

THE VOCAL WORKS OF OLIVIER MESSIAEN

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Olivier Messiaen's compositions for voice, though less widely known than his instrumental works, span some forty years and comprise a fifth of his total output. They have hitherto not been subject to much attention.

A study of the elements comprising the vocal lines and accompanying instrumentation from the piano-voice song set, *Trois mélodies* (1930), to the vast orchestral-choral *La Transfiguration de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (1969) reveals, amongst other characteristic and evolving features, the emergence of a unique, simulated, plainchant style and its subsequent transformation into incantation with suitably modified accompaniment. While wide-ranging, chromatic and rhythmically free vocal lines are typical of many twentieth century compositions, Messiaen's use of such features is found to be novel, by virtue of the peculiar modal and temporal ambits within which he operated. Vocal delivery is progressively expanded from conventional *bel canto* production to humming, howling, and eventually speech and percussive sounds and reaches an apotheosis in the virtuoso effects of *Cinq Rechants* (1949). This recedes somewhat in *La Transfiguration*, which displays instead a wealth of hybrid plainsong-type writing. Choral works are interesting in that the emphasis shifts from standard part-writing to monody or accompanied unison singing, with an attendant absence of characterised solo parts. By constantly varying the colour of the single melodic line with different permutations of voice types, timbre assumes a new importance, particularly in *La Transfiguration*.

The study of the texts, most of which were conceived by the composer simultaneously with the music, contributes much to the understanding of each work. Biblical symbolism

in the early lyrics is progressively enriched by references to numerological, mythological and nature symbolism, mixed in an increasingly Surrealistic manner. The gradual incorporation of emotive phonemes in the texts, culminates in the invented language of *Cinq Rechants*.

The thesis thus reveals an evolving yet persistently idiosyncratic vocal style, which establishes Messiaen as one of the most original composers of his time. It further demonstrates that his vocal works are an important component of his total oeuvre and also a significant contribution to twentieth century vocal literature.

DECLARATION

I wish to certify that the work reported in this thesis is my own original and unaided work except where specific acknowledgement is made. This thesis has not been submitted for a degree in any other university.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Donkin', written in a cursive style.

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Deo gratia.

v

CONVENTIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Full title

<i>Trois Mélodies I</i>	<i>Trois Mélodies</i>
<i>Trois Mélodies II</i>	<i>Pourquoi?</i>
<i>Trois Mélodies III</i>	<i>Le sourire</i>
	<i>La fiancée perdue</i>
	<i>Poèmes pour Mi</i>
<i>Poèmes pour Mi I</i>	<i>Action de grâces</i>
<i>Poèmes pour Mi II</i>	<i>Paysage</i>
<i>Poèmes pour Mi III</i>	<i>La maison</i>
<i>Poèmes pour Mi IV</i>	<i>Épouvante</i>
<i>Poèmes pour Mi V</i>	<i>L'épouse</i>
<i>Poèmes pour Mi VI</i>	<i>Ta voix</i>
<i>Poèmes pour Mi VII</i>	<i>Les deux guerriers</i>
<i>Poèmes pour Mi VIII</i>	<i>Le collier</i>
<i>Poèmes pour Mi IX</i>	<i>Prière exaucée</i>
	<i>Chants de Terre et de Ciel</i>
<i>Chants de Terre et de Ciel I</i>	<i>Bail avec Mi</i>
<i>Chants de Terre et de Ciel II</i>	<i>Antienne du silence</i>
<i>Chants de Terre et de Ciel III</i>	<i>Danse du bébé-Pilule</i>
<i>Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV</i>	<i>Arc-en-ciel d'innocence</i>
<i>Chants de Terre et de Ciel V</i>	<i>Minuit pile et face (pour la mort)</i>
<i>Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI</i>	<i>Résurrection (pour la jour de Pâques)</i>
	<i>Trois petites liturgies de la Présence divine</i>
<i>Trois petites liturgies</i>	<i>Antienne de la Conversation intérieure</i>
<i>Trois petites liturgies I</i>	<i>Séquence du Verbe, Cantique Divin</i>
<i>Trois petites liturgies II</i>	<i>Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour</i>
<i>Trois petites liturgies III</i>	
	<i>Harawi, chants d'amour et de mort</i>
<i>Harawi</i>	<i>La ville qui dormait, toi</i>
<i>Harawi I</i>	<i>Bonjour toi, colombe verte</i>
<i>Harawi II</i>	<i>Montagnes</i>
<i>Harawi III</i>	<i>Doundou tchil</i>
<i>Harawi IV</i>	<i>L'amour de Piroutcha</i>
<i>Harawi V</i>	<i>Répétition planétaire</i>
<i>Harawi VI</i>	<i>Adieu</i>
<i>Harawi VII</i>	<i>Syllabes</i>
<i>Harawi VIII</i>	<i>L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil</i>
<i>Harawi IX</i>	<i>Amour oiseau d'étoile</i>
<i>Harawi X</i>	<i>Katchikatchi les étoiles</i>
<i>Harawi XI</i>	<i>Dans le noir</i>
<i>Harawi XII</i>	
	<i>La Transfiguration de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ</i>
<i>La Transfiguration</i>	<i>Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus</i>
<i>Vingt regards</i>	<i>Technique de mon Langage Musical</i>
<i>Technique</i>	

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INTRODUCTION

"May he draw the whole sky in one breath!" (Reverdy, quoted by Messiaen, 1956)

My early acquaintanceship with the music and philosophies of Olivier Messiaen was, if not love at first sight, instant fascination. I was intrigued by a mind which could perceive the potential in sources as varied as plainchant, birdsong, Indian ragas, melodic 'quotations' from Western Classical composers, Greek rhythms, Peruvian folklore, Biblical symbolism, paintings, numerology, colours, stained glass windows, and gamelan orchestras; and then incorporate this unlikely amalgam, with novel, self-invented features, into a euphonious and utterly unique means of musical expression. The interest thus kindled, prompted me to explore the literature on his life and works. There are many excellent books on his total oeuvre and one cannot but be filled with admiration for the labours of such authors as Bell (1984), Griffiths (1985), Nichols (1986) and Johnson (1989). Their works proved to be priceless jewels in arousing and focusing my initial enthusiasm. On the other hand, the all-encompassing nature of such studies leaves little opportunity for the author to develop in depth, a particular aspect of a composer's work.

As a singer and pianist, I felt myself drawn initially to Messiaen's piano-voice cycles. While there was information available, in the comprehensive tomes mentioned above, it was necessarily brief or selective. In my Master's thesis (Donkin, 1992), I set about rectifying this perceived void and undertook a detailed study and classification of these cycles. This precipitated a more extensive search and consequent familiarity with literature available. To my surprise it revealed, as far as I could establish, that no one has concentrated on Messiaen's particular way of writing for the voice, and that this was a direction in which further research could be pursued. The evolution apparent in the cycles aroused my curiosity as to whether or not Messiaen treated the choral voice in a similar way. Was he as adventurous in writing for groups of voices as for soloists or did he assume a more conservative stance? Why did *Trois petites liturgies de la Présence Divine* precipitate a furore? Did the vocal technique continue to evolve or did it remain

at a static point after *Harawi, chant d'amour et de mort*? Was the emerging Surrealism of the songs appropriate and used in the other works? What importance was ascribed to the soloists in the oratorio-like construction of *La Transfiguration de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ*? Would the same elements of style which permeated the three solo cycles be apparent in all the other works: characteristic melodic shapes, linguistic symbolism, preferred textures, typical ways of accompanying, tempo and dynamic fastidiousness? All these questions flooded in and propelled me towards a study of all the vocal works of Olivier Messiaen from the earliest set of three songs (1930) to *La Transfiguration*, completed in 1969 almost forty years later.

Messiaen's status as a composer of importance is, at this stage, no longer in question. He is, however, more commonly associated with instrumental than vocal music: the organ and orchestral cycles, or the controversial 'bird' music. Yet he distributed his talents surprisingly evenly over the usual musical resources, devoting an almost equal share to piano, voice, organ and orchestra, with fewer chamber works to fill the complement. Of the approximate fifth they represent, the vocal works comprise eight different genres: four solo song cycles comprising some 30 songs (a small, piano-voice, three-song set and three large, piano-voice cycles), an orchestral-voice cycle adaptation, a vocalise, a miniature cantata, a choral motet, a choral-orchestral cycle, an unaccompanied virtuoso cycle for multiple solo voices, and one vast choral-orchestral 'oratorio'. Other than the three song cycles, no particular genre was repeated.

The composer's opinion of his vocal works is significant:

"The two cycles for voice and piano entitled *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel...* Since they are particularly "true" in sentiment and typical of my manner, I advise the reader who desires to understand my music better to begin by reading them" (Messiaen, 1956, p71).

Of *Harawi*, he said it is a composition to which "I am very much attached" and of *Cinq Rechants*: "I consider the *Cinq Rechants* one of my best works and I'm very fond of it..." (Samuel, 1976, p83).

Notably at the age of 77, when asked to which of his works he finally felt closest, he responded:

"Those that I think are most representative, because they contain colours, because they contain birds and because they contain my religious faith too, are *La Transfiguration*, *Des canyons aux étioles* and *Saint François...*" (Griffiths, 1986, p8).

In his resumé article 'Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)', Anderson (1992) adds that many consider *La Transfiguration* to be Messiaen's finest hour.

From the above comments, it is obvious that the composer and others considered his vocal works to be both important and representative.

A necessary prerequisite to my study was time spent thoroughly absorbing each composition aurally and visually. Thereafter I scrutinised the works chronologically to identify and trace common qualities, systematically examining melodic lines, rhythmic patterns, vertical textures and combinations, ways of vocalising, forms and accompaniments. Similarities between adjacent pieces were noted and compared to determine whether features reappeared unchanged or altered. If the latter, the means whereby the relationship was sustained was identified. The peculiar problem of such an undertaking is exacerbated in the context of Messiaen's music by his unique musical language, but my preliminary studies of his song cycles had in some measure prepared me for the complexities to be encountered. In order to present my findings logically and because of the relative unavailability of the scores, the text of the thesis has been amplified with examples judiciously selected to draw attention to these salient features. Conclusions reached were then related to the remainder of his oeuvre to establish whether, as the composer maintained, the works are indeed characteristic.

To do justice to the many extra-musical allusions Messiaen embedded in the fabric of the works, either in the music or in the texts, reading and research in other areas was necessary. A study of various Biblical books for example, an understanding of the workings and technicalities of Surrealism and familiarity with other artists whose work Messiaen used as inspiration for his music, revealed a veritable Pandora's Box which

begged not to be overlooked and added tantalising, if sometimes unessential details to the works. A useful dimension was finally added by listening to a wide range of representative contemporary compositions to make some assessment of his contribution to the world of twentieth century vocal literature.

With hindsight it can be reported that the task was daunting, but stimulating and inspiring. It has in no way diminished my enthusiasm for his work; if anything, the contrary applies and I am, to quote my supervisor, 'a converted disciple'! As will be revealed, though consistently distinctive and personal in style, Messiaen's vocal writing evolves through the oeuvre in a variety of canny ways.

I believe that the relatively low total of works devoted to the human voice belies what must be viewed as a significant contribution to the vocal literature of this century. Messiaen has fulfilled his own prophetic words:

"...to express with a lasting power our darkness struggling with the Holy Spirit, ...to give to our century the spring water for which it thirsts, there will have to be a great artist who will be both a great artisan and a great Christian" (Messiaen, 1956, preface p8).

CHAPTER 1: THE VOCAL COMPOSITIONS

Messiaen's vocal compositions span a period of approximately 40 years. This chapter is intended to set the scene for the detailed study which follows, by briefly describing the works and placing them within a narrative context of the composer's life.

1.1 *Trois Mélodies* (1930)

Born on December 10, 1908 to French parents, a poetess and professor of English, the boy Olivier Eugène Charles Prosper Messiaen, inherited a love for things linguistic and poetic. Showing an early propensity for music, he was encouraged to take lessons and at the age of 11 composed a pair of songs, the *Deux Ballades de Villon*. Although these are not available for perusal, they do demonstrate an early interest on his part in music for the voice. It was to the voice-piano combination that he returned in 1930 as a young man (22 years) and these *Trois Mélodies* earned him the *premier prix* at the Paris Conservatoire where he was a student. The songs were published and are important in that they show the roots of many ideas to be much developed later in his vocal writing. Although of modest dimensions, they require considerable skill from both performers. It is significant that, even at this stage, neither simplistic nor virtuoso elements occur for their own sake, rather the musical means are closely wed to the explication of the love poetry. The second song, for example, demands interpretative rather than 'acrobatic' skills of the singer. It is also the only solo song in which Messiaen set words other than his own, on this occasion the poetry of his mother.

1.2 *La mort du nombre* (1930)

La mort du nombre [The Death of Number, or The Death of the Multitude] was composed the same year as the *Trois Mélodies*, but where the set of songs contained occasional religious references, the chamber cantata is entirely sacred in subject. This manifestation of his religious faith stemmed from a childhood fascination with the symbolism and pageantry

of his mother's Catholicism. His own subsequent experiences convinced him of the reality of this faith and provided a specific motivation for his artistic impulses.

As was evident in the vocal range required of the *Trois Mélodies* soloist, Messiaen had acquired a preference for high voice. *La mort du nombre* is accordingly scored for soprano, tenor, piano and violin. The dialogue between the tormented soul about to die (tenor) and comforting voice of Hope (soprano) is resolved in a duet between soprano and the spiritualised voice of the violin. There is no duet writing between male and female voices. While none of his work thereafter features any extended male voice solos, the particular timbre of the soprano was one he favoured throughout his life. His use of the violin in a solo capacity may have been suggested by his blossoming relationship with the violinist Claire Delbos. The violin-voice alliance continued in a *Messe* [Mass] for 8 sopranos and 4 violins (1933) written in Neussargues (Griffiths, 1985, p107). This, regrettably for the Messiaen enthusiast, like the *Choeurs pour une Jeanne d'Arc* (1941) also written there, was not published and both have been lost¹.

1.3 *Vocalise-Étude* (1935)

In 1935 came a sign of Messiaen's rising prominence as a composer in France: he was commissioned to contribute a vocalise to the Hettich collection. This is a compilation of voice exercises especially written by celebrated composers for Hettich, a voice teacher. Other contributors for example, include Ravel and Rachmanninoff. For his *Vocalise-Étude*, Messiaen opted again for high voice and accompanied with piano. It is a relatively short work, characteristic in certain features and displays similar interplay between voice and piano to that between voice and violin in *La mort du nombre*.

¹Personal correspondence to author from Mme. Messiaen, letter dated 12.2.1993.

1.4 *Poèmes pour Mi* (1936)

Two telling occasions in Messiaen's life occurred between the composition of *La mort du nombre* and the *Vocalise*. The first was his appointment in 1931 to the post of organist at the Church of La Sainte Trinité in Paris, the youngest person in France to hold such a position, and the second was his marriage to Claire Delbos in 1935. The latter precipitated a joyous outburst of song from Messiaen in the form of the two books which make up the cycle, *Poèmes pour Mi*. The 'Mi' of the title was his pet name for his wife. Using the Biblical metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ, Messiaen examined in his texts, the spiritual and sacramental aspects of marriage. The songs show a profound influence on his melodic thinking from plainsong, the liturgical chant of the Roman Catholic Church.

Many composers have written vocal works with particular performers in mind: Britten's *Quatre Chansons Françaises* for Sophie Wys, and his many works for the tenor, Peter Pears; Sir Lennox-Berkely's *Four Poems of St. Teresa of Avila op. 27* for Kathleen Ferrier, and Poulenc's numerous songs for Pierre Bernac. Marcelle Bunlet, the French dramatic soprano, was Messiaen's vocal inspiration and this gives some insight into matters of presentation for *Poèmes pour Mi* and the other two big song cycles. Her performances were distinguished by controlled breathing, the ability to produce a wide range of sound qualities and a flexible voice with extended tessitura (Samuel, 1976, p82).

The piano writing of *Poèmes pour Mi* evinces Messiaen's growing interest in timbres and resonances. Although without the great virtuosity of the later piano-voice cycles, there are nevertheless some interesting passages in which it appears the composer was imitating the chiming sounds characteristic of the Balinese gamelan². Messiaen loved the piano and was stimulated by its apparent lack of timbral variety:

"The piano, which seems *a priori* an instrument without timbres, is precisely, because of its lack of personality, an instrument favourable to a quest for timbres, for timbre doesn't come from the instrument but from the player. So it is as mobile as the playing. And it's because I love the piano and have played it a lot that I've been led to create not melodies of timbre but melodies of complexes of timbre" (Messiaen, quoted by Samuel, 1976, p28).

²Generic term for Indonesian orchestra.

Possibly because the piano writing of this cycle was not as colouristic as those which followed, it was the only one he arranged for orchestra. The ensemble used is similar to that of his other contemporary orchestral works.

It is interesting to note that *Poèmes pour Mi* was twice performed at concerts given by the group, *La Jeune France*. This reactionary artistic circle, consisting of Yves Baudrier, Daniel-lesur, André Jolivet and Olivier Messiaen, strove to reinstate in music, the deeper spiritual and humanistic values they felt had been discarded by the post-war neo-classicists. On one notably 'domestic' occasion, *Poèmes pour Mi* was performed in conjunction with settings by Delbos from *L'âme en bourgeon* [The Flowering Soul]: poetry written by Messiaen's mother when she was still carrying him as an unborn child; Jolivet's *Poèmes pour l'enfant* for mezzo-soprano and 11 players (1937) written on the birth of that composer's son, and, to complete this intercourse on family and group, Daniel-lesur's setting of *Trois poèmes de Cécile Sauvage* for voice and piano (1939) (Griffiths, 1985, p73).

1.5 *O sacrum convivium!* (1937)

The following year saw Messiaen's first venture into choral composing with the brief communion motet *O sacrum convivium!*. For the first time he used a language other than French, in this instance that universal language of the church, Latin. Written for the communion service, this is the only vocal work by Messiaen entirely appropriate for ecclesiastical occasions. The motet is in sedate chordal style, but is entirely idiosyncratic in mood and harmony.

1.6 *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* (1938)

The birth of Messiaen's son Pascal, initiated from the composer another piano-voice cycle and one to follow on from *Poèmes pour Mi*. Although the text, self-composed as before, treats the state of parenthood in a similarly serious way to the husband/wife roles of the former cycle, the music also contains its share of childhood ebullience. The piano writing

advances Messiaen's concept of the piano as 'piano-orchestre', a term which implies a full exploitation of the timbre as if the instrument were an orchestra (Johnson, 1989, p53).

1.7 *Trois petites liturgies de la Présence Divine* (1944)

War broke out in 1939 and Messiaen, like thousands of others, was drafted into the army. Thus began a manifestly painful period in his life beginning with the parting from his young family and culminating in his capture and imprisonment with 7000 other unfortunates in the Stalag 18 camp of Silesia. The *Quatour pour la fin du Temps*, an instrumental quartet composed and first performed there, is a tribute to his indomitable spirit.

Returning home to Paris, in 1942 Messiaen was appointed professor of harmony at the Conservatoire. The excitement of his home-coming and auspicious appointment was surely marred by the recognition of his wife's illness. Claire Delbos was confined to an institution in 1943, never to return to her family.

Amazingly then, in an act of great praise and trust in his God, in 1944 Messiaen composed *Trois petites liturgies de la Présence Divine* [Three little liturgies on the Divine presence]. The work was written for a choir of eighteen sopranos with ondes martenot³, piano, vibraphone and orchestral accompaniment and expounds in three movements as the name suggests, on the character of God: I '*Antienne de la Conversation intérieure*' (*Dieu présent en nous...*), [Antiphon of Interior Communion (God present in us...)], II *Séquence du Verbe, Cantique Divin*' (*Dieu présent en lui-même...*) [Sequence of the Word, Divine Canticle (God present in Himself...)], and III '*Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par amour*' (*Dieu présent en toutes choses...*) [Psalmody of Omnipresence through Love (God present in all things...)]. This use in the titles of the terms antiphon, sequence and psalmody suggests a connection with the liturgy, yet the work is not liturgical being rather a mixture of images derived from selected sacred texts and compounded together within Messiaen's own poetry. His French text clearly

³Ondes martenot - a keyboard instrument which uses an electronic oscillator as a tone generator. It is capable only of monophonic music, but has a sliding ribbon that permits *glissandi* and the sounding of intermediate pitches (Harvard Dictionary of Music, 1970, p284).

and in an unconventional manner, overflows with religious ardour. This was Messiaen's attempt to transport things spiritual into a secular concert realm:

"I didn't chose this title idly: I thought of performing a liturgical act, that is to say, transporting a kind of Office, a kind of organised act of praise into the concert room..... my chief originality is to have taken the idea of the Catholic liturgy from the stone buildings intended for religious services and to have installed it in other buildings not intended for this kind of music and which, finally, have received it very well".

Handel had staged a similar invasion years before with his rousing Old Testament oratorios. Messiaen's 'infringement' raised a great controversy, although the first performance of the work met with a delighted reception from the public. The unusual, effervescent and colourful music was, no doubt, a marvellous antidote to the former grey and depressing days of the war. Wright (1991) aptly compares the timbral brilliance of the work to the fauvist paintings of the time. Many critics however, were not so forgiving and the *bataille des liturgies* [battle of the liturgies] raged in the press. Rostand (quoted in Nichols, 1986, p40) describes it as follows:

"...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..."

On the one hand he was praised as a composer of great originality and on the other condemned for tasteless vulgarity. The conservatives were displeased by its occasional dissonances, unorthodox instrumentation and vocal writing and the *avant-garde* were disappointed by its regular harmonies. Many atheists amongst the critics felt alienated by the intimate religious ecstasy in the texts, whilst puritanical Catholics were scandalised by the sheer audacity of making it public. In an interview with Samuel (1976, p84-85), Messiaen gave his own account of the affair:

Messiaen: "...its success was immediate - at least with the public! It only caused a scandal in the minds of certain colleagues and in the articles of certain critics; some of them let themselves go to their hearts content, and emptied dustbins on my head for ten years after this work. But the public always went along with me and now the work is well beyond its 100th performance."

Samuel: "At the time of the first performance in 1945, did the critical reaction disturb you?"

Messiaen: "It deeply amazed me, above all. I was astounded by this reaction, which I still can't understand today. The work was obviously very daring in its musical aesthetic and in its combination of timbres, but it didn't justify such an outburst of fury. I imagine it was a kind

of native mistrust by right-minded people, well ensconced in their armchairs with comfortable slippers, and opposed to everything out of the ordinary, especially in the spiritual domain - for this work is first of all a very great act of faith, and the poem is steeped with texts from the Holy Scriptures: the Gospels, the Epistles, the Song of songs, Psalms and the Book of Revelation, the most beautiful texts of Saint John and St Paul, and even texts from Saint Thomas and the 'Imitation of Christ'. Of course, the people attacking me didn't know these texts, they understood nothing of them - but they were all the same disturbed in their quietitude! Excuse this comparison of inordinate pride: but this is how stones were once thrown at the prophets of Israel..."

Griffiths (1985, p112), while expressing no surprise at the furore, instead registers amazement at the 'lateness' of this response when, by a remarkable coincidence of premieres, *Les corps glorieux* (organ) had only been heard six days before for the first time and *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (piano) a mere six weeks before that. He correctly points out that many of the features to which the detractors were referring had long been present in Messiaen's music: "the cheap harmony, the repetitiveness, the exotic sensuality of his music that purports to be divine praise...". What was really most novel was the instrumentation. Johnson (1989, p11) concludes that:

"...it is the mark of a truly original work that it tends to set off a very deep controversy, and it would be no exaggeration to say that *Trois petites liturgies* is one of the most original works of its genre to be written up to that time".

It is amusing with hindsight, to read that Messiaen was apparently considered to be a potentially dangerous influence at the Conservatoire (Boulez, quoted by Griffiths, 1981, p20)!

1.8 *Harawi, chant d'amour et da mort* (1945)

In addition to his work at the conservatory, Messiaen taught a private course in composition at the home of former fellow-prisoner, Guy Bernard-Delapierre. This class attracted illustrious students, many of whom went on to achieve musical greatness themselves. Amongst these were Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez and Yvonne Loriod. Loriod's facility at the piano was to prompt Messiaen to compose some fine and experimental piano works: in 1943, the year before *Trois petites liturgies*, the two piano *Visions de l'Amen*, and in 1944 the large solo cycle, *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*. Loriod has remained one of the foremost interpreters of his work. The third and last piano-voice cycle *Harawi, chant*

d'amour et da mort [Harawi, song of love and death] (1945) manifests some of these pianistic advances in a score which would be more correctly described as a piano-voice duet than an accompanied vocal cycle.

Vocally too, it is far more adventurous and demanding than anything written by him for solo voice up to this time. It is also the first work to be set in an ancient civilisation and to attempt expressions of these primordial elements by interesting vocal effects. This therefore demands a singer who is ideally, according to Drew (1964), "something between a Latin-American folk singer and a full-blooded Wagnerian soprano!". Although the tessitura is not unusually extended by twentieth century standards, the range of colour and intensity required at both extremes is demanding. The characteristically rapid changes in accompanying style too, test the musical intelligence and perspicacity of both performing partners. Like the piano work *Visions de l'Amen*, *Harawi* has a cyclic theme which binds the narrative of the work.

The text is an interesting one which combines a myriad of Messiaen's cherished ideals. It is the first of a trilogy of works based on the *Tristan and Isolde* theme and thus ushered in a new compositional phase which emphasized mythological rather than specific Christian symbolism.

This theme, the perfect fulfilment of sacrificial love in death, adds an interesting slant to the work. The other two cycles are overtly autobiographical and therefore much speculation has been made with regard to this one. Is it possible that *Harawi* was the disguised musical expression of a growing regard by Messiaen for Yvonne Loriod? With his staunch religious convictions this love could not have been expressed other than musically prior to the death of his first wife, who had already been incarcerated for three long years at this stage. One can but speculate..... It is significant that all three cycles relate to pivotal experiences in the relationship between a man and woman and were prompted, certainly in the case of the first two, by these occurrences in his own life: marriage, the birth of a child, and the death and ultimate union of the partners (or the denial of that love in a *Tristanesque* way.)

1.9 *Cinq Rechants* (1949)

The second panel of the *Tristan* tryptch, the *Turangalila-Symphonie*, was completed in 1948 and in the following year the last of the threesome, *Cinq Rechants*. It is linked by musical quotations to both the *Turangalila-Symphonie* and *Harawi*, but of the three works in the set, *Cinq Rechants* contains the most verbal references to *Tristan and Isolde*. This unusual work, like *Trois petites liturgies*, was surely unparalleled at the time. It is written for twelve soloists, three of each group: sopranos, contraltos, tenors and basses. The writing is wonderfully imaginative and innovative and features astute explorations of the possibilities of sound by each individual, as well as by varied combinations of sound and voice group. No instruments are used, nor indeed are necessary, so full is the exploitation of human sound.

The text contains a mixture of Messiaen's native French and an invented language of his own. Thus, in true Surrealist fashion, the 'story' is conveyed in impressions and sound images rather than in straight narrative. Perhaps this is just as well for sensitive minds because it is in *Cinq Rechants* that Messiaen, as Mellers (1968, p107) explains

"has attempted to heal the breach that Christianity has committed us to, by reasserting the spiritual validity of the sexual impulse".

Astoundingly the love theme found in this explicit third movement of *Cinq Rechants*, recurs in the fourth movement of the *Messe de la Pentecôte* [Mass for Pentecost] (1950). In the later work, the movement is called 'Communion', and this is, for the Christian, the consummation of divine love through the Eucharist. The use of the same love theme to symbolise both human and divine love is entirely typical of Messiaen, for whom the perception of the former was but a pale reflection of the latter.

Messiaen also felt himself to be influenced in this work by the style and spirit of the *Harawi* or *Yaravi* of Peru and Ecuador, and in addition, by the *Alba* or Medieval dawn-song of

Western Europe⁴. In her study of *Cinq Rechants*, Davidson (1981) finds closer parallels with Medieval poetry than melodies and she quotes the pervasive garden and 'enclosure' metaphors present in both.

Cinq Rechants seems to mark a pivotal point in Messiaen's composing: it denotes the end of the period wherein he made extensive use of symbolism and surrealistic techniques, the mosaic structures remain a constant, but the distance from tonality and the rhythmic manipulation, as opposed to superimposition, became significant features of the next years.

1.10 *La Transfiguration de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (1965 - 1969)

A time of intense musical experimentation followed during which Messiaen produced the serialistic *Neumes rythmiques* and the *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* (both 1949), highly acclaimed by the avant-garde. The relatively fallow period between 1952 and 1956 yielded only two works which together last about forty minutes. Messiaen's compositions from then until *Chronochromie* in 1960 are based in varying degrees, on birdsong: *Réveil des oiseaux* (1953), *Oiseaux exotiques* (1955) and *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1958). This sudden fall in production, as well as the eruption of birdsong in his music, may have been due to the tragic illness of his wife. By this time, Claire Delbos was no longer able to communicate with the outside world. While Nichols (1986, p56) feels it would be tendentious as well as impertinent to insist on a connection, he points out that Messiaen has admitted to finding refuge in birdsong ...

"when my uselessness is brutally revealed to me and all the musical languages of the world seem to be merely an effort of patient research..."

This thematic use of birdsong also precluded the voice from the works because of that instrument's unsuitability to convey material of such extremely high pitch and agility.

⁴The Yarawi is a plaintive song of the Andes, often set to an elegiac text with metaphors and mythological allusions. The Alba in troubadour repertory, was a poem dealing with the departure of the lover and usually took the form of a dialogue between the lover and a watchman who warns of approaching danger.

Eventually in 1959, sixteen long years after her consignment, Delbos died in the institution and in 1962 Messiaen and Loriod were married, thus cementing a long friendship and working relationship.

After what had been a sixteen year interval, Messiaen again returned to the voice in a work commissioned by the Gulbenkian Foundation. *La Transfiguration de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* was his largest work to date, in terms of resources and length and it resembles a vast oratorio. The subject is the gospel account (St Matthew) of the transfiguration of Christ told in Latin. The exotic and unusual nature of this subject is entirely appropriate to Messiaen in many ways. Firstly, he had always felt irresistibly drawn to the strange and fantastic aspects of his faith (Samuel, 1976, p6-7):

"The Truths of the Faith are *startling*; they are fairytales, in turn, mysterious, harrowing, glorious and sometimes terrifying, always based on a luminous, unchanging Reality"

"It's certain that in the Truths of the Catholic faith I found this attraction of the marvellous multiplied a hundredfold, a thousandfold, and it's no longer a matter of theatrical fiction but of something real. *I chose what was true.*"

The story portrays an instant contact between God and man, and an occasion in which all three manifestations of the Trinity are represented. The mountain setting of the episode was an added inducement for Messiaen who had always considered himself a man of the mountains. He explained in an extract from his notes to the work, how it was while looking on the Jungfrau, Mont Blanc and the three glaciers of the Meidje in clear weather that he understood the difference between the small splendour of the snow and the great splendour of the sun, and it was this that led him to imagine the extent to which the sight of the Transfiguration was awesome. This location also afforded him the opportunity to include in his score, birds from various mountainous regions.

The work itself has fourteen movements divided into two large septenaires, each consisting of Scriptural narrative followed by meditation. The performing resources include an enormous 100-voice choir of male and female voices, with large supporting orchestra and, in addition, seven instrumental soloists: piano, cello, flute, clarinet, xylorimba, vibraphone and marimba. The usual oratorio vocal soloists are notably absent and all that remains of that tradition are a few lines sung by individual voices. *La Transfiguration* does not, therefore,

fit into the conventional oratorio mould.

In a sense this work provides a grand resumé of much of Messiaen's vocal and orchestral writing up to that time. In the score one finds the birdsong, colours and resonances, instrumentation, neo-plainchant, the mountain setting, favoured melodic shapes and intervals, Greek and Sharngeveda rhythms, sacred texts, and the symbolic use of musical elements assimilated over some thirty years. Like *Trois petites liturgies*, it was not written specifically for church performance, yet embraces the same musical language and aesthetic as those instrumental works composed expressly for that venue. To Messiaen it seemed:

"...ridiculous and detrimental to contradict one's style and adopt different aesthetics under the pretext that the subject and idea to be expressed have changed" (Messiaen, quoted by Samuel, 1976, p3).

It is helpful however, to compare the overtly Christian works separated by a gap of approximately twenty years. In general it can be said that the early works are more concerned with presenting a personal vision and the later ones with more universal theological meditation. This applies both to the vocal and the instrumental works: compare say, *Poèmes pour Mi* (1936) with *La Transfiguration* (1965-69), and *Les corps glorieux* (1939) with *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum* (1964). Griffiths (1971) calls this change from subjectivity to objectivity a mutation from "mystic-surrealist to mystic-naturalist". In some respects the works of the 1960's are rather unexpected. Had they followed on in a natural progression from the immediately preceding '50's, one could have anticipated a more dissonant, atonal and abstract style featuring the serial procedures and birdsong initiated in that period. Instead, whilst the birdsong was clearly retained, there was a re-appearance of harmonies and religious symbolism associated with the earlier period or, as Nichols (1986, p62) remarks, "the birds continue to sing but they are no longer the only begetters of his music". Whilst melody re-emerged as a prominent element, it was only one of many important constituents. Johnson (1989, p191) speaks of an enriched "attitude to sound" whereby at this stage Messiaen could draw on all his varied sonic experiments from the extremes of pointillism to the lush washes of *Turangalila* sound.

La Transfiguration was the last composition other than the huge opera, *Saint François d'Assise* begun in 1975, in which Messiaen used voices. Relevant for the purposes of this thesis are Griffiths' observations (1985, p236) that the vocal writing of the opera owes much to Messiaen's earlier music. Apparently it demonstrates a firm connection with the style of evenly placed modal chant of *La Transfiguration* and further back to the song cycles of the 1930's and '40's. In his usual manner too, Messiaen composed the text, altering it as he went along to accommodate particular melodic lines and to provide the singers with good vowels (Johnson, 1989, p185). This shows that Messiaen, unlike Stravinsky, tended to assimilate rather than discard many of the experiments and procedures which he accumulated over years. The application of this mature, integrated and unique language in his opera has had the effect of associating it more closely with his other works than with the operas of other composers. Once again, and this time at the age of 75, Messiaen proved himself capable of novelty within an established genre. One feels instinctively that he would have cherished the following tribute paid to *Saint François d'Assise* by Marks (1986), and which also forms a fitting tribute to his vocal oeuvre:

"Messiaen's was not the voice of contemporary music; it was that of something timeless and huge which spoke of the tremendous power of religious belief to create magnificent, lasting works of art".

Saint François d'Assise was Messiaen's grand farewell to the world of vocal writing, completed in 1983. He died in 1992 leaving the world a richer place for his extravagant, metaphysical, musical celebrations.

CHAPTER 2: MELODIC ASPECTS

"Supremacy to melody! The noblest element of music, may melody be the principal aim of our investigations" (Messiaen, 1956, p31).

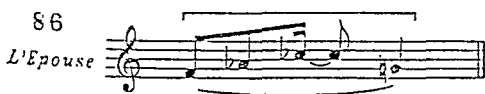
To the disciple of Messiaen, a melodic phrase would often be sufficient information to identify a work as of his composing. Certain 'trademarks' recur through the vocal oeuvre and indeed beyond to the instrumental melodies. Significantly, as he matured Messiaen became more adventurous and demanding in the type of melodic line he composed for singers, yet he neither forsook nor retracted his earlier melodic partialities. This facilitates identification regardless of date of composing. Further, it enables the scholar to trace a developmental line in the type of melodies Messiaen wrote in the approximate order of the following sub-sections.

2.1 'Debussy shape'

In order to follow the progression of his melody writing, it is necessary to look in some detail at the first set of published songs, *Trois Mélodies*. The opening phrase of the first song outlines a melodic contour which Messiaen favoured throughout his life: the 'Debussy shape'. In *Technique de mon langage musicale* (Messiaen, 1956, p32), he directed the reader's attention to the three notes at the beginning of Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau* and insisted that for him they "will serve to engender a great number of melodic contours". The examples he gave (see below) show that he referred to a 'triangular' melodic shape: a leap to an apex, followed by another leap to a note in the vicinity of the first.



Debussy: *Reflets dans l'eau*, Images, b1



Messiaen (1956, examples 86-89)

He also gave examples in which the shape is inverted and others in which certain intervals predominate: in this instance the augmented fourth.

Un peu lent

le so - leil t'é - cri - ra sur l'épau - le du ma - tin — pour lancer des oi - seaux

Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV, b15

The first line of *Trois Mélodies I⁵*, as seen below, shows clearly the inverted triangular shapes Messiaen derived from Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau* and also the recurrence of a particular interval, here the third.

CHANT

Très modéré

Pour - quoi les oi - seaux de l'air, — Pour -

Pourquoi?, Trois Mélodies I, b1

This contour is used consistently thereafter throughout the song cycles. An example from each cycle follows to illustrate this point.

CHANT

Très modéré

mf gracieux

Le lac comme un gros bi - jou bleu.

Paysage, Poèmes pour Mi II, b1

CHANT

Vif et joyeux

mf

Pi - lu - le, viens, dan - sons. — Ma - lon - lan - lai - ne, ma. Fi - cel - les du so -

Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, b1

Cou - pe - moi la tê - te, dou - dou - tchil. Nos souf - fles, nos souf - fles, bleu et or. —

L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b25

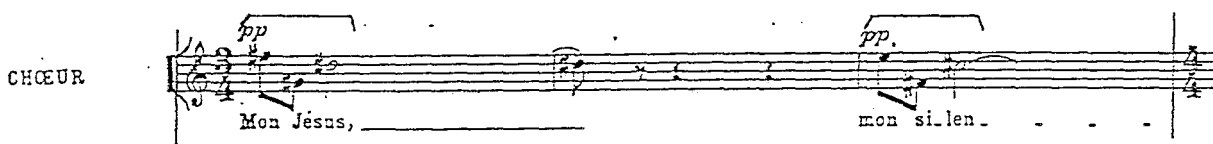
⁵Hereafter, for the sake of brevity, songs will be referred to only by their position in the relevant cycle. Where the individual title has a particular bearing on the discussion, it will be mentioned. Full titles are given in the appendices.

The shape also occurs in a choral context, as is seen in the next example from *O sacrum convivium!*



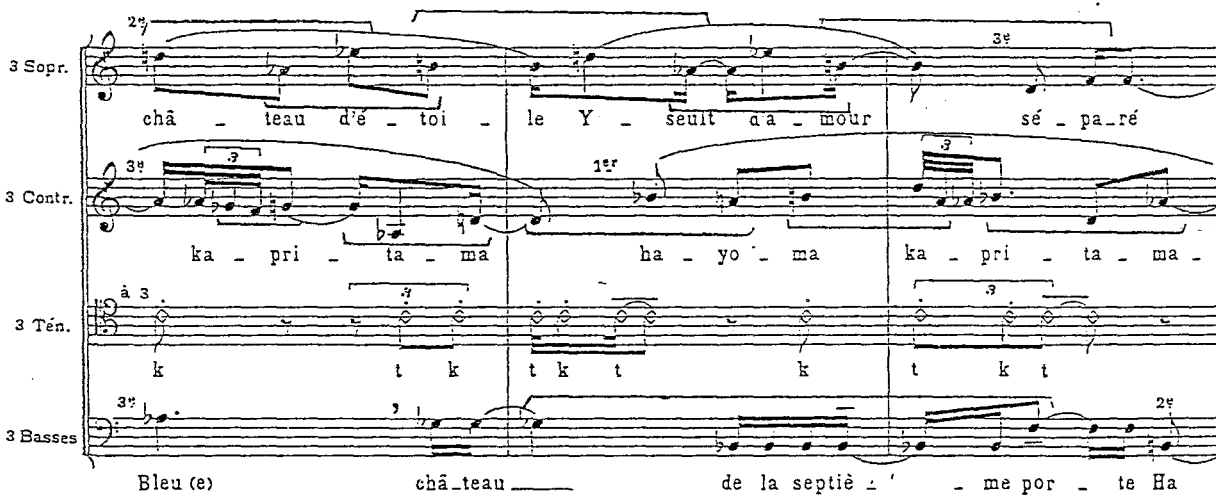
O sacrum convivium!, b20

The vocal melody of the first movement of the *Trois petites liturgies*, the beginning of which is given below, is still entirely dominated by this feature.



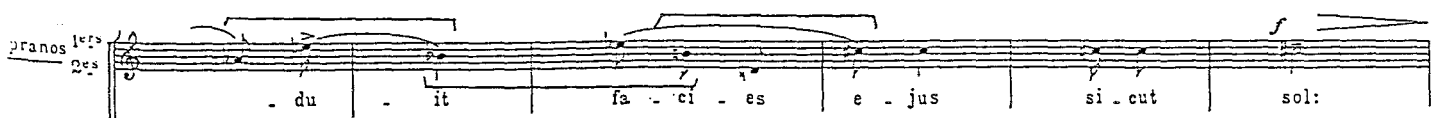
Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b1

Cinq Rechants, whilst exotic in many ways, nevertheless persistently and repeatedly features this melodic trait from the composer's youth.



Cinq Rechants I, b56

Thirty-three years after the first set of songs, the Debussy shape remains conspicuous in *La Transfiguration*. This narrative excerpt is taken from the beginning of the work.



La Transfiguration I, b48

2.2 Arch-shaped phrases

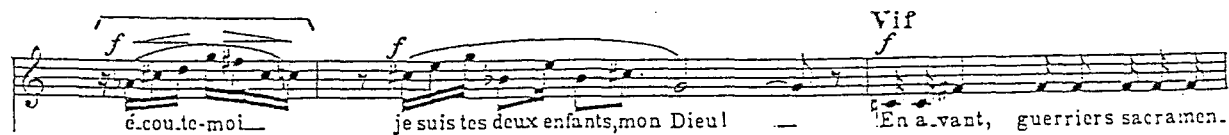
Messiaen's spiritual affiliation with the Catholic church nurtured his attachment to Gregorian chant, the liturgical plainsong of that faith. He apparently found it a rich source of inspiration for the kind of melodies he loved best. Specific melodic characteristics of plainchant were assimilated into his song-writing from *Poèmes pour Mi* onwards (see sections 2.9 and 2.12), but the typical arch-shaped contour of many plainsong phrases was an aspect he absorbed at an earlier stage. As with the 'Debussy shape', once encountered he retained a preference throughout his vocal output for these 'plainsong-shaped' phrases. This is, broadly speaking, a profile which begins at a relatively low point, rises to a higher pitch where it may remain for some time, then descends at the end.

The performance of such 'vaulted' phrases demands a *bel canto* ease and freedom of movement across the vocal range, in much the same manner as that required when executing a Mozart aria. With Messiaen's phrases, however, the singer must maintain the flawless constancy of tone in addition to negotiating with care, a pitch course which no longer conforms to triadic or tonal patterns. From his earliest songs, phrases tend to consist of an irregular admixture of tones and semitones. This makes considerable and increasing demands on the singer as one progresses through the vocal works, particularly those for soloist. The following examples illustrate:



.quoi n'ont-ils pour moi de char mes, Pour quoi? Pourquoi; Ah! — Pour.

Pourquoi?, Trois Mélodies I, b16



é.cou.te-moi je suis tes deux enfants, mon Dieu! — En a.vant, guerriers sacra-men.

Les deux guerriers, Poèmes pour Mi VII, b17

Vus par la mort. In - ven - tons l'a - mour du
 mon
 de Pour nous cher - cher,

ff *poco riten.*
 a Tempo

L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi IX, b64

The choral version of such an arch-shaped phrase, whilst still typical is a lot easier - a concession perhaps to the numbers of voices.

Chœur
 li - tes de vo - tre Douceur. Po - sez - vous comme un sceau sur mon cœur.

f

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b11

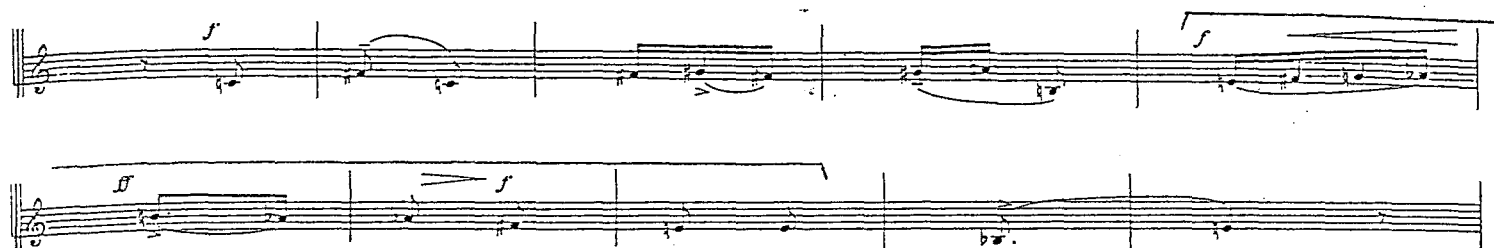
No such compromises are made in the soloistic *Cinq Rechants*. Although the work is for multiple voices, each voice is assumed to be of the calibre of a virtuoso. Three sopranos and three basses begin the first *rechant* with these arching phrases: one convex and the other concave.

Sopr.
 les a - moureux s'en - vo - lent Brangien dans l'es - pa - ce tu ... souf - fles

f *Presque vif (souple)*
 2^e et 3^e

Cinq Rechants I, b4

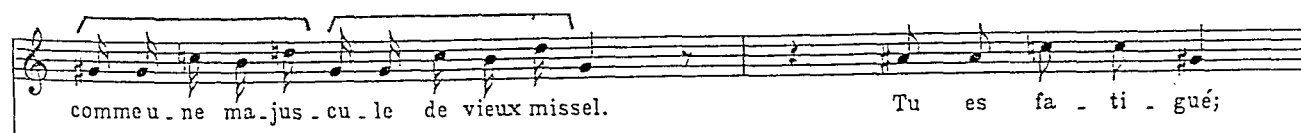
This classic contour persists in *La Transfiguration* as can be seen below.



La Transfiguration V, b31

2.3 Favoured intervals

The persistent use of favoured intervals within a phrase and even within a song is often to be found in Messiaen's music. It was apparent from the example used in section 2.1 (*Pourquoi?* bar 1) that the phrases of *Trois Mélodies I* were built with interlocking thirds. Subsequently the alternation of a melodic major third with a minor third becomes a recurring and aurally distinguishable feature of his melodies. This pattern, as shown in the following example from the later song cycle *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, can be identified as easily here as in the instrumental works. In *La Nativité du Seigneur* (1935) and *Visions de l'Amen III* (1943), for example, the pattern occurs on identical pitches. The second example shows an instrumental version of the interchanged major and minor thirds from the left hand piano part of *Vingt Regards XI* (1944). This melodic gesture could possibly be Messiaen's tribute to Moussorgsky's *Boris Godounov*, as suggested by its appearance in *Technique* (Messiaen, 1956, p31). He described its derivation as 'in the shadow of Moussorgsky'. The original is shown after the two Messiaen examples.



Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* IV, b3

Première communion de la Vierge, Vingt regards XI, b18

75

Moussorgsky
Boris Godounow
 1^{er} tableau

Messiaen (1956, example 75)

It is not inconceivable that some of the melodic thirds in Messiaen's music stem from his fondness for folk-song. Composers who have simulated the techniques of a particular brand of folk-music are many. In his *Padmâvatî* (1923) for example, Roussel used Hindu scales and rhythms, as well as the landscapes and legends of India (Myers, 1971, p49). More recently, Sculthorpe included contrived Pueblo Indian melodies in his recorder quartet, *The Sun Song* (1976), and String quartet no.10 (1983). Messiaen's use of folk-song is illustrated by his 'adoption' of the Peruvian folk-song *Delirio* as the cyclic theme for *Harawi*. Although the raised second and the occasionally raised sixth degree transport the original into the ambit of Messiaen's mode two⁶, the broadly triadic shape of the melody is retained. The two versions of the Peruvian song can be compared here to verify this conclusion.

Passionné et douloureux $\text{♩} = 66$

*Delirio*⁷

⁶Messiaen invented his own set of seven modes, known as the modes of limited transposition. These are not scales in the conventional sense with a finalis and dominant, but rather sets of notes from which pitch content could be drawn. As the name suggests, they can only be transposed a limited number of times before the pitches will be duplicated.

⁷d'Harcourt and d'Harcourt, *La musique des Incas*, p332-333, quoted by Griffiths (1985, p126).



Bonjour toi, colombe verte, Harawi II

Messiaen did not only create melodies by reiterating melodic thirds, but, as can be seen by this concluding phrase of *Trois Mélodies I*, he also used other intervals in the same generative process. Here the interval of a perfect fourth is repeated at different pitches. This is interesting on two counts. The melodic interval of the fourth and the technique of concluding a song with repeating interval leaps were both to become recognizable features of his vocal works. The following example shows how the choral work *O sacrum convivium!* concludes by means of similar soft, repeated, perfect fourths.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major, 2/4 time. The first staff has a forte (f) dynamic and concludes with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. The second staff has a piano (p) dynamic. The melody features repeated perfect fourth intervals (G4 to C5) that create a sense of resolution and closure. The lyrics are: 'Pour . quoi? - Pour . - quoi? Pour . quoi?'.

Pourquoi?, Trois Mélodies I, b22

The image shows a single staff of musical notation in G major, 2/4 time. The tempo is marked 'dim.' (diminuendo). The melody concludes with a pianissimo (pp) dynamic. The lyrics are: '... la. O | sa. crum, | sa. crum con. | vi. vi. um!'.

O sacrum convivium!, b33

Harawi finishes in the same way, but the interval used is the major sixth.

The musical score consists of four staves of music in a single system, all in treble clef and 3/4 time. The first staff begins with the tempo marking "Très lent" and the dynamic "mf". The lyrics "tout bas, Très loin," are written below the notes. The second staff starts with "p" and "tout bas," and ends with "pp" and "très". The third staff continues with "loin." and ends with a fermata and the word "court". The fourth staff begins with "Extrêmement lent, en rêve" and "ppp", followed by "Très lent" and "pp (à bouche fermée)". The lyrics "La vil - le qui dor - mait..." are written below the notes.

Dans le noir, *Harawi* XII, b78

Trois petites liturgies II uses this concluding device, but the expression here is joyous and exuberant and therefore produces a completely different effect to the quiet contemplation of the previous examples. This excerpt shows only eight of the 16 repetitions used to draw the movement to a tumultuous climax.

The musical score shows two staves of music for a choir, both in treble clef and 3/4 time. The first staff is labeled "Chœur" and contains the lyrics "Pour nous, Pour nous, Pour nous, Pour nous,". It features dynamic markings of "f" and "cresc.". The second staff is also labeled "Chœur" and contains the same lyrics. It features dynamic markings of "ff", "cresc.", and "molto".

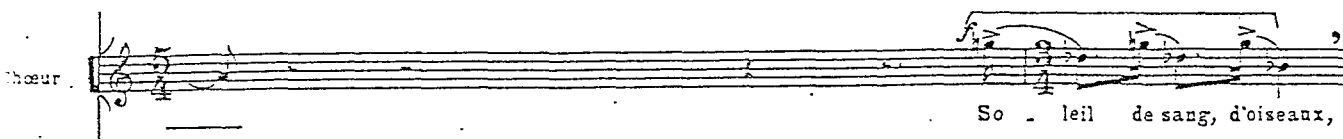
Séquence du Verbe, *Cantique Divin*, *Trois petites liturgies II*, b283

Later in his oeuvre, this insistence on an interval at the same pitch may take place within the phrase or may even comprise the phrase and it is not necessarily confined to the end of a song or movement. The phrases given below from *Harawi* and *Trois petites liturgies* are entirely characteristic, particularly as they consist of repeated tritones or augmented fourths. There was a trend in Messiaen's music, established vocally as early as *Trois*

Mélodies I, to accord respectability to the melodic interval of the tritone. He was not alone in this: Britten unified his *Illuminations* song cycle (1939) with the strikingly juxtaposed B^b and E major triads, while Stravinsky composed his 1964 *Elegy of JFK* tone-row of three tritones and two tones. Messiaen, however, attached a spiritual significance to his use of the tritone. For him it no longer represented as it had for centuries before, the *diabolis in musica*, but rather "the subtlety of radiant bodies...pure as the angels of God in the heavens" (Austin, 1966, p392). Thus from *Trois Mélodies* on, this interval occurs with increasing frequency in his songs. In fact every one of the vocal works except the *Vocalise* has at least one melodic tritone. These 'tritone' melodies lend a distinctive sound to all Messiaen's music. Instrumental versions can be heard for example, in *La Nativité du Seigneur I* or at the beginning of the piano *Prélude III*.



L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi IX, b21



Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b127

This example from *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* is no less vigorous, but moves with a more irregular rhythm than those shown above.



Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel V, b43

In the choral movement *Cinq Rechants IV*, the following chanted phrase reiterates the tritone and then repeats the phrase for added emphasis.

NORS
Niokha - mâ pa - la - lan(e) sou - ki mon bou - quet tout dé - fait ray -

Tén.
- on - ne Niokha - mâ pa - la - lan(e) sou - ki les vo - lets ro - ses

Cinq Rechants IV, b1

Sometimes, as in the early *Trois Mélodies I*, the interval leap is repeated but shifts in pitch.

INT
De deux nous voi-ci un. En a - vant!

Les deux guerriers, Poèmes pour Mi VII, b1

The following example is a spectacular if fiendishly difficult example from *Harawi* - far easier to execute in the instrumental version, as found in *Prélude IV* (G C# D A^b).

Répétition Planétaire, Harawi VI, b35

The vast choir of *La Transfiguration* has also to negotiate consecutive tritone leaps within the phrase in this excerpt from the ninth movement.

The image shows a musical score for a choir of six parts: Soprano, Mezzo, Contralto, Tenor, Baritone, and Basses. The score is for the ninth movement of *La Transfiguration*, measure 289. The lyrics are "per fe cta con sci". The score features a phrase with consecutive tritone leaps, indicated by brackets above the notes. The dynamics are marked *f* and *ff*.

La Transfiguration IX, b289

2.4 Favoured Chords

It is possible to extend Messiaen's fascination with preferred intervals to a penchant for outlining melodically, certain chords. The antecedent to the phrase given in the fourth example of this chapter (*Trois Mélodies I*) is constructed from a minor triad with added sixth (B D F[#] G[#]). This is one of Messiaen's favourite phrases and it has a distinctive and individual sound.

The image shows a single melodic line from *Trois Mélodies I*, measure 12. The lyrics are "té, Pour quoi les chansons du Prin. temps, Pour quoi? Pour". The dynamics are marked *p* and *mf*.

Pourquoi?, *Trois Mélodies I*, b12

A phrase of identical pitches can be found in *La mort du nombre*. This particular one is highlighted by the contrast it presents to the surrounding music: it is a single, slow, *pp*, soprano line 'sandwiched' between two passionate and lengthy sections sung by the tenor.

The image shows a single melodic line from *La mort du nombre*, measure 37. The lyrics are "l'eau dorman. te ne fuit pas la fleur, la fleur qu'il a re. gar. de". The dynamics are marked *Lent pp* and *Rall.*

La mort du nombre, b37

The first few bars of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III*, composed eight years later, trace the

same type of chord (F# A C# D#).

CHANT

Vif et joyeux

Pi - lu - le, viens, dan - sons. — Ma - lon - lan - lai - ne, ma. Fi - cel - les du so -

Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, b1

Although not readily apparent in the melodic lines of the later choral works (see section 5.1.2 for Messiaen's parallel use of the added sixth chord as a vertical combination), it is still in evidence in *Harawi* (E G B C#).

CHANT

Très modère
p très expressif (pour 2)

Cu - lom - he, co - lom - he ver - te, Le

Syllabes, Harawi VIII, b1

Another favourite and related shape is that rendered by lowering the perfect fifth of the original minor triad to produce a diminished seventh triad. The two examples below are from *Harawi V* (vocal) and *Vingt regards XVII* (instrumental).

ppp

Même mouvement

LE JEUNE HOMME mf

ta pe - ti - te cen - dre, pour toi." "Ton œil tous les ciels, doun.doutchil.

L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b22

Rubato

Au mouvt

Rall.

Au mouvt

dr. pp g.

mf

Regard du silence, Vingt regards XVII, b65

2.5 Wide-ranging melodic lines

Beginning with *Trois Mélodies III*, Messiaen began to demand of the vocalist a wide pitch range within a single phrase. Sometimes, as in this example, the line sweeps upwards with

runs and steps to accommodate the changing tension of the vocal chords. The interval covered here is a minor tenth.



La fiancée perdue, Trois Mélodies III, b41

On other occasions, the leaps are more dramatic. The following example is also from an early work, *La mort du nombre* and the octave range of the phrase is covered in the last two notes. Notice that, as in other songs and instrumental works, high pitch is associated with extravagant expressions of passion. In the ardent *Thème et variations V*, for example, Messiaen has the violin soar high above the staff.

les, dans un é - ter - nel prin - temps!

La mort du nombre, b149

The vocal range required within a phrase is extended by the 1936 song cycle *Poèmes pour Mi*, to a double diminished 12th (a perfect 11th). The long descent here is eased by the step-wise motion.

Pour ras - sa - sier les puis - san - ces du feu.

Épouvante, Poèmes pour Mi IV, b26

A further semitone is added to widen the compass in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, and the line is more difficult to negotiate intervallically than the preceding one.



Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV, b45

In these earlier works such phrases tend to be the exceptional line in a song. By the third solo cycle such wide-ranging vocal lines are not only common to many of the songs, but sometimes recur throughout that song. Many cover the range of a perfect 12th. A further progression is that such consecutive phrases occasionally sweep mercilessly up and down within those bounds instead of proceeding generally in one direction. The following example covers a major 13th.

Musical score for 'Adieu'. The score is written on two staves in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb). The first staff begins with 'dim.' and contains the lyrics 'mi - reir sans souf - fle d'a - mour, De fleur, de'. The second staff continues with 'nit, de fruit, de ciel, de jour, Pour tou - jours.' and ends with 'dim.'. The melody is highly melismatic, spanning a major 13th interval between the first and last notes of the phrase.

Adieu, Harawi VII, b74

An additional example from *Harawi* is worth mentioning. The distance of a minor 14th is covered by adjacent notes - not within a phrase, but with the conclusion of one and the commencement of the next.

Musical score for 'L'amour de Piroutcha'. The score is written on two staves in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The first staff begins with 'sfz' and contains the lyrics 'Ahl Ahll'. The second staff continues with 'Chai - nes rou - ges, noi - res, mau - ves, a - mour, la mort.' and ends with 'pp'. The melody is highly melismatic, spanning a minor 14th interval between the final note of the first staff and the first note of the second staff.

L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b28

Messiaen's songs, however, are not unique in the twentieth century repertoire in creating jagged and demanding solo vocal lines. It is a characteristic found in the works of a wide variety of composers from Poulenc to Ligeti, Penderecki, Crumb, Berg and Boulez.

example covering a minor 14th.

1^{re} Sopr. Solo

mf (*souple*) *f* *p*

fée) Vi - - - viane à mon chant d'a - - - amour

Cinq Rechants V, b19

Although one might have expected more moderate demands in terms of pitch range for choristers, the following example from *La Transfiguration* proves that this is not the case. The second sopranos encompass a perfect 12th in the following phrase.

2^{de} Sopr.

ppp *g* *is* - ti - am,

per pro - - - pri - am

La Transfiguration IX, b64

2.6 Sequences

The technique of generating consecutive phrases by means of repeating sequences emerged in the third of Messiaen's early set of songs. As seen in the following example, the entire phrase though slightly condensed, is transposed exactly at a consistent interval. It was not often, however, that Messiaen used the technique in such a straightforward fashion.

- té, C'est un a - - -

- près - mi - - - di en - - - so - - - leil - - -

- lé,

La fiancée perdue, Trois Mélodies III, b9

At the same point in the second verse, he introduced a line which was noticeably similar but not identical, to the one used before. In the preceding example, the span of each phrase

is a minor seventh. In the related phrases below, the span is a major seventh. The contour is like enough to be reminiscent of the first time, yet different enough to cause confusion. Although the immediate repetition is the same as its neighbour, the temptation to revert to the original line must be resisted by the singer. This irregular treatment of sequence was to become the norm for Messiaen's vocal works.

