical nature causes the figures to have the same rhythmical construction whether read from left to right or in retrograde, effectively freeing the figures from any logical temporal characteristics.

The *Thème de Dieu* makes another appearance in this piece, transposed to B-flat major (see Example 7.22).

Example 7.22



Très lent (♩=50)

tendre

1 *pp* *ff* 2 *p*

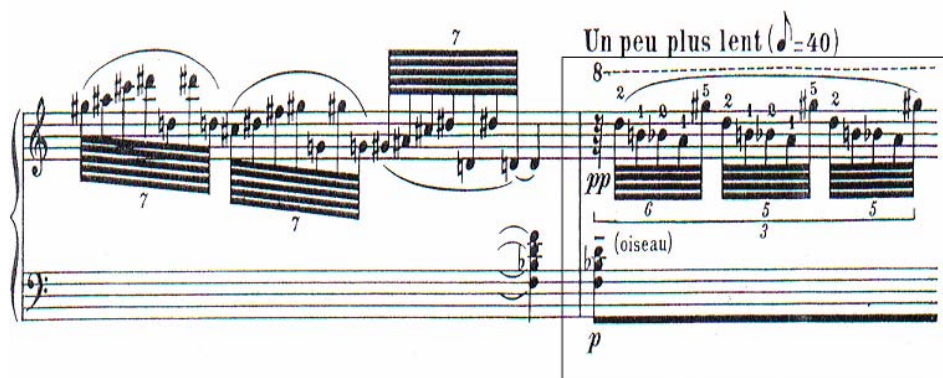
(intérieur)
(Thème de Dieu)

Detailed description: This musical score is for a piece titled 'Très lent' with a tempo of 50 quarter notes per minute. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff begins with a series of chords, marked with fingerings 8, 5, 2, 5, 4, 4, 5, 2. The dynamics range from *pp* to *ff*. The bass staff provides accompaniment, starting with a *p* dynamic. A section of the score is enclosed in a box and labeled '(intérieur) (Thème de Dieu)'. The piece concludes with a *p* dynamic and the word 'tendre' written above the notes.

The same symmetry that was mentioned in the first piece applies also here: the first and last chord of the theme is the same, which causes the figure to have cyclical rather than linear characteristics. This, in turn, symbolically negates time and logical temporal development by having the theme begin and end at the same point.

Messiaen imitates birdsong in bar 7 (see Example 7.23).

Example 7.23



Un peu plus lent (♩=40)

7 8 2 5 2 5 2

pp 6 5 5 3

(oiseau)

p

Detailed description: This musical score is for a piece titled 'Un peu plus lent' with a tempo of 40 quarter notes per minute. It features two staves. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a section of chords marked with fingerings 7, 7, 7. The bass staff provides accompaniment with chords marked with fingerings 6, 5, 5, 3. A section of the score is enclosed in a box and labeled '(oiseau)'. The dynamics range from *pp* to *p*. The tempo is marked as 'Un peu plus lent'.

The bird is unidentified in this piece, and the figuration which Messiaen specifies as *oiseau* is similar to the figure heard at the opening of the piece, the accompaniment to the

Thème de Dieu. This type of figuration is heard several times in the piece.

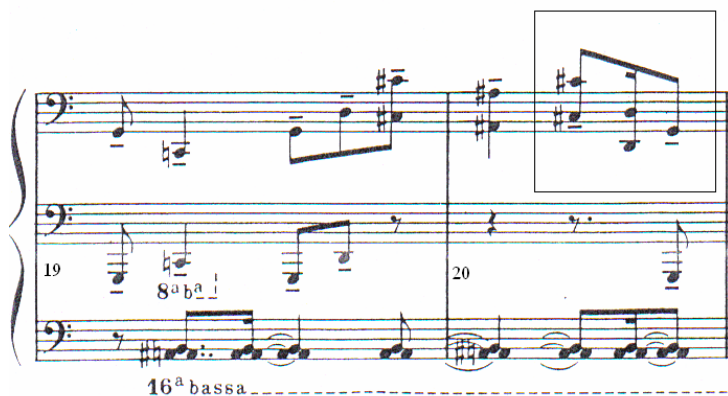
As was mentioned in connection with other pieces of the cycle, birdsong has a symbolic significance for Messiaen, especially concerning the nature of time. Birds make music completely free from human time constraints, and their music is not dependant on logical temporal development. They therefore exist “outside of time”, and for this reason, using birdsong in a piece of music would symbolically negate time in the music.

