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The Mind of Messiaen

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The Mind

of

Messiaen

An Honor's Thesis

by
Jarl Hulbert

Introduction

Several factors led me to choosing Messiaen as a subject of research. The most important factor probably lies in the similar interests which the late Messiaen had in common with me. I never thought I would meet another person pursuing a career in the field of musical arts who, while holding deep religious convictions, also spends ample time observing and studying aspects of the environment – in particular, the birds. When I found that this description precisely fits the life of Messiaen, I was very intrigued. And when I began to listen to and study some of his music, I became even more intrigued. After reading a little bit about him, I began to ponder over how he was able write music which was so set apart from the rest of Western music. I resolved to discover the reasons behind the extraordinary nature of his music, and decided that in order to do this I would have to probe his life and works. Because of the realization that this would in essence be taking a look inside of his mind, I chose the title, "The Mind of Messiaen".

The two concepts which set Messiaen so far apart have to do with harmony and rhythm. In harmony, the tradition in Western music since the Renaissance has been one of progression toward a cadence. This holds true even in many twentieth century works. In rhythm, the tradition has been one of meter, which, through the assigning of different emphases to different beats, allows for a sense of order. In compositions from as early as the 1920's, Messiaen began destroying both of these traditions. As Paul Griffiths states in the introductory section of his book *Olivier Messiaen and the Music of Time*, "Messiaen is the first great composer whose works exist entirely after, and to a large degree apart from, the great Western tradition" (pg. 15). Griffiths feels that the key reasons for this lie in Messiaen's reversals of harmony and rhythm. In his music, harmony progresses nowhere, but is instead symmetrical – so much so, that the effect of a progression when

played both forwards and backwards often is essentially the same. Instead of containing the regularities and consistencies which come with meter, his rhythm often contains nothing but a slow pulse. As Griffiths states, ". . . regularity is constantly upset by irregular groupings or syncopation, and rational progress [is] dislocated" (pg. 16). The result which Messiaen achieves in so structuring his harmony and rhythm is a sense of timelessness, or a "suspension of psychological time" (Johnson, pg. 13). The lack of ordered direction which causes this can be effective enough to allow (for Griffiths) the "possibility of eternity [to become] actually present in the music" (pg. 15).

How Messiaen was mentally capable of coming up with this remarkable discovery in music is the question which remains to be resolved, and, in order to resolve this, the influences exerted by his surrounding circumstances must first be determined. Hence, we begin with a biography on the life of Olivier Messiaen.

Messiaen's Life

On the 10th of December, 1908, Messiaen was born in the town of Avignon, and christened Olivier Eugène Prosper Charles. He was the first child of Pierre Messiaen, an English teacher and Shakespeare scholar, and Cécile Sauvage, a poetess. According to Nichols, ". . . from the point of view of art, Olivier Messiaen was 'born' before the day of his birth, when his mother . . . wrote a series of poems for the son that she was carrying" (pg. 7). As Messiaen has stated later in his life, this book of poems, known as *L'Âme en bourgeon* (The Flowering Soul), had a profound effect on his development as an artist. His father's vocation also had a great effect on him. Pierre Messiaen is best known for his critical translation of Shakespeare's plays, and as a child, Olivier Messiaen was exposed a great deal to Shakespeare. As an adult, he explained that this exposure had a great deal to do with his imagination.

Shortly after he was born, Messiaen's family moved to Ambert. This is where he learned to read. It is also where his brother, Alain Messiaen, was born. Before Olivier reached the age of six at this location, however, World War I broke out and his father was called to serve. As a result, his family had to move to his uncle's house in Grenoble. Messiaen's imagination and love for music had an opportunity to blossom at this location. Because his uncle was also absent much of the time due to the war, he and his brother were in charge of both their mother and grandmother (Marie Sauvage). It was during "these childhood years [that] Messiaen began to show a strong fascination with mysterious, magical, and supernatural things" (Bell, pg. 2). His father's work with Shakespeare was probably partly responsible for Messiaen's great love of Shakespeare's plays during this time. He would both recite and act out (with a make-believe stage and props) Shakespeare's plays to his brother. "Shakespeare meant all the human passions as

well as the magic of elves, fairies, weird phantoms, and apparitions" (Bell, pg. 2). His favorite play was *Macbeth*, "most of all because of the witches and Banquo's ghost" (Samuel 1994, pg. 26). Bell writes, "This world of make-believe was enhanced by the spiritual and creative qualities of Messiaen's mother. And according to Messiaen, this led to an environment of "poetry and fairytales . . . such as enormously develops a child's imagination and leads him towards thinking in immaterial terms, and so to music, the most immaterial of the arts" (Griffiths, pg. 20). Consequently, it was in this location that Messiaen taught himself to play the piano, and also to compose (he started with canons in the range of one octave at the age of eight). It was also in this location that he wrote his first full composition, *Le dame de Shalott* (The Lady of Shalott, based on a poem by Tennyson), in 1917. The scores of the Damnation of Faust and Don Giovanni were at least partly responsible for Messiaen's awakening in music. Both of these scores were given to him as Christmas gifts in 1916.

Pierre Messiaen returned to his family after the war ended, and in 1918 they moved across the country to the city of Nantes. It was here that Messiaen received his first formal instruction in both piano and harmony. He took piano lessons with several local teachers, including Gontran Arcouët, Robert Lortat and the Vêrnon sisters. He also started formal training with his first harmony teacher, Jehan de Gibon. Gibon was a kindly old man who gave Messiaen free lessons, and kept in contact with Messiaen until his death. As Messiaen said to Samuel regarding his first harmony teacher, "This last teacher, who was both poor and a very great artist, never forgot me. He wrote to me regularly throughout his life and I even had the great joy of seeing him again a few months before his death in the little town of Redon where he had gone to end his days" (Samuel 1976, pg. 69) At the age of ten, a gift from this kind old man – the score of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* – developed Messiaen's musical imagination even further as he continued his path toward a life as a composer. Messiaen has called this score "a revelation, a

thunderbolt . . . probably the most decisive influence on me" (Griffiths, pg. 23). He was in Nantes for only a few months, however, when his family made their final move to Paris after his father accepted a position at the Lycée Charlemagne. Shortly after arriving in Paris, and at the age of eleven, Olivier Messiaen was admitted to the Conservatoire National Supérieure on rue Madrid, where he would continue his studies until 1930.

At the Conservatoire, Messiaen first began studies in piano with Georges Falkenberg. Later, he studied harmony with Jean Gallon, under whom he earned a second prize in harmony in 1924. He received a first prize in counterpoint and fugue (1926) while studying under Georges Caussade, and he also received first prizes in piano accompaniment (1927), organ and improvisation (1928), history of music (1928), and composition (1929). In these subjects he studied with C. A. Estyle, Marcel Dupré, Maurice Emmanuel, and Paul Dukas respectively. He studied timpani and percussion with Joseph Baggers as well, and although he received no prize for this, his studies did affect his use of percussion in his scores later on. In addition to these teachers, Messiaen also worked with Jean Gallon's brother, Noël Gallon, who tutored Messiaen throughout his Conservatoire career in all the various areas of music theory. Messiaen has said that he received the "sense of natural harmony and harmonic technique of which I am very proud" (Griffiths, pg. 26) from the Gallon brothers. He received more than just harmonic technique when Jean Gallon introduced him to the organist and teacher, Marcel Dupré, after he sensed in Messiaen a talent in keyboard improvisation. Messiaen clarified this to Claude Samuel when he explained,

I was sixteen or seventeen when my harmony professor, Jean Gallon, introduced me to Marcel Dupré so I might study organ. Not because I was a Catholic, but because he had sensed I had a talent for improvisation. At the time, I had just won a prize in the piano accompaniment class, where we not only harmonized given melodies (with a good deal of improvisation at the keyboard), but also engaged in sight reading and score reduction. Since I exhibited some gifts in

this field, and since the organ is essentially intended for improvisation, Gallon sent me to the organ class. (Samuel 1994, pg. 22)

And it was fortunate for Messiaen that he ended up with organ. Organ was later to become his major instrument, with Dupré playing a major role in this. Messiaen called Dupré the "greatest of all organ virtuosos, perhaps even the greatest of all virtuosos that ever existed; he was the Liszt of the organ" (Samuel 1994, pg. 121). Messiaen received some of this virtuosity in his lessons from Dupré, and he also received some of his early training in Greek rhythms, which would later influence the rhythm in his compositions quite a bit. The other teacher from whom he received some training in Greek rhythms was his music history professor, Maurice Emmanuel, who had written the chapter "Grèce" in the *Encyclopédie de la musique*. While Dupré made Messiaen "improvise on Greek rhythms and spoke of them in his *Traité d' improvisation*" (Samuel 1994, pp. 72-3), Emmanuel "gave a year-long course centered around Greek meters" (Samuel 1994, pg. 73) that Messiaen was able to attend. It was also around this time that Messiaen first "discovered the table of 120 Indian 'deçî-tâlas' – that is, rhythms of the Indian provinces – listed by Sharngadeva in his treatise *Samgîta-ratnâkara* and reproduced in Lavignac' *Encyclopédie de la Musique*" (Johnson, pg. 10).

Messiaen was influenced by these sources and many others during his Conservatoire years, but one of his most important sources of influence during that period was his composition teacher, Paul Dukas. It was Dukas who helped Messiaen "develop a sense of artistic integrity and, of course, a sure and refined technique of orchestration" (Palmer, pg. 67). Messiaen developed this partly by looking up to the model that Dukas gave of strictness and severity during his years of composition and orchestration lessons. This model was due to Dukas' "arduous self-examination" which restricted Dukas to the point of only publishing five works in his entire lifetime. The works that he did compose, however, served as "a model of compositional integrity and prowess for the young

Messiaen, particularly his opera *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* (1899-1906)" (Griffiths, pg. 27). Messiaen also mentioned that Dukas was the first person to bring his attention to the concept of sound-color relationships (through the opera just mentioned) which would serve Messiaen with a very important compositional technique later in his life. "Dukas was able to link orchestration and tonality to the color of stones [used as stage props in the opera], and this correspondence struck me when I was eighteen" (Samuel 1994, pg. 167). Later on, Messiaen would meet the Swiss painter Blanc-Gatti, who would influence Messiaen's understanding of sound-color relationships even further.

It would not be too venturesome to assume that Messiaen was influenced by other factors in Paris aside from the influence he received from his various teachers during his time at the Conservatoire. Impressions on the young composer could easily have come from French composers like Charles Tournemire, American composers such as Villa-Lobos, and Russian composers like Nikolay Obukhov, Ivan Vishnegradsky, and Igor Stravinsky. Tournemire was an organist and composer at the church of Ste Clotilde (where César Franck had worked). Something which may have influenced Messiaen quite significantly was his vast cycle of meditations on plainchant contained in his *L'orgue mystique* (1927-32). Messiaen mentions this work specifically in an interview with Claude Samuel (1994) when he discusses Tournemire as being one of the "two names" which dominate all organ literature" (the other name is Marcel Dupré). He goes on to describe Tournemire as a "brilliant man who is unfortunately too little known" before mentioning the "monument" that Tournemire left in his *L'orgue mystique* (pgs. 120-1). The plainchant in Tounemire's work alone may have been enough to influence the young Messiaen, for later in his life he called plainchant an "inexhaustible mine of rare and expressive melodic contours" (Bell, pg. 8) The orchestral brilliance of Villa-Lobos' works probably had as much of an affect on Messiaen as it did on just about everyone else in Paris at the time. Messiaen called Villa-Lobos "a very great orchestrator" (Samuel 1994,

pg. 194) and used some of his orchestral brilliance in works such as his *Turangalila-symphonie*. Villa-Lobos lived in Paris from 1923 to 1930 and had sensational concerts performed there between 1924 and 1927.

Two of the three Russian composers mentioned (Obukhov and Vishnegradsky) "brought with them a line of harmonic and mystical venturing that emanated from Skryabin" (Griffiths, pg. 24). They each had their share of performances in Paris, were discussed in the *Revue musicale*, and may or may not have influenced Messiaen in one way or another. Obukhov is particularly close to Messiaen in style, although he may have drawn influence from Messiaen instead of the contrary. But however it occurred, it does seem that Messiaen drew influence from some of the harmonic and philosophical indications of Skryabin, whether or not it was directly from him or through his students (Griffiths, pg. 25). The impressions which he received from the third Russian (Stravinsky), on the other hand, are much more clearly defined. Of Stravinsky he has said,

Stravinsky is of immense importance because he was the first to restore the emphasis on rhythm: through the use of exclusively rhythmic themes, superimposed rhythmic ostinatos, and especially by creating (consciously or not) the procedure of rhythmic characters (Samuel 1994, pg. 193).