C'est un grand lys
blanc comme une ai

La fiancée perdue, Trois Mélodies III, b33

Four phrases are built from sequentially treated material in the next example from *Poèmes pour Mi VIII*. The interpolation of extra material on the alternate bars creates further difficulties for the performer.

Pe-tit soutien vivant de mes o-reilles las-ses, Collier de re-nouveau,
de sou-rire et de grâ-- ce, Col-lier d'O-ri-

Le collier, Poèmes pour Mi VIII, b14

Messiaen opened *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* with a recurring figure. With his characteristic delight in irregularity the first three phrases use notes a tone apart, but in the fourth appearance they move closer, to a semitone.

Un peu lent
CHANT
Ton œil de ter-re, mon œil de ter-re,
nos mains de ter-re, Pour-tis-ser l'at-mosphè-re,

Bail avec Mi, Chants de Terre et de Ciel I, b1

The same pattern of building music from irregularly transposed sequential phrases persists in the choral music. In *O sacrum convivium!* it becomes clear how Messiaen used

The third movement repeats a key phrase a minor sixth lower later in the movement, shifts it a further diminished fourth on a subsequent hearing and reverts to its original pitch at the end.

Chœur

li - tes de vo - tre Dou - ceur. Po - sez - vous comme un sceau sur mon cœur.

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b11

Chœur

pré - cieuses au mur de la Frai - cheur.) Po - sez - vous comme un sceau sur mon cœur.

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b48

Chœur

fort que la mort, - votre A - mour. Met - tez vo - tre ca - resse tout au - tour.

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b65

As in *O sacrum convivium!*, sometimes the shifting of consecutive phrases in *Trois petites liturgies III* does not maintain a constant interval of transposition. There is, nevertheless, sufficient similarity to recognize the sequence.

Chœur

Vous - qui par - lez en nous, Vous qui vous tai - sez en nous,
Et - gar - dez le si - le - ce dans vo - tre A - mour, Vous - ê - tes près,

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b121

A dramatic application of this idea occurs in *Harawi V*. One interval of transposition, a tone higher, is maintained for most of the first half of the phrase and another, a tone lower, for the second. The compass of the entire phrase is thus expanded at either end.

Nos souf - fles, nos souf - fles, bleu et or. - Ahil,

L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b10

ou. pe-moi la tē - te, dou - dou tchil. Nos souf - fles, nos souf - fles, bleu et or. —

L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b25

The musical score for 'L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b25' features a melodic line with a tritone interval. It includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *sfz*, and a melisma marked 'Abil'.

The second appearance of the *Harawi* cyclic song contains a consequent phrase which begins a tritone higher than the original. The shape of the original is maintained but the 'leaping interval' is expanded from a diminished fifth to a major sixth and decorated with a melisma.

très lent
A - dieu toi, mon ciel de ter - - - re,
più f
A - dieu toi, dé - sert qui pleu - - - re,

The musical score for 'Adieu, Harawi VII, b67' consists of two staves. The first staff is marked 'très lent' and the second 'più f'. Both staves feature melismas and dynamic markings.

Adieu, Harawi VII, b67

The most adventurous of the choral works, *Cinq Rechants*, does not shun the use of sequence as these phrases from movement *III* show.

Solo *f*
trou - ba - dour Vi - - viane Y - seult tous les cer - cles tous les yeux

The musical score for 'Cinq Rechants III, b33' is a solo piece marked 'Solo' and 'f'. It features a sequence of phrases with dynamic markings.

Cinq Rechants III, b33

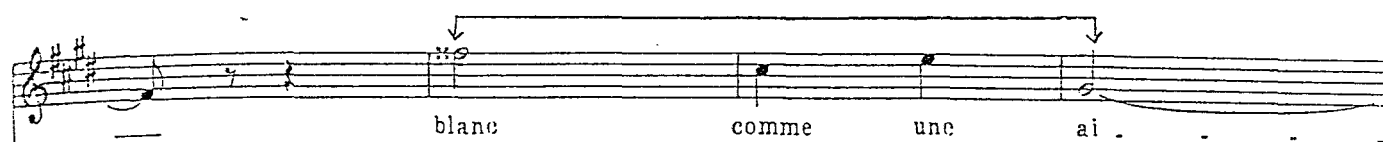
The following example is particularly impressive: each of the twelve voice repeats the same phrase, but begins one tone below the previous voice and one quaver later in time to create a powerful canon.

Cinq Rechants III, b86

(See overleaf)

2.7 Double degree phrases⁸

Trois Mélodies III contains a melodic quirk which Messiaen incorporated with increasing complexity into his later works: a phrase which ends a major seventh away from the first note, i.e. a semitone away from the original pitch class. This has peculiar difficulties for the singer whose ear is tuned into the initial octave pitch.



La fiancée perdue, *Trois Mélodies III*, b37

It was not a device he used frequently, but it can nevertheless be found again in *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Harawi*.

Two musical staves. The first staff is for 'Épouvante' in B-flat major (two flats), marked *fff*. It shows a melodic phrase starting on B-flat4 and ending on C5. The lyrics are: hol hol. The second staff is for 'Doundou tchil' in B-flat major, marked *f*. It shows a melodic phrase starting on B-flat4 and ending on C5. The lyrics are: tchil, tchil. Pi.rou - tchate voilà, ô mon à - moi,

Épouvante, *Poèmes pour Mi IV*, b43

Doundou tchil, *Harawi IV*, b63

These bars from *Cinq Rechants* testify once again to the virtuoso nature of that work.

Two musical staves. The first staff is marked 'Solo' and *f*. It shows a melodic phrase starting on G4 and ending on A5. The lyrics are: trou_ba_dour Vi - viane Y_sault tous les cer_cles tous les yeux. The second staff is marked '2^e et 3^e'. It shows a melodic phrase starting on G4 and ending on A5. The lyrics are: pieu_vre de lu - miè - re blessé fou_le ru - se ma ca - res -

Cinq Rechants III, b33

⁸A title conceived for convenience by taking into account the equal tempering system. By re-spelling the pitch classes so that, for example, F# equals G^b, the presence of F and F# (or G^b) in a phrase constitutes a double degree phrase.

Double degree phrases recur in *La Transfiguration*, possibly more than in all the other works put together. The following example is one of many found in this work. Note that there are three instances of double degrees in the phrase. A comparison with the excerpt from Webern's solo song in section 1.5 yields a similar double degree augmented octave leap, but Messiaen, in this instance at least, supplied an intervening note for the chorister.



La Transfiguration XIII, b161

2.8 Widening intervals

Beginning with the cantata *La mort du nombre*, it becomes apparent that Messiaen used progressively widening intervals in a melodic line to convey emphasis, agitation or excitement. By progressively augmenting the size of an interval, he professed to give a theme 'crushing power' (Messiaen, 1956, p36). This process generated some very jagged lines for the vocalist. In the example below, the tenor expresses in this way, the anguish of being close to death.

The image shows a musical score for a tenor part. It consists of two staves. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second staff has a bass clef. The music is written in a single melodic line. The tempo is marked 'Animé' and the dynamic is 'mf'. The lyrics are: 'O lon - gue, ô tris - te at - ten - tel' and 'O souffran - ce, cer.cle de feu!'. The intervals between notes progressively widen, creating a jagged line. There are slurs and a triplet of notes at the end of the second staff.

La mort du nombre, b60

Widening intervals in the two choral works, *Trois petites liturgies* and *Cinq Rechants*, are associated with the delirious joy of love.

The image shows a musical score for a choral part. It consists of two staves. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second staff has a bass clef. The music is written in a single melodic line. The tempo is marked '16'. The lyrics are: 'Dieu! Lou - an - ge du Pé -'. The intervals between notes progressively widen, creating a jagged line.

Séquence du Verbe, Cantique Divin, Trois petites liturgies II, b34

1^{er}
PRANO

Lent, caressant
Solo *mf*

ma ro-be d'amour | mon a - - - mour | ma prison d'a-mour

Cinq Rechants III, b1

In *Harawi IX* the widening intervals are no longer adjacent. The phrase is repeated three times with the central interval enlarged on each repetition. Such augmenting intervals are often supported by a corresponding growth in volume and alteration in tempo.

1. *ff*
Le feu man - ge - ra nos souf - fles. Philtre à deux voix.

2. *ff*
Nus re - gards d'un bout à l'au - - - - - tre

3. *ff* (poco riten.)
Yus par la mort. In - ven - tons l'a - mour du

a Tempo *fff*

L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi IX, b61

Only isolated examples of the technique can be found within *La Transfiguration*. Its relative rarity is probably due to the fact that this work communicates grandeur and might, rather than agitation and passion.

2.9 Florid passage-work

The *Vocalise* differs from the other vocal works in both motivation and aim. Whilst the remainder were conceived to propagate his faith and ideals, the *Vocalise* as a voice exercise, was not restricted by the necessity for clear verbal presentation. It was written as usual for high voice, but with this fresh purpose before him Messiaen chose to explore a new avenue: agility. The florid passage work which exploits that quality, is shown in the following example.



Vocalise, b43

Although Messiaen was not averse to technical difficulty, passage work such as this did not advance his intention of communicating directly with the audience. His quest was always...

"To express some noble sentiments (and especially the most noble of all, the religious sentiments exalted by the theology and the truths of our Catholic faith)" Messiaen (1956, p3).

It was, therefore, not a style he cultivated to any great extent. The final song of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* features the following fast semiquaver passages, but there are few other examples of vocal runs such as one may hear in, say, Britten's contemporaneous *Illuminations*.

A single staff of music in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps. The tempo/mood is marked 'Vif'. The melody consists of fast semiquaver passages. Below the staff, the lyrics are: "Sept étoi. les d'amour au trans-per-cé, re.vê.tez votre ha-bit de clar."

Résurrection, Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI, b9

Chorally, the nearest approach to this type of writing occurs in *Cinq Rechants*, and can be seen as the last example in section 2.6.

If one discounts the speed factor, Messiaen certainly evolved a florid style of writing for the voice, but he used it only in specific contexts. By superimposing the technique of passage work on the 'alleluiatic vocalise' [Messiaen's term] associated with plainchant, he engendered an atmosphere of celestial 'other-worldliness'. This first appears in *Poèmes pour Mi I*, which concludes with a section of freely undulating alleluias. The melismas used here are significantly longer than anything he had written before and continue to be relatively rare in his songs when not used in conjunction with the alleluiatic vocalise. Similar melismatic melodic lines can be found in the instrumental religious compositions of Hovhanness (1911-), but these, according to Warner (1974), echo ancient Armenian cantillation. Notice, in the following example, Messiaen's instruction to the singer: expressively, with a serene joy.

mf *expressif, avec une joie sereine*

Al - - le - lu - ia,

al - - le - lu - ia, al - - le - lu -

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is marked 'mf' and 'expressif, avec une joie sereine'. The lyrics 'Al - - le - lu - ia,' are written below the notes. The second staff continues the melody with lyrics 'al - - le - lu - ia, al - - le - lu -'.

Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi I, b48

The same effect is realized in *Antienne du silence (pour le jour des Anges gardiens)* [Anthem of silence (for the day of the guardian angels)], *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, where the subject of the song is similar.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major. The first staff features a long, undulating melodic line with a series of eighth notes and rests, all under a single slur. The second staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and some melodic fragments.

Antienne du silence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel II, b5b

The plainchant alleluia recurs in *O sacrum convivium!* in a fairly conservative form. The soprano sings an undulating line accompanied by chords in the rest of the choir. Rhythmically it is less complicated than some of the preceding examples, but the intonation is exacting.

p

nó - bis pi - gnus | dá - tur, | al - - - - -

dim. *pp*

- le - lú. - - - - - | O - - | sá - crum, | sá - crum con - ví - vi - um!

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major. The first staff is marked 'p' and contains the lyrics 'nó - bis pi - gnus | dá - tur, | al - - - - -'. The second staff is marked 'dim.' and 'pp' and contains the lyrics '- le - lú. - - - - - | O - - | sá - crum, | sá - crum con - ví - vi - um!'.

O sacrum convivium!, b25

In the vocal works of the 1940's Messiaen seemed to distance himself from such direct references to plainsong, but there is a definite reappearance in *La Transfiguration* where the choir sings extended florid phrases in this alleluiatic-vocalise style. It may be significant that

this text is overtly religious, whereas those of the intervening works, *Harawi* and *Cinq Rechants* at least, have a more universal application. The following examples are typical of many to be found in *La Transfiguration*.

Sopr. 1^{ers}
2^{es} *mf*
Can - dor est lu - cis ae - ter - nae,

Tén. 1^{ers}
2^{es} *mf*
3 Can - 3 2 - dor est 3 3 3 lu - cis ae - 2 - ter - nae,

La Transfiguration II, b24

Sopr. 1^{ers}
2^{es} *mf*
u - ia a

Sopr. 1^{ers}
2^{es} *mf* *p* *f* *pp*
(a) a a a

La Transfiguration II, b83

2.10 Reduction of motive

The progressive reduction of a motive to a schematic state, as suggested by the following passage from the *Vocalise*, is an idea which Messiaen continued to use and develop throughout his vocal music.

dim.

rall. au Mouv!
p

Vocalise, b25

In his later treatise he described this process as 'development through elimination' or, more colourfully, 'shrunken by crisis' (Messiaen, 1956, p35). The latter is an apt description of

the following excerpt from *Répétition planétaire* [Planetary repetition], *Harawi VI*. The singer has been instructed to sing *ff* and to *crescendo* as she repeats that final fragment another five times.

Tour - bil - lon. Pla - nè - te mange en tour - nant.

Répétition planétaire, Harawi VI, b121

Tour - bil - lon, Pla nè - te man - ge, Pla - nè - te mange
en tour - nant. Mange en tour - nant, Mange en tour - nant,

Répétition planétaire, Harawi VI, b141

Because this shrinking phrase in *O sacrum convivium!* becomes progressively slower, the effect achieved is one of gradual dissipation, rather than crisis.

grá - ti - a, mens im - plé - tur grá - ti - a. O sá - crum, sá - crum, sá - crum, sá - crum,

O sacrum convivium!, b10

2.11 Returning chromaticism

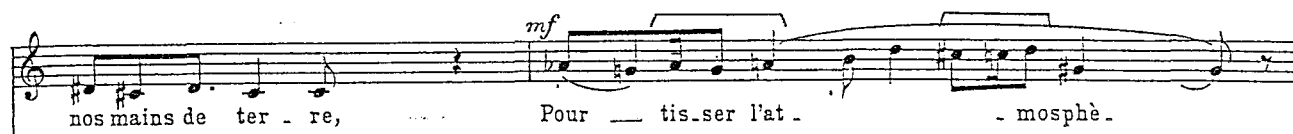
Many melodic fragments in the early songs 'reverse' chromatically upon themselves, but it is only in *Poèmes pour Mi* that the technique of returning chromaticism, as defined by Messiaen (1956), occurs plainly. The following example from his treatise explains the concept, and it is then shown in *Poèmes pour Mi I*.

Messiaen (1956, example 74)



Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi I, b4

The following line from the second cycle contains two figures of returning chromaticism in a single bar and is one example of many in the song. For the singer this obviously has its own peculiar difficulties of intonation similar to that of the double degree phrases.



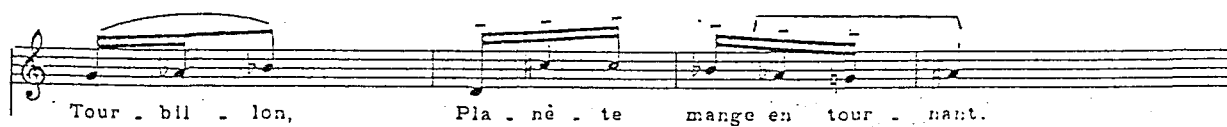
Bail avec Mi, Chants de Terre et de Ciel I, b5

In this phrase from *Trois petites liturgies* the entire choir is expected to negotiate the returning chromaticism at high speed.



Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b26

Often the returning chromaticism is embedded in a phrase which is already highly chromatic, as in these examples from *Harawi* and *Cinq Rechants*.



Répétition planétaire, Harawi VI, b121

à 3
3 Sopr.
1^{re} Contr.
1^{er} Tén.
1^{re} Basse

lu-mi-neux mon ri-re d'ombre ma jeune é-toi-le sur les fleu-ves
ma jeune é-toi-le sur les fleu-ves
ma jeune é-toi-le sur les fleu-ves
ma jeune é-toi-le sur les fleu-ves

Cinq Rechants II, b9

Messiaen consistently used this feature in his melody writing and phrases constructed in this way recur in *La Transfiguration*.

La Transfiguration XII, b78

Given Messiaen's obvious fascination for tiny melodic steps, it is perhaps surprising that he never ventured as far as Penderecki who notated quarter tones for the soprano soloist in the *St Luke Passion*. The reversed flat sign in the following example indicates a three-quarter tone flat; the sharp sign with one horizontal bar missing, the three-quarter tone sharp; and the single horizontal and vertical bar sharp, the quarter-tone sharp.

Penderecki: St. Luke Passion

2.12 Recitation

The first of Messiaen's cycles composed after his appointment as organist at the Church of La Sainte Trinité, Paris, shows the fruits of his studies of plainsong. Although other twentieth century composers have shown an interest in plainchant (for example Stravinsky in *Symphony of Psalms*; Langlais in *Trois Paraphrases Grégoriennes*; Sculthorpe in *Requiem* for solo cello; and Schnittke in his symphonies *II* and *IV*), the introductory music of Messiaen's *Poèmes pour Mi I* is unlike anything he or any of his contemporaries had written up to that time. With a master's hand, he took the idea of plainsong and transmuted it by applying to it some of the melodic idiosyncrasies of his own style. Many consecutive syllables are confined, as in authentic pre-Renaissance chant, to a single pitch class and the end of the phrase, usually a word of significance, is decorated with a melisma. The contour

of these melismas bear the unmistakable fingerprints of Messiaen. Apart from his characteristic irregular rhythms, they habitually follow his favourite shapes, often highly chromatic and containing his preferred melodic intervals. Thus Messiaen retained both the reciting tone and the melismatic style of plainchant (as seen in section 2.9), but transported the whole into the twentieth century and into a uniquely Messiaen-esque realm.

The function of reciting style is obviously, as in operatic recitative, to convey the message as clearly and concisely as possible. Its relevancy to Messiaen's 'mission' assured its frequent appearance in this first cycle. In *La mort du nombre* he experimented with a 'parlando' or recitative style. Comparison of a few bars from that cantata with his later recitative style as introduced in *Poèmes pour Mi I*, shows the radical changes. Note the repeating tones and the shape of the melisma in the second example.

Modéré *2^{me} ÂME (Ténor)*

C'é - tait un ray - on de so - leil qui dor - mait dans ta main.

The musical score is for a tenor part, marked 'Modéré' and '2^{me} ÂME (Ténor)'. It features a reciting style with a steady, stepwise melodic line. The lyrics are 'C'é - tait un ray - on de so - leil qui dor - mait dans ta main.' There are some triplets and a fermata over the final note.

La mort du nombre, b6

Et l'eau qui suit les variations des nu - a - ges, Et la ter - re, et les montagnes qui attendent toujours,
Et la lumière qui transfor - - - me.

The musical score consists of two staves. The first staff has lyrics 'Et l'eau qui suit les variations des nu - a - ges, Et la ter - re, et les montagnes qui attendent toujours,'. The second staff has lyrics 'Et la lumière qui transfor - - - me.' The melody is highly chromatic and features a prominent melisma with a fermata over the final note.

Action de grâces, *Poèmes pour Mi I*, b4

The reciting tone rises in pitch through the course of the song to generate the emotional excitement which will lead the singer into the final, joyous Alleluias.

Et un oeil près de mon oeil, u - ne pensée près de ma pen -

The musical score is a single staff with lyrics 'Et un oeil près de mon oeil, u - ne pensée près de ma pen -'. The melody is highly chromatic and features a melisma with a fermata over the final note.

Action de grâces, *Poèmes pour Mi I*, b6b

Et une â - me, In - vi - si - ble, plei - ne d'amour et d'im - mor - ta - li - té, Et un vé - te -

The musical score is a single staff with lyrics 'Et une â - me, In - vi - si - ble, plei - ne d'amour et d'im - mor - ta - li - té, Et un vé - te -'. The melody is highly chromatic and features a melisma with a fermata over the final note.

Action de grâces, *Poèmes pour Mi I*, b20



Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi I, b36



Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi I, b38

In *Cinque frammenti di saffo*, Dallapiccola also used a shifting reciting tone technique. The longer note values, different accompanying style, and complete absence of melismatic writing in the song, separates this from the examples of Messiaen's work.

Canto *ppp* (tranquilo; recitando)
 Pie - na splen - de - va la lu - na — quan - do pres - so l'al - ta - re si fer -
 (non arp.)
 Str. *ppp sost.*
 Trpt., Vla., Hn.

Dallapiccola: *Cinque frammenti di saffo*

Occasionally, as in the Dallapiccola example, Messiaen retained the repeated pitch for extensive periods with no concluding melisma. These few bars come from the second song of *Poèmes pour Mi*.

Mes pieds qui hé - si - tent dans la poussière, Le lac *mf*

Paysage, Poèmes pour Mi II, b7

O sacrum convivium! has no reciting sections, but the procedure re-appears with some modifications in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*. Instead of committing a whole song or large portion thereof to reciting style as in *Poèmes pour Mi*, in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* one finds 'random' lines of reciting tones within songs. Although the following reciting lines show the progressive rise in pitch commented on earlier, they are separated by music of different styles. Notice that the melodic shape of 'lancer par dessus bord' is identical to the melisma of the first *Poèmes pour Mi* example in this section.

mais on ne peut pas le lan - cer par des - sus bord

Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV, b8

jour comme la li - bellule - a - vi - a - teur! Te voi - là plus haut que moi;

Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV, b27

- gl - tes comme un battant de clo - che pas - ca - s

Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV, b43

In *Trois petites liturgies*, Messiaen applied plainsong techniques for the first time in a choral context. The central section of the first movement is dominated by the reciting technique as used in *Poèmes pour Mi*, complete with repeated pitches, syllabic writing and concluding melisma.

Chœur *p* Ce oui qui chan - te comme un é - cho de lu - miè - - - -

Chœur - - - - - *p* Mé - lo - die

Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, *Trois petites liturgies*, b42

As was pointed out in the initial example from *Poèmes pour Mi*, the melismas at the end of the reciting phrases often bear a characteristic shape. Observe in the following example

from *Trois petites liturgies III* as in the earlier example from *Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV*, that in works later than *Poèmes pour Mi* Messiaen sometimes retained only the melodic contour of the melisma, but replaced the sustained vowel with syllabic writing.

Psalmodie de l'unicité per amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b70

Harawi is particularly interesting in Messiaen's development of the idea of repeating pitches and reciting tones. Written some nine years after *Poèmes pour Mi*, it seems he was ready to experiment further. One gains the impression that the repeated notes in the opening bars of *Harawi*, used here in conjunction with large leaps rather than melismas, are influenced also by Hindu ragas and not only by Gregorian plainchant. Compare Messiaen's melody with this Hindu raga which the composer himself described as a 'ravishing example' (Messiaen, 1956, p33).

La ville qui dormait, toi, Harawi I, b1

Messiaen (1956, example 111)

The fourth song of *Harawi* brings a significant change. The single pitch is sung by the singer for 18 bars at the beginning and another 18 at the end of the song. There are no melismas of any sort, but neither are there any words to communicate. The singer is chanting on the repeated pitch the onomatopoeic sound of the ankle beads worn by Peruvian dancers. The use of the reciting tone therefore ceases to be a means of conveying narrative and becomes instead a descriptive tool.

Doundou tchil, Harawi IV, b5

In another instance repeated pitches are meant to represent animal cries.

Modéré, un peu vif
ff

Pia pia pia pia pia pia pia pia pia pia pia

Syllabes, Harawi VIII, b78

Messiaen had long been intrigued by the idea of incantation. Was it possible that chanted word formulas could produce magical effects? Honegger perhaps pondered the same possibility in the section of his oratorio *Le roi David* (1921) entitled *Incantation*, where the narrator emulates the spoken incantations of the witch of Endor. In Messiaen's *Répétition Planétaire, Harawi V*, the repeating pitch is associated with invented words quietly intoned over a mobile accompaniment.

Ma-pa na - ma li - la, Ma-pa na - ma li - la, mi - ka,

pam-pahi - ka.

Répétition planétaire, Harawi VI, b45b

Similar mesmeric effects are achieved in this choral passage from *Cinq Rechants* where three contraltos repeat meaningless words whilst the basses hum.

Modéré (monotone)
 à 3 *p*

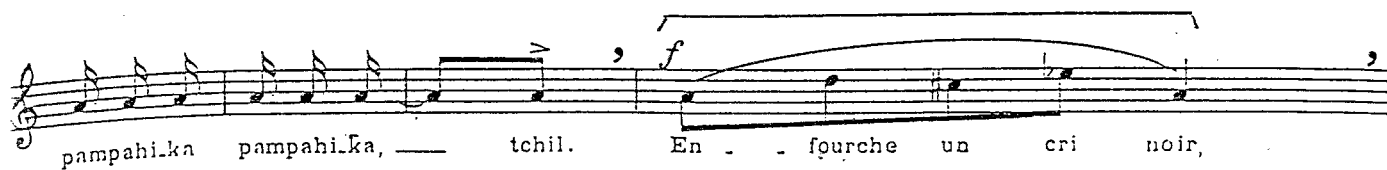
ro - ma ta - ma ta - ma ta - ma ro - ma ta - ma ta - ma ta - ma

(bouche fermée) *mf* *expressif*

um

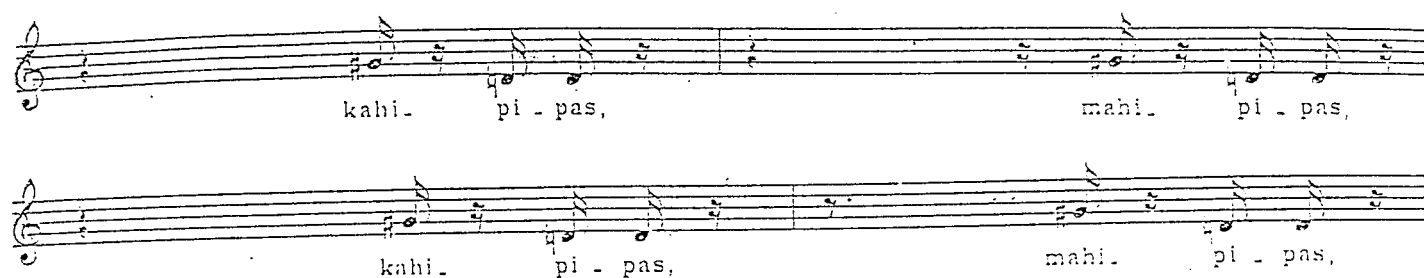
Cinq Rechants IV, b45

The following example is interesting in that, at this point in *Répétition Planétaire*, the repeated note and repeated 'nonsense words' cease and are replaced with French words and a mobile melody. Note, however, that the contour of the new melody is the characteristic shape used for the final melisma of a reciting phrase in earlier music.



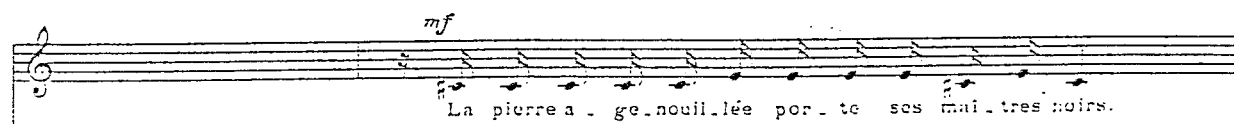
Répétition planétaire, Harawi VI, b81

Messiaen developed this incantatory style by alternating two pitches in *Syllabes* [Syllables], *Harawi VIII*.



Syllabes, Harawi VIII, b15

In *Harawi III* the alternation of two pitches, extending sometimes to four, is used to convey meaningful French words. The incantatory intent remains clear by the ceaseless nature of the repetition and the strong attack.



Montagnes, Harawi III, b32b

In *Cinq Rechants*, composed four years after *Harawi*, Messiaen implemented both conventional recitation and incantatory styles for choir. The *Rechant* of movement II occurs twice within the movement and consists of four repetitions of the following incantation. The text is 'nonsense' syllables similar to those used in *Harawi*. The pitch range, however, is far greater than the one or two pitches previously used.

Rechant
Vif, gai

3 Sopr. ma - yo - ma ka - pri - ta - ma ssa - ri -

3 Contr. ma - yo - ma ka - pri - ta - ma ssa - ri - mâ

3 Tén. ma - yo - ma ka - pri - ta - ma ssa - ri -

3 Basses ma - yo - ma ka - pri - ta - ma ssa - ri - mâ

Cinq Rechants II, b23

Notice that the incantatory patterns are not only growing in pitch range, but also in length. The repeating figure in the next example lasts for a quaver short of nine bars before it repeats, thus occupying significant musical space.

Couplet
Modéré (*berceur et tendre*)

3 Sopr. mi - roir d'é - toi - le châ - teau d'é - toi - le Y - seult d'a -

3 Sopr. _mour sé - pa - ré bul - le de cristal d'é - toi -

3 Sopr. - le mon re - _tour mi -

Cinq Rechants I, b20

Within the following 10-bar incantation for full choir, bars one and two are repeated exactly in bars five and six with the ends of the phrases varied. The whole incantation is repeated four times in the song.

Niokha - mâ pa - la - lan(e) sou - ki mon bou - quet tout dé - fait ray -

- on - ne Niokha - mâ pa - la - lan(e) sou - ki les vo - lets ro - ses

1^{er} 2^e et 3^e O - ha a - mour a - mour du clair au som - bre O - ha

Cinq Rechants IV, b1

The climax of Messiaen's experimentation in this regard was an entire 36 bar song (*Harawi XI*) comprising exclusively the repetition of a two bar phrase with two possible endings.

poco riten. a Tempo

Ri - re lo - ni - sé fu - reur d'hor - loge au meur - tre ab - - -

- sent, Cou - pez ma tête, son chif - fre

rou - - - le dans le sang!

Katchikatchi les étoiles, Harawi XI, 21

Recitation in *La Transfiguration* takes an interesting turn in that Messiaen reverted to the broad category of plainsong recitation as used in *Poèmes pour Mi* to communicate narrative words. Sometimes it takes the form of consistently repeating pitches, but on other occasions, as in the incantations of the intervening works, the pitch range is more generous. Melismas may be present, omitted altogether or even used in the middle of phrases. *La Transfiguration* then presents a plainsong technique which has been enriched since *Poèmes pour Mi* by the middle years of experimentation.

3 Modéré (♩ = 112)

Un peu vif (♩ = 132)

énors 1^{ers} 2^{es}

Ad - huc e - o lo - quen - te, ec - ce nu - bes

La Transfiguration VIII, b13

1^{ers} Tén.

ec - ce vox de nu - be, di - cens:

La Transfiguration VIII, b31

CHAPTER 3: TEMPORAL ASPECTS

"Rhythmic music is that which disregards repetition, squareness and regular durations"
(Messiaen, quoted by Samuel, 1976, p63).

As was observed in the previous chapter, Messiaen's melodic style was an accumulative one: new means were progressively added to the old to create a process of evolutionary enrichment. With the temporal aspects of composing, this changes. There are features which are retained throughout the vocal oeuvre, but others are definitely relinquished.

3.1 Time signatures

3.1.1 Changing time signatures

In 1930 Messiaen conceived his first set of songs, as was fairly common at the time, within the framework of changing time signatures. In the first and third songs, a constant beat is retained for large sections of the music with changes used primarily to create special effects. In *Trois Mélodies I* seen below, only four of the total 25 bars deviate from the 2/4 time signature and in the following way: a bar of 5/8 hurries the speed as if to denote the urgency of the repeated questions asked in the text, and a bar of 3/4 prolongs the final question.

The musical score shows a vocal line in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The lyrics are: ".quoi n'ont-ils pour moi de char mes, Pour quoi? Pourquoi, Ah! — Pour." The time signature changes to 5/8 for the bar containing "Pour" and back to 2/4 for the final bar. A 3/4 time signature is also indicated for the final bar.

Pourquoi?, *Trois Mélodies I*, b16

The third song is similar. It is divided into two large contrasting parts: the first in 2/4 (with the odd bar of 3/4 to sustain a phrase) and the second in 4/4, with a single bar of 3/2. The cantata, *La mort du nombre*, written the same year, keeps to these zonal time divisions with

a single time signature maintained for the duration of each separate section sung by either the first or the second of the characterised souls.

Trois Mélodies II is much more adventurous in this regard. It is an intimate colloquy and the time signatures change frequently to accommodate the hesitancy in the speech. Three bars of 4/4 are followed by one bar of 3/4, two bars of 4/4, two of 5/4 and then five of 4/4. It is apparent that, like many other musicians of the time, Messiaen was striving to free the song from being rigidly bound to 'keeping in time' in the sense of maintaining a regular beat and pulse.

His first attempt at recitative is enlightening. The introductory recitative to *La mort du nombre* accommodates speech with remarkable ease and freedom within the confines of a single 4/4 time signature. The only concessions made to irregularity are in the form of a few well-placed triplets. This is rather surprising considering the metric 'inconstancy' in the dialogue of *Trois Mélodies II* and is particularly conservative in the light of what was to follow.

The image shows a musical score for a recitative. It is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked 'Modéré' and the dynamics are 'p'. The text above the staff reads '2^{me} ÂME (Ténor)'. The lyrics are: 'C'é - tait un ray - on de so - leil qui dor - mait dans ta main.' The music consists of a series of quarter notes and eighth notes, with some triplets indicated by a '3' over a group of notes. The time signature is 4/4.

La mort du nombre, b6

3.1.2 No time signatures

Messiaen's studies in plainsong, Indian and ancient Greek music revolutionised his thinking on rhythm. In these musical cultures the notion of strong and weak beats within a bar is an anathema and instead the rhythmic impulse is derived from long and short durations. This appealed immensely to him and he was later able to sum up his attitude to rhythm in the following way:

"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 in the silence which follows it, the second beat will be longer than the first. Another number, another deviation. That is the birth of rhythm." (Messiaen, quoted by Bell, 1984, p5).

It is in the first major cycle, *Poèmes pour Mi*, that Messiaen applied this notion to vocal writing with radical results. The method casts away time signatures completely and phrases are constructed purely around the principle of the basic value, usually the quaver. It is particularly useful in conveying the free speech of plainsong which he regularly adopted at this stage. The absence of time signatures and relative rarity of bar lines can be seen in this example from that cycle.

HANT

Très modéré

p

Le ciel,

Et l'eau qui suit les variations des nuages, Et la terre, et les montagnes qui attendent toujours,

Et la lumière qui transfor - - me.

Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi I, b1

The obvious suitability of this style to recitative notwithstanding, Messiaen applied it with equal success to all his vocal writing. He found that a lyrical delivery could be as effectively communicated in this way as narrative, with bar lines used only to indicate phrase endings or to negate accidentals. Many of the new idiosyncrasies of his rhythmic language such as added values⁹ and irregular augmentation¹⁰ could be included without constant alterations to time signatures. The following example illustrates how the bars coincide with the phrases of an exuberant, lyrical song. Notice the disparity in beats from one bar to the next.

ff

Le feu man - ge - ra nos souf - fles. Philtre à deux voix.

L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi IX, b99

⁹An added value is a short value, added to any rhythm whatsoever whether by a note, or by a rest, or by the dot (Messiaen, 1956, p16). See also section 3.2.1.

¹⁰Irregular augmentation is derived from Bach's practise in which the rhythmic values of a theme are doubled or halved. Messiaen used more complex forms of augmentation by adding, for example, quarters, halves or thirds of the original values, or by varying the amounts within the phrase.

This presentation is satisfying on the composer's part because it reflects most truly what he initially had in his mind and imagination at the time of composing (Messiaen, 1956, p28). Ives (1874-1954) notated his song *The Cage*, with exactly the same disregard for time signatures and conventional barring. It even appears as if Ives, in this song at least, operated on the same basis as Messiaen in using the quaver as a basic mensural value.

A leopard went a-round his cage from one side back to the oth-er side; he stop-ped on-ly when the keep-er came a-round with meat;

Ives: *The Cage*, b1

The system of notation, though entirely possible and practicable with small ensembles, is less suitable when vast numbers of people are involved. All Messiaen's solo cycles from henceforth were notated in this way, but the addition of many instruments, such as in the orchestral version of *Poèmes pour Mi*, emphasized the need for another way of communicating the same musical intentions to many people simultaneously. Messiaen's solution was to divide the music into short measures each headed by a numeral to indicate the number of beats. In order to avoid confusion where beats are not equal in duration, a system of signs (originally devised by Désormière) was added. The explanation for the signs is given below and followed by an example of the system from the orchestral score of *Poèmes pour Mi*. It must be emphasized that the same rhythmic freedom is expressed in both versions of the work and that the only difference is in the visual presentation.

□ vaut⁽¹⁾ ♩ || △ vaut ♩ || | vaut ♩ || □ vaut ♩ || △ vaut ♩ || | vaut ♩ ||

(1) Vaut means "is worth", or "has the value of".

Messiaen (1956, example 63)

Chant
Et une â - me, In - vi - si - ble, plei-ne d'amour et d'im-mor-ta-li - té, Et un vé-te -

5 □ □ □ △ □ 3 □ △ □

1^{re} Vions
2^{es} Vions
Altos
Celles

Action de grâces, *Poèmes pour Mi I*, b42

In spite of being written for four vocal parts and optional organ accompaniment, *O sacrum convivium!* has no time signature. There is, however, much rhythmic conformity and little independent movement between the parts, as the following example confirms. Once the quaver beat is established, the pace does not alter and there should be little difficulty in the temporal presentation.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "O sacrum convivium!". It consists of four vocal staves and one organ accompaniment staff. The lyrics are: re - cō - li - tur memó - ri - a pas - si - ó - nis é - jus: mens implé - tur. The score includes dynamic markings like *mf* and a key signature of two sharps. The organ part is written in a lower register, likely for a pipe organ.

O sacrum convivium!, b5

The same cannot be said for the later *a cappella* choral work, *Cinq Rechants*. In order to preserve rhythmic accord within such a complex work, Messiaen reverted to using time signatures. Here he gathered the time values into normal meters and piled up metric changes in a manner recognizable from the scores of Stravinsky. Again, the divisions are in no way to be considered bars with accents in the traditional sense. They are, according to Messiaen (1956, p29), merely independent syncopes of time patterns written in normal meter and rhythms. By superimposing on those, a multitude of slurs, dynamic markings and accents, the desired result is heard by the listener. Whilst this is probably easiest for the performer because it does not disrupt their usual habits, it remains a contradiction to the original rhythmic conception of the composer. The following example from *Cinq Rechants I* shows the super-imposition of four different rhythms all constrained into 2/4 time.

pr. *mf* le châ - teau d'é - toi - le Y - seult d'a - mour sé - pa - ré
 1^{er} *mf* - ta - ma ha - yo - ma ka - pri - ta - ma ha -
 2^e *mf* t k t t k t k t k t k t k
 3^e *mf* châ - teau de la septiè - me por - te Ha

Cinq Rechants I, b56

The next example from the same work illustrates patterns accommodated by constantly changing time signatures within the phrase. Note also that the time signatures here bear more than one upper numeral to define the groupings within the bar.

Presque vif (*souple*)
 (à bouche fermée) *p*
 1^{er} Sopr. um
 2^e Sopr. um
 3^e Sopr. um
 1^{er} Contr. les amoureux s'en - vo - leant Brangien dans l'es - pace tu souf - fles
 2^e et 3^e Contr. les vo - leant pa - ce souf - fles
 3^e Tén. reux s'en - vo Brangien dans
 1^{er} Basse les amoureux s'en - vo - leant Brangien dans l'es - pace tu souf - fles
 2^e et 3^e Basses les vo - leant pa - ce souf - fles

Cinq Rechants I, b74

The contemporary English composer Tippett exercised a similar degree of rhythmic freedom in his music. Passages of rhythmic counterpoint, such as this excerpt from the

Concerto for Double String Orchestra (1938), can be found in his works. Note the opposition of the time signatures between the two orchestras and the constantly changing tempos of orchestra II.

Allegro con brio

ORCH. I
marcato

ORCH. II
espr.

(both lines doubled at octave above and below)

Tippett: *Scherzo*, *Concerto for Double String Orchestra*, b1

In the choral-orchestral work *Trois petites liturgies*, which pre-dates *Cinq Rechants* by five years, Messiaen mostly used the system of changing time signatures as in *Cinq Rechants*, rather than the signs and numerals as in the orchestral *Poèmes pour Mi*. He occasionally included some of Désormière's signs for greater clarification as seen below.

Cymb. ch.

Choeur

Piano

re, Mé - lo - die

13

ff

Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, *Trois petites liturgies* I, b45

The signs have disappeared by the late choral-orchestral work *La Transfiguration* and Messiaen simply used time signatures and much accenting to co-ordinate the vast performing resources. It is interesting to compare the aurally similar plainchant-like recitatives of *La Transfiguration* (1963) with those of *Poèmes pour Mi* (1936). In the former Messiaen makes allowance for the fact that there would be 20 tenors singing together and

notated the passage accordingly with time signatures. Compare this with the first example in section 3.1.2.

Ténors 1^{rs} 2^{es} 2 2 1 16 Je - sus, et 2 te - ti - git e - os, di -

Ténors 1^{rs} 2^{es} 3 3 8 Modéré (♩ = 112) 4 16 *mf* Sur - gi - te

La Transfiguration XI, b26

3.2 Rhythmic groupings of notes

3.2.1 Disruption of a steady flow

Early indications of Messiaen's delight in the unexpected and the slightly irregular appear in *Trois Mélodies I*. As noted above the steady 3/4 rhythm of all that precedes is suddenly disrupted by a bar of 5/8. Similarly in the third song, the continuous two crochets/ minim in a bar is disrupted by a capricious three crochets in the bar to extend the phrase slightly.

C'est un grand lys

blanc comme une ai -

- le, très haut dans u - ne cou - pe

La fiancée perdue, Trois Mélodies III, b33

Similar seemingly 'disrupted' rhythms are to be found in later songs in spite of the absence of time signatures. Messiaen appears to establish a regular pulse in the first three bars of *Poèmes pour Mi VIII* seen here, only to disrupt it by the addition of an extra dotted quaver, before reverting again to the regular pattern. Messiaen (1956, p48) would call this an 'added

value' which, to his apparent relish, makes the rhythm 'limp deliciously'. The repeating figure is not retained throughout the song and other less metrical material is also included.

Modéré, un peu vif *p*

CHANT

Modéré, un peu vif Prin - temps en - chaî - né;

PIANO *p*

Le collier, Poèmes pour Mi VIII, b1

Added values of this type become rarer as the works rely less on pulse and more on rhythmic freedom. The added value which is seen in the following example, is evident not because of the disruption of a steady beat, but because the phrase in which it occurs, is repeated three times, thus highlighting the modification.

1. /

Chœur *f*

Il est par - ti le Bien - Ai - - mé, C'est pour

2. /

Chœur nous! Il est mon - - té le Bien - Ai - -

3. /

Chœur - mé, C'est pour nous! Il a pri -

Chœur - é - le Bien - Ai - - mé, C'est pour nous,

Séquence du Verbe, Cantique Divin, Trois petites liturgies II, b52

Subsequently added values more frequently assume an effect of prolongation. The feeling of rhythmic disruption is reduced as repeating rhythms become less common.

Presque lent, avec charme et tendresse, très pur *p*

CHANT

Oi - seau d'é - - toi - le,

Amour oiseau d'étoile, Harawi X, b1

3.2.2 Prime number groupings

In order to resist the forward propulsion generated by a steady beat, Messiaen created irregular groupings within phrases. In the early songs this took the form of the occasional triplet within a simple time signature. Freed from the restraints of time signatures and the dictates of steady pulse in his later songs, he relied on irregular groupings to constantly undermine the sense of recurring beat. He was especially fond of prime number groupings, having a fascination for the 'charm of impossibilities' inherent in these indivisible numbers (Messiaen, 1956, p13). In *Poèmes pour Mi*, his first really free rhythmic writing for voice, conventional even-number groups occur in prime number groupings. Although these semiquavers are all grouped in fours there are consistently seven groups to each bar. All 28 are sounded only in the accompaniment and the singer has the unenviable task of learning which of the 28 to sound in any one bar.

Action de grâces, *Poèmes pour Mi I*, b49b

In *Poèmes pour Mi VI* the repeating pattern is six semi-quavers followed consistently by seven. Later in the song, as in the second example below, groups of seven, then four, five, four, three and five are consecutive.

Ta voix, *Poèmes pour Mi VI*, b1

-co - re. Tu es la ser.van - te du Fils,

Ta voix, Poèmes pour Mi VI, b1

3.3 Repeating rhythmic cells

From his earliest songs Messiaen often constructed phrases from identical repeating rhythmic cells. Consider in this respect, the first few phrases of the *Vocalise* (1930) shown below.

p *cresc.*

Vocalise, b1

This characteristic can be found throughout his vocal writing, but with increasing levels of complexity and individuality on the part of the cells used. The opening song of *Harawi*, uses the same rhythmic cell for every phrase but one. This cell however, is completely devoid of the lilting pulse of the former example.

CHANT

Extrêmement lent, en rêve

ppp

La vil - le qui dor - mait, toi. Ma

main sur ton cœur par toi. Le

plein mi - nuit le banc, toi. La vio - let - te dou - ble

La ville qui dormait, toi, Harawi I, b1

The free rhythm of some cells is due to their origin in cultures outside that of Western music. *Cinq Rechants* opens with the words: *les amoureux s'envolent*, set to the Greek metre, Aristophian: — ∪ ∪ — ∪ — — (Griffiths, 1985, p140).

Presque vif (*souple*)
2^e et 3^e

3 Sopr.
les a_moureux s'en - vo - lent Brangien dans l'es_pa_ce tu souffles

Cinq Rechants I, b4

In *Trois petites liturgies* a restated cell is generated from three Indian *deçī-tālas*: *rāgvardhana*, *candrakalā* and *lackskmiçā*¹¹. The later work for organ, *Livre d'Orgue* (1951), features 17 *Sharngedeva* rhythms in movement two. The religious music of Hovhanness also features repeating rhythmic patterns related to Indian talas (Rosner, 1980).

Chœur
re, D'un bai - ser vo - tre main dé - pas - se le
Chœur
tableau, Pa - y - sa - ge di - vin, ren - ver - se - toi dans l'eau.

Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b85

By manipulating rhythmic cells in various ways, Messiaen further indulged his pleasure in irregularity. The cells highlighted in the next example begin in the same way, but are modified on subsequent appearances by the addition of extra values at the end.

et mon â --
-- me se - ra gué - ri - e.

Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi IX, b6

Although the consecutive phrases in the following example begin and end in the same way, new material is interpolated on the second hearing. Both cells are used later in the song. A parallel can be found between these rhythmic manoeuvrings and Messiaen's handling of

¹¹Hindu rhythmic patterns documented and classified by Sharngedeva, a 13th century theorist.

phrases which are clearly related in terms of melodic contour but inexactly transposed (see section 2.6).

CHANT

Vif

Al - le - lu - ia,

Résurrection, Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI, b1

al - le - lu - ia.

Résurrection, Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI, b4

The opening rhythmic cell of the *Cinq Rechants III* couplet is subjected to interesting manoeuvrings. The cell comprises a non-retrogradable rhythm¹², shown below as it first appears, followed immediately by the augmentation of each component of the central core of the cell by a semi-quaver (example (i)). In the second appearance of the couplet, the cell appears once in its original form, then twice more, with the values comprising the central component enlarged by a semi-quaver on each occasion (example (ii)). The third appearance has each value of the core enlarged by yet another semi-quaver (iii) and then the cell repeats, decreasing the central values by a semi-quaver each time until the original cell reappears. As Messiaen explained:

"...since non-retrogradable rhythms are composed of two symmetrical retrograde groups, one on the right, the other on the left of the central value, it's necessary that there should be a symmetry between right and left for the added (p84) and contracting values. On the other hand when I develop the contracting values, I have no right to change those on the right and left, but only the central values may be augmented or diminished" (Messiaen, quoted by Samuel, 1976, p84).

Example (i)

Vif

ou - mi an - nō - la ou - mi ou - mi an - nō - la

ou - mi sa - ri sa - ri - sa flou - ti

Cinq Rechants III, b20

¹²A rhythmic cell constructed symmetrically about a central value so that it reads the same from left to right, or right to left. In this instance the 'core' of the cell (semi-quaver - quaver - semi-quaver) is augmented, whilst the surrounding constituents of the cell, two quavers on each side, remain constant.

Example (ii)

1^{re} et 2^e
Sopr.
an - nô - la ou - mi ou - mi

1^{re} et 2^e
Sopr.
an - nô - la ou - mi sa - ri sa - ri - sa flou.ti

Cinq Rechants III, b48

Example (iii)

1^{re} et 2^e
Sopr.
ou - mi an - nô - la ou - mi

Cinq Rechants III, b67

Some of the repeating cells used in later works do retain the element of regularity specifically to generate an incantatory atmosphere. *Cinq Rechants* is particularly rich in repeating cells of this type. The following example can be described as a rhythmic and melodic ostinato.

3^e
Tén.
tri - an - guil - lo tri - an - guil - lo tri - an - guil - lo tri - an - guil - lo tri - an - guil - lo

1^{re}
Basse
tri - an - guil - lo tri - an - guil - lo tri - an - guil - lo tri - an - guil - lo tri - an - guil - lo

2^e et 3^e
Basses
tri - an - guil - lo tri - an - guil - lo tri - an - guil - lo tri - an - guil - lo tri - an - guil - lo

Cinq Rechants III, b28

The evolution of Messiaen's focus and interest in rhythm reaches an apotheosis in the composer's description of a woodblock passage in the *Turangalîla-symphonie IV*, as a 'theme' (Messiaen: sleeve notes to *Turangalîla-symphonie*. DG, 1991, Stereo SB 431 781-2). This endorses his belief in the importance of that element and in its ability to independently sustain interest.

CHAPTER 4: VOCAL ASPECTS

"I have retained everything from the past: procedures, attachments and enthusiasm - and have renounced nothing" (Messiaen, quoted by Samuel, 1956).

This statement is certainly true when applied to the vocal expertise required by singers of his music. Indeed, the same initial constraints of facility are placed on the soloist who performs the *Trois Mélodies* as on the chorister participating in *La Transfiguration*. There are, however, further techniques and ways of vocalising which the composer adds progressively over the 35 year span, to enrich his vocal works and extend the singer.

4.1 *Bel canto* singing

Considering Messiaen's philosophical background it is not surprising that the *bel canto* technique with its emphasis on beauty of sound, is present in his songs. In 1936 at the age of 28, he was instrumental in forming the group *La Jeune France* which opposed the hard, mechanistic and impersonal way of modern life they felt was represented in neo-Classical music. They sought instead to re-instate the deeper spiritual and humanistic values which they perceived as belonging to pre-War France. This explains why Messiaen saw no need to discard that which had created beauty in music of an earlier period for the sake of mere cleverness or experimentation. Instead he assimilated the *bel canto* technique and applied it within his own unique musical language, posing an entirely new set of challenges for the singer. Indeed, much of the satisfaction in performing his vocal music lies in the persistent presence of these lyrical sections. Unusual ways of using the voice, novel sounds and peculiar effects are to be found increasingly in the scores, but always alongside 'conventional' singing. The performer is thus required to retain the *bel canto* technique acquired for the performance of music up to this time and to meld onto it, the experimental techniques associated with the twentieth century. This presupposes substantial versatility on the part of the singer. In the following examples taken from works at opposite ends of his vocal output chronologically speaking (*La mort du nombre* (1930) and *La Transfiguration* (1965)), the *bel canto* singer must preserve a warmth and evenness of tone throughout the range. Countless similar phrases can be found in the works which intervene.

cresc.

à - me et s'é - lan - ce vers des clar - tés nou - vel - les, dans un é - ter - nel prin - temps!

La mort du nombre, b46

Sopr. 1
Sopr. 2

glo - ri - ae, glo - ri - ae, glo - ri - ae, tu - ae!

La Transfiguration XIV, b69

Some of the songs depend upon the preservation of a sustained tone and beauty of line within the reduced framework of a narrower pitch range. In *Trois Mélodies II* an intimate conversational style is conveyed within an octave span.

CHANT

Lent

Cer.tain mot

mur - mu - ré Par vous est un bai - ser In - ti - me et pro - lon -

Le sourire, *Trois Mélodies II*, b1

A correspondingly intimate approach is to be found in *Harawi V*, but in this later song the melodic line of the second stanza is decorated in the manner of a *da capo* aria. The verse is presented first, as in example (i) in a relatively undecorated state, and then as in example (ii).

(i)

Lent, tendre et berceur
LA JEUNE FILLE

CHANT

"Toungou, ahi, toungou, toungou, ber ce, toi, ma cendre des lu, miè, res,"

L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b1

(ii)

Lent, tendre et berceur
LA JEUNE FILLE

court *pp*

"Toungou, ahi, toungou, toungou, ber ce, toi,"

L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b16

Vocal ornamentation of this sort is not used extensively by Messiaen and appears rarely in his choral music. In *Cinq Rechants IV*, the following grace notes occur in all parts except the second and third basses. The interval, minor 9th (augmented octave), to be negotiated at speed (*très vif*) by most parts, underscores the specialist nature of the composition.

à 3

3 Sopr. O ha a - mour a - mour du clair au som - bre O ha

1^{er} 2^e et 3^e à 3

3 Contr. O ha a - mour a - mour du clair au som - bre O ha

à 3

3 Tén. O ha a - mour a - mour du clair au som - bre 1^{er} 2^e et 3^e O ha

1^{er}

1^{re} Basse O ha a - mour a - mour du clair au som - bre O ha

2^e et 3^e

2^e et 3^e Basse ha a - mour a - mour du clair au som - bre ha

The next example, also from *Cinq Rechants* and written for the three sopranos, is even more difficult to execute than the former one, involving first a swoop up and then down.

Cinq Rechants I, b68

One wonders why Messiaen never used a trill to decorate a vocal line. He certainly did not hesitate to use this particular ornament to embellish a solo instrumental line (for example the violin part of the *Thème et variations*; the clarinet of *Quatour pour la fin du Temps*, or the melody line of the organ works *Apparition de l'Église éternelle* or *La Nativité du Seigneur* - in short wherever a line is melodically paramount), yet he appears to have stoically resisted the same in a vocal context.

4.2 Dynamic control

Although Messiaen showed an interest in dynamic variations from his earliest songs, instructions in the scores become increasingly demanding as one progresses sequentially through the material, both solo and choral.

4.2.1 Soft singing and degrees thereof

It is in his soft specifications especially that he asked a great deal of singers. As early as *Trois Mélodies II*, he wrote an entire song with no dynamic direction above *pp*. Although the following song in the set has a wider dynamic spectrum in that it ranges from *ff* to *pp*, it is not necessarily more difficult to perform than the second. A song sung in degrees of quietness compels great concentration and carefully studied control. In bar eight, as seen below, the singer is to *decrescendo* to *ppp* as she ascends in pitch, retaining always a quiet, clear tone.



Le sourire, *Trois Mélodies II*, b7

More so than many other composers, Messiaen appears to have found the combination of quietness and immobility an irresistibly compelling one and he used it as often in vocal as in instrumental works. The intensely still *Louange à l'Immortalité de Jésus*, *Quatour pour la fin du temps VIII* appears to symbolize by these means as the title suggests, the immortality of Christ. In *Harawi I*, written 25 years after *Trois Mélodies II*, he united the same two qualities but added extra complications for the performer. The *lent* has become *extrêmement lent* and the *pp* of the beginning, *ppp*. The *ppp* of the end of *Trois Mélodies II* is now *pppp*, sustained with a pause. Within the framework of the quiet dynamics, the singer must also preserve the speech accents as marked.

CHANT

Extrêmement lent, en rêve

ppp

La ville qui dormait, toi, *Harawi I*, b1

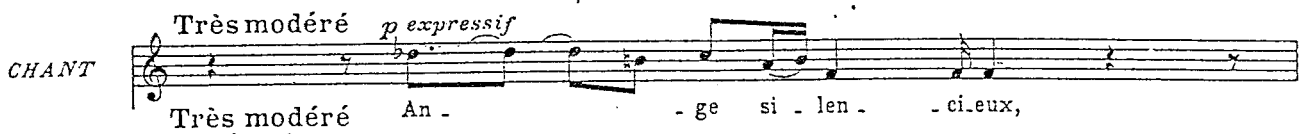
La ville qui dormait, toi, *Harawi I*, b12

The number of dynamic directions increases from the earlier to the later songs. In *Trois Mélodies II* the singer has only three dynamic directives in the total of 13 bars, while in *Harawi I* this changes to 17 instructions within 15 bars. In addition, the instructions become much more specific in *Harawi I*: the singer is not only required to sing phrases quietly, fairly quietly or very quietly, but also to *decrescendo* from *p* on a single sustained note.



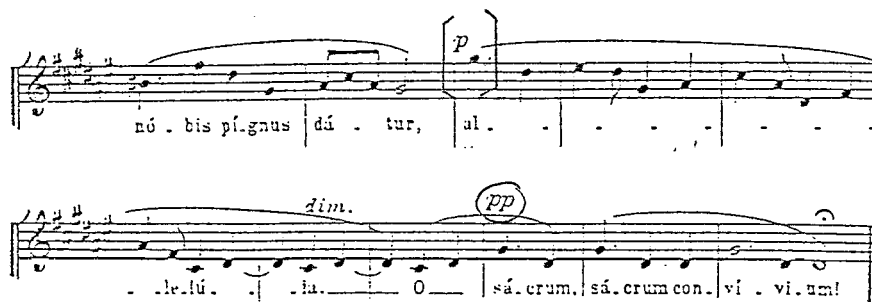
La ville qui dormait, toi, Harawi I, b7

Composed between these two songs was *Antienne du silence* [Anthem to silence], *Chants de Terre et de Ciel II*, in which the dynamic level never varies from *p*. The entire song unfolds quietly and seamlessly with no variation whatsoever in attack or volume.



Antienne du silence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel II, b1

Choirs too are expected to be able to control the dynamic levels of their singing. When listening to Messiaen's first choral work, *O sacrum convivium!*, the overwhelming impression gained is one of tranquillity. Quiet singing is said to be the true test of a good choir and this is what Messiaen demanded here. The motet does reach *mf* and even *f* for four bars at the centre of the work, but the remaining 27 bars are *p* or *pp*. Whilst the climax with its accompanying high notes are *f*, the final alleluia beginning for the sopranos on a G[#]¹³ is to be sung softly - a substantially more difficult feat than the former.



O sacrum convivium!, b25

As with the solo works, the second choral work makes greater demands on the choir in terms of soft singing than the first. *Trois petites liturgies* begins with the full choir singing *pp*

¹³System of notation taken from Karolyi (1967): *Introducing music*. Great Britain: Jarrold & Sons Ltd. Here middle C is referred to as C'.

and proceeds with dynamic instructions for virtually every phrase. The example below is the rather unusual ending of the first movement, in which the women's choir *divisi* sings *ppp*. As before, the high notes to be sung by the first sopranos are soft.

Chœur

pp Mon A - mour, *ppp* Div. en 3. Mon Dieu

Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b36

An extra consideration in the orchestral-choral compositions is the formulation of a sympathetic accompaniment to ensure the preservation of the mood as well as the continued audibility of the voices. There are extended periods of quiet singing in *Trois petites liturgies* which have been carefully orchestrated to fulfil these requirements. *Cinq Rechants* is far less prone to soft and especially very soft singing than any of the other vocal works. Instead it exploits degrees at the other end of the dynamic spectrum. Soft singing here is reserved mostly for those occasions when one group of voices is providing a backing 'accompaniment' to another as seen in this example.

