

**A STUDY OF OLIVER MESSIAEN'S SONG-CYCLES  
*POÈMES POUR MI, CHANTS DE TERRE ET DE CIEL,*  
AND *HARAWI***

**THESIS**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis ventures into the relatively neglected world of twentieth century vocal music, via the three song cycles of Oliver Messiaen.

The song cycle is a comparatively young genre, generally dated from Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* or by some, even later to Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin*. Nevertheless, considerable changes have taken place in the 160 years which separate Messiaen's cycles from those of the 'pioneers' mentioned above. A fuller appreciation of twentieth century cycles is facilitated by observing this evolutionary process and placing the works within an historical and cultural perspective. Such an introduction is provided in part one of this thesis, along with relevant details on the life and interests of Messiaen. The latter information gives insight into the compositions themselves and may satisfy the reader's curiosity on the origin of some of the more unexpected techniques or ideas Messiaen uses.

Before embarking on a study of the cycles, it is necessary to look at the highly individual musical language of the composer. Section two undertakes this task in some depth, wherever possible relating the explanations directly to the songs which follow. In order to clarify the text and to simplify the exercise for the reader, numerous musical examples have been used. This contributes to the apparent bulk of this section.

The main emphasis of the thesis is the detailed study of the 20 songs contained in *Poèmes pour Mi*, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and *Harawi*. The third section of the thesis deals with this material thoroughly and systematically, dividing it up into musical and extra-musical aspects. The texts are considered in terms of Surrealist, religious, Nature, numerological and, in the case of *Harawi*, mythological and Peruvian folk symbolism. The relationship of text to music is studied and developments highlighted. Musically, the study is further sub-divided into piano part and vocal part. In each case, an extensive exploration of the techniques required of the performer is presented. This makes possible the subsequent categorisation of the songs on the basis of similarities in the musical means.

Conclusions reached show a progressive development through the three song cycles in the composer's handling of the text, his treatment of the voice, his use of the piano and his expansion of the voice-piano relationship. This body of solo vocal literature emerges as typical of Olivier Messiaen's compositional style in general and therefore properly representative of the meticulous craftsmanship with which his works are constructed. The detailed analysis of all aspects of the songs contributes original material to scholarship on Messiaen and on song cycles in the twentieth century.

**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', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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## PREFACE

The fourth year course of my UNISA Bachelor of Musicology degree, *Twentieth Century Music*, was one to be ‘manfully endured’: a pill to be swallowed with plenty of water! To my astonishment, the course proved to be fascinating and, often, enjoyable. One of the highlights, was my discovery of Oliver Messiaen, the man and his music. His seemingly limitless capacity for innovation and synthesis, his Romantic notions and his undogmatic approach to the business of composing, interested me. As a singer and pianist, it was a further step of delight to discover his song cycles. In attempting to pursue this interest however, I drew a blank. A scouring of literature and citation indices uncovered only one German article specifically devoted to Messiaen’s songs and that dealing with only one of the cycles, *Harawi*. With enthusiasm and not a little difficulty, I set about the task of filling the gap. In doing so, I uncovered far more than had been anticipated.

I discovered that Messiaen began with a vocal style closely related to the plainsong techniques of psalmody and alleluistic vocalise, but which, through the three song cycles, gradually diverges into syllabic incantation, free vocalise and other associated styles. Significantly, the various new manifestations which emerge scarcely resemble each other, yet can be traced back to common roots. Beyond comments on the virtuosity, this evolution and the different styles of vocalization which emerge, are conspicuously absent from other discussions of the songs.

An extensive and pleasurable listening programme revealed that Messiaen’s piano writing is instantly aurally recognisable. Not only is his pianistic style consistent (whether for solo piano, piano-orchestra, or song cycle), but it bears distinct similarities to his writing for other instruments. This consistency of expression regardless of medium, is, as far as I can ascertain, undocumented. The song cycles therefore gained value in my eyes, as representative not only of Messiaen’s piano and vocal styles, but of his writing in general.

That an increasing level of virtuosity occurs as one progresses through the cycles, has

been noted by other authors. However, no specific study of the accompaniments has been made. An analysis of the piano parts disclosed a wealth of interesting and ingenious detail. Furthermore, it became obvious that the role of the piano undergoes a subtle transformation in the course of the cycles: from accompaniment, through solo, 'commentator' (in progressively longer interludes and postludes), to accompanied instrument, i.e. where the piano assumes pre-eminence over the voice.

Seeing as Messiaen wrote all the lyrics for his song cycles himself, they are, unsurprisingly, permeated with his personal philosophies and interests. It occurred to me, that here was a 'musical' C. S. Lewis: a Romantic, Christian apologist striving to present Christ in the twentieth century in an emotionally and intellectually appealing way. It was an unexpected charm to discover that he conceals as much symbolism in the *musical* mechanics of his work, as in the texts. The constancy of application and the extent to which he sustains musical and literary metaphors, increases through the cycles. A previously unnoted similarity of phraseology between *Harawi* (a member of the *Tristan trilogy*) and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* also emerged.

A consideration of all these aspects exposed the recurring patterns and relationships which facilitated a grouping of the songs into 'like' types. The system of categorisation I propose, equips the musicologist, the potential performer and the curious listener, with a means of approaching and appreciating these unusual works.

In conclusion then, it gives me great pleasure to present my findings: the first in-depth study of the song cycles of Oliver Messiaen.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To Dr. Robert Sherlaw Johnson of Oxford University and Ms. Noelle Barker, I express my gratitude for permission to reproduce, for study purposes, their recording of *Harawi* - a rendition which sparked of my interest in this whole subject in the first place. I also wish to thank Bev Nelson, for assistance in translating the French texts.

Various organisations have been generous in providing the funding necessary for an undertaking such as this. I am indebted to the administrators of the Raymond Pullen Art Bursary, the Coco-cola Bottlers Association and the Old Rhodian Doc and Mama Gruber Bursary, in this regard. The financial assistance of the Institute for Research Development towards this research is also hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed in this work, or conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not to be attributed to the Institute for Research Development.

Above all, I thank my husband, Michael. He has always believed in and encouraged me and has assisted with innumerable practical matters. Specifically, I think of the many hours he has spent patiently explaining to me, often at inappropriate hours, the intricacies of word processing. The final production of the thesis would not have been possible without his assistance and have proved to me that 'we may give without loving, but we can never love without giving'.

Finally, to Boots and Hansie (probably the only dogs in South Africa well acquainted with the songs of Messiaen), I express my appreciation for hours of silent and devoted companionship while I worked on this project!

## TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<i>DTC</i>	<i>Dictionary of Twentieth Century Music</i> , ed. J. Vinton.
<i>History</i>	<i>A History of song</i> , ed. D. Stevens.
<i>Modern Music</i>	<i>A concise history of modern music from Debussy to Boulez</i> , P. Griffiths.
<i>The avant-garde</i>	<i>Modern music and the avant-garde since 1945</i> , P. Griffiths.
<i>Messiaen</i>	<i>Oliver Messiaen and the music of time</i> , P. Griffiths.
<i>Technique</i>	<i>Technique de mon Langage Musical</i> [ <i>The technique of my musical language</i> ], O. Messiaen.
<i>NG</i>	<i>New Grove dictionary of music and musicians</i> , ed. S. Sadie.
<i>NG French</i>	<i>New Grove Twentieth Century French masters</i> , ed. S. Sadie.
<i>Harawi</i>	<i>Harawi, chant d'amour et de mort</i> , O. Messiaen

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## INTRODUCTION

The song cycle is a comparatively young genre, generally dated from Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* (1816), or a few years later, from Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* (1823)<sup>1</sup>. A survey of history shows how the song cycle, like other musical genres, invariably becomes a product of its time and culture. The song cycles of our century are no exception. In nine years time, the twentieth century will be 'last century'. At this late stage, much of its music is still surprisingly little known and appreciated. All too often, vocal recitals still rely heavily on the tried and tested appeal of Romantic song cycles. As lovely as these are, this exclusive focus on the musical products of one particular era at the expense of all others, fosters a narrow and impoverished perspective. This thesis attempts to broaden the spectrum by venturing into the world of twentieth century vocal music, via the three song cycles of Oliver Messiaen.

Mention the name of Messiaen and most people respond with "the bird music", "the organ music" or "the *Turangalîla Symphony*". His vocal music, in particular the solo vocal music, has been infrequently mentioned and nowhere studied in depth as a unit. In general, twentieth century vocal works are notoriously inaccessible to many audiences, often arduously difficult for the performer and therefore seldom encountered. In his song cycles, Messiaen steers something of a middle course. His music is different and demanding (in fact, typical to the twentieth century in many ways), but though the singer is called on to render unusual effects, singing as we have known it for centuries is never totally forsaken in favour of syllabic stuttering, grunting or *sprechstimme*. In other words, those who love to **sing** are still given the opportunity to do so, albeit it in a contemporary idiom. Messiaen's cycles have another advantage over some contemporary cycles in that they are scored only for voice and piano. Vast 'orchestral' song cycles, or even those for chamber combinations, lack the intimacy of

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<sup>1</sup>Maurice Brown (*The New Grove Schubert*, London: Macmillan, 1980, p92) states that "Schubert created and perfected not only the lied form but its further development, the song cycle; here too his masterpieces were practically without ancestry...". He describes Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* as "a set of love-lyrics composed in continuous cyclic form, essentially an extended song beginning and ending with the same music".

the two-man performance and present greater logistical problems. The paucity of instrumental variety in the piano-voice cycles is more of a challenge than an obstacle to Messiaen, who simply invents novel timbres with the resources in hand.

The neglect of Messiaen's song cycles is probably due in no small part, to the individuality of his musical language. Because this language is unfamiliar to most people, particularly those in the singing world, where he is rarely encountered, it is vital to acquaint oneself with his practices. Time thus spent, facilitates a fuller understanding and enjoyment of the manifold charms of his song cycles. The composer himself took the trouble to explain his musical language in a book published in 1944<sup>2</sup>, but in all honesty, his delightfully flowery descriptions are not always the clearest way forward. It is for this reason, that in this thesis an explanation of Messiaen's imaginative approach to composition (with special reference to the songs), precedes the section on the cycles. In order to clarify the text and to simplify the exercise for the reader, numerous musical examples have been used. It will become clear by the end, that the works are no haphazard arrangement of lucky coincidences: all is carefully pre-meditated and painstakingly welded together. These songs are indeed a worthy introduction to his meticulously fashioned language. As Messiaen<sup>3</sup> himself states:

"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."

He has only written three song cycles<sup>4</sup>, the aforementioned and, in 1945, *Harawi*. This research shows that *Harawi* (composed after the above statement was made), is a cycle in which Messiaen expanded both the techniques and the ideas of the first two. The three cycles form a unit in the chronological unfolding of the subject: the relationship between a man and a woman. *Poèmes pour Mi* deals with the initial love and union;

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<sup>2</sup>*Technique de mon langage musical.*

<sup>3</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p71.

<sup>4</sup>To date, and the composer is now in his 84th year.

*Chants de Terre et de Ciel* with the birth of a child; and *Harawi* with the death of the partners. Bearing these developments and connections in mind, one cannot help but feel that had he composed it earlier, Messiaen would have added *Harawi* to the above quotation. Of *Harawi* he says, it is a composition to which "I am very much attached"<sup>5</sup>.

In *Harawi*, one is confronted directly with the curious and relatively uncommon phenomenon in music: Surrealism. However, one grows to expect the unexpected in the music of Messiaen! While it is always possible to simply enjoy the auditory impressions of his music, his life and interests (dare one say his pre-occupations), are so closely bound up with his music that a knowledge of the latter certainly enriches one's experience of the former. The chapter devoted to his life discloses why, along with the advent of Surrealism in music, Messiaen's song cycles draw us into an unlikely amalgam of Gothic cathedrals, Indian *tâlas*, Nature, incantation, numerology, palindromes, colours, Greek rhythms and folk tales.

This study has proved to be fascinating, enlightening and stimulating. It will contribute original material to the study of the song cycle in the twentieth century, to studies of Surrealism in music and to scholarship on the work of Messiaen. Messiaen's refreshing attitude to composition, coupled with the ebullient and sincere optimism which permeates his music, are heartening aspects for those who have doubts about the music of our own time.

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<sup>5</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p83.

## CHAPTER 1            HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

### 1.1    The twentieth century - a time of change

The twentieth century began with an explosion of scientific knowledge and technology. The inventiveness of the human mind seemed to know no bounds. Advances in one field propelled forward the development of others. The problems and discomforts of former ages were to be discarded forever in a world of material delights and comforts. Visual perception was no longer confined to that which was discernible with the naked eye. Scientific discoveries, like X-rays and microscopes, contributed to an altered perception of time, space and matter. The inner essence of things began sometimes, to assume greater importance than the outward appearance. This physical phenomenon was reflected in a corresponding curiosity about the soul and personality, the 'inner' man. Freud and other psychologists probed unexplored territories of the mind: character, motivation, and the dream-like world of the subconscious. "How fashionably introspective Pierrot has become!" cites Giraud topically in the poem *Heimweh*, used by Arnold Schoenberg as the text for his 1912 'song' cycle, *Pierrot Lunaire*.

Geographically, the world has become a much smaller place. News in one part of the globe is transmitted to other parts almost before it has finished happening (*viz.* the Gulf War). Travel and communication with people in far-off continents is achieved with relative ease and even travel beyond the boundaries of our own planet is no longer a vision of the future.

In spite of this incredible effusion of knowledge, the twentieth century has been far from peaceful. Instead of benefitting mankind, much newfound information has been used to systematically destroy property and life, as witnessed in two **world** wars and many other 'minor' encounters. The distortion of the potentially creative into mindless destruction has left generations of people bewildered and disillusioned: technology has not brought the peace, prosperity and happiness it seemed to promise. In fact, it introduced a new set of unencountered ethical responsibilities and crises. The resulting

climate of doubt, distrust and dissatisfaction, as people attempted to resolve these apparent contradictions, precipitated economic, social and moral changes. If, by building on the achievements of the past, man only succeeded in creating the monsters of the future, perhaps it was better to discard the old entirely and begin anew. This questioning of the merits and relevance of former work, motivated the ensuing revolution in the Arts.

## 1.2 Arts in the twentieth century

The accelerated rate of change in many spheres of twentieth century life was reflected in the Art world. Much experimentation took place as artists responded to the challenge of instituting and establishing new norms. Despite the diversity of material produced, a few constant creeds persisted<sup>6</sup>.

- i) Artists generally, accepted that a break with the past was inevitable.
- ii) Subjective emotion, and certainly excesses of emotion, as a basis for art, was rejected. Particularly in its latter stages, nineteenth century Romantic art had been characterised by lavish displays of emotion. Its association with the past disqualified this type of expression from being acceptable to the emerging generation of artists.
- iii) Excessive ornamentation and decoration made way for a new emphasis on Classic simplicity and an appreciation of the beauty of basic elements. In painting, for example, the beauty of a simple line was considered fit subject for Piet Mondrian's *Composition in Gray*. In the plastic arts, Constantin Brancusi's marble sculpture *The Newborn*, delights in a single basic material and simple shape. Musically, Webern's Symphony op.21 fosters the same attitude, by

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<sup>6</sup>The author is well aware that for every general creed, there will be exceptions. What is quoted here, are widespread and generally held trends.

encouraging the listener to focus on the individual sound.

- iv) The concept of art as necessarily literal or realistic representation was repudiated. Firstly, in the visual arts, the camera produced 'copies' of reality mechanically, rendering artistic attempts at the same, superfluous. Secondly, the inner imaginative world suggested by Freud, offered exciting, and thus far largely untapped, possibilities.

One could presume from the above, that much 20th century art would be cold, intellectual and cynical. This, according to Cytler, was generally true in the initial decades of the century, but from about 1930, there was a recognition that even the machine had to be guided by human hands and so the human element was, in some circles, re-instated.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.2.1 Painting

In the visual arts, the Fauves and the Cubists explored different extremes of colour use: the former in a riot of brilliant, non-descriptive colour (as in Matisse's *Woman with the hat*, Figure 1a) and the latter in the limitation of their palette to muted greys, ochre, soft greens and browns, (as in Braque's *Violin and Palette*, Figure 1b). However, whilst the Fauves still painted the objective world, the Cubists re-interpreted their objects in loosely geometric shapes, flattened into planes of tonal colour. As can be seen, the Cubist approach had the effect of assimilating the objects into the surrounding space. Therefore, in the hands of the Fauves and Cubists, the traditional implications of colour, time and space were re-assessed.

Abstract art further realized the non-representational aspects of Cubism and compositions devoted purely to line and shape were created e.g. Vasily Kadinsky's *White Line*. A critical re-examination of all the traditions, order, rules and bases that

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<sup>7</sup>Cytler, p296.



Figure 1(a) *Woman with the hat*  
H.Matisse (1905).



Figure 1(b) *Violin and palette*  
G.Braque (1910).

had guided the creation of the arts for centuries, even the concepts of order, coherence and beauty, was meanwhile initiated in Switzerland by the Dadaists. Despite their serious intent, the art produced became known as the art of the Absurd. Dada artists were sensationalists, breaking down conventions by simply throwing out accepted methods and values. Their aim was to shock in order to be noticed. The early Expressionism of other painters led to Fantasy painting, with its unusual juxtapositions

of unlikely objects. In Rousseau's *The dream*, a nude lady reclines on a Victorian sofa in the jungle, with flute player and lions. This type of work reached something of a climax in paintings such as *Inventions of the monsters*, by the arch-Surrealist, Salvador Dali.