7.13 *La parole toute-puissante*

Being one of the “jubilatory” pieces in the cycle, the tempo indication is fast (*Un peu vif*), and has no influence on the role of time in the piece.

Non-retrogradable rhythm is used in bar 5, bar 6, bar 20 (see Example 7.24), bar 21, bar 30, bar 36, bar 38, bar 41, bar 42, and bar 43.

Example 7.24



16^a bassa

The frequent use of this type of rhythmical unit (which contains small palindromes within each figure), has a negating effect on time in the music. The figure reads the same in any direction, effectively leaving each musical unit at its original point of departure, and thus not allowing for temporal development on an intellectual level.

This rhythmical aspect is the only characteristic of the piece which has implications for time in the music. A possible reason for the small role that time plays in this piece is that the piece is one of the “jubilatory” *Regards*, and is meant to comment on the “Almighty Word”, an abstract concept which is more related to the power of God than His mysterious nature (which would include His connection with eternity and timelessness).

7.14 Noël

Although the tempo indication at the opening of the piece is fast (*Très vif, joyeux*), the long middle section has a slow tempo indication (*Très Modéré*), with a metronome marking of a quaver equal to 68. This section requires almost the double the playing time of the preceding fast section, and its slow tempo has a similar effect to the slow tempi used in other slow *Regards*: when music is played so slowly, it seems to exist beyond the scope and constraints of human temporal dependency, thus negating time on a symbolic and aural level.

The piece is written in ternary form, A–B–A. Bar 1 – 25 constitutes the A-section, which is followed by the slow B-section, bar 26 – 52. The A-section returns with minor modifications between bar 53 – 76. In a short quasi-coda, the B-section is briefly referred to (bar 77-79), and the piece ends with a final return of a melodic fragment from the A-section.

This formal symmetry has an intellectual effect on time in the music. The ternary form creates a type of palindrome or formal arch. The piece begins and ends with the same material, thus negating logical temporal development or progression. Another instance where symmetry is used to intellectually negate time is found in the construction of the A-section, which begins and ends with the same material, a six bar section spread over three registers (see Example 7.25).

Example 7.25

Très vif, joyeux (♩ = 168)

PIANO

ff

1 (comme des cloches)

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

8^a bassa



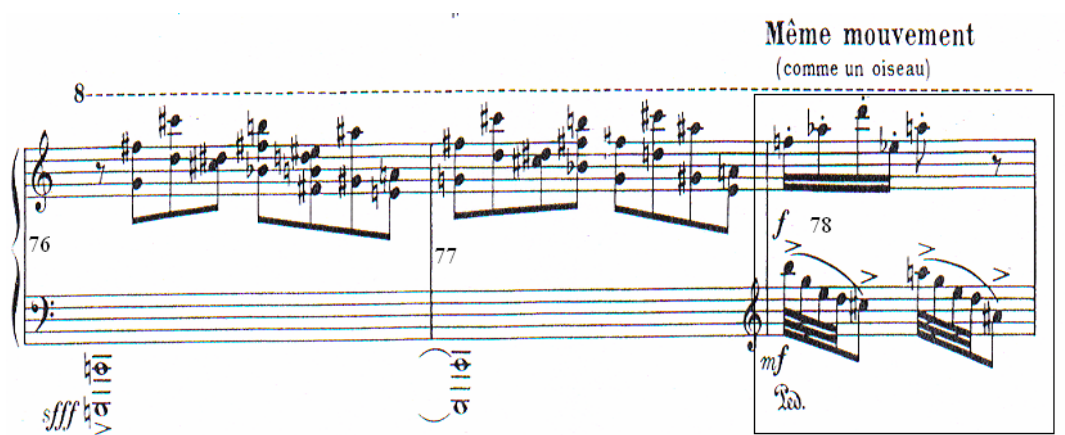
The symbolic significance of the chords found in the last bars of *Regard de l'étoile* and in the opening of *Regard du temps* can again be applied in this piece. The opening chords of *Noël* are harmonically related to the above-mentioned chords: A superimposition of a

fifth and augmented fourth is now changed to a fourth and augmented fifth, reaching the same harmonic result. If one supports the symbolic significance attached to these chords by Bruhn (Bruhn 1998:260), these opening chords symbolically represent divine time as opposed to human time, which in effect negates human time in the piece.

7.15 *Regard des Anges*

The only musical feature of this piece that has an impact on the role of time in music is the use of birdsong. Messiaen indicates the use of birdsong in bar 78 (see Example 7.26).