Bien modéré

3 Sopras. *(berceur et tendre)*

1^{er} Contr. Solo *mf* lo - san - gé ma fleur tou - jours philtre Y - seult ra -

3 Tén. 1^{re} *pp* fla - ko fla - ko

3 Basses 1^{re} *pp* fla - ko fla - ko

Cinq Rechants V, b16

Despite the massive conception and vast resources of *La Transfiguration*, soft singing and shades thereof continue to be effectively included in the score. In the section shown here, the second sopranos and second tenors sing the entire phrase, joined at various points by either the first sopranos and first tenors or mezzo-sopranos and baritones. Notice the large leaps in the vocal lines to be sung *ppp* and smoothly.

per pro - pri - am gra - ti - am,

per pro - pri - am gra - ti - am,

per pro - pri - am gra - ti - am,

per pro - pri - am gra - ti - am,

gra - ti - am quae

gra - ti - am vi - ae, quae

gra - ti - am quae

La Transfiguration IX, b64

In the following excerpt the full *La Transfiguration* choir *decrescendos* from *p* to *ppp* in stages. If accurately executed this is a moving moment in the score.

san - cto e - jus.

san - cto e - jus.

La Transfiguration VII, b28

4.2.2 Quiet endings

In terms of soft singing there is a particularly distinctive characteristic of Messiaen's music which evolves from the early songs. Consider the endings of the *Trois Mélodies* given below. In all three cases, the final words are sung quietly, at a low pitch and are separated from the rest of the song by a rest. These prognosticate Messiaen's fondness for a quiet instead of a climactic ending.

quoi? Pour . . . quoi?

pp

Pourquoi?, *Trois Mélodies I*, b24

Ma bouche veut souri.re Et mon sou . ri . re tremble.

ppp

Le sourire, *Trois Mélodies II*, b10

Jé . sus!

pp

8^a b^a!

8^a b^a!

La fiancée perdue, *Trois Mélodies III*, b71

The ending of the *Vocalise* corroborates these observations and accords with such instrumental works as *Apparition de l'Église éternelle*.

Vocalise, b47

Up to this point, however, the melodic material used for the ending has been consistent with that which preceded it. In *Poèmes pour Mi V* a transmutation begins. The volume, speed and melodic contour of the final bars differ from that which has gone before and the ending becomes increasingly separate from the rest of the song - like a little island of repose at the end.

Va — où l'Esprit te mè — ne, Com-me l'Egli — se — est le prolongement —

Très lent
pp mystérieux

Au mouvement
p

Comme l'Eglise est le pro-longe-ment du Christ. —

L'épouse, Poèmes pour Mi V, b9

This separation is more marked in two of the central songs of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, where the contrast between the main body of material in the songs and the endings is striking. The first, *Arc-en-ciel d'innocence* [Rainbow of innocence], a joyous child's play song, 'finishes' with a whoop of joy before the quiet ending. The second, *Minuit pile et face* [Midnight obverse and reverse] is a robust, musical nightmare vision of hell which ends as the father gazes tenderly down at his sleeping child. Perhaps one could even call these 'musical parentheses'¹⁴.

¹⁴A term Griffiths (1978, p15) uses to describe small sections in the music of Boulez' third piano sonata which draw attention to themselves by being different from their immediate musical surrounds.

Rall. - - - molto. (ad lib) a. vec u. netou. te pe. ti. te che. mi. se.

Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel V, b72

Although it cannot be said that the quiet ending of *O sacrum convivium!* is in any way contrasted to the rest of the song, the ending of *Trois petites liturgies* adheres to this formula. The final bars of the first *liturgie* in the example below, are immediately preceded by a bar of silence and before that by loud energetic birdsong on the piano and celesta.

Célésta
Chœur
Piano

Chœur
Mon A - - mour, Mon Dieu.

Onde
Plus lent, très tendre (♩=44), 13

1ers Vons
2es Vons
Altos
Velles
C.B.

Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b137

Et je res-te-rai seul à la mort qui m'enrou-le? - Pè-re des lu-mière-res,

Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel V, b43

per - le, la-vez-vous dans la Vé-ri-té.

Résurrection, Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI, b41b

The first time low pitch is associated with loudness (and the examples are few) is in *Harawi*. It is for an isolated note or two, rather than an extended passage, and used each time as an exclamation. A cry accounts for the first vocal *sfz*, also to be found in *Harawi* and illustrated beneath the former.

Un peu vif
Doun : dou tchil.

Doundou tchil, Harawi IV, b91

Ahil Ahil

L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b28

As one would expect, having widened the range of vocal dynamics by the time he wrote *Harawi*, in that score Messiaen demanded the full spectrum from *f* to *fff*, along with all the gradations from *p* to *pppp*.

The use of loud singing in choral works follows a similar curve to that found in the solo compositions. *O sacrum convivium!* only makes use briefly of *f* and *mf*, while *Trois petites liturgies*, written seven years later and a year before *Harawi*, makes far greater demands on the choir. The third movement, which is overall a loud movement, moves from *fff* in bar 100, down to *ff* bar 104 and then from *ff* to *fff* and finally *ffff* (bars 110-115). This is the loudest dynamic designated for voices by Messiaen. On the other hand, he had indicated

an *ffff* as early as 1932 for the solo violin in *Thème et variations V*, associated as here with high pitch.

Choeur
-té, Mais la por-te qui -parle et le so-leil qui

Choeur
s'ou- - - - -vre, L'au - ré - o - le

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b100

Choeur
Mais le face à face

Choeur
et l'A - - - - -mour.

(cresc. molto)

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b110

In *La Transfiguration* a swell in the sound from *f* to *ff* is created by adding extra voices at the crucial point in the phrase and then omitting them to achieve the decline to *mf*. This is obviously a device at the composer's disposal only in the choral works.

Sopr.
il - lu - xe - - - - - runt!

Mezzos.
il - lu - xe - - - - - runt!

Contr.
il - lu - xe - - - - - runt!

Tén.
il - lu - xe - - - - - runt!

Baryt.
il - lu - xe - - - - - runt!

Basses
il - lu - xe - - - - - runt!

La Transfiguration III, b44

As with quiet singing, Messiaen expected degrees of loudness to be shaded into phrases by a choir.

Chœur
Vous — ê-tes loin. — Vous — ê-tes près, — Vous — ê-tes loin. — Vous ê-tes la lumie -

Chœur
- - - - re et les té - nè - bres, Vous ê-tes si compliqué et si simple, Vous ê -

CTASC. *ff* *mf* *ppp* *CTASC. molto*

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b129

Although *sfz*'s and *ff*'s had become relatively commonplace in his vocal works by *Cinq Rechants*, one still encounters novelty. The fifth movement contains what can only be described as an enormous accent for the first and second tenors. He notated it, as can be seen below, as *sfffff!*

fff (furieux) *sfffff!*

Co-rol-le qui mord deu - xiè-me garde à man-ger d'a-bord Ha

fff (furieux) *sfffff!*

Co-rol-le qui mord deu - xiè-me garde à man-ger d'a-bord Ha

Cinq Rechants V, b47

Another different aspect encountered in *Cinq Rechants* is voices singing simultaneously at different degrees of loudness. In order to weight the importance of the lines, the first soprano in this example is to be a shade louder than the second and third sopranos. Observe too, the meticulously placed accents, the *sfz* and the *decrescendo* sign at the end of the phrase.

1^{er} Sopr.
ma_yo_ma ssa_ri ssa_ri man(e) thi - kâ - ri

2^e Sopr.
ma_yo_ma ssa_ri ssa_ri man(e) thi - kâ - ri

f *sfz* *sf*

Cinq Rechants III, b14

The degree of latitude any singer or chorister has in interpreting the music dynamically decreases as one progresses through the oeuvre. It is interesting to note further, that from

Poèmes pour Mi onwards the instructions for *p* and *f* are often accompanied with descriptive words. Hence one finds:

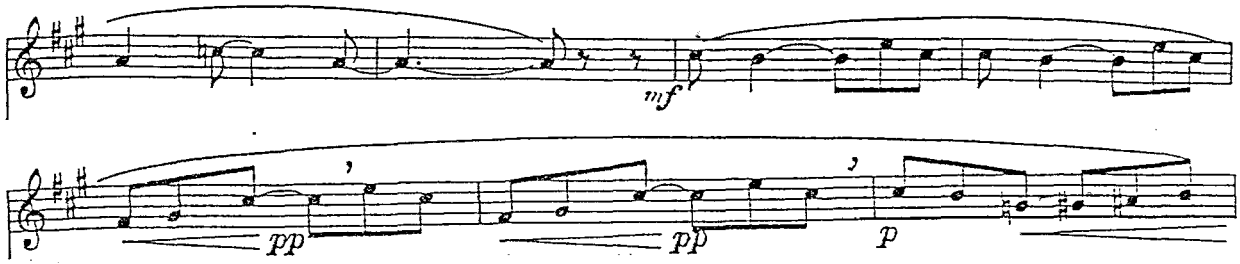
<i>mf expressif, avec une joie sereine (Poèmes pour Mi I):</i>	expressive, with serene joy
<i>mf gracieux (Poèmes pour Mi II):</i>	gracious
<i>mf haletant et plaintif (Poèmes pour Mi IV):</i>	breathless and pleading
<i>f très ému, très expressif (Harawi XII):</i>	very emotional, very expressive
<i>f vigoureux (Cinq Rechants V):</i>	vigorous
<i>f souple (Cinq Rechants V):</i>	supple
<i>ff passioné, intense (Harawi IX):</i>	passionate, intense
<i>ff joyeux (Cinq Rechants IV):</i>	joyously
<i>fff cri (Harawi XI):</i>	cry
<i>fff furieux (Cinq Rechants I):</i>	furiously
<i>p avec charme (Poèmes pour Mi VI):</i>	with charm
<i>p expressif (Chants de Terre et de Ciel II):</i>	expressively
<i>p très expressif (Harawi VIII):</i>	very expressively
<i>p vague (Cinq Rechants II):</i>	vague
<i>p souple et caressant (Cinq Rechants III):</i>	supple and caressing
<i>pp mystérieux (Poèmes pour Mi V; Cinq Rechants V):</i>	mysterious
<i>pp joyeux (Poèmes pour Mi IX):</i>	joyously

Messiaen's emotional instructions are by no means rare in the twentieth century vocal repertoire. It would appear that as conventional 'sung' vocal production and pitched melodies decrease in importance, emotional indications in the score increase. Berio's *Sequenza* (1966), which lasts about seven and a half minutes and explores a wide variety of sounds and means of producing them, contains 44 emotional instructions!

4.2.4 Dynamic gradations

A glance at Messiaen's early songs confirms that, in terms of dynamic gradations, they are not significantly different from numerous other songs written by composers of either a contemporary or an earlier period. A particular level of sound tends to persist through a section of the music rather than merely over a solitary phrase and when there is a change it is to a closely related level i.e. *mf* to *f* or *p* to *pp*. The most noticeable 'special effects' required of the singer are the *decrescendo* on a single *p* note in *Trois Mélodies I* and a *decrescendo* on a single *f* note in *La mort du nombre*. Such effects are the exception rather

than the rule at this stage. An increase in the number of dynamic changes occurs first in the central section of the *Vocalise*.



Vocalise, b17

Although progressively shaded, the consistent marking of virtually every phrase in *Poèmes pour Mi I*, shows a new and increasing concern by Messiaen with dynamic accuracy in his songs. It would appear that the dynamics became part of his initial conception of the songs. In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* performance of the designated dynamics becomes particularly taxing for the singer because they are no longer confined to a progression in a general direction. Instead, in an attempt to convey the changing moods within the songs, the dynamics of juxtaposed phrases may be directly contrasting, as seen in the next example.

Danse du bébé-Pilule, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III*, b22

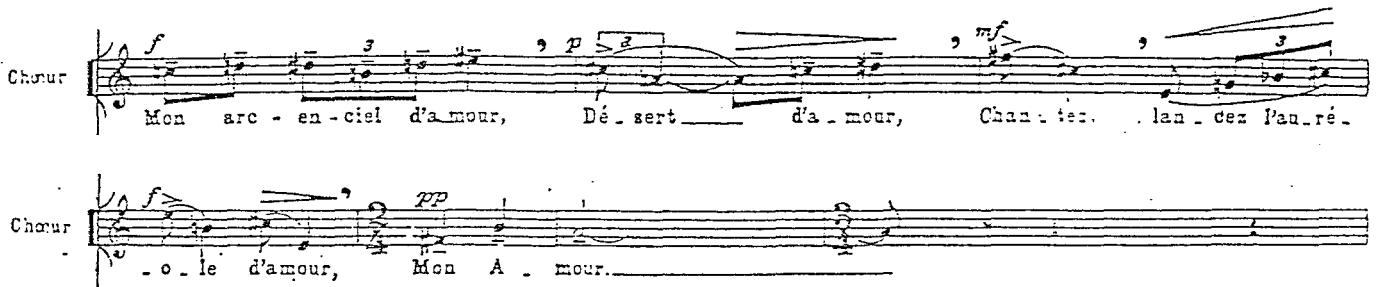
Harawi continues to be extremely detailed in terms of dynamic markings and persists with the merciless changes from phrase to phrase embarked on in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*. As early as *La mort du nombre*, Messiaen wrote a *pp* phrase adjacent to an *ff* one, but had not expected a solitary singer to cope with the abrupt change. Compare that with this rather harrowing example for a soloist from *Harawi*. Berio applies similar quick changes to the dynamic levels of the speaker's part in his *Sinfonia III: 'In ruhig fließender Bewegung'* (1968),

but those fluctuations sound more like someone randomly twiddling a volume control knob than expressing intense emotion as in the Messiaen example.



Katchikatchi les étoiles, Harawi XI, b26

O sacrum convivium! does not make many demands on the choir in terms of changing dynamics. It is evident in the later choral works though, that in order to portray Messiaen's intent, the choirs will have to absorb the dynamics as assiduously as the pitches and rhythmic values. Not all the phrases of *Trois petites liturgies* are as changeable as those in the first example, or have the extremes of the second, but virtually every phrase has at least one dynamic instruction.



Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b26



Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b133

Note the nuances in this opening phrase of *Cinq Rechants* which, the composer stressed in his notes at the beginning of the score, are to be carried out exactly.



Cinq Rechants I, b1

In *La Transfiguration* the comprehension of the words is assisted by the faithful interpretation of the many dynamic variances in the score. In these few bars Messiaen attempted to communicate the mystery and wonder of the word 'transfigured' by beginning *ppp*, growing to *p* and then to *f* for the melisma (see also section 7.8.2 on word painting).

[4] Très lent (♩ = 20)

[5] Un peu vif (♩ = 80)

La Transfiguration I, b29

Perhaps it is as well for singers that Messiaen committed nothing vocal to paper in the early 1950's. This was a period during which he experimented with the application of serial techniques to attack, dynamic and duration, in addition to pitch. In *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités*, the piano composition of 1949-50, a series of seven intensities from *ppp* to *fff* is distributed through three groups of 12-note pitch series yielding rows like the following.

Mode de valeurs et d'intensités

(The various separate series are quoted in the preface to the work.)

4.3 Tempo

The speed indication at the head of *Trois Mélodies I*, *très modéré* [very moderate] often features in Messiaen's vocal music, sometimes with minor variations: *modéré*, *bien modéré* and *modéré un peu vif*. In the initial example, the tempo is maintained throughout the song with no change. The same applies to the *lent* direction for the next song. *Trois Mélodies III* is the first song with any speed alteration and it occurs between two large, contrasted and separate sections. The first 50 bars are *vif* [fast] and the last 19 *modéré*. *La mort du nombre*

treats tempo in the same way confining differences to points where there are changes in vocalist and section. The soprano begins by singing softly and slowly in 4/4 time with a treble, chordal accompaniment. The tenor takes over *animé* with a 3/4 lower-pitched, scalar accompaniment. The differentiation is clear.

1^{re} AÏME (Soprano)
Lent *pp* Rall.
L'eau derman.te ne fuit pas la fleur, la fleur quila re.gar - de

Lent *pp* Rall.

Animé 2^{me} AÏME *mf*
Animé *mf*
Je veux m'ap - pro - cher. Quel - le for - ce in - vi - si -

mf *dr*

La mort du nombre, b37

The *Vocalise*, described as *lent avec charme*, has the first more subtle alteration in speed with a vocal *rall.* over three notes in the middle section. With *Poèmes pour Mi* this conservative attitude to tempo markings begins to change. In this cycle a number of tempo markings are to be found within each song and, as with the dynamic markings, Messiaen began to expand the range. *Vif* and *lent* co-exist with *très vif* and *très lent*. In the central section of *Poèmes pour Mi I*, as the song progresses towards the alleluistic vocalise, each phrase has its own tempo indication. Here too is the first progressive acceleration in tempo: *pressez*.

[Presque lent] *pp* [Pressez] [Modéré]
Et dans un Pain plus doux que la fraîcheur des é - toi -

Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi I, b40

By *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, some of the speed directives also contain mood hints. In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III*, *vif* becomes *vif et joyeux* and in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel V*, *lent* is *lent et berceur*. As may have been anticipated in this cycle, the numerous dynamic changes commonly favour attendant changes of tempo. The constant vicissitude makes performance physically and mentally taxing.

[Pressez beaucoup] [Poco rall.] [Au mouv^t] *ff*

gueill Ri-re, ai-gui-se-toi,

ri-re, a-va-le-toi: *ff* [Moins vif, ad libitum] [Rall.>]

ces flambeaux sont des montagnes de

Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel V, b32

The single-movement choral work, *O sacrum convivium!*, like the slightly earlier single-movement organ work, *Apparition de l'Église éternelle*, contributes little in the way of tempo variation and maintains a slow dignified tempo throughout. The stillness of these compositions is nevertheless worthy of comment. As mentioned in passing in section 4.2.1 this excessive slowness is entirely characteristic of Messiaen. There are few multi-movement works by him which pass without at least one such static movement.

In *Trois petites liturgies*, Messiaen not only altered speeds through the composition, but provided a metronome marking for almost every indication. *Modéré* in the first movement, for example, is 84 quavers to the minute and *modéré, presque vif, énergique* in the third is 112 crochets to the minute. The *plus lent très tendre* in the first movement which lasts only a bar, and even two bars of silence at the end of movement II are given metronome times!

Plus lent, très tendre (♩=44) (A tempo (♩=84))

Célésta

Vibr.

Tam-Tam

Chœur

- o - le d'a - mour, Mon A - mour.

ff

pp

pp

f

Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b132

(A tempo (♩=160)) (Moins vif (♩=132))

Célésta

Chœur

Pour nous, Pour nous, Pour nous!

8

ff

Séquence du Verbe, Cantique Divin, Trois petites liturgies II, b287

Obviously such instructions as *ralentir peu à peu* cannot be given a metronome marking, but the outer limits of the slowing down are defined: i.e. *un peu moins vif* begins at bar 70 (crochet=100) and at bar 111 the *ralentir* begins followed by a *rall. molto* and then the *a tempo* with the precise indication again. Perhaps the exactness of these markings is a consequence of the number of performers involved in the work. It is also an indication of the precise idea in the composer's mind.

The piano work *Vingt regards* followed *Trois petites liturgies* in 1944 and Messiaen again, consistently and doggedly, wrote in metronome markings for every tempo change. One wonders why he subsequently forsook this procedure in *Harawi*, which shows much further experimentation with extremes of speed, wide variations and more frequent tempo changes than heard thus far in a vocal work. The *lent* and *très lent* of the preceding works become *extrêmement lent* in *Harawi I*, with the addition of the emotive *en rêve*. The singer needs masterly breath and tone control to sustain the intense slowness of this song. This *extrêmement lent* reappears in the final movement of *La Transfiguration* to create a

movement of extravagant grandeur, which must rate as one of the slowest pieces in the entire choral repertoire. The progression of chords is so slow as to be almost pointillistic and the 76 bars take approximately seven and a quarter minutes to perform (National Symphony Orchestra recording, 1990, DECCA).

In *Harawi VIII* the opposite end of the range is explored and the singer begins *modéré un peu vif*, then has to *pressez* and finally *pressez beaucoup* to a frenzied speed. The macro-structure of *Harawi VIII* is sectional and each division bears its own tempo indication. Because some sections, obviously with their accompanying tempos, are repeated, tempo indications are dictated by the form of the song. Form governs the changes of speed in *Cinq Rechants* as well, because every movement is built on the structure of repeating *chants* and *rechants*.

Unlike the other late choral works, *Cinq Rechants* bears no metronome markings. Presumably the reason for this is the absence of orchestral accompaniment because the instructions reappear in *La Transfiguration*. There are nevertheless many tempo variations within each movement of *Cinq Rechants* which demand consensus and co-operation within the singing group. Observe the subtle alterations illustrated below: at bar 18 of the second movement, the full choir is to *rall. molto*, then *a tempo* to *modéré*, *rall. molto* again and then proceed *vif gai*. Notice the use of the subjective word *gai* [bright] to assist in the interpretation of the tempo.

so - lo de fi - te ber - ce les qua - tre lé - zar(ds) en t'é - loi - gnant ma - y

so - lo de fi - te ber - ce les qua - tre lé - zar(ds) en t'é - loi - gnant ma - y

ber - ce les qua - tre lé - zar(ds) en t'é - loi - gnant ma - y

Cinq Rechants II, b18

As mentioned above, Messiaen resumed his painstaking metronome instructions with every tempo change in *La Transfiguration*. The following example from the opening recitative portends what is to come in the remainder of the score.

The musical score is divided into two main sections. The first section, marked with a box containing the number 3, is titled "Modéré (♩ = 112)" and "Un peu vif (♩ = 132)". It features two staves for Tenors (1^{ers} and 2^{es}) and two staves for Sopranos (1^{ers} and 2^{es}). The tempo changes from Modéré to Un peu vif and back to Modéré. The lyrics are: "As - sump - sit Je - sus Pe - trum, et Ja - co - bum, et Jo - an - nem fra - trem e - jus, et du - xit il - los in mon - tem ex - cel - sum se - or - sum: et,". The second section, marked with a box containing the number 4, is titled "Très lent (♩ = 20)". It features two staves for Sopranos and two staves for Tenors. The lyrics are: "et trans - fi - gu - et trans - fi - gu -". The tempo is marked "Très lent" with a metronome marking of 20 quarter notes per minute. The dynamics range from *mf* to *ppp* and *p*.

La Transfiguration I, b13

The confusing aspect of this procedure is that the same verbal terminology does not always represent the same metronome markings. *Modéré* in *La Transfiguration* ranges from 112 semiquavers to the minute as in the above example, to 80 quavers, 144 semiquavers, 120 quavers, 66 quavers and back to 80 quavers within the space of 14 pages of the score and this does not include the variations like *bien modérés* or *très modérés*. This creates quite a task for the conductor!

Modéré (♩ = 80)

Modéré (♩ = 144)

Modéré (♩ = 120)

Modéré (♩ = 66)

☐ Bien modéré (♩ = 80)

La Transfiguration II, b10, 51, 74, 98, 115 & 120

No extra resources of speed are required from the *La Transfiguration* vocalists -there is a *vif* (quaver=192) indication, but this is for an instrument. By comparison the fastest speed in *Trois petites liturgies* is *crochet*=112 (*modéré, presque vif, énergique*). The range of slowness used by the choir is, as indicated above, extended to a new *très lent* of quaver=20, while the slowest indication in *Trois petites liturgies* is *semiquaver*=66 (*très lent, très soutenu*).

Even more than in previous works, the immense score of *La Transfiguration* is saturated with tempo indications. Interestingly, and possibly in deference to the greater austerity of this work, there are no supplementary descriptive words.

4.4 Changes of mood within a song

Messiaen is rare amongst vocal composers in that many of his songs contain material which is highly contrasted. Particularly in some of the later ones, completely separate sections co-exist within a song in the manner of some of the Schumann character pieces for piano.

The earliest songs are largely straightforward 'single mood' songs. Naturally changes of mood occur in the small quasi-narrative cantata *La mort du nombre*, but contrasted material is always sung by the other characterised soul. Neither individual is required to generate a new mood in mid-song or mid-section. Even *Poèmes pour Mi* with its multifarious experimentation does not really cultivate this aspect. *Poèmes pour Mi I* does change half way through from recitation to vocalise, but these are both techniques related to plainsong.

The first time Messiaen dabbled with this notion was comparatively early in his composing

career, in *Trois Melodies III*. The first 49 bars of the song contain a joyous outpouring of what his fiancée means to him and the last 19 bars, a prayer. The fast loud leaps of the initial melody are replaced in the second section with quiet step-wise motion. Assisted also by changes of tempo and dynamic, the soloist is required to alter the mood of the song from exuberance to reverential contemplation. This concurs with Messiaen's instrumental composing: *Combat de la Mort et de la Vie, Les Corps Glorieux IV*, presents the struggle between Life and Death and the turbulent music representing the struggle is replaced at the end of the piece by sublime, peaceful music as Life triumphs and reigns. Although he subsequently used a palindromic form for some songs, thereby ensuring that the material from the beginning of the song be heard again at the end, this is by no means habitual. There are many songs, like *Trois Mélodies III*, in which the contrasting material is heard only once at the end.

Vif

blanc comme une ai

La fiancée perdue, Trois Mélodies III, b37

Modéré

O Jé . . . sus,

La fiancée perdue, Trois Mélodies III, b55

It was not until the second song cycle written eight years later, that Messiaen returned to this idea and he no longer limited himself to only two moods in a song. It appears that he applied to his composing the Surrealistic *modus operandi* of generating a variety of different thoughts from a single stimulus. The freely associated images that filtered into his consciousness were expressed most noticeably in some of the songs evocative of childhood. In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel V* there is a dance, a lullaby and repeated notes chiming the time like bells. *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III* seen below, contains a nursery-rhyme-like refrain, laughter and recitative-like story-telling.

Vif et joyeux

CHANT

Pi . lu . le, viens, dan . sons. . . Ma . lon . lan . lai . ne, ma . Fi . cel . les du so .

Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, b1

Vir et joyeux

plus dé-li-ci-eu-se-ment? — Le vent sur tes o-

Detailed description: A single line of musical notation in treble clef. The first part is marked 'pp' and has a slur over it. The second part is marked 'mf'. The lyrics are 'plus dé-li-ci-eu-se-ment?' followed by a long dash, and 'Le vent sur tes o-'.

Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, b87

ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

Detailed description: A single line of musical notation in treble clef. The notes are marked with accents (>). The lyrics are 'ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!'.

Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, b120b

The ideas are not explored at any great length, a few lines or bars at most. The capricious style of the clarinet part in *Quatour pour la fin du temps III*, written two years after *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, resembles the childhood songs in this respect. This brevity changes with *Harawi* where the material incorporated into any one song may be continued for longer periods, but the material becomes increasingly diverse. In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, the most antithetical contrasts are lyricism, recitation and conversation. In *Harawi IV*, dance song co-exists with lullaby, lyricism and rhapsodic vocalisation. *Harawi VIII* contains an even wider variety of material: lyricism, chant, animal cries and ululations, sometimes with as little as a semiquaver rest between contrasts.

CHANT

Très modéré
p très expressif

(pour 2)
3

Co - lom - be, co - lom - be ver - te, Le

Syllabes, Harawi VIII, b1

Detailed description: A single line of musical notation in treble clef. The tempo is 'Très modéré' and the dynamics are 'p très expressif'. There is a '3' (triple) marking over a group of notes. The lyrics are 'Co - lom - be, co - lom - be ver - te, Le'.

Kah! pi - pas. mahi. pi - pas.

Syllabes, Harawi VIII, b15

Detailed description: A single line of musical notation in treble clef. The dynamics are 'f'. The lyrics are 'Kah! pi - pas. mahi. pi - pas.'

tchil. Pia pia pia pia pia pia pia doun - dou tchil tchil

Syllabes, Harawi VIII, b78

Detailed description: A single line of musical notation in treble clef. The lyrics are 'tchil. Pia pia pia pia pia pia pia doun - dou tchil tchil'.

O — o — fleu - ris .. sous de l'eau, Pi - rout - cha mi - al!

Syllabes, Harawi VIII, b51

Detailed description: A single line of musical notation in treble clef. The lyrics are 'O — o — fleu - ris .. sous de l'eau, Pi - rout - cha mi - al!'.

In the choral-orchestral works there are no adjacent contrasts of such a radical nature as those to be found in *Harawi*. Whilst the movements of *Trois petites liturgies* are certainly sectional, the variety of material is more modest. *Cinq Rechants* on the other hand, shows a great affinity with *Harawi*. In fact, here Messiaen took the principle a step further and actually combined different styles so that they happen not only in adjacent blocks, but also occasionally simultaneously. The first *rechant* juxtaposes ululations, lyrical material, chants, percussive sounds, ironic laughter and also, as seen below, combines chant with lyrical singing and percussive sounds.

The musical score is for the first *rechant* of *Cinq Rechants I*, page 71. It features four vocal parts: Soprano (3 Soprs.), Contralto (3 Contr.), Tenor (3 Tén.), and Basses (3 Basses). The Soprano part begins with a first ending (*1^{er}*) and a second ending (*2^e*), marked *pp* and *mf* respectively. The lyrics are: "re - - tour - - mi - - roir d'é - toi". The Contralto part has lyrics: "- - ta - - ma ha - yo - ma ka - pri - - ta - ma". The Tenor part includes percussive notation: "t k t k t k t k t k t k t k t". The Basses part has lyrics: "de la sep - tiè - me por - - te Ha ka - pri - ta - ma". The score is in 2/2 time and includes dynamic markings and articulation symbols.

Cinq Rechants I, b71

4.5 Subsidiary/dual role for the voice

Messiaen began his vocal oeuvre in traditional fashion with works in which the voice clearly reigns supreme and is accompanied by an instrument(s). In *La mort du nombre* he experimented with a vocal-instrumental duet and devoted a substantial portion of the final aria to the violin and soprano together accompanied by the piano. The two 'protagonists' complement and support one another, but neither appears to dominate. Richard Strauss, in *Beim Schlafengehen* from the *Four Last Songs* (1946), also linked the soprano voice and violin. Although in Strauss' song the two do not 'sing' a duet, there is a violin solo between verses two and three similar in character to the violin solo with which Messiaen concluded *La mort du nombre*. An excerpt from Messiaen's violin-voice duet is shown here.

- lan - - - ce - - - vers - - - des - - - clar - - -

La mort du nombre, b147

Such a close alliance between voice and instrument does not recur until *Chants de Terre et de Ciel II*. In the intervening eight years and twelve songs, Messiaen consistently treated the voice as a soloist with accompanying instrument in the Romantic sense: the instrumental part colours and sets the scene or mood for the voice, but it is always the singer who remains sovereign. By contrast, given the following 4-line stave from the middle of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel II* where the text is confined to a single melismatic syllable, it is difficult to isolate which line is intended for the voice. There is no separate accompaniment to the intricate web of sound created. Each part moves with a complete lack of the harmonic, melodic and rhythmic accord which prevails even in contrapuntal music. Note the notation of the heterophonic strands on different staves to facilitate reading and to underline the independence and equality of the parts. This 'impartial' treatment of voice and instrument is comparable to Boulez's contralto voice/alto flute duo in *Le marteau sans maître III* (1953). It is a point worth making however, that in a work using voice, Messiaen never chose to omit the singer(s) for extended periods, or even entire movements, in the way that Boulez did.

(m.g.) (m.d.) (m.g.) (m.d.)

Antienne du silence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel II, b8

Sometimes Messiaen conferred an equal status on voice and instrument in a different way. In this example from *Trois petites liturgies* voice and instruments share a phrase. The total

melodic *ostinato* consists of 10 notes. Only the instruments however, consistently sound all 10 notes, while the voices 'drop' in and out of the pattern.

ff (chanté)
Le successif vous est si - mal - né, Dans ces es - paces et ces temps que vous a - vez créés, Sa - tel - li - tes de vo - tre Dou - ceur.

ff

6^e basse

13

ff

24

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b7

In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel V*, Messiaen took this idea one step further and elevated the formerly accompanying partner to the role of soloist for a few bars, while the voice assumes a subservient role. The section shown is intended as a type of *danse macabre* and is introduced by the piano alone. Note that where the voice enters, it is *p* and has no melodic interest, whereas the piano continues with the soft but accented and mobile melody. This 'savage and brutal dance' idea obviously intrigued him as it occurs again in the two-piano *Visions de l'Amen II* (Messiaen: sleeve notes to EMI recording).

Même mouvement

Même mouvement

ff

p

8^a bassa

p

Ils dan . sent, mes péchés dan . sent!

p staccato sempre

cresc.

Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel V, b12

In *Harawi IV* where large sections are devoted to simulating another primitive dance, the piano again plays the dance, but this time the voice is deprived both of narrative words and tuneful melody, and is reduced to making accompanying noises on a single pitch. The onomatopoeic words *doundou tchil*, are meant to represent the sound made by the ankle beads of Peruvian traditional dancers. The style continues for 19 bars at either end of the song and is really a piano solo with vocal accompaniment.

ff

Dound.dou tchil. Dound.dou tchil.

ff

fff

Doundou tchil, Harawi IV, b74

The vocal accompaniment in *Répétition planétaire* [Planetary repetition], *Harawi VI*, has added complexities. To begin with the voice chants a formula of 'nonsense' words on one pitch in a repeating tala. The piano part also repeats, but has greater melodic and rhythmic interest than the vocal part. The careful instructions to the pianist ensure that the attention of the listener becomes focused primarily on the instrumental part.

pp
Ma - pa, na - ma, ma - pa na - ma li - la, tchil.

(très lié, lointain)

pp
(timbre noir et profond, comme une clarinette basse)

Répétition planétaire, Harawi VI, b18b

Further on in the song when, according to the dictates of form, the section re-appears, Messiaen reverted to the same style of busy piano part and accompanying chanting voice. For the first time though, rhythmic complexities were added to the accompanying vocal part.

pam - pahi - ka - ma,doun - dou tchil _____ tchil _____

Répétition planétaire, Harawi VI, b72

In *Cinq Rechants* the voice is both soloist and accompanying instrument and Messiaen's ingenious ways of contriving this will be fully explored in Chapter 5. In *La Transfiguration*

This dearth of unaccompanied singing continues through all the other solo and choral numbers until *Cinq Rechants*. Here, possibly as a means of providing the variety necessary to sustain an unaccompanied choral work of these dimensions, Messiaen reverted to the lone voice of monody. On some occasions, the solo line is sung by one person, such as that with which the first two movements commence (example (i)) or it may be a line sung in unison by a group. The second example below, from the fourth movement, uses all 12 voices together.

(i)

Bien modéré
mf

1^{er} CONTRALTO
 ma pre-mière fois terre terre l'éventail déployé

Cinq Rechants II, b1

(ii)

à 3
 3 Sopr.
 palalan(e) soukî les volets roses O_ha amour amour du clair au sombre Oha

à 3
 3 Contr.
 palalan(e) soukî les volets roses O_ha amour amour du clair au sombre Oha

à 3
 3 Tén.
 palalan(e) soukî les volets roses O_ha amour amour du clair au sombre Oha

1^{re}
 Basse
 palalan(e) soukî les volets roses O_ha amour amour du clair au sombre Oha

2^e et 3^e
 Basses
 palalan(e) soukî les volets roses ha amour amour du clair au sombre ha

Cinq Rechants IV, b57

It is in *La Transfiguration* that Messiaen returned to the unaccompanied single vocal line, exploiting it extensively and over longer periods than before. Entire sections of Scripture are communicated to the listener at regular intervals in this fashion. It is interesting to pause at this point and consider why Messiaen chose this style for this composition. Mellers (quoted by Bray, 1974, p108) observes that by the rhythmic fluidity, absence of cadential finality and lack of regular metrical accents common in monodic music, the singer conveys

an impression of oneness with the Universe. It is therefore often to be found in music of a religious nature, both Eastern and Western. Given the text of *La Transfiguration*, it is fitting that this is the composition in which one finds the most consistent use of unaccompanied unison singing. Observe though, that the vocal writing differs from that used in earlier recitatory passages (shown in the first example), in that pitch content is generally more varied.

mf
E-bran-lez la so-li-tai-re, la vieil-le mon-ta-gne de dou-leur, Que le so-leil tra-vail-le

Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi IX, b7

3 Modéré (♩ = 112) Un peu vif (♩ = 132)
[Ténors] 1^{ers} 2^{es} *mf* *p*
As - sump - sit Je - sus Pe - trum, - et Ja -
La Transfiguration I, b13

Most often the monody in *La Transfiguration* is voiced, as above, by groups within the large choir, but on two occasions a solo baritone carries the entire recitative unaccompanied.

[un Baryton solo] bap - tis - mo quam in Trans - fi - gu - ra - ti - o - ne,

La Transfiguration IX, b219

4.7 Pitched phonemes

With *Poèmes pour Mi IV*, Messiaen embarked on yet another innovatory route: the use of phonemes to convey activity or wordless emotion. The song *Poèmes pour Mi IV* is a vision of hell and the singer is to sing the 'ha's which frame the song in a breathless and panting manner. If followed, these instructions produce a most convincing vocal impression of torment and distress.

Vif
mf *haletant et plaintif*
CHANT ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha,
Épouvante, Poèmes pour Mi IV, b1

The anguish is enhanced by the dissonance of these loud chordal 'ha's sung by the choir in *Cinq Rechants I*. Griffiths (1985, p142) speculates that Messiaen was making attempts to return human vocalisation to two primitive functions: conveying emotion without words; and binding individuals rhythmically in a corporate event. This and other examples support this theory.

(*furieux*)

1^{re} et 2^e Sopr. *fff* ha ha ha ha ha ha soif _____

3^e Sopr. *fff* ha ha ha ha ha ha soif _____ (*souple*)

3 Contr. *fff* ha ha ha ha ha ha soif _____ à 3 *f* l'ex_plo_ra_teur Or -

1^{er} et 2^e Tén. *fff* ha ha ha ha ha ha soif _____

3^e Tén. *fff* ha ha ha ha ha ha soif _____

3 Basses *fff* ha ha ha ha ha ha soif _____ à 3 *f* l'ex_plo_ra_teur Or -

Cinq Rechants I, b13

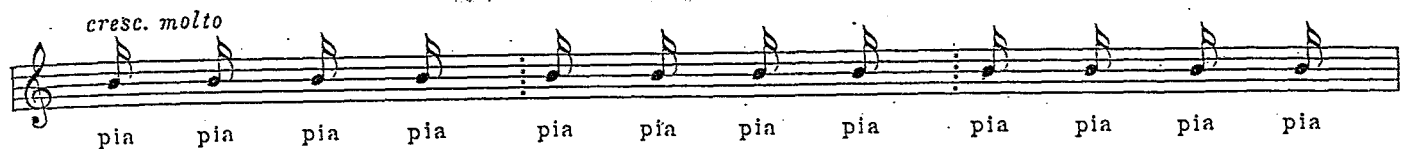
The 'ha's are used again in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, but more conventionally to conclude this song with joyful laughter.

ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, b120b

Messiaen advanced his experimentation in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III* by using nonsense words to create a happy nursery-rhyme-like refrain: *Malonalaine ma*. The use of the invented onomatopoeic word *doundou tchil* in *Harawi* has already been mentioned in the context of 'vocal supremacy'. It is a clever extension of the earlier use of such onomatopoeic words as: *frappe*, *tappe*, *choque* [beat, knock, strike], found in *Poèmes pour Mi IX*, which suggest the activities associated with them. *Harawi* is an engrossing source of such inventiveness on Messiaen's part. *Syllabes* [Syllables], *Harawi VIII*, alludes to a legend in

which a Peruvian prince was saved from disaster by the warning cries of a pack of monkeys. The singer is required for part of the song, to simulate the cries made by these animals. Messiaen gave precise instructions to the vocalist in order to achieve the desired result: *presque parle, très sec, en faisant claquer chaque syllabe* [almost speaking, very thin/ sharp/ hard, with a rotten crack on every syllable]. The syllable to be repeated, *pia*, has a prolonged vowel sound and elementary experimentation will reveal the imaginative monkey-like effect this reiteration produces. The *pias* continue for 21 bars at an average of nine *pias* per bar: about 189 *pias* - and that is only one section of the song. To add to the impact Messiaen built up both speed and volume dramatically through the repetitions. Significantly, in all the songs thus far, the voice retains a singable line in various places i.e. the voice is never reduced in any one song to purely 'making noises'.



Syllabes, Harawi VIII, b96

Messiaen expanded on many of these ideas in *Cinq Rechants* by formulating his own language. It resembles Sanskrit and Quechua, and enabled him to create sounds which corresponded to the qualities of rhythm and register he sought. In his own words, each syllable was selected for the...

"...gentleness or violence of its attack; for its aptitude in giving prominence to musical rhythms. They permit the smooth blending of four elements; phonetic (timbre), dynamics (intensities), kinetic (accents) and quantitative (durations)" (Messiaen: sleeve notes to Philips ABL-3400.1 recording of *Cinq Rechants*).

The success with which he achieved these aims is evident from the following phrases. The first line below opens the work. Apart from the aural effect, the physical sensation of producing the *lalila* semiquavers is pleasurable, creating a distinctly sensuous introduction. An analogous effect is briefly and surprisingly encountered in Martinu's cantata, *Bouquet of Flowers* (1937). In the movement called *Cowgirls*, the female soloists produce a similar *Hayo* sound against a background of choral humming.

34 Soprano Solo

Cinq Rechants I, b1

Some of the inventions are particularly catchy when coupled to fast-moving rhythms. In this example, the phrase is used antiphonally to form the entire *rechant* of movement two.

Vif, gai

3 Sopr. *à 3 ff* ma - yo - ma ka - pri - ta - ma ssa - ri

3 Contr. *à 3 ff* ma - yo - ma ka - pri - ta - ma ssa - ri - mâ

3 Tén. *à 3 ff* ma - yo - ma ka - pri - ta - ma ssa - ri

3 Basses *à 3 ff* ma - yo - ma ka - pri - ta - ma ssa - ri - mâ

Cinq Rechants II, b23

The less vigorous examples are as effective in their way as the animated ones. A somnolent effect is generated by the rolling monotone of these phonemes.

Modéré (*monotone*)

Contr. *à 3 p* ro - ma ta - ma ta - ma ta - ma ro - ma ta - ma ta - ma ta - ma ssou - ka ra - va kâ - li vâ - li

Tén. *à 3 p* rava kâli vâli roma tama tama tama roma tama tama tama

Cinq Rechants IV, b11

The unusual sounds in the bars below provide a quiet accompaniment to the tender lyricism of the contralto soloist.

(*berceur et tendre*)

1^{er} Contr. Solo *mf* lo - san - gé ma fleur tou - jours philtre Y - seult ra -

3 Tén. *1^{er} pp* fla - ko fla - ko

3 Basses *1^{er} pp* fla - ko fla - ko

Cinq Rechants V, b16

The phonemes in movement three are particularly evocative if it may be assumed that the movement represents the physical consummation of love. The following bars make up the couplet which is extended with new material on each repetition to build the music to the shout of triumph in its final stages.

The musical score consists of five staves, each with a vocal line and the lyrics "yo - ma" repeated five times. The staves are labeled as follows:

- 1^{re} et 2^e Contr. (1st and 2nd Contraltos)
- 3^e Contr. (3rd Contralto)
- 1^{er} et 2^e Tén. (1st and 2nd Tenors)
- 3^e Tén. (3rd Tenor)
- 3 Basses (3 Basses)

The score includes musical notation with various accidentals and dynamics. The dynamics "cresc. molto" are written above the first four staves. The instruction "à 3" is written above the fifth staff. The time signature is 2/4.

Cinq Rechants III, b83

After *Cinq Rechants*, Messiaen retreated to a more conservative stance in communicating the message of *La Transfiguration*. This was a consistent feature of Messiaen's composing. The uncovering of a new technique or method never guaranteed its re-appearance in his subsequent works unless he felt it to be particularly relevant. His successful and seminal experimentations with serialism in *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* (1949) for example, were not pursued by him in later works. In the same way, these Artuadesque vocalisations, ingenious and exciting though they were, did not form a prominent part of his future output. The use of pitched phonemes, albeit in a most imaginative way, is limited in *La Transfiguration* to an occasional 'ah', in the manner of Debussy's wordless *Sirènes*, *Nocturnes III* (1897). Messiaen's application of the single sung syllable in *La Transfiguration* is brief and contrived with graphic intent. The following occasions show five of the different ways in which he used the feature. The first excerpt is a dramatic rendition of Psalm 77:19: "the lightnings lighted the world: the earth trembled and shook". In the example below the voices

form a *crescendo* of clustered 'ah's against the trilling orchestral instruments to generate a spine-chilling climax.

div. en 3

Sopr. *a*

Sopr. *pp* *mf* *f* *ff*

Contr. *pp* *mf* *f* *ff*

Tén. *pp* *mf* *f* *ff*

Baryt. *a*

Basses 1 *a*

Basses 2 *a*

Fl. en 3 *tr* *tr* *tr* *tr*

Fl. en 3 div. *tr* *tr* *tr* *tr*

La Transfiguration III, b162

A completely different effect is created in movement nine, where the baritones and basses produce a ringing 'ah' tone. At that low pitch, the sound conjures up images of Tibetan monks at musical meditation. The Eastern and religious associations are strengthened by the accompanying gongs.

3/4

2/4

Baryt. *A* *(ff)* *(très long)*

Basses 1 *pp* *(ff)*

Basses 2 *pp* *(ff)*

Altos *unis* *pp*

Tén. *unis* *pp*

C. B. *pp*

V T-tams *3°* *pp*

La Transfiguration IX, b149

Most of the 'ah's in *La Transfiguration* are limited to a few bars as shown in the previous example, but in movements *XI* and *XIII*, there are lengthy phrases. Those in the *XI*th movement (first of the following examples) are unlike other 'ah's in that they are phrased in short groups of two or three notes which 'sigh'. This is similar to the breathless effect

found in the song *Poèmes pour Mi IV*. Note in the second example from movement XIII, the virtuoso nature of the lengthy melodic lines.

Musical score for *La Transfiguration XI, b90*. The score is arranged for six vocal parts: Sopranos, Mezzos, Contraltos, Tenors, Barytons, and Basses. Each part is written on a five-line staff. The vocal lines are characterized by long, continuous melodic phrases, often spanning multiple measures. Dynamic markings include *f*, *piu f*, and *ff*. The lyrics 'A' are written below the vocal lines, indicating the vocalists are singing 'ahs'. The score is divided into four measures, with the vocal lines continuing across these measures.

La Transfiguration XI, b90

Musical score for *La Transfiguration XIII, b161*. The score is arranged for multiple instrumental parts, likely strings. It features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include *f* and *ff*. The score is divided into three measures, with the instrumental lines continuing across these measures. The lyrics 'A' are written below the instrumental lines, indicating the instruments are playing 'ahs'. The score includes first and second endings for several parts.

La Transfiguration XIII, b161

Perhaps the most amazing effect using 'ahs' in *La Transfiguration* occurs in the XIIIth movement, where the subject is 'how terrible is the dwelling place of God'. With the *glissandos* of the instruments, the voices weave an elaborate web of *ff* 'ahs' to create an awesome impression of this grandeur.

Sopranos 1 à 5
 avec 1^{ers} Vops 1 et 2
 Sopranos 6 à 10
 avec 1^{ers} Vops 3 et 4
 Sopranos 1 à 5
 avec Altos 1 et 2
 Sopranos 6 à 10
 avec 1^{ers} Vops 5 et 6
 Mezzos 1 à 5
 avec 1^{ers} Vops 7 et 8
 Mezzos 6 à 10
 avec 2^{es} Vops 1 et 2
 Contraltos 1 à 5
 avec 2^{es} Vops 3 et 4
 Contraltos 6 à 10
 avec 2^{es} Vops 5 et 6
 Contraltos 1 à 5
 avec 2^{es} Vops 7 et 8
 Contraltos 6 à 10
 avec 2^{es} Vops 9 et 10
 Ténors 1 à 5
 avec Velles 1 et 2
 Ténors 6 à 10
 avec Altos 3 et 4
 Ténors 1 à 5
 avec Altos 5 et 6
 Ténors 6 à 10
 avec Altos 7 et 8
 Barytons 1 à 5
 avec Altos 9 et 10
 Barytons 6 à 10
 avec Velles 3 et 4
 Basses 1 à 5
 avec Velles 5 et 6
 Basses 6 à 10
 avec Velles 7 et 8
 Basses 1 à 5
 avec Velles 9 et 10
 Basses 6 à 10
 avec Velles 11 et 12

Modéré (♩ = 02)

(les cordes: sans liaisons)

Vocalise

sur

a)

(Vocalise sur a)

(les cordes: liaisons)

1^{ers} Vops 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16

2^{es} Vops 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16

Altos 11, 12

Altos 13, 14

Vclln solo

10 C.B. 1

arco.

gliss.

arco.

gliss.

4.8 Unpitched phonemes

Calaume-Griaule (1965, quoted in *Musical Analysis*, 1990, 9(2): 115) stated that "the difference between song and ordinary speech is a difference not in kind but almost of degree". In *Trois petites liturgies III*, Messiaen experimented with this relationship between the sung and spoken word by devoting a major part of the *liturgie* to speech. This is the first time in any of his vocal work that the chanting becomes 'deprived' of pitch - possibly a symptom of his increasing belief in the power of autonomous rhythm. The rhythms, though easy, follow the natural accents and rhythm of spoken French and Messiaen described in the score how to achieve the effect he desired.

Chœur *f* (*parlé, très articulé*)
 Tout en - tier en tous lieux, Tout en - tier en cha - que lien,
 Chœur
 Don - nant l'étre à cha - que lien, A tout ce qui oc - cupe un lien,

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b3

Chœur (*parlé*) *f*
 Temps de l'homme et de la pla
 Chœur
 - né - - - te, Temps de la mon - tagne et de l'in - sec - - te,

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b16

Surprisingly he chose not to use the spoken word anywhere in *Harawi*, the subsequent solo cycle, but returned to it in the next choral work, *Cinq Rechants*. The novel adjunct on this occasion is that the unpitched sounds are never used to convey meaningful words. Their function varies throughout the work, but in the excerpt below, spoken sounds form a punctuation between contrasting sections of the *rechant*. An antiphonal effect is created between the first tenor and first bass, and the second and third tenors and basses. Some of the sounds are like these, percussive and reliant on consonants, and others are borne on open vowel sounds. An engaging aside, is that Messiaen identified this *tiko-tiko-tiko* sound

as one of two oscillating patterns used in the song of the nightingale (Samuel, 1976, p55), but it is unconfirmed whether or not this usage is intended in *Cinq Rechants*.

(parlé, percuté, prononcer teu keu)

3 Tén. 1^{er} t k t k t t k t k t
2^e et 3^e t k t k t t k t k

3 Basses 1^{re} t k t k t t k t k t
2^e et 3^e t k t k t t k t k

p *cresc. molto*

Cinq Rechants I, b12

Crumb, in his second madrigal from Book I (1965), prescribes exactly the same *tkk* sound for the soprano soloist. Note that in the Crumb example, the pitch of the spoken voice is to be varied. This variable spoken pitch is also used by Messiaen in *Cinq Rechants* and can be seen in a subsequent example.

Tempo assolutamente metronomico; delicatissimo

ppp (dampen E#) (lasc. vibr.)
very light triangle beater (r.h.)
(dampen with finger)
two very soft mallets (l.h.)
arco sempre (sul G) (sul E#) (sempre sim.)
ppp sempre (hold Ped. down)

ppp sempre (pochiss. in rilievo)

fz ppp *fz ppp* (wind sound)
tas-mun (drum)

pp

Vibraphone harmonics are produced by placing l.h. forefinger lightly against very center of plate and striking plate with a rather hard mallet. The harmonic sounds two(!) octaves higher than the fundamental.

** The $\frac{5}{8}$ of the Vibraphone in the time of the $\frac{5}{8}$ of the Contrabass.

Crumb: *No piensan en la lluvia, y se han dormido*, Madrigals Book 1

The following example, in contrast to the preceding two, has the speaking voices intoning open vowel sounds as an accompaniment to the singing contralto.

Bien modéré

1^{er} Contr.
 2^e et 3^e Tén.
 2^e et 3^e Basses

mf
 ma pre - miè - re fois ter - re ter - re l'é - ven - tail dé - ploy - é
 (parlé, percuté) *pp*
 mano mano mano nad - ja lâ - ma krī - ta
 (parlé, percuté) *pp*
 ma yo ma yo ma - ta krī

Cinq Rechants II, b34

In the third movement the spoken words are *ff*, heavily accented and part of a complex mixture of singing and speaking. Observe too, as mentioned earlier, the differentiation of spoken pitch.

3^e Sopr.
 1^{er} et 2^e Contr.
 3^e Contr.
 1^{er} et 2^e Tén.
 3^e Tén.
 3 Basses

an - nô - la ou - mi sa_rī sa_rī flou_tī
 an - nô - la ou - mi 1^{er} sa_rī - sa sa_rī sa_rī 1^{er}
 an - nô - la ou - mi sa_rī - sa sa_rī sa_rī 2^e
 an - nô - la ou - mi sa_rī sa_rī sa_rī sa_rī sa_rī
 an - nô - la ou - mi sa_rī sa_rī sa_rī sa_rī sa_rī
 an - nô - la ou - mi sa_rī sa_rī sa_rī sa_rī sa_rī
 - yoma kapri.ta.ma kali.mo.li - mo cheu cheu ma sa_rī sa_rī

Cinq Rechants III, b49

Although he did not use speech in *Harawi*, Messiaen dabbled briefly with approximate pitch. In *Harawi VI* the approach of death is anticipated with plaintive howls written, as in all preceding examples, in exact pitch. Subsequently a more elongated cry is made and, although this is carefully notated in sequences of tritones, Messiaen's written instructions

indicate that only an approximation of pitch is intended: *fff*, full voice, a little out of tune, with appeal and intensity. Absolute accuracy of the phrase at the required speed would probably be impossible in any case.

CHANT

Modéré, un peu vif *ff*

Ahil

Répétition planétaire, Harawi VI, b1

fff (à pleins voix, un peu faux, comme un appel en forêt)

Ahil

Répétition planétaire, Harawi VI, b9

The following example, also from *Harawi*, is notated with an approximate pitch, but the performance instruction indicates that the sound is to be more a cry than a sung note. Penderecki used soprano screams with disquieting effect in his *St. Luke Passion* (1963), but Messiaen's solitary cry here is less disturbing as it promotes the atmosphere of primitive tribalism fostered throughout the cycle.

ff

rou - le dans le sang!

fff (cri)

Ahil

Katchikatchi les étoiles, Harawi XI, b35

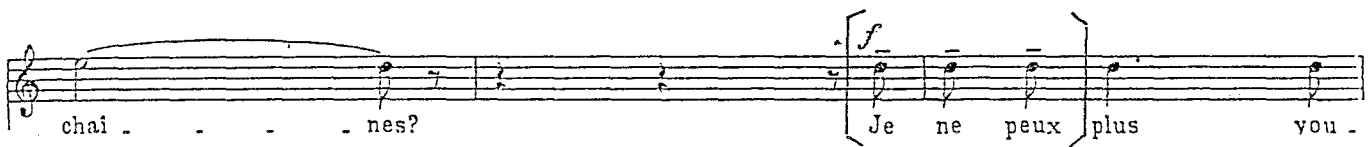
Although he had experimented extensively with unpitched phenomes, as with the pitched phenomes, these go largely unused in *La Transfiguration*. A possible reason for the contrasting diversity of vocalisation in *Cinq Rechants* could be the absence of instrumental accompaniment. It was hence incumbent on the composer to create as many different and interesting timbres as possible with the twelve virtuoso voices at his disposal.

A look further afield at the use of the solo human voice in the works of other twentieth century composers is absorbing. There are composers who have been even more adventurous in their use of the spoken word, actually stipulating specific types of speech like whispers or shrieks. Pousseur's *Phonemes for Cathy* (1966), for example, is a vast exploration of unaccompanied sung and spoken sounds. The text is treated in highly fragmented fashion and is therefore often difficult to follow. Messiaen's ventures in the

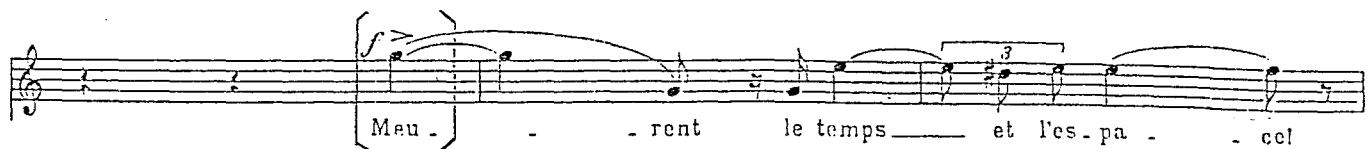
same direction, by contrast, always retain an essentially audible and comprehensible text. Cage's exciting *Aria* (1945) includes, as well as numerous different styles of singing and speaking, many additional sounds to be produced with the vocal apparatus: grunts, 'straining' sounds, 'chicken shrieks', contemptuous laughter, mutters and throat clearing. Euphony was an important consideration for Messiaen and he probably excluded on those grounds, some of these sounds!

4.9 Attack

While most of the singing in Messiaen's vocal compositions is *legato*, he occasionally varied the attack. As one would expect, this is to be found more in the later works as his experimentation with the possibilities of the human voice progressed. In *La mort du nombre* the only deviation from *legato* is a few accents introduced into the vocal line.

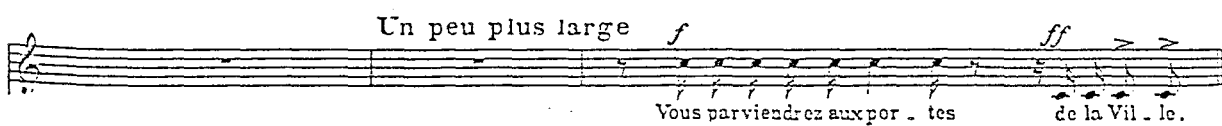


La mort du nombre, b48



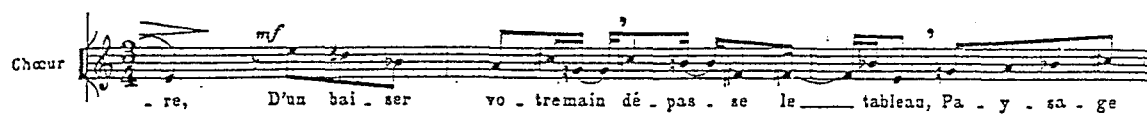
La mort du nombre, b66

The next departure from the norm is to be found in *Poèmes pour Mi IV*, where the singer is instructed to sing, as noted previously, in a breathless manner. The final section of *Les Deux Guerriers* [the two warriors] from the same cycle is, by virtue of the accents and the nature of the words, if not *staccato*, at least *non-legato*.



Les deux guerriers, Poèmes pour Mi VII, b30

The sung chants of *Trois petites liturgies I* and *Harawi III* are similar to *Les Deux Guerriers* in that the character of the words pre-supposes a *non-legato* attack, although again it is not explicitly stated. In the following example the *non-legato* effect is exacerbated by the jerky rhythms.



Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, *Trois petites liturgies I*, b52

Signs that Messiaen was becoming more specific in his demands regarding attack are the instructions in the second *liturgie* 'to be very sustained' (bar 95) and in the third *liturgie* to make the speech 'very articulated' (bar 3). *Harawi XI* appears to be a landmark song where, for the first time, he specifically used the voice *staccato*.



Katchikatchi les étoiles, *Harawi XI*, b4

Strangely, amid the numerous exotic effects of *Cinq Rechants*, not many sung lines are marked *staccato* and these sections are of shorter duration than those in *Harawi*. There are however, places where a semiquaver is followed by a rest, producing virtually the same aural effect as singing the note *staccato*.

Cinq Rechants III, b49

More commonly in *Cinq Rechants* it is the spoken words which are marked *staccato*, as in this example from the opening movement.