Messiaen spent a great deal of his life studying Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in particular, and regards that work as very innovative in its rhythmic content. In addition to his compositions, however, Stravinsky influenced Messiaen philosophically as well. In his dictum of 1935, he said "The phenomenon of music is given to us with the sole purpose of establishing an order in things, including, and particularly, the co-ordination between *man* and *time*" (Griffiths, pg. 25). This had a profound effect on Messiaen's understanding of rhythm, which will be clarified in the next section.

Other figures of Paris in the 1920's which seem to have influenced Messiaen in a philosophical way include the writers Dom André Mocquereau (a plainchant scholar), Romain Rolland, and Paul Claudel. Mocquereau wrote *Le nombre musical grégorien*, which dealt with the rhythmic performance of chant. Rolland and Claudel wrote of music as something much larger than its European heritage (much like what Stravinsky described). The work of people like these were very important for Messiaen in a time when neoclassicism and anti-romanticism (styles contrary to Messiaen's), such as that found in the music of "Les Six", seemed to have a very solid stronghold on the progression of music in Paris.

Before Messiaen completed his education at the Conservatoire in 1930, he tried to win the Prix de Rome twice – once in 1929, and once in 1930. He failed both times at this, but one year later became (at the age of 22) the youngest titulaire (church organist) in France. He was given a position at the church of *La Trinité* in Paris, and stayed active in that position until the time of his death, with the exception of two pauses. The first pause was because of World War II, and the second was the period from 1964-6 when the organ at the church was undergoing restoration. It was during the year that he received this post that he also enjoyed his first great public success with a performance of one of his orchestral works. It was on February 19th that *Les Offrandes oubliées* was performed for the first time by the Orchestre Straram, under the baton of Walther Straram, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris. Although it was not as celebrated an event, Messiaen's *Préludes* (a set of piano pieces written during his Conservatoire studies from 1928-9) were performed by the woman to whom he dedicated the pieces, Henriette Roget. Today, this work is considered a substantial piece of piano repertoire. One year later, in 1932, Messiaen married the violinist and fellow composer Claire Delbos (some sources report

the date as 1936), and in the same year as this, another work of his for orchestra (*Le tombeau resplendissant*) was performed in Paris under the direction of Pierre Monteux.

As Messiaen continued his work at *La Trinité*, he continued to compose. He wrote some twelve major works in the period between 1930 and 1935. This included the composition of his work for organ, *La Nativité du Seigneur*, which was his longest work (it takes almost sixty minutes to perform) up to that time. Of this work, Messiaen has said,

"This renewal [of organ composition] began with 'La nativité du Seigneur', a work that has had great success in France and abroad. The 'Nativité', with its Hindu rhythms, modes of limited transpositions, and unusual timbres, constituted a great change in organ music at a time when Franck represented the summit of modernism. It has remained one of my best organ works and, no doubt, one of the most often played" (Samuel 1994, pg. 118).

This was also the first work to display the influence exerted by the organist Tournemire in the area of plainchant. Messiaen spoke of using plainchant themes, though "rather tentatively" (Samuel 1994, pg. 139), throughout this work. By the time he wrote this piece, Messiaen's name was already well before the public. Several of his compositions were presented before the public during this period, and he was beginning to enjoy an established name. One year after the composition of his massive *Nativité*, Messiaen found it necessary to further this advance by associating with a group of composers. In 1936, this group was founded and named "La Jeune France". The three members aside from Messiaen were: André Jovilet (1905-74), Daniel-Lesur (b. 1908), and Yves Baudrier (b. 1906), who initially proposed the establishment of the group. It began partially as a reaction to the anti-romantic sentiments in Paris at the time. This was evident by the program notes of their first concert given on June 3rd of that same year at the Salle Gaveau. The notes included their manifesto, which "reacted against the tendency of the

life of the time to become increasingly hard, mechanical and impersonal" (Johnson, pg. 10). Part of this manifesto read, "[composition should emphasize] a living music, having the impetus of sincerity, generosity and artistic conscientiousness" (Griffiths, pg. 72). Messiaen's *Les offrandes oubliées* and *Hymne au Saint Sacrement* (1932) were the works performed at this event.

Of the three other members of "La Jeune France", Messiaen was probably most impressed with the work of André Jovilet. He compliments Jovilet very highly in a preface that he wrote to Jovilet's *Mana* (a set of six pieces for piano), and mentions to Samuel that he made the important contribution of "restoring magic to music" (1994, pg. 193). Griffiths feels that Jovilet may have appeared as an even "more boldly adventuresome composer" than Messiaen at that time, but does not see anything in his music that Messiaen had not already acquired for himself. Interestingly enough, Griffiths feels that the similarities in their music were reactions "to similar outer and inner circumstances, and perhaps most particularly to an intuition that the East held clues for changing Western music" (pg. 71). The other two composers were significantly more conservative. Daniel-Lesur was the closest to Messiaen in age, but was more conventional in style. His compositions were probably closer to those of Messiaen's teacher Dukas than to his own. Yves Baudrier was a late starter who published nothing before his meeting with Messiaen in 1935. Later, he was most famous for his film scoring, but did not write much due to constant illness.

In the same year as the first performances of "La Jeune France", Messiaen accepted his first positions as a teacher. He began conducting classes in sight reading and piano at the École Normale de Musique and improvisation at the Schola Cantorum. Of his teaching jobs, he has said, "I first began teaching to earn my living. I didn't want to make money by writing bad music, so I chose a nobler musical activity" (Samuel 1994, pg. 175). One year later, his wife gave birth to his first son, Pascal (he would later become a

Russian teacher), who inspired him in his composition of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* (1938) for soprano and piano. Messiaen's life as an organist, teacher, and composer continued until 1939, when it was interrupted by World War II and Messiaen's call to serve his country as a private.

Because his poor eyesight made him unfit for active service, Messiaen served as a hospital attendant. He served for less than a year before the Germans invaded in May of 1940. Messiaen and three other musicians failed at an attempt to escape from their location at Verdun on foot. The Germans captured Messiaen in June, while he was continuing his escape attempt on an old bicycle with no tires. He was taken to a prison camp at Görlitz in Silesia (now in Poland), Stalag VIII A, where he would spend the rest of the war.

Despite the cold and lack of adequate food, Messiaen "felt free inwardly because of his music" (Palmer, pg. 67). In the camp, he was able to find a violinist, a cellist, and a clarinetist. First he wrote a short trio which they were able to perform in the washroom, then he began work on a full scale work, which included a piano part for himself. He was given the opportunity to perform that work while in the prison camp, and as Griffiths puts it, "With the composer playing at a run-down upright piano, the performance was given before an audience of 5,000 prisoners sitting in the depths of winter at the blackest point in a world war. 'Never', Messiaen has recalled, 'have I been heard with as much attention and understanding.'" (Griffiths, pg. 90). The work performed was Messiaen's famous *Quatour pour la fin du temps*, or Quartet for the End of Time. Although some may take the title as an indication of the harshness of war, Messiaen took the title from a Biblical passage in the book of The Revelation, in which an angel announces that time shall be no more. It was such opportunities as this, along with the closely guarded collection of scores (including Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, works by Beethoven, Ravel, Stravinsky, and Berg's *Lyric Suite*) that kept Messiaen well through his detourment. When speaking of

his love for music analysis, Messiaen referred back to his time in the prison camp. He said,

. . . I've always loved musical analysis; curiously, it was while in captivity that I acquired a taste for it. A German officer gave me an edition of Beethoven's piano sonatas as a gift. Since my childhood, I had poured over the composition treatise of Vincent d'Indy and his commentaries on Beethoven and sonata form, so I was well prepared to read these sonatas closely, and I recognized them as the miracles of structure they are. That's how music analysis came into my life (Samuel 1994, pg. 175).

Perhaps captivity was not such a bad experience for Messiaen after all.

The winter performance of his *Quatour pour la fin du temps* occurred in January of 1941. Messiaen was released from the prison camp and returned to Paris in 1942. The director of the Paris Conservatoire, Claude Delvincourt, made a progressive move and hired Messiaen as a professor of Harmony upon his return. He would remain a teacher there until his retirement in 1978 (at first, just of harmony – he taught other subjects later). There is not much record of compositions or anything else in 1942 (besides the beginnings that summer of his book, *Technique de mon langage musical* – Technique of my Musical Language), perhaps because Paris was still under German occupation. In 1943, however, Messiaen began teaching private composition classes at the home of a friend, and musical Egyptologist, Guy-Bernard Delapierre, whom he had met during his war-time confinement, and to whom he dedicated *Technique de mon langage musical*. His decision to begin these composition classes was propelled in part by the formation of the student cadre known as "les flèches" (or, "The Arrows"). Included among the first group of "Arrows" were composers Pierre Boulez, Serge Nigg, Jean-Louis Martinet, and Maurice Le Roux, and pianists Yvonne Loriod and Yvette Grimaud. Messiaen found the need to start the composition class partly because his first set of students at the Conservatoire were bright and demanding. This inspired Messiaen to move in that direction. Another

part of it may have been the simple fact that Messiaen was an excellent teacher. Peyser has gone so far as to say, "In the early '40s he was the most important teacher at the Conservatoire" (pg. 30). Pierre Boulez, who is now a famous conductor and composer, has said of Messiaen,

In the desert, the solitude of the Conservatoire, one man seemed to us the only sheet-anchor. He was just a teacher of harmony, but his reputation was rather notorious. To choose to study with him already meant a great deal: it was as if one were withdrawing oneself from the mass and electing for obstinacy. . . . It was truly an epoch of exploring and freedom – fresh air and openness amid the stupidity which surrounded us. Secretly, or almost so, we grew to a total admiration for unwhispered names, unknown works which aroused our attention; meanwhile we moved forward together. And our investigation was not confined to Europe: acquaintance with Asia and Africa taught us that we were not alone in having the privilege of 'tradition'. They brought us to a stage at which music was not just an art object but truly a way of life, an indelible branding (Griffiths, pgs. 107-8).

Thus, it is clear that Messiaen made quite an impression on his students (another noteworthy student who he influenced was Karlheinz Stockhausen). His influence was great enough to prompt Boulez and others to put together a petition to make Messiaen a Professor of Composition (since he could not officially teach it). This helped enough to get Messiaen the position of Professor of Analysis, Aesthetics, and Rhythm in 1947. With this, his classes essentially became composition classes. He did not receive the official position of Composition Professor, however, until 1966.

While the pre-war 1930's saw Messiaen dedicating much of his time to producing works for the organ, the post-war 1940's saw a switch in Messiaen to producing works for the piano. A large part of this was due to his association with his student, Yvonne Loriod. According to Palmer, "The extraordinary pianistic abilities of [Yvonne Loriod] stimulated him to turn his attention to the piano" (pg. 69). He wrote two Monumental works in 1943

and 1944. The first, *Visions de l' Amen*, was written for two pianos. Messiaen wrote the piece with himself in mind for the second part and Loriod in mind for the first. He said of this work, "I have allotted to the first piano the rhythmic difficulties, chord clusters and all problems in velocity, charm and quality of sound: to the second piano I have allotted the principle melody, thematic elements and everything that demands emotion and power" (Friskin and Freundlich, pg. 348). This division in the work load of this piece is because, as Messiaen puts it, ". . . in the field of piano playing, it's obvious that I'll never have the transcendental virtuosity of Yvonne Loriod" (Samuel 1976, pg. 72). The second work, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus*, is a monumental solo cycle which will be discussed in more depth later. Of this work and *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* (another monumental solo cycle for piano, composed between 1956 and 1958), Messiaen said, "I knew that they would be played by Yvonne Loriod; I could thus allow myself the greatest eccentricities, because everything is possible to her. I knew that I could imagine things that were very difficult, very extraordinary and very new, and that they would be played and played well" (Samuel 1976, pg. 73). This probably explains why Messiaen also included the piano in much of his symphonic work after having met Loriod.