Example 7.26



The image shows a musical score for 'Regard des Anges' by Olivier Messiaen. It features three measures of music. The first two measures, numbered 76 and 77, are in the left hand and consist of complex, dense chords. The first measure is marked with a very soft dynamic 'sfff'. The third measure, numbered 78, is in the right hand and features a melodic line with bird-like characteristics, marked with a forte dynamic 'f' and the instruction 'Même mouvement (comme un oiseau)'. Below the staff for measure 78, there is a dynamic marking 'mf' and a fermata symbol.

The use of birdsong has the same purpose in this piece as in the other instances where birdsong is used: birds are unconnected to human time constraints, and their music is free from temporal dependency. Therefore, using birdsong symbolically negates time for Messiaen.

On another level, the “Angels” of this *Regard* are related to birds on a philosophical level as being also “creatures of the heavens”, and are traditionally the heavenly musicians. Therefore, on a symbolic level, the entire piece is philosophically freed from time constraints through its subject matter.

7.16 *Le Baiser de l'Enfant Jésus*

In the fifteenth *Regard*, Messiaen again indicates an extremely slow tempo for the first section (*Très lent, calme*), with a metronome indication of a semi-quaver equal to 88. As a result of this tempo choice, the opening section takes more than five minutes to play, more than half the playing time of the entire piece. As was mentioned in other slow movements, this extremely slow tempo creates an atmosphere of timelessness within the music, as if the music exists outside the scope of human time constraints, and is free of human temporal dependency and development.

Apart from the tempo choice, this piece again exhibits no other characteristics directly related to time. Thematically, much of the material is related to preceding pieces, but these themes no longer have the characteristics that impacted on their relation to time. So, for example, the *Thème de Dieu* is referred to in the opening and many times throughout the piece, but without the symmetrical characteristics that were commented on in earlier pieces.

The piece's main role within the cycle is an emotional portrayal of the infant Jesus which reaches out to humanity, a very "human" image. The presence of time as an abstract concept related to divinity plays a secondary role in this piece to the pictorial symbolism of the union of the infant Jesus with humanity.

7.17 *Regard des prophètes, des bergers et des Mages*

The sixteenth piece is again a "jubilatory" *Regard*, and as a result the tempo choice is fairly fast and does not have implications on the role of time in the music.

The overall formal structure has symmetrical characteristics. The piece begins and ends with a "scale of duration" in the left hand, the first with decreasing note values ("ascending" scale) and the second with increasing note values ("descending" scale) (see Example 7.27 and 7.28).

Example 7.27

Modéré (♩=72)

PIANO

1 *mf* (*laissez résonner*)
fff >

2 *mf* 3 4

5 6 7 8 *dim.* 9

10 11 12 13 *p* 14 *f* *dim.*

15 16 17 18 *pp*
mf > *p*

8^a bassa
(comme un Tam-tam) (Valeurs progressivement accélérées)
αα.



Example 7.28

8ª bassa

8ª bassa

8ª bassa

8ª bª

8ª bª

A “chromatic scale of duration” is a technique used by Messiaen which occurs through the progressive addition or subtraction of a unit which is established as the minimum duration (in this piece a semi-quaver). In an “ascending” scale, the durations are subtracted until the basic unit is reached. The opposite process applies for the “descending” scale (Fabbi 1998:61).

This use of a process to determine rhythmical structures has a deeper symbolic meaning. The permutations produce the maximum rhythmical variety that can be obtained by using only one rhythmical unit (the semi-quaver in this case), but they follow a rigid generative principle. The result is a “very deep, concealed cyclicity that is imperceptible, or only subliminally perceptible” (Fabbi 1998:61).

This cyclical aspect is directly opposed to the linear nature of time as we perceive it in the human time sense. In an intellectual sense, therefore, the use of this rhythmical technique negates time.

Again, this piece exhibits few characteristics that can be related to time, and, similarly to the fifteenth *Regard*, the portrayal of the Prophets, Shepherds and Magi has a symbolic and pictorial function rather than one related to the mystical and divine aspect of time.

7.18 Regard du silence

The piece opens in with a slow tempo (*Très modéré*) with a metronome indication of a quaver equal to 66. This slow tempo again creates the impression that the music is timeless and free of movement and therefore also logical temporal development.