(parlé, percuté, prononcer teu keu)

3 Tén. 1^{re} t k t k t t k t k t
2^e et 3^e t k t k t t k t k

3 Basses 1^{re} t k t k t t k t k t
2^e et 3^e t k t k t t k t k

p *cresc. molto*

Cinq Rechants I, b12

Another attack generally uncommon in vocal compositions, is *bouche fermée* or humming. Messiaen first used humming quite late in his vocal compositions, beginning with *Harawi*. The cycle commences and concludes with the same phrase of text and melody, but the *toi* [you] from the first phrase is missing and is replaced in the final phrase with humming. Compare the two phrases given below.

CHANT

Extrêmement lent, en rêve
ppp

La vil - le qui dor - mait, MG toi. Ma

La ville qui dormait, toi, Harawi I, b1

Extrêmement lent, en rêve
ppp

Très lent
pp (à bouche fermée)

La vil le qui dor - mait... MG

Dans le noir, Harawi XII, b88

Humming is probably even more unusual in an orchestral-choral work than in a solo song. There are nevertheless a number of occasions in which Messiaen used it in *La Transfiguration*. The conclusion to the third movement is, as shown, separated from the remaining movement by bars of rests and then softly hummed by all the parts. The volume of the chord is reduced by the exclusion of the tenors with the *decrescendo*.

16 (bouche fermée) 4

2 Sopr. *p* *pp* *ppp*

2 Mezzo. *p* *pp* *ppp*

2 Contr. *p* *pp* *ppp*

3 Tén. *p* *pp* *ppp*

3 Baryt. *p* *pp* *ppp*

3 Basses *p* *pp* *ppp*

(bouche fermée)

La Transfiguration III, b212

A lush effect, reminiscent of the gardens of the *Turangalila-symphonie*, is achieved in the fifth movement, where the subject is the believer's longing for the courts of the Lord. Birdsong, with muted strings and soft clusters of hummed shifting pitches all contribute to the impression of languid pleasure. Messiaen described this passage in his notes to the score:

"Modal colours evolve: gold and violet, red and purplish-blue, blue-ish grey studded with gold and deep blue, green and orange, blue and gold, yellow and violet streaked with gold and whiteness. The solo cello sings the simple clarity of eternal light. The solo piano adds the American Blue Robin, and the Rock Thrush (a mountain bird with a bright orange and slate-blue livery) is heard from the ensemble of soloists. A conclusion with the red and gold harmonies of the choir humming: a smooth carpeting, a very distant pianissimo over which there rises in the night, on the piano, the first strophe of the Nightingale's song..."

It is at this point in *La Transfiguration* that the voices most closely approach equal status with the instruments.

Merle de roche

Fl. solo

Clar. solo

Sylorim. solo

Marim. solo

Vibra. solo

Piano solo

1^{re} 1^{re} Sop.

1^{re} 2^e Sop.

1^{re} Mezzo

1^{re} 1^{re} Contr.

1^{re} 1^{re} Tén.

1^{re} 2^e Tén.

1^{re} 1^{re} Basse

1^{re} 2^e Basse

Velle solo

3 1^{re} Vous

3 2^e Vous

4 Altos

4 Velles

Rossignol

Merle de roche

Accenteur Alpin

(bouche fermée)

(bouche fermée)

(sourd.)

(sourd.)

2
16

3
16

4
16

2
8

* Red

* Red

* Red

* Red

2
16

3
16

4
16

2
8

Although the humming in *La Transfiguration* is atypical to a choral work of these dimensions, it does not begin to approach the intriguing and imaginative uses for *bouche fermée* Messiaen devised in *Cinq Rechants*. Compare the following two examples: the first is from *Trois petites liturgies* and the second from *Cinq Rechants*. In the first Messiaen created a 'halo' effect around the words of the sopranos by using the vibraphone. In the second, he contrived a similar effect by reverberating the final syllable of the soloist's part with the humming voices of the other two sopranos.

VIBRAPHONE
 (baguettes douces) (hauteur réelle) (la pédale prolonge le son)
 (résonner et vibrer) *pp*

CHŒUR
 (Voix de femmes, 18 Soprani)
pp
 Mon Jésus, mon silen.

Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b1

1^{re} et 2^e
SOPRANOS

3^e Soprano Solo

Modere (faire exactement les nuances et les valeurs)

(lointain)
 à 2, à bouche *ppp* fermée, (ouvrir)

um

ha yo ka - pri - ta - ma la li la li la ssa - ré - no

Cinq Rechants I, b1

A similar 'shimmer' is achieved here by using a cluster of shifting pitch hums.

Lent, caressant

1^{re}
SOPRANO

Solo *mf*

ma robe d'amour mon a - - - - - amour ma prison d'a-mour

(bouche fermée) *pp*

2^e et 3^e
CONTRALTOS

um um um um

(bouche fermée) *pp*

2^e et 3^e
TÉNORS

um um um um

(bouche fermée) à 3 *pp*

3 BASSES

um um um um

Cinq Rechants III, b1

In the next example, the hummers have to separate their hums into three separate crochets and a longer final one. All of these original modifications bring a slightly different nuance to the music. Although other experimental composers, Boulez and Penderecki included, have used humming in their vocal compositions; this 'separated note' humming of Messiaen's seems to be unique.

Lent (lointain)
2^e et 3^e (à bouche fermée) *ppp* (ouvrir)

Cinq Rechants V, b14

The humming is not always slow or confined to one or two pitches. In this example the humming of the soprano voices forms a mobile mesh around the melody of the other voices.

Presque vif (souple)
(à bouche fermée) *P*

Cinq Rechants I, b74

Humming is often assumed to be a soft and unaccented sound. Messiaen's imagination was not bound by this convention and in the following example the *mf* humming *crescendoes* to a *sf* accent and then dies away.

1^{er} Sopr. *f* ma_yo_ma ssa_ri ssa_ri man(e) thi - kâ - ri *sf*

2^e Sopr. *mf* ma_yo_ma ssa_ri ssa_ri man(e) thi - kâ - ri *sf*

1^{er} et 2^e Contr. (bouche fermée) *mf* um um *sf* (ouvrir)

1^{er} Tén. (bouche fermée) *mf* um um *sf* (ouvrir)

2^e Tén. (bouche fermée) *mf* um um *sf* (ouvrir)

1^{er} Basse (bouche fermée) *mf* um um *sf* (ouvrir)

Cinq Rechants III, b14

The following hums show a dynamic line of similar gradation, but notice that they are set in his favoured parallel tritones to accompany the monotone incantation.

3 Contr. *à 3 p* ra_va kâ-li vâ-li ro_ma ta_ma ta_ma ta_ma ro_ma ta_ma ta_ma ta_ma

3 Tén. kassou

1^{er} et 2^e Basses (bouche fermée) *ff* *dim.* (ouvrir)

Cinq Rechants IV, b32

Conclusion:

While not forsaking the traditional beauty of lyrical singing in his songs, Messiaen nevertheless imaginatively widened the range of sounds and attacks required. The specific instructions and swift changes presuppose a high standard of excellence on the part of the performers. The excitement and challenge presented by his vocal music is documented by the prominent recording artist Barker (1990):

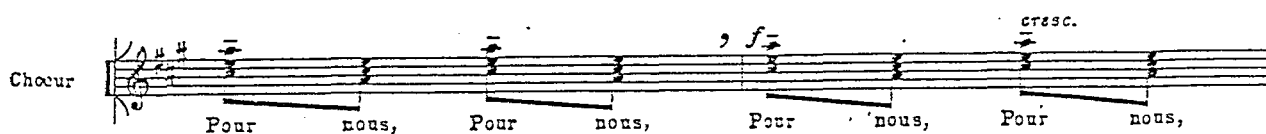
".. in 1963 when we were submerged in '60's music, rather gloomy and self-centred young composers trying to find their way using involved poems which they were inclined to separate into syllables to serve their musical ends. Messiaen came like a whirlwind of sanity. Here was strong faith, hope and joy bringing with it a truly singable line."

CHAPTER 5: CHORAL WRITING

Many of the vocal techniques with which Messiaen experimented in the solo works are applied in a choral context. Writing for a choir of voices as opposed to a single voice, however, implies certain differences in methodology. This chapter deals with those possibilities inherent in having more than one voice at the composer's disposal.

5.1 Vertical relationships

In spite of having created an entirely new system of modality, Messiaen persisted in using major or minor triads in his music. Just as he tenaciously used the 'dated' *bel canto* technique with experimental means of vocalising, standard chords co-exist in his music next to more unusual and original combinations of notes. One thus discovers, sometimes unexpectedly as in Hindemith's music, that the choir comes to rest on a major triad. In *Trois petites liturgies*, there are some fairly extended major chord sections and in fact, every time the choir forms a chordal structure of any sort it is major in construction. Two of the three *liturgies* end with the choir on an A major triad and in the second *liturgie*, the chord is reiterated in the following way for ten bars. Such prolonged passages in a single harmonic area are by no means confined to his vocal works and the beginning of *Vingt regards XIX* for example, persists for seven slow bars with the chord of F[♯] major. Walsh (1985) equates this tactic with Satie's experiments in a 'music of monotony'.



Séquence du Verbe, Cantique Divin, Trois petites liturgies II, b283

In *Cinq Rechants* Messiaen explored the opposite extreme and there is not one regular major triad to be found in the entire work. *La Transfiguration* provides a mixture of these two extremes in that it has both major chords and other chordal combinations. Shown below is the triumphant end of the work in E major, preceded by some less orthodox vertical combinations, as in bar 78 (A^b, C, D^b, D, E^b, F[♯], G).

The image shows a musical score for a vocal ensemble and piano. The lyrics are "glo - ri - ae tu - ae!" and "glo - ri - ae tu - ae!". The score is divided into two systems. The first system has a vocal line with lyrics "glo - ri - ae" and a piano accompaniment. The second system has a vocal line with lyrics "tu - ae!" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features complex chordal textures with many accidentals and a "rit." marking. The vocal lines are in a high register and feature many accidentals.

La Transfiguration XIV, b77

O sacrum convivium! maintains a chordal style throughout, thus conforming to traditional Romantic choral pieces in this respect, but it remains an unusual work. Firstly, it sounds different from the music of other composers because chords formed are those highlighted in Messiaen's distinctive musical language. Frequently at cadence points, as seen in the next musical example, the choir lingers on one of these preferred combinations: the major or minor triad with added sixth. Such chords are used at will in the scores with no particular preparation or resolution. Messiaen justified the inclusion of the added notes in the following way:

"...it is a question of foreign notes, with neither preparation nor resolution, without particular expressive accent, which tranquilly make a part of the chord, changing its colour, giving it a spice, a new perfume. These notes keep a character of intrusion, of supplement: the bee in the flower! They have, nevertheless, a certain citizenship in the chord, either because they have the same sonority as some classified appoggiatura, or because they issue from the resonance of the fundamental" (Messiaen, 1956, p47).

In *O sacrum convivium!* the listener's awareness of each chord is heightened by the leisurely presentation of the work. The directive given by the composer, *Lent et expressif* [slow and expressive], is qualified by the additional instruction to the choir to *battre les croches* [beat/count the quavers; i.e. the singers are to feel the quaver pulse]. The composition comprises only 35 bars, yet takes about five and a quarter minutes to perform (Virgin Classics recording, 1991). The deliberate savouring of each moment in this way hints at a kinship between the philosophy of Messiaen and that of Webern. Webern's music however, tends towards fragmentation and isolation of musical events, where Messiaen's, though not progressing in the conventional sense, creates an atmosphere of 'quiet ecstasy' (Edwards:

sleeve notes - *O sacrum convivium!* recording. Virgin Classics, 1991) by the sustained, connected sounds. The following bars from *O sacrum convivium!* show the cadential use of added sixth triads (B D# F# G# or B D F# G#, and F# A# C# D#) within phrases of numerous added note chords.

re . có . li . tur memó . ri . a pas . si . ó . nis é . jus : mens imple . tur
 re . có . li . tur memó . ri . a pas . si . ó . nis é . jus : mens imple . tur
 re . có . li . tur memó . ri . a pas . si . ó . nis é . jus : mens imple . tur
 re . có . li . tur memó . ri . a pas . si . ó . nis é . jus : mens imple . tur

Figured bass notation: +2, +2 +6, +4, * +6, +2, +2 +6, * +4, +6 +2

O sacrum convivium!, b5

. Je . hú . ia . O . sa . crum sa . crum con . vi . vi . um!
 . Je . hú . ia . O . sa . crum sa . crum con . vi . vi . um!
 . Je . hú . ia . O . sa . crum sa . crum con . vi . vi . um!
 . Je . hú . ia . O . sa . crum sa . crum con . vi . vi . um!

Figured bass notation: +6 dim. * +6 pp * +6 +6

O sacrum convivium!, b30

These added sixth chords are found as vocal combinations in his other choral works, sometimes, as in this example from *Cinq Rechants*, alongside chords of greater dissonance (A, C, D#, G# in bar 102).

(souple et caressant)

1^{er} Soprano Solo *p*
 1^{er} Sopr. Ha
 2^e et 3^e Sopr. *pp* (bouche fermée) en - cor Ha Ha
 1^{er} et 2^e Contr. *pp* (bouche fermée) en um um
 3^e Contr. *pp* (bouche fermée) en um um
 1^{er} et 2^e Tén. *pp* (bouche fermée) en um um
 3^e Tén. *pp* (bouche fermée) en um um
 1^{re} Basse en - cor
 2^e Basse en - cor

Cinq Rechants III, b102

From some of the double degree chords of *O sacrum convivium!*, Messiaen proceeded in *Cinq Rechants* to chords with more than one double degree. Note also in the examples which follow, that the 'false relations' of the earlier work are separated by two octaves, whereas they move closer in the later one.

pp *p*
 sá . crum, sá . crum, O sá . crum con . ví . vium! in quo Christus
pp *p*
 sá . crum, sá . crum, O sá . crum con . ví . vium! in quo Christus
pp *p*
 sá . crum, sá . crum, O sá . crum con . ví . vium! in quo Christus

O sacrum convivium!, b15

1^{er} Sopr.
ma_yo_ma ssa_ri ssa_ri man(e) thi - kâ - ri

2^e Sopr.
ma_yo_ma ssa_ri ssa_ri man(e) thi - kâ ri

2^e et 3^e Contr.
(bouche fermée) um (ouvir)

1^{er} Tén.
(bouche fermée) um (ouvir)

2^e Tén.
(bouche fermée) um (ouvir)

1^{er} Basse
(bouche fermée) um (ouvir)

Cinq Rechants III, b14

In *Cinq Rechants*, he investigated a variety of vertical relationships between groups of voices from the warm buzz of closely clustered notes softly hummed, to the harsh blast of loud, more-widely spaced sounds. In these examples every alphabetic pitch class occurs at least once, with seven and ten of the 12 possible notes in the well-tempered scale, represented in the first and second examples respectively.

1^{er} SOPRANO
Solo *mf*
ma robe d'amour mon a - - mour ma prison d'a.mour

2^e et 3^e CONTRALTOS
(bouche fermée) *pp*
um um um um

2^e et 3^e TÉNORS
(bouche fermée) *pp*
um um um um

3 BASSES
(bouche fermée) *pp*
um um um um

Cinq Rechants III, b1

1^{er} Sopr. mort la
(*poco dim.*)

2^e Sopr. mort la
(*poco dim.*)

3^e Sopr. mort la
(*poco dim.*)

1^{er} Contr. mort la
(*poco dim.*)

2^e Contr. mort la
(*poco dim.*)

3^e Contr. mort la
(*poco dim.*)

1^{er} Tén. *fff (furieux)* qua tre lé zar(ds) et la pieuvre et la mort tourne à *fff*

2^e Tén. *fff (furieux)* qua tre lé zar(ds) et la pieuvre et la mort tourne à *fff*

3^e Tén. *fff (furieux)* qua tre lé zar(ds) et la pieuvre et la mort tourne à *fff*

1^{er} Basse mort la
(*poco dim.*)

2^e Basse mort la
(*poco dim.*)

3^e Basse mort la
(*poco dim.*)

Cinq Rechants V, b58

Penderecki ventured even further than Messiaen to generate cluster chords by combining the 12 tones within a single octave. An example from his *Dies Irae* is provided here for comparative purposes.

CORO *legatissimo*

S
A
T

tp

et
pu-er-um
na-tum
pu-er-um
erit
in
no-dum
qui
cum
mu-lieris
co-di-
-tas
-si
-las
-nes
-laci
-ci-o-la
-cu-la

p

Penderecki: *I Lamentatio*, Dies Irae, b13

At the opposite extreme in Messiaen's music, are the vertical relationships created when the texture is reduced to only two voices. In a section of the organ work *Apparition de l'Église éternelle*, the harmony is reduced to bare fifths. Messiaen proposed a vocal version of this stark fabric in *Cinq Rechants* when the singers remain an harmonic tritone or sometimes a perfect fourth apart. In the first example, the monotone chant contributes little melodically and is, to all intents and purposes, a separate entity to the other harmonically conceived voices.

3 Contr. *à 3 p*

3 Tén. *à 3*

1^{re} et 2^e Basses

kassou

ff *dim.*

ra-va kâ-li vâ-li ro-ma ta-ma ta-ma ta-ma ro-ma ta-ma ta-ma ta-ma

Cinq Rechants IV, b32

In this example the tritone is restated baldly in both male and female voices.

Lent (lointain)
2^e et 3^e (à bouche fermée) *ppp* (ouvrir)

3 Contr. um um um um

3 Basses dans le pas - sé

Cinq Rechants V, b14

Sometimes the quartal principle is extended as can be seen in this six-part chord built of stacked fourths. Significantly, the intervals separating the bottom three and top two pitches are tritones.

Un peu vif (brutal)

1^{er} Sopr. fleur du bourdon tourne tourne

2^e Sopr. fleur du bourdon tourne tourne

3^e Sopr. fleur du bourdon tourne tourne

1^{er} Contr. fleur du bourdon tourne tourne

2^e Contr. fleur du bourdon tourne tourne

3^e Contr. fleur du bourdon tourne tourne

1^{er} Tén. fleur du bourdon mort mort

2^e Tén. fleur du bourdon mort mort

3^e Tén. fleur du bourdon mort mort

1^{er} Basse fleur du bourdon

Cinq Rechants V, b50

Other twentieth century composers experimented with the construction of chords in intervals of fourths instead of the traditional thirds. Hindemith in particular favoured these combinations, but they can also be found in the work of Ives (1874-1954). Notice in this example from Ives' choral arrangement of Psalm XXIV that the final chords in fourths are preceded by a unison melody moving in leaps of a fourth. A telling difference between the Ives example and those of Messiaen, is that Ives' melody and chords consist of perfect fourths and Messiaen's, characteristically, of tritones or augmented fourths.

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The lyrics are: "He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and". The score is in 4/4 time and consists of two measures. The first measure is in C major, and the second measure is in C minor. The melody in each part is a unison line moving in leaps of a fourth. The final chords in the second measure are perfect fourths.

Ives: Psalm XXIV, b1

On other occasions the vertical relationships in Messiaen's choral scores appear to be coincidental in the light of the heterophonic texture. Sometimes this results in sharp dissonances between the voices. In the following example note the simultaneous occurrence of notes a tone or semitone apart. Because each part is singing an isorhythm¹⁵ of different length, they intersect at different points on each repetition. This means that the vertical intervals between the voices are not constant. On the first occasion (bar 20) the altos and sopranos 'clash' directly with an A and an A^b, and the other intervals in the bar are a major and minor 3rd, a diminished fourth, a tone, tone and a half and another semitone. On the second meeting (beginning bar 21), the relationships are altered to a major third, an octave, a unison, a tritone, a perfect fifth, a tone and a half, and a semitone, with the double degree occurring on the B and B^b. Obviously the more voices added by the composer, the more complex the vertical relationships become.

¹⁵A term describing a structural principle frequently found in fourteenth century motets, in which the *cantus firmus* is heard in a repeating scheme of time values.

Modéré (berceur et tendre)

Sopr. mi - roir d'é - toi - le châ - teau d'é - toi - le Y - seult d'a -

Cinç Rechants I, b20 ha - yo - ma ka - pri - ta - ma ha - yo - ma ka - pri -

Cinç Rechants I, b20

It is apparent that a progression of vertical combinations can be found in the vocal music of Messiaen from a conservative use of major and minor triads, through more unusual added note chords, to some radical combinations generated by independent but simultaneous lines. Significantly though, the combinations used in early works are never discarded in the later works, only enriched by the expansion of the vocabulary.

5.2 Texture

5.2.1 Homophony

The first work for a choir of voices, *O sacrum convivium!*, is written solely in a conventional homophonic texture: the sopranos have the melody and the other voices supply the harmonies underneath. It was a texture Messiaen all but forsook in *Trois petites liturgies*, the few major triadic places in the score excepted. He used it again sporadically in *Cinq Rechants*, but in the context of more exotic combinations of notes than before. *La Transfiguration*, like *Cinq Rechants*, has a far more varied texture than either *O sacrum convivium!* or *Trois petites liturgies* and this includes areas of homophony.

5.2.2 Accompanied unison singing:

For want of a better term and for the need to distinguish between a single accompanied line and monody (see section 5.2.3), what is meant here is unison singing in which the

accompaniment does not merely double the single sung line. This accompanied unison singing, as seen in the next example, completely dominates the *Trois petites liturgies*: an unusual style for a choral work of these dimensions. An unexpected affinity in this regard can be discovered with the first of Joubert's *Three Hymns to St. Oswald* (1972), where not only are the voices used much in unison, but they also exhibit a freedom from rhythmic direction reminiscent of plainsong. Joubert accompanies his motets with the organ. Although Messiaen did not use the voice-organ combination, given his affinity for church music and the vast quantities of music he composed for organ, one feels he might have.

(Voix de femmes, 18 Soprani)
CHŒUR
pp
Mon Jésus, mon si-len-
8
8
PIANO SOLO
Comme un chant d'oiseau
p

Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b1

Because there is no instrumental accompaniment, one could be forgiven for assuming that there would be no accompanied unison singing in *Cinq Rechants*. On the contrary, the following passage is completely convincing in this regard. The first soprano sings her line accompanied by quiet humming from five other choristers.

Sopr.
pieu-vre de lu-mière blessée foule rose ma ca-resse (ouvrir)
2^e et 3^e Contr.
um
1^{er} et 2^e Tén.
um
1^{re} Basse
(bouche fermée) p
um

Cinq Rechants III, b37

In this excerpt from the second movement, a single line by the three sopranos is strengthened by the addition of the first contralto, first tenor and first bass; all accompanied by the spoken sounds of the second and third tenors and basses.

3 Sopr. *mf* *à 3* lu - mi - neux mon ri - re d'om - bre ma jeune é - toi - le sur les fleu - ves Ha

1^{er} Contr. *mf* ma jeune é - toi - le sur les fleu - ves

1^{er} Tén. *mf* ma jeune é - toi - le sur les fleu - ves

1^{re} Basse *mf* ma jeune é - toi - le sur les fleu - ves

2^e et 3^e Tén. *mf* mano mano mano nad - ja lâ - ma

2^e et 3^e Basses *mf* noma ma yo ma yo ma - ta

rall. molto a Tempo 1^{er} Solo

Cinq Rechants II, b38

The accompanied unison line is much used in *La Transfiguration*. Sometimes the accompaniment is sparse, as in this section where the sopranos, mezzo-sopranos, tenors and baritones (60 voices) are accompanied only by bells or, as in the passage immediately preceding this in the score, by triangles.

Sopranos 1^{ers} 2^{es} - du - it fa - ci - es e - jus si - cut sol:

Mezzos - du - it fa - ci - es e - jus si - cut sol:

Ténors 1^{ers} 2^{es} - du - it fa - ci - es e - jus si - cut sol:

Barytons - du - it fa - ci - es e - jus si - cut sol:

III Cloches 3 2 3 3 3 2 2 16 8 8 16 4

La Transfiguration I, b48

At the other extreme, Messiaen used the whole *La Transfiguration* choir in unison with full orchestral accompaniment in the following example: 100 voices rousinglly sing 'my heart and my flesh cry out'.

Un peu lent (♩ = 66)

1^{re} Htb.
2^e, 3^e Htb.
C.A.
1^{re}, 2^e Clar.
3^e Clar.
Cl. basse
3 Bois
1^{re}, 2^e Trp.
3^e Trp.
Cors
1^{re}, 2^e Trb.
3^e Trb.
Trb. basse
Tuba et Sax.
Tuba et Sax.
Tuba C.B.
Supr. 1, 2
Mezios
1^{re} Contr.
2^e Contr.
1^{re} Tén.
2^e Tén.
Baryt.
Basses 1, 2
1^{re}s Vocs
Div. en 3
2^{de}s Vocs
Div.
Altos
Vocals
Div. en 3

2 3 2 4
8 16 8 16

(ouvrir) Cor - me - um, et ca - ro me - a, ex - sul - ta.

2 3 2 4
8 16 8 16

div. en 3 unis

5.2.3 Monody

Both the relevance to Messiaen's work and his fondness for monody¹⁶ have already been discussed (see section 4.6). There are many instrumental precedents throughout his oeuvre for this choice of a single line when many instruments or 'voices' were at his disposal. The entire first and fifth movements of the organ cycle *Les Corps Glorieux* (1939) (approximately six and four minutes respectively) are monodic. Extended monodies also occur in *La Nativité du Seigneur II* (1935), *Quatour pour la fin du temps VI* (1940), *Visions de l'Amen II* (1943), *Livre d'orgue I* (1951) and *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum II* (1964). What is interesting in his application of monody within a choral context, is the great variety of timbres he created by combining different groups of voices. Monody appears for the first time for a choir in *Cinq Rechants*. Four of the five movements begin with monody and in this example, the first contralto opens and the first bass repeats the line an octave lower. Notice that the monody is sung by one voice in each case.

Bien modéré

Cinq Rechants II, b1

By contrast, in the next examples the monodies are sung by groups of voices: the three low male and the three low female voices in the first one, and then all the male and all the female voices in the second. A parallel can be drawn between Messiaen's use of male and female voices an octave apart as seen in the first example, and the rendition of monodies by instruments of widely differing range. In *Quatour pour la fin du temps IV* for example, violin and cello combine in a 'widely spaced' monody, while in the *Turangalîla-symphonie IV*, the bassoon and piccolo join in an even more bizarre alliance. In *Vingt Regards II* the collaborating left and right hand piano parts are separated by four octaves.

¹⁶Music consisting of a single melodic line without additional parts or accompaniment (Harvard Dictionary of Music, 1970, p539).

(souple)

à 3 *f*

3 Contr. l'ex - plo - ra - teur Or - phé - e trou - ve son cœur dans la mort

à 3 *f*

3 Basses l'ex - plo - ra - teur Or - phé - e trou - ve son cœur dans la mort

Cinq Rechants I, b87

Vif

3 SOPRANOS

3 CONTR.

à 3 *f* (vigoureux)

3 TÉNORS ma - yo - ma ka - li - mo - li - mo ma - yo - ma ka - li - mo - li - mo

1^{re} *f*

3 BASSES ma - yo - ma ka - li - mo ma - yo - ma ka - li - mo

3^e *f*

tes yeux voy - a - gent

tes yeux voy - a - gent

Cinq Rechants V, b1

Group monodies also occur in *La Transfiguration*. Shown here is an unaccompanied monodic line for tenors. Though unusual in a choral-orchestral composition, this texture occurs sporadically throughout the work.

3 Modéré ($\text{♩} = 112$)

Un peu vif ($\text{♩} = 132$)

Ténors 1^{er}s 2^{es}

mf Ad - 16 - huc e - o lo - 8 - quen - te, *f* ec - ce nu - bes

La Transfiguration VIII, b13

Yet another option exploited by Messiaen in *Cinq Rechants* was that of using the full unaccompanied choir in unison. The entire *rechant* of the fourth movement is sung in this way.

Très vif (joyeux)

SOPRANOS
CONTRALTOS
TÉNORS
BASSES

Niokha - mâ pa - la - lan(e) sou - ki mon bou - quet tout dé - fait ray -

Niokha - mâ pa - la - lan(e) sou - ki mon bou - quet tout dé - fait ray -

Niokha - mâ pa - la - lan(e) sou - ki mon bou - quet tout dé - fait ray -

Niokha - mâ pa - la - lan(e) sou - ki mon bou - quet tout dé - fait ray -

Cinq Rechants IV, b1

In the following example a single line is heard, but at various points it is fortified by additional voices to generate swelling waves of sound. The difficulty of executing such a line accurately at speed need scarcely be mentioned. With many more voices at his disposal in *La Transfiguration*, Messiaen used the device again to create an even more powerful impression.

Presque vif (souple)

3 Sopr.
3 Contr.
3 Tén.
1^{re} Basse
2^e et 3^e Basses

les amoureux s'en - vo - lent Brangien dans l'es - pa - ce tu souf - fles

les vo - lent pa - ce souf - fles

reux s'en - vo Brangien dans

les amoureux s'en - vo - lent Brangien dans l'es - pa - ce tu souf - fles

les vo - lent pa - ce souf - fles

Cinq Rechants I, b4

Instead of adding weight only at isolated points in the phrase as shown above, the entire consequent of the following phrase is amplified by more voices.

à 3 *mf* *3^e mf* *rall.* *molto*

3^e Sopr. lu-mi-neux mon ri-re d'ombre ma jeune é-toi-le sur les fleu-ves

1^{er} Contr. ma jeune é-toi-le sur les fleu-ves

1^{er} Tén. ma jeune é-toi-le sur les fleu-ves

1^{er} Basse ma jeune é-toi-le sur les fleu-ves

Cinq Rechants II, b9

The following example is novel in that voices are added to the monodic line, but the volume of sound diminishes. By doing this, Messiaen contrasted the loud singing of a few voices with the soft singing of many.

mf *3^e p (vague)* *rall.* *molto* *ppp*

1^{er} Sopr. so-lo de flû-te ber-ce les qua-tre lé-zar(ds)en t'é-loi-gnant

1^{er} Contr. ber-ce les qua-tre lé-zar(ds)en t'é-loi-gnant *ppp*

1^{er} Tén. so-lo de flû-te ber-ce les qua-tre lé-zar(ds)en t'é-loi-gnant *ppp*

1^{er} Basse ber-ce les qua-tre lé-zar(ds)en t'é-loi-gnant *ppp*

Cinq Rechants II, b59

Another unusual application of monody is to be found in *Cinq Rechants II*. An antiphonal effect is achieved by the altered vocal grouping of the antecedent/question and consequent/answer phrases: basses and contraltos respond to tenors and sopranos.

3 Sopr. *à 3*
-mâ ma-yo.ma kapritama ssa-ri - mâ

3 Contr. *ff*
ma-yo.ma kaprita.ma ssa-ri.mâ

3 Tén. *à 3*
-mâ ma-yo.ma kapritama ssa-ri - mâ

3 Basses *ff*
ma-yo.ma kaprita.ma ssa-ri.mâ

Cinq Rechants II, b27

In *Cinq Rechants V* Messiaen adopted more unorthodox groupings: the first and second sopranos are grouped with the third alto, the first and second altos with the third tenor, the first and second tenors with the second basses, and finally all three basses together. In each case the participating voices are an octave apart.

1^{re} et 2^e Sopr. *à 2*
ha - yo ha - yo

1^{re} et 2^e Contr. *à 2*
ha - yo

3^e Contr. *à 2*
ha - yo ha - yo

1^{re} et 2^e Tén. *f*
ha - yo ha - yo ha - yo ha - yo

3^e Tén. *f*
ha - yo

1^{re} et 2^e Basses *f*
ha - yo ha - yo ha - yo ha - yo ha - yo

3^e Basse *f*
ha - yo

Cinq Rechants V, b28

It would appear that Messiaen, having ascribed to a fondness for monody, set about wringing all the possibilities from it by varying the number, volume and colour of the voices used. The results are resourceful and imaginative.

5.2.4 Vocal Heterophony

Cinq Rechants, experimental and innovative in so many ways, also introduced into the vocal writing a texture probably without precedent in the choral repertoire. Like monody, heterophony symbolically communicates Messiaen's philosophy. The simultaneous presentation of melodic or chordal strands in which there is no rhythmic, melodic or harmonic co-operation has the effect of annulling the forward impetus of the music to make the intersections of the strands pure 'accidents' of time. This represents musically the concepts of the timelessness of the truths of God and of a free movement in eternity such as one supposes is enjoyed by God. Consider this passage from *Cinq Rechants I* in which each part repeats its own pattern with due disregard for any other.

3^e Sopr. 2^e 3^e 1^{er}

bul - le de cris - tal - d'é - toi - le mon

3^e Contr. 1^{er} 3^e 1^{er}

ha - yo - ma ka - pri - ta - ma ha - yo - ma ka - pri -

3^e Tén. à 3

t k : k t k t k t

3 Basses 2^e 3^e

ka - pri - tama Bar - be Bleu(e) château

Cinq Rechants I, b68

The percussive noises made by the tenors in the preceding example are reminiscent of instrumental sounds. In *Trois petites liturgies* instruments participate in forming the complex heterophonic textures with the soprano voices. Slominsky's (1986) description of *Couleurs de la cité celeste* could just as well apply to the following example from *Trois petites liturgies*:

"...suite scored for large orchestra, with a resonant assortment of tinkling, banging and tintinnabulating percussion instruments, superadded upon ornithological chirping, twitting and crackling sounds of (two) birds .."

Celesta

Vibr.

Marac.

Tam-Tam

Chœur

Pour nous! Il est mon...

Piano

Onde

1ers Violons

2es Violons

Altos

Vielles

C.B.

5.2.5 Soloists

In a large choral work, one takes for granted the presence of the soloists, usually four (SATB), whose vocal prowess sets them above the rest of the choir. Their solo recitatives and arias often comprise a substantial share of the work and demonstrate their superior expertise. With Messiaen's choral works the situation alters. The short motet *O sacrum convivium!* has no solo sections, although Messiaen apparently regarded the work as suitable for four soloists or four part choir. Beginning with *Trois petites liturgies*, it becomes evident that his choral works are not designed as choral numbers separated by dazzling solo displays. Excepting for 12 bars in the entire *Trois petites liturgies*, the full choir sings all the time. The solo voice is used twice to sing a single phrase in intimate dialogue with God. It is technically far from the most difficult line in the work and is immediately repeated by a bigger group of six sopranos, thus belying any soloistic exclusivity. The phrase is then modified and a further six voices are added before the full choir continues as before. One can therefore deduce that Messiaen's main aim in using one voice was to devise a specific sound quality for the most lucid communication of the text.

6 Très lent, intérieur, infiniment tendre (♩ = 48)

Chœur *pp* 1 Soprano solo 6 Soprani soli

Vous qui parlez en nous, Vous qui vous taisez en nous,

Chœur 12 Soprani Tous (18 Soprani)

Et gardez le silence dans votre Amour, Vous êtes près,

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b121

He upheld this approach in *La Transfiguration* where soloists are heard on only three occasions in three hours of music. Again these are not virtuoso solo arias, but recitatives of no greater technical difficulty than those also allocated to choral groups. Walton in his *Balshazzar's Feast* (1929) had already begun to move in that direction by communicating much of the story by means of the chorus. Stravinsky too used a male chorus to represent the Lord in *Babel* (1944), but both these works use part singing, whereas those of Messiaen persist with unison recitation. Even *Cinq Rechants*, conceived for 12 skilful soloists, contains relatively few places where a line for one voice is obviously the line of overwhelming importance or, as occasionally happens, is actually marked 'solo'. On the contrary he did

not spare any of the 12 singers and there are some exceedingly difficult phrases, virtually instrumental in appearance, to be performed by all the voices. His practise of having solo lines dotted through an unaccompanied choral cycle, as seen in the following example, is rare.

The musical score is for 'Cinq Rechants V, b19'. It features five vocal parts: 1st Soprano Solo, 3rd Soprano, 1st Contralto Solo, 3rd Tenor, and 3 Basses. The time signature is 3/8. The 1st Soprano Solo part has a melodic line with lyrics 'fé(e) Vi - viane à mon chant d'a_mour' and dynamic markings *mf (souple)*, *f*, and *p*. The 3rd Soprano part has lyrics 'mour' and a dynamic marking *p*. The 1st Contralto Solo part has lyrics '- meur: d'a_mour'. The 3rd Tenor part has lyrics '1^{er} fla_ ko fla_ ko' and '2^e fla_ ko fla_ ko'. The 3 Basses part has lyrics '1^{re} fla_ ko fla_ ko'. The score is divided into measures of 16 and 8 bars.

Cinq Rechants V, b19

In his choice of the distribution of the solo lines Messiaen betrayed his partisanship for the female, specifically the soprano, voice. Of the 18 solo 'occasions' in *Cinq Rechants* (most of which comprise only a few bars at a time), none are for tenor, two are for bass and the rest for female voice. Of the remaining 16, the contralto is allocated four and the other 12 are divided between the three sopranos with the second soprano singing one, the third soprano two, and the first soprano nine. This presumably justifies the 12-part choir version of *Cinq Rechants* by the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music (Fidélío PL 5566/8), in which all the soprano solos are sung by a single soloist.

5.3 Choice of voices for the choir

Messiaen's choice of vocal resources for his choral works is sometimes unusual. The first, *O sacrum convivium!*, is written in the customary way for four-part SATB choir or four soloists. *Trois petites liturgies* however, makes use only of female voices. It even differs from

most three-part womens' choral works in that it was conceived for 18 sopranos. Poulenc's *Litanies à la vierge noir* (1936) for female voices, for example, contains much part-writing, but specifies neither the number nor the type to be used.

O sacrum convivium!

motet au Saint-Sacrement

[pour chœur à quatre voix mixtes
ou quatre solistes]

(avec accompagnement d'orgue *ad libitum*)

O sacrum convivium!

CHŒUR

(Voix de femmes. 18 Soprani)

Mon Jésus, mon si. len.

Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b1

In *Cinq Rechants* Messiaen returned to a more conventional approach in that the work is written for the broad categories of SATB, however there is a further division of each part into three independent and soloistically treated voices. Once again, in the score he specified the number and type of voices required. Only Vaughan-Williams' *Serenade to Music* (1938) appears to have been more specific than this, having been written expressly for the original 16 individuals!

CINQ RECHANTS

pour 12 voix mixtes

(3 Sopranos, 3 Contraltos, 3 Ténors, 3 Basses)

Cinq Rechants

Unlike *Trois petites liturgies*, *La Transfiguration* was indeed written for a mixed choir of men and women, but Messiaen further differentiated the voices into mezzo-sopranos and baritones. This gave him numerous options from which to choose, and he combined these vocal colours, as in *Cinq Rechants*, in a multiplicity of ways.

5.3.1 Ways of writing for those voices:

To a certain extent, Messiaen's use of the choir in *La Transfiguration* resembles Richard Strauss' use of a large orchestra. It is seldom that the total resources are used together to

produce a huge sound. Instead different combinations are exploited to create seemingly endless varieties.

5.3.1.1 Full Choir

Despite the above comment, there are nevertheless occasions, such as the one shown below, in which the full choir sings together in its primary divisions.

The image shows a musical score for a full choir with 16 parts. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure is marked '16 (ouvrir)' and the second and third are marked '8'. The lyrics are 'Al - ta - ri - a tu -'. The score includes vocal staves for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B), each with first and second parts. The music is in a key with one flat and a common time signature. The lyrics are written above the vocal staves.

La Transfiguration VII, b1

In the next example it can be seen how Messiaen capitalised on the vastness of the band of singers to create a highly *divisi* choir. Each sub-group (for example, first and second sopranos) is further sub-divided into two groups of five each, to yield a 20-part vocal texture. In his *Requiem*, Ligeti devised similar choral sub-divisions by separating each of the five parts of his choir (S, M-S, A, T, B) into four.

Modéré (♩ = 92)

Soprano 1 à 5
 avec 1ers Vocs 1 et 2
 Soprano 6 à 10
 avec 1ers Vocs 3 et 4
 Soprano 1 à 5
 avec Altos 1 et 2
 Soprano 6 à 10
 avec 1ers Vocs 5 et 6
 Ténor 1 à 5
 avec 1ers Vocs 7 et 8
 Ténor 6 à 10
 avec 2ds Vocs 1 et 2
 Contralto 1 à 5
 avec 2ds Vocs 3 et 4
 Contralto 6 à 10
 avec 2ds Vocs 5 et 6
 Contralto 1 à 5
 avec 2ds Vocs 7 et 8
 Contralto 6 à 10
 avec 2ds Vocs 9 et 10
 Violon 1 à 5
 avec Violoncelles 1 et 2
 Violon 6 à 10
 avec Altos 3 et 4
 Violon 1 à 5
 avec Altos 5 et 6
 Violon 6 à 10
 avec Altos 7 et 8
 Violoncelle 1 à 5
 avec Altos 9 et 10
 Violoncelle 6 à 10
 avec Violoncelles 3 et 4
 Basses 1 à 5
 avec Violoncelles 5 et 6
 Basses 6 à 10
 avec Violoncelles 7 et 8
 Basses 1 à 5
 avec Violoncelles 9 et 10
 Basses 6 à 10
 avec Violoncelles 11 et 12

(les cordes: b
 sans
 liaisons) *ff*
 (Vocalise
 sur *ff*
 a)
 (Vocalise *ff*
 sur
 a) *ff*
 (les cordes:
 sans
 liaisons) *ff*

In *La Transfiguration IX*, Messiaen often added the basses only at the end of a phrase to emphasize the finality or to highlight certain words. In this example, the basses are added towards the end of the sentence which refers to God 'alone' (solus).

2^{es} Sopr. ... qui - a so - lus

Mezzos

2^{es} Contr. ... lus

1^{er} Tén.

Baryt.

1^{er} Basses

... qui - a so - lus

La Transfiguration IX, b285

Sometimes the 'full choir' sings without the outer extremities. Note in this example, the presence of all the voices from second sopranos to first basses.

2^{es} Sopr. 3 16 Glo - ri - 4 16 - a in ex - 2 8 - cel - sis

Mezzos

1^{er} Contr.

2^{es} Contr.

1^{er} Tén.

2^{es} Tén.

Baryt.

1^{er} Basses

9 Glo - ri - a in ex - cel - sis

La Transfiguration XII, b47

The highest male and female voices are omitted in the following example. As there is no part writing here, the timbre of the dark voices singing in unison would appear to have been Messiaen's prime consideration.

Mezzos
Contr. 1res
Baryt.
Basses 1res

ves - ti - men - ta au - tem e - jus fac - ta

ves - ti - men - ta au - tem e - jus fac - ta

ves - ti - men - ta au - tem e - jus fac - ta

ves - ti - men - ta au - tem e - jus fac - ta

2 3 4 3

La Transfiguration I, b54

Smaller 'inner cores' of voices are derived by excluding the outer voices (all the sopranos and basses) as in this example.

Mezzos
1res Contr.
2es Contr.
1es Tén.
2es Tén.
Baryt.

De - fi - cit a - ni - ma me -

De - fi - cit a - ni - ma me -

De - fi - cit a - ni - ma me -

De - fi - cit a - ni - ma me -

De - fi - cit a - ni - ma me -

De - fi - cit a - ni - ma me -

4/16 2/16 4/16

La Transfiguration V, b13

5.3.1.2 Contrasts

5.3.1.2.1 Male/female

The possibilities for contrast within so large a choir are rich and Messiaen fully availed himself of the opportunities provided by this diversity. The primary difference between male and female voices is emphasized in *La Transfiguration* and in *Cinq Rechants*, as in this example, by using male and female choirs separately or antiphonally. This is but one of numerous points of similitude between *La Transfiguration* and Prokofiev's *Cantata for the*

20th Anniversary of the October Revolution (1936). Both are large choral works which contain much unison singing as a means of communicating a philosophy of life: the one exalting God and the other the glorifying man and a man-made institution. To this end, in both compositions words are presented audibly and in syllabic form. Obviously the overall sound is different because of Messiaen's individual musical language, but there are still sufficient similarities to make the comparison diverting.

Vif

3 SOPRANOS
3 CONTR.
3 TÉNORS
3 BASSES

à 3 *f* (*vigoureux*)
ma_yo_ma ka.li.mo_li_mo ma_yo_ma ka.li.mo_li_mo

1^{re} *f*
ma_yo_ma ka.li.mo ma_yo_ma ka.li.mo

tes yeux voy - a - gent
tes yeux voy - a - gent

Cinq Rechants V, b1

5.3.1.2.2 Solo/group

As a complete contrast to the imposing sound of large choral groupings, he occasionally used a single voice part, for example, the 10-voice baritone group, or even a single voice. The solo voice is usually directly contrasted with groups of voices, as in this example.

3
8

im - per - fec - ta.

1^{re} Contr.
2^{de} Contr.
1^{er} Tén. solo
1^{er} Basses
2^{es} Basses

ppp
ppp

4
8

1^{er} Tén. solo *mf*
Se - cun - do:

im - per - fec - ta.

La Transfiguration IX, b77

5.3.1.3 Groups of like voices

Just as combinations of male voices are used as seen in some of the preceding examples, so too are groupings of exclusively female voices. The darker voices of the mezzo-sopranos and altos, as seen in this example, are a regular pair.

3 Mezzos
3 1st Contr.

Can - dor est lu - cis aë -

mf *f*

La Transfiguration V, b50

Frequently and for extended periods a lighter shade is formulated by combining as in the next example, the second sopranos, mezzo-sopranos and first altos. Similar effects are generated in the male voice domain. Baritones and basses unite to produce a dark sound (*La Transfiguration IX*, bar 3) or baritone and first basses for a medium shade (*X*, bar 11).

2nd SOPRANOS
MEZZOS
CONTRALTOS

Can - dor est lu - cis aë -

mf

La Transfiguration VI, b1

5.3.1.4 Bridging voices

In order to lessen the disparity between high and low voices, Messiaen often used a 'bridging voice'. In the next example the dark voices of the contraltos direct the sound from female to male sonorities.

Qui re - for - ma - bit

Qui re - for - ma - bit cor - pus, 1. 2.

La Transfiguration II, b98

A similar procedure is used in the tenth movement to bridge the gap from the low to high female voices. The mezzo-sopranos function here as the intermediaries.

Modéré ($\text{♩} = 80$)

nos co - he - re - des

La Transfiguration X, b66

In the following examples, the music progressively passes from the low to the high voices, first within an all female context and then in the full choir.

es - se con - so -

La Transfiguration X, b77

Supr. 1
2
Mezzos
1^{er} Contr.
2^e Contr.
1^{er} Tén.
2^e Tén.
Baryt.
Basses 1
2

Al - le - lu - ia! A

2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3

16 16 16 8 8

La Transfiguration XIII, b36

5.3.1.5 Mixed groups

Combinations of mixed male and female voices provide further sources for mutation. Messiaen generally aligned the high, medium and low voices of the males with the same class of voice in the female choir. Some of the regular parallel male-female groupings are: mezzo-sopranos, first contraltos, baritones, first basses (*VII*, bar 65); second altos and second basses (*X*, bar 50); first and second altos and first and second basses (*IX*, bar 77); second sopranos and mezzo-sopranos with second tenors and baritones (*VIII*, bar 51); and contraltos and basses (*IX*, bar 90). The most common pairing, shown in the first example below, is soprano and tenor. In the second example they are seen to form a partnership for an antiphonal exchange with an alto-bass alliance, while the mezzo-sopranos and baritones sing almost continuously.

Sopr.
Tén.

3 1^{ers} Sopr.
3 1^{ers} Tén.

Al - le - lu - ia!

fp

Al - le - lu - ia!

(4/16) 2 3 2 2 2 2

8 16 8

La Transfiguration X, b110

La Transfiguration II, b32

Occasionally Messiaen created yet another new colour by combining a male or female choir with the opposite sex voice closest in range. In *La Transfiguration* the female choir is used with the tenors (III, bar 172) and, at bar 102 as seen here, the contraltos combine with the male voices.

La Transfiguration III, b102

By continuing the line from one voice to the next as in this example from *Cinq Rechants*, Messiaen made the most of the similarity between the contralto and the tenor voice.

Cinq Rechants IV, b32

These numerous examples demonstrate Messiaen's meticulous approach to the detail of timbre.

5.3.2 Vocal Ranges

No undue or outrageous demands are made by Messiaen on the skilful chorister. The soprano range is fairly consistent for all the works being fixed, within a semitone or two, at middle C to B^b". In *O sacrum convivium!* the altos range from 'A^b to B', with a slight extension at the top for *La Transfiguration*. This range is enlarged at both ends for *Cinq Rechants* to 'F for the third contralto and F^{#" for the first. The tenors' lower notes stay much the same throughout the oeuvre, with the upper range extended considerably in *Cinq Rechants* and *La Transfiguration*. From the E' of *O sacrum convivium!*, the third, second and first tenors respectively need a G', A^b and B'. The bass range also expands a little upwards in *Cinq Rechants*. "F[#] remains their low anchor, but the middle C' of *O sacrum convivium!* gives way to an E' for the second bass and an F' for the first. A further semitone down is required of the basses in *La Transfiguration*.}

The vocal ranges are summarised as follows:

O Sacrum convivium!:

Sopranos: middle C^x - A[#]"
 Altos: 'G[#] - B'
 Tenors: 'C[#] - E'
 Basses: "F[#] - middle C[#]'

Trois Petites Liturgies

Sopranos: all middle C[#]' - A''

Cinq Rechants

Sopranos: 1st - middle C' ↔ B<sup>#" ; 2nd - middle C' ↔ A'' ; 3rd - C' ↔ G^{#"}
 Altos: 1st - 'A^b ↔ F<sup>#" ; 2nd - 'A^b ↔ D[#]"" ; 3rd - F' ↔ D[#]""
 Tenors: 1st - 'D ↔ B' ; 2nd 'D ↔ A^b ; 3rd - 'D ↔ G'
 Basses: 1st - "A^b ↔ F' ; 2nd - "A^b ↔ E' ; 3rd - 'G^b ↔ D^b'</sup></sup>

La Transfiguration

Sopranos: 1sts - middle C[#] ↔ B²; 2nds - middle C[#] ↔ G²

Mezzo-sopranos: middle C¹ ↔ F²

Altos: 1sts - 'G² ↔ D²'; 2nds - 'G ↔ 'B

Tenors: 1sts - 'D ↔ A'; 2nds - 'D ↔ G'

Baritones: 'C ↔ F[#]'

Basses: 1sts - "F ↔ middle C[#]"; 2nds - "F ↔ 'B; 3rds - "F ↔ "C

CHAPTER 6: FORM

6.1 Sets and cycles

The Christian God which Messiaen sought to portray and glorify in his music is a 'corporate' God: three but one. Many of his compositions uphold this idea of collectivity by being issued as sets, rather than as single pieces. Other composers have of course, composed compilations, but in Messiaen's case there was a deliberate connection between the numerological, theological and musical elements.

The titles of three vocal works contain numbers: *Trois Mélodies*, *Trois petites liturgies* and *Cinq Rechants*¹⁷. The Christian Trinity explains the reference to three in the title of the *liturgies* which deal with, respectively, God present in us (the Holy Spirit), God present in Himself (Jesus Christ) and God present in all things (God the Father). The relationship to the Trinity in *Trois Mélodies* is more tenuous as they are songs addressed to the mortal Beloved. Nevertheless in later life, Messiaen consistently used the Beloved as the symbol of the church, the bride of Christ. At this early stage, the choice of a three song set may have been coincidental, but it certainly conforms to his later usage. *Les Offrandes oubliées*, an orchestral work composed the same year as *Trois Mélodies* (1930), also consists of three movements.

The central theme of *Cinq Rechants* is sacrificial love and, as the name suggests, the work comprises five movements. In his studies of Indian rhythms Messiaen had discovered that five is the number of the Indian god, Shiva, who represents the death of death. This may have influenced the number of movements chosen to convey the message of this composition.

The number of songs comprising each solo cycle is significant. Presumably because this is the number of months from conception to birth, nine is considered to be symbolic of maternity and hence the number of songs of *Poèmes pour Mi*, written for Messiaen's young bride. The organ work *La Nativité du Seigneur* [the birth of the Lord], written in 1935, i.e.

¹⁷Numbers are also mentioned in the titles of the following instrumental works: *Vingt Regards pour l'enfant Jésus* (1944) and *Sept Haïkaï* (1962).

the year preceding *Poèmes pour Mi*, also consists of nine movements.

Six is the number of Creation, the number of days taken by God to make a perfect universe, and therefore an appropriate number of songs for *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, which was inspired by the birth of his son, Pascal.

The number 12 and its multiples, are used persistently throughout the book of Revelation. There are, for example, 24 thrones surrounding the throne of God, 24 elders, 12 tribes, 144 000 sealed saints and 12 000 representatives from each tribe. Bearing in mind that it also was Christ's choice to select 12 disciples, the number seems to denote completeness, an ideal number. The text of *Harawi* presents ideal or perfect love and the cycle accordingly comprises 12 movements. Much later, Messiaen again composed a set of 12 pieces for the orchestral suite *Des Canyons aux étoiles* (1971).

La Transfiguration consists of 14 movements divided into two *septenaires*. Of the instrumental works: *Les corps glorieux* (1939), *Visions de l'Amen* (1943), *Livre d'orgue* (1951), *Chronochromie* (1959) and *Sept Haïkai* (1962), are all sets of seven. Messiaen explained the significance of the number seven himself:

"Seven is the perfect number, the creation of six days made holy by the divine Sabbath"
(Messiaen, 1976, sleeve notes: *Quatour pour la fin du temps*. RCA ARLI-1567).

Within each septenary of *La Transfiguration*, there are further subdivisions into two groups of three, plus one (3 + 3 + 1).

In some compositions, the number symbolism permeates the inner structure of the music in addition to determining the number of movements. The number three, for example, is constantly in evidence in the construction of *Trois petites liturgies*: the opening motive recurs three times; two of the three movements are in ternary form; the percussion is divided into two groups of three instruments each - piano, celesta, vibraphone and maracas, Chinese cymbal, tam-tam; five-part string orchestra is used with ondes martenot to give six parts; and the choir is divided into three times six to give 18 sopranos used either in unison, in groups of 12 or six, or as a single voice. A related and often quoted example of this attention to 'internal' numerological detail is Messiaen's interpretation of the Holy Trinity

in the organ work *Les Corps Glorieux VII*: a three-part texture is used and the principal melody is based on a nine-fold *Alleluia*.

Three vocal works remain uncategorised, numerologically speaking. *La mort du nombre* is a cantata, by definition a single work made up of different sections. The *Vocalise* was a commission as a vocal exercise and therefore differs in essence from the other works. Only the communion motet *O sacrum convivium!* remains as a solitary single-movement composition. Although *Cinq Rechants* and *La Transfiguration* comprise many movements, they are different from the other vocal sets in that individual movements are not named.

6.2 The principle of return

There are two principles which govern the structure of Messiaen's vocal works: repetition and variation. The powerful force of return in his music is often tempered by a varied recapitulation of ideas.

6.2.1 Immediately repeating material within a verse

A general song-writing principle to which he consistently adhered in the strophic and through composed songs, was the immediate repetition of melodies. The first line of the verse of *Trois Mélodies I* repeats exactly before the song digresses onto other material.

CHANT

Très modéré

Pour - quoi les oi - seaux de l'air, — Pour -

— quoi les reflets de l'eau, — Pour - quoi les nu - ges du ciel, — Pour -

Pourquoi?, *Trois Mélodies I*, b1

The first 'verse' of the *Vocalise* similarly consists of a six bar phrase heard twice with a single (penultimate) note modification. *Poèmes pour Mi VI* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*

III operate in the same way. The through composed cyclic song in *Harawi* (II, VIII and XII) comprises four different, of a total of nine, phrases. The mixture is as follows: the first two are identical, the next repeats immediately, there is a different phrase and the final one is heard twice: AA BB C DD.

In *O sacrum convivium!* Messiaen modified this slightly by beginning consecutive phrases in the same way and then altering the ending. Much of the song is constructed in pairs of phrases operating in this way, as seen in these musical excerpts. The first verse could be represented diagrammatically as: AA' BB' CC' CODA. The opening *rechant* of *Cinq Rechants IV* is assembled in a similar manner.

Lent et expressif (battre les croches)
 P

SOPRANO

O sacrum con - vi - vium! in quo Christus sú - mitur:

O sacrum convivium!, b1

re - có - li - tur memó - ri - a pas - si - ó - nis é - jus: mens implé - tur

O sacrum convivium!, b5

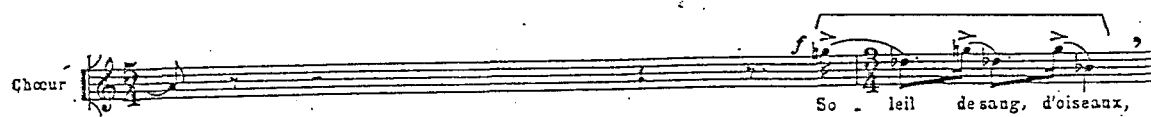
This economical method reaches an extreme in *Harawi X*, where the entire song consists of a single repeating phrase with two alternating endings.

Ka - tchi - ka - tchi les a - to - mes, fai - tes - les sau - ter.
 Ka - tchi - ka - tchi les a - to - mes,
 fai - tes - les dan - ser.

Katchikatchi les étoiles, Harawi XI, b9

Occasionally, as in *Les Corps Glorieux* for organ, Messiaen 'cross-pollinated' between movements of a work by relating themes motivically. In *Trois petites liturgies* a motivic

connection between the major themes as well as the secondary themes, can be detected. Prominent tritones feature in each of these excerpts from the secondary themes of movements *I*, *II* and *III*, respectively.



Trois petites liturgies I, b25

Chœur

Par lui le Père dit: c'est moi, Le

This musical excerpt shows a choral line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody features a prominent tritone interval between the notes G#4 and C5. The lyrics are 'Par lui le Père dit: c'est moi, Le'.

Trois petites liturgies II, b82

Chœur

ff (chanté)
Le successif vous est si - multa - né, Dans ces es - paces et ces temps que vous a - vez créés, Salet

This musical excerpt shows a choral line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody features a prominent tritone interval between the notes G#4 and C5. The lyrics are 'Le successif vous est si - multa - né, Dans ces es - paces et ces temps que vous a - vez créés, Salet'.

Trois petites liturgies III, b7

6.2.2 Consecutive strophes

It is rare in Messiaen's oeuvre to find a straightforward strophic song such as Schubert's *Das Wandern (Die Schöne Müllerin I)*, where the entire song begins and ends with the same music: A A A etc. An isolated example of a standard strophic form does occur in *Harawi V* but the second verse is ornamented in the manner of a Baroque *da capo* aria. The precept of consecutive strophes is more commonly treated with a measure of freedom. *Trois Mélodies I* is one of Messiaen's rare songs which contains identical consecutive verses, both melodically and accompanistically, but the seven-bar strophes are followed by a ten-bar coda of material not duplicated from the verse i.e. A A B. This repeating-strophes-and-coda form was one he reused periodically through his composing life and identical constructions can be found again much later, for example, in *Harawi X*. On a larger scale and within a choral context, the same form appears in *Trois petites liturgies II* where repetitions of the strophe are varied by an ever-increasing accumulation of instruments.

Trois Mélodies III features Messiaen's more characteristic approach to strophic writing. The first two verses appear to be very similar until they are put alongside each other. The

following example shows that the melodic contours of individual phrases are identical, but intervals at either end of the phrase are altered:

...té, C'est un a...

...près mi... di en... so... leil...

...lé, C'est le vent sur les

Verse 1: *La fiancée perdue*, Trois Mélodies III, b9

C'est un grand lys

blanc comme une ai...

...le, très haut dans u... ne cou... pe...

Verse 2: *La fiancée perdue*, Trois Mélodies III, b33

Verse one, phrase one: descending major 6th, ascending minor 3rd, descending diminished 4th.

Verse two, phrase one: descending tritone, ascending minor 3rd, descending minor 6th.

The time values are also slightly at variance:

Verse one, phrase one: minim, four crochets (2 on each pitch), minim.

Verse two, phrase one: minim, two crochets (one on each pitch) and minim tied to quaver.

Both second phrases in each verse use the same time formulas, but the intervals within the related contour have been 'tampered' with in the same way as in the first phrases. The accompanying style remains constant throughout.