It was shortly after the premiere performance by Loriod of the *Vingt Regards* that Messiaen's *Trois petites Liturgies de la Présence Divine* for thirty-six female voices, piano and orchestra was performed. It occurred in Paris on the 21st of April, 1945, with the Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire under the direction of Roger Désormière. According to Nichols, this performance "produced a riot" and "was followed by a sustained barrage of criticism in the press". Nichols quotes Claude Rostand's description:

. . . in short, the whole musical world in Paris suddenly went mad, a madness for which, possibly, the end of the Occupation was partly responsible and which had not been seen since the great days of

Stravinsky. It was a kind of dance of glory and death around Messiaen, the hero crucified. . . (pg. 40).

It was either because of this attention or in spite of it, but Messiaen's name as a composer continued to gain ground, and he began receiving commissions – including an important commission from Serge Koussevitzky, the result of which was the monumental *Turangalila-symphonie*. Messiaen has called this work his "richest in discoveries; it's also the most melodic, the warmest, the most dynamic, and the most colored" (Samuel 1994, pg. 131) – this work will also be discussed in more depth later.

In the period between 1940 and 1945, Messiaen's compositional output showed an increase in the use of birdsong, his love of which will be elaborated on in the next section. He also began exploring love-death relationships in his music (the Tristan legend), partly because his wife had become ill in the 1940's, and was hospitalized as an invalid until her death in 1959. In the late 40's, Messiaen began to travel outside of the country. He gave courses in both Budapest and the United States (Tanglewood) before 1950, and during the period between 1949 and 1951, he gave classes in Darmstadt and Sarrbrücken (which brought Stockhausen to him as a student). According to Palmer, "The works of these years represent Messiaen's most ascetic and cerebral phase, demonstrating formidable research into rhythm" (pg. 69). It was during this period that he composed the four *Études de rythme* for piano, which demonstrate a particular emphasis on rhythm, and the organ works *Livre d'Orgue* and *Messe de la Pentecôte*. The first piece deals with serial techniques, while the second is an improvisatory work.

In the 1950's, Messiaen began to turn even more of his attention to birds. According to Palmer, this has been called "Messiaen's 'bird decade'" (pg. 69). Messiaen spent much of his time in the French countryside transcribing bird songs to be used in his works, and this resulted in numerous compositions which support bird song as the main subject. The pieces written during this period include *Réveil des Oiseaux* (1952-3) for

piano and orchestra, *Oiseaux exotiques* (1955-6) for piano, winds and percussion, and the huge cycle for piano solo (mentioned earlier), *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* (1956-8).

With the death of his wife in 1959, Messiaen returned his focus in the 1960's to religious centered works. He also began concentrating more on the sound-color relationships which had made such an impression on him throughout his life. Some of the major works he composed in the 1960's include the orchestral works *Sept haïkai* (1962), *Couleurs de la cité céleste* (1963), the massive orchestral work *La Transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (1965-9), and *Meditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité* (1969) for organ. In 1962, Messiaen married Yvonne Loriod and then went with her on a tour of Japan (that is what prompted him to write *Sept haïkai* – it is based on the music and bird song of Japan). In 1967 he was given the honor of being elected unanimously to the Institut de France, Academie des Beaux Arts.

The 1970's saw Messiaen begin his first and only opera. Up until that time, he "didn't feel that [he] had the gift" (Samuel 1994, pg. 207) for writing opera, but he couldn't resist the commission given by the Paris opera. This monumental work took four years to compose, and another four years to orchestrate, but was finally finished in 1983 and performed for the first time in Paris in November of that year. The 1970's was also a year of great recognition for Messiaen. In 1973, he received honors at various "Messiaen" festivals in Dusseldorf, Cardiff, London, Flanders, and the United States. In the same year, he was elected a Doctor of Literature at Cornell College in Iowa, and received nomination as a Member of the Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston, Massachusetts. The following year, a "Messiaen Week" was held in Karlsruhe in honor of his sixty-fifth birthday. The demand for Messiaen's presence throughout the world continued up until his death on the evening of April 27th, 1992. The last works he completed include *Livre du Saint Sacrement* (1984) for organ, *Petites esquisses d'oiseaux* (1985) for piano, and

finally *Éclairs sur l'au-delà* (Bright Glimpses of the Beyond) for symphony orchestra, which he finished shortly before his death.

Messiaen's Beliefs

With the circumstances of Messiaen's life and musical development now firmly understood, it should be less difficult to grasp an understanding of Messiaen's belief system – which, of course, was influenced in one way or another by his circumstances. In order to understand his beliefs, the best person to consult would be Messiaen himself. This is why the Claude Samuel books (*Conversations with Olivier Messiaen* and *Olivier Messiaen; Music and Color*) will be to be invaluable resources throughout this section. These two books are comprised of interviews in which Samuel asks Messiaen numerous questions about aspects of his life, music, etc. Although not all questions have been answered through these books, they most certainly provide a very good basis for understanding Messiaen's mentality.

In order to better understand the system of beliefs which have significantly influenced Messiaen's life and works, it is best to categorize these beliefs into general concepts. These would include: Catholicism, the Tristan myth, bird calls, sound-color relationships, and rhythm. The most important of these in terms of influence exerted is probably that of his religious faith. As Messiaen has said,

The first idea I wanted to express (through music), the most important, is the existence of the truths of the Catholic faith. I have the good fortune to be a Catholic. I was born a believer, and the Scriptures impressed me even as a child. The illumination of the theological truths of the Catholic faith is the first aspect of my work, the noblest, and no doubt the most useful and valuable – perhaps the only one I won't regret at the hour of my death" (Samuel 1994, pgs. 20 – 21).

Thus, it is clear that Messiaen's reasons for composing are deeply rooted in Catholicism. His religious faith takes his reasons for composing a step further when he explains to Samuel about his beliefs regarding his mother's poetry. Messiaen said "I have always believed and I believe more and more in the determining role of that maternal collection (the poems)" (Samuel 1994, pg. 13). Messiaen explains this in more depth during the same interview by explaining his belief in predetermination – that "from the very moment of conception, the child is himself – the future artist or future murderer, the future factory worker or future president of the republic" (pg. 13). Religious faith supports this belief of Messiaen's through the understanding that God is above time, and that he is omnipresent. Since He is able to exist in all times and all places simultaneously, the future is no secret to Him. How else would Messiaen's mother have known that her son would become a composer when she wrote "*Je souffre d'un lointain musical que j'ignore*" [I suffer from an unknown, distant music], except through a premonition of God's plan? And how would she have known that he would become an amateur ornithologist fascinated with Japan when she wrote "*Voici tout l'Orient qui chante dans mon être – avec ses oiseaux bleus, avec ses papillons*" [All the Orient is singing here within me – with its blue birds, with its butterflies]? As Messiaen says, "This is quite an example of premonition It was my mother who pointed me, before I was born, toward nature and art" (Samuel 1994, pg. 15).

Messiaen's religious beliefs clearly influence his understanding of his life's work, so it would be interesting to note his understanding of how he began in Catholicism in the first place. When asked about his attractions to religious faith, Messiaen refers back to his childhood love of Shakespeare's plays and his attraction to the fantastic, unusual and marvelous happenings which occur in those plays.

It is certain that in the truths of the Catholic faith, I found this attraction of the marvelous multiplied a hundredfold, a thousandfold, and it was no longer a matter of theatrical fiction but of something true. **I chose what was true** (Samuel 1994, pg. 26).

It is not unusual then, that Messiaen would mix these two loves (Catholic faith and theater) in order to produce the momentous work *Saint Francis of Assisi* in the latter part of his life. And to say that religious faith influenced Messiaen's basic compositional techniques through all his works would not be presumptuous. He said himself that there is little difference between the languages of his religious and secular works (Samuel 1976, pg. 3). This is made clear through his use of plainchant, numbers, and titles.

Messiaen's expression of religious faith through plainchant can be found in many of his works. When speaking at the Conférence de Notre Dame on December 4th, 1977, Messiaen said of Liturgical music:

There is only one: plainsong. Only plainsong possesses all at once the purity, the joy, the lightness necessary for the soul's flight toward Truth (Röbber, pg. 57).

And although plainsong is (in Messiaen's opinion) the only true form of Liturgy, he constantly used numbers to demonstrate Liturgical concepts. He made regular use of the numbers two, three, five, and seven – two being the number which represents the duality of Christ (who is both fully man, and fully God), three, of course, being the number of the mysterious trinity, seven being the number of perfection, and eight the number of eternity. He uses the number two regularly in canon-like passages (whether or not they are rhythmic or melodic). The number three is used by Messiaen in sonorities, modes, and rhythms. When he spoke of "Regard du Fils sur le Fils" (number five of his *Vingt Regards sur L'Enfant Jesus*), he mentioned "three sonorities, three modes, three rhythms, three strands of music superimposed on each other" (Johnson, pg. 41). And he mentions his use of the numbers in the preface to *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*. "Seven is the perfect number, the Creation of six days sanctified by the divine Sabbath: the 'seven' of this (day of) rest is prolonged through eternity and becomes the 'eight' of inextinguishable light, of

perfect peace" (Johnson, pg. 41). These numbers are directly evident in this work through his use of seven numbered movements, along with an eighth movement called simply, "Intermède".

In the aspect of the religious titles of his works, Messiaen was asked at a Messiaen Festival in Dusseldorf in 1968 whether or not the religious titles of his organ pieces were just titles, or if they were connected in some way to the thematic material of the piece. Messiaen responded:

These quotations are of the greatest significance; I'd go so far as to say that, if that were not the case, I might just as well pack up; I wouldn't compose any more music. These quotations are inseparable from the origins of my organ pieces and most of the works I've written which have a religious content. Generally speaking, I've allowed my thoughts to revolve around a specific subject – a mystery of the Christian faith, such as the birth of our Lord or his Resurrection, or else a mystery of the Holy Spirit such as the Feast of Pentecost; and in the Bible, in the writings of the fathers of the Early Church or in other religious texts, but above all in the Holy Scriptures, I've chosen and then have tried to translate into music – not just into notes, not just into sound and rhythms, but into sound-colours as well, into colours. (Röblier, pg. 28).

This makes it clear that Messiaen sees his work with sound-color relationships as religious in essence as well. But this is true of many of his systems and understandings. As will be continually demonstrated, practically everything with Messiaen is related to his religious faith. Many have used his deep devotion to label him a mystic – a label which Messiaen rejected very strongly during his life. When asked about his particular relationship to that particular word, Messiaen explained:

Personally, I deeply distrust this word. It doesn't suit me at all, and I'd like to say why not. As soon as one starts talking about mysticism, people think of a diseased state, of a neurotic who has vague sentiments and ecstasies. I don't like that; I'm a devout man and I love the sound, solid gifts of Faith (Röblier, pg. 89).

The second concept, that of the Tristan and Isolde myth, was probably strongest in Messiaen's music and life during the time that his first wife took ill. Messiaen has pointed to three of his works as "Tristan" works. These include *Harawi* (1945) – an hour long cycle for voice and piano, *Turangalila* (1946-8) – a seventy-five minute orchestral piece with solo piano and ondes martenot (an electronic instrument invented by Maurice Martenot in 1928), and *Cinq rechants* (1948) – a thirty minute work for twelve a cappella voices. In calling these works "Tristan" works, Messiaen was asserting these works as symbolizing "all great loves and . . . all great love poems in literature or music" (Samuel 1976, pg. 9). He did not mean for the works to be thought of as programmatic demonstrations of the old Celtic legend:

I've kept only the idea of a love that is fatal, irresistible and which, as a rule, leads to death; a love which, to some extent, invokes death, for it transcends that body – even the limits of the mind – and extends on a cosmic scale (Samuel 1976, pg. 9).

He appears to abandon Christian symbols in these works, but as Griffiths points out (pg. 124), there are still profound similarities between Messiaen's choice of chords and colors in his "Tristan" works and religious works. This is not surprising, as Messiaen himself said, ". . . a great love is a reflection – a pale reflection, but nevertheless a reflection – of the only true love. Divine Love" (Samuel 1994, pgs. 30-1). It is not surprising that Messiaen would turn so much of his concentration toward human love-death relationships at a time when his wife was so threatened with disease. To assume that his wife's situation (and even, perhaps, his growing relationship with his student and future second wife Yvonne Loriod) had something to do with the beliefs he developed would not be unreasonable. The emphasis on "the eternal theatrical triangle of the gentleman, the lady, and the lover" and on "contradiction" (the situation created by the love triangle) and

"separation" (Samuel 1994, pg. 31) seem to fit very well with Messiaen's life at that time.