The opening section is made up of rhythmic canons that “float beyond measured time” (Hill 1995:101), within an atmosphere of extreme stillness. These canons are created by each time adding half of the value of the top system to the value on the bottom system. So, for example, if the top system has a crotchet, the bottom system would have a dotted crotchet (or crotchet tied with a quaver). While the piece has a through-composed formal

structure made up of contrasting sections, the atmosphere of the opening section inspires a sense of timelessness, which accounts for a large part of the musical material.

The coda of the piece is a 22 bar long figure consisting only of semi-quavers. This creates an impression of “rhythmic stillness” (Hill 1995:101) because of the lack of rhythmical development, which in turn denies the passage any temporal developmental characteristics.

7.19 Regard de l’Onction terrible

A striking rhythmical feature of the piece is that the piece is framed by ascending and descending “scales of duration” (see Example 7.29 and 7.30), similar to those found in the sixteenth piece, *Regard des prophètes, des bergers et des Mages*. These scales are found in the left hand. As was mentioned in 7.17, this type of occurs through the progressive addition or subtraction of a unit which is established as the minimum duration. This piece begins with an ascending scale, where the durations are subtracted until the basic unit is reached (a semi-quaver). At the end of the piece, a descending scale is used – the basic unit of a semi-quaver is added to until a value of a semibreve is reached.

Example 7.29

Modéré (♩ = 80)

PIANO *p*

(Valeurs progressivement ralenties)

(Valeurs progressivement accélérées)

8

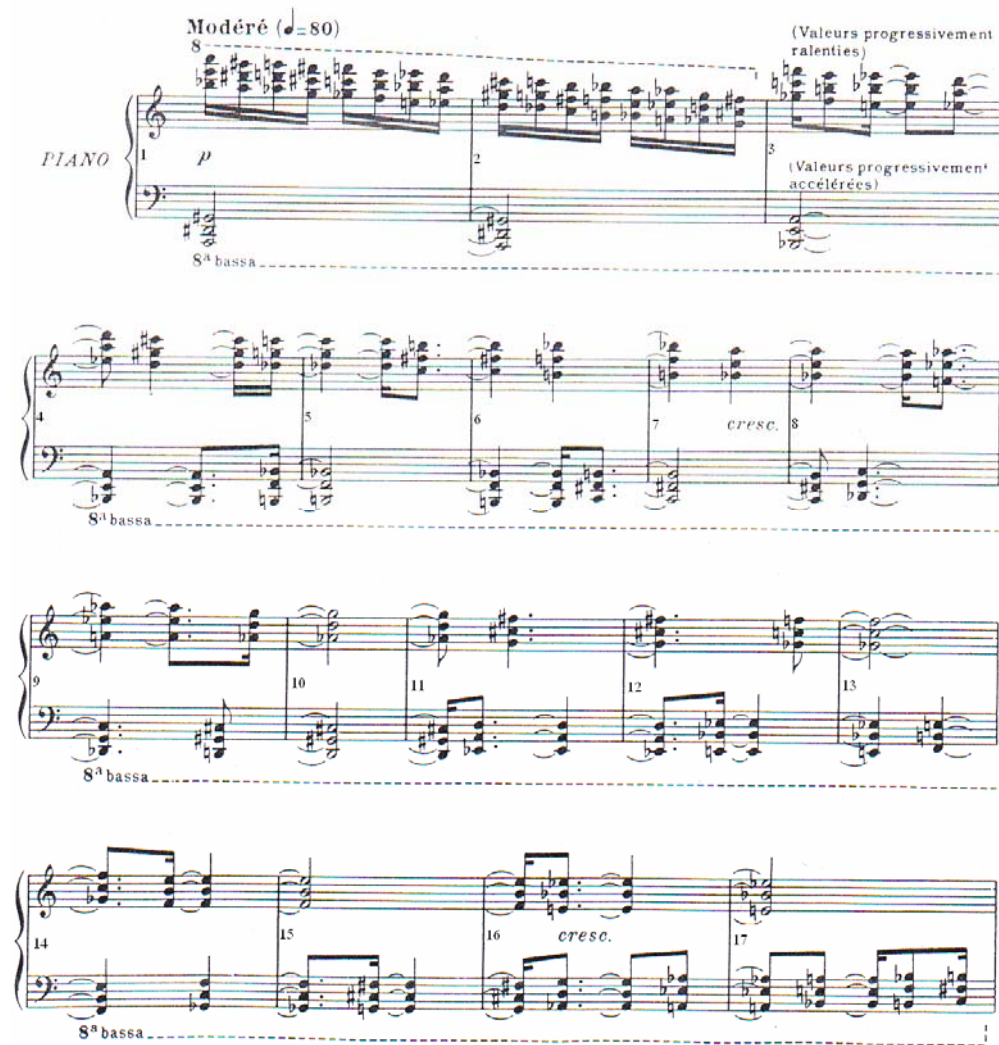
1 2 3

4 5 6 7 8 *cresc.*

9 10 11 12 13

14 15 16 *cresc.* 17

8^a bassa



Example 7.30



(Valeurs progressivement accélérées)