The final song of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* is treated with similar liberty. In the second verse, phrases are sometimes transposed in their entirety as seen in example (i), whilst others are left as before. In example (ii), certain intervals are enlarged but the melodic shape, as in the *Trois Mélodies* example, remains easily recognizable.

Example (i)

CHANT *Vif*

Résurrection, Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI, b1

Vif

Résurrection, Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI, b22

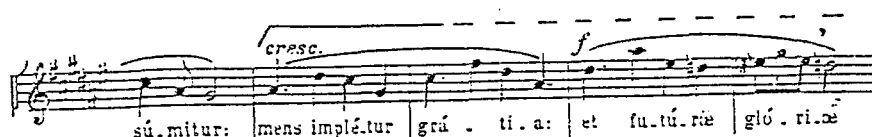
Example (ii)

Résurrection, Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI, b20

Résurrection, Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI, b41

O sacrum convivium! is also constructed on broadly strophic lines with matching coda. Here instead of transposing individual phrases in the second verse, lines are actually altered to create a sense of grand climax at the centre of the piece. The remainder of the motet is an exact repetition and the effect thus remains strophic.

O sacrum convivium!, b5



O sacrum convivium!, b20

In the large song *Harawi VII*, each strophe consists of four contrasting sub-sections which are subject to some interesting manipulations within the song:

(a b c d)	(a b c' d)	(a'd)
verse one	verse two	verse three

a is repeated exactly in verse two, and then extended and decorated on the third appearance, whilst *b* remains unaltered. *c* is treated in verse two in a quite ingenious way which can best be described as melody and accompaniment which 'reverse upon themselves' and is most clearly explained by illustration (see section 6.5). *d* is repeated once exactly and extended considerably the third time.

The huge 13th movement of *La Transfiguration* evolves this axiom of strophicity even further. Each of the three verses consists of many sections which repeat in the same order (with only one exception). A definite aural association between verses persists in the listener's mind, although few of the sections repeat exactly what has been heard in the previous verse. For example each verse contains an instrumental introduction, *alleluias*, plainsong-like recitation, and a slow chordal section. These divisions are readily discernable in each case even where there are no shared melodic, rhythmic, key or harmonic features. In the following examples, material from two of the 'verses' can be compared to show that the same voices and instruments are used, thus creating a related timbre; and that in both cases the vocal line simulates free plainsong *alleluias*. In the absence of an exactly repeating melody, the 'strophic' element is therefore dependent on the association of a style of writing.

(Un peu vif)

Modéré (♩ = 152)
Al

le - lu - ia!

La Transfiguration XIII, b26

La Transfiguration XIII, b352

As seen, the strophic form with coda is to be found throughout Messiaen's vocal oeuvre, but the verses themselves and their relationships to one another become more complex as one progresses chronologically through the compositions.

6.2.2.1 The contrasting coda

The first strophic song, *Trois Mélodies I*, has two identical verses followed by a lengthy coda. In this instance, the material making up the coda, does not vary significantly from the substance of the verses. In other words, the coda, although not a repetition of anything heard thus far, follows logically. Another much later strophic + coda song, *Harawi X*, adheres to this pattern.

By contrast, in *Trois Mélodies III*, the material appended after the second verse is sufficiently different to constitute an altogether separate section. A perusal of the following bars (the first from the beginning of the song and the second from the beginning of the coda) will highlight the disparity: the verses are loud, fast, have two crochet beats in a bar, use wide-ranging melodic lines and have a busy *mf* accompaniment in the treble half of the piano; whilst the coda is soft, moderate speed, has two minim beats in the bar, uses a step-wise melody in one register, and has a *pp* trickling, triplet accompaniment in the mid to high register of the piano.

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system, labeled 'CHANT' and 'PIANO', shows the beginning of the song. The vocal line is in a high register, starting with a note on the second line of the staff. The piano accompaniment is in the treble clef, featuring a busy, wide-ranging melodic line. The tempo is marked 'Vif' and the dynamics are 'f'. The lyrics are 'C'est la dou - ce fi - an - cé -'. The second system shows the beginning of the coda. The vocal line is in a lower register, starting with a note on the first line of the staff. The piano accompaniment is in the mid to high register, featuring a soft, step-wise melody. The tempo is marked 'Vif' and the dynamics are 'mf'.

La fiancée perdue, *Trois Mélodies III*, b1

Modéré

O Je - sus,

Modéré

La fiancée perdue, Trois Mélodies III, b50

This slow contemplative coda or codetta, particularly in a lively energetic song, becomes a distinguishing characteristic of Messiaen's work (see also section 4.2.2).

It is often, as in the following example from the end of *Cinq Rechants*, separated from the rest of the work by silence. The final words murmured by the basses whilst the contraltos hum, are preceded as usual by a contrasting section, here a vigorous *f* incantation.

Lent (lointain)
(bouche fermée)

2^e et 3^e *ppp*

um um um

um

à 3

t t t

à 3

t t t

2^e et 3^e *pp*

dans l'a ve nir

Cinq Rechants V, b92

The last phrase of *La Transfiguration* is also isolated from the rest of the movement by silence and the work ends in a grand and slow manner ($\text{♩} = 30$). The difference on this occasion is the *fff* volume of the phrase. There are other examples of a separated loud ending, but they are outnumbered by the quiet ones.

glo - ri - ae tu - ae!

glo - ri - ae tu - ae!

La Transfiguration XIV, b77

6.2.3 Strophes separated by contrasting material / Ternary form

With the *Vocalise* Messiaen applied his returning material principle in a slightly different, if nonetheless conventional way. Two 12-bar strophes occur at either end of the piece (with a brief coda on the final one) separated by material which is related, but different. Pitch and contour are altered, but the phrasing and rhythmic cell remain the same to sustain the relationship between the two sections. The first example shows the end of the first verse and the second, the central digression.

Vocalise, b1

Vocalise, b15

ABA + coda is also used in *Trois Mélodies III* and in four of the *Poèmes pour Mi* songs (IV, VI, VII and VIII). Ternary form is applied strictly in *Trois petites liturgies I*, but as in the expanded version of strophic songs, the outer sections of these large choral movements

comprise more than a single section i.e. A consists of recitation, a melodic ostinato and then lyricism to make together the outer panel of the ternary form.

Ternary structures persist within *La Transfiguration*, but the mature Messiaen treated the format with greater freedom. In the same way as the correlation between consecutive strophes is relaxed in this later work, the reappearance of A in a ternary structure bears less resemblance to its original. In movement five, for example, the second A retains the same melodic material and time patterns, but is varied by the use of different keys and longer instrumental interludes.

6.2.4 Refrain lines

In *Poèmes pour Mi* Messiaen introduced a condensation of the ternary notion where the A's and B's no longer represent sections of a composition, but lines. *Poèmes pour Mi II* consists only of alternations of a refrain line and repeated note recitations. In *Poèmes pour Mi V*, shown below, he experimented further with this initial idea by tying the refrain line as before, to the same words, but by also transposing it to a different pitch on its third appearance. Examples (i) and (iii) show the refrain line and (ii), some of the intervening material.

Example (i)

CHANT

Presque lent

mf

Va où l'Es - prit te mè - ne,

L'Épouse, Poèmes pour Mi V, b1

Example (ii)

Nul ne peut sépa.rer ce que Dieu a u - ni,

L'Épouse, Poèmes pour Mi V, b3

Example (iii)

Va où l'Esprit te mè - ne, Com.me l'Egli - se est le pro.longem: —

L'Épouse, Poèmes pour Mi V, b9

A transposed refrain line also occurs in *Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III*. As suggested by the title, it possibly has a base in liturgical responsorial psalmody, where a short response is repeated after each line of psalm. In Messiaen's version, part of the text is rhythmically declaimed and a refrain line of repeating music and similar text follows. In *Séquence du Verbe, Cantique Divin, Trois petites liturgies II*, he used a more extended pattern of repeating melodic lines as a response to each versicle. The variation in the accompanying orchestral material perhaps justified his description of the movement as a Sequence, seeing as the true liturgical sequence apparently uses different music for each pair of successive stanzas¹⁸.

Chants de Terre et de Ciel III is much bigger in every way than the refrain line songs of *Poèmes pour Mi*. Material between the refrain lines is longer and more diverse. Even the refrain line itself is varied, but not to the extent that one loses the link with the original. The first example which follows, gives the original and the second, the varied version.

Vif et joyeux

CHANT 

Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, b1

Plus lent 

Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, b22

Messiaen slowly evolved the idea further within the larger edifice of the song cycle: instead of a refrain line within a song, a recurring song within a cycle. His first attempt at unifying a work by means of a cyclic theme had been in the piano composition *Visions de l'Amen*, written in 1943, five years before *Harawi*. In this seven-movement work, the theme representing the 'Amen of the Divine will' is heard in movements one, five and seven and in fragmented fashion in the third. The two-piano *Vingt Regards*, composed the year before

¹⁸The feature of the fully-developed Sequences of the later Middle Ages was the repetition of a different musical phrase for each pair of stanzas. The musical form was therefore usually AABBC... throughout. Although *Trois petites liturgies II* is described as a Sequence, the form of the text and the melodic line has a closer resemblance to an extended responsory than to a liturgical Sequence. The essential musical feature of the Sequence is the use of different music for each pair of successive stanzas (Johnson, 1989, p48; p68).

Harawi, has two cyclic themes labelled in the score, whilst the *Turangalila-symphonie* (1948) has four. In *Harawi* the cyclic song recurs at strategic points in the unfolding of the drama: song *II*, again as song *VII* and at the conclusion of the cycle, song *XII*. The accompaniment 'comments' on the story: the first appearance of the theme is frilled with joyous birdsong to suggest the morning of life; the second is at the time of death, intimated in the piano part by the tolling of funeral bells; and the final appearance is accompanied by slow, descending chords to suggest the path to Eternity.

In *La Transfiguration*, Messiaen applied the element of recurrence on an even larger scale: that of recurring movements. Tippett had used Negro Spirituals to punctuate and unify his composition *A Child of our Time* (1939). Messiaen's use of plainchant and chorale style in *La Transfiguration* could be likened to this procedure. Each septenary contains two choral narratives which, although not identical, are similar enough to sustain the notion of cyclicality. All four begin with gongs and temple blocks and proceed with the text in a neo-plainchant style. Melodic material is hardly altered. In *La Transfiguration*, as in *Harawi*, the accompaniment is modified in each instance to adhere more closely to the musical depiction of the text. In the second septenary for example, the luminous cloud surrounding the mountain where Christ was transfigured is represented by string *glissandos* and trilled harmonics.

3 Modéré (♩ = 112) Un peu vif (♩ = 132)

Ténors 1^{ers} 2^{es} *mf* *p*
 As - sump - sit Je - sus Pe - trum, et Ja -
 - co - bum, et Jo - an - nem fra - trem e - jus,

La Transfiguration I, b18

Modéré (♩ = 112)

Un peu vif (♩ = 132)

1^{re} 2^{es} *mf* Ad - luc e - o lo - quen - te, *p* ec - ce nu - bes

1^{re} 2^{es} lu - ci - da o - bum bra - vit e - os.

Un peu vif (♩ = 80)

1, 2, 3 *pp* *gliss.*

4, 5, 6 *pp* *gliss.*

12 Voies 7, 8, 9 *pp* *gliss.* *cresc.* *f*

10, 11, 12 *pp* *gliss.* *cresc.* *f*

2 8 1, 2, 3 *pp* *gliss.*

4, 5, 6 *pp* *gliss.* *cresc.* *f*

12 Voies 7, 8, 9 *pp* *gliss.* *cresc.* *f*

10, 11, 12 *pp* *gliss.* *cresc.* *f*

Altos 1, 2, 3 *pp* *gliss.*

4, 5, 6 *pp* *gliss.* *cresc.* *f*

7, 8, 9 *pp* *gliss.* *cresc.* *f*

2 8 1. *pp* *gliss.*

2. *pp* *cresc.* *f*

3. *pp* *gliss.*

4. *pp* *cresc.* *f*

5. *pp* *gliss.*

6 Voies 6. *pp* *cresc.* *f*

La Transfiguration VIII, b13

The ultimate step in the re-use of material must surely be Messiaen's quotations of music from one work to another. This 'borrowing' was not confined to vocal works, but significant

to this discussion are the thematic references in *Cinq Rechants* to the two other works of the *Tristan* trilogy, *Harawi* and the *Turangalila-symphonie*.

6.3 The principle of variety: through composition

Despite his penchant for using melodic material in a frugal way, it was unusual for Messiaen to compose straightforward strophic songs. Neither, however, are there an overwhelming number of totally through-composed songs in his oeuvre. The short central song of *Trois Mélodies* is the first such composition and sets a precedent for those that follow. Most of them are intimate, self-absorbed little songs: *Poèmes pour Mi III*, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel II* and *Harawi I*. The other two 'through-composed' songs, both from *Poèmes pour Mi* (I and IX) are songs which follow the style of plainsong with recitation and alleluistic vocalise. *La Transfiguration VI* is a brief, densely heterophonic through composed movement in which the same words are sung three times, but to different music on each occasion.

6.4 Combination of return and contrast

In *La mort du nombre*, Messiaen used a combination of the principles of repetition and variation. The second appearance of a refrain line is transposed, but is identical in every other way. The melodic material which separates the refrain lines on the other hand, is not specifically restated, but aurally aligned by virtue of the dynamic level, speed, tenor timbre and piano accompaniment used. In the example which follows the corresponding excerpts by the tenor (second soul) are separated by the contrasting soprano line (first soul).

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for the tenor (second soul), marked 'Animé' and '2^{me} ÂME mf'. The middle staff is for the soprano (first soul), marked 'Animé'. The bottom staff is for the piano accompaniment, marked 'PIANO mf' and featuring triplets. The lyrics 'Je suis en - co - re très loin de toi...' are written below the tenor staff. The score is identified as 'La mort du nombre, b25' at the bottom right.

1^{re} ÂME Sop

Lent *pp* Rall.

L'eau dorman - te ne fuit pas la fleur, — la fleur — qui la re - gar - de

2^{me} ÂME

Animé *mf*

Je veux m'ap - pro - chér. Quel - le for - ce in - vi - si -

Animé *mf* *dr*

La mort du nombre, b37

The form of the work can be represented diagrammatically thus:

Introductory recitative - A - B - A - B - A - C - postlude

A represents the tenor's *Animé* sections and B the refrain line of the first soul, while C is an extended aria for the soprano. The cantata concludes with a violin postlude which acts as a balancing measure to the introductory recitative. Although the form is clearly defined and retains strong areas of affiliation, there is no recurring strophe whatsoever.

A similar extension of the rondo idea was first applied with a single voice in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*. As in *La mort du nombre*, the returning A has no obviously repeating theme, but the material is associated in the same way i.e. by the style of singing and accompaniment. In *La Transfiguration* a relationship between corresponding movements of each septenary can be detected. Such an affinity exists between movements VII and XIV, the final chorale of each septenary. XIV is conceived on much larger lines, but the slow, chordal approach

of both seen in the examples which follow, is sufficient to associate them in the mind of the listener.

C.A.
1^{re} Clar.
2^e, 3^e Clar.
3^e Clar.
Cl. basse
3 B \flat s
C. B \flat s
1^{re} Trp.
2^e, 3^e Trp.
3^e Trp.
1
2
3
4
5
6
Cors
3 Trb.
Trb. basse
Tuba
Saxh.
Tuba C.H.
Sopr. 1 2
Mezzos
Contr. 1 2
Tén. 1 2
Baryt.
Basses 1 2
1^{re} Vcs div.
2^e Vcs div.

La Transfiguration VII, b23

C.A.

1^{re} Clar.

2^e, 3^e Clar.

3^e Clar.

Cl. basse

1^{er} B^{as}

2^e, 3^e B^{as}

1^{er} Trp.

3 Trp.

2^e, 3^e Trb.

1^{er} Trb.

2^e, 3^e Trb.

Tuba

Saxh.

Sopr.

Mezzo

Contr.

Tén.

Baryt.

Basses

1^{er} V^ocs div.

2^e V^ocs div.

ri - ae, gio - ri - ae

gio - ri - ae, gio - ri - ae

La Transfiguration XIV, b40

In *Cinq Rechants* Messiaen restricted himself to a more rigid interpretation of the rondo form. The composition is based entirely on alternating *chants* (C) and *rechants* (R).

Couplet
 Bien modéré

1^{er} Contr.
 ma pre - miè - re fois terre terre l'é - ven - tail dé - ploy - é

2^e et 3^e Tén.
 (parlé, percuté) pp
 mano mano mano nad - ja lâ - ma krî - ta

2^e et 3^e Basses
 (parlé, percuté) pp
 ma yo ma yo ma - ta krî

Cinq Rechants II, b32

The form of *Cinq Rechants* has literary antecedents. In this, as in the title, Messiaen paid tribute to *Printemps*, a work by the Renaissance poet Claude Le Jeune, for whom he had a great admiration (Johnson, 1989, p95). In the *rechants* Messiaen copied Le Jeune's model in retaining the same text and basically the same music. In the *chants*, however, Messiaen varied the music whilst keeping the same text, where Le Jeune kept the same music, but used a different text for each repetition.

Five years earlier Messiaen had expressed a similar poetic intention in the music of *Vingt Regards*, apparently gleaned from the writings of Dom Colombo Marmion and Maurice Toesca. Another literary form served as the inspiration for *Chronochromie*, though as in *Cinq Rechants*, the prototype was treated with a measure of freedom. The *strophe*, *antistrophe* and *epode* of certain Greek lyrics was modified to two *strophes* and two *antistrophes* before the *epode* and coda.

6.5 Symmetry

Symmetry plays an increasing role in the form of Messiaen's vocal works, both in terms of the macro- and micro structure. The *Vocalise* in its traditional ABA form, like the other ternary songs, shows an early desire for balance, with the principle of return conceived within symmetrical precincts. Following instrumental precedents of multi-movement works such as *Les Corps Glorieux* and *Quatour pour la fin du temps*, Messiaen constructed *Harawi*

in symmetrical fashion around the central seventh song. The introductory number is separate, *II* and *XII* are paired, *III* and *XI* are similar in style, and the pair of songs *IV* and *V* correspond with the pair *IX* and *X*.

	2	3	{4	5}	6	7	8	{9	10}	11	12
I	*					*					*
<i>I</i>											
N	*					*					*
T	*					*					*
R	*					*					*
O	*					*					*

La Transfiguration, whilst not constructed in an arch form, nevertheless displays symmetry between the two complementary blocks. In addition, the form of each movement in the first septenary often corresponds to the form of its counterpart in the second. A sense of finality is created at the end of each septenary, for example, by the movements in chorale style.

SEPTENARY I

Gospel narrative
Meditation
Meditation
Gospel narrative
Meditation
Meditation
Chorale

SEPTENARY II

Gospel narrative
Meditation
Meditation
Gospel narrative
Meditation
Meditation
Chorale.

Other twentieth century composers have also used palindromic forms, rather than traditional sonata-type or developing forms. Lipkin's *Sun Symphony*, for example, reflects in its form the arc of Herrick's sun which provided the programmatic inspiration for his work (Headington, 1989). In addition, Messiaen sometimes paid attention to finer details of symmetry often overlooked by other composers.

In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel V* the A section shown in the following example, occurs on the outer edges of several contrasting sections. Note how Messiaen inverted the accompaniment

in the second A so that the convex arc of the first four bars become a concave one in the second (bar 55).

CHANT

Bien modéré *mf*

Bien modéré

PIANO

p *sf* *sf*

Vil - le, œil puant,

Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel V, b1

Bien modéré *mf*

Bien modéré

Clo - che,

Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel V, b55

This 'framing' technique is also to be found in the instrumental composition *Regard de la Vierge* [The Look of the Virgin] (*Vingt Regards IV*), where the gentle rocking motion suggestive of Mary with her baby, occurs at the beginning and end of the movement. In the contemporary vocal work, *Harawi VIII*, Messiaen carefully inverted the material in a manner similar to that seen in the preceding example. The following bars show the original and 'mirror image' appearances of this recurring section. Notice, in comparing the two excerpts that:

- a) the melody notes in (i) are G# descending to D, but in (ii) D ascends to G#
- b) the four piano chords which occur with the voice in (i) are reversed in (ii)
- c) the 'intervening' accompaniment chords (i.e. where the voice does not sing) grow in number from one to four semiquavers and decrease back to one in both (i) and (ii), but the order of the chords is reversed in (ii).

The musical score consists of four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Kahi pi - pas, mahi pi - pas, kahi pi - pas, mahi pi - pas, kahi pi - pas." The piano accompaniment features various dynamics including *ff staccato*, *f*, and *ff*. There are performance markings such as "Ped." (pedal) and "ff" (fortissimo) throughout. The score includes musical notations like slurs, accents, and dynamic hairpins. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 8/8.

Syllables, Harawi VIII, b13

mi - a! Pi - pas - kahi,

ff martelé

ff staccato

Red.

pi - pas - mahi, pi - pas - kahi,

ff

Red.

pi - pas - mahi, pi - pas - kahi,

ff

Red.

pi - pas - mahi, pi - pas - kahi.

ff

Red.

Red. Syllables, Harawi VIII, b42

Messiaen continued to use this technique in *La Transfiguration* and the second movement, for example, is 'edged' by the exultant cries of specific birds. This was an appropriate

tribute, both melodic and formal, to his great and ongoing source of inspiration: Nature. For it was his desire to remain true to the symmetrical designs of nature as seen, for example, in butterfly wings, people, and leaves, and which is significantly reiterated in the cross (Samuel, 1976, p204).

CHAPTER 7: TEXTS

"An act of faith; a music which may touch on all subjects without ceasing to touch upon God"
(Messiaen, 1956, p8).

This was Messiaen's quest. There are, however, numerous twentieth century composers who have written individual compositions of religious significance. Some have assumed the traditional nomenclatures and divisions of the Mass or shortened Mass, for example Bernstein's *Missa brevis* (1985). Still others rely specifically on Catholic liturgy, such as Poulenc's *Stabat Mater* (1950). Many express the deep anguish and suffering associated with the World Wars: Kodály's *Psalmus Hungaricus* op.13, (1923), Britten's *War Requiem* op.66 (1962) and Penderecki's *St. Luke Passion* (1963). Martin's oratorio, *In terra pax* (1944), commissioned to be performed on Armistice Day, encompasses the gloom of wartime and the ultimate resolution of torment in divine peace. Still others retell Old Testament stories, sometimes presenting them, as in Stravinsky's case, in brief, dispassionate style (*Babel* (1944) and *Abraham and Isaac* (1962)). In his song cycle *Le Poèmes juifs* [Jewish poems] op.34 (1916), Milhaud appealed to the group identity provided by religion, in this case Judaism.

Despite the strong religious associations in Messiaen's music in all these aspects, he stands apart. Except for one short communion motet, in his vocal works he did not use traditional or liturgical forms. Like many twentieth century composers, he too endured the hardships of war, yet suffering does not dominate his music. The only work which contains a nucleus of narrative is *La Transfiguration*, but the textual content is weighted far more heavily in the direction of meditation than history. Neither is his music specifically a rallying call for Christians. Yet, as will be seen, he realized his goal as stated above and a thread of spirituality runs consistently through his work.

7.1 The Bible as source

The Bible, as the Christian version of the Word of God, is the inspiration behind all Messiaen's music and poetry and it was not unusual for him to precede the individual movements of instrumental works with Biblical quotations in the score. *Les corps glorieux, Vingt Regards, Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum* and even as abstruse a work as *Livre d'orgue* all contain

Biblical prefixes. On the other hand, there is only one vocal composition in which he used direct quotations as text. The narrative core of *La Transfiguration*, derived from Matthew's gospel, describes the incident in which Christ, in prayer with a few disciples on the mountainside, is transfigured into a radiant state. Only the first nine verses of chapter 17 of the gospel book are used and these are contained in four episodes in each of the first, fourth, seventh and eleventh movements of *La Transfiguration*. Each narrative extract is followed by two meditations which comprise mixtures of Biblical text and quotations from other sacred writings. Biblical books quoted include Philippians and Hebrews (first septenary), Luke and Genesis (second septenary), and Psalms (used to conclude both septenaries).

7.2 Images derived from the Bible

Whilst Messiaen, like Stockhausen, preferred to write his own texts, it is just as apparent that many of the images which grace his own poetry are, if not gleaned from the Bible, in happy agreement with that source.

7.2.1 Light

"All the bells quiver in this light - light and therefore life" - inscription to *Amen de la Création, Visions de l'Amen I*.

Light, as a representative of goodness and spiritual enlightenment, is a metaphor which permeates both the Christian scriptures and Messiaen's vocal texts. *La Transfiguration* is obviously dominated by that miraculous event in which Christ was transfigured by light. The following two lines are taken from the first and third movements respectively, and the last is a refrain which recurs throughout the work:

"His face did shine as the sun and His raiment was white as the light" (Matthew 17:1-2).

"Christ Jesus, the brightness of His Father's glory" (Hebrews 1:3)

"Wisdom is the brightness of everlasting light" (Song of Solomon 7:26).

Of the works for which he wrote his own texts, Messiaen began as early as *La mort du nombre* to proffer light in this metaphysical way. The opening recitative of that cantata reads as follows:

"There was a ray of sun asleep in your hand. You raised up high your little fingers. It began to shine forth with such brilliance that I could no longer see. And as it unfolded it grew so long that it embraced the land around. Climbing still higher it bathed me in light and led me to your calm soul."

The final aria asserts that:

"It [the new single soul created from the union of the two] climbs higher than the old soul and soars up towards new lights".

A parallel Biblical text endorses Messiaen's perspective:

"the path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (Proverbs 4:18)

From then on, the yearning for enlightenment is a prevailing theme. In *Poèmes pour Mi I* for example, there is 'the heritage of light', in *Poèmes pour Mi III* and *VI* 'eternal light', in *Trois petites liturgies I* 'my Forever of light', in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI (Résurrection)* the newly resurrected soul is called to put on a 'garment of light' and in *La Transfiguration XII* the people cry to God to 'send out Thy light and Thy truth'. An Impressionist influence is conceivably extant in the *Poèmes pour Mi I* quotation 'the light which transforms', but the metaphor serves as well in a Christian or religious context.

Naturally as a primary source of light, the sun occurs repeatedly in the texts. In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel I*, Messiaen used the image of the sun revolving around the earth to represent the relationship between the man and his wife: 'little ball of sun complementary to my earth'. No doubt there would be feminists who would take exception to the metaphor, but what cannot be argued is that it is used with great affection and tenderness.

The softer light of the moon and its fellow reflectors of light, the stars, were a great source of delight to Messiaen and therefore frequently mentioned in the folios. These numerous references are habitually couched in congenial terms: 'sweeter than the freshness of the stars' (*Poèmes pour Mi I*), 'star of love' (*Harawi IX*) and 'star bird' (*Harawi X*). The latter is not as surrealistic as it might seem on first hearing as it seems that, in Messiaen's words:

"...the stars do sing. One can record vibrations from stars, each star has its own vibration and produces a note" (Watts, 1979).

All the images which refer to the freshness and sweetness of stars can be further illuminated by referring to the Biblical book of Revelation: chapter 2:28 promises the gift of the 'morning star' to those who endure hardship and in chapter 22:16 Jesus describes Himself as this 'bright Morning Star'. The star therefore, can be seen in this instance to represent God Himself. In the piano work *Regard de l'étoile* [Contemplation of the star], *Vingt Regards II*, Messiaen devised a 'theme of the star and the cross': the one symbol heralding the birth of the Christ and the other, his death.

Messiaen's knowledge of astronomy is apparent in *Harawi XI* and *Trois petites liturgies III* which name various stars. The composer professed to having a 'favourite star' with which he identified on the following basis:

"I've chosen Aldebaran, because it has a nice name, a really charming name. It's an Arabic name which means the one who follows, Aldebaran, the follower. I chose that particular star because it has a great velocity, a great light, and because it follows the Pleiades. I found that to be an admirable function of the follower" (Watts, 1979).

Some of the star messages are cryptic if one is unfamiliar with the Christian version of the Apocalypse. *Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI*, for example, sings of 'seven stars of love'. This is explained in Revelation 1:20 where Jesus is seen holding seven stars which are 'the angels of the seven churches'. Other related star references are contained in *Harawi II, VI, VII, Chants de Terre et de Ciel I* and *Cinq Rechants I, V*.

Throughout the oeuvre, stars are also used in scenes of cosmic disorder. These probably have their origin in Revelation texts such as:

"...the dragon swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.." (Revelation 12:3)

"...and there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough and he lost his place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan" (Revelation 12:7).

Stars are first mentioned in this context in *La mort du nombre*: 'the stars are tumbling down'.

Similar interstellar disruptions are implied in the much later song, *Harawi XI*, where ‘the stars dance’.

It is also most often in scenes of universal turmoil that the other heavenly bodies, the planets and satellites, appear (*Trois petites liturgies III* and *Harawi VI*). According to Messiaen’s commentary for a related instrumental movement *Amen des étoiles, de la planète à l’anneau* [Amen of the stars and the ringed planet], *Visions de l’Amen II*, ‘the stars, sun and Saturn, the planet with its multicoloured ring, rotate violently’.

There are songs which present, in contrast to the light, the darkness, shadow and night associated with hell. Shadows occur in many songs (*Harawi II, IV, V IX, X, XII; Cinq Rechants II, IV, V* and *La Transfiguration I, II, V, VI, VIII, XII*), but harsher phrases such as ‘devious midnight’ (*Chants de Terre et de Ciel V*) are, as one would expect, far fewer than the light images.

Associated with its denizens the various orbs of light, the sky (or heaven) occurs frequently in Messiaen’s lyrics from *Trois Mélodies* to *La Transfiguration*. The clouds mentioned within the first few lines of *Trois Mélodies I* and also to be found in *La mort du nombre* and *Poèmes pour Mi I*, play a significant role in *La Transfiguration*, where they symbolize the presence of God the Father from which the voice emanates to confirm the Sonship of Jesus Christ. They are depicted musically as a halo of strings (see section 6.6.1).

Rainbows, caused by the refraction of light, occur in the texts as a symbol of hope, of the reliability of God’s Word and of the transforming power of light. Along with ‘plain’ rainbows (*Poèmes pour Mi VIII, Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV, Harawi IV*), there are ‘rainbows of love’ (*Trois petites liturgies I*), ‘rainbow ladders of truth’ (*Trois petites liturgies III*), and ‘rainbow space’ (*Harawi XI*). Mirrors, those reflectors of light and images, appear in *Trois petites liturgies II; Harawi IV, VII; Cinq Rechants I* and *La Transfiguration II* and *VI*.

7.2.2 Apocalypse

The book of Revelation contains a vision of the final judgement of the world and of the Celestial City awaiting those redeemed by God. This apocalyptic vision clarifies many of the seeming

enigmas of the imagery in the vocal texts. The vision itself comprises various sections: cosmic chaos (already noted in connection with the stars), hell and the Beast, gifts conferred upon the faithful, specific activities, the Celestial city, and Eternity with God in the Garden.

7.2.2.1 Cosmic chaos

The war in heaven, apart from causing the stars to fall, will also be experienced in terms of:

"... flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake" (Revelation 16:18).

These are, no doubt, the source of similar phrases in Messiaen's texts and have been dealt with at length above in section 7.2.1. Thunder and lightning are specifically referred to in *La Transfiguration*.

7.2.2.2 Hell and the Beast

In the struggle between the powers of Light and those of Darkness, it is recorded that:

"Michael and his angels fought against the dragon ...the great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan" (Revelation 12:3)

The abyss into which the devil is cast is featured in Messiaen's songs and in his instrumental works. Thus in *La mort du nombre* the suffering soul awaiting the end, sings 'the earth gapes open, the stars tumble down, the world is buried'. In *Harawi III*, the singer sings of the 'solar chaos of vertigo' as she looks down in to 'the abyss cast on all sides ... black on black'.

"The Beast and the false prophet were captured and the two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur..." (Revelation 19:20)

"If anyone's name was not found in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15).

Fire and flame are not commonly remarked on in the vocal works, but when they are it is usually, in line with the above Revelation texts, in the context of visions of hell. The tormented

first soul in *La mort du nombre* sings of the 'circle of fire' and in *Poèmes pour Mi VII* there are 'sulphur-crumbling geometries'. The beast is mentioned in *Poèmes pour Mi VII* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel V*.

7.2.2.3 Gifts conferred on the Saints

To the saints who persevere through the persecution of the time immediately preceding the establishment of the Holy City, God promises various symbolic gifts. A mark of protection, a seal, will be placed on His beloved people to preserve them in these times of trial. The Biblical text states:

"He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 'do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God'" (Revelation 7:2-3).

This explains such phrases as 'His sign upon your brow' (*Poèmes pour Mi VI*) and 'set yourself as a seal on my heart' (*Trois petites liturgies III*).

The redeemed Saint will be given a new name written on a white stone:

"I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name" (Revelation 3:12)

"I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it" (Revelation 2:17).

In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI* mention is made of the stone, in *Trois petites liturgies III* 'stone of snow with a new name', and in *Harawi IX*, 'clear stone'.

God adds in His Revelation, that the names of the Chosen will be written in the Book of Life:

"I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels" (Revelation 3:5).

This is doubtless the source for 'the golden ink indelible on the book' from *Trois petites liturgies III*.

Not only will the Christian be given a seal and a new name, but he/she will be clad in new garments:

"They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy" (Revelation 3:4).

There are various references to garments and robes in Messiaen's songs, used particularly within the context of this afterlife. In *Résurrection, Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI* the soprano sings 'put on your garment of light', *La Transfiguration XII* reads 'Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment' (from Psalm 104:2), *Trois petites liturgies III* 'robe washed in the blood of the lamb', and *Cinq Rechants III* 'robe of love'. In *Poèmes pour Mi III* 'we shall contemplate Truth in young unblemished bodies, eternally luminous' refers more specifically to the resurrection body as mentioned in *La Transfiguration II*:

"...we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Philippians 3:20-21).

This transformation of the body also provides the main subject of the organ cycle *Les Corps Glorieux*. The sub-title of that work reads *Sept visions brèves de la Vie des Ressuscités* [Seven short visions of the Life of the Resurrected]. The joy associated with that resurrection body is expressed in the heading of another instrumental work, *Amen de la Consommation, Visions de l'Amen VII*:

"The life of the bodies in glory, in a carillon of light, the shining light that shineth more and more" (from the Prophets).

In *Poèmes pour Mi I*, the idea of the Revelation 'resurrection garment' is apparently superimposed on that culled from another apocalyptic book. In Ezekiel chapter 37, this prophet expounds a vision in which the bones of the dead become clad in flesh. The text of Messiaen's song *Action de grace* reads 'Garment of flesh and bone which will germinate for the Resurrection'.

7.2.2.4 Activities

Trumpeters sound the signal for the onset of each new stage in the unfolding of this final drama.

"I saw the seven angels who stand before God and to them were given seven trumpets"... "then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them" (Revelation 8:2,6).

In *Trois petites liturgies II* these activities are reiterated: 'blue pattern for angels, blue trumpet which draws out the day'.

There are many references to silence in Messiaen's texts and these may well emanate from this verse:

"When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour" (Revelation 8:1).

Silence is mentioned repeatedly in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel I* and *IV* and in *Trois petites liturgies I*. There are also numerous winsome phrases used elsewhere: 'Silent angel', 'write silence in my hands', 'let me breathe in the silence of heaven' (*Chants de Terre et de Ciel II*), 'melodious silence of eternity' (*Trois petites liturgies III*), 'the colour of new silence' (*Harawi IX*), and 'augmented silence of the sky' (*Harawi X*). The score annotation to *Quatour pour la fin du temps I*, refers to the 'harmonious silence of heaven'.

7.2.2.5 Celestial City

The splendour of the Celestial City is presented in Revelation 21:

"...the bride, the wife of the lamb"... "the Holy City Jerusalem"... "shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper clear as crystal. It had a great high wall with 12 gates".... "On the gates were written the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. The foundations of the city wall were decorated with every kind of precious stone".

Thus inspired, in *Trois petites liturgies III*, Messiaen mentioned the 'precious stones in the wall', while in the notes to *Visions de l'Amen VII* the carillons and rhythms of the first piano part are described as representing 'sapphire, emerald, topaz, jacinth, amethyst, sard, the entire rainbow of precious stones of the Apocalypse that ring, collide with, dance, colour and perfume

the light of life'. Pearls became a favourite symbol of Messiaen's for something which was to be especially treasured, and he used parts in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI* and then repeatedly in *Harawi (VIII, IX and XII)*.

In Revelation 3:12 one reads that God pledges to the saints, the right to become a metaphorical pillar in the temple and in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI* the vocalist sings of that portal or pillar.

Messiaen's orchestral composition of 1963, *Couleurs de la cité céleste* [Colours of the Celestial city], concentrates entirely on this metropolitan aspect of the Apocalyptic vision.

7.2.2.6 Garden

The garden of the Celestial city is described in the following way:

"...the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God,... down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:1).

The Christian is promised

"...the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7).

This continual fruit-bearing surely implies the Eternal Spring which forms the climax to *La mort du nombre*.

un é - ter - nel prin - temps!

ff

ff

8

8

8

6

7

6

7

La mort du nombre, b150

Spring, with its association of rebirth and regeneration, is an image which recurs periodically in Messiaen's texts and would seem to symbolize fecundity and the abundance of God's

provision. In *Poèmes pour Mi VI* there is the 'bird of Spring', and in *Trois Mélodies I* the 'song of Spring'. In *Le collier* [The necklace], *Poèmes pour Mi VIII*, Messiaen combined the image of Spring with the 'necklace' embrace of the beloved to create an 'enchained Spring'.

By comparison with the Revelation garden, Messiaen described his idyllic garden in the following way:

"the two lovers emanate, are immersed in the sleep of love. The landscape has emanated from them. The garden which surrounds them is called Tristan. The garden which surrounds them is called Isolde. This garden is full of light and shade, of plants and new flowers, of brightly coloured and melodious birds" (Johnson, 1989, p88).

Although parts of the Tristan trilogy are specifically set in this garden, 'garden' texts (or programmes, as in the case of the instrumental *Turangalîla-symphonie*), are by no means limited to these three works. Various bits of foliage including leaves, firs, corn and 'green arms' find their way into his song texts, but flowers and fruit are more common. A number of flowers are named in *Trois petites liturgies*: fuschia, balsam, lily and begonia, and to those are added the 'double violet' of *Harawi* and the rose in *Cinq Rechants*. Significantly both the rose and violet are associated in common parlance with love. The terms 'Rose of Sharon' and 'the Lily of the Valley' (Song of Solomon 2:1), are designations which have been applied to Christ.

The image of the profuse and generous garden is not confined exclusively to the Revelation text of the Bible, but also occurs in the love poetry of the Song of Solomon. The association between the garden and lovers in the latter is aptly paralleled in Messiaen's three solo cycles, which express his love for his wife and family.

The following descriptions of the Beloved come from the Song of Solomon 4.

"You are a garden" and "...you are a garden fountain, a well of flowing water' and then 'wind blow on my garden that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits".

Many Romantic songs refer to gardens and lovers. *Liebesode*, for example, the sixth of Berg's *Sieben frühe Lieder* (1907), describes an analogous garden of love in which the lovers lie asleep in an embrace. What often distinguishes Messiaen's use of the garden from that of other Romantically inclined composers, is his concurrent use of other affiliated Biblical references.

His explicit descriptions of the guileless delight of the lover in the physical being of the Beloved, such as one encounters in the Song of Solomon, are also a relative rarity.

7.2.3 Water

As already indicated, the garden of the Lord contains a mighty life-giving river which flows from His throne. Whoever is thirsty for Life is admonished to ...

"...take the free gift of the water" (Revelation 22:17)

The voice of Christ proclaiming the mighty message is:

"...like the sound of rushing waters" (Revelation 1:15).

This water therefore, can be seen as representing a source of life, both in the physical and spiritual sense.

Of the vocal works only *O sacrum convivium!* contains no water imagery. Direct references are less plentiful in *La Transfiguration* than in the other works, but baptism is mentioned in the ninth movement. The water in Messiaen's songs is generally in a peaceful state ('the sleeping water' - *La mort du nombre*, 'the water that follows the variations of the clouds' - *Poèmes pour Mi I*, 'a tranquil lake' - *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III*), or a joyful one ('the mountain skips like a ram and becomes a great ocean' - *Trois petites liturgies III*). By rare contrast, the water in the turbulent *Harawi VI* is a whirlpool. He also referred to certain qualities of water such as the transforming effect of watery reflections. In *Trois petites liturgies I*, entitled 'God present in us', the text reads 'Divine landscape be inverted in water', which presumably represents God's reflection present in the believer.

The cleansing and redemptive power of water are attributed in the Bible to the blood of Jesus:

"...and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from every sin" (John 1:7)

"...in Him we have redemption through His blood" (Ephesians 1:7).

In Messiaen's songs this interpretation holds good: 'the robe washed in the blood of the Lamb'

(*Trois petites liturgies III*). In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI*, one is urged to 'wash yourself in blood' from the 'single river of life in his side', a reference to the wound made in the side of Jesus Christ at the time of his crucifixion. Blood is often used, as in the Bible, without the sombre connotations of destruction, and is seen instead as a libation and therefore a source for thanksgiving. This explains such strangely joyful lines as 'Sun of blood, of birds' (*Trois petites liturgies I*).

7.2.4 Winged Creatures

"The birds are our desire for light, for stars, for rainbows and for jubilant outpourings of song!"
(Messiaen: notes to *Quatuor pour le fin du temps III*).

There is an increasing use of birdsong through Messiaen's vocal oeuvre in the lyrics and more particularly, as a vocal accompaniment. It is portentous therefore, that the first sung line of music he ever wrote, *Trois Mélodies I*, contains the first of these numerous references to birds, and that the opening movement of his earliest published work, *Préludes* (1929) for piano, is entitled *La Colombe* [the dove].

There is a Biblical precedent for his poetical use of birds, as can be seen in these affectionate lines.

"My dove.. show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet and your face is lovely"... "My dove, my flawless one"... "My Dove my perfect one"... "How beautiful you are my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves" (Song of Solomon 2:14; 5:2; 6:9; 1:15).

Messiaen used this metaphor in *Harawi* by naming the central figure of the cycle, *Colombe verte* [green dove]. This allegorical creature possesses by implication, the gentle disposition customarily associated with the dove, and the freshness associated with the green colour of Spring and Nature.

Birds also appear in *Trois Mélodies*, *La mort du nombre*, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, *Trois petites liturgies* and *La Transfiguration*. Textually in works up to *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* they are simply referred to as 'birds'. In *Harawi*, as mentioned above, a specific bird is named. In *Trois petites liturgies* other types of birds appear: the blackbird and the lark (movement *III*),

named. In *Trois petites liturgies* other types of birds appear: the blackbird and the lark (movement III), alongside less explicit references to wings and winged creatures in movements I and II. The dragonfly puts in a fleeting appearance in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV* and insects are mentioned in *Trois petites liturgies III*, but these creatures are by no means as common as their feathered counterparts in Messiaen's songs.

Birdsong first occurs discernibly in a song accompaniment in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and is used extensively thereafter in *Trois petites liturgies*, *Harawi* and *La Transfiguration*. Although they are not mentioned in the words of the choir, there are countless printed references to birds in the instrumental score of *La Transfiguration* where Messiaen painstakingly noted each species represented alongside its song. His attention to ornithological detail bespeaks his great attachment to them. The following example from *La Transfiguration* shows four birdsongs represented and annotated as they may well occur in natural surroundings: simultaneously and in *stretto*.

Vif (♩ = 132) Un peu vif (♩ = 100)

The musical score is arranged in several staves. The top two staves are marked 'solo' and contain the vocal lines for 'Fauvette des jardins' and 'Fauvette Orphée orientale (Grèce)'. The third staff is marked 'pau.' and contains the vocal line for 'Hypolaïs des oliviers (Grèce)'. The fourth staff is marked 'cim.' and contains the vocal line for 'Oropendola de Montezuma (Mexique)'. Below these are two piano accompaniment staves, each marked 'pau. solo'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, dynamics (mf, f, p, pp), and rhythmic patterns (3 2 2, 16, 3 2, 16, 8). A box containing the number '11' is located at the bottom left of the piano accompaniment section.

In certain instrumental works, even more careful attention is paid to the correctness of the bird references. For example, the Uirapuru bird is, according to Amazon legend, only heard at the hearer's moment of death, so Messiaen used it in *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum III* in relation to the quotation:

"The hour will come when the dead will hear the voice of God..." (John 5:25).

Angels, those immortal winged creatures, appear less than one would imagine in his music. They do occur nevertheless, in *Trois Mélodies III*, two songs of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and in one song of *Harawi*. Significantly, the title of *Visions de l'Amen V* is 'Amen of the angels, saints and birdsong' where the winged varieties unite in the Amen that 'all is for ever, consummated in Paradise' (Messiaen: sleeve notes to *Visions de l'Amen*. EMI, CDC 754050 2).

7.2.5 Love

There is a sense in which all of Messiaen's poetry is love poetry. For him love was the overwhelming force of the universe. That in itself is not an uncommon conviction, but his extension of that idea is more unusual. With Biblical precedent, he likened man's love for his spouse, to a reflection of the Creator's love for the created. It was, therefore, in Messiaen's eyes neither irreverent nor ungodly to mention both in the same breath, nor to use one as an image of the other. The dominating theme of every set or cycle is love in some form or other.

7.2.5.1 Love for the Beloved

The first type of love which emerges in the vocal texts is love for the mortal beloved, the spouse, or in the early set, the idealised partner. In *Trois Mélodies*, the verbal expression is highly romantic in the sentimental sense of the word. One dare not say the emotion dealt with is superficial, but perhaps one could describe it as love in its early stages. The first song deals with the feelings of restless longing experienced by the uncertain lover, the second with that 'special smile' and the speculation of what it means, and the third with the delirious joy in the object of one's affections. *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* take this immature

passion a step further and convert it into the more stable devotion of a committed married couple. The Biblical text:

"Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her"
(Ephesians 5:25).

is surely the inspiration for all of the solo work which follows.

Poèmes pour Mi, specifically written in response to the composer's own marriage, deals with more far-reaching issues than merely the pleasures of love. The poet still marvels and delights in the Beloved, but now expresses wonder at the mysterious and indissoluble union which has transformed them from two into one: 'Tristan and Isolde transcended by Tristan-Isolde' as Messiaen explained in his notes to *Development of Love, Turangalîla-symphonie VIII*. He also faced the issue of possible separation and the resultant pain in the song entitled *Épouvante* [Hell]. While *Poèmes pour Mi* is indeed a celebration of earthly marriage, spiritual and physical realities are closely inter-twined throughout the cycle. Thus in *Épouvante* the torment of being separated from the Beloved, concurrently deals with the spiritual hell attested for those cast out from the presence of God. Similarly the subject of the mortality of the lovers is countered with the anticipated ultimate, abiding union in 'pure, young eternally shining bodies'. *Poèmes pour Mi* also contains Messiaen's first use of the wife as a metaphor for the church as the bride of Christ. This is implied in the Ephesians quotation, but explicitly stated in Revelation:

"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Revelation 21:2)

"the bride, the wife of the lamb,... the Holy City Jerusalem... shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel" (Revelation 21:9).

In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* the relationship progresses a step further by the addition of the child to the marriage union, again reflecting that happy occasion in the composer's own life.

The full gamut of a love relationship is explored within *Harawi*. The treatment is, if not peculiar to Messiaen, at least not shared by many other songwriters. Milhuad's 'love story' song-cycle, *Alissa* (1931), for example, represents the more common tragic twist of sadness and separation at the end of the tale. Instead *Harawi* traces the relationship from the initial meeting, to the death and subsequent triumphant union of the resurrected lovers. This introduces the Tristan-

esque idea apparent in the second half of the initial Ephesians quotation, of love which demands sacrifice in order to find ultimate perfect fulfilment. Whilst disclosed in embryonic form in *La mort du nombre*, the idea is much developed in *Harawi* and the later choral *Cinq Rechants*. Six of the twelve songs in *Harawi* deal with the death and post-death state. Of the twentieth century composers, Richard Strauss possibly comes closest to Messiaen in expressing such sentiments. In the *Vier Letzte Lieder* (1946), a moving final tribute to his wife Pauline, the composer expressed a yearning for a shared eternity with her.

An exclusively 'human' experience of love takes place in *Cinq Rechants III* which apparently portrays the first fulfilment and physical union of the lovers.

7.2.5.2 Love for God

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment" (Matthew 22:37-38).

Messiaen's first choice in expressing this exclusive devotion to God would appear to have been a choir, with the solo voice left to deal with the comparatively diminutive relationship of a man and woman. Although love for God alone is expressed in the solo works, they more commonly express concurrently, the composer's devotion to his earthly Beloved. A choir is used on one occasion to express human love (*Cinq Rechants*), but the size of the choir (12) is substantially smaller than that used in *La Transfiguration* (100) and even in *Trois petites liturgies* (18). The total sound produced in the *Cinq Rechants* would also be less than in the other choral works by virtue of the total absence of instrumentation.

In *O sacrum convivium!*, *Trois petites liturgies* and *La Transfiguration*, the love referred to is unmistakably that between man and Almighty God. Countless composers through the centuries have expressed love for God in their music, but few have approached it in quite the same manner as Messiaen. In his self-composed *Trois petites liturgies* text, the composer poured all the ardour formerly expressed in the solo works into an exuberant choral celebration of adoration for the Creator. The result was a candid display of religious devotion which was quite new in the choral repertoire and as far as can be established, remains unduplicated. Offence was caused to both believers and unbelievers, yet the work has survived to delight many (see

appendix for text, and section 1.7 for details on the controversy).

7.2.5.3. Use in the same song of the love of God and the love of man

The presence of a quiet benediction at the end of *Trois Mélodies III*, adds a new dimension to the love song genre and is a unique Messiaen-esque touch. This makes *Trois Mélodies III* the first song which specifically expresses love for God and the Beloved in a single song. Introduced directly in his first set of songs, this subject was thereafter, never absent from his vocal works. Although love for God is sometimes expressed independently of the love for another person, one cannot categorically state that God is ever absent from his 'human' lovesongs. Sometimes the distinction between the 'loves' is shrouded in uncertainty and the listener is not quite sure which love Messiaen is addressing. This would probably have made perfect sense to the composer. On other occasions it is clear he is either referring to both simultaneously, or, as often happens in *Poèmes pour Mi*, using one as an image of the other.

7.2.6 Numerology

Messiaen's penchant for numerology has already been mentioned in connection with his choice of formal structures (see section 6.1). This fascination extended from the forms and 'mechanical' resources, to the vocal texts. From *Poèmes pour Mi* onwards numbers increasingly permeate the texts the composer wrote himself, and their significance is largely drawn from their Biblical use. To recapitulate briefly, three is the number of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Ghost); five is the number of the Indian god, Shiva who represents the death of death; six, the number of creation; nine, the number of maternity; and twelve, the number of completeness (twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles).

The number two is used in the text of *Poèmes pour Mi* to hint at the mysterious union of husband and wife, two becoming one, and to the miraculous duality of Christ's nature, both human and divine. In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, seven stars of love and seven gifts are mentioned in the final two songs. Surprisingly enough, numbers do not occur in the text of *Trois petites liturgies* despite their appearance in the title.

Number symbolism assumes a new importance in *Harawi*, where references recur at strategic places in the cycle: the first, the seventh 'core' song, and the last. The violet of *Harawi*, always a double one (*la violette double*), and the figure five are used to describe the Beloved throughout the cycle. The text of *Cinq Rechants* is less immediately accessible in a semantic sense, spiced as it is with emotive phonemes, but nevertheless still contains references to the seventh door, four lizards, and the second death. Four is apparently the number Messiaen associated with nature, as an extension of three, the number of the Godhead (Marcel, quoted by Johnson 1989, p69). *La Transfiguration* contains references to three tabernacles and the Trinity.

7.2.7 Eternity

The book of Revelation opens with words of Christ from which Messiaen derived great significance:

"I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of Death and Hades."

The score of *Quatour pour la fin du temps* is headed with a similar quotation from the angel who addressed John in his divine Revelation and who:

"...swore by Him who lives through centuries everlasting, saying: "Time will be no more..."."

Messiaen was captivated by the notion that God is not bound by time as we experience it. The absence of passing time and the sense of a free movement within eternity, such as God has, is a central theme in his works. Musically he conveyed this by non-progressing harmonies, by cyclic rather than developmental forms and by tempos of great slowness. Excessively slow tempos, for example, graphically illustrate the subject of such organ works as *Apparition de l'église éternelle* [vision of the eternal church] and *Desseins éternels* [the eternal plan], *La Nativité du Seigneur III*.

Messiaen did not perceive death as the end of time, simply the end of time as we know it on earth. Neither did he consider death a disaster for the Christian, who hopes for the ultimate reunion between Beloved and Lover. Death is therefore treated in an optimistic and joyful way

in his work. As early as *La mort du nombre*, the vocalist begs for the death of time and space that eternity may begin. *Poèmes pour Mi VI* sings of eternity, 'an eternal light' and an 'eternity of happiness'. Similar cheerful references are made in all three of the *Trois petites liturgies* and in the fifth and final of the *Cinq Rechants*. In *La Transfiguration* there is 'eternal light' and 'eternal glory' and in *O sacrum convivium!* the 'promise of future glory'.

Significantly, in his music eternity is often linked to the lovers for whom time stands, or appears to stand, still. A brief excerpt from Messiaen's programme notes to the *Turangalîla-symphonie VI*, which is closely related to the texts of both *Harawi* and *Cinq Rechants*, elaborates:

"Time flows forgotten. The lovers are outside time: let us not wake them..."

Every vocal work contains some reference to time: the afternoon in *Trois Mélodies III*, midnight and the 'folds of time' in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, days, hours or time in each of the *Trois petites liturgies*, and midnight and morning in *Harawi* (*I* and *II*, *VII* and *IX* respectively). That measurer of the passage of time, the clock, appears in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel V*, *Trois petites liturgies III*, *Harawi IX*, *XI*, and *Cinq Rechants III*, and tolling bells occur in *La mort du nombre*, *Poèmes pour Mi IX* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV*.

7.2.8 Ecclesiastical words

Various words which do not fit neatly into any of the above categories, but which are nevertheless still strongly associated with things spiritual or holy in a Christian sense, recur throughout the vocal oeuvre. The word 'truth' occurs many times in the songs, most often with a capital letter as 'The Truth'. Also repeatedly encountered are Spirit, Grace, Joy and Resurrection. The Cross is mentioned, in deference to the manner in which Christ was killed whilst on earth and many references are made to the bread-and-wine communion meal of which Christians partake in memory of Him: bread (*Poèmes pour Mi I*, *Chants de terre V*, *Harawi IX*), 'Living Bread' (*Poèmes pour Mi IX*), and 'Sacred feast in which Christ is taken' (*O sacrum convivium!*).

7.3 Other Christian sources

7.3.1 Apocrypha

The Apocrypha is a body of literature included in the Septuagint and Vulgate, but which was excluded from the sacred canon by the Protestant party at the Reformation. They are nevertheless, writings which venerate God and are used by Messiaen in the text of *La Transfiguration*. As indicated in section 7.1, each of the four Biblical narratives of that work is followed by two meditations. In the first septenary the meditations are largely drawn from the Bible with one additional text from the Apocrypha. The latter is from the book called the Wisdom of Solomon and this particular verse is used as a type of refrain throughout *La Transfiguration*. The quotation is worth repeating in full as it sustains and embodies the images of light and brightness suggested by the transfiguration story:

"For wisdom is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness".

7.3.2 St. Thomas Aquinas

Messiaen's knowledge of a wide variety of erudite Christian authors is apparent in his musical texts. He chose portions of St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, for example, to enrich the meditations of *La Transfiguration* and the commentaries of *Vingt Regards*. In *La Transfiguration* these are contained in the second septenary. The first meditation to the third portion of narrative uses St. Thomas' words to explain the transfiguration of Christ as the foreshadowing of man's transfigured status as adopted sons of God. The last portion of the story recounts how, as a result of this strange phenomenon, the disciples are filled with holy awe and fear. In the pair of meditations which follow, for the first time Biblical and non-Biblical passages are used side by side. The first meditation is an amalgam of Psalm 104, the gospel of Luke, the Solomon wisdom text, Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* and Genesis. The first four quotations are tied together by the common image of light and brightness and the fifth refers to the awfulness of God. The second meditation is a compound of Psalms, Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* again, and

extracts from the Catholic Missal.

Although Messiaen did not quote their words, the inspiration for *Vingt Regards* apparently came from two other Christian writers: Dom Marmion, in *Christ and His mysteries*, and Toesca in *Les Douze Regards*. Similarly for his opera *Saint François d'Assise*, Messiaen used as source material the *Cantico delle creature*, attributed to St. Francis (Griffiths, 1985, p236).

It is interesting to compare the devotional texts used by another contemporary composer, Schnittke. For his *Concerto for mixed Chorus* (mid-1980s) Schnittke chose Narekatsi's commentary on the book of Lamentations. This must surely preclude from his music, much of the religious optimism found in Messiaen's.

7.3.3 Missal

The Missal, a Roman Catholic book of prayers, contains the service of the Mass for the whole year. Missal texts, like those from the *Summa Theologica*, appear in *La Transfiguration*, in the second septenary. In addition to the occasion mentioned in section 7.3.2, it also contributes the Catholic prayer for the Feast of the Transfiguration which makes up the final portion of the meditation following the third narrative.

O sacrum convivium! is the only other vocal work which makes use of the Missal and the subject is again a miraculous transmutation: the 'taking' of Christ in the holy feast of the Eucharist.

Messiaen also used Missal quotations in the score of *Les Corps Glorieux* and as a source of inspiration for the *Vingt Regards* commentaries.

7.4 Other poets

7.4.1 Mother

There is only one song in which Messiaen set the poetry of another poet. The words of the diminutive *Trois Mélodies II* were penned by his mother, the poetess, Cecile Sauvage.

7.4.2 Stated influence

He professed to having been influenced in his own writing by a range of poets including Shakespeare, Reverdy, Éluard, Hello, Marmion and Cécile Sauvage.

7.4.3 Tristan

Gardiner (1967) explains that the meaning of the Tristan legend for Messiaen was not its 'contradiction' - *philtre*, rapturous passion, tragic death, but rather the transcendent love rendered cosmic by death. In his conversations with Samuel (1976, p9), Messiaen himself explained:

"There is in this an initiation, by death and separation from the world, into a greater and purer love".

It would therefore follow that his Tristan is a symbol for the purity of love (Samuel, 1976, p10). The correlation between this understanding of Tristan and the Christian conception of Christ's sacrificial and vicarious death is plain.

The Tristan principle, first introduced into a vocal work in *Harawi*, is more tangibly present in the later work, *Cinq Rechants*, where names and objects associated with it are specifically mentioned. Isolde is referred to by name in the first, third and fifth movements, and the famed love potion appears in the fifth. Brangäne's unheeded warning to the lovers is expressed in Messiaen's poetry in the following succinct way (first *rechant*):

"...les amoureux s'envolent Brangien dans l'espace tu souffle"
 [...the lovers fly away, Brangäne you breathe in space].

To the initial idea, Messiaen freely added prototypes of love from other classics and romances: Orpheus and Euridice, Bluebeard, Vivian and Merlin, and Perseus, the slayer of the terrible Meduse.

Since the two vocal works *Harawi* and *Cinq Rechants* form two parts of a trilogy based on the Tristan theme and that they are followed chronologically only by *La Transfiguration*, there are no further textual references to this subject.

7.5 Other recurring imagery

7.5.1 The human body

Messiaen frequently referred to parts of the human body and their associated activities, in his song texts. The eye and sight recur most often (*Poèmes pour Mi I, II; Chants de Terre et de Ciel I, III, V, VI; Harawi IV, V, IX, X; Cinq Rechants III, V* and *La Transfiguration XI, XIII*). References to other facial features are also common: face (*Poèmes pour Mi I; Trois petites liturgies III; La Transfiguration XI*), the head (*Chants de Terre et de Ciel V; Harawi V, X, XI*), neck (*Harawi X*) and ears (*Poèmes pour Mi VIII; Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, V*).