The co-existence of many different artistic experiments and trends in the first half of the century has levelled out in the second half and periods of consolidation have followed. As artists jet from one end of the world to the other with ease, art has become characterized by an increasing internationalism.

### 1.2.2 Sculpture

Sculpture in the twentieth century has seen fundamental new departures. Full spatial organisation was abandoned for frontality and monumentality in Brancusi's *The Kiss* (Figure 2). By its extreme simplicity of shape and basic, elemental subject, this work also shows the typical influence of primitive art on the art of this century.

Cubist sculpture provided another alternative to unfashionable Renaissance traditions. In his *Sailor with Guitar*, Jacques Lipchitz sheds extraneous details and reduces the forms to geometric shapes. In *The Fallen*, Lehmbruck shuns authenticity in a different way. He distorts the prostrate figure by elongation in order to convey the agony and despair of war.

New materials, combinations of materials, or even independent objects have been assembled this century to create sculpture. Duchamp, associated with the Dadaist movement, fathered two major innovations: the ready-made or found object (art or 'non-art' based on constructions of everyday material) and the mobile (sculpture that moves). Hausmann adds a touch of twentieth century fantasy to such assembled sculptural creations in his *Mechanical Head*: a variety of miscellaneous objects (e.g. a tape measure, labels, a metal collapsing cup, and a pocket book) is attached to a mannequin's head.

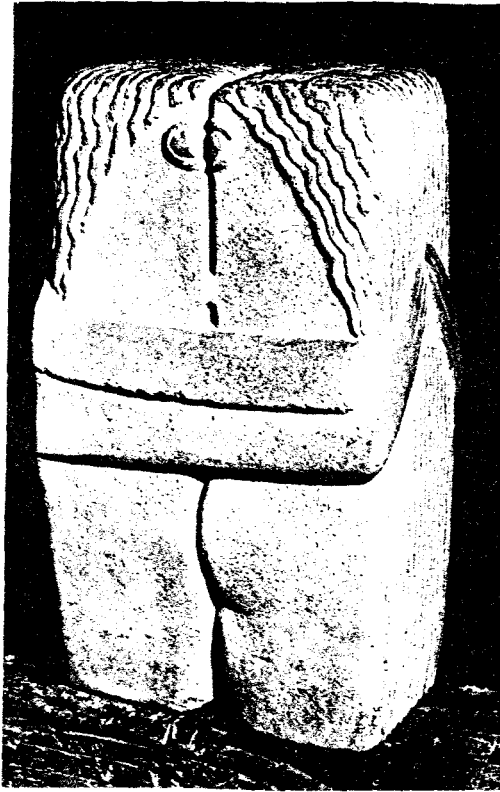


Figure 2. *The Kiss*. C.Brancusi (1912)

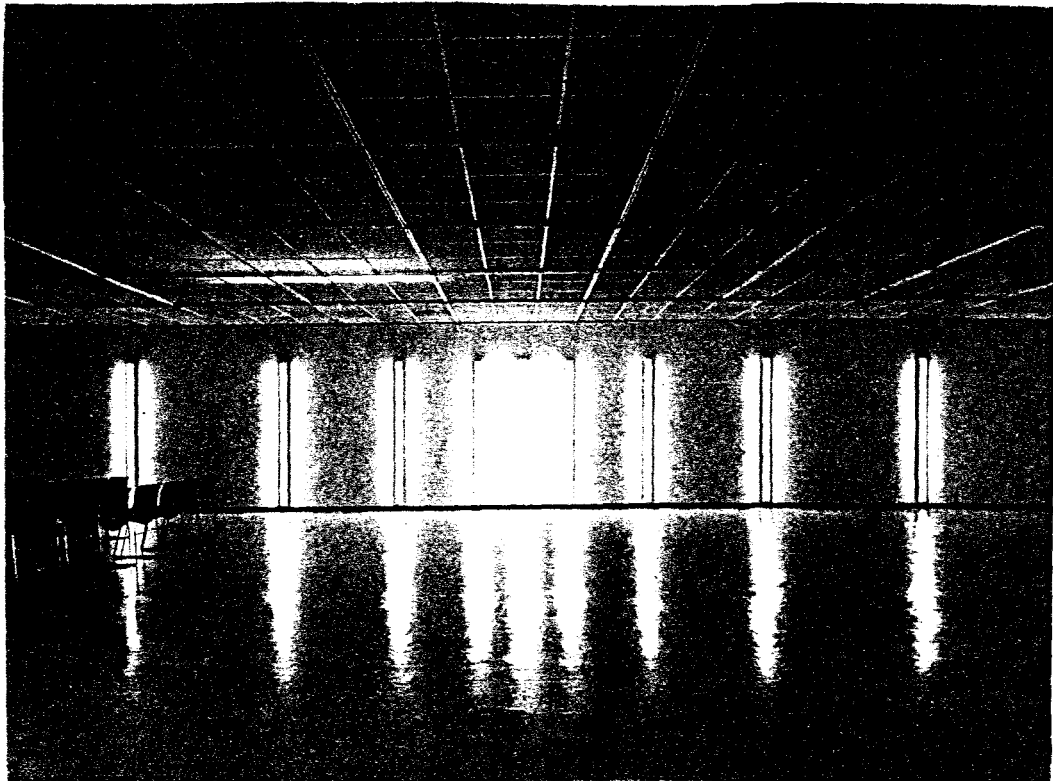


Figure 3. Installation view of *Pink and Gold*. D.Flavin (1968)

The vast size of much sculpture of the 1960's and 1970's led inevitably to the idea of sculpture designed for a specific place or space. Dan Flavin's *Pink and Gold* (Figure 3), constructed in the Dwan Gallery, New York, is an example. In this work, electric light columns arranged around a central accent, re-interpret, in modern technological terms, the Classical notion of balance.

### 1.2.3 Music

As in the other arts, every structural element of music, has, at some stage in this century, been re-appraised. The essence of Western music since time immemorial, the singable melody, and its primacy, has been challenged. Nonvocal melodies, with wide ranging leaps and rapid changes of register, have been written for voice and instrument alike (e.g. Berg's opera *Wozzeck*). In his *Five orchestral pieces* op.16, Schoenberg created *klangfarbenmelodies*<sup>8</sup> (relying on timbre rather than pitch), to replace conventional lyricism. This exploitation of tone quality is a province in which even the most traditional of twentieth century composers have indulged themselves. New ways of using instruments and voices, and sometimes new instruments, have been part of the quest. Disenchanted with Western civilisation, musicians have drawn further inspiration from music foreign to the Classical heritage: Asian scales, instruments of the gamelan, and jazz techniques. Tonal harmony, extended to the limits in Late Romantic chromaticism, dissolved this century into atonality (Webern's *Drei Gesänge*), polytonality (Ives' *The unanswerd Question*), modality (Bartok's op.6 no.1 from *Fourteen Bagatelles* in the Phrygian mode), or even into oblivion in the world of electronic sound where harmony has little or no relevance (e.g. *Mikrofonie I*, Stockhausen).

The recurring accents which had displaced the free flow of Medieval plainsong as early as the Renaissance, gave way again to an increasing freedom of movement, ranging from the constantly changing and propulsive (Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*), to the

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<sup>8</sup>*Melodie* here implies the object of main interest, rather than a melody in the accepted sense of the word.

seamlessly immobile (Messiaen's *Le banquet céleste*). Many composers achieved rhythmic complexity by combining independent rhythms into polyrhythms. Alternatives to regular and symmetrical phrase construction were sought. Some composers clung tenaciously to the old Classical forms, but others, like Krenek, were prepared to discard them as redundant<sup>9</sup>.

Some extremists queried man's right to decide on the material to be included in a work and relied on the elements of chance and indeterminacy to create compositions (e.g. Cage's use of the *I Ching* to compose *Music of changes* for piano). Still others have deliberated on the traditional concept of the concert, with a 'passive' audience observing an artiste performing the notated work of somebody else. In Nelson Howe's *Fur Music*, the listener is to stroke a fur score, and listen to the music it produces in his imagination<sup>10</sup>.

As in the other arts, after so much rebellion and experimentation, the second half of the century has seemed to bring a consolidation and ratification of certain new ideas and a toning down of some of the more radical ones. A significant feature of many contemporary works, has been the return to tonality<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, much twentieth century music continues to be little known. Difficulties of execution militate against widespread performances or sometimes result in inferior renditions. Unfortunately, this has caused an even greater rift between composer and public than existed in the Romantic era - concertgoers remain notoriously slow to welcome the unfamiliar or 'strange'.

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<sup>9</sup>The form of Krenek's *Twelve short piano pieces*, is generated by the systematic application of twelve tone organisation: the four types of any one series being introduced, (Original, Retrograde, Inversion and Retrograde Inversion) and then combined according to a pre-ordained scheme.

<sup>10</sup>Dallin, p243.

<sup>11</sup>J. Schaefer, *New sounds*, U.S.: Harper and Row, 1987, p92.

### 1.3 Song cycles in history

#### 1.3.1 The poetry

Obviously the *raison d'être* for a song, is the desire on the part of the composer to communicate the words and mood of the poetry which has inspired him. The finest lieder generally represent a meeting of poetical and musical affinities, hence it is not uncommon to find a composer 'tied' to the poetry of a single, often contemporary, poet e.g. Mozart and Goethe, Schumann and Heine, Webern and Hildegard Jone, Hindemith and Rilke. Although almost all the lyric poets of the Middle Ages were poet and composer in one, this is rare today except among folk singers. Mahler and Messiaen are notable exceptions to this norm, having both set song texts of their own to music.

The quality of the poetry chosen for setting to music has long been a source of debate. Hegel, in his series of 'Aesthetics' lectures<sup>12</sup>, found it a ..

"harmful prejudice to think the nature of the text of no importance to the composition... nothing musically deep and worthwhile can be coaxed from a text that is in itself flat, trivial, bald, and absurd. But neither must the poem be too burdened with thought, too philosophical and deep"<sup>13</sup>.

According to Schumann,

"There can be nothing more beautiful than to adorn with music the brow of a true poet. But why trouble to waste music on a common, an everyday face?"<sup>13</sup>

Hugo Wolf agreed. Reger and Weber conversely declared their preferences for minor poems: one which, as Weber said "has not too much music to start with".<sup>13</sup> Schubert was notoriously indiscriminating, setting both good and inferior poetry to music.

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<sup>12</sup>Delivered in the 1820's at Berlin University.

<sup>13</sup>Prawer, p13.

The chosen text, whatever its literary merit, subsequently becomes turned into a vocal melody and enters into many harmonic and contrapuntal relations with the accompanying part. In so doing, the lied seemed to satisfy the Romantic desire for a re-fusion of the arts of poetry and music, inseparable in the Medieval poets, but which had drifted apart in the modern world<sup>14</sup>.

In oratorio, the elements of recitative and aria are presented alternately. A successful lied succeeds in marrying the two together, although often one predominates over the other. The recitative element gained new prominence in the twentieth century, through the use of speech song (*sprechgesang*). In this type of presentation, the singer is concerned with rhythm and interval, as opposed to exactitude of pitch. In Schoenberg's song cycle *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), *sprechgesang* is used throughout, thus adding another new dimension to the performance of song cycles this century.

### 1.3.2 Instrumentation

The development of the lied and lieder cycles, depended originally on the advancement of the piano. The balance between the voice and piano has varied from composer to composer, creating distinctive and recognizable styles. Initially the piano was used mainly as an harmonic support. Schubert managed to achieve an ideal balance wherein the piano set the scene, established the mood, and supplemented the voice. Schumann added interest to the piano part, so that sometimes the postludes to his songs are more memorable than the vocal line. Brahms, ever conservative, reversed the direction, giving primacy again to the voice. The piano parts of Hugo Wolf's songs are so vital, one hesitates to speak of accompaniments at all.

Increasingly in the nineteenth century, the colouristic resources of the piano seemed inadequate and the songs seemed to strain after orchestral effects. In 1840, Berlioz orchestrated the original piano accompaniment of his song cycle *Les Nuits d'Été* and

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<sup>14</sup>Prawer, p16.

thereby produced what was generally considered a superior version of that composition. In the work of Mahler and Strauss, the orchestral song becomes the rule rather than the exception. Mahler however, soon realized that the full orchestra was too overwhelming for the frail lyrics of the songs and experimented in his 'Ruckert' settings, with small chamber groups. The potentials of such chamber groups was further exploited with notable mastery by Schoenberg in *Pierrot Lunaire* and Webern in his *Geistliche lieder*. As could be expected, under the pointillist hand of Webern, the song cycle texture became unusually sparse. In the 1955 cycle of the Frenchman Pierre Boulez, *Le marteau sans maître*, vocalized sounds merge with the instrumental to become, in places, merely another timbre in the texture rather than an accompanied soloist.

### 1.3.3 Tonality

It was not only the poetry and the accompaniment-voice relationship of song cycles which evolved. The chromaticism of Mahler and Strauss had far reaching effects in the music of other Austro-Germans. The early songs of Schoenberg and Berg abandoned the fading residues of tonality, for atonality. The dangers of monotony in such a system had the effect of considerably reducing the size of their songs. The nebulous tonality of Impressionistic writers, like Debussy and Ravel, took the song cycle in still other harmonic directions. More recently electronic experiments with the voice, such as those of Berio and Stockhausen, have rendered tonality a redundant word. Whilst it is noteworthy that most significant tape and electronic works of the late 1950's and early 1960's have used voice as an essential part of the conception<sup>15</sup>, their contributions seem unlikely to encourage the progress of song.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>For example Babbit's *Philomel* and *Vision and a Prayer*, and Berio's *Visage* and *Omaggio*.

<sup>16</sup>E. Salzman, *Twentieth Century Music: an Introduction*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974, p143.

The twentieth century quest for new timbres and 'tonalities' has had the effect of placing many song cycles out of the reach of most domestic music-makers. The German lied grew out of folksong and managed to preserve these links, although increasingly tenuously, right up to the music of Mahler and Strauss. However subtle the variations and accompaniments, the central melody could usually be sung without too much difficulty by the music-lover who read music, or who heard two or three performances of the work. This situation changes with atonal and dodecaphonic music, which has so angular a vocal line and so few suggestions of folk as to totally preclude its use as *hausmusik*<sup>17</sup>. Regrettably, nowhere in the contemporary world does the song have the part in domestic life that it had in the nineteenth century. Songs written today are generally conceived as concert pieces and heard only at recitals. Many younger composers have shown more interest in choral and dramatic music, than song<sup>18</sup>. Praver feels that the lied, can be compared to a sleeping beauty awaiting her prince....<sup>17</sup>

#### 1.4 A global view of the song cycle in the twentieth century

As mentioned above, the early part of the century found the German Expressionists pre-occupied with the production of small-scale cycles in progressively 'decaying' states of tonality. After the highly controversial *Pierrot Lunaire*, Schoenberg's music became more rigidly organized into a twelve-tone system and he wrote much instrumental and choral music, but only one set of three songs. Webern, on the other hand, from as early as 1909, wrote several sets of uncompromisingly atonal songs. He adopted the twelve-tone system in 1924 and the result was the extreme sparseness of texture and highly fragmentary, almost disembodied vocal line, which remains the hallmark of his style. Radcliffe suggests that the songs of Hindemith, a later, 'un-atonal' German composer, may ultimately reach a wider musical public than those of the Second

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<sup>17</sup>Praver, p17.

<sup>18</sup>P. Radcliffe, *History*, p264.

Viennese school<sup>19</sup>. The relatively few songs in his vast output, show his distinctive use of a system of expanded tonality. Chords do have functions relative to one another, but progressions with obvious Romantic associations e.g. dominant seventh to tonic, are avoided. Double degree chords and chords in quartal construction<sup>20</sup> are juxtaposed with those in conventional tertian construction in his music. It is possible that his often contrapuntal style is more suited to instrumental genres, but his *English Songs* of 1944 nevertheless make an interesting and not inaccessible contribution to twentieth century literature for the voice.

Many nations were, in the early part of the century, shaking themselves free of the shackles of Imperialist domination. The assertion of an individual national identity took the form of a re-discovery and glorification of traditional folksong. In twentieth century Hungary, the arduous compiling and arranging of vast collections of folksongs by Bartok and Kodaly, gave them little time to spare on songs of their own creating. Although Bartok did compose songs, the folk collections naturally coloured his style to a great extent. Nathan describes Bartok's *Five songs* op.16 (1916) as a cycle in which harmony assumes major significance,

"while the vocal part tends to assimilate itself with the high-strung poetry with disjointed recitative-like phrases, consisting of nothing more than repeated or adjacent notes in speech rhythm".<sup>21</sup>

In Spain, Manuel de Falla perpetrated his own brand of Nationalism. As a basis for his *Seven Spanish Popular Songs* for voice and piano, completed in 1914, he used traditional melodies from various regions in Spain. Unlike Bartok and Kodaly, who had not wanted to spoil the Hungarian folksongs with 'city clothes'<sup>22</sup>, he added brilliant pianistic accompaniments, which vividly capture the spirit of the songs. The intertwining

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<sup>19</sup>Radcliffe, *History*, p263.

<sup>20</sup>Chords built in fourths above a root e.g. C - F - B - E etc., instead of in conventional tertian construction i.e. in thirds: C - E - G etc.

<sup>21</sup>H. Nathan, *History*, p285.

<sup>22</sup>Nathan, *History*, p275.

of popular and artistic elements so often found in the Spanish-speaking world, is faithfully presented by de Falla<sup>23</sup>. This has made him a figure of importance in the history of Spanish song and as a model for contemporary Spanish songwriters. However, although there are many Hispanic composers of the present time who have followed his lead and written attractive songs for voice and piano, they have added little that is new to the style he established<sup>24</sup>.