He explains:

. . . contradiction is what gives birth to great love and leads to death; but the essential idea is not the contradiction but the great love and ensuing death. Therein is an initiation, through death and separation from the world, into a greater and purer love . . . (Samuel 1994, pg. 31).

With this, Messiaen makes it clear that his objective in writing about "Tristan" is to represent a "pure love" that comes through trial and separation. When asked further about this, he mentioned his definition of what the different types of love are. "We start with the trivial love we mentioned, before attaining the great human love, that magnificent love which is fatal passion. Then we reach maternal love, but divine love is at the top of the pyramid" (Samuel 1994, pg. 31). The reason for divine love existing at the top of the pyramid is clear, and it seems that Messiaen's placing of maternal love above "fatal passion" has to do with the imperfection of that love. A mother can share in the development of her child, but "a man and a woman can know each other only incompletely. Even if they share the same tastes, do the same things, even if their desires correspond, there is always a bit of the personality of one that escapes the other" (Samuel 1994, pg. 32). Thus is Messiaen's understanding of Tristanian love.

With the third concept (his use of and beliefs regarding bird song), the same holds true as with the second: Messiaen relates his knowledge and love of the subject to his religious faith. When asked about the link between his love of nature and his Catholic faith, Messiaen responded, "Linked, yet simultaneously independent (like Tristanian love?). I love nature for itself. Of course, like Saint Paul, I see in nature a manifestation of one of the aspects of divinity, but certainly God's creations are not God himself"

(Samuel 1994, pg. 34). Nonetheless, birds are an aspect of nature that Messiaen relates to God even through comparing their song to the worshipping of God through plainchant. At the Conférence de Notre Dame in 1977, Messiaen mentioned that "neumes", a melodic formulae (as he puts it) that is found in plainchant, is "also found in the songs of birds: the Garden Warbler, the Black-Cap, the Song-Thrush, the Field Lark, the Robin, all sing neumes" (Rößler, pg. 58). And they must sing them well, for according to Messiaen, "It's probable that in the artistic hierarchy, birds are the greatest musicians on our planet" (Samuel 1994, pg. 85).

How did Messiaen get involved with birds in the first place? When Samuel asks, "At what period were you attracted to nature", Messiaen explains:

As with music and faith, always. But my strongest feelings about nature, those I remember quite vividly, date back to my adolescence, to the age of fourteen or fifteen. There were perhaps others before that; they remain blurred for they date back to a time when I was very young. When I was three or four years old, I lived in Ambert, where my father had his first post as an English teacher. There I obviously experienced the revelation of nature, but that revelation remained unconscious, and I haven't retained any precise memories of it. So my memories go back to the age of fourteen or fifteen, mainly to a period when I used to stay in the Aube region with aunts who owned a rather quaint farm, with sculptures by one of my uncles, a flower garden, an orchard, and cows and hens. All this was quite novel, and, to "improve" my health, my good aunts sent me to tend a tiny herd of cows. It was really tiny: only three cows; even so, I tended them very badly, and one day they found a way to escape and wreak terrible havoc in a field of beets, which they devoured in a few hours, earning me the scorn of the village people. The Aube countryside is very beautiful and very simple: the plain, the big meadows surrounded by trees, magnificent sunrises and sunsets, and a great number of birds. It was there that I first began jotting down the bird songs. I was obviously a beginner, and I understood nothing about these notes and was not even able to identify the bird that sang" (Samuel 1976, pg. 10).

Messiaen received further encouragement as a student when Dukas told him, "Listen to the birds! They are great teachers" (Griffiths, pg. 166). He had already been listening, of course, but perhaps this encouragement pushed him far enough to produce his first work in the "style oiseau" (with bird calls) in 1935 – *La Nativité du Seigneur*. According to Johnson, his first "specific use of identifiable bird-song does not appear in his compositions until the *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps* in 1941 (pg. 116, emphasis added). He continued putting bird calls in his music throughout his life, and this culminated in the composition of four major works that consist predominantly of material from bird calls. The first of these is *Reveil des oiseaux* (1953), for piano solo, celesta, xylophone, glockenspiel, and two percussion instruments. This was followed by *Oiseaux exotiques* (for piano solo, glockenspiel, xylophone, and five percussion instruments) in 1956, *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (for piano solo, dedicated to Yvonne Loriod) in 1958, and *Chronochromie* (for glockenspiel, xylophone, marimba, and three percussion instruments) in 1960. Of these pieces, only *Reveil des oiseaux* uses bird song exclusively, both for melody and rhythm. Next in order would be *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, in which Messiaen tries to imitate the sounds of the habitat in the music as well. While the first work contains the songs of about forty European birds and takes approximately twenty minutes to perform, the latter work for piano contains songs of about eighty European birds which Messiaen classifies by song "type" into four different groups. This work is immense, taking about two and one-half hours to perform the entire set.

In order to write extensive works like these dedicated to bird song, Messiaen must first be able to transcribe the bird song into standard notation. When asked about this process, Messiaen explained,

... the way in which I notate birdsongs is very simple: with paper and pencil. Sometimes my wife accompanies me, using a tape recorder. That's very useful, since, with it, one can listen to the same thing again lots of times. But just as a photograph can only show one

view of a face at only one moment, the tape recorder only reproduces one theme instead of all its conceivable variants – and, therefore, on no account can it replace one's own work out in the open. Writing down birdsongs: that means taking great sacrifices and great difficulties upon oneself. To begin with: one has to know what it is one is hearing, and one can only know that when the first expedition of this kind is undertaken accompanied by a professional ornithologist. There are two initial difficulties in this work: the recognition of the individual singer and the species to which it belongs, then that of the musical dictation, which is all the greater because the bird sings very fast and very high, and while one's notating one stanza, the bird's already on the second or third Once the birdsong is written down, the real work begins, that is, it has to be worked into a piece, whether it be for piano, for orchestra, or whatever other instruments. . . . Following the difficulty of the rhythmic and melodic notation, which I try to execute as exactly as possible, comes a further difficulty: the reproduction of timbres. These tone-colours are so extraordinary that no musical instrument can reproduce them. One needs combinations of instruments, and still more combinations or complexes of pitches. If I want to reproduce on the piano, let's say, the song of a garden warbler or a song thrush or a nightingale, I need to find a complex of pitches for each melody note. Each note of the melody is furnished with a chord which is intended to reproduce the timbre of that note. If we have an orchestra, not only is each note provided with a chord, but every chord also has a particular function within the orchestral sound and even the change from one instrument to another helps towards reproducing the required timbre – as you see, it's very complicated work (Röbber, pgs. 31-2).

So it is evident that Messiaen has gone through quite a bit of effort in order to incorporate birdsong into his compositions. His reasons for incorporating birds into his music is related, of course, to his love of nature. In his quest for representing birds accurately, his love of nature appears to have been driving him. He has responded to questions about his love for nature by relating it to his health: "Nature is indeed marvelously beautiful and pacifying, and, for me, ornithological work was not only an element of consolation in my pursuits of musical aesthetics, but also a factor of health. It's perhaps thanks to that work that I was able to withstand the misfortunes and complications of life" (Samuel 1994, pg. 32). Without a doubt, however, his occupation with bird song has to do with nothing less

or more than his strong love of nature, which, for him, served as a refuge from the city, and from certain aspects of his life. "You'll notice, as I do, that nature never displays anything in bad taste; you'll never find a mistake in lighting or coloration or, in bird songs, an error in rhythm, melody, or counterpoint . . . Nature has retained a purity, an exuberance, a freshness we have lost" (Samuel 1994, pg. 33). There has been some controversy in regards to the accuracy of his bird calls, but this never disturbed him. He regarded his notated birdsong as something like a personal interpretation – an interpretation important enough to be included as one of his main tools of composition. As he said, "There is in my music this juxtaposition of Catholic faith, the Tristan and Isolde myth and a highly developed use of birdsong" (Samuel 1976, pg. 3), all of which relate back to his "quest for purity" (Samuel 1994, pg. 34), or love in its purest form, whether between man and God, man and woman, or man and nature. Samuel discovered this aspect of Messiaen, and related to him, "So, in speaking of nature, we return to your Catholic faith, just as we returned to it and nature when describing the Tristans. All this confirms that your personality is centered on these three notions, different in character yet very close." To this Messiaen responded, "And they all finally boil down to one and the same idea: *divine love*" (Samuel 1994, pg. 37 – emphasis added).

Messiaen mentioned the Catholic, Tristan, and birdsong usage in his work as a group of compositional tools, but this role is also extended to his beliefs regarding and usage of both rhythm and color (both of which, once again, are related to his religious faith). With color, first of all, Messiaen had the ability throughout most of his life to see colors in his "mind's eye" when he heard music. "When I hear music, I see in my mind complexes of colors corresponding to complexes of sounds, so it's understandable that color interests me as well as sound" (Samuel 1994, pg. 62). He was able to relate certain colors to certain scales, modes, and chords, and this greatly influenced his compositions –

in part by influencing Messiaen's development of a system of modes which he called the "modes of limited transposition" (see appendix). As he said,

My passion for the sound-colour relationship drove me to work with these modes of limited transposition, which people didn't understand because they thought it to be an arithmetical problem. But first and foremost it's a colour phenomenon. Each mode has a precisely definable colour, which changes every time it's transposed (Röbler, pg. 76).

He has said often that he had this particular ability since childhood, and that it was influenced in a large way by an experience he had when he was ten years old with the stained glass window at the Sainte Chapelle in Paris – ". . . for me that was a shining revelation, which I've never forgotten, and this first impression as a child – I was 10 years old – became a key experience for my later musical thinking" (Röbler, pg. 78). He also managed to relate colors to his love of nature by confirming that Nature has helped provide his love of colors to Samuel (1976, pg. 14), and in addition to this, he was very much influenced later in life by three painters. These included Robert Delaunay (1885-1941), Sonia Delaunay, and Charles Blanc-Gatti. Blanc-Gatti was a painter with a disorder called "synopsia". This is a disorder of the optic and auditory nerves which allowed him to see colors as he heard sounds. It was the influence of this painter, whom Messiaen knew personally when he was younger, that "caused me to think about my own sensations" (Samuel 1994, pg. 168). He said of Robert Delaunay,

I prefer one painter over all others, not only because he's the precursor of abstract painting, and consequently **very close to what I see when I hear music**, but mainly because he established connections between complementary colors in a very subtle yet very violent manner, especially through the principle of "simultaneous contrast" (that is to say complementary colors evoked by the eye of the observer): that painter is Robert Delaunay (Samuel 1994, pg. 43 – emphasis added).

The "simultaneous" contrast of which he speaks has to do with a theory of complimentary colors developed by Robert and Sonia Delaunay. According to this theory, certain colors fit together, such as red and green, blue and orange, and yellow and violet. Messiaen discusses this at the Conférence de Notre Dame in 1977, and mentions that this can be discovered through staring at a colored dot on a white page for a certain length of time. The fact that red and green are complimentary colors will be reaffirmed through the transformation to the human eye of the white paper. Staring at the red causes the white to "take on a flaming green, a spasmodic flaming, which flashed, fades, flashes again, and gives a bright green of incomparable beauty (a bit like emerald, diopside or certain opals)" (Röbner, pg. 61). Complementary colors together with "natural resonance of sounding bodies" (which is basically Messiaen's acute ability to hear the harmonic series very clearly when a note is resonating) serve, as Messiaen said, "[as] the basis of everything that I've done" (Röbner, pg. 115).

I believe in the resonance of sounding bodies and in the complementary colours. . . I've imparted this twofold experience to my class: I've tried to get my pupils to see complementary colours and to hear the resonance of sounding bodies. I believe that those are two interconnected phenomena of outstanding importance which are also scientifically verifiable; one sees them and hears them and they're real and natural. Everything else is the invention of mankind which, though, doesn't have the same value as the two natural phenomena (Röbner, pg. 115).