The mouth and activities associated with it abound: lips (*Chants de Terre et de Ciel I, IV*), breath (*Harawi IV, V, IX; Cinq Rechants I*), voice (*Poèmes pour Mi VI*), sing (*Poèmes pour Mi VI; Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, IV, VI; Harawi X*), kiss (*Trois petites liturgies I; Harawi IX*), smile (*Trois Mélodies II, III; La mort du nombre; Poèmes pour Mi II*) and laughter (*Trois petites liturgies I, III*). As usual, these themes are also reflected in the notes to the instrumental works: *Vingt Regards XV*, for example, is called 'The kiss of the baby Jesus'. Note that all the actions represented are generous, positive ones.

Much mention is made of touching or caressing (*Trois petites liturgies III; Harawi VII, X*) and

also therefore of the hands (*Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV*) and fingers (*La mort du nombre; Chants de Terre et de Ciel I, III, IV, V; Trois petites liturgies I*). There are 'arms which encircle' in a loving, beneficent gesture (*Poèmes pour Mi VIII*) and a shoulder (*Chants de Terre et de Ciel I, IV*), doubtless for support. Dancing (*Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, V; Harawi XI; Trois petites liturgies II*), feet and climbing (*La mort du nombre*), also feature in the texts.

The heart, in its metaphoric sense as the seat of the emotions, occurs from the first set of songs onwards (*Trois Mélodies III; Chants de Terre et de Ciel I; Trois petites liturgies III; Harawi I, IX; Cinq Rechants I*). The soul can be mentioned here, as, apart from references to the soul on its own (*Trois Mélodies II; La mort du nombre; Poèmes pour Mi I, IX; Trois petites liturgies II*), there are also numerous comments on the union of two heart and souls into one inseparable whole (*Poèmes pour Mi I, III, V, VII; Chants de Terre et de Ciel I; Harawi VII, IX*).

The final act of a physical body, dying, is commonly celebrated as a joyous transition to the afterlife to be shared with the Beloved (*La mort du nombre; Chants de Terre et de Ciel V, VI; Harawi V, IX; Trois petites liturgies III; Cinq Rechants I, V; La Transfiguration XI*).

7.5.2 Colours

Colours in Messiaen's texts warrant more attention than may initially be supposed. He possessed the gift of synaesthesia, the ability to perceive sound as colour, and this formed a serious part of his composing technique. Although the linking of sound and colour was a fashionable French pre-occupation amongst the earlier Symbolists, Messiaen's application was far more complex than a mere association of note with key and colour. Rather than regarding vertical combinations of notes as chords, he preferred to think of them as colours which could be mixed to fashion sounds in much the same way as an organist adjusts stops. Certain combinations of notes conveyed certain colours to him: his so-called 'chord on the dominant', for example, suggested Prussian blue spotted with red, gold, orange and lilac (Messiaen, 1956, p50). He believed that the use of musical colours in his works would 'eblouis, dazzle' his listeners to the extent that another reality would be revealed to them: the reality that God is beyond words, thoughts and concepts. He called this knowledge a 'perpetual eblouissement: an eternal music of colours, an eternal colour of musics' (Godwin, 1987, p69) and hoped that this would be an elementary

preparation for the time when all will know God in the Resurrection body of the life to come. The scholarly purpose in the artistic means suggests that the use of colours in the texts ought to be looked at carefully.

White and gold, colours to be found repeatedly in Revelation, are mentioned in *Trois Mélodies II*, presumably to suggest both the purity and the inestimable value of the Beloved. In *Paysage* [landscape], *Poèmes pour Mi II*, the two primary colours of nature: blue and green, first appear. Messiaen purported to have acquired his love of colour from Nature. It is appropriate therefore that these two colours recur consistently in the song texts thereafter. In *Trois petites liturgies* the colours become more exotic: red and mauve (*Trois petites liturgies I*), blue (*Trois petites liturgies II*), yellow, purple, white, orange-blue, blue, and green in *Trois petites liturgies III*. Of particular significance in that list, is the inclusion of red-mauve, associated by Messiaen with his first mode of limited transposition.¹⁹ Of *Trois petites liturgies* Messiaen said:

"The music in them concerns, above all, colours, and the 'modes' that I use are harmonic colours. Their juxtaposition and superimposition produce blues, reds, blues streaked with red, mauves, greys spotted with orange, blues studded with green and ringed with gold, purple, hyacinth, violet and produce also the gleaming of precious stones: ruby, sapphire, emerald, amethyst, all of these being in draperies, in waves, in whirlings and spirals, in intermingling movements. My researches into rhythm must also be taken into consideration: non-retrogradable rhythms, rhythmic canons, and the percussive use of the piano, vibraphone and celesta (which evokes the gamelan orchestra of Bali and Java); the rhythms and timbres chosen accentuate the colours and their movements" (Messiaen: sleeve notes to *Trois petites liturgies*. Virgin Classics).

The same colour variety recurs in *Harawi*, with particular emphasis on green and violet. Green, associated with Spring, hope and regeneration, is used in conjunction with the name of the Beloved. Violet, one of his favourite colours and associated with his second and favourite mode, is used as part of another descriptive metaphor for the Beloved, 'the double violet' (*Harawi VIII*). In stained glass window artistry, with which Messiaen was familiar, violet represents the truth of love. The Medieval interpretation of violet as symbolic of the love of truth, adds a further dimension to this image. *Harawi V* reiterates the red-violet of *Trois petites liturgies* and adds green, blue, and gold. New colours mentioned are green-mauve (*Harawi IX*) and black (*Harawi III, V, VI*).

¹⁹Messiaen's modes are associated with the following colours - **One**: reddish violet; **Two**: certain shades of violet, blue and purple; **Three**: orange in a halo of milky-white, speckled with a little red, green and gold like an opal; **Four**: dark purple; **Five**: grey-pink-green, dotted with gold (Bell, 1984, p30).

In *Oiseaux exotiques* [Exotic Birds] (1959), Messiaen contrived vertical combinations to reflect not only the sound of a particular bird, but the colour of plumage. The most overt demonstration of his colour philosophy is to be found in the *Couleurs de la cité céleste* [Colours of the celestial city] where colour blends are noted in the score itself.

7.5.3 Nature imagery

From the first short song he penned until *La Transfiguration*, references to Nature and nature symbols pervade Messiaen's vocal texts. Much of this has already been covered in the earlier sections on Biblical symbolism: birds, colours, water, sun, sky, clouds, stars, planets, gardens, fruit, flowers, - with one notable exception which is nevertheless not exempt from mention in the Bible. The composer described himself as a man of the mountains and they are a prominent feature of the texts from *Poèmes pour Mi* onwards. In *Poèmes pour Mi*, I and IX they are venerated as a majestic part of God's creation. In *Trois petites liturgies III* the mountain joyfully 'skips like a ram' (Psalms 114:6) while the mountain of *Montagnes (Harawi III)* is associated with the abyss of hell. In accordance with the setting of the event, *La Transfiguration* contains numerous references to mountains (I, VIII, XI and XII).

The echoes associated with mountain landscapes merit but a passing mention in *Trois petites liturgies I* and *Harawi IV*.

7.5.4 Miscellaneous images

Other random images, difficult to classify, recur in the vocal texts. Stairways, ladders, and stairs are one case in point. Messiaen's stairways are invariably 'eternal' or 'stairways of the sky' (*La mort du nombre*; *Trois petites liturgies II*; *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III*; *Harawi VI, IX*), reminiscent perhaps of Jacob's heavenly ladder.

Other images include chains, which occur in the context of hell, or liberation (*La mort du nombre*; *Harawi V, X*); and fans (*Trois petites liturgies III*; *Harawi IX* and *Cinq Rechants II*).

7.6. Phonemes

Messiaen experimented with invented sounds to convey emotion, a process Mellers (1968, p102) aptly describes as 'the dissolution of meaning into musical sound images'. *Pourquoi?* [Why?] (*Trois Mélodies I*) is the first song by Messiaen in which an 'emotion conveying word', *ah*, is used, here interjected plaintively between the reiterated question. This *ah* recurs in subsequent songs, but also evolves into *ahi* - a more primitive sounding exclamation, appropriate to the primal setting of *Harawi*. It is used in different songs to express a crooning and deep-throated satisfaction, or to communicate anguish. Similarly, *ha*'s are used to suggest laughter (*Chants de Terre et de Ciel III*), fury (*Cinq Rechants I*) and fear (*Poèmes pour Mi IV*).

The first completely meaningless and 'concocted' word occurs in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III*. *Io* communicates unspeakable or inarticulate joy and is only used in this one instance. *Harawi* contains quite a few invented words, or words derived from Quechua, the native language of tribal Peru. Apart from the *ahi*'s and *ah*'s of this cycle, there are also lullaby-like *toungou*'s (*Harawi IV*) and onomatopoeic words: *pia*, emulating monkey cries (*Harawi VIII*), and *doundou tchil*, rattling beads (*Harawi IV*).

Cinq Rechants is a rich source of invented sounds and words. Here, for the first time, Messiaen strung together 'sentences' of nonsense phonemes. Words were created not only for their emotional impact, nor with a specifically onomatopoeic function as in *Harawi*, but also for their phonetic qualities. The component vowels and consonants were chosen for their phonetic and rhythmic qualities and for propensity to promote certain vocal registers. These lines show that the new language was inspired and influenced by Sanskrit as well as Quechua.

Hayo kapri tama la li la lassaré no
Hayoma kapritama
Mayoma kapritama ssarima - mano mano mano mano nadja, lama, krita, mata, krima, ladja na
noma noma

mayoma ssari ssari man(e) thikari oumi anola oumi sari sarisa flouti yoma -

oumi annola oumi oumi annola oumi saris saris a flouti yoma cheu cheu mayo kapritama
kalimolimo cheu cheu or Niokhama palalane souki
roma tama tama tama ssouka rava kali vali ssouka naham(e) kassou rava kali vali roma tama..

flako tktk

Clearly Messiaen was attracted by certain types of sound. Note the preponderance of *ayo*, *amo*, or similar sounds: *hayo*, *mayo*, *yamo*, *tama*, *roma*, *tama*. The short 'a' vowel sound, pleasant and comfortable to sing, as in *ha*, *ka*, *la*, *ta*, *ma*, *ra*, *dja*, *na*, *ssa*, *sa*, *va*, dominates. Many of the syllables end in 'i': *kapri*, *li*, *ssari*, *thikari*, *oumi*, *flouti*, *souki*, *vali*, *kali*, which, with the consonants (many *ms* and *ks*), impart an exotic, eastern flavour to the language.

Other than a few *ahs*, emotive phonemes are entirely absent from *La Transfiguration*.

7.7 Surrealism

The opening recitative of *La mort du nombre* uses striking surrealistic imagery:

"There was a ray of sun asleep in your hand, You raised up high your little fingers, It began to shine forth with such brilliance..."

Although Surrealism in its initial conception was politically anarchic and anti-Christian, Messiaen rejected its ideology and made use only of its artistic and symbolic aspects. The liberality with which he applied Surrealist techniques to his texts becomes increasingly evident as one moves chronologically through the vocal works. *Poèmes pour Mi* contains the first lengthy tumbling of images associated merely by the free passage of thought. These can be particularly unexpected and disconcerting to the listener unacquainted with the 'translating' images of the Bible. In *Poèmes pour Mi I* for example, the tender description of the two lovers and their natural surrounds, is interrupted by the rather grotesque image of a 'garment of flesh and bone which will germinate for the resurrection'. The startling description, as explained in section 7.2.2.3, refers merely to the invisible soul which will be clad in the resurrection body. As the cycle progresses the use of surrealistic language increases. In the true spirit of Surrealism, Messiaen refused to be bound by the pedantries of 'mere good taste' and in *Poèmes pour Mi IV* confronts the unsuspecting listener with such impolite images as 'a triangle of vomit' and 'bloody shreds' which 'would follow you into the dark'.

Similar dark imagery is used in *Minuit pile et face (pour la mort)* [Midnight obverse, and reverse for death], *Chants de Terre et de Ciel V*. Again, the words do not read in conventionally meaningful sentences, but a vivid impression is conveyed by the powerfully congested images:

'stinking eye', 'devious midnight', 'carnival of the pavements of death', 'cross-road of fear', 'rotten beneath the hard street-lamps', and 'unheard of beast that devours'. *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* as a whole abounds with seemingly haphazardly strewn pictures. It is also in this cycle that Messiaen introduced another Surrealist element: the use of childhood dreams and fantasies. Both *Danse du bébé-Pilule* [Dance of Baby Pill] and *Arc-en-ciel d'innocence* [Rainbow of innocence] communicate a Dylan Thomas²⁰-like experience of childhood.

In *Danse du bébé-Pilule* the words give the impression of a small boy at play: the alphabet, the surprise at the corner of the door, birds, blue fish, blue moons, cream, a little nose, the horizons of a glass and leapfrog.

Trois petites liturgies is probably one of the first choral works to have a blatantly surrealistic text. An atmosphere of joyous exultation is created by such consecutive phrases as the following:

"this yes which sings like an echo of light,
red and mauve melody in praise of the Father,
with a kiss your hand surpasses the image..." (*Trois petites liturgies I*)

In addressing God with such warmth and familiarity, many felt that Messiaen had further and irrevocably transgressed the bounds of good taste.

Two primary areas of concern in Surrealism were the powerful drives of the so-called 'savage mind': love and death. Although all three solo cycles deal with these issues, *Harawi* is actually subtitled *chant d'amour et de mort* [song of love and death]. This cycle is not narrative at all in the accepted sense, but deals in a series of striking metaphors, with the follow-through from love to the sacrificial and fulfilling death of the lovers. The Beloved is seen as a Green Dove, as a star, the head is rolling in blood, there are double violets, a garden and mountains. All are used to evoke images of a spiritual reality which transcends that of everyday world. The images are far more disjointed than before and are, in that sense, more surrealistic. Nowhere, as in the previous three works, is one assisted by the obvious references to God or the Eucharist. In fact

²⁰English poet of the 1940's. Criticized for 'empty rhetoric and obscurantism', but also received adulation for original and creative use of words (Heese, M. and Lawton, R., 1983. *The Owl Critic - an introduction to literary criticism*. Cape Town, Nasou, p80).

the only help provided in unravelling some of the textual imagery is to be found in the Surrealist painting *L'île Invisible* (1937) by Sir Roland Penrose. Messiaen based *Harawi* on this picture which shows the man's outstretched hands reaching upwards and the woman's head upside down, with her neck merging into the sky and stars. It gives precise clues to the poetry of the whole cycle, but very specifically to the tenth song, *Amour oiseau d'étoile* [Star bird of love]:

"Star bird, Your eye which sings,
Towards the stars
Thy head upside down under the sky,
- Far from the picture my hands sing,
My hands, your eye, your neck, the sky."

In *Vingt Regards*, composed the year before *Harawi*, Messiaen had also made use of visual inspiration. Movements *XV* and *XVIII* were influenced by a painting and tapestry respectively (artists unspecified). *Cinq Rechants* begins with the line 'the lovers take flight', which was suggested to Messiaen by the Marc Chagall painting in which the 'lovers surpass themselves and are carried away to the clouds' (Messiaen: sleeve notes to *Cinq Rechants*. Philips ABL 3400). The *bulle de cristal d'étoile* [crystal ball of the star] mentioned in the same movement, alludes according to Messiaen, to the crystal ball in which Hieronymus Bosch's lovers are enclosed²¹. It is possible that the left panel of Bosch's triptych, 'Earthly paradise', provides the explanation for the four lizards and the 'octopus of light', also in the text of *Cinq Rechants*. To the right of centre the painting contains a number of lizards and in the centre is a 'strange fruit-like object with ivory tentacles...[which] is pulling a group of lovers into its centre' (Davidson, 1981).

²¹Anon: sleeve notes for *Cinq Rechants*. ERATO STU 70457. Although he was not a Surrealist painter, Bosch (1450 - 1516) was nevertheless much admired by the Surrealists.



Chagall: Over the City, lithograph, 1922/1923.



Penrose: L'île Invisible, 1937.



Bosch: detail from the middle panel, Earthly Paradise, 1578.

Visual stimuli continued to play a role in Messiaen's music up to and including the staging of his opera *Saint François d'Assise*. Based on the Renaissance paintings of Fra Angelico, he stipulated exact designs and colours to be used for the angels' costumes.

Eroticism was embraced as a great liberating force in Surrealism. This amatory drive is manifest in *Harawi* and *Cinq Rechants* and to a lesser extent in *Poèmes pour Mi*, but is always tempered by an essential innocence. Messiaen's work has none of the disturbing sexuality of Baudelaire, Dalin or Magritte, but instead expresses delight in carnal feelings as a gift from God, and as a reflection of God's greater love for Man. Despite being couched largely in the 'secret' terms of Messiaen's invented language, *Cinq Rechants* probably makes the most explicit description of physical love-making yet composed in the classical repertoire.

The broad application of Surrealism in *Harawi* also encompasses the relationship between words and music. In *L'amour de Piroutcha* [the love of Piroutcha] (*Harawi V*), the young man's part expresses simply, with native savagery, the death wish: 'cut off my head'. The warmth and tenderness of the music stand in sharp contrast to the harshness of the words.

Même mouvement
LE JEUNE HOMME

pour toi." _____ "Ton œil tous les ciels, doun, dou tchil. Coupe-moi la tête, doun, dou

Même mouvement

ppp mf

L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b7

Similarly in *Harawi IX*, the words 'He speaks no more' are not uttered in the hushed tones of loss, but with a joyous feeling of fulfilment.

Vif, joyeux et passionné

CHANT

f Il ne par le plus;

Vif, joyeux et passionné

PIANO

f *mf* *molto*

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi IX, b1

It is possible that these apparently Surrealist connections do not appear at all unlikely to someone of Messiaen's convictions, where death is viewed as a gateway to eternal joy and union with God and the Beloved.

This juxtaposition of the unlikely is apparent between text and music in another way: between voice and accompanying instrument. Nichols (1986, p42) finds the lyricism of the vocal line in *Adieu (Harawi VII)*, and the percussive use of the piano, 'a stringent test of compatibility'. In the mosaic structure of the song, fragments of the cyclic folk-melody are separated by instrumental interludes representative of funeral bells. In mitigation of Messiaen's music, the clanging bell sounds which accompany the folk-melody can be justified by the references in the text to death.

Harawi also ushered in to Messiaen's vocal music another aspect favoured by Surrealists: the exploration of the primordial. The cycle is set in some long-lost Peruvian Inca culture and represents primal elements in its savage rhythms, ritual dances, incantations and human sacrifices.

The communication of moods and emotions by wordless sounds is seen by many as Messiaen's most advanced application of Surrealism (Evans, 1974). Notice the overwhelming portion of the fourth *rechant* which is devoted to the invented language, rather than French (French in italics):

Niokhama palalane souki
Mon bouquet tout défait rayonne
 Niokhama palalane souki
Les volets roses Oha
amour amour du clair au sombre

roma tama tama tama
 roma tama tama tama
 ssouka rava kali vali
 ssouka naham(e) kassou
 rava kali vali roma tama..

Messiaen had explored virtually every angle of Surrealism by the time he had completed *Cinq Rechants* and he then turned to something new. In *La Transfiguration*, for the first time, he set a narrative Biblical text in clear, sequential sentences.

7.8 Presentation

7.8.1 Syllabic clarity

For Messiaen the presentation of the text in an audible manner was paramount in the construction of the vocal works. At no stage does the listener have to struggle to uncover a text embedded in a jumble of fugally delivered lines or within an overpowering instrumental part. This is in marked contrast to some twentieth century scores which are at times, so congested with sounds that the voice can scarcely be distinguished, as in parts of Ligeti's *Requiem*. In Book 1 of the Crumb *Madrigals*, the text is audible but presented in so disjointed and fragmented fashion and that it is virtually incomprehensible. By comparison, in Messiaen's music narrative words are frequently delivered in a recitatory manner with minimal accompaniment: a single resounding chord or even the mere tinkle of a triangle.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "je suis res - sus.ci - té. Je chan - te:". The bottom two staves are piano accompaniment, featuring simple chords and rhythmic patterns. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is for the piece "Résurrection" from "Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI, b12".

Résurrection, Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI, b12

4 Très lent (♩ = 20)

Sopranos 1^{ers}
2^{es}

Ténors 1^{ers}
2^{es}

I Triangle

et trans - fi - gu -

et trans - fi - gu -

Trgl.

mf *ppp* *p* *mf* *sf* *sfz* *sfz*

(long) (long)

1
8

La Transfiguration I, b29

Typically, words are most often presented syllabically with the indicated accents following the normal enunciation of the language in question. Messiaen's own poetry accounts for seven of the nine works and these are all in French. He was anxious to ensure that the Latin of the remaining works be pronounced correctly and in *La Transfiguration* added lengthy notes to this effect.

It was this clarity of verbal presentation which was to lead him into serious trouble after the first performance of *Trois petites liturgies*, when some members of the audience took exception to what they were hearing.

7.8.2 Pictorial writing

It could be misleading to speak of pictorial writing when discussing Messiaen's music. He insisted that the poetry and music were borne of a single act of creation and this would tend to negate the concept of a score in which the music 'illustrates' the text. Nevertheless examples of such graphic depiction may be found. The technique is first noticeable in *La mort du nombre* and reaches an apotheosis in the three solo cycles. Interestingly, there are not many examples in *Trois petites liturgies*, the choral work which falls chronologically in the midst of the solo cycles. This may be because each liturgy is made up of repeating musical sections to which different words are set. It is therefore more difficult to ensure that the musical depiction will be appropriate for each verse. The same may apply to the

later choral work, *Cinq Rechants*, where there is also much repetition of musical section in the work, and in addition, fewer French words to illustrate.

Obviously certain words lend themselves more readily to this means of musical expression than others.

(i) Activity:

Rising phrases in his music are often used to illustrate forward or upward motion in the text. Hence references in his poetry to the resurrection are invariably, as in the following example, accompanied by ascending pitch.

The image shows a musical score for a voice and piano. The voice part is on a single staff with a treble clef. The lyrics are "et de ré -- sur - rec - tion!". Above the staff, a long horizontal arrow points from left to right, indicating an ascending melodic line. The dynamics are marked as *f* (forte) at the beginning and *ff* (fortissimo) towards the end. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs). The piano part features a series of ascending chords and arpeggiated figures that mirror the rising pitch of the voice line. The overall mood is one of upward motion and hope.

Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi IX, b26

Similarly, 'It climbs higher than the old soul and soars up towards new lights' (*La mort du nombre*) also steadily rises in pitch (bars 144-149). Conversely the descent into the fires of hell in *Poèmes pour Mi IV*, or into the Abyss in *Harawi III*, is conveyed by downward motion.

In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV*, the music 'plays games' with the little boy. Hither and thither motion musically communicates the game of hide-and-seek mentioned in the poetry. The following example shows, as the words suggest, an imaginary dragon-fly 'catapulted into the day'.

ver? Viens, que je te ca-ta-pul-tes dans le

8' bassa

jour comme la li-bellule-a-via-teur! Te voi-là plus haut que moi;

Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV, b26

Even in the absence of sung text, Messiaen attempted to illustrate movement in musical terms. In *Livre d'orgue VI*, he created a turbulent sound-picture of the strange vision of the four rotating wheels full of eyes (Ezekiel 1:18-20) by means of constant semi-quaver motion in the two manual parts. The weary trudging of the Wise Men on their long journey in *Les Mages* [The Magi], *La Nativité VIII*, is implied by means of regularly repeating chord patterns. A metaphysical journey in *Poèmes pour Mi V*, engenders the following meandering melodic line to accompany the words *Va ou l'Esprit te mene* [go where the spirit leads].

Presque lent
mf

CHANT

Va où l'Esprit te mene,

L'Épouse, Poèmes pour Mi V, b1

In *Harawi V* a sharply jagged line, as seen in the next example, sketches the outline of a mountain range.

A musical score for a vocal line. It begins with a dynamic marking of *sfz* and the word "Ahil". The melody is marked with *mf*, *p*, and *pp*. The lyrics are "Chânes rouges, noires, mauves, amour, lamort." with a small "(1)" under "lamort".

Chânes rouges, noires, mauves, amour, lamort."

L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b13

The 'trembling earth' in *La Transfiguration*, is graphically represented by wavy melodic lines in the first example and in the second, clashing pitch clusters with instruments enhance the effect of the word 'lightning'.

Bien modéré (♩ = 112)

A musical score for three vocal parts: Contr. 2, Tén. 1, and Tén. 2. The lyrics are "Com-mo - ta est,". The score shows wavy melodic lines and dynamic markings like *f* and *mf*.

La Transfiguration III, b102

A complex musical score for multiple instruments and voices. It features various time signatures (4/16, 2/4, 2/8, 3/8, 2/8) and dynamic markings (*f*, *mf*, *non legato*). The lyrics include "il - lu - xe - runt!". The score is dense with musical notation, including triplets and divisi passages.

La Transfiguration III, b6

Such writing, though relatively rare and even regarded by some stoics in the twentieth century as naïve, can also be found in the work of Stockhausen. In his *Atmen gibt das Leben...* (1974-77) the movement of electrons and neutrinos passing through the air is represented by yodelling vocal sounds.

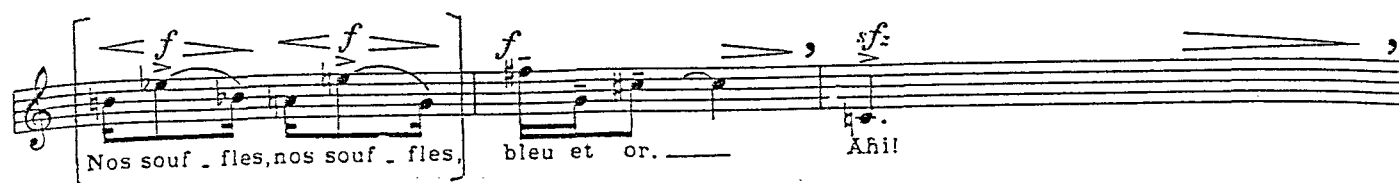
(ii) Sound:

Because of their sensory kinship with music, everyday sounds naturally lend themselves to aural depiction in the scores. In *Poèmes pour Mi IX*, the words *frappe, tappe, choque* [beat, knock, thump/shock] are set to music which does precisely that.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The vocal line is written in a soprano clef and has the lyrics "Frappe, tape, choque pour ton roi" and "Frappe, tape, choque pour ton". The piano accompaniment is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and includes dynamic markings such as "pff", "mf", and "pff". The music consists of rhythmic patterns that correspond to the sounds described in the text.

Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi IX, b20

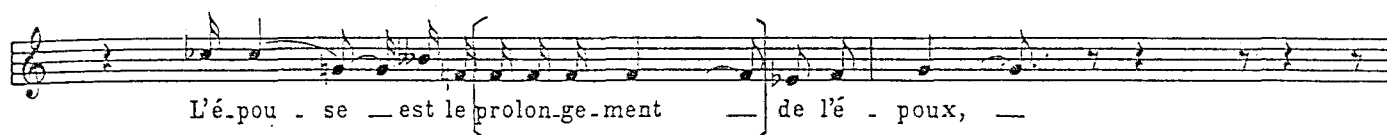
Since they are common in the texts and programmes of Messiaen's music, bells encompass a wide range of representations through his oeuvre, both vocal and instrumental. They can be heard in the music of the piano *Préludes*, *La mort du nombre*, *Poèmes pour Mi IX*, *Visions de l'Amen VII*, *Vingt Regards XX* and *Harawi III*. Cries too, are obvious choices for musical portrayal. The piano 'cries' of *Harawi VI* are mentioned in section 8.3, but there are also clear 'organ cries' in *Jésus accepte la souffrance* [Jesus accepts the suffering] (*La Nativité VII*), and 'horn cries' in *Appel interstellaire* [Interstellar Call] (*Des canyons aux étoiles VI*). The following example shows the musical sighs: 'our breaths', to be found in *Harawi V*. Again by way of contrast, at the beginning of *Atmen gibt das Leben...* [breathing gives life] Stockhausen actually used genuine breathing sounds. With Messiaen however, the pictorial writing always remains that: an artistic representation of reality.



L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b10

iii) Time:

Messiaen did not limit his pictorial writing to the domain of pitch. Such words as eternal, forever and *prolongement* are, as in the next example, augmented in value.



L'Épouse, Poèmes pour Mi V, b7

Similar treatment is accorded to such phrases 'as forever of light' (*Trois petites liturgies I*), 'they slowly fall into line' (*Trois petites liturgies III*), 'prolonge' (*Trois Mélodies II*), 'climb the eternal stairway' and 'O long and sad is the waiting' (*La mort du nombre*).

7.8.3 Choice of performer

One cannot conclude a chapter on the presentation of the texts without recording some thoughts on the particular vantage point of the three solo cycles. While all three are obviously written from the man's point of view, Messiaen composed each one for a woman's voice. This unconventional choice of interpreter could possibly have been his attempt to preserve inviolate the feelings he expressed in his poetry. Should a man sing the songs, he might thus appropriate Messiaen's passions for himself.

CHAPTER 8: ACCOMPANIMENTS

The accompaniments to Messiaen's vocal works manifest individuality and an imaginative evolution of thought. It is sometimes possible to trace the steps from fairly commonplace practises in the early works, through to unexpected conclusions in the later ones. As will be seen, the same styles of accompanying permeate the vocal works irrespective of instrumentation: piano for *Trois Mélodies*, *Poèmes pour Mi*, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and *Harawi*; piano and violin for *La mort du nombre*; and orchestra for *Trois petites liturgies* and *La Transfiguration*.

8.1 Resonating chords

8.1.1 Introductory chords

In *Trois Mélodies I* Messiaen established a precedent for all future vocal works: the use of a resonating chord to introduce a vocal line. In this early song, the chord is arpeggiated and occurs virtually every alternate bar for the two verses of the song. The following example shows that the chord is not sustained for any length of time, but is quickly replaced in the intervening bars with moving accompaniment.

CHANT

Très modéré *pp*

Pour - quoi les oi-seaux de l'air, — Pour -

Très modéré

8-----1

8-----1

PIANO

pp

p

pp

Pourquoi?, *Trois Mélodies I*, b1

This device still features in 1938, 18 years later. It is particularly appropriate to the childlike atmosphere of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV* shown here. The chords used to introduce the voice are presented first as fast flurries of sound which are then sustained as the voice prattles happily on.

Modéré

CHANT

mf

Pi.lu.le, tu t'é.ti - res

- Modéré

PIANO

mf

11

3

Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV, b1

The stationary chord used as an anchor for the voice becomes more typical. As can be seen in the following example from *Trois Mélodies II*, the chord remains static while the voice begins to intone. This is an aspect much in evidence in later songs, although in this early song it occurs only in isolated bars.

Lent

CHANT

pp

Cer.tain mot

Lent

pp

expressif

PIANO

3

Le sourire, Trois Mélodies II, b1

By the time he composed *La mort du nombre*, sustained chords provided the background for more extended passages of vocal recitation. This procedure, as shown in the following example, is maintained for seven consecutive bars. Note that a single chord suffices for each bar. Whilst later developments on this style did take place, similar applications to that of *La mort du nombre* can be found later in his output, for example in *La Transfiguration II*, where the reciting voices are accompanied by orchestral chords.

Modéré *p* 2^m ÂME (Ténor)

C'é - tait un ray - on de so - leil qui dor - mait dans ta main.

Modéré

PIANO *p*

La mort du nombre, b6

The following example is taken from *Poèmes pour Mi IX*, but notice that the chord in this instance creates a slightly more dissonant sound than the opening chord of the preceding example. The five widely-spaced notes of the diminished chord with added seventh and fourth (B-D-F-A-E) used in *La mort du nombre*, are replaced here with a denser seven-note major seventh chord with double degree fifth (A-C[#]-E-E[#]-G[#]).

Bien modéré *mf*

CHANT

E - bran - lez la so - li - tai - re, la vieil - le mon - ta - gne de dou - leur,

Bien modéré

PIANO *mf*

Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi IX, b1

In *Poèmes pour Mi I*, the single chord which introduces the reciting voice is preceded itself by a lengthy pattern of repeating chords. The right hand pattern repeats after six chords and the left after five, but the pattern of rhythmic values used in each case does not correspond with the chordal ones. This then, is the first use in a vocal number, of simultaneous isorhythms. The chiming chords are all in the treble to create an effect not unlike that of the tuned percussion of the Javanese gamelan. Messiaen described these chord clusters as giving his writing:

"...an aspect of precious stones, a shimmer, a stained glass quality which is rather characteristic" (Messiaen, quoted in Samuel, 1976, p4).

Surprisingly in the later orchestral version, shown in the subsequent example, these chords are not played by tuned percussion at all, but by flutes, oboes, violins, violas and even horns and trumpets. A further advance on the previous examples is the increased amount of recitation which occurs uninterrupted between instrumental interludes.

Très modéré

CHANT

Très modéré

PIANO

pp

Le ciel,

Et l'eau qui suit les variations des nu-a-ges, Et la ter-re, et les montagnes qui attendent toujours,

Et la lumière qui transfor - - - me.

mf

Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi I, b1

Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi I, b5

An even more complex application of isorhythmic chord patterns can be found in *Trois petites liturgies I*. A solo violin and the ondes martenot weave high pitched melodic lines over a chanting, but melodically adventurous, vocal part, all undergirded with string pizzicato. The piano meanwhile, repeats patterns of 13 chords and nine rhythmic values in the right hand part and eight chords with nine rhythmic values in the left hand part. Each left hand part rhythmic value is one and a half times the size of those in the right hand part. The vibraphone reinforces the upper, and the maracas the lower part. For reasons of space, only the piano part is shown in the next example. Of further significance is that here the voice actually sings at the same time as the isorhythmic chords.

Chœur

re, D'un bai-ser vo-tre main dé-pas-se le

Piano

Chœur

tableau, Pa-y-sa-ge di-vin, ren-ver-se-toi dans l'eau.

Piano

Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b85

Subsequently extended instrumental passages of this sort become separated from plainsong-like writing altogether and occur as independent interludes between lines of sung text. Such an example can be found in the final song of *Harawi*.

Although the vocal style tended to move away from straightforward recitation, *La Transfiguration* with its overtly sacred text, reverted to the more austere simulation of plainchant as found in *Poèmes pour Mi*. In the later work, though, the accompaniment is no longer contrived to sound like percussion, but actually uses percussion instruments both tuned and untuned: bells, temple blocks, gongs, tam-tams and cymbals.

Meanwhile, repeating patterns of 'gamelan-type' chords were used by Messiaen as an accompaniment to another instrument as early as the first variation of the *Thème et variations* for violin and piano (1932), while slow, chiming treble patterns are discernable in the solo *Prélude V* (1929). *Visions de l'Amen* opens with the same peal of soft, isorhythmic treble chords in the first piano part against a bass register part in the second piano. It is

also interesting to note that this gamelan style was subsequently adopted by the Australian composer Sculthorpe and used in his early *Sun Music III* (1967).

The modified form of recitation used in *Harawi*, incantation, has an accordingly modified accompaniment. Observe in the following example, how the more aggressive tones of the incantatory voice are preceded by *f* chords which crash from one end of the keyboard to the other and are then sustained while the voice rings out.

Montagnes, Harawi III, b6b

8.1.2 Chords with upper resonance

Infrequently used in his vocal music is a specific pianistic effect Messiaen called 'inferior resonance': a rush of chords played after a loud and powerful bass register chord. In the following example from *L'amour de Piroutcha* [The love of Piroutcha] (*Harawi V*) the inferior resonance takes the alternate form of a chord played quietly above a louder principal chord. It creates a tender effect entirely appropriate to this song and is instantly recognizable from solo piano compositions such as *Chant d'extase dans un paysage triste* [song of ecstasy in a sad landscape], *Prélude II*, and the opening movement of *Vingt Regards* (the Theme of God).

L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi V, b1

8.13 Concluding chords

Messiaen also favoured the arpeggiated chord as a conclusion to his compositions. A return to that first song, *Trois Mélodies I*, illustrates the point. This final chord resonates in the bass register of the keyboard.

The musical score for 'Pourquoi?' from *Trois Mélodies I*, b24, consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a common time signature. It contains the lyrics '- quoi?' and 'Pour - quoi?'. The piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the same key signature and time signature. It features arpeggiated chords, particularly in the bass register, marked with 'ppp' (pianississimo). The final chord is a low, resonant arpeggiated chord.

Pourquoi?, *Trois Mélodies I*, b24

He continued to use this type of ending, but sometimes in later works, as in this example from *Poèmes pour Mi III*, a wider pitch span is covered.

The musical score for 'La Maison' from *Poèmes pour Mi III*, b13, consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. It contains the lyrics 'é - ter - nel - le - ment' and 'lu - mi - neux.'. The piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the same key signature and time signature. It features a wide range of arpeggiated chords, marked with 'f' (forte) and 'pp' (pianissimo). The score includes a 'Rall.' (Ritardando) marking, indicating a slowing down of the tempo towards the end.

La Maison, *Poèmes pour Mi III*, b13

In the orchestral-vocal compositions the effect of enduring resonance is enhanced by tuned and untuned percussion added to those final chords. In the following typical example from the end of the first *liturgie*, the tam-tam intensifies the resonance of the penultimate phrase, and the vibraphone and Chinese cymbal, the final one.

Plus lent, très tendre ($\text{♩} = 44$)

Vibr.

Cymb. ch.

Tam-Tam

Chœur

Mon A - - - - - mour, Mon Dieu.

Div. en 3

Onde

Plus lent, très tendre ($\text{♩} = 44$) , 13

4es Vngs

2es Vngs

Altos

Velles

C.B.

Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b139

8.2 Homo-rhythmic and pitch class doubling of the vocal line

Directly after that first anticipatory chord of *Trois Mélodies I*, the piano part adopts a style which Messiaen was to use a great deal throughout his vocal writing: the accompaniment which doubles both the rhythm and pitch class of the vocal line. This is a novel approach to accompaniment in the twentieth century, the majority of composers opting either for grandiose sweeps of chordal or broken chordal sound in traditional Romantic vein, or for the disjointed bursts of dissonant or percussive sounds favoured by the *avant garde*. The following early example illustrates his use of the doubled vocal line, but note the slight delay in the first chord - a touch of characteristic Messiaenic inconsistency.

c'est les reflets de l'eau, Pour quoi les nu.a.ges du ciel, Pour

.. Pourquoi?, Trois Mélodies I, b4

In this later example from *Poèmes pour Mi II*, the first interval leap is anticipated before the remainder of the phrase is doubled.

Très modéré
mf gracieux

CHANT
Le lac comme un gros bi.jou bleu.

Très modéré

PIANO
mf *pp*
gracieux

Paysage, Poèmes pour Mi II, b1

Sometimes only 'new' notes are included in the accompaniment. Where the voice sings another syllable on the same pitch, the accompaniment simply sustains the harmonising chord.

la vé.ri.té, Dans des corps purs, jeu.nes,

La Maison, Poèmes pour Mi III, b11

This doubling of the vocal line is the style of accompanying Messiaen used most often for slow, calm music, thus enhancing the motionless atmosphere. Each of the *Trois petites liturgies* ends in this manner.

Not infrequently melodies accompanied in this way, consist of repeating notes made more interesting by the changing harmonies. Observe the complex chords and the octave leaps of the piano part in the following example from *Harawi I*.

Extrêmement lent, en rêve

PPP

CHANT

La vil . le qui dor . mait, toi. ——— Mi

Extrêmement lent, en rêve

PPP

PIANO

PPP

PPP

La ville qui dormait, toi, Harawi I, b1

This sedate chordal style recurs in his instrumental writing and can be heard for example, in *Quatour pour la fin du temps VIII*, where the violin sustains a note and the accompanying piano part changes the colour of the chord. A similar effect is achieved in the choral work *O sacrum convivium!* where, as in the other examples the tempo is slow. Here the 'lower' voices which accompany the sopranos, at first retain the same harmony beneath a 'triadic' melody (bars 10, 11) and then change to alter the shade of the repeating melody (bars 15, 16).

grá . ti . a, mens im . plé . tur grá . ti . a. O sá . crum, sá . crum,
 grá . ti . a, mens im . plé . tur grá . ti . a. O sá . crum, sá . crum,
 grá . ti . a, mens im . plé . tur grá . ti . a. O sá . crum, sá . crum,
 grá . ti . a, mens im . plé . tur grá . ti . a. O sá . crum, sá . crum,

sá . crum, sá . crum, O sá . crum con . ví . vium!
 sá . crum, sá . crum, O sá . crum con . ví . vium!
 sá . crum, sá . crum, O sá . crum con . ví . vium!
 sá . crum, sá . crum, O sá . crum con . ví . vium!

O sacrum convivium!, b10

Consider, in another all vocal chordal context, the following changing chords which tint the repeating notes of the top line in *Cinq Rechants IV* and *I* respectively. The soft, subtle sonorities of the first example are replaced by harsh dissonances in the second.

Très modéré (souple) rall. Lent
 1^{er} Sopr. Solo: *f* Solo
 3^e Tén.: à 3 *p*
 1^{re} Basse: *p*
 2^e et 3^e Basses: *p*
 Ha mon bouquet ray - on - ne
 mon bouquet ray - on - ne
 mon bouquet ray - on - ne

Cinq Rechants IV, b64

8.3 Treble flourish

Messiaen's use of clusters of hemi-demi-semiquavers in the coda of his first song portends a love for fast flurries of sound, particularly high pitched, tinkly ones. This was possibly derived from his enchantment with, and later use of, the percussion instruments associated with the Javanese gamelan. In this early example, see how the group of short notes is flanked on either side by loud chords. Significant too is the use of the figure as punctuation, i.e. occurring between entries of the voice, rather than at the same time. This delicate motif stands in marked contrast to the aggressive punctuation used sometimes by composers of the *avant-garde*, for example - Boulez's introduction to *Don (Pli selon pli)* (1957-1962). Note that Messiaen's notation at this early stage, presents the three strands on separate staves to facilitate reading and comprehension for the performer.

Pourquoi?, *Trois Mélodies I*, b22

He did not use this little figure again in a vocal composition until *Poèmes pour Mi*, although it can be heard in the 1929 piano *Préludes*. One could possibly have anticipated its re-appearance in this cycle, where the use of 'gamelan' chords in the first number has already been noted. The figure, as before, is consistently confined to a bar or two in length, but is applied in a slightly different way here. The tempo indication is the same as in *Trois Mélodies I* above (*Modéré*), and although the piece begins *pp*, the pianist is to *crescendo* through the flourish. Again the pattern is surrounded by loud chords (or octaves). Three staves are not used here possibly because the chiming chords do not overlap in time with the other chords.

Presque lent *f* Modéré

Presque lent Tout ce-la, vous me l'avez donné. —

ff Modéré *pp*

Très modéré Modéré

Et vous vous ê-tes en-co-re don-né vous - mê - me, ..

Très modéré Modéré *pp*

Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi I, b34

In the next example from the same song, the flourish is longer, extends into new and higher reaches of the keyboard, and ends with a *rall.* exaggerated by the augmenting note values. Despite the general motion upward direction of both parts, the contrary motion within groups of notes is retained as in the earlier examples.

Rall.

Rall.

cresc. molto

Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi I, b32

It is useful to compare how Messiaen contrived the same flourish for orchestra. Although no tuned percussion was included in the orchestration at this stage, even the untuned percussion used elsewhere in the song, is excluded at this point.

3 Flûtes

2 Hautb.

2 Clar. en La

1^{re} Violes Div. en 3

2^{es} Violes Div. en 3

Alto

più f *cresc. molto* *Rall.*

4 □ □ □ □ Δ 6 □ □ □ □ □ □ Δ 5 □ □ □ □ Δ

più f *cresc. molto* *Rall.*

più f *cresc. molto*

Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi I, b54

Whilst further evolving the style, Messiaen also retained it as heard above, so that similar, cascading, contrary motion chords can be heard in the piano writing of the *Vingt Regards XIII* (1944).

In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III* the punctuatory flourish continues to be associated with speed (here with a *pressez*), but the pitch range for the pianist begins to expand. Both right and left hand parts here commence in the bass register. Another innovation is the gradual transmutation of the right hand notes into a mighty *glissando* while the left hand ascends in semiquavers. *Glissandos* do appear in his other piano works, for example *Visions de l'Amen VII*, but occur more commonly in the writing for other instruments. There is a violin *glissando* in *Quatour pour la fin du temps VII* and an ingenious bestial howling created by adding the wind machine to a traditional instrument *glissando* in *Des canyons aux étioles V*. Unlike some other twentieth century composers such as Cage, Messiaen did not indicate vocal *glissandos*.

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system is for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the word "seau." and the tempo marking "Pressez". The piano accompaniment has dynamic markings "f" and "Pia." and includes fingerings like "8", "4", and "3". The second system also has a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the tempo marking "Modéré" and the word "Io, Modéré". The piano accompaniment has dynamic markings "mf cresc. molto" and "f", and the instruction "glissando". Both systems end with a double bar line and an asterisk.

Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, b45

The previous example has an orchestral parallel in *Trois petites liturgies II*. The excitement generated at this point of punctuation is intensified by exaggerating certain distinguishing characteristics. Again the chords (here in the strings) move in contrary motion and there is a *glissando* (in the ondes martenot), but the rapid volley of piano chords ascends both higher and faster than before.

A musical score for 'Arc-en-ciel d'innocence'. It features a vocal line at the top and a piano accompaniment below. The vocal line has two staves. The first staff has the instruction 'Au mouy!' and a dynamic marking 'ff'. The second staff has 'Au mouy!' and 'Tu t'a'. The piano accompaniment has three staves. The left hand has a 'cresc. molto' marking. The right hand has a '5 (pour 4)' marking. The score is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature.

Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV, b41

In *Harawi*, Messiaen transformed converging treble lines into a dramatic simulation of a vocal scream. Instead of crescendoing to *ff* at the apex of the pattern, the entire short motifs are played *ff*. The vocal screams which follow are quite spine-chilling set in this way.

A musical score for 'Répétition planétaire'. It features a vocal line at the top and a piano accompaniment below. The vocal line has two staves. The first staff has the instruction 'Modéré, un peu vif' and a dynamic marking 'ff'. The second staff has 'Modéré, un peu vif' and the word 'Ahil'. The piano accompaniment has three staves. The left hand has a 'ff' marking. The right hand has '(pour 4)' and '6 4' markings. The score is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature.

Répétition planétaire, *Harawi* VI, b1

The instrumental treble flourish occurs simultaneously with a vocal line first in *Trois petites liturgies III*. Messiaen then applied it in the same way in the solo cycle which followed. The undulating figures in *Harawi II* are used first to accompany the voice and then to provide the punctuation. An arresting tactic here, is that the two hands play a tone and sometimes a semitone apart. The harshness of the expected dissonance is diffused by the relatively high pitch and the gentleness of the attack. Messiaen's notes to a similar passage in *Regard du silence, Vingt Regards XVII* ('contrary-motion, crossed hand arpeggios') describe the music as quivering 'with the delicacy of cobwebs'.

Très modéré

CHANT

Bon - jour toi, co - lom - be

PIANO

Très modéré

p *f* *mf*

ver - te,

f *p*

Bonjour toi, colombe verte, Harawi II, b1

The following flurries drawn from the central section of *Harawi IX* show a condensation of thought: three quick, descending treble chords, but the overall effect remains much the same. A similar quick flurry of demi-semiquavers, this time in the flutes, clarinets, bassoons, marimba and strings, can be found at the beginning of *La Transfiguration X*.

ff *f*

- pi - re. De l'eau, du temps,

ff *fff* *f*

Red. Red.

L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi IX, b40

8.4 Uni-directional endings

Of the early works, both *Trois Mélodies I* and the *Vocalise* end with an accompaniment which moves in a single direction. This progressive ascent or descent of pitch was to become a recognisable trait in the conclusions of Messiaen's vocal works. The final few bars of the *Vocalise* illustrate.

Vocalise, b47

Sometimes the rising figure was used with graphic intent. The final alleluias of *Action de grâce* [Act of grace] (*Poèmes pour Mi I*) extend significantly upwards towards heaven. An additional feature in this rendition is the tied, added value notes at the end of the phrase. These make it difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint exactly the cessation of sound and suggest that the sounds too, continue into infinity. The final song of that same cycle, concludes with a lengthy passage of descending chords.

Action de grâce, *Poèmes pour Mi I*, b56

Given the nature and subject of *Antienne du silence*, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel II*, the following ascending passage is entirely in keeping with the rest of the song. As with all the other examples shown, the dynamic is quiet, the attack *legato* and here the sound is blurred and prolonged by the indicated pedalling.

A musical score for a piano piece. It features a vocal line at the top and a piano accompaniment below. The piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clef). The vocal line has lyrics: "tout bas, Très loin,". The piano accompaniment includes markings such as *pp legato*, *dim.*, and *dim. molto*. There are also dynamic markings *f* and *mf* in the vocal line. The score is marked with a fermata and a repeat sign.

Antienne du silence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel II, b9

The final song of *Harawi* implies by the same means, the path into eternity. This excerpt is of particular interest because each 'voice' part within the four octave succession of chords, realizes mode two in its first transposition. Mode two is given below to facilitate the comparison.

A musical score for a piano piece, likely a comparison of mode two. It features a vocal line at the top and a piano accompaniment below. The piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clef). The vocal line has lyrics: "tout bas, Très loin, très". The piano accompaniment includes markings such as *Très lent*, *f*, *mf*, *pp legato*, and *dim.*. There are also dynamic markings *p* and *pp* in the vocal line. The score is marked with a fermata and a repeat sign.

lois. _____

ppp

dim.

court

court

ppp

dim.

court

court

Dans le noir, Harawi XII, b78

Mode 2

8.5 Repeating chord patterns tossed from part to part:

A joyful vocal delivery, often associated with passionate outpourings of love, is frequently accompanied in Messiaen's music as shown, in the following manner by rapidly 'tossing' patterns of chords from one hand to the other. The style is generally used at some length to generate an atmosphere of busy excitement.

CHANT

Vif

f

C'est la dou - ce fi - an - cé .

PIANO

Vif

mf

f

La fiancée perdue, Trois Mélodies III, b1

A similar example can be found in *Harawi IX*, written 15 years later. The same effervescent mood prevails and as before, the melody is mostly to be found doubled in the chords, but where the accompanying notes in *Trois Mélodies III* were off-beat to the melody, these occur with the voice. In both cases the sound is predominantly treble, *f* and invigorating, but

rather too frenetic to maintain for an entire song. Relief is provided in both instances, with contrasting material.

Vif, joyeux et passionné

Le si - lence est mort,

Vif, joyeux et passionné

f *mf* *molto*

Re. Re. Re. Re.

L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi IX, b84

In *Poèmes pour Mi III*, Messiaen applied the technique in a quieter song. The pattern is not sustained for long, but recurs with each appearance of the refrain line. As in *Trois Mélodies III*, the melody notes occur in most cases after the singer has sung them.

CHANT

Presque vif

mf

Cet - te mai - son nous al - lons la quitter

PIANO

Presque vif

p

La Maison, Poèmes pour Mi III, b1

8.6 Blurred chords

Unusual in a vocal accompaniment is the use of specifically blurred sounds. Messiaen introduced the idea early on in his oeuvre in a basic form. In the following bars from *Trois Mélodies III*, the rapidly alternated chord and note create a climactic effect of resonating sounds as the singer approaches the dramatic high note of the piece.

le, très haut dans une cou - pe

La fiancée perdue, Trois Mélodies III, b42

In *Poèmes pour Mi IV*, the pianist is expressly instructed to blur the sounds with the pedal. In this instance the result is suggestive of the flames of hell mentioned in the text. Activity is confined largely to the bass register, while chords descend slowly in the treble part. A denser sound mass than in the previous example is created by alternating chords in both the pianist's hands. The procedure continues for a further four bars without the voice as the chords shift downwards by tones.

fff

Pour ras-sa-sier les puis-san-ces du feu.

fff

p m.d.

p (confus et très brouillé du pédale)

Épouvante, Poèmes pour Mi IV, b26

In the following example, also from *Épouvante*, the chordal patterns to be blurred by pedalling become more complex: four patterns of chords repeat rapidly three times to support the singer's high note, as in the example from *Trois Mélodies III*. Notice, as in the immediately preceding example, the addition of the resonating chord, here of lower pitch.

ff

-poir

Épouvante, Poèmes pour Mi IV, b25

The section of *Poèmes pour Mi IX* shown in the following example, is the longest section of uninterrupted 'pedal blurring' up to this point. Patterns of eight chords are repeated, beginning softly and building up to a climax on the words 'glory' and 'resurrection'. The text suggests that the effect may be meant to convey the sound of bells. The first of the *Visions de l'Amen* creates carillons in the same way.

ff Rall. - - - molto - - - Très vif

Don - nez - moi vo - tre grâ - - ce!

Rall. - - - molto - - - Très vif

pp (brouillé de pédales)

pp joyeux

Ca - ril - lon - - ne, mon

Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi IX, b11

The style can be found briefly in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III*, but the chords alternating between right and left hands no longer repeat a pattern. A further reversion to the brief use of the technique occurs in *Harawi*, where two chords *crescendo* through four bars to accompany the primitive howls of the vocalist. The chords are dissonant in character and in an unusually high register. Messiaen also applied these techniques to his solo piano writing and an example, closely related to this one, can be heard in *Vingt Regards XV*. An equal and opposite example occurs in *Vingt Regards XII*, where a simulated drum roll is generated by using the bass register of the piano.

A musical score for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is on a single staff with the lyrics "Ahil" and "O". The piano accompaniment consists of three staves. The first two staves are marked "(pour 4)". The score includes dynamic markings such as *fff*, *pp*, and *cresc.*, as well as performance instructions like "16^a alta" and "(trille)".

Répétition planétaire, Harawi VI, b155

Blurred chords occur in an orchestral-choral context too, such as in *La Transfiguration VIII* where the entire string section of the orchestra plays clusters of sliding *glissando* sounds.

A detailed musical score for the string section of an orchestra, labeled "La Transfiguration VIII, b20". It features multiple staves for different string groups: 12 1^{re} Vols, 12 2^{de} Vols, 9 Altos, 6 Violles, and 2 C.B. Each staff shows a series of chords that are blurred together, with the instruction "gliss." written above them. Dynamic markings include *pp* and *cresc.*. The score is organized into systems, with some staves having a "2/8" time signature.

La Transfiguration VIII, b20

Further on in the same movement an equally unusual and blurred sound is created by the trilling of all the strings, again in multiple divisions.

8.7 Rocking accompaniments

Accompaniments of this type undergo a great deal of sophistication from Messiaen's early to his more mature works. First encountered in the second section of *Trois Mélodies III*, the rocking accompaniment is characterised by a very soft dynamic (*pp*) and faltering rhythm. This 'limping effect' is fashioned here by tying the third quaver of each triplet to the first of the next group. The continual return to and from the same pitches reiterates the rocking motion. The singing to be accompanied in these instances is usually unhurried, soft and sustained.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. The top staff is a vocal line with a single note and a long horizontal line underneath it, indicating a sustained note. Below it, the piano accompaniment is shown in two staves (treble and bass clef). The piano part consists of a series of eighth-note triplets. The third note of each triplet is tied to the first note of the following triplet, creating a 'limping' or rocking effect. The dynamics are marked as *pp* (pianissimo).

La fiancée perdue, *Trois Mélodies III*, b69

The interruption in the steady flow of demi-semiquavers in the following example from *La mort du nombre*, renders a similar effect. Although more pitches are used, the element of repetition is maintained. The contemporary piano *Prélude II* features a similar passage.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "Plus légers que des oiseaux de". The piano accompaniment is shown in two staves (treble and bass clef). The piano part features a steady flow of eighth notes (demi-semiquavers) with some interruptions or changes in pitch. The dynamics are marked as *mf* (mezzo-forte) for the vocal line and *p* (piano) for the piano accompaniment.

La mort du nombre, b106

In *Poèmes pour Mi*, the disruptions begin to assume a less conventional guise. In the second song, a disturbance of the rhythm occurs after three bars: four crochet beats in the bar are

converted to four dotted eighth notes for a single bar. The same sort of contrivance recurs in *Trois petites liturgies III* where a steady triplet beat is established for ten bars and then is unexpectedly altered to a duple division for two bars. As before, the general mien of the *Poèmes pour Mi* piece shown here is soft.

Presque vif *mf*

CHANT Cet - te mai - son nous al - lons la quitter: —

Presque vif *p*

PIANO

Je la vois dans ton œil. Nous quit - te - rons nos corps — aus - si: —

mf expressif

La Maison, Poèmes pour Mi III, b1

Messiaen kept the idea of duplicated bars disrupted by an 'irregular' bar in *Poèmes pour Mi VIII*, but here the irregularity consists of more than a change in the size of the beats. The bar is enlarged by a beat and a half - an odd amount by conventional temporal standards.

Modéré, un peu vif *p*

CHANT Modéré, un peu vif Prin - temps en - chaî - né,

PIANO *p*

Le Collier, Poèmes pour Mi VIII, b1

Subsequently, Messiaen introduced a 'régular irregularity'. Compare the early example of a repeating rocking accompaniment taken from the *Vocalise* with his later application of the

idea as found in *Poèmes pour Mi VI*. Both songs are designated *lent* [slow] and *avec charme* [with charm]. In the second, the notion of equal sized beats within the bar has been discarded and the lullaby-like accompaniment consists of two disparate groups of semiquavers: 6+7.

A musical score for a vocal piece. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature. It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The bottom two staves are piano accompaniment, with the right hand in treble clef and the left hand in bass clef. The piano part features a complex, lullaby-like accompaniment with two distinct groups of semiquavers (6 and 7 notes) within the bar.

Vocalise, b4

A musical score for a vocal piece. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature. It is marked "CHANT" and "Presque lent" with a piano (*p*) dynamic and "avec charme". The lyrics are "Fe - nè - tre plei - ne d'a - près-mi -". The bottom two staves are piano accompaniment, with the right hand in treble clef and the left hand in bass clef. It is marked "PIANO" and "Presque lent" with a piano (*p*) dynamic and "avec charme".

Ta Voix, Poèmes pour Mi VI, b1

The following example from *Trois petites liturgies III* shows a similar 'regular' irregularity. The accompaniment maintains a consistent 3+2, 3+2 pattern as can be seen below.

A musical score for a vocal piece. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. It is marked "2es Vocs" and "3". The bottom two staves are piano accompaniment, with the right hand in treble clef and the left hand in bass clef. It is marked "Altos" and "3". The piano part features a consistent 3+2, 3+2 pattern of semiquavers.

Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour, Trois petites liturgies III, b3

Irregularity, in the sense of a disruption of a steady flow or established pattern, is found less often in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*. The simple reason for this is that the temporal aspects of this cycle are treated with much freedom and a constant pulse is rarely felt. There are nevertheless occasions where an irregularity is perceived. The following example comes from *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III* and on first glance one is tempted to deduce that the change is from simple to compound duple time. It is not, however, that straightforward. Although the first complete bar could be described as 2/4, the next is a semi-quaver short of that total. The following bar, which at a quick scan appears to be 6/8 giving compound duple, is again a semi-quaver short of fulfilling that expectation. The air of spontaneity generated in this way endorses the subject of the song.

Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, b1

The absence of regularity rather than irregularity is epitomized in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel II*. Within the bars no particular pattern of numerical groupings asserts itself on the listener and the mood created is one of ethereal, other-worldliness. The groupings of flowing semiquavers in the first bar, seen below, are as follows:

$$6 + 5 + 4 + 4 + 5 + 4 + 6$$

An element of symmetry can be detected if one considers the groupings in the following way: $6 + (5+4) + 4 + (5+4) + 6$, but the aural effect is seamless.

Antienne du silence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel II, b1

By comparison, and with a different purpose, repeating rhythms and their attendant abrupt disruptions reappear in *Harawi*. The primitiveness inherent in the cycle is exemplified in various dance-like or incantatory movements, in which extended passages of regular rhythms sometimes occur. In *Harawi IV*, 19 bars of 4 + 4 + 4 semiquavers per bar are suddenly replaced with by two bars of 6 + 6 in the left hand part and 9 + 9 in the right hand part.