The Nationalistic trend for collecting folksongs also took place in Britain. Vaughan Williams was active as a collector of both English folksong and Tudor church music. Meanwhile composers of new songs in Britain were experiencing lean times. Audience taste had tended to crystallize around Schubert, Schumann and Wolf. Drawing room singing was on the decline and the increased following of the symphony orchestra meant that songs with piano were no longer the medium through which the widest audience was reached<sup>25</sup>. Elgar, a major figure in choral and orchestral writing (although of lesser stature in song-writing), retained an interest in music for voice and piano and continued to turn out occasional songs for this combination until 1931. His *Sea pictures* cycle with orchestra, conceding to public taste and to his more expansive talents, has remained popular. It was only through the later talents of Benjamin Britten that, according to Jacobs, English song was really 'born again'<sup>26</sup>. Three characteristics of his music which have particularly enriched British song are: enlarged harmonic resources (in his case, a characteristic simultaneous use of tonic and dominant harmony); accompaniments built from short melodic motives often used contrapuntally (rather than by extending chords into flowing lines); and florid, expansive, Purcell-ian melodies<sup>27</sup>. These aspects are apparent in his 1943 *Serenade for tenor, horn and strings* and in the *Canticle I*. Eric Roseberry attributes Britten's independence of the Germanic

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<sup>23</sup>G. Chase, *History*, p392.

<sup>24</sup>Chase, *History*, p397.

<sup>25</sup>A. Jacobs, *History*, p173.

<sup>26</sup>Jacobs, *History*, p175.

<sup>27</sup>Jacobs, *History*, p176.

Romantic tradition to the countering influence of French neo-Classicism<sup>28</sup>. This may well be so. *Les Illuminations* (1939), a cycle for soprano and orchestra, sets the words of Frenchman, Arthur Rimbaud, in sensuous and virtuoso vocal lines which are significantly more French than Teutonic in character. This cycle was, like Messiaen's cycles, written for a particular soprano: in this case, Sophie Wyss.

Of the many Russian composers who emigrated from their home country after the revolution, few had anything musically original to offer. Stravinsky, the one who did continue to develop, ceased to write songs. A critical change in Soviet music occurred during the period 1930-34: the dividing line drawn in arts and literature by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Modernism and all forms of 'subjectivism' or abstract 'formalism' were taboo<sup>29</sup>. This change was especially marked in the field of solo song, where it was hoped that the romance, and in fact all manifestations of lyricism, would be replaced by the 'mass song' (unison with piano). This did little to promote the development of the song cycle in that part of the world. More recently, Shostakovitch returned to the song cycle, with all the monumentality of conception typical of Romanticism. Ottaway describes the Symphony no.14, op.135, as a song cycle for bass and soprano soloists with chamber orchestra<sup>30</sup>. The cycle for bass, *Suite on verses by Michelangelo*, op.145a, written in 1974, assumes the same large outer dimensions. There are eleven songs, with thematic references between the first and tenth, and the eleventh treated as an epilogue (Messiaen treats *Harawi* in a similar way, with references between the second and last songs, and the first treated separately as an introduction). The original accompaniment to the *Michelangelo* songs was piano, but the subsequent orchestration is for a full symphony orchestra, with sizable percussion section, celesta, harp, and piano. The scoring, however, is very selective and often light, so that the syllabically-treated text is clearly audible. The voice never

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<sup>28</sup>E. Roseberry, Record sleeve, B.Britten, *Les Illuminations*, perf. F. Lott, sop., Scottish National Orchestra, cond. B. Thomson. England: Chandos, 1989. CHAN 8657.

<sup>29</sup>G. Abraham, *History*, p373.

<sup>30</sup>H. Ottaway, record sleeve of Shostakovitch song cycles, Perf. I. Bogacheva, mezzo-sop.; Y. Nestorenko, bass; Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra; cond. M. Shostakovitch; Moscow Chamber Orchestra; cond. R. Barshai. USSR: EMI Melodiya, 1977. SLS 5078.

'competes' with the orchestra and there are no displays of vocal gymnastics. Other than the final song, which deals with the immortality of living on in people's hearts, an air of sombreness pervades the cycle. The other two late song cycles, *Six songs to lyrics by English Poets*, op.62/140, (1942/1970) and *Six Songs to poems by Marina Tsvetayeva*, op.143, (1974), were both composed for voice and piano before being supplied later with chamber orchestral accompaniments.

The history of song in America this century was initially marked by a pronounced orientation towards French aesthetics and settings of French poetry were not uncommon<sup>31</sup>. This influence has waned though and is almost extinct in later American composers like Barber, Copland, and Carter. In the early years of the century, Charles Ives offered a unique and fresh approach to song-writing. His songs were so innovative that, although only published in 1922<sup>32</sup>, it took almost a generation before they were listened to with "respect and occasional pleasure"<sup>33</sup>. American hymns, especially the urbanized gospel hymns, quotations from war songs, ragtime, popular songs and cowboy ballads co-exist in Ives' songs as symbols of the diversity of American experience. He, like Messiaen, also drew much inspiration for his illustrative writing from a communion with Nature. Major-minor tonality was used if he considered it appropriate to the message of the song, otherwise atonal chord progressions and non-triadic sonorities sufficed. He showed little regard for "chords without bites to them"<sup>34</sup>. As evidence of their peculiarly American quality, Nathan notes that, performed with the innate subtleties of diction, timbre and dynamic of the traditional European vocal delivery, Ives' songs sound very stilted. They need instead "a voice and manner shaped by the informal and comparatively steady cadences of American speech"<sup>35</sup>. The popularity of

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<sup>31</sup>Nathan, *History*, p426.

<sup>32</sup>They were written in the years 1888 - 1918.

<sup>33</sup>Nathan, *History*, p431.

<sup>34</sup>Nathan, *History*, p436. Messiaen describes an added note in a chord as "the bee within the flower", see section 7.1.1.

<sup>35</sup>Nathan, *History*, p432.

jazz in America has fostered new ways of singing and 'crooning', which have been gradually incorporated into the works of some 'serious' composers, notably Gershwin and more recently, the Frenchman, Poulenc.

Between the wars i.e. 1919 - 1945, the mainstream of music flowed not through Berlin, Vienna, London or New York, but through Paris<sup>36</sup>. The musical upheavals of the twentieth century have been supported and sometimes initiated by French musicians: Debussy, Messiaen and later, Boulez<sup>37</sup>. The early twentieth century is a particularly productive period in French song.

### 1.5 The song cycle in France

In the history of solo song, the heritage of France is rich and important. Despite strong foreign influences at times, French song has steadfastly retained qualities which have made it very different to German song<sup>38</sup>.

A discussion of French song cycles could begin with Berlioz, a contemporary of Schumann's. His *Neuf Mélodies Irlandaises* (1830), a song cycle of great originality<sup>39</sup>, is an expression of extravagant Romanticism dedicated to Harriet Smithson, the object of his passion<sup>40</sup>. His later orchestrated cycle, *Les Nuits d'Été*, has already been mentioned.

In 1871, at the end of the Franco-Prussian war, the Foundation of French Music was established. This was of vital significance to the evolution and self-determination of

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<sup>36</sup>Abraham, p825.

<sup>37</sup>Golea, p22.

<sup>38</sup>D. Cox, *History*, p194-5.

<sup>39</sup>Cox, *History*, p202.

<sup>40</sup>Harriet Smithson is also the lady who inspired the *Symphonie Fantastique*.

modern French music. The purpose of the Foundation was to encourage native composers by giving performances of their work. A marked rise in the quantity and quality of both symphonic and chamber music resulted and France was re-elevated, by the beginning of the twentieth century, to a leading position amongst the musical nations of the world. The French revival began with aims similar to those of other nationalistic movements, but ended by producing results of prime importance for music everywhere. Three interdependent lines can be traced from 1871 to the early years of the twentieth century. In each can be found one of the three great master of French song: Fauré, Duparc and Debussy<sup>41</sup>.

The first line was a cosmopolitan tradition transmitted through Franck and his pupils. They worked in traditional instrumental genres, shaped and developed themes in conventional ways and used mostly homophonic textures, with some contrapuntal features. Franck wrote a few songs, but Adams finds them heavily weighted with German Romantic qualities<sup>42</sup>. Duparc's reputation rests on a mere fourteen published songs, all composed between 1868 and 1884. The remarkable quality of these few songs places him among the world's great song-writers<sup>43</sup>. Certain elements of his style were indeed inherited from his master, Franck: a rich chromatic texture and a depth of expression, but his gift for intensely personal melodies was unique<sup>43</sup>. Some of his songs were originally written for piano and later orchestrated most satisfyingly e.g. *Phidylé*.

A second line of development was a specifically French tradition, classic in the sense that music was conceived primarily as sonorous form, rather than as a means of expression (*viz.* the Romantic ideal). Order and restraint were fundamental, thus favouring the lyric and dance-like over the epic or dramatic. As a result, the music tends to be economical rather than profuse, simple rather than complex, and reserved rather than grandiloquent. This tradition has been upheld by two French composers as

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<sup>41</sup>Cox, *History*, p208.

<sup>42</sup>Cox, *History*, p206.

<sup>43</sup>Cox, *History*, p210.

remote in time and temperament as Couperin (1668 - 1733) and Gounod (1818 - 1893) and was relayed in the early years of this century through Saint-Saëns and continued by his pupils, especially Fauré. According to Cox, Fauré reveals this characteristic French subtlety and restraint in his masterpiece *La Bonne Chanson*, a song cycle with piano accompaniment and alternative arrangement for string orchestra and piano.<sup>44</sup>

A third main line of development was later in inception, but more far-reaching and fundamental in its influence. In the music of Debussy, the potential of the French tradition was carried to unforeseen conclusions. Golea describes his genius as the starting point of the revolution in musical language of our time<sup>45</sup>; Grout sees him as one of the greatest French composers and one of the most potent influences on the course of music in the twentieth century<sup>46</sup>; and Drew calls him the last truly comprehensive figure in the French tradition, and the last of undisputed greatness<sup>47</sup>.

Debussy's idiom was closely related to, and influenced by, the literary and pictorial movements of the day. Like the Symbolist poets, he felt that artistic forms should arise from the subject matter, not be imposed on it. With the Impressionist painters, he longed to return French music to what he felt was its fundamental source in Nature. The 'fluid' rhythms he used, abolished the prevailing 'artificial tyranny'<sup>3</sup> of the barline, while his harmonic practise (using modes and the whole tone scale) expanded the whole concept of key. Prophetically, timbre became a central element in his compositions. Golea feels that the person to eventually capitalize on Debussy's gains, particularly in the areas of form and rhythm, was Messiaen<sup>48</sup>. Meanwhile Caplet, in his *Cinq Ballades Française* of 1920, followed Debussy in his use of delicate, atmospheric accompaniments of high technical accomplishment.

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<sup>44</sup>Cox, *History*, p210.

<sup>45</sup>Golea, p22.

<sup>46</sup>Grout, p793.

<sup>47</sup>Drew, *Score III*, p60.

<sup>48</sup>Golea, p23.

Other French composers worked outside the main trends. One such composer worthy of mention, is Albert Roussel. His style was a happy synthesis of many different trends: Impressionism, neo-Classicism, d'Indy, German composers, and oriental music<sup>49</sup>. In his *Réponse d'une épouse sage*, these influences translate into a distinctive style.

Ravel adopted some Impressionist techniques and was, for example, a brilliant colourist. However his affinity for clean melodic contours, distinct rhythms, and the firm structures of Classicism, disqualifies him too, from easy categorisation. As a song writer, he is less important than Debussy, but has nevertheless contributed items of great beauty to the repertoire. The *Chansons Madécasses* of 1926 share certain significant features with Messiaen's later cycle, *Harawi*<sup>50</sup>. In Ravel's earlier group of songs, *Histoires Naturelles* (1907), the elements of sarcasm and humour, bespeak the influence of other Frenchmen. Chabrier in his *Six Mélodies* of 1890 (otherwise known as his Barnyard Suite!), preceded Ravel in this humorous, anthropomorphic vein.

Cocteau, a prominent, contemporary writer, explained that Erik Satie "teaches what is in our day the greatest audacity, simplicity"<sup>51</sup>. Satie was a contemporary of Debussy's and both men were interested in deviations from conventional tonality. While Debussy's work was characterised by an elaborate seriousness of intent, Satie's approach was bitingly unsentimental and satirical. Satie did not write many songs, but like all his other works, they are 'anti-pretentious' and direct. Ironic words, economical textures and severity of harmony and melody are recognizable trademarks of his songs. The strange and unique personality of Satie and his influence on younger composers of his time is of considerable significance in the history of French music.

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<sup>49</sup>Cox, *History*, p217.

<sup>50</sup>Each, for example, evokes a primitive exotic setting and does so by means of primal expressions of emotion and propulsive tempos.

<sup>51</sup>Cocteau in *Le coq et l'Arlequin*, quoted in W. Martin and J. Drossen, *Music of the Twentieth century*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, p193.

The formation of the group *Les Six*<sup>52</sup> in 1920, was initiated partly as a reaction to the war and partly as a response to Impressionism and the over-seriousness of Romanticism. Under the influence of Satie and Stravinsky, the group vowed allegiance to simplicity, clarity and conciseness. They declared themselves to be in favour of the music of real life. Popular music, the cafe style, the cabaret style and jazz were all included in their, often satirical, music. In the case of Auric and Poulenc, Cox asserts this all too easily degenerated into "anything-will-do-as-long-as-it's-not-serious"!<sup>53</sup> With their bitter-sweet 'wrong note' diatonicism, members of *Les Six* retained a tenacious and unlikely hold on tonality. Much of the vocal music they produced has now been 'deservedly forgotten'<sup>53</sup>, but that of Poulenc deserves special mention. Martin Cooper calls him "a musical clown of the first order, a brilliant musical mimic, an adroit craftsman, who pieces together the most heterogenous collection of musical styles to form an unmistakable personal style of his own"<sup>54</sup>. No doubt this synthesis of such disparate and seemingly contradictory elements makes him ideally suited to illustrate Surrealist poetry. Despite the wide range of poetry Poulenc did set in some 40 years of song-writing, Lockspeiser describes him as **the** illustrator of the Surrealist poets.<sup>54</sup>

A fellow member of *Les Six*, Darius Milhaud, produced some of his best works in the vocal genres<sup>55</sup>. Traditional patterns, polytonality, jazz and folklore all mingle in his music. Two humorous works have achieved fame: *Catalogue de fleurs* and *Machines agricoles*, the latter setting passages from an agricultural catalogue. Both are for voice and seven instruments.

The institution of *La Jeune France*<sup>56</sup> in 1936 supports Reid's assertion that the musical

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<sup>52</sup>The group comprised Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc and Germaine Tailleferre.

<sup>53</sup>Cox, *History*, p219.

<sup>54</sup>Cox, *History*, p220.

<sup>55</sup>Cox, *History*, p221.

<sup>56</sup>*La Jeune France* consisted of Yves Baudrier, Daniel Lesur, André Jolivet and Oliver Messiaen.

history of France can be told as a story of reactionary trends<sup>57</sup>. The National School of Franck was formed as a direct reaction to Germanic dominance in France; Debussy's Impressionism reacted both to Wagnerianism and to Franck's chromaticism; Satie and *Les Six* rebelled against Romanticism and Impressionism. *La Jeune France* was born of a protest against neo-Classicism and nurtured by the desire to restore emotionalism to music. They fought for the right of the composer to write music of a lyric kind with a personal message i.e. to re-instate certain values which French music seemed to have lost. One would expect this credo to find its most spontaneous realization in song.

With Jolivet, the spirit of *La Jeune France* found expression in a style related to the practises of primitive religion (rather than Catholicism, as is the case with Messiaen). For the spell of the music to have its full effect, Jolivet seemed to need orchestral colour and he published his two main song cycles, *Les trois Complaintes du Soldat* and *Poèmes intimes*, for piano or orchestral accompaniment. His magical incantations and his fondness for the Ondes Martenot<sup>58</sup>, are two aspects of his work which influenced Messiaen.

Of the younger Frenchmen who emerged in the 1930's, one of the most important is Oliver Messiaen<sup>59</sup>. Like Berlioz, he has always been a controversial figure, sharing with his forbearer, a waywardness of genius and a gift for startling originality. His music is intensely personal, yet remains typically French<sup>60</sup>. Unlike his immediate predecessors, flippancy and satire are incompatible with his musical philosophies and his song cycles, by comparison, deal with profound subjects. The works are a mixture of many stylistic elements: Impressionism, elaborate experimental rhythms and

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<sup>57</sup>Reid, p17-18.

<sup>58</sup>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. Apel, p284.

<sup>59</sup>Abraham, p829.

<sup>60</sup>Lyons, p569.

harmonic textures which are both 'juicily naive'<sup>61</sup> and highly sophisticated. The influence he has had on younger composers is immense, not often evoking direct imitation<sup>62</sup>, but rather stimulating an expansive attitude to the world of experimentation in music.

A distinguished pupil of Messiaen's, Pierre Boulez, originally favoured the total serial organisation and motivic use of rhythm propounded by Messiaen in *Quatre Études*. In his cycle for soprano and chamber ensemble, *Improvisation sur Mallarmé* (1957), Boulez uses a pre-determined 'constellation' of registers<sup>63</sup>. A later, more relaxed approach to serial techniques enabled him to incorporate elements of freedom into some works. In *Improvisation II*, sections are marked *senza tempo* and therefore leave the soloist and conductor free to judge durations themselves. In the song cycle, *Le marteau sans maître* (1954, revd. 1957), he develops Messiaen's interest in exotic instrumental colour by scoring the work for contralto, alto flute, xyloimba, vibraphone, percussion, guitar and viola. This novel combination gave him the opportunity to follow up on another aspect of Messiaen's writing: he exploited the similarity in timbre between the alto flute and the alto voice in order to experiment with a range of application from vocal to instrumental supremacy.