Thus, for Messiaen, all other techniques used in composition (such as tonality and the concepts of classical theory, the serial technique, and the twelve-tone system) are simply inventions of man, while the real truth lies in resonance and color. They are related as the two senses of smell and taste are related; but with color and resonance, "one acts on our ear, the other on our eyes" (Samuel 1994, pg. 62), and with Messiaen, the resonance which is heard becomes the colors which are seen. This phenomena became his technique

for composition. He did use his "modes of limited transposition", but never apart from color – in fact his discovery of these modes had to do with his experimentation with color.

He described some of the colors of some of his modes:

Mode 2 is thrice transposable (see appendix), so it has only three possibilities of coloration. For me, the first transposition of Mode 2 is defined like this: "blue-violet rocks speckled with little gray cubes, cobalt blue, deep Prussian blue, highlighted by a bit of violet-purple, gold, red, ruby, and stars of mauve, black and white. Blue-violet is dominant." The same mode in its second transposition is totally different: "gold and silver spirals against a background of brown and ruby-red vertical stripes. Gold and brown are dominant." And here's the third transposition: "light reddish orange. Dominant is green. . . . the second transposition of Mode 3 is the best of all my modes. For its colors, I've noted the following: "horizontally layered stripes: from bottom to top, dark gray, mauve, light gray, and white with mauve and pale yellow highlights – with flaming gold letters, of an unknown script, and a quantity of little red or blue arcs that are very thin, very fine, hardly visible. Dominant are gray and mauve" (Samuel 1994, pg. 64).

Some colors of his other modes (in the first transposition) include: Mode 1, which is reddish-violet; Mode 3, which is orange in a halo of milky white, speckled with a little red like opal; Mode 4, which is dark purple; and Mode 5, which is gray-green-pink dotted with gold (Bell, pg. 30).

Finally, he succeeds once again in relating all this back to his religious faith. He calls resonance and complementary colors ". . . phenomena [which] are connected to the sensation of the sacred, to the dazzlement which gives birth to Reverence, Adoration, [and Praise" (Rößler, pg. 62). In concluding his *Conférence de Notre Dame* (1977), he said:

"Eternal life", we read in Saint John (17:3), "is to know Thee, Thou, the only true God and Him whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ"
This knowledge will be a perpetual dazzlement, and eternal music of colors, an eternal color of musics.
In Thy Music, we will SEE the Music,

In Thy Light, we will HEAR the Light. . .
(Rößler, pg. 66).

He has even gone so far as to point out complimentary colors in the Bible. He mentions a passage where Christ is described "like stone of jasper and carnelian", seated on a throne encircled by a rainbow "like unto emerald". As Messiaen explained, jasper and carnelian are red color, which is complimentary to the emerald green rainbow. What does this mean to Messiaen? He remarked,

All these dazzlements are a great lesson. They show us that God is beyond words, thoughts, concepts, beyond our earth and our sun, beyond the thousands of stars which circle around us, above and beyond time and space, beyond all these things which are somehow linked to Him. He alone knows himself by His Word, incarnate in Jesus Christ. And when musical painting, colored music, sound-color magnify it by dazzlement, they participate in this fine praise of the Gloria which speaks to God and to Christ: "Only Thou art Holy, Thou alone art the Most-High! (Rößler, pg. 65).

Hence, it becomes clear that Messiaen's harmonies can easily be traced back to his ideas about color, which are linked in turn to religious faith, but there is still an unusual area of his music which remains to be explained: namely, rhythm.

When asked by Samuel about his vocation as a composer during one interview, Messiaen added, "I'm a composer and a rhythmician" (1994, pg. 67). His ornithological views have already been discussed to some extent, but rhythm also remained a very important aspect of his music and life's work. Johnson notes that "Messiaen's interest in rhythm dates back to his student days" (pg. 32). It has already been noted earlier that this interest was expanded by his introduction to ancient Greek rhythms through his organ teacher Marcel Dupré and his history teacher Maurice Emmanuel. This interest in exotic rhythms grew when he discovered the 120 *deçî-tâlas* (*deçî* meaning regional, *tâlas* meaning

rhythm, or rhythms of the Indian provinces) listed by Sharngadeva (see appendix).

Messiaen explained,

It was a strike of luck. I accidentally came across Sharngaveda's treatise and the famous list of 120 *deçî-tâlas*; that list was a revelation. I immediately sensed that this was an extraordinary find; I studied it, copied it, contemplated and reapproached it from every possible angle, for years, in order to grasp its hidden meaning (Samuel 1994, pg. 77).

Although he worked with Greek rhythms at first, his discovery of the Hindu *deçî-tâlas* had a far greater impact on his compositional style than did the Greek rhythms. The two types of rhythms are similar in concept, however. While Western music uses rhythm to divide strong from weak beats, the Greek and Hindu systems are based on a poetic meter which simply arranges notes into longer or shorter values. As Bell explains, "In Messiaen's musical language, the use of the short value (such as the sixteenth note and its free multiplication) produces 'ametical' music, or music with free but precise rhythmic patterns, in opposition to measured or equally barred music" (pg. 8). In other words, Messiaen uses the Greek / Hindu idea of short and long note values instead of traditional strong / weak beat rhythmic patterns. This is complicated enough, but it seems that his reasons for using this unusual rhythmic idea is simple. He explained, "I felt the need to do other things after my traditional studies. That's why I studied Greek prosody and Indian rhythms" (Röblier, pgs. 108-9). Nonetheless, his studies influenced his concepts regarding rhythm, and his concepts remained strongly opposed to the norm throughout his life.

During the course of a lecture he gave at the "Conférence de Bruxelles" in 1958, Messiaen said,

Let us not forget that the first, essential element in music is Rhythm, and that Rhythm is first and foremost the change of number and duration. Suppose that there were a single beat in all the universe.

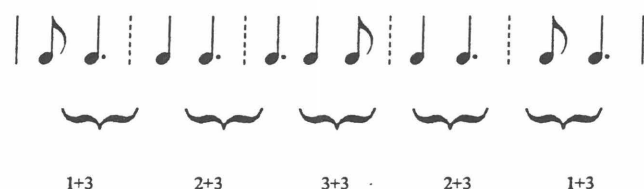
One beat; with eternity before it and eternity after it. A before and an after. That is the birth of time. Imagine then, almost immediately, a second beat. Since any beat is prolonged by the silence which follows it, the second beat will be longer than the first. Another number, another duration. That is the birth of Rhythm (Johnson, pg. 32).

Consequently, he felt that his job as a rhythmician consisted of dividing up "eternity" by using note durations of differing lengths. In 1971, he said at an address in Amsterdam, "First of all I love time, because it's the starting point of all creation. . . Time makes eternity comprehensible for us by contrasting with it. Time ought to be the friend of all musicians" (Röblier, pg. 40). Messiaen said in the same address that it was partly because of a "Rhythmic Analysis" class that he taught at the Paris Conservatoire that caused him to develop his philosophy of time-lengths. In this philosophy, he finds that traditionally "rhythmic" music, such as jazz and military music, are not really rhythmic at all. These types of music use "equal-note values" (as opposed to long and short notes) quite extensively, and are to Messiaen, therefore, "the negation of rhythm". He said the same thing about the music of Bach and Prokofiev: ". . . they seem rhythmic precisely because they have no rhythm" (Samuel 1994, pg. 36). For Messiaen, rhythm is something which is closer to natural movements, expressions and sounds. "I've attained a rhythmic language of ever greater freedom, which comes ever closer to Nature, for example, to the undulating motion of the sea, of the wind, of the movements of the clouds, etc." (Röblier, pgs. 122-3). This, of course relates back to his love of nature, just as his love of color did. Nature never provides completely steady and repetitive beat patterns. What nature does provide, however, is symmetrical design (such as the two wings of a butterfly, the two sides of the face, etc.), and Messiaen relates this to his rhythm in what he calls "non-retrogradable rhythms". He discovered these in the Hindu *deçî-tâlas*, and has used them extensively in his works. As Johnson explains, non-retrogradable rhythms are "rhythmic

patterns which cannot be reversed because they are the same both forwards and backwards. An example of this would be deçî-tâlas rhythm no. 51, the vijaya rhythm:



This is quite clearly the same from left to right as it is from right to left. One more example would be the simhavikrîdita rhythm (number 27):



When this is read from left to right, you get 1+3, 2+3, and 3+3 (each 1 represents 1 eighth note, the dotted quarter note contains 3 eighth notes), and when read from right to left, you get the same thing. It is partly in this technique that Messiaen gets the freedom which he referred to.

How does all of this refer back to religious love, as did everything else? One might think that in exploring Hindu rhythms, Messiaen would actually be contradicting his Catholic faith. Quite the contrary is true, however. He feels that religious expression can be found in practically everything, and with Hinduism, he said:

I have a great admiration for Hindu rhythms, but only for the rhythms, not for Indian philosophy. I've studied it in order to understand the rhythms, but I'm not at all Hindu or Shivaist (Röbler, pg. 97).

He has even gone so far as to relate some of the Hindu philosophy behind the rhythms to his own Christian philosophy.

While I was learning the meaning of the names of the Deçî-Tâlas with the help of a Sanskrit specialist, I tried to understand the relationship between the names and time-lengths, and I saw that there are relationships of a religious, philosophical and a cosmic nature. Thus all rhythms which are divisible by 5, for example, a rhythm of 15 time-lengths (usually notated in eighth note values: 1 time length = 1 eighth note), pertain to Shiva, the god of destructive and restorative dance, and they also belong to the primitive idea of the five fingers of the hand (Röblier, pg. 83).

Messiaen mentioned that he used this particular symbolism in the number five, and related this god of destruction and restoration to pieces which he wrote on the theme of the Christian Apocalypse. As mentioned before, he also related rhythm quite frequently to time and eternity. Messiaen believed that time and space were the first things created by God. Since rhythm is the dividing up of time, it must also have been created along with time, and Messiaen loves rhythm partly because of God's intervention in creating it. Thus, he has successfully related his use of rhythm back to religious faith as well.

Messiaen's use of all these elements (religion, Tristan, bird calls, color, and rhythms) make him a very unusual but also very colorful person. Unfortunately, he experienced throughout his life the tragedy of having to write music for and explain music to people who could not understand those areas which he loved. He told Röblier about four particular areas which caused drama in his life. Those areas include all of the mentioned techniques with the exception of "Tristan" (probably because most people have experienced human love). As he said,

. . . the drama of my life consists of four things. Firstly, I talk about birdsongs to urban dwellers who've never heard a bird in their lives. . . The second drama consists of my telling people that I see colours whenever I hear music, and they see nothing, nothing at all. That's terrible! And they don't even believe me. The third drama is that I've worked out a language of rhythm in detail, have researched Greek

metres and Indian rhythms, etc. . . . [and] Whenever I talk about Rhythm, most people understand nothing, because to them, (at least to the most primitive of them), Rhythm just means a military march or jazz. That's awful; they confuse Rhythm with jazz which I loathe. I find jazz music repellent; I hate it when my rhythms are confused with it. . . . The fourth drama, the worst of them all: I'm a believer, and I talk about the mysteries of Christ to people who don't believe, who think that Christ wasn't God, and who don't understand anything, not even time and space. There's one thing which is very difficult to explain to most people: the matter of time. (pgs. 122-3).

Hopefully, a better understanding of these areas has been accomplished thus far –
Messiaen would have appreciated it!

Selections from Messiaen's Works

With Messiaen's life and belief system as a background, it will now be significantly easier to understand his compositions. The two that I have chosen for analysis are the *Turangalîla-Symphonie* (completed in 1948) and the *Vingt Regards sur L'Enfant-Jésus* (1944) for piano. Since both of these works are massive, not every movement from each work will be looked at in depth. The *Turangalîla-Symphonie* was chosen at first because of what Messiaen said regarding this work: "It's one of my works that is richest in discoveries; it's also the most melodious, the warmest, the most dynamic and the most coloured" (Samuel 1976, pg. 85). This opinion probably did not hold true with Messiaen up until the time of his death (especially with the composition of his massive opera), but nevertheless, he did feel that this was one of his most representative works. My fortune in finding both the score and a recording of this work confirmed my choice. With *Vingt Regards sur L'Enfant-Jésus*, my choice rested entirely upon my earlier decision to learn selections from this work. Having worked personally on this work as a performer has helped my understanding of both this work and of Messiaen quite significantly. I will begin, however, with the *Turangalîla-Symphonie*.