182

8ª bassa

(Valeurs progressivement ralenties)

187

cresc. sempre

8ª bassa

192

cresc. molto

8ª bassa

197

ff

8ª bassa

The use of the “chromatic scale of durations” has the same symbolic meaning as the scales used in the sixteenth piece. Within the generative principle that governs these figures lies a concealed cyclicity – after the initial process of diminution or augmentation is completed, the figure will have to be augmented or diminished in the opposite “direction”, returning it to its initial point of departure. On an intellectual and symbolic level, these figures therefore have a negating effect on time, specifically the linear aspects

of time as contained in the human time concept.

The intellectual impact of this type of rhythmical process is clear. However, the rest of the piece exhibits no characteristics that can be related to time.

The connection between the sixteenth and eighteenth piece goes beyond mere rhythmical similarities – the mystical and divine aspects of time are of secondary importance, while more “human” or at least accessible aspects of God are described in a pictorial rather than a symbolic manner.

7.20 *Je dors, mais mon cœur veille*

The tempo indication of the opening of this piece is *Lent* (slow), with a metronome indication of a semi-quaver equal to 72. As a result, the first eight bars take more than a minute and a half to play, creating an atmosphere of extreme stillness, which negates time in terms of logical temporal progression. This slow tempo returns several times in the work. The general tempo is slow, and the music, as a result, becomes motionless and timeless.

The opening material is referred to again in the coda, with minor developments, giving the overall formal construction a symmetrical nature. Having the piece begin and end with the same material intellectually does not allow for temporal progression or development, effectively negating time in terms of the formal structure.

Although the piece does not employ many time-related techniques (there are no non-retrogradable rhythms or examples of birdsong), the overall character of the music which is encouraged by the slow tempo and general feeling of motionlessness creates a sense of time being completely absent from the music. Time is negated through the general atmosphere, rather than specific techniques.

7.21 *Regard de l'Eglise d'amour*

The final piece of the cycle has a generally fast and energetic tempo indication, which does not affect the treatment of time in the music as such. There are, however, several instances where non-retrogradable rhythm is used: bars 2, 4 and 6 (see Example 7.31), 85, 87, 89 and 91.

Example 7.31



The use of non-retrogradable rhythm symbolically and intellectually negates time and forward motion by giving the figures symmetrical features that cause them to read the same in either direction.

Another technique which is used several times in the piece is “asymmetrical enlargement” a technique with similar characteristics to the chromatic scale of duration used in the sixteenth and eighteenth pieces. Asymmetrical enlargement results in each melodic figure being repeated at a higher interval (see Example 7.32) until the figure eventually will reach its original point of departure.



Example 7.32

159

The musical score consists of five systems, each with a piano (piano) staff and a bassoon (8^a bassa) staff. The piano part is characterized by intricate sixteenth-note patterns, often grouped in sixteenth-note beams. Fingerings (1-5) and slurs are used extensively to guide the performer. The bassoon part provides a steady accompaniment with chords and moving lines. Dynamics include *cresc.* (crescendo), *f* (forte), and *cresc. molto* (very crescendo). The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4.

This generative principle has similar implications to the rhythmical implications of the chromatic scale of durations: the nature of the technique is cyclical rather than linear, and therefore symbolically supports a cyclical time-connection, which is not dependant on human time constraints or temporal restrictions.

There are only a few features of the last piece of the cycle that have a direct implication for time in the music. The symbolic placing of this piece within the cycle however already confirms its connection with divinity. The recurrence of the major themes, such as the *Thème de Dieu* in bar 105 and the *Thème d'amour* in bar 30, as well as its length and virtuosic requirements take the place of lesser time-related characteristics.

7.22 General Comments

The numerical significance of the titles of the individual pieces as discussed at the beginning of this chapter also influences the role that time plays in each piece.