What will be the future of the French song?

The music of any era is no transient episode. Rather, it can be understood as the culmination of the past and the foundation of the future, meeting in the present. The dramatic innovations in the music of this century have only kept pace with advances in science and technology and with the changes in attitudes, social institutions, and other arts. Perhaps song, attached as it is to poetry, gives the listener a clearer

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<sup>61</sup>Cox, *History*, p225.

<sup>62</sup>The notable exception to this is, of course, his use of totally controlled serialism in the *Quatre Études* of 1949, which was used as a starting point for the *avant-garde*.

<sup>63</sup>A fixed field of pitch registers, sometimes circling around a central note or group of notes.

reflection of its time than purely instrumental genres. Oliver Messiaen was a product of his time **and** an influential figure in the subsequent evolution of French music. The rich heritage of French song this century directs us toward his vital contribution in this genre.

**CHAPTER 2            LIFE AND IDEALS PERTAINING TO THE SONG CYCLES  
(1908-1945)**

*"Je porte en moi l'amour des choses mystérieuses et merveilleuses"*<sup>64</sup>

[I carry within me the love of mysterious and marvellous things]

So wrote Cécile Sauvage prophetically of the son she had yet to bear on December 10, 1908, Oliver Eugène Charles Prosper Messiaen. Messiaen has always been especially enthralled by the enigmatic and the fantastic<sup>65</sup>. His father, a professor of English, exposed him early to the wide range of human emotions and to the realm of weird fairies, witches, apparitions and heroes present in Shakespeare's literature. Thus brought up, with a love for literature and the theatre, an acute awareness of what constituted both verbal and musical drama was early inculcated in Messiaen. It may even have been this literary background which encouraged him later to write the texts of most of his choral and vocal works himself.

The boy was, however, soon to be parted from his father. With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 and the call-up of able-bodied men, Cécile Sauvage and her children took refuge in Grenoble, near the mountains of Dauphiné. Six-year old Oliver escaped into the world of Shakespeare, building sets and performing the plays for the captive audience of his younger brother. On one notable occasion, after attending the Lycée in Grenoble, Oliver (at the tender age of eight) picked out the music of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust* on the family piano entirely untutored and unassisted. This incredible demonstration of musical precocity convinced the family that music lessons were a necessity for the child. Soon his Christmas gift solicitations for games and toys, were replaced by requests for musical scores. At the

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<sup>64</sup>Poetry book called *L'âme en Bourgeon* [The flowering soul].

<sup>65</sup>Flemish art is apparently characterized by mystery and fantasy and Messiaen's Flemish roots go back more than two centuries. Bell, preface.

age of ten, he was given the score which was to "decide my vocation"<sup>66</sup>: Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Messiaen entered the Paris Conservatoire the following year, where he was an exceptional student and winner of many prizes until he completed his studies in 1930.

It was obvious that music was to be his chosen vocation and composition his creative course. The type of music he was to write, would be a product of various influences in his life.

His time in Grenoble had given him the opportunity to draw close to Nature. The mountains of the region made a considerable impact on him, to the extent that today Messiaen still considers his true homeland to be the Alps of the Dauphiné<sup>67</sup>. Mountain grandeur is a recurring feature of the programmes and texts of his works. In fact, Nature became to him a source of spiritual strength in the face of his increasing disillusionment with Western civilization.

Messiaen himself said

"when all seems lost, when the way is no longer clear, to what master can one turn? In the face of so many opposing schools and contradictory languages, there is no human voice to restore confidence to the desperate. This is where the voice of Nature intervenes"<sup>68</sup>.

He professes to have acquired his love for colour from Nature<sup>69</sup>. The colourful plumage and the song of birds fascinated him and as part of his ornithological studies, he began to attempt to notate birdsong. This was to become a lifelong endeavour, also, eventually, to find expression in his music.

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<sup>66</sup>Messiaen to B.Gavoty quoted in Bell, p3.

<sup>67</sup>Tremblay, *DTC*, p474.

<sup>68</sup>Messiaen quoted in Bell, p20.

<sup>69</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p13-14.

At the conservatory, Messiaen received not only a thorough traditional Western musical background, but also encouragement to contemplate more distant musical horizons. With his teacher, Marcel Dupré, he began improvising on the organ with Greek rhythms. His music history professor, Maurice Emmanuel, was another authority on Greek music<sup>70</sup>. Messiaen's interest in this ancient music was influential later in the formation of his own approach to, and theories about, rhythm. It led him into studies of other ancient rhythmic systems, namely the Carnatic music of southern India and that of the north India Hindustanis. He would also have become aware of the complex ideas or emotions conveyed by association, in Indian music<sup>71</sup>. However, perhaps most importantly from the wise tutoring of his conservatory teachers, he acquired an open-minded attitude to diverse musical experiences. All the ideas to which he was exposed, became but the starting impetus to a far-ranging exploration and search for the potential in the musics, not only of other countries and cultures, but also of nature.

Chou Wen Chung has pointed out that, increasingly this century, Eastern culture has played a role in the music of the West<sup>72</sup>. In Messiaen's case, his interest in Eastern music was certainly stimulated by his first hearing of a Balinese gamelan<sup>73</sup> in the year after his graduation. The young man was captivated both by the sound and form of the music and in later instrumental compositions was to attempt his own version of the gamelan by grouping certain tuned metal percussion instruments. Despite his wide-ranging and penetrating studies in the East, his music has nevertheless remained surprisingly unoriental in effect<sup>74</sup>.

In 1931, Messiaen was appointed organist at the Church of La Sainte Trinité in Paris:

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<sup>70</sup>Emmanuel wrote the chapter *Greece* in the *Encyclopédie de la musique*.

<sup>71</sup>Indian ragas (the Sanskrit word for melodic patterns) are imbued with symbolic meanings.

<sup>72</sup>Chou Wen-Chung, p211.

<sup>73</sup>The generic term for an Indonesian orchestra.

<sup>74</sup>Whittall, p216.

the youngest person in France to hold such a position<sup>75</sup>. His association with the church, as well as his studies at the conservatory, led him into independent studies of plainchant<sup>76</sup>. Drew notes certain similarities between this pre-Renaissance chant and Indian music<sup>77</sup>. In the same way that ragas have extra-musical associations attached to them, the church modes have clearly defined expressive functions with regard to feasts in the church year<sup>78</sup>. Messiaen favoured this concept and subsequently saturated his own music with much symbolism. Both plainsong and Indian ragas were conceived in an 'Age of Faith'. India remains still in such a state, where religion dictates structure much of the way of life. Messiaen's preoccupation with these styles of music speaks not only of his disenchantment with the West and the twentieth century, but also of his affinity for things spiritual.

Messiaen's mother had done her best to bestow the riches of her Catholic heritage on her children. Always a sensitive and imaginative child, the symbolism and pageantry of the denomination appealed to him. His own religious experiences convinced him of the reality of his faith and gave him a reason for living and composing. In response to the creativity and magnificence of God, Messiaen strove to write music which "touches all things without ceasing to touch God"<sup>79</sup>, thereby expanding the existing scope of sacred music. He has produced some powerful religious music and is scornful of those who expect sacred music to be "soporific saccharine"<sup>80</sup>. He has had to endure widespread incomprehension, but his contribution in this area remains substantial<sup>81</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, in his music, Messiaen focuses on the spectacular in his faith: the

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<sup>75</sup>As far as can be established, at the time of writing, he continues to hold that office.

<sup>76</sup>Liturgical chant of the Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>77</sup>Drew, *Score I*, p43.

<sup>78</sup>Mellers, p9, describes plainsong as a 'Christianized raga'.

<sup>79</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p8.

<sup>80</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p51.

<sup>81</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p50.

miracles, the birth of Christ, the Transfiguration, the Ascension, Christ's re-appearance in the Eucharist and the apocalyptic vision of St. John. Nature is glorified as an indication of the magnificence of God's love for His people and His Church and as evidence of His bounty and creativity.

Related to his Christian experience, is Messiaen's disregard for the conventionally accepted boundaries of life: birth and death. He believes his destiny to have been influenced by the spiritual bond with his mother prior to his birth. He also believes in the continuation and consummation of life and love in and beyond death. This latter idea is derived, in the Christian context, from the love-death sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It also explains Messiaen's fixation with the legend of Tristan and Isolde, who transcended the limitations of earthly love by being united in death.

In 1935, Messiaen married the violinist, Claire Delbos. At first ecstatically happy, the composer expressed his delight in his young wife and his thanks to God, in his first song cycle, *Poèmes pour Mi*<sup>82</sup> (1936). By embracing the Biblical metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ, Messiaen examined the spiritual and sacramental aspects of marriage<sup>83</sup>. The birth of their son, Pascal, in 1938, precipitated another song cycle, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, which treats parenthood in a similar way.

Meanwhile in 1936, at the age of 28, Messiaen was instrumental in forming the group *La Jeune France*. Although possibly bound more by friendship than common aesthetic, the members were nevertheless united in their desire to re-instate the deeper spiritual and humanistic values discarded by the immediate post-war generation<sup>84</sup>. Neo-classicism was rejected out of hand as endorsing the hard, mechanistic and impersonal

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<sup>82</sup>'Mi' was one of Messiaen's pet-names for Claire Delbos.

<sup>83</sup>"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*

"For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour". *Ephesians 5:23*.

<sup>84</sup>Boucourechliev, *N.G.* 12, p204.

way of modern life. *La Jeune France* laboured instead towards music which was "sincere, generous and artistically conscientious"<sup>85</sup>. The alliance was, of necessity, a short one, as war broke out again in 1939.

Messiaen, like thousands of others, was drafted into the army and had to endure the hardships of war, as well as the pain of parting from his young family. He was taken prisoner of war after only a few months of service, but, unimprisoned in spirit, he continued to compose. *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1941), written for the available resources of clarinet, violin, cello and piano, was first performed in the prison camp of Silesia for 7000 prisoners and their guards.

The war over, Messiaen returned to civilian life and was appointed professor of harmony at the Paris Conservatoire in 1942. In the meantime, his longed-for reunion with his wife was surely marred by the recognition of her illness. Claire Delbos was consigned to an institution in 1943, never to return to her family. She was finally laid to rest in 1959 after 16 years of confinement. Life was manifestly painful for the relatively young husband and father.

Life and work, however, had to continue for Messiaen, as he provided for himself and his young son. In addition to his work at the conservatory, he taught a private course in composition at the home of former fellow-prisoner, Guy Bernard-Delapierre. This

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<sup>85</sup>*Revue Musicale*, no.138 (1932), p128-129, quoted by Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p72.

The manifesto, as printed in the programme of their first concert reads as follows:

"As the conditions of life become more and more hard, mechanical and impersonal, music must bring ceaselessly to those who live it its spiritual violence and its courageous reactions. *La Jeune France*, reaffirming the title once created by Berlioz, pursues the road upon which the master once took his obdurate course. This is a friendly group of four young composers: Oliver Messiaen, Daniel Lesur, Yves Baudrier, and André Jolivet. *La Jeune France* proposes the dissemination of works youthful, free, as far removed from revolutionary formulas as from academic formulas...

The tendencies of the group will be diverse: their only unqualified agreement is in the common desire to be satisfied with nothing less than sincerity, generosity and artistic good faith. Their aim is to create and to promote a living music...". from Bell, p18.

class attracted illustrious students, many of whom went on to achieve musical greatness themselves. Amongst these were Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez and Yvonne Loriod. It was at this stage, prompted by the persistent questions of his 'arrows'<sup>86</sup>, that Messiaen produced the theoretical explanation of his method of composition, *Technique de mon langage musical*. The presence in this class of the celebrated concert pianist Yvonne Loriod, stimulated Messiaen to compose major solo works for the piano e.g. *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* (1944) and later, orchestral works in which the piano featured prominently: the *Turungalîla Symphony* (1946) and *Reveil des oiseaux* (1953). Loriod has remained the foremost interpreter of Messiaen's piano work<sup>87</sup>. The two were eventually married in 1962, thus cementing a long-standing friendship and working relationship.

In 1945, Messiaen's first wife had been incarcerated for three long years. He had struggled on, lecturing at the conservatory and at the home of Delapierre. It was at this stage, that he composed his third song cycle *Harawi, chant de mort et d'amour* [Harawi, song of love and death]. The cycle expresses another aspect of Messiaen's favourite theme of love: the Tristan and Isolde-like quest for the fulfilment of love in death. The auto-biographical nature of the other two song cycles, has elicited speculation of the third being considered in the same light. Messiaen has neither denied nor endorsed this possibility. Could it be that *Harawi* was the disguised musical expression of a growing love by Messiaen for Yvonne Loriod? With Messiaen's staunch religious convictions, this love could not have been expressed other than musically prior to the death of his first wife. One can but speculate... It is significant that all three cycles relate to pivotal experiences in the relationship between a man and a 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).

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<sup>86</sup>Messiaen's students chose to call themselves *Les flèches*, as an indication of their intention to shoot arrows into the future. Bell, p77.

<sup>87</sup>Bell, p78.

Perhaps Messiaen saw no further need to express himself in this genre because to date (from 1945-1991, at the time of completion of this thesis), he has not embarked on another song cycle. There have, however, been two works for choir: *Cinq rechants* (1949) for mixed choir and *La transfiguration de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (1963-69) for orchestra and choir.

With the 60's came increasing fame and recognition for Messiaen and the accompanying demands of international tours and lectures. Awards and premieres held in his honour have become too many to detail<sup>88</sup>. Until 1978, he continued to hold the position of professor of composition at the conservatory, ensuring a continuously busy schedule there of teaching, composing and performing. He surprised the world by producing in 1983 at the age of 75, his first opera: *Saint François d'Assise*, a mammoth 2000 page, four-hour work. His mind appears to remain so alert and creative, it is impossible, despite his advancing years, to predict what he may add to his compositional output. According to Messiaen "there are a thousand ways of probing the future"<sup>89</sup> and it is likely that he will continue to explore them in his own way as long as is humanly possible.

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<sup>88</sup>Bell, p133. She does nevertheless mention the Erasmus prize in Amsterdam (1971); the Sibelius prize in Helsinki (1972); an honorary doctorate conferred by the Catholic University of the United States (1972); a D.Litt from Cornell College, Iowa (1974); and honours at various festivals including 'Messiaen weeks' held in Dusseldorf, Cardiff, London, Flanders, the United States,(1973); later in Karlsruhe (1974); and in New York (1978-79). In 1978, the White Cliffs in Utah, were re-named Mount Messiaen. No doubt more have since been added to this illustrious list.

<sup>89</sup>*Conference de Bruxelles*, p4, quoted in Bell, p136.

### CHAPTER 3      MESSIAEN'S COMPOSITIONAL PHASES

In terms of a dated division of Messiaen's work into compositional phases, few commentators concur<sup>90</sup>.

#### 3.1      Harmony

What emerges from various sources and also from a study of the music, is evidence of a gradual sophistication of the initial highly personal, basically homophonic style of *Le banquet céleste* (1926). This work, set in the extended concept of tonality Messiaen had inherited from Debussy, reveals the composer's traditional background and his technical competence. In these early stages of his composing career, the greater part of his attention seems to have been focused on melodic, harmonic and modal discoveries, so

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<sup>90</sup>Reid, p19, divides Messiaen's music into two categories: compositions before 1949 (in which melodic and harmonic aspects are paramount) and those after (in which rhythmic considerations feature more prominently).

Boucourechliev, *NG*, 12, p206, agrees with this initial division up to the *Turangalîla Symphony* (1948), in which principal discoveries in rhythm, harmony and timbre are already apparent; but divides another three style periods thereafter: up to 1951, from then till 1962 and from 1962 onwards.

Nichols, p87, although critical of any division of Messiaen's work into style periods, nevertheless discusses the works in the following time divisions: 1926-34, 1935-39 (thus perceiving a similar division to Griffiths), 1940-48, 1948-58, 1960-71, 1971-83.

Griffiths, *NG French*, p235, describes five broad phases: the first up to and including *Les Corps glorieux* (1939) and the second from *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* to the *Turangalîla Symphony* (1948), which brings everything in his early style to a climax of achievement.

Drew, *Score II*, p59, comprehends Messiaen's compositional career in three clearly defined phases (up to the article, dated 1955): the first from *Le banquet céleste* (1926) to *L'ascension* (1934) - all highly personal works; - 1948, more exploratory works culminating in the *Turangalîla Symphony*; and works thereafter.

Bell, p23-24, calls it "logical and practical" to divide Messiaen's output into the same three general periods, although no sharp cleavage between periods is apparent to her.

that Griffiths describes the works as having a "predominance of harmony"<sup>91</sup>. In *Le banquet céleste*, added note chords, the important tritone relationship between chords (subsequently to be recognizable as an important melodic interval too by *Diptyque* (1930)), the juxtaposition of unrelated chords and extreme slowness are all apparent. By *Apparition de l'église éternelle* (1931), the very explicit registration markings for organ, indicate that timbre was already an integral part of his instrumental thought, later to become an important structural tool. By 1933, Messiaen had acquired the fundamentals of his individualistic art, but his overwhelming concern for harmonic relationships had limited the extent to which complex rhythmic patterns could overlap and develop.