Messiaen wrote the *Turangalîla-Symphonie* as a result of a commission from the conductor of the Boston Symphony, Serge Koussevitzky. The premiere took place with that same symphony on December 2nd, 1949, in the Symphony Hall in Boston, under the direction of Leonard Bernstein. The word "*Turangalîla*" (pronounced "tour-ahn-gu-lee-lah") comes from the 33rd rhythm in the list of the 120 *deçî-tâlas*. The rhythm that fits this word is the following:



Interestingly enough, however, the work shows a surprising lack of this rhythm throughout. It is probable that Messiaen used the word for nothing more than the meaning of the word itself, which, when divided up, has several meanings. *Turanga* means movement and rhythm in a sense of time. Messiaen compares what this word represents to "time that runs, like a galloping horse", or "time that flows, like the sand in an hourglass" (Messiaen 1991, pg. 1). The word *Lila* literally means "play", but is also understood as meaning "love". The play aspect of the word, as Messiaen puts it, is "play in the sense of the divine action upon the cosmos, the play of creation, of destruction, of reconstruction, the play of life and death". So all together, the word *Turangelila* means "love song, hymn to joy, time, movement, rhythm, life and death" (Messiaen 1991, pg. 1). Messiaen chose this word in order to represent properly what he meant this work to be: a love song and a hymn to joy. The joy is not just normal respectable joy, but joy "that is superhuman, overflowing, blinding, and unlimited". In the same manner, the love represented in this work "is a love that is fatal, irresistible, transcending everything, suppressing everything outside itself" (Messiaen 1991, pg. 1), this being, of course, being in the style of the Tristan and Isolde myth.

The work itself is divided up into a total of ten movements, which are as follows: 1. Introduction; 2. Chant d'amour 1 (*Love Song 1*); 3. Turangelila 1; 4. Chant d'amour 2 (*Love Song 2*); 5. Joie du sang des étoiles (*Joy of the Blood of the Stars*); 6. Jardin du sommeil d'armour (*Garden of Love's Sleep*); 7. Turangelila 2; 8. Développement de l'amour (*Development of Love*); 9. Turangelila 3; and 10. Final (*Finale*). The entire work takes just over seventy-five minutes to perform, and is orchestrated with the following instruments: Woodwinds include – piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets in B flat, bass clarinet in B flat, and 3 bassoons; Brass include – 4 horns in F, piccolo trumpet in D, 3 trumpets in C, cornet in B flat, 3 trombones, and tuba; Strings include – 16 first violins, 16 second violins, 14 violas, 12 cellos, and 10 contrabasses;

Percussion include – celesta, glockenspiel, vibraphone, triangle, three temple blocks, one wood block, small Turkish cymbal, cymbals (one suspended and one pair to be clashed together), Chinese cymbal, tam-tam, Basque drum, maracas, side drum, Provençal tabor, bass drum, and tubular bells (here, Messiaen's training at the Conservatoire in percussion can be seen as having an effect); and finally, the two solo instruments of piano and ondes martenot (an electric instrument).

The effect of Messiaen's instrumentation, and, in actuality, of the entire composition itself, is rather amazing. He makes use of many of the elements discussed throughout this paper, including nonretrogradable rhythms (particularly in the third movement), Hindu rhythms, the modes of limited transposition, and bird song (particularly in the sixth movement). As a listener rather than analyzer of the work, however, these compositional techniques (with the exception of the bird calls), are hardly noticed. The effect which they produce is very concrete, but the elements themselves (unless, of course, you are very familiar with all 120 of the *deçî-tâlas*, or with all seven of his modes of limited transpositions) would be difficult for an everyday listener to spot without score study and research. Hopefully, the awareness achieved thus far of Messiaen's compositional techniques will help achieve the goal of understanding the emotional effect caused by the culmination of his technique which lies in this work.

The introduction begins with a string solo (violins and cellos in the first measure) before the brass and winds come in a little at a time in the following measures. The strings play fortissimo sixteenth notes (at a moderato speed), which provides for a very marcato sound. This, along with the fact that the opening consists melodically of tritones, gives a very powerful entrance. Messiaen sustains this power through a chromatic descent in the lower strings which brings the listener to a powerful climax, found in the resonating crash of a tam tam (Messiaen uses the technique of descending into the tam tam throughout the introduction. The second time, it occurs with a descent in the piano). After this climatic

crash (having occurred already in the eleventh bar of the music), Messiaen moves on to his "statue" theme (the first masculine theme), which occurs at a fortissimo level in the trombones and tuba in measure eighteen. The theme is presented with simple straight eighth notes, and is given the background of high register trilling in the strings and piccolo, along with single scattered sforzando notes in the lower woodwinds. This theme could probably best be described as a solid, gripping theme, which is contrasted later in the introduction with his "flower" (feminine) theme. This second theme occurs in the clarinets in measure 52. It occurs after the first theme culminates into a climax which ends with a powerful descending chromatic scale in the piano and a downward glissando in the ondes martenot. The "flower" theme is presented by the clarinets with single notes preceded by three grace notes each. The intervals presented seem to suggest mode five of his mode of limited transpositions, which would make sense since the colors he saw in that mode included green and pink (possibly flower colors). The background to this theme is very thin, with nothing more than sustained notes in the violas and cellos (low register notes, contrasting with the higher register theme, which contrasts in turn to the opposite arrangement which occurred in the first theme). While the first theme repeated for several pages, this theme lasts for only two and a half measures before it ends. Single eighth chords in the celesta, vibraphone, and piano take over after the completion of this short theme, and soon the descent occurs again, this time into a twenty measure virtuosic piano solo. With the exception of the "flower" theme, the majority of the introduction stays within the forte range. The effect is that of a triumphant opening, which shows two sides of the love found in the word Turangalila. This triumph is confirmed in the final measures of the introduction, when the descent occurs again in the piano and woodwinds, this time leaping through thirds (making the descent quicker), into the final tam tam crash indicative of the beginning.

Now that Messiaen has boldly declared two types of love through his introduction, he moves to a movement which demonstrates the expression of this love. Movement 2, which is the first love song of the work, continues with a bold, but scattered beginning (something like a somewhat confused but determined lover trying to gather his thoughts). The effect comes from Messiaen's placing of various notes and chords separated by rests which occur at different times in the various instruments. This gives way to the beating of percussion instruments which crescendos through seven measures into a firm, fortissimo, melodic declaration. This occurs as sixteenth notes running through first a 2/8, then a 5/16, and finally a return to a 2/8 measure. The declaration is very vivacious, and gives a feeling that Messiaen placed a certain aspect of joy in the phrase. The melody is repeated and then followed by a slow, pianissimo melodic passage. The ondes martenot is used in this section, and helps contribute to a very eerie, yet meditative feeling. Something like what would occur in silent reflection after the realization that comes with the initial declaration. This meditative reflection occurs for only three measures, however, before the declaration comes back in full force – bold and almost passionate (the word Messiaen marked in the score). This pattern occurs frequently throughout the first love song before ending with a sixteenth note descent, reminiscent of the introduction (this time with piano and strings), which leads to the final tam tam crash of that movement.

The next movement is the first Turangalila movement, and this contrasts the two former movements by both starting and ending at a soft dynamic level. The feeling which seems prevalent throughout this movement has to do with that part of the word "Turangalila" which deals with time. The movement opens with a clarinet solo, which is soon coupled by the ondes martenot, the vibraphone, a pizzicato in the contrabass, and a bell. The clarinet shares the opening chord with the bell, and helps give the immediate impression that the movement deals with time. The coupling of the clarinet and the ondes martenot in the opening twenty-three measures also helps provide a sort of eerie floating

feeling – a type of feeling which also deals with time (or timelessness). After the softer opening, Messiaen brings the movement to a bombastic fortissimo which is characterized by ascending and descending glissandos (shared by the ondes martenot and violas) and steady sixteenth note throbs in the percussion and piano. This provides a background for the scattered melody lines in the brass. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this piece is the role that Messiaen gives to the maracas (representing mineral), the wood block (vegetable), and the bass drum (animal). These three instruments begin a cycle of rhythms that begins in measure fifty-five (the number five being symbolic for Messiaen). The rhythms are as follows:

Maracas: ; Wood block: ; & Bass Drum: 

The speed of the maracas gradually increases (next moving to two quarter tied to dotted eighth note values), while the bass drum speed decreases (next moving to eighth note values). These two instruments move in a cycle by decreasing / increasing and then returning to their original rhythms. The wood block stays the same, and is the most intriguing in that it stays constant until the very end of the movement, which, in effect, it ends. Perhaps this represents the timelessness of the forest (which, for Messiaen, was both timeless and pure). The other difference is in the rhythm. While there are several rhythms from the *deçî-tâlas* that consist of two equal value notes, there is only from which the wood block rhythm could have come from; namely, the *sârasa* rhythm (number 103):



Messiaen alters these rhythms often, and here it appears that he has left off the last eighth note value. Still, there is a significance here that would probably require an explanation from Messiaen himself.

The quiet, yet percussive ending of the first Turangalīla movement gives way to the quiet non-percussive beginning of the second love song – the fourth movement of the symphony. This movement begins with a melody line which is shared by the bassoon and piccolo. At the beginning, it seems almost like a silly sort of love. When the wooden block adds more of a percussive sound to the piece in measure five, however, it becomes a little bit more serious. The addition of the piano in measure twelve pushes it along even further toward a more serious feeling, and as the piano moves up and down, accelerating with the rest of the orchestra, the feeling of a climax is imminent. It finally is reached, and with it, the entire orchestra slows down into a beautiful melodic high point where the strings dominate. This point in the movement (occurring around measure 50) is one of those heart-felt moments where the involved listener experiences emotional undertones which resonate from the music. From here, the music continues to fall in intensity – the love becomes quiet. This lasts only for a moment, however, before the strings burst back out into song once again. The piano can again be heard in the background, with its quick, percussive chords moving back and forth. When the theme in the strings comes back for the third time, the trombones can also be heard in the background, once again presenting the "statue" theme from the introduction. The masculine theme is now a little bit softer, existing only as a background to the predominant song of love. The song eventually moves into the background as well, however, as do all the voices. The movement begins to sound like a cauldron of mixing themes, instruments, and emotions before finally giving up in an abrupt halt which allows the piano to return with a large solo, reminiscent of the introduction. Although not as technical as the solo of the introduction, the piano has its say before moving up into the high registers to serve as the background for the "statue" theme in the trombones, which comes out once again into the foreground. The theme only occurs once in this manner, however, before the movement falls back into the silence of a pianissimo which slowly settles into a pianianissimo conclusion.

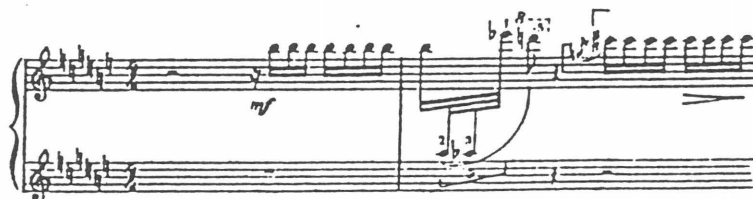
The fifth movement of Messiaen's *Turangalila* is the first movement (aside from the introduction) which is not a *Turangalila* movement or a love song. The movement is titled *Joy of the Blood of the Stars*, and this movement is one of the most moving. Messiaen calls the fifth movement a "long, frenetic dance of joy" (Messiaen 1991, pg. 5), and mentions the word "transformation" (caused by the union of true lovers) as something that the piece symbolizes. This symbolic dance of joy begins with the following rhythm:



This rhythm continues throughout most of the piece in different melodic forms, although the melody never seems to stay in one instrument. Rather, the melody jumps between instruments through the course of the rhythmic motif. The joyful melodic rhythm stays at a fortissimo level through most of the movement. Although there are a few dynamic pull backs, they are few and far between. It seems that Messiaen is able to accomplish motion forward from fortissimo with rhythmic pushes and additions of instruments (the ondes martenot comes back near the middle with its ascending and descending glissandos). The drive forward continues through another "cauldron" of instruments and thematic material before halting once again to the piano solo which prepares the ending. It is the ending which is perhaps the most exiting section of the entire movement, as repeated fortississimo chords drive toward a sudden drop to pianissimo, before coming back up to fortississimo in the course of seven measures. All this occurs on a triumphant D flat major triad which holds all voices fixed in the last four measures with the exception of the cellos, which can faintly be heard arpeggiating downward from F, to D flat, A flat, and finally low D flat.