Doun.doutchil. Doun.dou tchil.

8a b

Doundou tchil, Harawi IV, b10

Vif
16a alta

5 4 5
1 2 1

ff

Red. (comme du verre)

Doundou tchil, Harawi IV, b20

The second large section of the song contains a 'regular' 4+5 semiquavers to the bar, with 3+3 interspersed every now and then.

doun.dou tchil. Pi-rou tcha te voi-lâ, ô mou-t-moi,

Doundou tchil, Harawi IV, b25

8.8 *Animé* accompaniments

Accompaniments of this type, like the rocking ones, undergo considerable change through the vocal oeuvre. They occur most often in conjunction with texts on the suffering soul in hell. Not unexpectedly the style of accompanying used is characteristically loud and often anchored in the lower pitch reaches of the keyboard or relevant instrumentation. The first example of such writing is to be found in *La mort du nombre* and, whilst reasonably effective, is not unduly exciting. Rhythmic interest is generated by the activity of brisk chromatic scales and cross-rhythmic chords.

The musical score for 'La mort du nombre, b28' consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line with the lyrics 'Qui men é - loi - gne - da - van - ta - ge?'. The middle staff is the right-hand piano part, featuring arpeggiated chords and some triplet figures. The bottom staff is the left-hand piano part, characterized by dense, chromatic sixteenth-note patterns. The key signature has one flat, and the time signature is 3/4.

La mort du nombre, b28

A second illustration from the same work is worthwhile in that it introduces another feature which became entirely idiosyncratic to Messiaen's style in subsequent comparable passages. In the following excerpt wide areas of the keyboard are covered by the leaping arpeggio figures in the left hand part and the converging lines in the right hand part. This was the first of many such attempts to express the high drama of the text by traversing vast pitch ranges in a short space of time.

The musical score for 'La mort du nombre, b79' consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line with the lyrics 'crou - lent, le mon -'. The middle staff is the right-hand piano part, featuring converging lines and some triplet figures. The bottom staff is the left-hand piano part, characterized by leaping arpeggio figures. The key signature has one flat, and the time signature is 3/4. Dynamics include *più f*, *f*, and *p*. The left hand part includes markings for $8^{\text{va}} \text{ b}^{\text{a}}$.

La mort du nombre, b79

In *Poèmes pour Mi IV*, Messiaen's next musical excursion to hell, one finds again passages centred in the lower reaches of the keyboard (example i), as well as those when the pianist

rapidly encompasses large ranges of pitch (example ii). Notice in example (i), the unusual effect created by the rapid grace notes in the left hand part. Note also that, as in *La mort du nombre*, the pitch path moves relentlessly upwards. Example (ii) shows a slight extension of the range covered by the converging lines, from five in the previous example to five and a half octaves. The effect is far more powerful than in *La mort du nombre* because of the sudden torrent of chords.

Example (i): *Épouvante, Poèmes pour Mi IV, b13*

Example (ii): *Épouvante, Poèmes pour Mi IV, b35*

In the first section of the *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* vision of hell, the pianist is required to travel ceaselessly up and down the keyboard in repeating arc-shaped patterns of chords. Messiaen had already experimented with a similar keyboard accompaniment to the violin in the third variation of *Thème et variations* before applying the technique to vocal accompanying in *Poèmes pour Mi VII* and again here in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel V*.

CHANT

Bien modéré

mf

Bien modéré

Vil - le, ceil puant,

PIANO

p

mf

sf

Red.

Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel V, b1

In *Harawi* the wide-ranging style becomes altogether more dramatic. The phrase which follows is taken from the third song and compels the accompanist to crash from one end of the piano to the other.

mf

L'an - tique

(pour 2)
3

f

Red.

ff

Red.

Montagnes, Harawi III, b8

The examples of this technique are more frequent in *Harawi* and less specifically associated with hell. In *Harawi VII (Adieu)*, the lover takes leave of the Beloved in a tender folk-like song, and prepares for death. The accompaniment chimes the funeral bells in the *ff - sfz* pattern shown here and the final chord is, according to an instruction in the score by Messiaen, meant to sound like a gong. With orchestral instruments at his disposal in *Turangalila-symphonie VII* and *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum III*, Messiaen used bells and tam-tams to create a tremendous punctuation mark in the same way as is suggested in this keyboard example. An interesting side issue here is Messiaen's occasional instructions for one instrument to sound like another. In *Vingt Regards XII*, he also directed the piano to emulate a tam-tam and in movement *XIII*, a xylophone. Even in *Quatour pour la fin du*

temps Messiaen instructed those instruments (piano, cello, violin and clarinet) to sound like gongs and trumpets!

Très modéré

(comme un Tam-tam)

Adieu, Harawi VII, b82

The lengthy upward sweep of pitch in an orchestral context is used many times in the course of *La Transfiguration* and also in the later orchestral work *Des canyons aux étoiles*.

Up to *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, Messiaen's musical representations of hell habitually employed both the wide-ranging and the confined, bass register procedures. In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel V*, he introduced the idea of a diabolical dance (example i). This time the section begins softly with a *staccato* attack and a relatively sparse texture creating an effect of brooding malevolence. This evil dance is eclipsed by the one from *Harawi* (example ii) which is both longer and lower. It also marks the beginning of less rhythmically regular groupings within the 'purgatory' music.

Même mouvement

Même mouvement

8^{va} bassa

Example (i): *Minuit pile et face*, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel V*, b12

8^{va} bassa

Example (ii): *Répétition planétaire*, *Harawi VI*, b51

In *Harawi XI*, cosmic disruption is represented neither by a consistently rumbling bass, nor by a crash from one end of the pitch spectrum to the other. Instead, Messiaen used simultaneously the outer extents of the range: a seven octave span. Notice in the following example, the thin, high, *staccato* line in the treble and the rumbled clusters in the bass, this time with a contrived improvisatory freedom to the rhythm. Again parallels can be found in the exclusively instrumental repertoire: a wide range separates the two hands in *Vingt Regards VI* and the two piano parts in *Visions de l'Amen II*, and both correspondingly deal with matters stellar.

CHANT

PIANO

Modéré

Modéré

f *staccato*

f *staccato*

Mod. 8 = b

Mod.

Katchikatchi les étoiles, Harawi XI, b1

8.9 Monody

An unharmonised melodic line in the accompaniment is used as early as *La mort du nombre*, shown in the following example. In this instance, a violin melody opens the work and precedes the voice. The relative rarity in the vocal repertoire of such a meagre instrumental introduction adds to the special effectiveness of its usage here and accords with the sombre contents of parts of the text. Similar examples of 'solo' instrumental lines can be found later in *Poèmes pour Mi VI* and in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III*.

VIOLON

Très lent

Sourdine

pp

La mort du nombre, b1

In *Poèmes pour Mi IX*, Messiaen introduced an unusual and yet unexpected means of accompanying the voice, by doubling it exactly with the accompanying instrument. As seen here, the piano part consists of parallel octaves.

et mon à...

Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi IX, b6

It is interesting that in the orchestrated version of the same song, Messiaen altered the instrumentation through the monody: the vocal part is indeed consistently doubled, but not always by the same combination of instruments. Compare the following orchestral extract with the piano-voice version given previously.

Flûtes
mf

2 Clar.
en Sib
mf

Chant
et mon à...

4 □ □ □ □ Δ 4 Δ Δ □ □ 4 Δ □ □ □ 4 Δ □ □ □ 2 Δ □

Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi IX, b13

Its affinity with plainsong-inspired music may explain the increased frequency of monody in *Poèmes pour Mi* and *La Transfiguration* when compared to *Harawi*, which has but fleeting examples of the technique. The example which follows records a particularly impressive moment in *La Transfiguration IX* when the bass voices are doubled by trombones, saxophone, tubas, cellos and double basses and the mighty tam-tam rings through the conglomeration.

Lent ($\text{♩} = 48$) à 2

1^{er}, 2^e Trb.
3^e Trb.
Trb. basse
Tuba
Saxh.
Tuba C.B.
1^{er}s Basses
2^es Basses
Bells
C. B.
3^e T.-tam
V T.-tams

... qui - a so - lus

La Transfiguration IX, b33

Much of the plainsong writing in *La Transfiguration* is accompanied only by bells. A prototype for this is set by the immediately preceding work: *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum*, where bells double a sombre, pseudo-plainchant, brass line.

Monody is much used in the choral work *Cinq Rechants*. Although the work has no instruments, the monodic writing can be compared to Messiaen's orchestrally conceived monodies in that many different combinations of voices are used to create different vocal timbres (see section 5.2.3).

8.10 Birdsong

"Among the artistic hierarchy, the birds are probably the greatest musicians to inhabit our planet" (Messiaen, quoted by Samuel, 1976, p.95).

Birdsong with its extremely high pitches, rapid trills and fast flurries of sound is not suited to the human voice, but Messiaen often chose to mention birds in the texts and to

accompany with instrumental birdsong. It first emerged in a vocal work in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel III* and although not marked as such, the brief passage shown correlates closely with later birdsong passages: swift, high pitched, decorated with grace notes and containing many repeated notes. It is used here as an interlude rather than as a background for the voice: a snatch of avian song between lines of vocal melody.

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, with the lyrics "tresses de la vi - e," written below it. The middle and bottom staves are for the piano accompaniment. The piano part begins with a melodic line that includes a section of birdsong, indicated by the marking "ad lib." above it. This section is characterized by a rapid, high-pitched melody with many repeated notes and grace notes. The piano part also includes a "cresc." (crescendo) marking. The overall style is light and whimsical, typical of the composer's work.

Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel III, b82

In *Trois petites liturgies*, the orchestral-choral composition which followed *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, he used birdsong in a similar but more extensive way. It is generally restricted, as before, to those moments when the voice is not singing. There are however, occasional brief moments, as can be seen in this example from the first *liturgie*, when voice and 'bird' overlap. In spite of having other instruments available, he still elected the piano as the best vehicle for his representations. The *ad lib.* of the previous example is omitted in this work as the birdsong must be coordinated with the other instruments. Notice the composer's instruction in the excerpt below: *comme un chant d'oiseau* [like the song of a bird].

CHCEUR

Mon Jésus, mon si. len

PIANO SOLO

Comme un chant d'oiseau

Timbre Oude amplifié (Cor)

ONDE MARTENOT SOLO

Clavier

Modéré (♩ = 84)

Sourd. (à 4)

1^{er}s VIOLONS

Sourd. (à 4)

2^{es} VIOLONS

Sourd. (à 3)

ALTOS

Antienne de la Conversation intérieure, Trois petites liturgies I, b1

The many references in the text of *Harawi* gave the composer ample license to explore again musical portrayals of birds. Although restricted to embellishments at the end of, or between, vocal lines, for the first time here extended interludes are devoted to birdsong alone. In the first of the following examples from *Amour oiseau d'étoile* [Love star-bird], the pianist plays each phrase with the voice in chordal style, then ornaments the end of the phrase with birdsong. The second example shows the first bar-and-a-half of a lengthy interlude from *Bonjour toi, colombe verte* [Good day, green dove]. The composer's note in both instances leaves the pianist in no doubt as to what he is conveying by imitation.

Ta tête à l'en . vers sous le ciel .

p

pp comme un oiseau

Amour oiseau d'étoile, Harawi X, b7

Bonjour toi, colombe verte, Harawi II, b7

In his notes to the score of *Quatour pour la fin du temps* (1940), Messiaen had suggested that the bird imitated in the music might be a thrush or a nightingale. Between that work and *La Transfiguration* (1965) came a whole new chapter of the composer's life in which he experimented extensively with birdsong: *Le merle noir* for flute and piano (1951), *Réveil des oiseaux* for orchestra and piano (1953), *Oiseaux exotiques* for orchestra and piano (1955) and *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1958). Noticeable in that period are his increasing attempts to realize timbre by harmonic means, rather than to simply present the melodic contour of the creature's song. *La Transfiguration* bears the fruits of that research and is, in comparison to the other vocal works, a treasure-trove of birdsong. Over 80 different birdsongs are recorded and, in an upgrade on his former vocal works, specific birdsongs are labelled in the score. Also for the first time in a vocal work, birds are (a) represented by instruments other than the piano, (b) used in multiple chorus, and (c) used simultaneously with the singers.

FLÛTE
FLÛTE SOLO
FLÛTES
BASSONS
CORIMBE solo
CORIMBE solo
CLARINETTE
CLARINETTE solo
TROMPETTE
TROMPETTE solo
TROMBONE
TROMBONE solo
HORNES
HORNES solo
VIOLONCELLES
VIOLONCELLES solo
CONTREBASSES
CONTREBASSES solo
VOIX

Cisticole du Natal (Afrique)
Merle noir
Hibou oreillard (Canada)
Accenteur Alpin
Fauvette des jardins

Can - dor est lu - cis se

Can - dor est lu - cis se

La Transfiguration VI, b1

In *Saint François d'Assise*, Messiaen again allowed the 'bird' instruments the freedom to perform their songs in a more 'nature-like' *ad lib.* manner: at an indication from the conductor, the birdsong soloists commence and play at their own *tempi* independently of the rest of the orchestra.

Sculthorpe, the Australian composer, has followed Messiaen in his use of birdsong in many of his major works since the *Sun Music*. He, however, goes further and introduces animal noises with the birds in *Mangrove VI* (1979).

8.11 Relationship to voices

8.11.1 Vocal Entries

A relatively minor point, but one worth mentioning is the vocal entry in many of the songs. Messiaen's first set of songs begins with the briefest of introductory gestures. This custom

persisted throughout his vocal writing. Although there are works such as the *Vocalise*, with quite long introductions, these tend to be the exception rather than the rule. *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* opens in the following succinct way.

Un peu lent *p*

CHANT

Un peu lent. Ton œil de terre, mon œil de terre,

PIANO

pp *(m.s.)* *pp* *(m.s.)* *(m.s.)*

Bail avec Mi, Chants de Terre et de Ciel I, b1

Messiaen is as remorseless in this regard with choirs. The women's ensemble receives a semiquaver's warning for their entry at the beginning of *La Transfiguration VI*.

Fauvette à tête grise (Afrique)

AUTOBOIS

ANGLAIS

CLARINETTE

CORIMBA solo

TROMPONE solo

VIOLON SOLO

CORPES

CORRANOS

CLARINOS

CONTRALTOS

VOIX SOLO

Accenteur Alpin

4/8 (vibrato) (baguettes douces) *mf* *Red*

Fauvette des jardins

* Can - dor est lu - cis ae -

* Can - dor est lu - cis ae -

La Transfiguration VI, b1

There are a number of songs which dispense altogether with an instrumental introduction and begin directly with the voice. Such openings, to be found for example in *Poèmes pour Mi VII* or *Chants de Terre et de Ciel VI*, have their own perils. The entries must be carefully prepared so that when the accompaniment commences, there will be no dissension between the parts. Although none of the songs in *Harawi* begins with the voice alone, eight of the twelve begin simultaneously with voice and piano. The singer is therefore seldom afforded the luxury of the slight relaxation between songs that an instrumental interlude would provide. Continuous concentration and acute listening must be maintained throughout. *Harawi XI* for instance, ends as indicated, with a scream. The next song begins solemnly on an E^b.

ff (cri) fff

rou le dans le sang!

16

fff

fff

* Ped. *

Katchikatchi les étoiles, Harawi XI, b35

Très lent, solennel

CHANT

f

Dans le noir, co - lom - be ver -

Très lent, solennel

PIANO

pp legato

f

Ped. Ped. Ped.

Dans le noir, Harawi XII, b1

Two of the *Trois petites liturgies* begin in the same direct way, but the join from the first to the second *liturgie* is relatively straightforward: a final A major chord to a single E at the start of the next movement. *La Transfiguration* has three such movements where the choir must anticipate the opening notes of the subsequent movement whilst completing the one before. The join between movements *XIII* and *XIV* is not an easy one, as can be seen in this example showing only the choral part.

2
4

Sopr. 1 2
Mezzos 1 2
Contr. 1 2
Tén. 1 2
Baryt. 1 2
Basses 1 2

ela ra.

La Transfiguration XIII, b379

3
8

4
8

2
8

3
8

SOPRANOS 1 2
MEZZOS 1 2
CONTRALTOS 1 2
TÉNORS 1 2
BARYTONS 1 2
BASSES 1 2

Do mi ne, di le

La Transfiguration XIV, b1

8.11.2 Antiphonal exchanges with accompaniment

It was in the *Vocalise* that Messiaen first experimented with the idea of a 'sharing' relationship between voice and instrument. From bars 27 to 33, shown below, the voice is imitated by a single line of instrumental melody. Priority is given to the voice in the sense that the voice sings each phrase first. Notice how, as one progresses through the passage, the piano enters before the voice has finished until they actually meet on the last note. Britten used a similar tactic between tenor and horn in the *Nocturne* from the *Serenade for tenor, horn and strings* (1943).

pp *p* *f*

pp *p* *f*

dim.

f

rall. au Mouv!

p

dim.

rall. au Mouv!

pp *p*

Vocalise, b25

Although not antiphonal, a similar sharing is evident in *Trois petites liturgies III*. A ten-note melodic ostinato is created, but only the instruments consistently sustain the full pattern with the womens' voices dropping in and out of the sequence at different points. See also the discussion and example in section 4.5. A simpler version of this occurs in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV*, where a recurring bar is retained *in toto* in the piano part, but with progressively less participation by the voice.

comme la jo-lie poupée en co.ton. Rêve aux plis de l'heure; tres.se, tresse des vo.ca.li.ses

expressif

Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV, b9b

Sou - ri - re, sou - ri - re, ce que tu chan - tes, chanter, chanter,

expressif

Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV, b20

t'a appris à sou - ri - re. Ce que tu ne vois pas, sau - ras - tu en rè -

p

Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel IV, b23

Isolated examples of a symbiotic relationship between voice and instrument can be found in *La Transfiguration*, but there are no antiphonal effects such as those mentioned above. There are occasions such as in the fifth movement, where the voices respond to an instrumental antecedent with an identical consequent phrase.

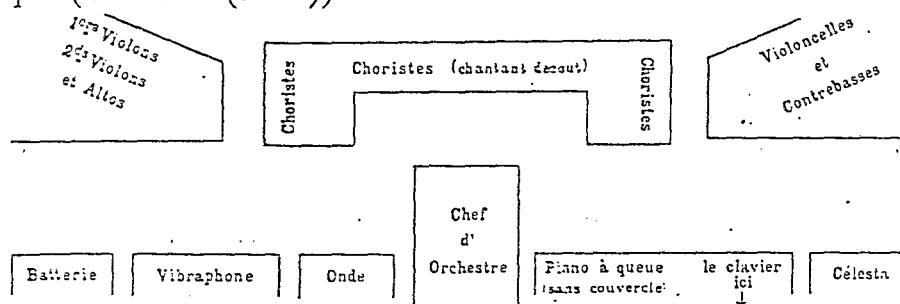
8.11.3 Equal status

As one progresses chronologically through the vocal works it is clear that Messiaen evolved the role of both protagonists (voices and instruments). From a standard voice and instrumental accompaniment, he experimented with varying emphases through equal partnership, to instrument with vocal accompaniment. The traditional approach lasted till *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* where, for the first time, the voice briefly assumes a less dominant part. The dance sequence is played by the pianist and the voice murmurs along. In *Trois petites liturgies*, the voice generally reigns supreme by virtue of the important words to be communicated. There are moments though, when the texture is densely heterophonic and it would be more accurate to describe the voice as an equal thread in the musical fabric.

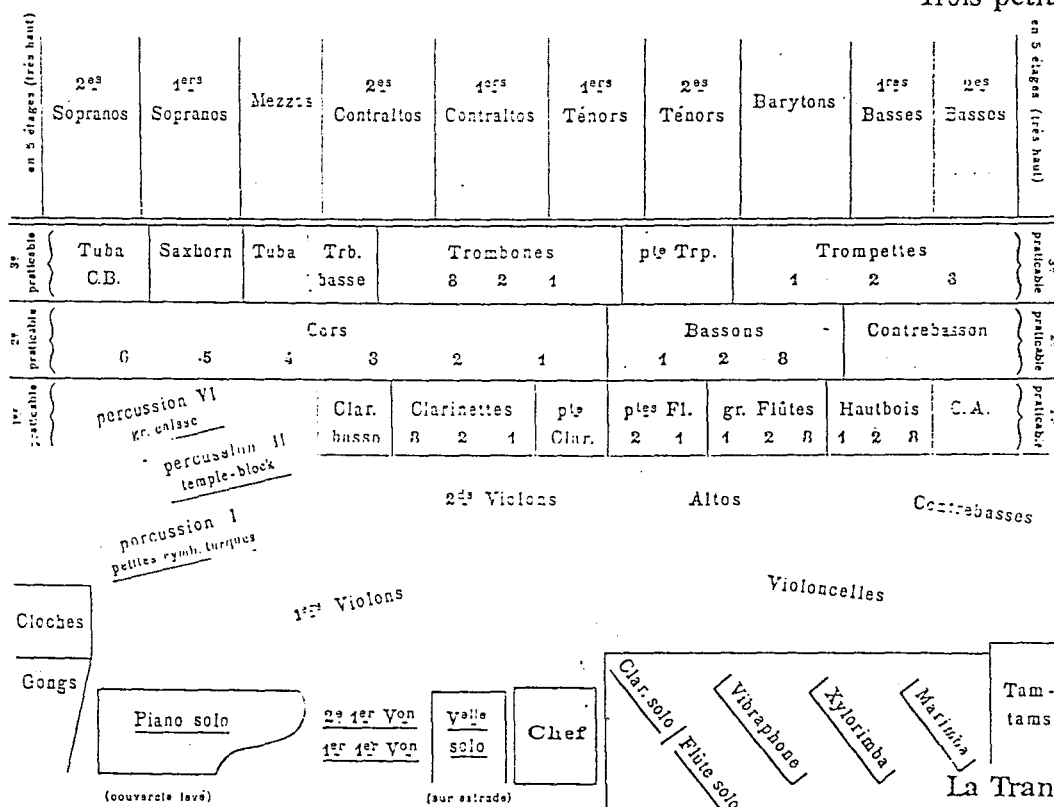
8.12 Spatial features

With only two performers involved in the voice-piano cycles, it was hardly necessary for Messiaen to give explicit instructions with respect to staging the works. The orchestral version of *Poèmes pour Mi* too contains no such directions. Beginning with *Trois petites liturgies*, the first, large, orchestrally accompanied, choral composition, he made particular specifications regarding the arrangement of the performers. In order to achieve the precise sound-concept in his mind, he placed the strings at the back of the stage on either side of the choir and behind the rest of the instruments, including the percussion.

Detailed arrangements were also supplied for *La Transfiguration*, with instrumental soloists again given a prominent position. Spatial configurations have also been included in the scores of other temporary composers such as Stockhausen (*Gruppen* (1975)), Xenakis (*Eonta* (1964)) and Barraque (*Concerto* (1968)).



Trois petites liturgies, floor plan



La Transfiguration, floor plan

8.13 Soloistic use of instruments

In general, individual instruments feature in soloistic roles in Messiaen's vocal-orchestral works. The orchestral arrangement of *Poèmes pour Mi* has occasional string solos, but in *Trois petites liturgies* Messiaen embarked on an interesting course with regard to the use of the piano. Just as solo voices in his work were designed more for timbral contrast than for virtuoso display, the semi-solo piano in *Trois petites liturgies* was used more to create a novel tone colour than to impress with keyboard expertise. Messiaen describes its function as that of 'studding the texture with diamonds', a part 'which does not correspond to its role in a classical concerto' (Samuel, 1976, p75-76). His use of the piano in a solo capacity within the orchestra increased after *Trois petites liturgies* and it was sometimes used as a *concertante* soloist in such non-vocal works as *Réveil des oiseaux* and *Oiseaux exotiques*.

The piano is also associated in *Trois petites liturgies* with the celesta and vibraphone to form a Balinese 'gamelan'. At the time this was a totally new concept to orchestral writing and in doing this, Messiaen asserted the right for composers to choose freely their timbral resources for each composition. Griffiths (1985, p112) maintains that it was this, which was most novel about *Trois petites liturgies* and which was to be a vital element in Messiaen's future music. He perceives the pseudo-gamelan tuned percussion in this work to be a natural extension of the piano writing in *Visions de l'Amen* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*.

In the *Turangalila-symphonie* the 'gamelan triumvirate' of *Trois petites liturgies* was amplified by the glockenspiel and metal percussion to form a little 'orchestra' within the orchestra. Later in *Couleurs de la cité céleste* the section was further augmented by cencerros, gongs, tamtams and other metal percussion. In *La Transfiguration*, the piano forms one of a more varied group of seven soloists: flute, clarinet, xyloimba, vibraphone, grand marimba and cello.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

It is fitting at this point of conclusion to consider the vocal works of Olivier Messiaen first as an isolated unit, and then more generally as a contribution to vocal composing in the twentieth century.

9.1 Messiaen's vocal oeuvre

9.1.1 Musical considerations

There are three factors which characterise Messiaen's entire vocal oeuvre: elements which persist unchanged, others which slowly evolve and a third group which comprise fresh, innovative ideas. For the performer, particularly of the solo songs, this intimates that a chronological study of the works provides an ideal opportunity to assimilate gradually the unique musical language and the vocal techniques.

9.1.1.1 Solo works

Favoured melodic shapes, chords, tempo fluctuations and even the characteristic bursts of exuberance alongside periods of inert calm, are introduced in embryonic form in the *Trois Mélodies* (1930). In addition the singer becomes acquainted, with elementary yet nevertheless typical forms of Messiaen's accompaniments. *La mort du nombre* (1930) includes the composer's first instrumental monodies within a vocal work and also his first 'pairing' of voice and instrument in the soprano-violin duet. The *Vocalise* (1935) contributes little that is new, but does highlight Messiaen's technique of repeating rhythmic cells and his overwhelming interest even at this early stage, with the high voice.

Poèmes pour Mi (1936) ushered in a period of major significance. Strongly influenced by plainsong, he conceived a style in which the voice proceeded for the first time completely

unfettered by time signatures, beat or pulse. In the opening song, loose prose is recited on repeating pitches with characteristically 'Messiaen'-shaped melismas to decorate the ends of the phrases. Incorporated for the first time too is the freely undulating 'alleuiatic' vocalise, also gleaned from plainsong. The range of emotions explored in the *Poèmes pour Mi* songs is wider and more profound than that of the earlier songs. The increased range of sentiment correspondingly exacerbates the colouristic demands placed on the pianist. Novelty in the accompaniment emerges immediately in the 'gamelan-like' isorhythmic chords which chime out the start to the composition, as well as in various contrived pictorial effects: the blurred chords which simulate the flames of hell, the trace of birdsong, and the athletically wide-ranging accompaniments used to convey torment and anguish.

Chants de Terre et de Ciel (1938), whilst following on logically in many ways from *Poèmes pour Mi*, also has its share of portentous songs. The cycle opens with chant in a manner similar to that instituted in the previous cycle, but in the second song Messiaen transferred to the vocal sphere, a style previously heard only in the instrumental works. The voice is woven seamlessly into a blend of non-progressing instrumental parts to form a composite, rather than the conventional voice-accompanied-by-piano, texture. This is an early indication of the greater diversity of roles in store for the Messiaen vocalist.

Surrealistic techniques are increasingly manifest in the text of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, especially in the childhood play songs (*III* and *IV*). Images succeed one another with haste and brevity, matched by the changefulness of the music. These moods which flit across the score aptly convey the delirium that is sometimes associated with childhood and require great versatility on the part of both performers.

Messiaen's fascination with the long-distant past most likely accounts for certain new features in the third cycle *Harawi* (1945): the transformation from chant to incantation and primitive howls of both notated and approximate pitch. Always maintaining an interest in the lyrical side of his composing, he included at least two songs of supreme sweetness. These, however, are not without variant. Both *Harawi I* and *X* attain and sustain for the entire duration of each song, degrees of slowness not yet heard in any preceding solo song. *Harawi I* preserves a link with the repeating notes of plainsong, but where those of *Poèmes pour Mi* were recited

over a single resonating chord, the repeated notes in *Harawi* are each coloured by a new chord. This creates what Messiaen would probably have described as a 'stained glass window' effect: just as the changing light affects the appearance of the same window, so the altered chordal combinations beneath transform the repeating notes of the melody. A great advance is made in *Harawi* on the dynamic range required of the singer: from *pppp* to *fff*. She is also required to vary the vocal attack of her singing from *staccato* to humming.

Pianistically the cycle is more exacting than the earlier ones, in that the conventional roles of soloist and accompanist are reversed in places. This allows for more frequent and extended solo piano interludes. In these Messiaen indulged his love of 'gamelan' chords and, for the first time in a solo vocal work, birdsong. Both of these procedures call for exceptional skill on the part of the pianist, as the examples in this cycle are considerably more complicated than those of the earlier works. It is truly in *Harawi* that Messiaen conceived a piano-voice duet.

9.1.1.2 Choral works

O sacrum convivium! (1937) is novel for its time in terms of the musical language and the vertical sonorities produced. The dignified slowness, whilst idiosyncratic of Messiaen, calls to mind the traditional four-part hymn. There is, by contrast, nothing even vaguely hymn-like about *Trois petites liturgies* (1944). The sumptuous sound amalgam created in this choral composition initially aroused, as has been noted, delight and fury in seemingly equal measures. In his choice of female choir and in the manner of writing for them, Messiaen made it clear that his main interest was not astute part writing. Instead the voices are used primarily as the desired tone colour for conveying his ecstatic and worshipful poetry. Perhaps vertical, vocal combinations seemed to be superfluous against a background of such colourful accompanying instrumentation. Unusually, in *Trois petites liturgies* Messiaen introduced an aspect to vocal writing before he had tried it in a solo context: pitchless rhythms. In the third *liturgie*, rhythmic speech alternates with conventional sung passages. No special declamation is used, nor are there any pitch indications for the speech as occurs subsequently in *Cinq Rechants*.

Cinq Rechants (1949) is in many senses Messiaen's most adventurous work for voices and a highly imaginative artifice it is too. All the features of the solo melodic lines are present here, often with extra complications: wide-ranging phrases, awkward intervals, immense dynamic variations and long sustained phrases, all compounded with intricate and often difficult part-singing. Aspects of the primitivism which had infiltrated *Harawi* now invade this score to a greater degree and percussive noises and spoken words appear side by side and sometimes simultaneously with the sung melodies. Singers are called on to howl, hum, speak, make percussive sounds and to sing lyrically in order to provide both solo interest and vocal-accompaniment, as had happened gradually in the solo cycles. For the first time too, the numerous monodies of the instrumental works finally assume a vocal parallel in groups of unison voices or in the single unaccompanied voice. Time signatures re-emerge to regulate the performance of the twelve soloists, but their appearance bears little relation to the resumption of a conventional pulse or beat.

Finally, *La Transfiguration* (1965) presents a synthesis of Messiaen's vocal writing up to this time. This involves some advances on the earlier works, but a concurrent recanting of the radically experimental aspects of *Cinq Rechants*. Typical melodic, harmonic and rhythmic traits identified through the course of the other solo and choral works appear routinely in *La Transfiguration*. The numbers of all represented parties increase: choristers, orchestral instrumentalists, tuned percussion 'Balinese gamelan' performers and instrumental soloists - with one significant omission, vocal soloists. As in the other choral works, the few solo voices of *La Transfiguration* are used purely for tone colour and not in a soloistic or character role at all. Words are, for the most part, sung in standard syllabic fashion. This neo-chant style with minimal accompaniment resembles the early chant of *Poèmes pour Mi*, but in *La Transfiguration* it embraces a much wider pitch range and is less frequently prone to the characteristic melismatic end to the phrase. Numerous vocal timbre blends are produced by the continually varied grouping of voices in the manner initiated in *Cinq Rechants*, but howls and other primitivistic gestures are entirely absent. With the re-introduction of the instruments, birdsong, obviously absent from the unaccompanied *Cinq Rechants*, again conspicuously rears its brilliant and decorative head and is used for the first time simultaneously with singing voices.

9.1.2 Texts

Extra-musical considerations, specifically religious ones, are the *raison d'être* of Messiaen's music. These thoughts and philosophies are invariably attached to the compositions in his own words as vocal texts or programmes. Conceived simultaneously, they cannot be viewed other than as an integral part of the vocal works and respected accordingly. As with the strictly musical aspects, one notices in the writing of the texts the unvarying recurrence of certain themes, the development of others and the periodic introduction of new material.

The earliest texts penned by Messiaen are the two outer songs of the *Trois Mélodies*. These are essentially straightforward, rather juvenile love poems, distinguished by the addition of the brief, concluding benediction. This early reference to God within his love poetry set the precedent for all his future efforts. Thereafter, the notion of love which touches on God, the source of all loves, is never absent from his poetry. The idea is developed in *Poèmes pour Mi* where the marriage union is used as a symbol for the union of Christ and His church, and vice versa. In *Poèmes pour Mi VI*, Messiaen presented an unusual picture of aging lovers to counter the usual earthbound concept of love: the vision of a future together in Eternity. The expression of the love becomes increasingly explicit through the affectionate God-love poetry of *Trois petites liturgies*, to the physical consummation of human love asserted in *Cinq Rechants*, the last of Messiaen's self-composed texts. It is significant though, that with Messiaen, the emphasis is consistently on purity and the texts contain none of the bawdiness of say, Poulenc's songs on the same subject. The element of self-sacrificial love is particularly emphasised in those vocal works which belong to the *Tristan* trilogy: *Harawi* and *Cinq Rechants*. Direct nominative references are made in *Cinq Rechants*, whereas the references in *Harawi* are more oblique. In *Cinq Rechants* Messiaen used not only the famous *Tristan und Isolde* love myth, but also alluded to other well-known couples.

La mort du nombre introduced various new aspects to Messiaen's vocal texts: apocalyptic imagery, timelessness, and the metaphorical use of light to representing spiritual enlightenment. As part of the apocalyptic vision, this text contains the first disruptions of nature which were to be developed in the larger works: *Poèmes pour Mi*, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, *Trois petites liturgies* and especially *Harawi*. The cantata concludes with

meditations on eternity, another theme to be much advanced both textually and musically in subsequent compositions. In *Antienne de Silence* [anthem to silence], *Chants de Terre et de Ciel II*, for example, the non-developmental nature of the music reinforces the textual notions, while in *Harawi I* the music reflects a similar stillness by means of pointilistically slow chords. Messiaen's musical concept of eternity reached a mighty vocal climax in the concluding movement of *La Transfiguration* which contemplates the eternal residence of God.

La mort du nombre is also the first vocal work which introduces the conflicting emotions stirred up by love: the pain and anguish which often balance the joy and elation. All future solo cycles contain this mixture and as here, the triumph of the good and positive prevails and concludes the works. In *Poèmes pour Mi*, Messiaen's attempts to portray the horrors of hell facilitated the first infrequent, but recurring, grotesque images in the texts. These become increasingly shocking until the singer in *Harawi*, dealing with the specifics of death, sings of 'heads rolling in blood!'. As one moves chronologically through the compositions, the hideous symbols coincide with increasingly surrealistic juxtapositions of images. *Trois petites liturgies*, which slots between *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and *Harawi*, maintains this unusual and invigorating style. *Harawi* and later *Cinq Rechants*, extend the Surrealist inspiration by also drawing images from Surrealist paintings.

From *Poèmes pour Mi* onwards, a knowledge of the Christian scriptures is highly desirable, if not essential. Some of the imagery remains singularly cryptic without this key. The texts of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, *Harawi*, *Cinq Rechants* and especially *Trois petites liturgies* are drenched with Christian symbolism. Interestingly, the last two self-composed texts, *Harawi* and *Cinq Rechants*, while nevertheless rich in Christian symbolism are the only ones which do not specifically mention God. New in the text of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and related to the Biblical imagery is the use of numerological symbols, which were also to be used in subsequent works and with particular insistence in *Harawi*.

Trois petites liturgies is the earliest of the self-composed texts which addresses God in a personal and affectionate way, and is one of the few multi-movement works in which there is no 'dark' movement. There are quiet moments of contemplation, but no dreadful, ominous ones. In the third *liturgie*, for the first time, Messiaen the poet ventured beyond the bounds

of his immediate relationship with the mortal Beloved (as in *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*), and his individual relationship with God (as in *O sacrum convivium!* and *Trois petites liturgies I* and *II*), to God abounding everywhere. The extension of the Surrealistic techniques of the solo works to this choral one precipitates the first flood of joyous colours: rainbows, red, mauve, blue, yellow, purple-yellow, orange-blue, green, leaf-flame-gold. The text breathes abundance and proliferation. With *Harawi* the delight in colour continues and is combined with a wealth of nature imagery: fruit, flowers, birds, cinders, mountains. One also encounters in *Harawi*, occasional passages of incantatory, onomatopoeic or nonsense syllables. The following vocal work, *Cinq Rechants*, is heavily infused with this primal elements. In fact, Messiaen's prefatory notes state that the work is a song of life in which the words serve only as a guide to interpreting the feelings of the poem and the music, and that the singers should consider the effect of the sound rather than the meaning. This must surely justify his claim that in writing the texts himself, he could achieve a perfect accord between the melodies, rhythms and words.

After the comprehensive surrealism and experimentalism of the *Cinq Rechants* text, Messiaen turned to, for him, a fresh approach. The text of *La Transfiguration* is a strict narrative with accompanying meditations, all presented in logical sentences and constructed entirely from literary excerpts by authors other than the composer.

9.2 Messiaen in company

9.2.1 Vocal writing

For the first time in the twentieth century, the voice has been recognized as an instrument, a means of producing sound, rather than simply as an organ capable only of song. Just as much experimentation has been undertaken in producing unusual sounds from standard orchestral instruments, the voice too has been subject to scrutiny and trial because of its altered status. Some composers have exploited the indisputable fact of its attachment to a human being and have wrung forth passionate and intensely emotional articulations. Others

have subjugated the personal element by producing more 'mechanical' sounds, sometimes with the assistance of tape or other technological manipulation. There also appears to have been a trend at the turn of the century, to detach singing completely from the florid vocal styles of long ago. Instead of concealing words within a deluge of ornamentation, modern composers followed on from the Romantic lieder writers in showing a real concern for the audibility of their texts. Thus in the vocal works of composers like Mussorgsky, Debussy, Schoenberg and Stravinsky one finds musical recitation in which text is presented in a manner resembling speech. Messiaen was part of such a movement. Commentators (for example, Johnson, 1989, p56-57) have noted a similarity between the *parlando* styles of his early songs and those of Debussy or Ravel. In fairness to Messiaen, as Nichols (1986, p22) points out, the rhythmic freedom of all three styles may simply be attributable to the peculiar cadence of their French language. Although Messiaen progressed to establishing a *parlando* style of his own, it is true to say that he never forsook this common goal of ensuring that the audience could hear the words of his singers.

His *parlando* and indeed melodic writing in general was clearly influenced by a fascination with plainsong. This was but one manifestation of Messiaen's yearning for, what one suspects, are rather idealised dreams of times long gone by. In the following quotation he reveals some of his reasons for that obsession:

"Those (epochs) of the Chaldeans, the Assyrians, the Sumerians, the Hittites, those epochs where words correspond with reality, where numbers were symbols, where everything was taken seriously, where nothing was superficial, where the sense of metaphor was acute..." (Samuel, 1973).

This would also explain his attraction to, and use of, ancient Greek and Indian music. Parallels between his musical language and that of Eastern cultures (rhythmic patterns, talas, gamelan instrumentation) have been much noted. The fact that both Indian music and plainsong are essentially monophonic and deistic in nature furnishes an interesting and understandable correlation. Messiaen was not alone in this broader musical perspective. Ancient Greek music appealed to Scelsi, for example, though in his case the attraction was specifically with the aulodia, a melody played on the aulos, an antique flute (Freeman, 1991).

Chou wen-Chung (1971) has noted a further delightful correspondence between the musical

workings of Messiaen and that ascribed to by another ancient civilisation. His penchant for using verbal imagery to describe various technical features in his music has a distant precedent in Chinese *ch'in* music. In the latter, each finger technique and tone quality has a specific poetic and pictorial reference to define the requisite state of mind to adequately express the meaning of the musical event. Some of these bear an amazing resemblance to Messiaen's images: 'butterfly over flowers' in *ch'in* music becomes the 'bee in the flower' in Messiaen's commentary; 'fading reverberations of a temple bell', 'distant carillon'; and 'like the sound of wind', 'gust of wind'. Whether deliberate or otherwise, this is yet another example of Messiaen's integration of Western and non-Western musical concepts and techniques.

To return to the plainsong, one finds that he was not the only composer this century to turn to this ancient liturgical model. In much of his music of the 1960's, Gorecki harks back to Medieval Polish modal and liturgical incantation (Mellers, 1989). Schnittke, like Messiaen, simulated chant-like melodies as well as actually quoting plainsong directly in his music (Moody, 1989). Davies was similarly inspired, but, according to Griffiths (1981, p190), differs from Messiaen in his treatment of that resource: where Messiaen accepted the plainsong unaltered into his music and quoted it (described by Griffiths as 'an exposition'), Davies develops it as 'an interpretation'. While quoting specific plainchant melodies in some works, Messiaen also formulated from this source his answer to the *parlando* styles of other composers.

Schoenberg had ventured further than most with his innovative *parlando* style, *sprechgesang*, as found in *Pierrot Lunaire* (1910). The disjointed style and violent leaps from one end of the singer's pitch range to the other which characterised his early attempts have wielded considerable influence on the succeeding generation of composers, including Messiaen. Messiaen's response was characteristic: absorb what could be happily included with his aesthetic and discard the inappropriate. Thus it is in Messiaen's songs that one finds these taxingly disjunct intervals within a phrase, yet the vocal line still adheres to melodious shapes, absent from much serial and expressionist music.

Cage and Pousseur diverged further from Schoenberg's speech song to create all manner of

unusual and sometimes amusing sounds with the voice. Messiaen explored the possibilities, but integrated none which would have aroused either embarrassment on the part of the singer, or scorn and distaste on the part of the listener. It is interesting to compare his use of experimental sounds with those of two other contemporary composers. In the work of Penderecki, the listener gains the impression that in his use of 'noises', he was striving to make the texts more 'visually - audible'. Messiaen, on the other hand, in true Romantic spirit, seems to have rather been indulging a fascination with sensuous sounds. Strangely enough, it is this captivation with sound and sound symbols which also presents an affinity between the thinking of Messiaen and one of his students, Stockhausen. The following words written by Stockhausen in his discussion on his *Gesang der Jünglinge* for electronic tape of 1956, could well have been attributed to Messiaen with reference to *Cinq Rechants*, where phonemes and an invented language dominate the text:

"At certain points in the composition, sung groups of words become comprehensible speech-symbols, words; at others they remain pure sound qualities, sound-symbols; between these two extremes there are various degrees of comprehensibility of the word" (Johnson, 1989, p194).

It has been said that a feature of French music at its highest level has always been its predominantly intellectual character. French composers, according to Myers (1971, p51), have tended to be interested and in touch with literature and the other arts. In his vocal texts specifically, Messiaen forged a close link with the Symbolist and Surrealist poetics of his day. In their literary work, these men each secured their own individual symbolism as a means to convey intensely personal feelings. Messiaen's kinship with them is obvious. Perhaps his surrealist inclination finds its most extreme expression in the deployment of phonemes where sounds, devoid of meaning in a linguistic sense, are used to convey emotion. In this respect Messiaen connected with the ideas of Artuad or even further back to the disruptive linguistic experiments of Poe. Evans (1974) points out some striking similarities between the invented language of Messiaen's *Cinq Rechants* [*Ahi! O mapa nama mapa nama lila, tchil...* or *Mayoma kalimolimo mayoma kalimolimo t k tk t k t k...*] and Artuad's *Letura d'Eprahi* [*calipa/Ke loc tispera/Kalispera/enoctimi*]. Significantly, the latter, like Messiaen's *Harawi*, owes something to a fascination on the part of that author for the myths of pre-Columbian America. In both instances it is difficult for an interpreter to give an exact translation or 'meaning'. Despite the diametrically opposed theological stance of

Artuad, Messiaen was able to incorporate without prejudice, into his own blatantly religious work, some of the wealth of Artuad's work.

Messiaen's synaesthesia immediately establishes his relationship with the world of visual art. Other composers have indeed tried to connect colour and music. In Scriabin's *Prometheus: A Poem of Fire* (1913) a 'light-keyboard' was used to throw a play of coloured light onto a screen, while in his opera *Die Glückliche Hand*, completed in the same year, Schoenberg prescribed exactly the coloured projections to accompany the staging. It is clear, however, that Messiaen's colour conceptions and the application thereof, were far more complicated than these. Scriabin for example, made no attempt at all to mix the colours from his light-keyboard, while Messiaen's mode-colour associations are, by contrast, frighteningly complex: mode three conjures up for him, orange in a halo of milky-white, speckled with a little red, green and gold like an opal (Bell, 1984, p30)! He did not impose these colours on people by external means, but rather used them himself internally as a means of composing. The colours were visible to him in an intellectual sense, in his mind's eye as it were, and he blended them by means of aural combinations in his scores. This close relationship between the world of sound and the world of colour was one he cherished and he greatly admired painters with whom he perceived an affinity:

"I prefer one painter to all others, not only because he was the precursor to abstract painting, and consequently very close to what I see when I hear music, but above all, because he established in a very subtle and forceful manner the rapport between complementary colours, especially the principle of 'simultaneous contrast' and Orphisme: that painter is Robert Delauney" (Samuel, 1976, p21).

There are more subtle links between the two. Messiaen's church affiliations are reflected in several versions Delauney painted of the Gothic church of St. Severin, while planets, much used in Messiaen's texts, can also be found prominently in Delauney's brilliantly coloured *Homage to Blériot* (1914). Messiaen's other favourite painter was Kandinsky, who apparently responded to colour in a reverse direction i.e. the soul responded to the work of art in terms of vibrations, and the vibration produced by the colour resulted in a musical sound (Watts, 1979).

In his interview with Watts (1979), Messiaen mentioned two other painters: Ciurlionis, a Lithuanian painter, whose paintings of music have musical titles like *Scherzo*, *Allegro* and *Finale*; and Blanc-Gatti, a Swiss painter who had an actual synaesthetic disorder, which deranged the optic nerve so that whenever he heard sounds he saw colours.

A brief digression is warranted to consider a more curious alliance between painter and composer: Max Ernst and Messiaen in his post-1949 works. While some of the 'many points of rapport' deduced by Evans (1974) are debatable, he does draw attention to a series of pictures entitled *Nymph Echo*, *Nature at Dawn*, and *Joie de vivre*, which confront us with 'giant bird-headed creatures lurking amid luscious blossoms and green leathery leaves', whose 'vast dimensions' seem to imply to Evans, 'the cosmic landscapes of the *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. Ernst's bird monuments, like Messiaen's birdsongs, are numerous and stylised.

Messiaen's use of birdsong is not without precedent in Western music: Beethoven's stylised cuckoo (*Sixth Symphony II*) or Respighi's more realistic nightingale (*Pines of Rome III*), but his systematic and unconventional approach is unusual. It seems that no other composers have tramped the countryside, notebook in hand, to painstakingly transcribe the songs of birds for incorporation into a serious composition. There has always been some controversy over the accuracy of his transcriptions, but subject to the manipulations he felt necessary for instrumental adaptation, it is little wonder there is some difference from the original. Because timbres of authentic birdsong are so varied, it is not always possible to reproduce on a single instrument the particular quality of the bird concerned. This challenged Messiaen to create 'melodies of timbres' in which different combinations of instruments are used playing together but not in unison, to represent a single bird. In this context harmony assumes a timbral function. Birdsong has also generated in his music a simultaneity of which Ives would have strongly approved. Just as in nature, sometimes in Messiaen's music the birds join together in a chorus which defies laws of all order but inclusiveness. His birdsong has indisputably produced a completely new type of music.

Messiaen attributed his love for colour to two main sources: nature (including the colourful plumage of birds) and stained glass windows. In the former, he felt Debussy to be a kindred spirit:

"Debussy was a composer who understood the sound-colour relationship which I feel myself so intensely, and he understood it by contemplating nature" (Messiaen, quoted by Samuel, 1976, p13).

Certainly Messiaen shared with his French compatriot, a delight in the sounds of nature and a strong desire to follow its tutelage in terms of form and free rhythms. While both composers attempted to emulate natural sounds in their music, Messiaen decided that the sounds of wind and water selected by Debussy were simply too complex for him to capture and settled instead for birdsong (Samuel, 1976, p13)! It has also been felt that Messiaen's early piano preludes are indebted harmonically to Debussy. Smalley (1968) actually identifies four chords from the beginning of *Poèmes pour Mi III* with the beginning of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the work which Messiaen accredited as determining his musical career. Messiaen's harmonic language obviously evolved into a more individual expression, but he did develop an aspect of harmony which, if not derived from, is certainly shared with an unexpected colleague. His tendency to persist in a single tonal area is surely akin to the 'music of monotony' devised by Satie (Walsh, 1985). Anderson (1992) meanwhile points out that people never seem to tire of drawing comparisons between Messiaen's harmony and that of Gershwin or dance-band music. Although Messiaen repeatedly professed a loathing for jazz, a great number of similar added note chords do flavour both types of music. Equally, the quartal chords which abound in Hindemith's compositions are in evidence in Messiaen's work. Yet Messiaen's creation of chords has seldom been instigated by the selection of particular constituent notes, but rather because of the total sound complex created. In this he draws nigh to an even more unexpected field: his conception of harmony as essentially integrated sounds is, as indicated by Johnson (1989, p185), relevant in the electronic field.

His unconventional approach to tonality mitigated against an unreserved commitment to the developmental, often harmonically-generated forms used by composers up to the twentieth century. Messiaen renegaded in favour of arch-shaped or rose-window forms, revealing again his affinity with the artifacts and designs of the church. His fondness for palindromic forms was shared by other twentieth century composers, notably Bartok, Stravinsky and Webern. In Messiaen's rose-window forms, musical moments contribute fragments of a mosaic picture, which, when put together reveal a comprehensive whole. The rule governing adjacency may be contrast or similarity. Salzman's (1974, p21) description of Debussy's

forms as 'ongoing and associative' is appropriate in part to Messiaen's forms, but there are times when the element of forward motion suggested here is entirely absent. Perhaps a closer affinity exists with the temporal concepts of LeFanu. In an explanation of the form of her song cycle *The same day dawns* (1974), she states in the sleeve notes (1980, Chandos. ABR 1017):

"Time may seem to move forward, but this is our illusion: as the cycle ends, we are back in the dream world of the opening... The still drone of the time past midnight..."

Messiaen brought the same originality of thought to bear on the form of his opera. Though approached independently and from three different directions, the theatrical views of Stockhausen, Messiaen and Glass appear to coincide. According to Freeman (1988), all three perceive opera as ceremony, with a procedure and hierarchy of symbols similar to that of religion.

Both Debussy and Messiaen defined form by juxtapositions of contrasting timbre. In this Messiaen saw himself as also following Schoenberg and Webern in their *klangfarbenmelodies* [melodies of timbre] (Samuel, 1976, p25). To provide himself with an optimum of colouristic choices in this regard, like Bruckner and Strauss before him, Messiaen opted for vast and varied orchestral resources. His orchestration was also influenced by a love for the Balinese gamelan. Many Western composers before had shown an interest in music of the East, but Messiaen was surely the first to include so many oriental features as an integral part of his own music. The gradual incorporation of a gamelan 'orchestra' within the conventional orchestra was but one manifestation of this. Although it appears to be mainly the timbre which appealed to Messiaen, he did make use in his own music of some of the polyphonic procedures from that source. In the ninth movement of his *Turangalila-symphonie* for example, a tune repeats in 'gamelan' fashion against other *ostinati* derived largely from its own augmentation and diminution. Because gamelan music maintains a clear tonal organisation and melodic phrasing, it is often more accessible to many Westerners than atonal music. This means that, by and large, Messiaen's pleasure in the gamelan is shared by composers who have maintained links with tonality. Messiaen's contrived gamelan consisted of a large variety of tuned and untuned percussion instruments. In capitalizing on the hitherto largely underutilized potential of the percussion department in this way, he was part of a

broader trend in Western twentieth century music. Debussy, Bartok, Stravinsky and Varèse spring to mind and they have been followed by the subsequent generation of composers: Boulez, Stockhausen and Jean-Claude Eloy, amongst others.

In terms of more unusual instrumentation, Messiaen's name has been strongly associated with the ondes martenot. In fact he only used it prominently in *Trois petites liturgies* and the *Turangalila-symphonie* and then not again until *Saint François d'Assise*, when three take the stage simultaneously. Its appeal undoubtedly lay in the new timbres it could produce, but as Messiaen himself pointed out, he was not the first to use it:

"Arthur Honegger, in *Sémiramis* and in *Joan of Arc at the Stake*, was the first composer to use them, then André Jolivet used them in one of his youthful works, the *Danse Incantatoire*, for two Ondes martenot and orchestra, and a first-rate concerto for Ondes martenot" (Messiaen, quoted by Samuel, 1976, p30-31).

More recently, Tristan Murail has composed *Les courants* for ondes martenot and orchestra (Thomas, 1993).

The religious impetus of Messiaen's composing, though relatively rare in the twentieth century is shared with other composers, but seldom with such constantly optimistic countenance. While much of the sacred vocal music in the first half of the century expressed the painful and tormented cries of anguish to a God who seemed to pay little heed, Messiaen declared overwhelmingly the joyful prospect of an eternity to be spent with a majestic God. The dedication of an entire oeuvre to God, as Messiaen (1956, p8) has claimed, is remarkable. He unfailingly exuded an overwhelming desire to 'touch on all things without ceasing to touch on God'. By contrast, Poulenc produced some exquisitely moving religious music, for example the *Stabat Mater*, yet some of his songs could scarcely be considered 'godly'. With Messiaen's work, there is no inconsistency. Even those works without overt religious reference, contain nothing which could be described as ungodly. In many cases such 'un-sacred' works can be understood as relating to Messiaen's broader concept of worshipping the Creator as revealed in the creation.

It is obvious that in many ways, Messiaen is an archetypal twentieth century composer, sharing with his contemporaries many revolutionary musical attributes. Amongst these must

number such specifics as an interest in ancient musics, unusual forms, vocal experimentation, exotic instrumentation, and a new concept of vertical sound. In non-musical ways too, Messiaen has participated in artistic trends of the twentieth century, namely linguistic experimentation and colour-sound relationships. Perhaps most importantly, he displayed a modern liberal attitude which allows for exploration and divergence from the norm.

Despite all these correspondences, he nevertheless remains a composer apart. Although various composers have shared specific musical features with Messiaen, there is no other in whom they all come together in such distinctive guise. It is the individual synthesis of these elements which contradictorily makes his music both uniquely his, and uniquely characteristic of the twentieth century.

9.3 Conclusions

Messiaen's amenity to experimentation, coupled with a love for beautiful sound have endowed the vocal repertoire with several irreplaceable masterpieces. In the solo works it is, of course, the sopranos who gain particular benefit from his attention. The number of works from which to choose is limited, but the variety offered within the oeuvre is great. Although a broader perspective than conventional singing is broached, unusual songs are invariably euphonious ones. Noelle Barker (*pers. comm.*, 1990), who has produced some fine recordings of his song cycles notes that, despite the technical difficulties "it is the sheer physical enjoyment... which carries the singer through". Equally, in the unusual choral works the chorister will find opportunities to sing and create conventionally harmonious sound, but will also be faced with new challenges.

Messiaen's genius is thus revealed in his vocal music: a sophisticated and technically complex synthesis of palindromes, Greek rhythms and forms, Gregorian chant, Indian rhythmic and melodic patterns, gamelan orchestration, colours, references to the visual arts, nature, birdsong, Christian symbols, numerology, mythology and novel, self-invented features, all resting on the Western classical foundation. The astonishing corollary is that from that elaborate language, emerged vocal works which appeal directly, almost naively, to the heart of listener and performer to generate a musical experience which is both intellectually and emotionally satisfying.

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APPENDIX I - List of vocal works

- 1921: *Deux Ballades de Villon*
voice and piano, unpublished
- 1930: *Trois Mélodies*
soprano and piano
- 1930: *La mort du Nombre*
soprano, tenor, violin and piano.
- 1933: *Messe*
8 sopranos and 4 violins, unpublished, manuscript lost during World War II.
- 1935: *Vocalise*
soprano and piano
- 1936: *Poèmes pour Mi*
soprano and piano
- 1937: *O sacrum convivium!*
mixed chorus or soloists, in 4 parts, *a cappella*
- 1938: *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*
soprano and piano
- 1941: *Choeurs pour une Jeanne d'Arc*
large and small chorus, mixed, *a cappella*, unpublished, manuscript lost during World War II.
- 1944: *Trois petites Liturgies de la Présence divine*
women's voices and orchestra
- 1945: *Harawi, chants d'amour et de mort*
soprano and piano
- 1949: *Cinq Rechants*
12 solo voices
- 1965-9: *La Transfiguration de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ*
choir, 7 soloists and orchestra

APPENDIX II - Song texts

Trois Mélodies [Three melodies]1. *Pourquoi?* [Why?]

<i>Pourquoi les oiseaux de l'air,</i>	Why the birds of the air,
<i>Pourquoi les reflets de l'eau,</i>	Why the reflections of the water,
<i>Pourquoi les nuages du ciel,</i>	Why the clouds of the sky,
<i>Pourquoi les feuilles de l'Automne,</i>	Why the Autumn leaves,
<i>Pourquoi les chansons du Printemps,</i>	Why the songs of Spring,
<i>Pourquoi?</i>	Why?
<i>Pourquoi n'ont-ils pour moi de charmes,</i>	Why do they not please me,
<i>Pourquoi? Pourquoi, ah - pourquoi?</i>	Why? Why, ah - why?
<i>Pourquoi? Pourquoi? Pourquoi?</i>	Why? Why? Why?

2. *Le sourire* [The smile]

<i>Certain mot murmuré</i>	A certain word murmured by you
<i>Par vous est un baiser intime et prolongé</i>	Is a prolonged and intimate kiss
<i>Comme in baiser sur l'â</i>	Like a kiss that goes to the very heart of me
<i>Ma bouche veut sourire</i>	My mouth wants to smile
<i>Et mon sourire tremble.</i>	And my smile trembles.

3. *La fiancée perdue* [The lost fiancée]

<i>C'est la douce fiancée</i>	It is the sweet fiancée
<i>C'est l'ange de la bonté</i>	It is the angel of goodness
<i>C'est un après-midi en soleil</i>	It is an afternoon in the sun,
<i>C'est le vent sur les fleurs.</i>	It is the wind on the flowers.
<i>C'est un sourire pur comme un coeur d'enfant,</i>	It is a smile pure as the heart of a child,
<i>C'est un grand lys blanc comme une aile,</i>	It is a tall white lily, like a wing,
<i>très haut dans une coupe d'or!</i>	High in a golden cup!
<i>O Jésus, bénissez la!</i>	O Jesus, bless her!
<i>Elle! Donnez-lui votre grace puissante!</i>	To her! Give her your mighty grace!
<i>Qu'elle ignore la souffrance, les larmes!</i>	That she may ignore the suffering, the tears!
<i>Donnez-lui le repos, - Jésus!</i>	Grant her rest - Jesus!

La mort du nombre [The Death of the Multitude]

2me Ame:	2nd Soul:
<i>C'était un rayon de soleil qui dormait dans ta main.</i>	There was a ray of sun asleep in your hand.
<i>Tu levas très haut tes petits doigts.</i>	You raised up high your little fingers.
<i>Il se mit à briller d'un tel éclat</i>	It began to shine forth with such brilliance
<i>que je ne vis plus que lui.</i>	that I could no longer see.
<i>Et il se déroula et devint si long</i>	And as it unfolded it grew so long that it
<i>qu'il embrassait les quatre confins.</i>	embraced the land around.
<i>En montant il m'enveloppa et me conduisit</i>	Climbing still higher it bathed me in light and
<i>vers ton âme sereine.</i>	led me to your calm soul.