### 3.2 Rhythm

The demarcation perceived by both Nichols and Bell between *L'ascension* (1933) and the works which follow, is presumably due to the rhythmic explorations present in Messiaen's later compositions. In *La nativité du Seigneur* (1935), for the first time, rhythm is used, albeit intermittently, to produce the effects of tension and relaxation no longer implicit in the harmony. The two rhythmic devices introduced in this composition, the addition and subtraction of fractional values<sup>92</sup>, nevertheless remain subservient to the demands of harmony and melody and the structure of the music is not yet determined by the rhythmic procedures. Interestingly, Drew suggests that Messiaen's rhythmic explorations after *L'ascension* may really have been a search for convincing means of ensuring an asymmetrical build-up of phrases and motifs<sup>93</sup>. Non-retrogradable rhythms<sup>94</sup> were introduced in the period 1940-48. His experiments with rhythm were eventually to culminate in such works as *Quatre études de rythme* (1950)

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<sup>91</sup>Griffiths, *Poèmes*, p851.

<sup>92</sup>See section 10.3.

<sup>93</sup>Drew, *Score II*, p65.

<sup>94</sup>Rhythmic 'cells' which read the same from either end e.g. quaver-crochet-minim-crochet-quaver. See section 10.2.4.

and *Le livre d'orgue* (1951).

### 3.3 Form

*Les corps glorieux*, an organ cycle dating from 1939, shows Messiaen consolidating on ideas of symmetrical construction already attempted in *Poèmes pour Mi* (1936) and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* (1938)<sup>95</sup>. As in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, the largest movement is placed towards the centre of the work. In *Harawi* (1945), refinements of these formal techniques are apparent.

### 3.4 Birdsong

Birdsong began to make an appearance in Messiaen's music of the forties, notably in *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1941), and noticeably in *Harawi* (1945). However at this stage, its use was limited to token gestures, to be much developed later. Perhaps this use of birdsong is one of the reasons motivating both Nichols and Griffiths to discern a new compositional phase at this point.

### 3.5 Consolidation

The 1940's seem to have been a period of consolidation for Messiaen. Nichols suggests that the works of the period 1944-1948 (*Trois Petite Liturgies de la présence divine*, *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus*, *Harawi* and *Turangalîla Symphony*) form a stylistic plateau, a period of assimilation or even an impasse<sup>96</sup>. The last mentioned work, the *Turangalîla Symphony*, is viewed by most critics as a grand culmination of his early

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<sup>95</sup>Here, thematic relationships between first and last pieces.

<sup>96</sup>Nichols, p41.

style, in which his main discoveries in harmony, melody and rhythm are all explicit<sup>97</sup>. It remained for Messiaen thereafter, to develop these interests, having already forecast the direction of future explorations.

### 3.6 Experimentation

The period from 1949 to the present, could be labelled Messiaen's experimental phase. It contains works that reflect the entire evolution of his musical language. Influential were his experiments with serialism and total organization. Bell describes *Livre d'orgue* (1951), mentioned above, as the highest peak of Messiaen's rhythmic achievement<sup>98</sup>. In this work, Hindu rhythms, the procedures of *Personnages rythmiques*<sup>99</sup> and the serial techniques of interverson and permutation, are developed to complex levels of intricacy. These aspects of his work were ardently pursued by *avant-garde* composers, who ventured beyond the bounds Messiaen himself cared to go. After this brief excursion into the 'abstract', Messiaen returned to his preferred religious images and nature for inspiration.

In 1951, *Le merle noir* (the blackbird) was composed. This was the first work in which birdsong became the main body of the composition. *Reveil des oiseaux* (1953), *Oiseaux exotiques* (1956) and *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1956-58) developed birdsong into major works, expanding the technique of the piano at the same time. His 'communicable language' was an innovation of the 1960's, in which modes of sounds, pitches and durations corresponding to the alphabet, were devised. In this way, words could be transformed into musical equivalents. Although this stemmed from an attempt to transmit ideas through the music, it probably more importantly provided formal structure. Messiaen had not used this communicable language before, but the

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<sup>97</sup>Boucourechliev, Griffiths and Drew, to name a few.

<sup>98</sup>Bell, p106.

<sup>99</sup>See section 10.3.5.

constraints imposed by a musical 'game'<sup>100</sup> were not totally new to him. He had long since tarried with the notion of conceiving music within pre-determined limits. His own modes of limited transposition<sup>101</sup> and non-retrogradable rhythms were products of his creative imagination as early as the 1930's.

### 3.7 Constancy of vision

Messiaen himself has never perceived his career in terms of curves or patterns such as one finds in the career of Beethoven<sup>102</sup>. He has retained everything from the past: procedures, attachments, and enthusiasm - and has renounced nothing. It does nonetheless seem true that there is a re-focusing after the 1940's, from the prominence of harmonic and melodic aspects to the rhythmic<sup>103</sup>. Griffiths attributes this change in emphasis to a change in Messiaen from 'mystic-surrealist' (where the works make a statement about his vision), to 'mystic-realist' (where the works show a world in which everything joins in awe and joy in the presence of the Divine)<sup>104</sup>. However in support of Messiaen's claim of constancy, Griffiths concedes that the fundamental aim remains constant: the exposition of a musical vision using the imagery of Christianity and Nature: the stars, mountains, rainbows, human love and birdsong.

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<sup>100</sup>Sleeve notes to recording of *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité*, perf. Jennifer Bate, Unicorn-Kanchana: Beauvais Cathedral, 1983.

<sup>101</sup>Scales of his own creating. See chapter 6.

<sup>102</sup>Nichols, p87. Beethoven's music, by comparison, falls quite easily into three distinct compositional phases.

<sup>103</sup>A comparative article by Griffiths in the *Musical Times*, is revealing: the rhythms used by Messiaen in *Sept Haïkai* (1962) are shown to be far more complex than those of *Poèmes pour Mi* (1936).

<sup>104</sup>Griffiths, *Poèmes*, p852.

### 3.8 Song Cycles

The composition of the song cycles spans nine years, from 1936 - 1945. For all practical purposes, these fall into the same period of composition, although, as has already been pointed out, a gradual evolution was constantly in progress. The basic tools and grammar of his language: the modes, the harmony, the rhythmic ideas and the imagery, were all present as Messiaen began to compose *Poèmes pour Mi*. In the course of the song cycles, birdsong, rhythmic independence, non-retrogradable rhythms and formal symmetry are areas which show development. The metaphoric language is broadened to encompass symbols no longer purely religious and the poetry grows increasingly Surrealistic. Both piano and vocal techniques are extended and the cycles grow in length, as if Messiaen gained in confidence as he wrote more for the voice. Although he did not return to the genre, it seems that in his song cycles he had already arrived at a mature vocal style. Griffiths remarks that the style of evenly-placed modal chant used by characters in *Saint François d'Assise* (Messiaen's opera of 1975), can be traced back to the song cycles<sup>105</sup>: hence evidence of Messiaen's own consistent and indefatigable vocal style.

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<sup>105</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p236.

## PART II

In order to enhance enjoyment of the music of great composers, it is necessary to analyze the craftsmanship behind the art. This analysis takes considerably more time and effort with the music of Messiaen, whose practises are not typical of other composers. Bell claims that any analysis of his work requires an understanding of his total aesthetic<sup>106</sup> and proposes this as the reason for the undeserved lack of detailed examination or discussion devoted to it.<sup>107</sup>

### CHAPTER 4            MESSIAEN'S MUSICAL LANGUAGE

#### 4.1    Spirituality

Messiaen's ideas are unusual in what Myers has called, our 'Age of Unbelief'<sup>108</sup>. In his music he unashamedly seeks to arouse in the listener, a spiritual, or at least an emotional response. The music will be:

"an act of faith; a music which may touch on all subjects without ceasing to touch upon God; an original music...".<sup>109</sup>

It should be able to express...

"some noble sentiments (and especially the most noble of all, the religious sentiments exalted by the theology and truths of our Catholic faith)".<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Bell, p24.

<sup>107</sup>Bell, preface.

<sup>108</sup>Myers, p163.

<sup>109</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p8.

<sup>110</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p13.

According to Messiaen, listeners will be led by the strange ‘charm of impossibilities’ in his music to the ‘theological rainbow’<sup>111</sup> i.e. he feels exposure to his compositions will facilitate spiritual enlightenment. This ‘charm of impossibilities’, though apparently beguiling, is not readily discernable aurally. The term refers to a self-imposed set of boundaries intrinsic to his musical language. The modes of limited transposition and the non-retrogradable rhythms are two areas in which choice is restricted in this way.

## 4.2 Sensuousness

Deri finds Messiaen’s desire to ‘delight the auditory senses’ similarly anachronistic in a mid 20th-century context<sup>112</sup>. Messiaen writes:

"It is a glistening music we seek, giving to the aural sense voluptuously refined pleasures. This charm, at once voluptuous and contemplative, resides particularly in certain mathematical impossibilities of the modal and rhythmic domains".<sup>113</sup>

## 4.3 Eclecticism

Austin reminds us that the word ‘language’ usually implies a shared means of communication<sup>114</sup>. In Messiaen’s case, the musical language, though inspired by other sources, is unique. It has grown out of an assimilation of diverse ideas and techniques, with a geographical background as wide-ranging as the temporal. These devices have been borrowed and isolated from their original contexts, then transformed or used in new ways. As a result, in his music we find simultaneously, derivations from: Indian

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<sup>111</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p21. See also section 6.3.

<sup>112</sup>Deri, p424.

<sup>113</sup>From *Technique de mon Langage Musical*, published in 1944, eight years after *Poèmes pour Mi*, six years after *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, and four years before *Harawi*.

<sup>114</sup>Austin, p390.

deçi-tâlas, Christian symbolism, birdsong, colour evocations, Medieval plainchant, Peruvian folklore and number symbolism. This wealth of technical means, Messiaen finds, allows 'the heart to expand'<sup>115</sup>, without precluding craftsmanship and careful organisation. Ingenious parallels between melodic, rhythmic and harmonic elements in his compositions, provide logic and coherency. The following quotation by C.S. Lewis, is particularly appropriate to Messiaen's music:

"How nobly the ..[work].. approaches the romantic ideal of a labyrinthine tale in which the thread is never lost, and multiplicity does no more than illustrate an underlying singleness".<sup>116</sup>

#### 4.4 Effusiveness

Despite, or perhaps because of, the super-abundance of source material in his works, Messiaen did not feel the Neo-Classicist's urge for brevity. The composer states with glorious high-handedness: "I chose all"<sup>117</sup>. The resultant presentations are therefore "very remote from objectivity, simplicity of style, or economy of means"<sup>118</sup>. Stravinsky remarked, in somewhat caustic tone, that all one needed to write the *Turangalîla Symphony* was "enough paper!"<sup>119</sup>. A pupil of Messiaen, Nguyen Thien Dao, equates his teacher's expansive attitude with a typically Eastern one, where the contemplation of a moment is tranquil and all-encompassing<sup>117</sup>. Stravinsky's attitude, on the other hand, arises from the West, where refinement and exclusion have been favoured.<sup>117</sup>

It is certainly possible to relate to, and enjoy, Messiaen's compositions without an

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<sup>115</sup>Messiaen quoted in Nichols, p88.

<sup>116</sup>C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, London: Oxford University Press, 1936, reprinted 1946, p25.

<sup>117</sup>Nichols, p87.

<sup>118</sup>Collaer, p277.

<sup>119</sup>Quoted in Nichols, p88.

understanding of "the total aesthetic"<sup>120</sup>. However, with that knowledge, one's understanding and pleasure is considerably enhanced. The next few chapters are devoted to unravelling these mysteries.

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<sup>120</sup>Bell, p24.

## CHAPTER 5      MELODY

It may well be that Messiaen is peculiarly well-suited to writing vocal music. Firstly, being something of a singer, he prides himself on writing skilfully for the voice. Secondly, he cherishes the following sentiments regarding melody:

"Supremacy to melody! The noblest element of music, may melody be the principal aim of our investigations. Let us always work melodically; rhythm remains pliant and gives precedence to melodic development..".<sup>121</sup>

"The melody is the point of departure. May it remain sovereign! And whatever may be the complexities of our rhythms and our harmonies, they shall not draw it [melody] along in their wake, but, on the contrary, shall obey it as faithful servants".<sup>122</sup>

Important ideals for a composer of songs and an explanation, suggests Johnson, why most of the forms up to the *Turangalîla Symphony* (1948) arise from melodic, rather than harmonic considerations.<sup>123</sup>

"Messiaen is a crucible of material in fusion" states Stockhausen in *Hommage à Messiaen*<sup>124</sup>. This statement can be applied significantly to Messiaen's melodic writing. The composer himself draws attention to the importance in his music of plainchant, birdsong, Indian ragas and certain favourite melodic fragments written originally by other composers.

### 5.1 Plainsong

In plainsong, Messiaen found a well-spring of inspiration for the "rare and expressive"

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<sup>121</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p31.

<sup>122</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p13.

<sup>123</sup>Johnson, p22.

<sup>124</sup>K. Stockhausen, *Melos*, 1958, p392, quoted by Tremblay, in *DTC*, p475.

melodies he sought<sup>125</sup>. Religious associations aside, plainsong has three important characteristics which made it appealing and useful to him: tonal/modal ambiguity, a monodic line and free-flowing rhythm. The three basic melodic styles of plainchant are: syllabic (in which each syllable has its own note), neumatic (where there is more frequent use of two or four notes per syllable) and melismatic (which may have up to 10 or 20 notes per syllable). Messiaen uses the original forms of plainchant in a variety of ways.

### 5.1.1 Alleluia

In the first two song cycles, notes of the *alleluia* and other chants appear, freed from their original modes and times and recalled instead in Messiaen's modes and time patterns. In *Résurrection*, the final song of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, the *alleluia* resembles authentic plainsong as it occurs in an unaccompanied voice.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, marked 'Vif'. It contains the lyrics 'Al . le . lu . lu ,'. Below the vocal line is a piano accompaniment consisting of three staves: a treble clef staff, a middle clef staff, and a bass clef staff. The piano part features various chords and melodic lines, with dynamic markings such as 'ff' and 'f'. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4.

*Résurrection, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b22*

<sup>125</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p33.

In *Poèmes pour Mi*, the gently undulating plainsong-like *alleluias* are accompanied. The following excerpt, from *Action de grâces*, is part of a seven-fold *alleluia*.<sup>126</sup>



*Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi, b49*

In *Antienne du silence*, the second song of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, the *alleluia* is embedded in a denser texture. One voice repeats the *alleluia* like a raga, another vocal line is superposed and then both are surrounded with quasi-atonal counterpoint.

*Antienne du silence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b3*

Sometimes in a single song, a quotation from an original plainchant is used, as well as an 'emulation' of Messiaen's own creating. The opening section of the first song of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* refers specifically to the *alleluia* of the Easter Vigil, whilst

<sup>126</sup>This is significant for Messiaen, who uses number symbolism in his music. Seven is the number of perfection.

the rest of the song retains the melodic style of plainchant.<sup>127</sup>

In other places, the *alleluiatic* vocalise (which Messiaen considers to be the most important part of the *alleluia*),<sup>128</sup> is kept and blended with psalmody.

### 5.1.2 Psalmody

This blending of vocalise and psalmody (words uttered at a very swift pace), enabled Messiaen to work out his own system of declamation to suit the texts. In *Action de grâces* [*Poèmes pour Mi*], and again in *Arc-en-ciel d'innocence* [*Chants de Terre et de Ciel*], the recitative-like words are set as psalmody in the manner of a syllabic chant i.e. on a repeated note, and important words, or those rich in meaning, are adorned with long, or occasionally very long, vocalises.

*Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi, b4*

In liturgical settings, the repeated notes are often found at the beginning of the music

<sup>127</sup>Johnson, p60.

<sup>128</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p44. 'Alleluiatic vocalise' is the term used by Messiaen.

and Messiaen usually follows this pattern. Sometimes he sets a reciting tone which rises in pitch throughout the song. The example below is taken from the first section of *Action de grâces*.

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

sé . e, Et un vi . sa . ge qui sourit et pleure a.vec le mien, Et deux pieds derrière mes

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

Très modéré Modéré

Et vous vous é . tes en.co.re don.né vous - mê . me,

Très modéré Modéré

Dans l'o . bé . is . sance et dans le sang de vo.tre Croix,

*Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi, b4, 8, 20, 36, 38*

This particular application of plainsong-derived techniques is found only in the early two song cycles. By *Harawi*, psalmody has taken on a new form.

### 5.1.3 Incantation<sup>129</sup>

In *Harawi*, the reciting tone becomes modified to an 'incantation' tone. The repeated pitch is no longer only used as a means of presenting words clearly and as closely as possible to the spoken word. Instead unintelligible or onomatopoeic sounds are repeated, to induce a ritualistic or primitive mood. In *Doundou tchil*, the voice chants

<sup>129</sup>A formula of words chanted to produce a magical effect.

a word representing the sound of the ankle bells worn by traditional Peruvian dancers. This sound then becomes an accompaniment to the more mobile melody in the piano part.

The musical score for "Doundou tchil" consists of two staves. The upper staff is a single treble clef line with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. It contains three measures of music, each starting with the instruction *cresc.* and the lyrics "Doundou tchil." below the notes. The lower staff is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 2/4 time signature. It contains three measures of music, each starting with the instruction *cresc.* and the dynamic marking *sf b* at the beginning of the first measure. The piano part features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with many beamed notes.

*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b5*

*Répétition planétaire* is an interesting song in terms of incantatory effects. The words *mapa nama lila* and *pampahika* persist with the same 'reciting' pitches, but are tied to some very complex rhythms. This prognosticates Messiaen's increasing focus on rhythm. As in *Doundou tchil*, the melodic interest is in the piano part.