The sixth movement provides sharp contrast to the triumphant conclusion of the fifth. Entitled *Garden of Love's Sleep*, the thematic content of this movement is clear. While the fifth movement can be classified as very moving, this movement is the most peaceful, and probably the most picturesque. This is the only movement which gives a

very clear mental picture of an outdoor scene with detailed specifics. Messiaen probably had an outdoor scene (such as a garden) in mind when he wrote this piece, particularly when considering the use of birdsong. The outdoor scene is accomplished through, once again, a sense of timelessness that Messiaen crafts with repeated birdsong on the piano coupled with the eerie sound of the ondes martenot, and warm sustained sounds on the strings (the intervals here seem to indicate Messiaen's fifth mode again, as in the "flower" theme – perhaps this is his "nature mode"). This pattern remains through most of the movement (which lasts twelve and a half minutes), with the exception of melodic lines appearing in additional instruments, such as the clarinet or other wind instruments. The addition of the triangle later in the movement gives the impression of chimes, which, in turn, strongly suggests the image of a gentle breeze. Messiaen states in the program notes that the songs of the birds which are imitated on the piano include those of "a nightingale, of a blackbird, of a garden warbler, but stylized, idealized" (meaning, of course, that they are not completely accurate, but are twisted slightly to fit the movement). The opening bird call on the piano is shown here:



The idealization he is speaking of here seems to be a slowing down and softening of the call, which produces a very dreamy effect, fitting the title word "sleep" very well. So, with all this put together, an image visualizes of tranquil birds singing softly while a gentle breeze blows through the tops of tender trees, with hanging chimes sounding every now and again in response to the mild wind. Of course, this picture of the *Garden of Love's Sleep* would not be complete without the two lovers sitting beneath one of the trees, listening quietly to the peaceful sounds of nature resonating around them. Their breath flows with the gradual rising and falling of their chests, as they drink deeply of this

seemingly eternal beauty. The sense of timelessness relaxes the pair, bringing them into a gentle sleep, signaled by the slow decrescendo of sounds around them, and the distant tolling of a (church) bell.

This peaceful interlude ends with the beginning of the seventh movement, which is the second Turangalila. It begins with a thirteen measure piano solo at a fortissimo level – the number (13) seeming very indicative of what is to come in this movement. The first Turangalila was probably indicative of the time aspect of the word – this movement appears to be indicative of the life and death aspect. The instrumentation and rhythms which pervade this work are very dark, yielding a sense of dread, fear, and almost horror. Messiaen accomplishes this through heavy use of lower brass, dark percussion instruments (such as bass drum and tam tam), and chromaticism. The eerily descending chromatic line of the ondes martenot contributes significantly to these feelings. And while high register instruments are also present (often just as single scattered notes), the lower register instruments always seem to dominate. This holds true even for the soloistic piano. It seems to become very clear and realistic the one time in this movement when it moves down to the lower register in a flurry of scale-like notes (indicative of the Mephisto theme in Liszt's B Minor Sonata). The ending of this piece occurs with the final hope of a high register piano chord destroyed by the final staccato boom of the bass drum.

One would expect this nightmarish quality to end with the opening of the eighth movement (Development of Love), especially considering the title. Messiaen, however, in understanding the pain which can accompany such a development, calls this title "terrible" (Messiaen 1991, pg. 6), and succeeds in producing this sort of feeling in the opening of the work. The dark and heavy percussion instruments return in the very opening, along with bass clarinets and ondes martenot glissandos. The "statue" theme also returns, but in a much darker spirit, as it lacks the background of the upper register instruments. This, however, soon moves to the indescribable development of joy, as the strings and the ondes

martenot return with a powerful melodic declaration (the love theme). Confusion seems to return (like in other movements), as does the quiet meditation, but it all continually returns to a melodic declaration which grows stronger each of the three times that it bursts forth. This declaration moves forward toward climax through most of the piece, which intensifies the final climax when it occurs. And not only does he intensify it through withholding it, but Messiaen has a way of elongating the climax after it has clearly occurred. Once the high point is reached, a slow fall back occurs over the course of many pages – a fall back into the comfort of a seemingly peaceful love. Just when it seems that rest has been accomplished, however, the terror of the beginning returns, and the listener, as Messiaen puts it, is brought to the edge of the "abyss" (Messiaen 1991, pg. 6) with the final crash of the tam tam which ends that movement.

The ninth movement is the third and final Turangalila movement. It begins with a clarinet solo, but the wood block is soon to return, in a manner similar to that of the first Turangalila movement. As the wood block continues, the clarinet is soon replaced by the piano as a solo instrument. The piano seems to be searching for some sort of harmonic and rhythmic relief in a desperate sort of manner. This piano is joined by the woodwinds and the strings, which take over in the desperation while the piano falls into the background. The wood block continues, once again, all the way up until the end, but the piece never finds relief. It ends abruptly without conclusion – perhaps suggesting, once again, a sense of time which cannot possibly resolve, simply because it cannot end.

The finale is the first movement since the *Garden of Love's Sleep* to offer clear and uncompromising relief from the distress caused by the preceding movements. It opens with a fanfare for trumpets (and wood block again in the background) which has similarities to an Aaron Copeland composition in the Spanish style. This fanfare repeats throughout the movement (as other themes did in preceding movements), growing in intensity and excitement as it repeats – the excitement being stimulated through some

extreme dynamic changes which allow for climactic crescendos that lead back to the triumphant and joyful fanfare. About three-quarters of the way through the finale, the love theme from the eighth movement returns in a very beautiful form, with brass and woodwinds soaring majestically above the rest of the orchestra. This gives way once again to a return of the fanfare, which drives toward a triumphant ending, similar in effect to that of the fifth movement. Before the last chord is reached, the orchestra drops from fortissimo to pianissimo, in preparation for a five measure crescendo that brings the orchestra to a fortississimo on an F sharp major triad (the enharmonic dominant of the D flat major triad which occurred at the end of the fifth movement). Thus ends the tenth movement – the last of the work which may be Messiaen's most emotionally compelling symphony.

The second work to be examined, Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus*, is at least as monumental for piano as is the *Turangalîla-Symphonie* for orchestra. The piano work, however, is almost twice as long in time (120 minutes compared to 75), and is exactly twice as long in movements (20 instead of 10). The other difference lies in the content. While the *Turangalîla-Symphonie* deals with a human type of love, the *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* deals purely with divine love, as is evident by the name (which means "Twenty Meditations of the Infant Jesus"). The twenty movements of this piece deal with different aspects from which these meditations take place, such as from the view of Time, of the Virgin Mary, of the Three Wise Men, etc. The twenty works are in the order as follows: 1. *Regard du Père* ("The Meditation, or Adoration, of the Father"); 2. *Regard de l'Étoile* ("The Adoration of the Star"); 3. *L'échange* ("The Exchange"); 4. *Regard de la Vierge* ("The Adoration of the Virgin"); 5. *Regard du Fils sur le Fils* ("The Adoration of the Son by the Son"); 6. *Par Lui tout a été fait* ("By Him were all things made"); 7. *Regard de la Croix* ("The Adoration of the Cross"); 8. *Regard des Hauteurs*

("The Adoration of the Heights"); 9. *Regard du Temps* ("The Adoration of Time"); 10. *Regard de l'Esprit de joie* ("The Adoration of the Spirit of Joy"); 11. *Première Communion de la Vierge* ("The Virgin's First Communion"); 12. *La Parole toute-puissante* ("The All-Powerful Word"); 13. *Noël* (Christmas); 14. *Regard des Anges* ("The Adoration of the Angels"); 15. *Le Baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus* ("The Kiss of the Child Jesus"); 16. *Regard des prophètes, des bergers et des Mages* ("The Adoration of the Prophets, the Shepherds, and the Wise Men"); 17. *Regard du Silence* ("The Adoration of Silence"); 18. *Regard de l'Onction terrible* ("The Adoration of the Awesome Anointing"), 19. *Je dors, mais mon cœur veille* ("I Sleep, but my Heart Wakes"); and 20. *Regard de l'Église d'Amour* ("The Adoration of the Church of Love"). Messiaen uses his compositional techniques (rhythms, modes of limited transposition, etc.) very extensively throughout this piece. In particular, Messiaen mentions in the program notes his use of certain cyclic themes that he came up with for this composition. These themes include the *Thème de Dieu* (Theme of God), the *Thème de l'amour mystique* (Theme of mystical Love), the *Thème de Étoile et de la Croix* (Theme of the Star and the Cross), and the *Thème d'accords* (Theme of chords). Messiaen uses these themes in various movements throughout the piece.

It holds true that Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* are a set up as pieces which, although they all deal with a common subject matter, can be divided up by thematic material. It seems that Messiaen does this partially with numbers. The first movement, and then every fifth after it, is one that deals with an aspect of divinity (these include numbers 1, 5, 10, 15, and 20 – "The Adoration of the Father", "The Adoration of the Son by the Son", "The Adoration of the Spirit of Joy", "The Kiss of the Child Jesus", and "The Adoration of the Church of Love"). The order in which the movements with this subject matter appears makes perfect sense, since the Father is the first member of the Godhead, the Son the second, and the Holy Spirit the third. The last two of this set demonstrate the

order with which the God head redeems man through action – first the Word becomes flesh (the Child Jesus), then with the sacrifice of that flesh, a new body is formed (that of the Church). Other subject matters include those of grace, time, the creation, the birth, and the Virgin. The first category is one in which Messiaen uses the number seven for (the number of perfection). The two that fit under this category are movements 7 and 14 (2x7), which are "The Adoration of the Cross" (representing the grace that he presented through his sacrifice), and "The Adoration of the Angels" (Angels have already been confirmed in grace). Messiaen places two movements in the category of time as well. These include movements 9 ("The Adoration of Time") and 18 (2x9) ("The Adoration of the Awesome Anointing"). Messiaen chose the number nine as a representation of time, because of the period of nine months during which Jesus was in his mother's womb. The second piece of this category deals with time in that the anointing is something that presupposes the creation. The third category, that of the creation, seems to group movements 2, 6, and 12. Messiaen mentions the fact that the number six is the number of the creation, and this helps group movement 6 ("By Him were all things made") and 12 ("The All-Powerful Word" – it was through the Word that all things were made). The second movement ("The Adoration of the Star"), however, also seems to fit this character in that it is the object of a creative act. The subject of the birth of Christ appears to group movements 3 ("The Exchange"), 8 ("The Adoration of the Heights"), 13 ("Christmas"), and 16 ("The Adoration of the Prophets, the Shepherds, and the Wise Men"). The first of this group is symbolic of the exchange which took place when God became flesh in order to bring us immortality. The second has to do with the hill over which the Angels were singing praise (in view of the shepherds) on the night of Christ's birth, and the third has to do with Christmas, which is directly invocative of an image of the birth of Christ. The fourth of this group is clearly about those groups of people who were aware of Christ's birth at the time that it took place. The last category (that of the Virgin) seems to fit

numbers 4 and 11 ("The Adoration of the Virgin", and "The Virgin's First Communion"). This category is self-explanatory. The two works that do not seem to fit any particular category are numbers 17 and 19. Number 17 ("The Adoration of Silence") has to do with the awe of the presence of God. Messiaen mentions his heavy use of colors in this movement, which seems to suggest a reference back to the descriptions of the "New Jerusalem" found in the Book of the Revelation. This is a city in which the presence of God is so strong, that there is no need for sunlight – his presence lights the sky every hour of the day. Number 19 ("I Sleep, but my Heart Wakes") has to do with mystical love. This particular title comes from the Song of Songs (or *Song of Solomon*) chapter 5, verse 2. This particular book of the Bible is one which deals with the relationship of two lovers. Many Christian interpreters have taken the images presented in this book as images of the relationship between the believer and his spiritual love, namely, Christ.