*Je suis encore très loin de toi.
Qui m'en éloigne davantage?
Pourquoi l'adieu? Rien ne peut détruire le rêve!*

1re Ame:

L'eau dormante ne fuit pas le fleur qui la regarde.

2me Ame:

*Je veux m'approcher,
Quelle force invisible m'arrête?
Pour qui ces liens?
Pour qui ces chaînes?
Je ne peux plus vouloir?
Pourrai-je monter ainsi cet escalier sans fin?*

1re Ame:

Il faut dissourde les nuées, combler les océans.

2me Ame:

*O longue, ô triste attente!
O souffrance, cercle de feu!
Meurent le temps et l'espace!
Loin, la joie!
Loin la lumière!
Cloches d'horreur! breuvage affreux! mur qui m'écrase!
La terre s'entr'ouvre,
Les astres croulent, le monde est enseveli!*

*La fin, la fin, qui la dira?
Je souffre! Je souffre! Je souffre!*

1re Ame:

*Attends! espère!
Plus légers que des oiseaux de plumes,
Plus légers que le vide,
Plus légers que ce qui n'est pas,
Nous planerons au-dessus d'un rêve.
Le poids du nombre sera mort. Il sera mort!*

*Entends le chant de notre âme unique!
Clair sourire, regard pur, tremblant extase,
Il monte plus haut cette âme
Et s'élançe vers des clartés nouvelles,
Dans un éternel printemps!*

I am still a fair distance from you.
Who will keep me even further?
Why the farewell? Nothing can destroy the dream!

1st Soul:

The sleeping water does not flee the observing flower.

2nd Soul:

I want to get nearer.
What invisible force is holding me back?
Whose are these bonds?
Whose these chains?
Can I no longer want to do so?
Can I thus climb this eternal stairway?

1st Soul:

The clouds must be banished, the oceans filled in.

2nd Soul:

O long and sad is the waiting!
O suffering! Circle of fire!
May time and space die!
Begone joy!
Begone light!
Bells of horror! dreadful potion! wall of death!
The earth gapes open!
The stars come tumbling down, the world is buried!
The end, the end, who will announce the end?
I am suffering, suffering, suffering!

1st Soul:

Wait! Take heart!
Lighter than the feathered birds,
lighter than the void,
lighter than what is not,
we shall hover above dreams,
The weight of the multitude will no longer be!
Will no longer be!
Listen to the song of our single soul!
Bright smile, pure look, trembling ecstasy,
it climbs higher than the old soul
and soars up towards new lights,
in an eternal spring!

Poèmes pour Mi [Poems for Mi]1. *Action de grâces* [Act of grace]

*Le ciel,
Et l'eau qui suit les variations
des nuages,
Et la terre, et les montagnes
qui attendent toujours,
Et la lumière qui transforme.*

*Et un oeil près de mon oeil,
une pensée près de ma pensée,
Et un visage qui sourit et
pleure avec le mien,
Et deux pieds derrière mes pieds
Comme la vague à la vague est unie.*

*Et une âme,
Invisible, pleine d'amour
et d'immortalité,
Et un vêtement de chair et d'os
qui germera pour la résurrection,
Et la Vérité, et l'Esprit,
et la grâce avec son héritage
de lumière.*

*Tout cela, vous me l'avez donné.
Et vous vous êtes encore
donné vous-même,
Dans l'obéissance et dans le sang
de votre Croix,
Et dans un Pain plus doux que
la fraîcheur des étoiles,
Mon Dieu. Alleluia.*

The sky,
and the water that follows the variations
of the clouds,
and the earth, and the mountains
that forever wait,
and the light which transforms.

And an eye close to my eye,
a thought close to my thought,
and a face that smiles and
weeps with mine,
and two feet behind my feet
as wave is united to wave.

And a soul,
invisible, full of love
and immortality,
and a garment of flesh and bone
which will germinate for the resurrection,
and Truth, and the Spirit,
and the grace with its
heritage of light.

All this, you have given me.
And you have given yourself
as well,
in obedience and in the
blood of your Cross,
and in a Bread, sweeter than
the freshness of the stars.
my God, Alleluia.

2. *Paysage* [Landscape]

*Le lac comme un gros bijou bleu.
La route pleine de chagrins
et des fondrières,
Mes pieds qui hésitent
dans la poussière,
Le lac comme un gros bijou bleu.*

*Et la voilà, verte et bleue
comme le paysage!
Entre le blé et le soleil
je vois son visage:
Elle sourit, la main sur les yeux.
Le lac comme un gros bijou bleu.*

The lake like a great blue jewel.
The road full of sorrows
and pot holes,
my feet which hesitate
in the dust,
the lake like a great blue jewel.

And there she is, green and
blue like the landscape!
Between the wheat and the sun
I see her face:
she smiles, her hand shading her eyes.
the lake like a great blue jewel.

3. *La maison* [The house]

*Cette maison nous allons la quitter
Je la vois dans ton oeil.
Nous quitterons nos corps aussi:
Je les vois dans ton oeil.*

We are going to leave this house:
I see it in your eye.
We shall leave our bodies also:
I see them in your eye.

*Toutes ces images de douleur
qui s'impriment dans ton oeil,
Ton oeil ne les retrouvera plus:
Quand nous contemplerons
la Vérité,
Dans des corps purs, jeunes,
éternellement lumineux.*

All these images of sorrow
which imprint themselves in your eye,
your eye will not find again,
when we contemplate the
Truth,
in pure young bodies,
eternally luminous.

4. *Epouvante* [Terror]

*Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ho!
N'enfouis pas tes souvenirs dans
la terre,
tu ne les retrouverais plus.
Ne tire pas, ne froisse pas,
de déchire pas.
Des lambeaux sanglants te
suivraient dans les ténèbres
comme une vomissure triangulaire,
et le choc bruyant des anneaux
sur la porte irrécusable
rythmerait ton désespoir
pour rassasier les puissances
du feu.
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ho!
ha, ha, ha, ha!*

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ho!
Don't bury your memories in
the earth,
you would not find them again.
Don't pull, don't bruise,
don't tear.
Bloody shreds would follow
you into the dark
like a triangle of vomit,
and the noisy impact of the
rings on the broken gate
would suit the rhythm of your despair.
To satisfy the powers
of Hell.
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ho!
ha, ha, ha, ha!

5. *L'épouse* [The wife]

*Va où l'Esprit te mène,
nul ne peut séparer ce que Dieu
a uni,
Va où l'Esprit te mène,
l'épouse est la prolongement
de l'époux,
Va où l'Esprit te mène,
comme l'Eglise est le prolongement
du Christ.*

Go wither the Spirit leads you,
no-one can separate what God
has joined together,
Go wither the Spirit leads you,
the wife is the extension
of the husband,
Go wither the Spirit leads you,
just as the Church is the
extension of Christ.

6. *Ta voix* [Your voice]

*Fenêtre pleine d'après-midi,
qui s'ouvre sur l'après-midi,
et sur ta voix fraîche
(Oiseau de printemps qui s'éveille).
Si elle s'ouvrait sur l'éternité
je te verrais plus belle encore.
Tu es la servante du Fils,
et le Père t'aimerait pour cela.*

Window full of the afternoon,
which opens onto the afternoon,
and onto your fresh voice
(bird of spring that awakens).
If it opened onto eternity
I would find you even more beautiful.
You are the handmaiden of the Son,
and the Father would love you for that.

*Sa lumière sans fin tomberait
sur tes épaules,
sa marque sur ton front.
Tu complèterais le nombre
des anges incorporels.
A la gloire de la trinité sainte
un toujours de bonheur élèverait
ta voix fraîche
(Oiseau de printemps qui s'éveille):
tu chanterais.*

His eternal light would fall
upon your shoulders,
His mark upon your brow.
You would complete the
number of the incorporeal angels.
To the glory of the Holy Trinity
an eternity of happiness
would lift up your fresh voice.
(bird of spring that awakens):
you would sing.

7. *Les Deux Guerriers* [Two warriors]

*De deux nous voici un En avant!
Comme des guerriers bardés de fer!
Ton oeil et mon oeil parmi les
statues qui marchent,
parmi les hurlements noirs,
les écroulements de sulfureuses
géométries.
Nous gémissons: ah!
écoute-moi, je suis tes deux
enfants, mon Dieu!
En avant, guerriers sacramentels!
Tendez joyeusement vos boucliers.
Lancez vers le ciel les flèches
du dévouement d'aurore.
Vous parviendrez aux portes
de la Ville.*

Of two, behold, we are made one! Onward!
Like warriors clad in steel!
your eye and mine among the
marching statues,
amid black howlings,
sulphur-crumbled
geometries.
We groan: oh!
hear me, I am your two
children, my God!
Onward, sacramental warriors!
Present your shields joyfully.
Shoot the arrows of dawn-
felt devotion at heaven,
you will reach the gates
of the city.

8. *Le collier* [The necklace]

*Printemps enchaîné, arc-en-ciel
léger du matin,
Ah, mon collier! Ah! mon collier!
Petit soutien vivant de mes
oreilles lasses,
Collier de renouveau, de sourire
et de grâce,
Collier d'Orient, collier choisi
multicolore aux perles dures
et cocasses!
Paysage courbe, épousant l'air
frais du matin,
Ah! mon collier! Ah! mon collier!
Tes deux bras autour de mon cou,
ce matin.*

Spring enchained, light
rainbow of the morning,
oh, my necklace, my necklace!
Tiny living support of my
weary ears,
necklace of renewal,
necklace of smiles and charm,
necklace of the Orient,
necklace chosen many-
coloured of hard, odd beads!
Landscape sweeps, embracing
the fresh morning air,
oh, my necklace, my necklace!
Your two arms around my neck,
this morning.

9. *Prière exaucée* [A prayer heard]

*Ebranlez la solitaire, la vieille
montagne de douleur,
Que le soleil travaille les eaux
amères de mon coeur!
O Jésus, Pain vivant et qui donnez*

Shake the solitary, the
ancient mountain of grief,
let the sunshine work on the bitter
waters of my heart!
Oh Jesus, Living Bread,

la vie,
 Ne dites qu'une seule parole,
 et mon âme sera guérie.
 Ebranlez la solitaire, etc.
 Donnez-moi votre grâce!
 Donnez-moi votre grâce!
 Carillone, mon coeur!
 Que ta résonance soit dure,
 et longue, et profonde!
 Frappe, tape, pour ton roi!
 Frappe, tape, pour ton Dieu!
 Voici ton jour de gloire et de
 résurrection!
 La joie est revenue.

which gives life,
 speak but one word and my
 soul will be healed.
 Shake the solitary, etc.
 Grant me your grace!
 Grant me your grace!
 Chime, my heart!
 May your resonance be
 strong, long and deep!
 Smite, strike, hit for your king!
 Smite, strike, hit for your God!
 Behold your day of glory and
 of resurrection!
 Joy has returned.

O sacrum convivium! [O sacred feast!]

*O sacrum convivium,
 in quo Christus sumitur,
 recolitur memoria passionis eius,
 mens impletur gratia*

O sacred feast
 in which Christ is taken,
 The memory of his passion is renewed
 the mind is filled with grace

O sacrum convivium....

O sacred feast ...

*et futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur.
 Alleluia.*

and a promise of future glory is given to us
 Alleluia.

Chants de terre et de ciel [Songs of the earth and the sky]

1. *Bail avec Mi* [Union with wife]

*Ton oeil de terre, mon oeil
 de terre, nos mains de terre,
 Pour tisser l'atmosphère,
 la montagne de l'atmosphère
 Étoile de silence à mon coeur
 de terre, à mes lèvres de terre,
 Petite boule de soleil
 complémentaire à ma terre.
 Le bail, doux compagnon de mon
 épaule amère.*

Your mortal eye; my mortal
 eye, our mortal hands,
 to weave the atmosphere,
 the mountain of the atmosphere
 star of silence to my mortal
 heart, to my mortal lips,
 little ball of sun
 complementary to my earth.
 The union, sweet companion
 to my bitter shoulder.

2. *Antienne du silence* [Anthem of silence]

*Ange silencieux, écris du silence
 dans mes mains, alleluia.
 Que j'aspire le silence du ciel,
 alleluia.*

Silent angel, write silence
 in my hands, alleluia.
 Let me breathe in the
 silence of heaven, alleluia.

3. *Danse du bébé-Pilule* [Dance of baby 'Pill']

Pilule, viens, dansons.
Malonlanlaine, ma.
Ficelles du soleil.
Malonlanlaine, ma.
C'est l'alphabet du rire
aux doigts de ta maman.
Son oui perpétuel était un lac
tranquille.
Malonlanlaine, ma, ma.
Douceur des escaliers, surprise
au coin des portes.
Tous les oiseaux légers
s'envolaient de tes mains.
Oiseaux légers, cailloux,
refains, crème légère.
En poissons bleus, en lunes
bleues, les auréoles de la terre
at de l'eau,
un seul poumon dans un seul roseau
Io, io, malonlaine, ma, etc.
L'oeil désarmé, un ange sur
la tête,
ton petite nez levé vers
le bleu qui s'avale,
ourlant de cris dorés les
horizons de verre,
tu tendais ton coeur si pur.
Chanter, chanter, ah, chanter,
glaneuses d'étoile, tresses de la vie
pouviez vous chanter plus délicieusement?
Le vent sur tes oreilles,
Malonlanlaine, ma,
joue à saute-mouton,
Malonlanlaine, ma,
Et la présence verte et l'oeil
de ta maman.
En effeuillant une heute
autour de mon sourire.
Malonlanlaine, ma.
Ma, ma, ma, io!
ha, ha, ha, ha!

Come, Pill, let's dance.
 Malonlanlaine, ma.
 Strings of the sun.
 Malonlanlaine, ma.
 It's the alphabet of laughter
 on your mother's fingers.
 Her constant yes was a
 tranquil lake.
 Malonlanlaine, ma, ma.
 Sweetness of the stairs,
 surprise at the corner of the doors.
 All the airy birds flew away
 from your hands.
 Airy birds, pebbles,
 choruses, light cream.
 In blue fish, in blue moons,
 the haloes of earth and
 water,
 a single breath in a single reed.
 Io, io, malonlaine, ma, etc.
 The disarmed eye, an angel
 on the head,
 your little nose raised
 towards the blue that one swallows,
 the horizons of glass,
 hemming with golden cries,
 you stretched out your innocent heart.
 To sing, to sing, ah! to sing.
 gleaners of stars, tresses of life,
 could you sing more deliciously?
 The wind on your ears,
 Malonlanlaine, ma,
 plays at leap-frog,
 Malonlanlaine, ma,
 and the verdant presence
 and your mother's eye.
 In shedding an hour about
 my smile.
 Malonlanlaine, ma.
 Ma, ma, ma, io!
 ha, ha, ha, ha!

4. *Arc-en-ciel d'innocence* [Rainbow of innocence]

Pilule, tu t'étires comme une
majuscule de vieux missal.
Tu es fatigué; regarde ta main.
Jouet incassable, les ressorts
fonctionnent toujours;
mais on ne peut pas le lancer
par-dessus bord
comme la jolie poupée en coton.
Rêve aux plis de l'heure;
tresse, tresse des vocalises
autour de silence:

Pill, you stretch yourself
 like a capital letter in an old missal.
 You are tired; look at your hand.
 Unbreakable toy, the springs
 still work;
 but you can't throw it
 overboard
 like the pretty rag doll.
 Dream of the folds of time;
 plait, plait vocalises
 round the silence:

le soleil t'écrira sur l'épaule
 du matin
 pour lancer des oiseaux dans ta
 bouche sans dents.
 Sourire, sourire, ce que tu
 chantes, chanter, chanter, t'a
 appris à sourire.
 Ce que tu ne vois pas, sauras-tu
 en rêver?
 Viens, que je te catapulte dans
 le jour
 comme le libellule-avaiteur!
 Te voilà plus haut que moi; quel
 plaisir de dominer tous ces
 géants!
 Attache à tes poignets fins les
 arcs-en-ciel d'innocence
 qui sont tombés de tes yeux,
 fais-les frémir dans les
 encognures du temps.
 Très loin, très près; recommençons
 cent fois le jeu!
 Où est-il? si haut qu'on ne le
 voit plus?
 Saute, mon bilboquet Pilule!
 Tu t'agitates comme un battant
 de cloche pascale.
 Bonjour, petit garçon.

the sun will write to you on
 the shoulder of the morning
 to release birds in your
 toothless mouth.
 Smile, smile, what you sing,
 singing, singing has taught
 you to smile.
 Will you be able to dream
 about what you don't see?
 Come here and let me
 catapult you into the day
 like the aviator-dragonfly!
 There now, taller than me;
 what a pleasure to dominate
 all these giants!
 To your little wrists fasten
 the rainbows of innocence
 that have fallen from your
 eyes, make them vibrate in
 the corners of time.
 Very far, very near to;
 let's start the game a hundred times over!
 Where is he? so high you
 can't see him anymore?
 Jump, cup-and-ball Pill!
 You wriggle like the clapper
 of a paschal bell.
 Good morning, little boy.

5. *Minuit pile et face (pour la mort)* [Midnight obverse and reverse (to death)]

Ville, oeil puant, minuits
 obliques,
 clous rouillés enfoncés aux
 angles de l'oubli.
 Agneau, Seigneur!
 Ils dansent, mes péchés dansent!
 Carnaval décevant des pavés de
 la mort.
 Grand corps tout pourri des rues,
 sous la dure lanterne.
 Carrefour de la peur!
 Couverture de démence et d'orgueil!
 Rire, aiguise-toi,
 rire, avale-toi:
 ces flambeaux sont des montagnes de nuit
 Noeuds bien serrés de l'angoisse.
 Bête inouïe qui mange. Qui have
 dans ma poitrine.
 Tête, tête, quelle sueur!
 Et je resterais seul à la mort
 qui m'enroule?
 Père des lumières, Christ, Vigne
 d'amour, Esprit Consolateur,
 Consolateur aux sept dons!
 Cloche, mes os vibrent, chiffre soudain,

City, stinking eye, devious
 midnights,
 rusty nails stuck in the
 corners of oblivion.
 Lamb, Lord!
 They dance, my sins dance!
 Deceitful carnival of the
 pavements of death.
 Great body of the streets
 all rotten beneath the hard street-lamps.
 Cross-road of fear!
 Cloak of madness and pride!
 Laughter, sharpen yourself,
 laughter, swallow yourself:
 these torches are mountains of night.
 Tight-drawn knots of anguish.
 Unheard-of beast that
 devours. That slobbers inside my chest.
 Head, head, what sweat!
 And I would remain alone to
 death that coils about me?
 Father of light, Christ,
 Vine of love, Spirit of compassion,
 Comforter of the seven gifts!
 Clock-strike, my bones vibrate,

décombres de l'erreur et des
cercles à gauche,
neuf, dix, onze, douze.
Oh! m'endormir petit! sous l'air
trop large,
dans un lit bleu, la main sous l'oreille,
avec une toute petite chemise.

debris of error and of the
circles to the left,
nine, ten, eleven, twelve.
Oh, to fall asleep a little!
beneath the too-wide air,
In a little bed, my hand under my ear,
with a tiny little nightshirt.

6. *Résurrection (pour la jour de Pâques)* [Resurrection (for Easter day)]

*Alleluia, alleluia. Il est le
premier, le Seigneur-Jésus.
Des morts il est le premier-né.
Sept étoiles d'amour au transpercé,
revêtez votre habit de clarté.
"Je suis ressuscité, je suis
ressuscité.
Je chante: pour toi, mon Père,
pour toi, mon Dieu, alleluia.
De mort à vie je passe."
Un ange. Sur la pierre il s'est posé.
Parfum, porte, perle, azymes de
la Vérité.*

Alleluia, alleluia! He is the first, the
Lord Jesus.
He is the first-born of the dead.
Seven stars of love to the transfixed,
put on your garment of love.
"I am risen, I am risen.
I sing: for you, my Father, for you,
my God, Alleluia.
I pass from death to life."
An angel. He has alighted on the stone.
Perfume, portal, pearl, unleavened bread
of Truth.

*Alleluia, alleluia. Nous l'avons
touché, nous l'avons vu.
De nos mains nous l'avons touché.
Un seul fleuve de vie dans son côté,
revêtez votre habit de clarté.
"Je suis ressuscité, je suis ressuscité.
Je monte: vers toi, mon Père,
vers toi, mon Dieu, alleluia.
De terre à ciel je passe."
Du pain. Il le rompt et leurs yeux
sont dessillés.
Parfum, porte, perle, lavez-vous
dans la Vérité.*

Alleluia, alleluia. We have touched
him, we have seen him.
We touched him with our hands.
A single river of life in his side,
put on your garment of light.
"I am risen, I am risen.
I rise: towards you, my Father, towards
you, my God, alleluia.
I pass from earth to heaven."
Bread. He breaks it and their eyes are
opened.
Perfume, portal, pearl, wash yourselves
in Truth.

Trois petites Liturgies de la Présence divine [Three little liturgies on the divine Presence]

I. Antienne de la Conversation intérieure
(Dieu présent en nous...)

Antiphon of Interior Communion
(God present in us...)

*Mon Jésus, mon silence, restez en moi.
Mon Jésus, mon royaume de silence, parlez en moi.
Mon Jésus, niut d'arc-en-ciel et de silence,
Priez en moi.
Soleil de sang, d'oiseaux,
mon arc-en-ciel d'amour, désert d'amour, chantez,
mon Amour, mon Amour, mon Dieu.*

My Jesus, my silence, remain in me.
My Jesus, my kingdom of silence, speak in me.
My Jesus, night of rainbow and of silence,
Pray in me.
Sun of blood, of birds,
my rainbow of love, desert of love, sing,
my Love, my Love, my God.

*Ce oui qui chante comme un écho de lumière,
mélodie rouge et mauve en louange du Père,*

This yes which sings like an echo of light,
red and mauve melody in praise of the Father,

*d'un baisser votre main dépasse le tableau,
paysage divin, renversez-toi dans l'eau.
Louange de la Gloire à mes ailes de terre,
mon Dimanche, ma Paix, mon Toujours de lumière,
que le ciel parle en moi, rire, ange nouveau,
ne me réveillez pas: c'est le temps de l'oiseau!
Ce oui qui chante....
Mon Jésus, mon silence...*

with a kiss your hand surpasses the image,
divine landscape, be inverted in water.
Praise of Glory to my earthly wings,
my Sunday, my Peace, my Forever of light
let heaven speak in me, laughter, new angel,
do not wake me: it is the hour of the bird!
This yes which sings...
My Jesus, my silence...

II.

*Séquence du Verbe, Cantique Divin
(Dieu présent en lui-même...)*

Sequence of the Word, Divine Cantic
(God present in Himself...)

*Il est parti le Bien-Aimé,
c'est pour nous!
Il est monté le Bien-Aimé,
c'est pour nous!
Il a prié le Bien-Aimé,
c'est pour nous, pour nous!*

He is gone, the Beloved,
it is for us!
He has ascended, the Beloved,
it is for us!
He has prayed, the Beloved,
it is for us!

*Il a parlé, il a chanté,
et le Verbe était en Dieu!*

He has spoken, he has sung,
and the Word was God!

*Louange du Père, substance du Père,
empreinte et rejaillissement toujours,
dans l'amour, Verbe d'Amour!*

Praise of the Father, substance of the Father,
imprint and outpouring for ever,
in Love, Word of Love!

Il est parti....

He is gone....

*Par lui le Père dit: c'est moi,
parole de mon sein!
Par lui le Père dit: c'est moi,
le Verbe est dans mon sein!
Le verbe est la louange,
modèle en bleu pour anges,
trompette bleu qui prolonge le jour,
par l'Amour, chant de l'Amour!*

Through Him the Father says: it is I,
word of my bosom!
Through Him the Father says: it is I,
the Word is in my bosom!
The Word is praise,
blue pattern for angels,
blue trumpet which draws out the day,
through Love, song of Love!

Il est parti...

He is gone....

*Il était riche et bienheureux,
Il a donné son ciel!
Il était riche et bienheureux,
pour compléter son ciel!
Le Fils c'est la Présence,
l'Esprit c'est la Présence,
Les adoptés dans le grâce toujours,
pour l'Amour, Enfants d'Amour!*

He was rich and blessed,
he was given his heaven!
He was rich and blessed,
to complete his heaven!
The Son is the Presence,
The Spirit is the Presence,
enfolded eternally in grace,
for Love, Children of Love!

*Il est parti...
Il a parlé...*

He is gone...
He has spoken..

*Il est vivant, il est présent,
et Lui se dit en Lui!
Il est vivant, il est présent,
et Lui se voit en Lui!
Présent au sang de l'âme,*

He is living, he is present,
and He says forth Himself in Himself,
He is living, he is present,
and He looks on Himself in Himself,
Present in the blood of the soul,

*étoile aspirant l'âme,
présent partout, miroir ailé des jours,
par l'Amour, le Dieu d'Amour!*

Il est parti....

star drawing the soul upwards,
present everywhere, winged mirror of days,
through Love, the God of Love!

He is gone....

III.

*Psalmodie de l'Ubiquité par Amour
(Dieu présent en toutes choses...)*

*Tout entier en tous lieux,
Tout entier en chaque lieux,
donnant l'être à chaque lieu,
à tout ce qui occupe un lieu,
le successif vous est simultanée.
Dans ces espaces et ces temps que vous avez créés,*

*satellites de votre Douceur,
posez-vous comme un sceau sur mon coeur.*

*Temps de l'homme et de la planète,
temps de la montagne et de l'insecte,
bouquet de rire pour le merle noir et l'alouette,
éventail de lune au fuschia,
à la balsamine, au bégonia,
de la profondeur une ride surgit,
la montagne saute comme une brebis,
et devient un grand océan.
Présent, vous êtes présent.
Imprimez votre nom dans mon sang.*

*Dans le mouvement d'Arcturus présent,
dans l'arc-en-ciel d'une aile après l'autre
(ècharpe aveugle autour de Saturne),
dans la race cachée de mes cellules, présent,
dans le sang qui répare ses rives,
dans vos Saints par la Grâce, présent
(Interprétations de votre Verbe,
pierres précieuses au mur de la Fraîcheur).
Posez-vous comme un sceau sur mon coeur.*

*In coeur pur est votre repos,
lis en arc-en-ciel de tropeau,
vous vous cachez sur votre Hostie,
Frère silencieux dans la Fleur Eucharistique,
Pour que je demeure en vous
comme une aile dans le soleil,
vers la résurrection du dernier jour.
Il est plus fort que la mort, votre Amour.
Mettez votre caresse tout autour.*

*Violet-jaune, vision,
Voile blanc, subtilité,
orangé-bleu, force et joie,
flèche azur, agilité,
donnez-moi le rouge et le vert de votre amour,*

Psalmody of Omnipresence through Love
(God present in all things...) - - -

Wholly in every place,
Wholly in each place,
giving being to each place,
to everything which fills a place,
succession, to you, is simultaneity.
In these spaces and times which you have
created,
satellites of your Sweetness,
set yourself as a seal upon my heart.

Time of man and of planet,
time of mountain and of insect,
nosegay of laughter for blackbird and lark,
fan of moonlight to the fuschia,
to the yellow balsam, to the begonia,
from the depths a ripple rises,
the mountain skips like a ram,
and becomes a great ocean.
Present, you are present.
imprint your name in my blood.

In the motion of Acturus, present,
in the rainbow of wing after wing
(blind scarf around Saturn),
in the ancestry hidden in my cells, present,
in the bloodstream which restores its banks,
in your Saints through Grace, present
(Interpretations of your Word,
precious stones in the wall of my Coolness).
Set yourself as a seal on my heart.

A pure heart is your resting place,
lily-in-rainbow of the flock,
you conceal yourself in your Host,
silent Brother in the Eucharistic Flower,
that I may dwell in you
as a wing in the sun,
towards the resurrection at the last day.
It is stronger than death, your Love.
Set your caress all around.

Purple-yellow, vision,
white veil, subtlety,
orange-blue, strength and joy,
blue arrow, agility,
give me the red and green of your love,

*feuille-flamme-or, clarté.
 Plus de langage, plus de mots,
 plus de prophètes, ni di science
 (c'est l'Amen de l'espérance,
 silence mélodieux de l'Eternité),
 mais la robe lavée dans le sang de l'Agneau,
 mais le pierre de neige avec un nom nouveau,
 les éventails, la cloche, et l'ordre des clartés,
 et l'échelle en arc-en-ciel de Verité,
 mais la porte qui parle et le soleil qui s'ouvre,*

*l'auréole tête de rechange qui délivre,
 et l'encre d'or ineffaçable sur le livre,
 mais la face à face et l'Amour.*

*Vous qui parlez en nous,
 vous qui vous taisez en nous,
 et gardez le silence dans votre Amour,
 vous êtes près, vous êtes loin
 vous êtes près, vous êtes loin,
 vous êtes la lumière et les ténèbres,
 vous êtes si compliqué et si simple,
 vous êtes infiniment simple,
 L'arc-en-ciel de l'Amour, c'est vous,
 l'unique oiseau de l'Eternité, c'est vous.
 Elles s'alignent lentement, les cloches de la profondeur.*

Posez-vous comme un sceau sur mon coeur.

*Tout entier...
 dans votre Amour.
 Enforcez votre image dans le durée de mes jours.*

leaf-flame-gold, brightness.
 No more language, no more words,
 no more prophets, nor knowledge
 (it is the Amen of hope,
 melodious silence of Eternity),
 but the robe washed in the blood of the Lamb,
 but the stone of snow with a new name,
 the fans, the bell, and the ranks of brightness,
 and the rainbow ladder of Truth,
 but the door which speaks and the sun which
 opens,
 the halo, a change of head which liberates,
 and the golden ink indelible on the book,
 but face to face, and Love.

You who speak in us,
 you who are silent in us,
 and keep the silence in your Love,
 you are near, you are far,
 you are near, you are far,
 you are near, you are far,
 you are light and darkness,
 you are so complex and so simple
 you are infinite simplicity.
 The rainbow of Love, it is you,
 the sole bird of Eternity, it is you.
 They slowly fall into line, the bells of the depths.

Set yourself as a seal upon my heart.

Wholly ..etc
 in your Love.
 immerse your image in the duration of my days.

Harawi, chant d'amour et de mort [Harawi, song of love and death]1. *La ville qui dormait, toi* [The sleeping village, thou]

<i>La ville qui dormait, toi.</i>	The sleeping village, thou.
<i>Ma main sur ton coeur par toi.</i>	My hand on thy heart by thee.
<i>Le plein minuit le banc, toi.</i>	The bench in the depth of midnight, thou.
<i>La violette double toi.</i>	The double violet thou.
<i>L'oeil immobile, sans dénouer ton regard, moi.</i>	Thy eye immobile, thy gaze unwavering, me.

2. *Bonjour toi, colombe verte* [Good morning, green dove]

<i>Bonjour toi, colombe verte,</i>	Good morning, green dove,
<i>Retour du ciel.</i>	Back from the sky.
<i>Bonjour toi, perle limpide</i>	Good morning, limpid pearl,
<i>Départ de l'eau.</i>	Leaving the water.
<i>Etoile enchaînée,</i>	Enchained star,
<i>Ombre partagée,</i>	Shared shadow,
<i>Toi, de fleur, de fruit, de ciel et d'eau,</i>	Thou, of flower, fruit, sky and water,
<i>Chant des oiseaux.</i>	Song of the birds.
<i>Bonjour,</i>	Good morning,
<i>D'eau.</i>	Of water.

3. *Montagnes* [Mountains]

<i>Rouge-violet, noir sur noir.</i>	Red-violet, black on black.
<i>L'antique inutile rayon noir.</i>	The ancient useless black ray.
<i>Montagne, écoute le chaos solaire du vertige.</i>	Mountain, listen to the solar chaos of vertigo.
<i>La pierre agenouillée porte ses maîtres noirs.</i>	The kneeling stone bears his black masters.
<i>En capuchons serrés les sapins se hâtent vers le noir.</i>	In tight monks'-hoods the firs rush to the black.
<i>Gouffre lancé partout dans le vertige.</i>	An abyss cast on all sides towards vertigo.
<i>Noir sur noir.</i>	Black on black.

4. *Doundou tchil* [Doundou tchil]

<i>Doundou tchil. Doundou tchil.</i>	Doundou tchil. Doundou tchil
<i>Piroutcha te voilà,</i>	Piroutcha there you are
<i>A mon à-moi, la danse les étoiles,</i>	O my own one, the dance of stars,
<i>Doundou tchil.</i>	Doundou tchil.
<i>Piroutcha te voilà,</i>	Piroutcha there you are,
<i>O mon à-moi, miroir d'oiseau</i>	O my own one, mirror of a tame familiar, bird,
<i>Doundou tchil.</i>	Doundou tchil.
<i>Arc-en-ciel, mon souffle,</i>	Rainbow, my breath,
<i>mon écho,</i>	my echo,
<i>Ton regard est revenu,</i>	Thy gaze has returned,
<i>tchil, tchil,</i>	tchil, tchil,
<i>Piroutcha, te voilà,</i>	Piroutcha there you are,
<i>O mon à-moi, mon fruit léger dans la lumière,</i>	O my own one, my fruit light in the light,

*Doundou tchil.
Toungou, toungou, mapa, nama
mapa, kahipas.*

Doundou tchil.
Toungou, toungou, mapa nama
mapa, kahipas.

5. *L'amour de Piroutcha* [The love of Piroutcha]

*La jeune fille
"Toungou, ahi, toungou, berce, toi,
Ma cendre des lumières,
Berce ta petite en tes bras verts.
Piroutcha, ta petite cendre,
pour toi."*

The young girl
"Toungou, ah, toungou, rock, thee,
My cinder of light,
Rock thy little girl in thy green arms.
Piroutcha, thy little cinder,
for thee"

*Le jeune homme
"Ton oeil tous les ciels, doundou
tchil.
Coupe-moi la tête, doundou, tchil.
Nos souffles, nos souffles, bleu
et or. Ahi!
Chaines rouges, noires, mauves,
amour, la mort."*

The young man
Your eye all the heavens,
doundou tchil.
Chop off my head, doundou, tchil.
Our breath, our breath, blue
and gold. Ah!
Chains of red, black, mauve,
love, death."

6. *Répétition planétaire* [Planetary repetition]

*Ahi! Ahi! O
Mapa, nama, mapa nama lila, tchil.
Mapa, nama lila, mapa nama lila
mika, pampahika.*

Ahi! Ahi! O
Mapa, nama, mapa namalila, tchil.
Mapa, nama lila, mapa nama lila
mika, pampahika.

*Ahi! Ahi! O.
Tchil, tchil, tchil pampa hika
tchil tchil.*

Ahi! Ahi! O.
Tchil, tchil, tchil pampa hika
tchil tchil.

*Enfourche un cri noir,
Echo noir du temps,
Cri d'avant la terre à tout moment,
Echo noir du temps,
Escalier tournant.
Tourbillon,
Etoile rouge,
Tourbillon,
Planète mange en tournant.
Tchil tchil tchil pampahika
Tchil tchil tchil pampahika
Doundou tchil tchil tchil*

Ride astride a black shriek,
Black echo of time,
Cry from before the earth every moment,
Black echo of time,
Spiralling stair.
Whirlpool,
Red star,
Whirlpool,
Planet eats spinning.
Tchil tchil tchil pampahika
Tchil tchil tchil pampahika
Doundou tchil tchil tchil

7. *Adieu* [Farewell]

*Adieu toi, colombe verte,
Ange attristé.
Adieu toi, perle limpide,
Soleil gardien.
Toi, de nuit, de fruit, de ciel,
de jour,
Aile d'amour.*

Farewell to you, green dove,
Saddened Angel,
Farewell to you, limpid pearl,
Guardian sun.
Thou, of night, of fruit, of
sky, of day,
Wing of love.

*Adieu toi, lumière neuve,
Philtre à deux voix.*

Farewell to you, new light,
Love potion with two voices.

*Etoile enchaînée,
Ombre partagée,
Dans ma main mon fruit de ciel, de jour,
Lointain d'amour.*

Enchained star,
Shared shadow,
In my hand my fruit of heaven, of day,
Far distance of love.

*Adieu toi, mon ciel de terre,
Adieu toi, désert qui pleure,
Miroir sans souffle d'amour,
De fleur, de nuit, de fruit,
de ciel, de jour, pour toujours.*

Farewell to you, my heaven of earth,
Farewell to you, weeping desert,
Mirror without the breath of love,
Of flower, of night, of fruit,
of sky, of day, for ever.

8. *Syllabes* [Syllabes]

*Colombe, colombe verte,
Le chiffre cinq à toi,
La violette double doublera,
Très loin, tout bas.
O mon ciel, tu fleuris,
Piroutcha mia!
O déplions du ciel,
Piroutcha mia!
O fleurissons de l'eau,
Piroutcha mia!
Kahipipas, mahipipas.
Pia pia pia pia
Doundou tchil tchil.*

Dove, green dove,
The figure five for you,
The double violet shall double,
Very far, so low.
O my heaven, you will blossom,
Piroutcha mine!
O let us unfold from the sky,
Piroutcha mine!
O we will blossom from the water,
Piroutcha mine!
Kahipipas, mahipipas.
Pia pia pia pia
Doundou tchil tchil.

Tout bas.

So low.

9. *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil* [The staircase repeated, gestures of the sun]

*Il ne parle plus, l'escalier
sourit,
Chaque marche vers le sud.
Du ciel, de l'eau, du temps,
l'escalier du temps.
Son oeil est désert, lumière
en secret,
Pierre claire et soleil clair.
De l'eau, du temps, du ciel,
l'escalier du ciel.
Ma petite cendre tu es là,
Tes tempes vertes, mauves,
sur de l'eau.
Comme la mort.
L'oeil de l'eau.
L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil,
Couleur de silence neuf.
De l'eau, du temps, du ciel,
l'escalier du ciel.
J'attends dans le vert,
étoilé d'amour.
C'est si simple d'être mort.*

He speaks no more, the stair
smiles,
Each step towards the south.
Of sky, of water, of time,
the staircase of time.
Its eye is desert, light
in secret.
Clear stone, clear sun.
Of water, of time, of sky,
stairway of the sky.
My little cinder you are there,
Your temples green, mauve,
on the water.
Like death.
The water's eye.
The staircase repeats, gestures of the sun,
The colour of new silence.
Of water, of time, of sky,
stairway of the sky.
I wait in the green,
star of love.
It is so simple to be dead.

Du temps, du ciel, de l'eau,
 l'escalier de l'eau.
 Ma petite cendre tu es là,
 Tes tempes vertes, mauves, sur de temps.
 Comme la mort.
 L'oeil du temps.
 Du ciel, de l'eau, du temps,
 Ton oeil présent qui respire.
 De l'eau, du temps, du ciel,
 Le coeur de l'horloge folle.
 La mort est là, ma colombe verte.
 La mort est là, ma perle limpide.
 La mort est là.
 Nous dormons loin du temps
 dans ton regard.
 Je suis mort.
 L'eau dépassera nos têtes,
 Soleil gardien.
 Le feu mangera nos souffles,
 Philtre à deux voix.
 Nos regards d'un bout à l'autre
 Vus par la mort.
 Inventons l'amour du monde
 Pour nous chercher, pour nous
 pleurer,
 Pour nous rêver, pour nous
 trouver.
 Du ciel, de l'eau, du temps,
 ton coeur qui bat,
 Mon fruit, ma part de ténèbres,
 tu es là, toi.
 L'amour, la joie!
 Le silence est mort, embrasse le temps.
 Le soleil aux cris joyeux.
 Du temps, du ciel, de l'eau,
 l'escalier de l'eau.
 La gaieté fleurit dans le bras
 du ciel.
 Eventail en chant d'oiseau.
 Du ciel, de l'eau, du temps,
 l'escalier du temps.
 Ma petite cendre tu es là,
 Tes tempes vertes, mauves, sur du ciel.
 Comme la mort.
 L'oeil du ciel.

Of time, of sky, of water,
 stairway of the water.
 My little cinder you are there,
 Your temples green, mauve, on time.
 Like death.
 The eye of time.
 Of sky, of water, of time,
 Your present eye which breathes.
 Of water, of time, of sky,
 The heart of the crazy clock.
 Death is there, my green dove,
 Death is there, my limpid pearl.
 Death is there.
 We sleep far from time in
 your gaze.
 I am dead.
 The water will go over our heads,
 Sun guardian.
 The fire shall devour our breath,
 Love potion with two voices.
 We gaze from one end to the other
 Seen by death.
 We will invent the love of the world
 To seek each other out, to
 weep for us,
 To dream of us, to find each
 other.
 Of sky, of water, of time,
 Your heart which beats,
 My fruit, my share of darkness,
 You are there, you.
 Love, joy!
 Silence is dead, embrace time.
 The sun with joyous cries.
 Of time, of sky, of water,
 The stairway of the water.
 Gaiety blossoms in the arms
 of the sky.
 A fan made of birdsong.
 Of sky, of water, of time,
 Stairway of time.
 My little cinder you are there,
 Your temples green mauve, on the sky.
 Like death.
 Heaven's eye.

10. *Amour oiseau d'étoile* [Love star-bird]

Oiseau d'étoile,
 Ton oeil qui chante,
 Vers les étoiles,
 Ta tête à l'envers sous le ciel.
 Ton oeil d'étoile,
 Chaînes tombantes,
 Vers les étoiles,
 Plus court chemin de l'ombre

Star-bird,
 Your eye, which sings,
 Towards the stars,
 Thy head upside down under the sky
 Your eye, star-like,
 Falling chains,
 Towards the stars,
 The shortest path from shadow

au ciel.
 Tous les oiseaux des étoiles,
 Loin du tableau des mains
 chanrent,
 Etoile, silence augmenté du ciel.
 Mes mains, ton oeil, ton cou, le ciel.

to the sky.
 All the birds of the stars,
 Far from the picture, my hands
 sing,
 Star, augmented silence of the sky.
 My hands, your eye, your neck, the sky.

11. *Katchikatchi les étoiles* [Katchikatchi the stars]

Katchikatchi les étoiles,
faites-les sauter,
Katchikatchi les étoiles,
faites-les danser.
Katchikatchi les atomes,
faites-les sauter,
Katchikatchi les atomes,
faites-les danser.
Les nébuleuses spirales,
mains de mes cheveux.
Les électrons, fourmis,
flèches, le silence en deux.
Alpha du Centuaire, Betélgeuse
Aldébaran,
Dilataz l'espace arc-en-ciel
tapageur du temps,
Rire ionisé fureur d'horloge
au metre absent,
Coupe ma tête, son chiffre
roule dans le sang!
Tou, ahi! mané, mani
Tou, Ahi!
mané, mani, O.
Roule dans le sang,
roule dans sang! Ahi!

Katchikatchi the stars,
 make them leap,
 Katchikatchi the stars,
 make them dance.
 Katchikatchi the atoms,
 make them leap,
 Katchikatchi the atoms,
 make them dance.
 The spiral nebulae, hands of
 my hair.
 Electrons, ants, arrows,
 silence halved.
 Alpha Centuari, Betelgeuse,
 Aldebaran,
 Dilate the rainbow space kicking
 up a row in time,
 Ionised laughter rage of timepiece
 for absent murder.
 Chop off my head, its figures
 are rolling in blood!
 Tou, ahi! mane, mani
 Tou, Ahi!
 mane, mani, O.
 Roll in blood, roll in
 roll in blood! Ahi!

12. *Dans le noir* [In the Dark]

Dans le noir, colombe verte.
Dans le noir, perle limpide.
Dans le noir, mon fruit de ciel, de jour,
Lointain d'amour.
Mon amour, mon souffle!
Colombe, colombe verte,
Le chiffre cinq à toi,
La violette double, doublera,
Très loin, tout bas.
Très loin, tout bas, très loin.
La ville qui dormait ...

In the dark, green dove.
 In the dark, limpid pearl.
 In the dark, my fruit of sky of day,
 Far off distance of love.
 My love, my breath!
 Dove, green dove,
 The figure five for you,
 The double violet shall double,
 Far away, so low.
 Far away, so low, far away.
 The sleeping village...

Cinq Rechants

I

Hayo kapri tama la li la li lassaré no
 Les amoureux s'envolent
 Brangien dans l'espace tu souffles
 Les amoureux s'envolent
 Vers les étoiles de la mort

t k t k t k t k

ha ha ha ha ha soif
 L'explorateur Orphée
 trouve son coeur dans la mort

Miroir d'étoile château d'étoile
 Yseult d'amour séparé
 Bulle de cristal d'étoile mon retour
 Miroir d'étoile château d'étoile
 Yseult d'amour
Hayoma kapritama hayoma kapritama

Les amoureux s'envolent...

L'explorateur Orphée
 trouve son coeur dans la mort
 Barbe Bleu(e)
 Château de la septième porte

IV

Niokhmamâ palalan(e) souki
 mon bouquet tout défait rayonne
Niokhmamâ palalan(e) souki
 Les volets roses Oha
 amour amour du clair au sombre Oha

Roma tama tama tama
Roma tama tama tama
ssouka rava kâli vâli
ssouka naham(e) kassou
rava kâli vâli roma tama ...

Niokhmamâ palalan(e)

II

Ma première fois terre terre
 l'éventail déployé
 Ma dernière fois terre terre
 l'éventail refermé
 Lumineux mon rire d'ombre
 Ma jeune étoile sur les fleuves
 Ha....

Solo de flûte berce
 les quatre lézar(ds)
 en t'éloignant
Mayoma kapritama ssarimâ...

Ma première fois ...
mano mano mano nadja
lâma krîta mata krîma
lâdja na noma noma

Lumineux mon rire d'ombre...

V

Mayoma kalimolimo
 Tes yeux viyagent dans le passé
 Mélodi(e) solaire de corbeille
 courbe *t k t k t k t k*
 Dans le passé

Losangé ma fleurs toujours
 philtre Yseult rameur d'amour
flako flako
 Fe(e) Viviane à mon chant
 d'amour cercle du jour
 hayo hayo
 Foule rose hayo bras tendu
 Pieuvre aux tentacles d'or
 Persé(e) Méduse
 l'abeille l'alphabet majeur

Fleur du bourdon tourne
 tourne à mort
 Quatre lézards la grotte
 pieuvre et la mort
doka do do do doka doka...

III

Ma robe d'amour mon amour
 Ma prison d'amour faite d'air léger
 lila lila ma mémoire
 ma caresse
mayoma ssari ssari man(e) thikâri
oumi annôla oumi sarî
sarîsa floutî yoma
trianguillo trianguillo

Robe tendre toute la beauté
 paysage neuf
 troubadour Viviane Yseult
 tout les cercles tous les yeux
 pieuvre de lumière blesse
 foule rose ma caresse

oumi annôla oumi oumi
annôla oumi sarî sarîs a floutî yoma
(cheu cheu mayo kapritama
kalimolimo cheu cheu...)

Robe tendre ...

Sarî sarî... sarî ma

Tout les philtres sont bus ce soir
 encor

Corolle qui mord deuxième
 garde à manger d'abord..Ha!
 Fleur du bourdon...

Losangé ma fleurs toujours
flako flako
 philtre Yseult...
 Quatre lézards grotte
 pieuvre à mort la mort
 Quatre lézar(ds) et la pieuvre
 et la mort tourne à mort

Corolle qui mord
 Losange ma fleur...

Mayoma kalimolimo
tk tk tk tk
 Dans l'avenir

La Transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ
[The transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ]

Premier Septénaire [First septenary]

I. Récit évangélique

Assumpsit Jesus Petrum, et Jacobum, et Joannem fratrem ejus et duxit illos in montem excelsum seorsum: et transfiguratus est ante eos. Et resplenduit facies ejus sicut sol: vestimenta autem ejus facta sunt alba sicut nix.

Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. (Matthew 17: 1,2)

II. Configuratum corpori claritatis suae

Salvatorem expectamus Dominum nostrum Jesus Christum, qui reformabit corpus humilitatis nostrae configuratum corpori claritatis suae.

Candor est lucis aeternae, speculum sine macula, et imago bonitatis illius. Alleuia.

We look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body. (Philippians 4: 20, 21)

For she (wisdom) is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness. (Wisdom of Solomon 7:26)

III. Christus Jesus, splendor Patris

Illuxerunt coruscationes tuae orbi terrae: commota est, et contremuit terra. Christus Jesus, splendor Patris, et figura substantiae ejus.

The lightnings lighted the world: the earth trembled and shook. (Psalm 77:19)
Christ Jesus, the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person. (Hebrews 1:3)

IV. Récit évangélique

Et Ecce apparuerunt illis Moyses et Elias cum eo loquentes. Respondens autem Petrus, dixit ad Jesum: Domine, bonum est nos hic esse: si, vis faciamus hic tria tabernacula, tibi unum, Moysi unum, et Eliae unum.

And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias, talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. (Matt 17: 3,4)

V. Quam dilecta tabernacula tua

Quam dilecta tabernacula tua!... Deficit anima mea in atria Domini. Cor meum, et caro mea, exultaverunt in Deum vivum. Altaria tua!... Rex meus et Deus meus!

Candor est lucis aeternae.

How amiable are they tabernacles.. My soul longeth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God....thine altars... my King and my God (Psalm 84: 2,3,4)

For wisdom is the brightness of the everlasting light. (Wisdom of Solomon 7:26)

VI. *Candor est lucis aeternae*

Candor est lucis aeternae, speculum sine macula, et imago bonitatis illius.

For wisdom is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness. (Wisdom of Solomon 7:26)

VII. *Choral de la sainte montagne*

Magnus Dominus, et laudabilis nimis: in civitate Dei nostri, in monte sanxcto ejus.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness. (Psalm 48:2)

Deuxième Septénaire [Second Septenary]

VIII. *Récit évangélique*

Adhuc eo loquente, ecce nubes lucida obumbravit eos: et ecce vox de nube, dicens: His est Filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi bene complacui: ipsum audite.

While He yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him. (Matthew 17:5)

IX. *Perfecte conscius illius perfectae generationis*

Adoptio filiorum Dei est per quamdam conformitatem imaginis ad Dei Filium naturalem... Primo quidem, per propriam gratiam viae, quae est conformitas imperfecto: secundo, per gloriam, quae est conformitas perfecta.... Gratiam per baptismum consequimur, et Transfiguratione autem praemonstrata est claritas futurae gloriae, ideo, tam in baptismo quam in Transfiguratione, conveniens fuit manifestare naturalem Christi filiationem testimonio Patris: quia solus est perfecte conscius illius perfectae generationis, simul cum Filio et Spiritu sancto.

The adoption of the sons of God is through a certain process of conformity of image to the natural Son of God. Now this takes place in two ways: first, by the grace of the wayfarer, which is imperfect conformity; secondly, by glory, which is perfect conformity... Since, therefore, it is in baptism that we acquire grace, while the clarity of the glory to come was foreshadowed in the Transfiguration, therefore both in His baptism and in His transfiguration the natural sonship of Christ was fittingly made known by the testimony of the Father: because He alone with the Son and the Holy Ghost is perfectly conscious of that generation (St Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologica*, Question 45, Article 4, Conclusion).

X. *Adoptionem Filiorum perfectam*

Deus, qui fidei, sacramenta in Unigeniti tui gloriosa Transfiguratione, patrum testimonio roborasti, et adoptionem filiorum perfectam voce delapsa in nube lucida mirabiliter praesignasti: concede propitius, ut ipsius Regis gloriae nos coheredes efficias, et ejusdem gloriae tribuas esse consortes. Alleluia, Alleluia.

O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine only begotten Son didst confirm the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and who by Thy voice from the shining cloud didst in wondrous manner foreshow the perfect adoption of sons; make us in Thy loving kindness, we beseech Thee, as co-heirs with Him who is the King of Glory, and in that very glory call us in the end to share, Alleluia, Alleluia. (Prayer for the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ).

XI. *Récit évangélique*

Et audientes discipuli, ceciderunt in faciem suam, et timuerunt valde. Et accessit Jesus, et tetigit eos, dixitque eis: Surgite et nolite timere. Levantes autem oculos suos, neminem viderunt, nisi solum Jesum. Et descentibus illius de monte praecepit eis Jesus, decens: Nemini dixeritis visionem, donec Filius hominīs a mortuis resurgat.

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead. (Matthew 17: 6-9)

XII. *Terribilis est locus iste*

Amictus lumine sicut vestimento.

Claritas vestimentorum ejus designat futuram claritatem sanctorum, quae superabitur a claritate Christi, sicut candor nivis superatur a candore solis.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Candor est lucis aeternae.

Terribilis est locus iste: hic domus Dei est, et porta caeli.

Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment. (Psalm 104:2)

The clarity which was in His garments signified the future clarity of the saints, which will be surpassed by that of Christ, just as the brightness of the snow is surpassed by the brightness of the sun. (St Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologica, Question 45, Article 2, Answer 3)

Glory to God in the highest! (Luke 2:14 and *Gloria* of the Ordinary of the Mass)

For wisdom is the brightness of the everlasting light. (Wisdom of Solomon 7:26)

How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. (Genesis 28:17)

XIII. *Tota Trinitas apparuit*

Alleluia! Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam: ipsae me deduxerunt, et adduxerunt, in montem sanctum tuum, et in tabernacula tua.

Quicumque Christum quaeritis, oculos in altum tollite: illic licebit visere signum perennis gloriae.

Quia per incarnati Verbi mysterium, nova mentis nostrae oculis lux tuae claritatis infulsit: ut dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilium amorem rapiamur.

In Transfiguratione, quae est sacramentum secundae regenerationis, tota Trinitas apparuit: Pater in voce, Filius in homine, Spiritus Sanctus in nube clara.

Alleluia. O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacle. (Psalm 43:3)

All ye who seek Christ, lift your eyes above, where you will see the sign of His eternal glory. (Hymn of the Second Vespers of the Feast of the Transfiguration)

Because by the mystery of the Word made flesh the light of Thy glory hath shone anew upon the eyes of our mind: that while we acknowledge Him to be God seen by men, we may be drawn by Him to the love of things unseen. (Preface to the Feast of the Transfiguration)

In the Transfiguration which is the mystery of the second generation, the whole Trinity appears - the Father in the voice, the Son in the man, the Holy Ghost in the bright cloud. (St Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologica, Question 45, Article 4, Answer 2)

XIV. Chorla de la lumière de gloire

Domine dilexi decorem domus tuae, et locum habitationis gloriae tuae!

Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth. (Psalm 26:8)

APPENDIX III - Chronology

- 1908 Olivier Eugène Prosper Charles Messiaen born on December 10 in Avignon, France, the first son of Pierre Messiaen and poetess, Cecile Sauvage.
- 1917 Has first piano lessons, *La dame de Shalott* (piano)
- 1919 Enters Paris Conservatory to study music
- 1921 *Deux ballades de Villon* (voice and piano)
- 1925 Wins first prize for counterpoint and fugue at Conservatory, *La tristesse d'un grand ciel blanc* (piano)
- 1927 Wins first prize for piano accompaniment at Conservatory, *Esquisse modale* (organ)
- 1928 *Variations écossaises* (organ), *Le banquet céleste* (organ), *Fugue in d minor* (orchestral), *Le banquet eucharistique* (orchestra)
- 1929 Wins first prize at Conservatory for organ, improvisation and history of music, *Préludes* (piano)
- 1930 Wins first prize at Conservatory for composition, *Diptyque* (organ), *Trois Mélodies* (voice and piano), *La mort du nombre* (soprano, tenor, violin and piano), *Simple chant d'un âme* (orchestra), *Les offrandes oubliées* (orchestra)
- 1931 Becomes organist for Church of la Sainte Trinité, Paris. *Le tombeau resplendissant* (orchestra)
- 1932 *Thème et Variations* (violin and piano), *Fantasie Burlesque* (piano), *Apparition de l'église éternelle* (organ), *Hymne au Saint Sacrement* (orchestra), *L'Ascension* (orchestra)
- 1933 *L'Ascension* (organ), *Fantasie* (violin and piano), *Mass* (8 sopranos and 4 violins)
- 1934 Assumes appointment as teacher of chamber music and piano sight-reading at the Ecole Normale de Musique.
- 1935 *Vocalise* (high voice and piano), *Pièce pour la tombe de Paul Dukas* (piano), *La Nativité du Seigneur* (organ). Marries violinist Claire Delbos.
- 1936 Appointed to teach organ improvisation at Schola Cantorum. Founds *La Jeune France*. *Poèmes pour Mi* (soprano and piano)
- 1937 Son, Pascal, born. *Fête des belles eaux* (ondes martenots), *O sacrum convivium!* (4 soloists or 4-part choir)
- 1938 *Deux monodies en quarts de ton* (ondes martenot), *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* (soprano and piano)

- 1939 *Les corps glorieux* (organ), World War II and Messiaen enlists in the army.
- 1940 Messiaen taken prisoner of war.
- 1941 *Quatour pour la fin du temps* (violin, clarinet, piano, cello) composed and premiered in the prison camp. Messiaen subsequently freed and returned to France. *Choeurs pour une Jeanne d'Arc* (large and small choirs)
- 1942 Appointed Professor of harmony at Paris Conservatory. *Musique de scène pour un Oedipe* (ondes martenot)
- 1943 Begins harmony classes for *les flèches* at the home of Guy Bernard-Delapierre. *Visions de l'Amen* (2 pianos), *Rondeau* (piano)
- 1944 *Technique de mon langage musical. Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (piano), *Trois petites liturgies de la Présence Divine* (choir of sopranos, orchestra)
- 1945 *Harawi* (soprano and piano)
- 1948 *Cantéyodjayâ* (piano), *Turangalila-symphonie* (orchestra)
- 1949 *Quatre études de rythme* (piano), *Messe de la Pentecôte* (organ), *Cinq Rechants* (12 soloists)
- 1951 *Le merle noir* (flute and piano)
- 1952 *Timbres-durées* (tape)
- 1953 *Réveil des oiseaux* (orchestra and instrumental soloists)
- 1955 *Oiseaux exotiques* (orchestra and instrumental soloists)
- 1958 *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (piano)
- 1959 *Chronochromie* (orchestra and instrumental soloists). First wife, Claire, dies after long illness.
- 1960 *Verset pour la fête de la Dedicace* (organ)
- 1962 Marries pianist Yvonne Loriod. *Sept Haïkai* (orchestra and instrumental soloists)
- 1963 *Couleurs de la cité céleste* (orchestra and instrumental soloists)
- 1964 *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum* (orchestra)
- 1966 Appointed Professor of composition at Paris Conservatory.
- 1967 Guest of honour at Olivier Messiaen Festival held in Paris.
- 1968 Attends Messiaen week in Dusseldorf for his sixtieth birthday

- 1969 *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité* (organ), *La Transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (choir and orchestra)
- 1970 *La fauvette des jardins* (piano)
- 1971 *Des canyons aux étoiles...* (orchestra). Receives Erasmus prize at Amsterdam, presented by Queen Juliana and Prince Bernhard.
- 1972 Receives Sibelius prize in Helsinki. Awarded Doctorate *honoris causa* by Catholic University of the United States.
- 1973 Messiaen weeks held in Dusseldorf, Cardiff, London, Flanders, United States. Elected D. Litt. at Cornell College, Iowa.
- 1974 Attends Messiaen week at Karlsruhe for sixty-fifth birthday.
- 1975 Awarded the Von Siemens prize.
- 1977 Awarded the Leonie Sonnig prize.
- 1978 Tours major cities of United States, culminating in Messiaen week held at New York's Lincoln Centre in honour of his seventieth birthday. Retires from Conservatory. White Cliffs in Utah re-named Mount Messiaen.
- 1979 Awarded the Hamburg Bach prize.
- 1982 Awarded the Wolf Foundation Prize.
- 1983 *Saint Françoise d'Assise* (opera) completed. Awarded the Lieberman Prix d'Honneur.
- 1984 *Livre du Saint Sacrament* (organ)
- 1985 *Six petites esquisses d'oiseaux* (piano). Awarded the Prix Inamori de Kyoto, the Grand Croix de l'Order National du Mérite, and elected Grand Officer Commdr. des Arts et des Lettres.
- 1986 *Un vitrail et des oiseaux* (piano and ensemble), *Éclairs sur l'Au-Dela* (orchestra)
- 1992 Dies peacefully in Paris.