The musical score for "Répétition planétaire" consists of two systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The first system has a vocal line in a single treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The lyrics are "Tchil Tchil Tchil pam - pahl - ka, — tchil Tchil Tchil". The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 2/4 time signature. It features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with many beamed notes. The dynamic marking *f legato (sans pédale)* is written above the piano part, and *mf staccato* is written below it. The second system has a vocal line with the lyrics "pam - pahl - ka - ma, dou - dou Tchil — Tchil —". The piano accompaniment continues with the same complex, rhythmic accompaniment.

*Répétition planétaire, Harawi, b69*

In *Montagnes*, as in the earlier song cycles and indeed as in many liturgical settings, the chanting voice is preceded by a chord, but here, the chant is 'enlarged' to include another note, or even a melodic pattern of four notes. The incantatory intent remains clear because of the ceaseless nature of the repetition. The cool, monastery-like tones of the chants in *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, are replaced by passionate, almost menacing ones here.

Musical score for *Montagnes, Harawi, b32*. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "ser-rés los sa-plus se-hâ- tent vers le noir." The piano accompaniment features a prominent bass line with repeated notes and chords, marked with "Red." and "(pour 2)".

*Montagnes, Harawi, b32*

Musical score for *Montagnes, Harawi, b35*. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "La pierre a - ge-nouil-lée por-te son mai-tre en noir." The piano accompaniment features a prominent bass line with repeated notes and chords, marked with "Red." and "mf".

*Montagnes, Harawi, b35*

#### 5.1.4 Melismas

The use of melismas on important words apart from reciting tones, is probably also gleaned from plainchant. This recurring feature is found in the long embellishments of phrases in *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*.

Presque lent, Pressez, Modéré

Et dans un Pain plus doux que la frai- cheur des é - toi..

*Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi, b40*

Although most of the writing in *Harawi* is syllabic, melismas can be seen on a few occasions. The melisma on *monde*, shown below, is used to gradually extend the phrase. The unpredictable sequence of intervals: an irregular arrangement of tones, semitones, and minor thirds, makes the phrase difficult to execute, but refreshingly spontaneous to the ear.

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

Nos re - gards d'un bout à l'au - tre

Yus par la mort. In - ven - tons l'a - mour du

mon

de Pour nous cher - cher,

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

### 5.1.5 Contour

The most common plainchant phrase shape is that which takes the form of an arch: beginning low, rising to a higher pitch, where it may remain for some time, then descending at the end<sup>130</sup>. Many phrases in Messiaen's music follow this contour. Whilst appearing jagged at first glance, the following illustration from *Amour oiseau d'étoile*, nevertheless retains that profile.



*Amour oiseau d'étoile, Harawi, b19*

### 5.2 Birdsong

Birdsong could be considered an expression of Nature's emotion in its purest form. If this seems fanciful, Messiaen obviously thinks differently<sup>131</sup>! For the composer, the attraction of birdsong may be two-fold. Drew suggests that this 'style oiseau' gives him the licence to avoid harmonic implications and satisfies his desire for the ornamental.<sup>132</sup>

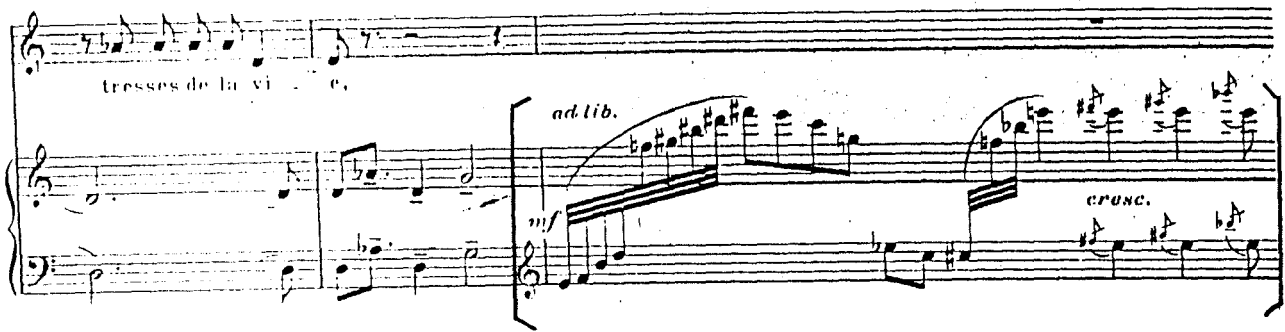
Unassisted by modern technology, Messiaen has spent time transcribing the calls of various birds. Despite the high-pitched, agile and micro-tonal nature of birdsong, Hold's study reveals that the composer reproduced faithfully the following salient features: shape, patterns of short ostinato phrases and superimposition of contrasted strata of

<sup>130</sup>Bell, p8-9.

<sup>131</sup>Messiaen invites us to consider that the 'free' song of birds (mating and property calls aside), is provoked by the dawning and fading of the light. Similarly, the song thrush appears to perform more extravagantly when the sunset is particularly striking. Messiaen, quoted in Samuel, *Conversations*, p52.

<sup>132</sup>Drew, *The Score I*, p44.

sound<sup>133</sup>. Snatches of bird-like melodies occur in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*:



*Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b84*

Of the song cycles, it is only in *Harawi* that extended passages are devoted to this style and acknowledged as birdsong. In subsequent music he even notes down in the score, the type of bird represented. His use of birdsong culminated in the *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1956-58), in which the song of any one bird is set within an appropriate context of its ornithological neighbours, geographical location and time of day.

Obviously birdsong does not usually occur in a vocal line, because of the unsuitability of the instrument. The piano on the other hand, does have the facility for the requisite extremes of pitch and speed. It seems likely that his fascination with birdsong was instrumental in Messiaen's expansion of the upper working range of the piano, as seen in this example:

*Bonjour toi, colombe verte, Harawi, b7*

<sup>133</sup>T. Hold, 'Messiaen's birds'. *Music and Filters*, 52, April 1971, p113-122; quoted in Bell, p21.

### 5.3 Indian Influences

Messiaen admits to an influence from Indian jatis and ragas<sup>134</sup> in his melodies<sup>135</sup>. He describes these as having "exquisite, unexpected melodic contours"<sup>135</sup> and records that they are characterised by large leaps and repeated notes i.e. not totally dissimilar from later Western plainchant. Compare the repeated notes and large leaps found in these bars of *La ville qui dormait, toi*, to the Hindu raga above it.



Hindu raga from *Technique*, no.111

*Extrêmement lent, en rêve*  
*ppp*

La ville qui dormait, toi. Ma  
nouer ton regard, moi.

*ppp* *pppp*

*La ville qui dormait, toi, Harawi*, b1-3, b12-14

### 5.4 Other Western Composers

Messiaen has an affection for certain melodic fragments used by other composers, specifically: the opening of Mussourgsky's *Boris*, a phrase from Grieg's *Solveig's song*, and a fragment from Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau*<sup>136</sup>. It is possible to find derivations

<sup>134</sup>Melodic formulae. The jatis evolved later into more complex ragas. Johnson, p21.

<sup>135</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p33.

<sup>136</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p31-32.

from these in Messiaen's work, but by no stretch of the imagination can they be referred to as quotations. The motives always occur in Messiaen's own modality and within his own time structures and therefore seem more like 'borrowed' or 'inspired' shapes than citations. Messiaen says:

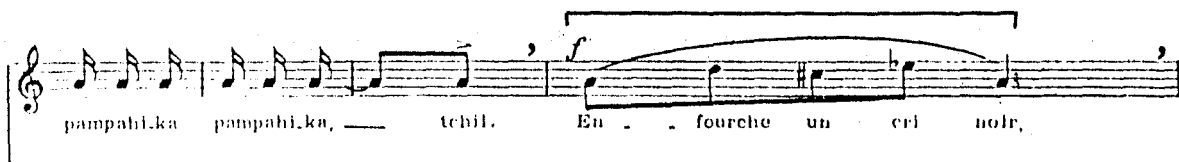
"...we shall see some shadows of former times float by, we shall salute some great names of modern times; but all these borrowings, ... will be passed through the deforming prism of our language, will receive from our style a different blood, an unexpected melodic and rhythmic colour in which fantasy and research will be united to destroy the least resemblance to the model."<sup>137</sup>

The Moussorgsky fragment...



*Boris Godounow*, 1st scene, Moussorgsky

...can be identified, for example, in *Répétition planétaire*,



*Répétition planétaire*, Harawi, b84

The more extended Grieg fragment is harder to isolate, but the Debussy shape abounds:



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

<sup>137</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p39.



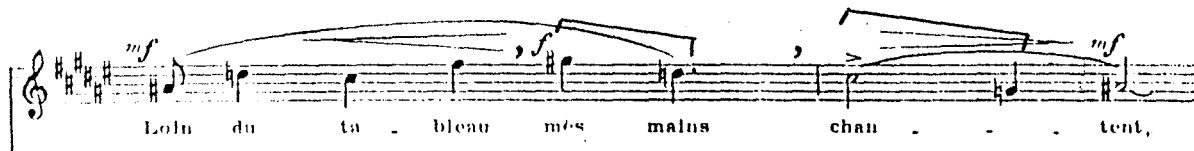
*L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b26*

## 5.5 Preferred intervals

It becomes increasingly apparent as one proceeds with a study of his musical language, that Messiaen applies certain principles within different contexts: for example, he has favourite intervals which recur melodically *and* harmonically.

### 5.5.1 Tritones

Evidence of Messiaen's high regard for the tritone, is its melodic occurrence in every song of the 28 studied. His acoustical justification for using it, is his claim that it can be heard in the overtone series by a very fine ear<sup>138</sup>. The following example from *Harawi* is striking and not atypical:



*Amour oiseau d'étoile, Harawi, b19*

He renounces the long-standing Medieval role of the tritone as the 'diabolis in musica' and uses it instead to depict, as below, the 'subtlety of radiant bodies ... pure as the

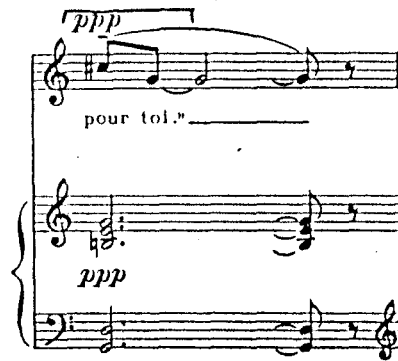
<sup>138</sup>Apel, p10. The tritone is the tenth overtone of the fundamental.

angels of God in the heavens'.<sup>139</sup>



*Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b48*

Tritone cadencing, though not especially common in *Harawi*, is typical of much of Messiaen's music.



*L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b7*

### 5.5.2 Sixths

Another of Messiaen's favoured intervals is the major sixth and this has, as its harmonic counterpart, the added sixth chord. Whilst apparently later preferred by him in its descending version, there are a significant number of ascending sixths in *Harawi*<sup>140</sup>. The following examples show the initial and final intervals of the cycle. The second example gives three of the four progressively quieter repetitions of the ascending sixth, as the cycle draws to a close.

<sup>139</sup>Austin, p391.

<sup>140</sup>Johnson, p20.

Extrêmement lent, en rêve  
*ppp*

La ville qui dormait, toi, Ma

This musical snippet is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It features a melodic line with a descending sixth interval. The tempo is 'Extrêmement lent, en rêve' and the dynamic is 'ppp'. The lyrics are 'La ville qui dormait, toi, Ma'.

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

Très lent

tout bas, Très loin,

This musical snippet is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It features a melodic line with a descending sixth interval. The tempo is 'Très lent' and the dynamic is 'mf'. The lyrics are 'tout bas, Très loin,'.

Extrêmement lent, en rêve  
*ppp*

Très lent  
*pp* (à bouche fermée)

La ville qui dormait...

This musical snippet is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It features a melodic line with a descending sixth interval. The tempo is 'Extrêmement lent, en rêve' and the dynamic is 'ppp'. The lyrics are 'La ville qui dormait...'.

*Dans le noir, Harawi, b78*

Descending sixths do nevertheless occur:

Vers les étoiles,

This musical snippet is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps. It features a melodic line with a descending sixth interval. The lyrics are 'Vers les étoiles,'.

*Amour oiseau d'étoile, Harawi, b5*

### 5.5.3 Thirds

The prominence of thirds (both major and minor) in *Harawi* may be a concession to the style of Peruvian folk music<sup>141</sup>. Note the repetitive use of the minor third in *Montagnes*.

*mf*

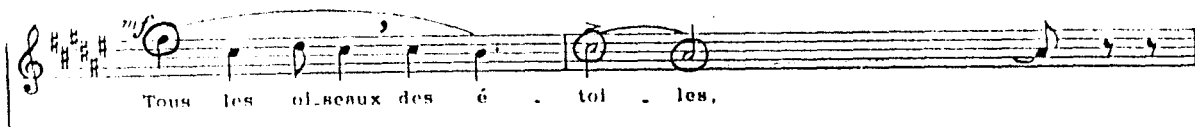
La pierre a genouillée porte ses mal-tres noirs.

This musical snippet is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp. It features a melodic line with a repetitive use of the minor third interval. The dynamic is 'mf'. The lyrics are 'La pierre a genouillée porte ses mal-tres noirs.'.

*Montagnes, Harawi, b33*

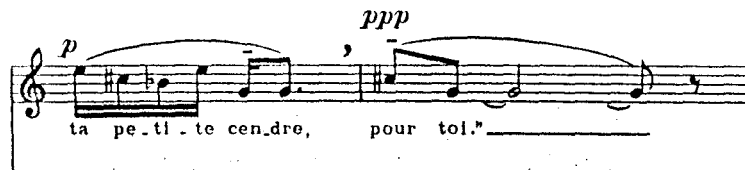
<sup>141</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p126.

This melodic use of thirds has the effect of imparting a strongly tonal sound to some of the melodies. Despite the lack of diatonicism, in *Bonjour toi, colombe verte* every phrase except one has the shape E-flat - B-flat - G, thus giving an unmistakable E-flat major sound to the melody. *Amour oiseau d'étoile* has the notes of the major triad: F-sharp, A-sharp, C-sharp, strategically placed, especially as points of repose.



*Amour oiseau d'étoile, Harawi, b17*

Some melodies, by their initial adjacent minor third leaps, outline or imply diminished, or diminished seventh chords :

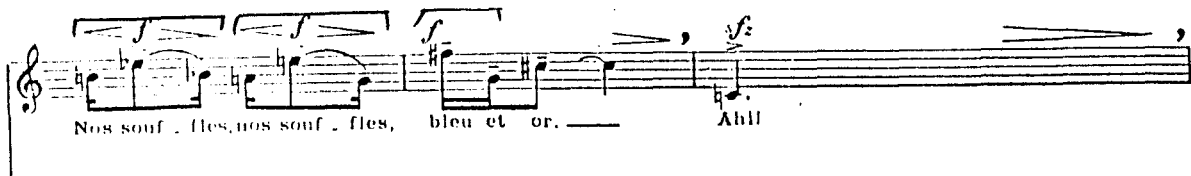


*L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b22*

## 5.6 Augmentation of Intervals

By progressively augmenting the size of an interval, Messiaen professes to give a theme "crushing power"<sup>142</sup>. No doubt this refers to the emotional impact on the listener, of the widening leaps in the melodic line. The examples in *Harawi* would add credence to this claim. The first shows expansion of consecutive intervals in the phrase:

<sup>142</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p36.



*L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b10-12*

In the next example, the entire phrase is initially transposed up by a tritone, then the "leaping interval" is dramatically expanded from a tritone to a major sixth, taking the soprano up to a Fortissimo B. Such augmenting intervals are often supported by a corresponding growth in volume and alteration in tempo.

*Adieu, Harawi, b67*

### 5.7 Economy of means

Messiaen's fondness for folk music drew him to that classic study of Peruvian Inca folk-music, *La Musique des Incas*<sup>143</sup>. This was enough to convince him that Peruvian music contains "...the most beautiful folk melodies in the world"<sup>144</sup>. In spite of this admiration, he was not tempted to 'arrange' folk melodies. Instead he treated folk music as he had other sources of inspiration i.e. by absorbing various aspects of the

<sup>143</sup>R. and M. d'Harcourt, *La musique des Incas*, Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1925.

<sup>144</sup>Messiaen, record sleeve notes, *Turangalîla Symphony*, RCA Stereo SB 6761-2.

style<sup>145</sup>.

As has already been mentioned, Messiaen's music shares with folk, a penchant for melodies moving in melodic leaps of a third. Another feature common to both, is repeating phrases. Songs built up in this way, show a great economy of means. Although some melodies are repeated without change, the majority undergo some modification.

### 5.7.1 Varied afterphrase

In the next example, the initial part of the first phrase is repeated exactly in the second, with only the last four notes altered.

The musical score consists of three staves of music in G-flat major (one flat) and 4/4 time. The first staff, marked '1.', contains the first phrase: 'Ka - tchi - ka - tchi les a - to - mes, fai - tes - les sau - ter,'. The second staff, marked '2.', contains the second phrase: 'Ka - tchi - ka - tchi les a - to - mes, fai - tes - les dan - ser.'. The first four notes of the first phrase are repeated in the second phrase, but the final four notes are altered. Brackets and arrows indicate these correspondences.

*Katchikatchi les étoiles, Harawi, b9*

### 5.7.2 Omission of afterphrase

The cyclic theme from *Adieu* appears truncated in *Dans le noir*.

<sup>145</sup>One exception to this rule is the cyclic theme of *Harawi*, quoted in section 6.1, which can be seen to be closely related to the Peruvian folk tune, *Delirio*.