In the course of listening to the entire group of 20 movements, one notices the incredible fluency with which Messiaen relates one movement to another. The work is colored by movements which demonstrate power, gentleness, affection, and even harshness, but Messiaen's compositional techniques, particularly those of modes and rhythms, make it clear through listening, that thematic material (even apart from his four cyclic themes) tie the movements together. This thematic material can be found in areas that range from the sounding of two chords from a certain mode, to a driving rhythmic progression. Thematic material like this appears once, and then repeats itself in many forms throughout the work, demonstrating a line (that of the divine love of Christ) that ties the entire work together. Listening to this work is quite an experience – similar in scope, but also very different from that of the *Turangalila-Symphonie*. Rather than discussing the work movements by movement, I will look at the two which I have experienced personally. In listening to the entire work, I can confidently say that these two movements contain many of the elements which Messiaen scattered throughout.

Therefore, in examining these two movements, a relatively good understanding of the entire piece can be achieved.

Of the twenty movements that make up the work, I chose to work on two from the later half in preparation for a recital. These include numbers 16 ("The Adoration of the Prophets, the Shepherds, and the Wise Men") and 19 ("I sleep, but my heart wakes"), and come from the categories of "the birth" and "mystical love" (one of the single-work-categories). I begin work on number 16 at first, and began number 19 only after number 16 was memorized and near the point of technical feasibility. Of the two works, number 16 is by far the most technically difficult, while number 19 is most difficult in the examination and understanding it takes to perform convincingly and successfully. Despite their differences, I have found that both movements have similarities, particularly in the area of form. Messiaen seems fond of the particular form that uses in these two movements, as he uses it throughout the entire *Vingt regards*. The form is as follows:

A (first theme)

B (second theme)

C (third theme)

Development (on the third theme)

B' (altered second theme)

A' (altered opening theme)

Coda (usually with fragments present from earlier themes)

This form demonstrates Messiaen's love of symmetrical patterns (like in his non-retrogradable rhythms). With the exception of the coda and the minute alterations made to the opening themes, this format is very symmetrical. This, of course, has to do again with his love of both time and nature, the evidence of which appears frequently in his compositional style, and quite clearly in the first movement to be discussed, *Regard des prophètes, des bergers, et des Mages* (number 16).

The first thing that one notices when beginning this work is Messiaen's love of the tam tam. He marks the word tam tam as a descriptive word for how the left hand of the first twenty-one measures is to be played. When looking through the score at other movements, it becomes evident that this instrumental association was used by Messiaen quite often. It is clear, then that his love of percussion instruments and other orchestral instruments pervaded even in his compositions for the solo piano. It is helpful as a performer to be given such a clear picture of how the work is to be approached. The other thing that is clear in the first twenty-one measures (which comprises theme A), is Messiaen's love of time and dynamic extremes. The tam tam chord of the left hand repeats a total of forty-eight times, beginning as an accented and fortississimo whole note value, then gradually decreasing in volume while increasing rhythmically until the value drops to that of a sixteenth note by the 16th repetition. This occurs while the right hand follows with four chords from the truncated second mode of limited transpositions. The volume drops to piano by the eighteenth repetition, and at this point the repetitions become static until they end. After this firm beginning, Messiaen moves to the second theme, above which he marked "hautbois" (oboe). This theme is nothing more than a single melodic line of three triplets and a single duplet, which is repeated and then followed by a single triplet and two duplets. This pattern repeats, and then changes by becoming a pattern of four triplets and one duplet. When learning this piece, I took this theme as a representation of the "shepherd" aspect of the piece (the oboe marking perhaps being representative of a shepherd-style wind instrument). This theme continues by breaking off into unison triplets before Messiaen uses a heavy octave passage to lead into the third theme. In this theme, Messiaen uses heavily chromatic 32nd notes in the left hand to counter a single quarter note melody in the right hand. This is the theme (C) which develops later when Messiaen turns the 32nd note figure into a canon between the left and right hands, while the quarter note melody continues. After the development, Messiaen returns to B. This time,

however, it appears as thirds (rather than a single line oboe melody) in the right hand, with the addition of the quarter note melody from C in the left hand (perhaps the shepherds and the Wise Men have crossed paths in their common goal of finding and worshipping the Christ). Additions of extra notes continue throughout B', until it ends with the breaking out of A', this time in reverse. Messiaen works again with time and symmetry by beginning with quiet 32nd notes in the left and, and then increasing in volume while slowing down in speed. The coda for this movement is very short, consisting only of a fragment from B' (this time with octave chords in the left hand, rather than single notes), and the addition of a new triplet – duplet figure, before the piece ends with octaves similar to those which helped in the transition from B to C.

After having studied this movement, I have come to the conclusion that the order of the figures in the title show the order with which Messiaen presents the figures in his work. For the prophets, who have an anointing from God which allows them to see both into the future and into the past, Messiaen provides a theme (A) which is stately enough to announce the presence of those who have been anointed by God, and also plays with time enough (especially with the symmetrical aspects which exist between A and A') in order to suggest a sense of the past and the future, rather than of the present. The use of the second theme as a representation of the shepherds has already been discussed, and the use of C to symbolize the Three Wise Men most likely has its main technique in that of the canon, which would represent the intricacy of the number three (the canon uses two 32nd note lines and one quarter note melody).

While the techniques in the next movement, *Je dors, mais mon cœur veille* (number 19), are similar, they paint a very different picture. An aspect that is pervasive throughout this movement is Messiaen's use of long sustained chords (the last chord must be held for approximately sixteen seconds). His purpose in this is most likely an effort to

characterize the sense of timelessness which exists in the mystical love prevalent in relationships between man and God. This work begins with nothing but a pianissimo F sharp major triad for the first seven measures which repeats slowly in different inversions up and down the piano. The mood which he conveys in writing this way for **A** is one of extreme peacefulness that ends with the eighth measure, which is a rest (the number of eternity), which in turn leads to the second theme. The second theme moves slightly quicker, and displays some of the passion which existed in certain movements of the *Turangalila-Symphonie*. The thematic material consists of melodic chords, indicative of the second mode of limited transpositions, which are presented in this section and repeated three times before moving to a close and a falling back to pianissimo from the opening mezzo forte. This segment also ends with an entire measure of rest. Segment **C** is the segment of this piece which contains the *Thème d'amour* (theme of mystical love). This theme is the most persistent and passionate portion of this entire movement, and it also repeats three times, showing that the number three is probably meant by Messiaen as a symbolic number in this movement. With the final presentation of the theme, Messiaen moves the piece through a progression of chords and theme fragments (the Development) before returning to a quiet and peaceful theme **B**. The theme, of course, is altered, but not through the addition of extra notes. This time, it is through an increase in the rhythmic speed of certain chords, along with the subtraction of certain repetitions and the insertion of extra measures with repeated material from elsewhere in **B**. **B'** is also different in that Messiaen inserts a new theme in between certain chords which occur late in the segment. This new theme is only two chords, and Messiaen calls it the *Thème d'accords concentré*, thus pointing it out as a compact form of his "Theme of Chords". In this movement, upon the return to **A**, it becomes clear that it is not reversed, but remains much the same. The difference this time appears near the end, where Messiaen changes the intervals from sixths (which he used the first time) to thirds, and then repeats the segment three times,

with an alteration in direction the third time. This gives way to the quiet coda, which exhibits fragments from **B** and from the "Theme of Mystical Love" in **C**. The final chord is in F sharp major, as the piece began – the chord which Messiaen calls "a sparkling of all possible colors" (Röbner, pg. 118). So, with this sparkling of color, Messiaen ends the second to last movement of his *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus*.

Conclusion

















In the course of this study, I believe that I have accomplished my initial goal of looking into the mind of Messiaen. It is a fascinating and colorful mind, filled with beliefs and theories which are evident throughout all his works. It appears that his surroundings influenced his belief system, and that it was, in turn, his belief system which influenced his incredible compositional style. Some aspects, such as that of sound-color association, appear to be aspects that he was born with, while other aspects, such as that of rhythm, are aspects which he absorbed in the process of his studies and in the attempting to assert himself as an original composer. Aspects such as bird calls and his religious faith came from the deeply rooted loves that he developed as a child, and all of these mixed together in an occupation which was, as far as he was concerned, his calling in life. It is understandable that such a devoted person would mix all of his experiences together in pursuit of that which he believes to be his life's plan and purpose, and when this is understood, the rich and exotic style in which Messiaen wrote can also become clearly understood.





















Thus is the mind and music of Olivier Messiaen.





















— Jarl Hulbert













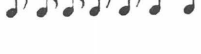







Appendix






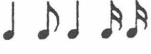














The Table of 120 Deçî-Tâlas





















1.	aditâla	
2.	dvitîya	
3.	tritîya	
4.	caturthaka	
5.	pañcama	
6.	niḥçankalila	
7.	darpana	
8.	simhavikrama	
9.	ratilîla	
10.	simhalîla	
11.	kandarpa	
12.	vîravikrama	
13.	ranga	
14.	çiriranga	
15.	caccarî	
16.	pratyanga	















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|-----|-----------------|--|
| 17. | yatilagna |  |
| 18. | gajalîla |  |
| 19. | hamsalîla |  |
| 20. | varnabhinna |  |
| 21. | tribhinna |  |
| 22. | râjacûdâmâni |  |
| 23. | rangodyota |  |
| 24. | rangapradîpaka |  |
| 25. | râjatâla |  |
| 26. | tryasra varna |  |
| | miçra varna |  |
| | caturasra varna |  |
| 27. | simhavikrîdita |  |
| 28. | jaya |  |
| 29. | vanamâlî |  |
| 30. | hamsanâda |  |
| 31. | simhanâda |  |
| 32. | kudukka |  |
| 33. | turangalîla |  |
| 34. | çarabhalîla |  |

35. simhanandana 
36. tribhângi 
37. rangâbharana 
38. mantha (1) 
- (2) 
- mudrita (3) 
- (4) 
- [There are six other forms of mantha]
39. kokilâpriya 
40. nihsâruka 
41. râjavidyâdhara 
42. jayamangala 
43. mallikâmourâ 
44. vijayânanda 
45. krîdâ (and) candanihsâruka 
46. jayaçrî 
47. makaranda 
48. kîrti 
49. çrikîrti 
50. partitâla 
51. vijaya 

52. bindumālī 
53. sama 
54. nandana 
55. manthikā 
- or 
56. dīpaka 
57. udikshana 
58. dhenkī 
59. vishama 
60. varnamanthikā 
61. abhinanda 
62. ananga 
63. nāndī 
64. mallatāla 
65. kankāla (1) pūrna 
- (2) khanda 
- (3) sama 
- (4) vishama 
66. kanduka 
67. ekatālī 

68. kumuda 
- or 
69. catustāla 
70. dombulī 
71. abhanga 
72. rāysvsnkōla 
73. vasanta 
74. laghuṣekhara 
75. pratāpaṣekhara 
76. jhāihpā 
77. gajajhampa 
78. caturmukha 
79. madana 
80. pratimanthaka or kollaka 
81. pārvatilocana 
82. rati 
83. līlā 
84. karanayati 
85. lalita 
86. gārugi 

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|------|--------------|--|
| 87. | râjanârâyana |  |
| 88. | lakskmīṇa |  |
| 89. | lalitapriya |  |
| 90. | ṇrīnandana |  |
| 91. | janaka |  |
| 92. | vardhana |  |
| 93. | rāgavardhana |  |
| 94. | shattāla |  |
| 95. | antarakrītā |  |
| 96. | hamsa |  |
| 97. | utsava |  |
| 98. | vilokita |  |
| 99. | gaja |  |
| 100. | varnayati |  |
| 101. | simha |  |
| 102. | karuna |  |
| 103. | sārasa |  |
| 104. | candatāla |  |
| 105. | candrakalā |  |
| 106. | laya |  |

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 107. skanda |  |
| 108. addatâli or tripata |  |
| 109. dhattâ |  |
| 110. dvandva |  |
| 111. mukunda |  |
| 112. kuvindaka |  |
| 113. kaladhavani |  |
| 114. gauri |  |
| 115. saravatikanthâbharana |  |
| 116. bhagna |  |
| 117. râjamrigânka |  |
| 118. râjamârtanda |  |
| 119. niççanka |  |
| 120. çârngadeva |  |

Modes of Limited Transposition

<u>Number of transpositions</u>	<u>Messiaen name</u>	
2	mode 1	
2	mode 2	
4	mode 3	
4		
6		
6	truncated mode 5	
6	truncated mode 2	
6	truncated mode 2	
6	mode 5	
6	mode 6	
6	mode 4	
6	mode 7	

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