The “contemplative” pieces are usually characterised by slow tempi or repetitive ostinato patterns. These characteristics create the impression that the music is devoid of forward motion and lacks any temporal development. This is especially clear in the first, fifth, seventh, ninth, fifteenth and nineteenth pieces.

The other major characteristic related to the negation of time, non-retrogradable rhythm, is more commonly found in the “jubilatory” *regards*, for example number six, ten and twelve.

Formal symmetry and large formal palindromes are used frequently in both types of pieces. Numbers five, nine, thirteen and sixteen are good examples of this technique.

The techniques used to negate time in the *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* have either a musical or an intellectual meaning.

Extremely slow tempi have an aural effect rather than an intellectual effect in terms of the negation of time – the listener perceives the music as so slow that time and temporal development seems to have no place or purpose at all.

Rhythmical procedures such as ascending or descending scales of duration, non-retrogradable rhythm, and formal procedures such as larger symmetries and palindromes are used by Messiaen from an intellectual standpoint to symbolically negate time in the music.

Even though these techniques are often imperceptible to the listener and only become clear after thorough analyses, the aural effect of the music is not dependant on the intellectual aspect of these techniques. The music is successful without analytical knowledge.

However, the writer believes that through analyses, Messiaen's true intention with the composition of this work becomes clear: the negation of time in music, in order to free the music from human time constraints, and to thereby elevate the music to a divine level.

8. Summary and Conclusion

Olivier Messiaen is undoubtedly one of the most prolific and important composers of the 20th century. He was a musical innovator: among his various musical developments are the modes of limited transposition, the use of Indian rhythmical formulas, rhythmical innovations such as non-retrogradable rhythms and additive rhythmical procedures, and the use of birdsong in music. These innovations influenced an entire generation of composers, many of whom were also students of Messiaen, for example Pierre Boulez (b. 1925) and Karlheinz Stockhausen (b. 1928) (Grout 1996:745).

One of Messiaen's main sources of inspiration was his devotion to the Catholic faith. Messiaen often claimed that his faith was his main reason and motivation for being a composer (Samuel 1986:16), and many of his musical philosophies can be related to his belief system. One of the most important musical features of his compositional style that is intrinsically related to his faith is his application of time in music.

Time as a linear concept, which is dependant on forward motion and logical forms of development, is a very human concept. Everything that is related to divinity and godliness exists outside of time, especially when we consider time to be a creation of God. Eternity and boundlessness (terms normally associated with divinity) have a cyclical rather than a linear implication, and do not adhere to any human temporal restrictions. Temporal dependency and any form of time constraint are therefore human concepts, and cannot be reconciled with a concept of divinity or godliness.

Music is an art form which is intrinsically related to time constraints and temporal dependency. Any piece of music has a beginning and an end, giving it a sense of forward motion. This makes it by nature a linear form of art, very much related to the linear time concept.

Time, when viewed against this background, becomes one of the most important features of music that has to be transcended in order for music to become closer to an ideal of



godliness and divinity. Messiaen attempts to do this in various ways: by using non-retrogradable rhythm, symmetry, large palindromes as formal features and birdsong. These factors all negate time in music in different ways.

Non-retrogradable rhythms read the same in both directions, which has the intellectual and symbolic effect of denying forward motion and temporal development. Symmetry and palindromes have the same intellectual and symbolic implications as non-retrogradable rhythm: when the point of departure and eventual point of arrival are similar, linear forward motion and temporal development are negated. Birdsong is a type of music which is free from human time constraints, and therefore also human temporal dependency. Using birdsong in western classical music therefore symbolically negates time and temporal dependency.

The frequency with which Messiaen uses these types of techniques in especially works written after 1941 (the year of composition of the *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*) proves that the negation of time in his music was an important part of his compositional philosophy, not only during this period but in his entire compositional output. The application of these concepts with the purpose of negating time in music is especially prominent in the two works analysed in this dissertation: *Visions de l'Amen* (1943) and *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* (1944).

On an intellectual and analytical level, Messiaen's innovations that apply to the role of time in music are highly original and influential, and had an impact on compositional styles throughout the 20th century. Philosophically, his reasons for approaching time in such an innovative and original way confirm once more the deep spirituality and faithful devotion of Messiaen, who always related his compositional inspiration to his faith. Musically, Messiaen's creative output, and specifically the pieces discussed in this paper, has the ability to have a profound impact on any listener, with or without analytical tools. This assures Messiaen's music a place in musical history, and confirms his role as one of the most significant composers of the modern age.



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