*Très lent, solennel et très soutenu*

A . dieu . toi, co - lom - be ver - te;

*Un peu vif*

Ange at - tris - té.

Detailed description: This block contains two staves of musical notation. The first staff is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time, marked 'Très lent, solennel et très soutenu'. It features a melodic line with a long slur over the first four measures, corresponding to the lyrics 'A . dieu . toi, co - lom - be ver - te;'. The second staff continues the melody, marked 'Un peu vif', with a key signature change to D minor (two flats) and a new melodic line for the lyrics 'Ange at - tris - té.'.

*Adieu, Harawi, b1*

*Très lent, solennel*

Dans le noir, co - lom - be ver -

*Bien modéré*

te.

Detailed description: This block contains two staves of musical notation. The first staff is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time, marked 'Très lent, solennel'. It features a melodic line with a long slur over the first four measures, corresponding to the lyrics 'Dans le noir, co - lom - be ver -'. The second staff continues the melody, marked 'Bien modéré', with a key signature change to D minor (two flats) and a new melodic line for the lyrics 'te.'.

*Dans le noir, Harawi, b1*

### 5.7.3 Embellished repetition

While the essential shape of the melody remains constant from first to second 'verse' in *L'amour de Piroutcha*, extra notes are added the second time to create the impression of a florid, Baroque-like repeat.

1.

Lent, tendre et berceur  
LA JEUNE FILLE

"Toungou, ahi, toungou, — toungou, ber . ce, toi, — ma cendre des lu . miè . res, —  
ber . ce ta pe . tite en tes bras verts. — Pi . roucha, — ta pe . ti . te cendre

2.

Lent, tendre et berceur  
LA JEUNE FILLE

"Toungou, — a . hi, — toungou, — toungou, — ber . ce, toi, —  
ma cendre des lu . miè . res, — berce ta pe . tite en tes bras verts. Pi . roucha, —

*L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b1-4, 19-23*

## 5.7.4 Transposition

### 5.7.4.1 Transposition of the whole phrase

The retention of the jagged contour, the text and the time values, assist the listener to associate the next two phrases even though neither the interval, nor direction, of transposition is constant. This is typical of the 'inconsistency' in which Messiaen delights.

Nos souf . fles, nos souf . fles, bleu et or. — Ah!!

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

*L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b10, 26*

### 5.7.4.2 Transposition of part of the phrase

The following phrase is constructed by repeating sequences:

pampahi.ku pampahi.ku, — tchll. En . . fourche un cri noir,  
E . . cho noir du temps, Cri d'a . vant la terre à

*Répétition planétaire, Harawi, b84*

### 5.7.5 Extended afterphrase

This phrase in *Le collier* is gradually extended by the decoration and repetition of the final motive.

Pe . til soutien vivant de mes o . reil.les las . . ses, Collier de re.nouveau,  
de sou.rire et de grâ.. . . ce, Col . lier d'O . ri .

*Le collier, Poèmes pour Mi, b14*

In another example, this time from *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*, the final fragment of the phrase is repeated four times musically unchanged. Only the verb is altered each time as the lovers ponder "to look for us, to weep for us, to dream for us, to find us". This has the effect of dissipating the excitement generated by heightening pitch and lengthy melismas in the preceding section.



*L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi, b69*

In *Répétition planétaire* the motive is broken down with each repetition in a process Messiaen describes as "development through elimination"<sup>146</sup>. By taking away successively a part of itself, the motive is reduced to a schematic state, or, in Messiaen's words, "shrunken by crisis".<sup>146</sup>

rou - ge, Tour - bil - lon, Pla - nè - te mange en tour - nant

Tour - bil - lon, Pla - nè - te man - ge, Pla - nè - te mange

en tour - nant. Mange en tour - nant, Mange en tour - nant,

tour - nant. Tour - bil - lon, E - toi - le rou - ge,

*Répétition planétaire, Harawi, b96-99, 141, 143-145*

### 5.7.6 'Refrain' line

In *Danse du bébé-Pilule*, Messiaen makes use of a refrain technique. Between phrases, an expression of endearment to the little boy is repeated.

<sup>146</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p35.

**Vif et joyeux**

Pi - lu - le, viens, dan - sons. — Ma - lon - lan - lai - ne, ma. Fi - cel - les du so - leil. Ma - lon - lan - lai - ne, ma. C'est l'al - pha - bet du ri - re

*Dances du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b1*

In *L'Épouse* [*Poèmes pour Mi*] the entire first phrase alternates with other material throughout the song. In *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*, the following bar recurs at the end of each 'verse'.

De l'eau, du temps, du ciel, l'es - ca - lier du ciel.

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

### 5.7.7 Repetition of the rhythmic motif only

On occasions, only the rhythmic values are retained from one phrase to another. In the following excerpt from *La ville qui dormait, toi*, pitch, motion, text and dynamic are all altered, yet the relationship remains aurally discernible.

**Extrêmement lent, en rêve**

La ville qui dor - mait, toi. — ple in mi - nuit le banc, toi. — La vio - let - te dou - ble

*La ville qui dormait, toi, Harawi, b1-3, 7-9*

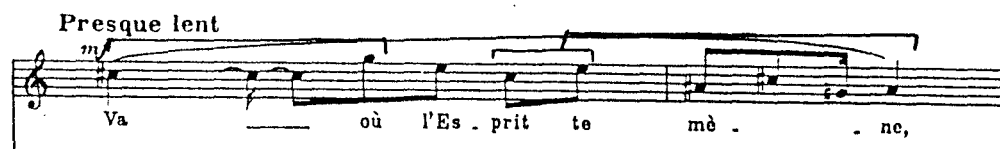
Overall, Messiaen's methodology shows a Bach-ian desire to get the maximum mileage from the minimum amount of material. When represented schematically, it is apparent that some of the songs are constructed from startlingly little material. The ingenious means used to maintain the musical interest, is a tribute to Messiaen's imagination. The 60 bars of *Montagnes* is based vocally, on the following meagre material:



chords), the Debussy 'shape', the syllabic treatment of text, the augmenting values<sup>147</sup>, the added values<sup>148</sup> and the rhythmic accents of long amongst short, rather than strong amongst weak<sup>149</sup>.



*Paysage, Poèmes pour Mi, b1*



*L'Épouse, Poèmes pour Mi, b1*



*Bail avec Mi, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b20*



*L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi, b9*

These melodic ideas are further defined by "passing through the deforming prism"<sup>150</sup> of his own modes of limited transposition. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>147</sup>The rhythmic values of the notes increase through the phrase, from, in the first example, quaver to minim; and in the third, from quaver to minim-tied-to-crochet. See also section 10.4.

<sup>148</sup>Notes lengthened by the value of a dot or a tie. See also section 10.3.

<sup>149</sup>See section 10.1.2, The individual duration.

<sup>150</sup>Smalley, p128.

## CHAPTER 6 THE MODES OF LIMITED TRANSPOSITION

Other modal systems (monastic, Oriental, classical Greek) originated in cultures in which there existed a close connection between religion and music. Significantly, the religious intention of Messiaen's music is undeviating. It is possible that his use of modality was an attempt to disassociate himself from the 'corrupt' tonality of Neo-classicism and to be transported instead to an unspoiled "innocent universe".<sup>151</sup>

Messiaen's modes are self-invented. Unlike the ancient 'monastic' modes, his have neither finalis nor dominant. They are simply a set, or repertoire, of notes, conceived within the framework of the tempered scale<sup>152</sup>, from which a composition can be composed. In the sense of possessing no particular internal relationships one with another, they resemble the tone row. Despite a brief flirtation with serialism however, that method was not Messiaen's usual *modus operandi*. The practical value of Messiaen's system, according to musical theoretician Dallin, is the comprehensibility and homogeneity it imparts to the music - aspects often lacking in music not based on selective scales.<sup>153</sup>

Messiaen's system of modes is based on logical harmonic thought and is mathematically inexpendable. Each mode is formulated by systematically dividing the octave into two, three or four equal intervals, and then by sub-dividing each interval into the same number of tones and semitones. Mode two, for example (his most frequently used),<sup>154</sup> divides the octave into four intervals of a minor third each, with each division consisting of a semitone and then a tone.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Griffiths, *Modern Music*, p130.

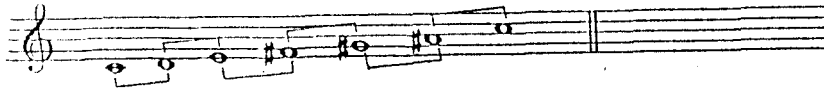
<sup>152</sup>In which enharmonic equivalentents represent the same pitch.

<sup>153</sup>Dallin, p44.

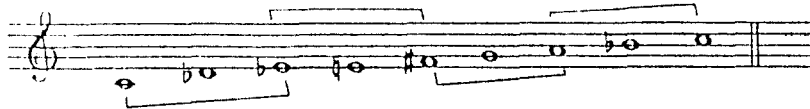
<sup>154</sup>Johnson, p16.

<sup>155</sup>Mode two can also be recognised as the octatonic scale, made up of notes of successive diminished tetrads.

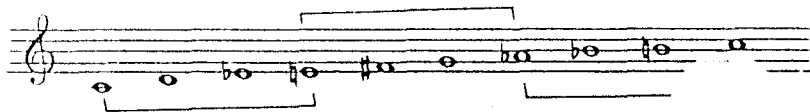
Mode 1



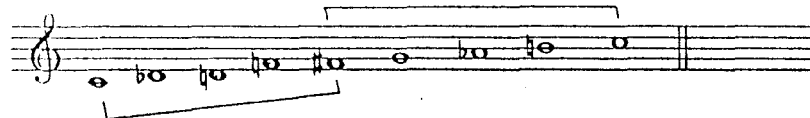
Mode 2, first transposition



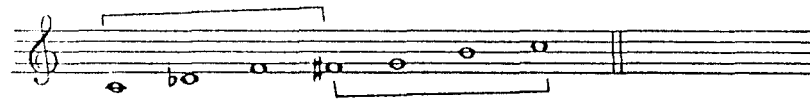
Mode 3, first transposition



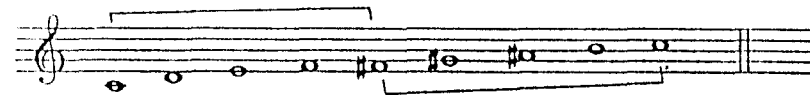
Mode 4, first transposition



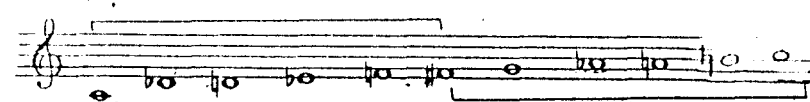
Mode 5, first transposition



Mode 6, first transposition



Mode 7, first transposition



### All the modes of limited transposition

The equal division of mode two into two tritones is noteworthy because reference has already been made to Messiaen's fondness for the interval. This mode does not contain an ascending perfect fourth or conversely, a descending fifth (except for D flat - F sharp). The absence of this 'pillar' of tonality provides precisely the harmonic fluidity which Messiaen, and Debussy before him, sought. Although Messiaen's music often shows a persistent emphasis on the note a diminished fifth away from the tonic, by virtue of its decorative rather than dominant function, this cannot really be considered

a substitute dominant.<sup>156</sup>

As the name suggests, these modes can only be transposed a limited number of times before duplicate pitch content is produced. Mode one is the whole tone scale and thus transposable only twice. Generally Messiaen avoided this mode, as he felt it had been exhaustively used by Debussy in *Pelléas et Mélisande*<sup>157</sup>. In Messiaen's music, it is most often found concealed in some superimposition or mixture with another mode.<sup>157</sup>

The three possible transpositions of mode two are given below. The fourth transposition can be seen to be identical to the first.

Mode 2. 1<sup>re</sup> transposition

Mode 2. 2<sup>de</sup> transposition

Mode 2. 3<sup>de</sup> transposition

Mode 2. 4<sup>e</sup> transposition

Mode 2. 1<sup>re</sup> transposition

Mode three is transposable four times, and modes four to seven, six times each. The increasing number of possible transpositions explains Messiaen's preference for mode two: a slightly more restricted field. His fascination with the 'charm of impossibilities', a deliberately limited range, is surprisingly reminiscent of the strict boundaries within

<sup>156</sup>Drew, *The Score I*, p36.

<sup>157</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p59.

which Stravinsky preferred to work. Francis Routh states:

"Paradoxically his [Stravinsky's] aesthetic rests on the assumption, which is a Christian principle, that in the acceptance of constraints, the human creative spirit becomes free".<sup>158</sup>

### 6.1 Melodic use

Smalley, as mentioned at the end of the preceding chapter, likens the modes of limited transposition to prisms which slightly, but significantly change the melodic fragments passing through them<sup>159</sup>. This is best explained by illustration. The Peruvian folk song *Delirio*, printed here, was used by Messiaen as the basis of a cyclic theme in *Harawi*.

#### 'Delirio' (Peruvian song)

Passionné et douloureux ♩ = 66

Fin

Dal S. ⌘

*Delirio*<sup>160</sup>

By raising the second and sometimes the sixth degree of the 'scale' beginning on E-flat, Messiaen lifted the tune from its original fundamentally pentatonic modality and transferred it into a slightly 'defective' version of mode two.

<sup>158</sup>F.Routh, *Stravinsky*, London: Dent, 1975, p149.

<sup>159</sup>Smalley, p129.

<sup>160</sup>d'Harcourt and d'Harcourt, *La Musique des Incas*, p332-333, quoted by Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p126.

## Harawi 2 'Bonjour toi, colombe verte'

*Bonjour toi, colombe verte, Harawi*

Messiaen does not only use the modes melodically, but also harmonically. Deri compares his two-dimensional concept of space, to the two-dimensional system favoured by Schoenberg.<sup>161</sup>

## 6.2 Harmonic Use

The modes of limited transposition enabled Messiaen to create a "sweet and succulent" harmony: a sound which stood in almost direct contrast to the "soured" sounds of Stravinsky's neo-classicism, or the "dark confusions" of Schoenberg's serial atonality<sup>162</sup>. Griffiths remarks on the particular appropriateness of Messiaen's sound for conveying his messages of marital fondness and of the love and mystery of God.<sup>162</sup>

The modes of limited transposition can be used to produce non-functional tonal harmony because they do not imply any particular tonality themselves. They are:

"..in the atmosphere of several tonalities at once, without polytonality, the composer being free to give predominance to one of the tonalities or to leave the tonal impression unsettled"<sup>163</sup>.

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<sup>161</sup>Deri, p425.

<sup>162</sup>Griffiths, *Modern music*, p131.

<sup>163</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p64.

Mode two in its first transposition, for example, can suggest the keys of C, E-flat, F-sharp, or A<sup>163</sup>. By returning frequently to the tonic of a particular key, or by using the dominant seventh, the mode becomes mixed with the major tonality. In *Bonjour toi, colombe verte* (the modified Peruvian - mode two - folk tune mentioned above), Messiaen chose to highlight harmonically, its affinity with E-flat major. He achieved this by strategically placing E-flat major triads (perfect triads) throughout the song. The following excerpt illustrates:

*Bonjour toi, colombe verte, Harawi, b6*

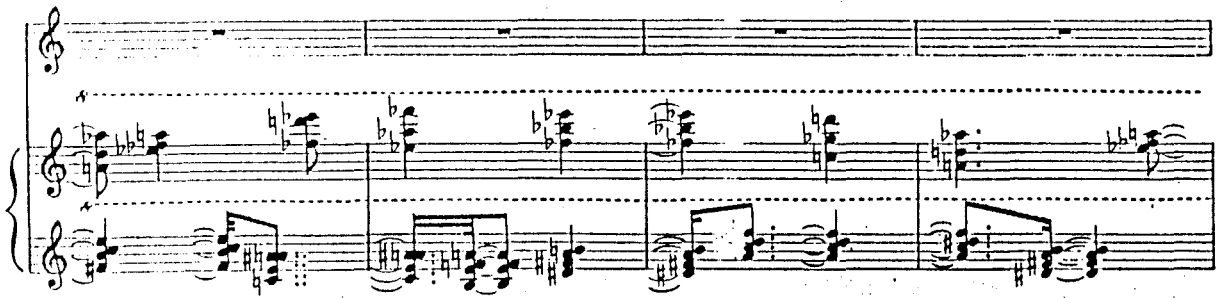
Another way of suggesting a mixture of mode and major tonality is the sustained bass pedal. *Amour oiseau d'étoile* [Harawi] has low sustained F-sharps which anchor the song in F-sharp major.

*Amour oiseau d'étoile, Harawi, b14*

Because the mode can slip easily from the emphasis of one tonality to another, Drew describes it as functioning like a long rope attached to a ring: the rope allows the harmony to rove over a wide range, whilst all the time the ring, in the form of the

tonic, imposes a restraint.<sup>164</sup>

Messiaen does not always limit himself to a single mode, or even one transposition, in any one composition. The modes can alternate, modulate to other modes, combine to produce polymodality, or even modulate to, or borrow from themselves in other transpositions. In the next example, mode six (upper staff) is superposed on mode seven (lower staff):



*Dans le noir, Harawi, b20*

### 6.3 Mode-key-idea Associations

Messiaen associates certain modes and keys, with certain expressive ideas. Mode two combined with the key of F-sharp major, for example, is used to convey the mystical experience of superhuman love. In slow, ecstatic movements such as *Amour oiseau d'étoile* [*Harawi*] and *Jardin du sommeil d'amour* [*Turangalîla Symphony*], this alliance represents the fulfilment of ideal love, as symbolized by Tristan and Isolde.

The key of G is sometimes used when the subject of the music is the desire for the fulfilment of love: human in the case of *L'amour de Piroutcha* and *La ville qui dormait, toi* [*Harawi*], and Divine in *Amen des anges* [*Visions de l'Amen*].

The key of F can be connected with angels or heavenly bodies. *Antienne du Silence* [*Chants de Terre et de Ciel*], in F, is dedicated to the Feast day of the guardian angels

<sup>164</sup>Drew, *The Score I*, p35.

and links up with *Les Anges* (The Angels) [*La Nativité du Seigneur*]. Slow movements in E major have been associated with praise of the Blessed Trinity.

The modes are also linked with specific colours. Messiaen possesses the unusual gift of synaesthesia, the ability to perceive sound as colour<sup>165</sup>. He describes the phenomenon experienced when reading a score or hearing a piece of music, as a simultaneous perception with the sounds, of the same mix, blend and turn of colours in his mind's eye<sup>166</sup>. According to Johnson, Messiaen speaks with absolute conviction of this as seen, not imagined: an inward reality.<sup>167</sup>

The translation of these colour impressions into sound, requires complex chords and sonorities. His method of composing them has been compared to that of a painter mixing colours on a palette, or an organist mixing sounds with stops<sup>168</sup>. The subtlety of his own modal system, being in the ambit of several tonalities at once, seems to provide the harmonic and melodic background suitable for the creation of these colours. The modes conjure up for him the following shades:

Mode one	-	reddish-violet
Mode two	-	certain shades of violet, blue and purple
Mode three	-	orange in a halo of milky-white, speckled with a little red, green and gold like an opal
Mode four	-	dark purple
Mode five	-	grey-pink-green, dotted with gold <sup>169</sup>

The absence of pure shades from the above list is noticeable. Messiaen prefers complex

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<sup>165</sup>*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol.2, p2222, defines it as "Production, from a sense-impression of one kind, of an associated mental image of a sense-impression of another kind".

<sup>166</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p14.

<sup>167</sup>Johnson, p19.

<sup>168</sup>Boucourechliev, *NG*, vol.12, p206.

<sup>169</sup>Bell, p30.

colours, like violet, to primary ones, like yellow. Violet, his favourite complex,<sup>170</sup> is capable of many nuances, ranging from purple (produced by the addition of warm reds), to hyacinth blue (produced by the addition of cold blues). Such a variety of hues gives him ample scope to express a wide range of musical emotions. His attraction for violet, however, probably goes deeper than mere colour preference. His affection for plainchant has already been mentioned. This, in turn, has connections with the Middle Ages and with the church. In the symbolism of the Middle Ages, violet represents the Love of Truth. In the symbolism of stained glass windows, violet stands for the Truth of Love<sup>171</sup>. This play on words corresponds to the nuances of the colour violet. In *La ville qui dort, toi [Harawi]*, all these allusions are concealed in the musical address to the Beloved: the 'double violet' (referring to the 'truth of love') in his favourite mode two (the violet complex). This interweaving of personal symbolism, ideas and interests on more than one level at once, is especially characteristic of Messiaen's music.

Violet and other colours are used prominently in the text of *Harawi*. They are used in most instances to describe natural features, such as trees and water. This is appropriate because Messiaen explains that his love for colour is acquired from Nature<sup>172</sup>.

Messiaen is not the first person through the ages to have linked sounds with colours. One is reminded of the earlier French Symbolist obsession with colour. Artists craved both the sensuousness of sound and the sensuousness of colour: "Music of colour, music of words"<sup>173</sup>. Although his gift enabled Messiaen to follow through on this fashionable preoccupation, his use of the idea always had a seriousness of intent far beyond mere sensuousness and is much more complex than an arbitrary association of notes or keys with certain colours. He feels that, although listeners are probably not consciously

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<sup>170</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p20.

<sup>171</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p20.

<sup>172</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p17.

<sup>173</sup>Lockspeiser, p41.

aware of them, his musical colours will reveal to them "another reality"<sup>174</sup>. He explains it this way: the listener will experience the same sensations of being "eblouis, dizzied, dazzled", as someone staring at a stained glass window<sup>174</sup>. These encounters will in turn, show that God is beyond words, thoughts and concepts and will prepare for when all will know God in the Resurrection body of the life to come. Messiaen calls this knowledge a "perpetual eblouissement: an eternal music of colours, an eternal colour of musics".<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup>Godwin, p69.

<sup>175</sup>Godwin, p69.

## CHAPTER 7 HARMONY

"My secret desire of enchanted gorgeousness in harmony has pushed me toward those swords of fire, those sudden stars, those flows of blue-orange lavas, those planets of turquoise, those violet shades, those garnets of long-haired arborescence, those wheelings of sound and colours in a jumble of rainbows..."<sup>176</sup>

Messiaen

In referring to combinations of notes, Messiaen prefers the term 'colours', to chords<sup>177</sup>. This is because he builds up aggregations of sound on the basis of the aural and visual colours they represent to him, rather than according to the dictates of tonality or tone rows. Because each chord is used for its individual contribution to the sound picture required, rather than in the traditionally accepted sense of generating tension and release, constructional harmonic relationships between chords are rarely significant. The conception is almost totally vertical as opposed to horizontal i.e. the creation of a 'colour' for any given moment is of greater importance than the subsequent direction of individual voices. Part-writing, therefore, has no real place. This obviously differs markedly from traditional classical-romantic music and leads Johnson to the apt description of Messiaen's harmony as decorative, rather than fundamental<sup>178</sup>.

In spite of this, seemingly arbitrary, selection of sounds, it is still possible to see patterns of thought in the construction of Messiaen's chords.

Always to be borne in mind is Messiaen's claim that, for him, chord construction arises from melody:

"Let us not forget the natural harmony: the true, unique, voluptuously pretty by essence, willed by the melody, issued from it, pre-existent in it, having always been enclosed in it, awaiting manifestation."<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p52.

<sup>177</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p23.

<sup>178</sup>Johnson, p13.

He does, nevertheless, favour certain chords.

## 7.1 Typical chords

### 7.1.1 Added note chords

The fact that chord construction is dictated by colour rather than structure, does not preclude the use of diatonic chords in Messiaen's music. Such tertian construction chords, however, are usually used (a) apart from their expected context; and (b) often with multiple added notes. These added notes occur most often without preparation or resolution, to "insidiously transform the tint of the chord"<sup>179</sup>. According to Messiaen, they

"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!"<sup>180</sup>

#### 7.1.1.1 Added sixth chords

Messiaen, like Debussy before him, shows great liking for the added sixth chord<sup>180</sup>. Drew has attributed this fondness to the chord's ambiguous nature, existing as it does in the state of mutual frustration of discord and concord<sup>181</sup>. Because of its 'indecisiveness', the added sixth contributes significantly to the evasion of the tension-relaxation pattern of conventional tonal music. This entire example is based on the ninth chord, with added sixth:

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<sup>179</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p48.

<sup>180</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p47.

<sup>181</sup>Drew, *The Score I*, p39.

Ahl mon collier! Ahl mon col . lier!

Root

*f* *p*

*Le collier, Poèmes pour Mi, b11*

7.1.1.2 Tritone chords

In addition to the added sixth, seventh, and ninth chords, Messiaen uses the added augmented fourth, or tritone chord. He justifies the harmonic inclusion of that interval on the same grounds as the melodic i.e. the tritone is perceived as the tenth overtone of the fundamental<sup>182</sup>. The first chord of this excerpt is the perfect chord with added augmented fourth.

*CHANT*

*Presque lent*  
*mf*

Va où l'Es . prit te mè . ne,

*PIANO*

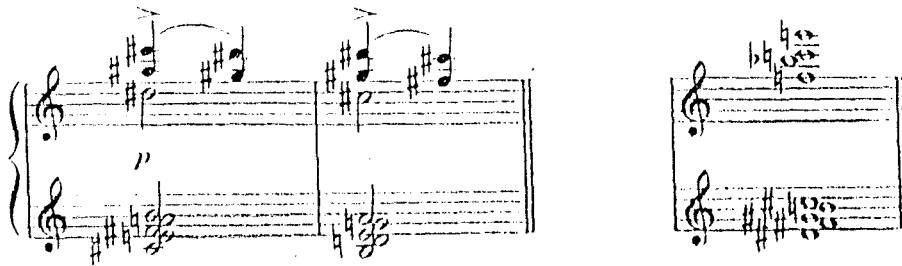
*Presque lent*  
*expressif*  
*f*

*L'Épouse, Poèmes pour Mi, b1*

<sup>182</sup>Apel, p10. See section 5.5.1.

### 7.1.1.3 The chord on the dominant

Messiaen's so-called chord (a bit of a misnomer as it has no dominant function) takes this principle of the added note further. Here appoggiaturas to the added notes are incorporated into the chord so that the chord actually contains all the notes of the major scale<sup>183</sup>. The following examples from Messiaen's theoretical treatise *Technique de mon Langage Musical*, give his derivation of the chord. In the first example, the root chord G-B-D, has added to it: the augmented fourth, C-sharp; the sixth, E; the seventh, F-sharp; and the ninth, A. The added fourth and ninth are preceded by the appoggiaturas, D-sharp and G-sharp. This gives all the notes of the A major scale, plus one chromatic note, the D-sharp. The second example shows the appoggiaturas actually included in the chord, built this time on D-sharp.



*Technique de mon Langage Musical*, nos.205, 206

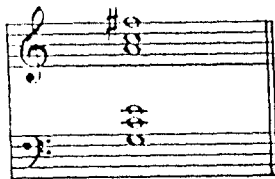
These chords on the dominant have their own peculiar colouring for Messiaen: Prussian blue, spotted with red, gold, orange and lilac.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>183</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p50.

<sup>184</sup>P. Mari, *Oliver Messiaen, l'Homme et son oeuvre*, Paris: Editions Seghers, 1965, p129; quoted in Bell, p30.

### 7.1.2 Distinctive chords of the modes

Messiaen's harmony is predictably influenced by his own modes of limited transposition. Certain modes have a specific chord associated with them. The typical chord of the second mode, for example, is the perfect chord with added sixth and added augmented fourth.<sup>185</sup>



Mode two even has a typical cadence formula, seen here as used in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*:

*Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b51*

All the notes of the third mode of limited transposition are contained in the "chord of resonance"<sup>186</sup>. The example shows the chord of resonance connected to its first inversion. Underneath, for reference, is mode three.

<sup>185</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p48.

<sup>186</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p50.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Arc en ciel d'innocence" from "Chants de Terre et de Ciel". The score is written for voice and piano. The voice part is on a single staff, and the piano accompaniment is on two staves (treble and bass clef). The lyrics are: "mir dans les enco.gnures du temps. Très loin, très près;". The music features dynamic markings such as *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). There are also performance instructions like "Très loin," and "très près;". The piano part includes complex chordal structures, including a "chord of fourths" which is detailed in a separate diagram below. The score includes various musical notations such as accidentals, slurs, and dynamic markings.

The diagram illustrates a "chord of fourths" in a single staff. It consists of a sequence of notes: C, F, C#, G, D, A, E, B. These notes are stacked in a way that they form a series of augmented fourths (C-F, F-C#, C#-G, G-D, D-A, A-B) and perfect fourths (C#, G, G, D, D, A, A, B). This chord contains all the notes of the fifth mode of limited transposition.

*Arc en ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b37*

The chord of fourths, illustrated below, comprises 'stacked' augmented and perfect fourths and contains all the notes of the fifth mode of limited transposition:

The diagram illustrates a "chord of fourths" in a single staff. It consists of a sequence of notes: C, F, C#, G, D, A, E, B. These notes are stacked in a way that they form a series of augmented fourths (C-F, F-C#, C#-G, G-D, D-A, A-B) and perfect fourths (C#, G, G, D, D, A, A, B). This chord contains all the notes of the fifth mode of limited transposition.

## 7.2 Connection of chords

It has already been stated that chords do not resolve in the usual way in Messiaen's music. His means of connecting chords often relies on the sustaining of a musical 'colour'.

## 7.2.1 Parallel streams

Streams or cascades of chords, in which each voice realizes the entire mode starting on a different degree, are one such device. Messiaen uses this technique in the final song of *Harawi*. The downward descent of the chords here, is the simultaneous progression of mode two beginning on three different degrees. Mode two supplied for reference.

*Dans le noir, Harawi, b78*

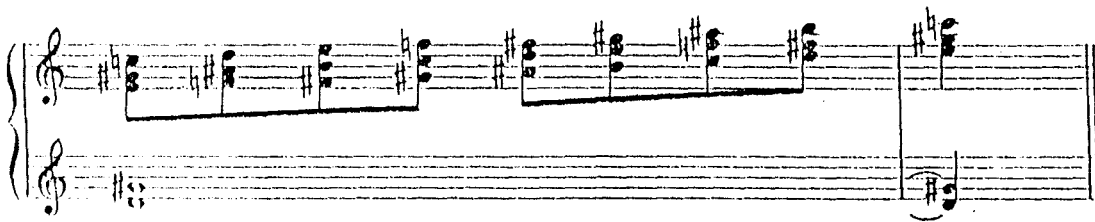
It will be noted that such a scale-wise succession of modal added-note chords gives rise to different types of chords from one modal degree to the next. In mode two, the six-four chord with added augmented fourth, alternates with the dominant-seventh with added sixth.

*Technique de mon Language Musical, no.317*

In the case of modes with bigger basic groups, the number of different types of chords produced is obviously greater. In mode three, for example, there are three recurring

chord structures and in mode four, four.

Messiaen describes different inversions of a chord over a common bass note, as "making multicolour work"<sup>187</sup>. In the following instance, the chord is the mode six "chord of resonance", arranged over a sustained augmented fourth interval. The harmony is prolonged by the cascade, thus maintaining an essential fidelity to the tonic, whilst interest is aroused chord by changing chord<sup>188</sup>.



*Technique de mon Language Musical*, no.353

### 7.2.2 Contrary motion streams

Streams of contrary motion chords are relatively common in his music. In the following example from *Poèmes pour Mi*, each voice realizes part of a chromatic scale:

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The vocal line (top staff) is marked "Très modéré" and "Modéré". The piano accompaniment (bottom staves) is marked "Très modéré" and "Modéré". The piano part features a chromatic scale in the right hand and a corresponding chromatic scale in the left hand, creating a stream of contrary motion chords. The lyrics are: "Dans l'o-bé-is-sance et dans le sang de vo-tre Croix, —". The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *piu f*, *p*, and *ff*.

*Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi*, b38

<sup>187</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p50.

<sup>188</sup>Drew, *The Score I*, p 39.

Mention was made in the discussion on modes, of the superimposition of one mode on another<sup>189</sup>. The harmonic effect of layering cascades of chords from one mode on those of another mode, is the inhibition of the usual progressing impulses of tonal harmony. The next example, shows repeating chord patterns, or pedal groups (Messiaen's answer to the pedal point<sup>190</sup>), in mode six, fifth transposition, superimposed on a similar ostinato pattern in mode seven, fourth transposition. Such polymodal ostinatos become common in Messiaen's work after 1943<sup>191</sup>.

*Dans le noir, Harawi, b46*

By arresting the usual forward propulsion of harmony, Messiaen creates a sense of stasis in the music, so that it exists neither in a state of tension, nor one of relaxation. The listener is compelled to reflect on the moment at hand. Because interest becomes

<sup>189</sup>See section 6.2.

<sup>190</sup>Note that in Messiaen's music, pedal points become pedal groups; passing notes, passing groups; and embellishments, embellishment groups. See Messiaen, *Technique*, p55-56.

<sup>191</sup>Drew, *The Score II*, p61.

focused on prolongation and sonority, Drew feels that a fair representation of the harmonic framework of many a Messiaen composition would be I - I<sup>192</sup>. There are further implications to the use of this 'motionless' harmony. Traditional forms were often originally harmonically 'generated' and therefore reliant on harmonic impetus for their existence. Messiaen's solutions to this problem are dealt with in the next chapter.

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<sup>192</sup>Drew, *The Score I*, p38.

## CHAPTER 8      FORM

Johnson has noted that in works up to the *Turangalîla Symphony* (i.e. including all three song cycles), forms are often generated by melodic considerations<sup>193</sup>. Given the absence of constructional harmony in Messiaen's music and the important place melody occupied in his thoughts, this is hardly surprising.

### 8.1      Melodic forms

The creation of songs from minimum melodic material has been dealt with in some detail in the earlier chapter on melody. Suffice to say that the form of many of the songs depends on the repetition and variation of a basic theme, or of material derived from that theme.

### 8.2      Overlapping variations

A form described by Johnson as "variations of the first theme separated by developments of the second", was used for the first time in *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1942)<sup>194</sup>. This is essentially the main material stated in juxtaposed 'cellules', each of which undergoes a process of variation peculiar to itself. The alternating attention given to two different musical ideas has the effect of suggesting both growth and continuity, so that past, present and future become linked. As with fugue, this is more a technique or procedure, than a form and thus allows for a great deal of lassitude in application. This method served as the basis for the couplet refrain and other strophic forms found subsequently in *Harawi* and other music. In *L'amour de Piroutcha*, Messiaen applied the overlapping variation technique to a through-composed two part dialogue song with a modified repeat: AB A'B'. The overlapping variation

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<sup>193</sup>Johnson, p22.

<sup>194</sup>Johnson, p23.

principle here is simple: varied repetitions of A, the young girl's speech, interrupted by varied repetitions of B, the young man's speech.

### 8.3 Mosaic forms

As a churchgoer in France, Messiaen would have been confronted with the "vast, luminous walls of glass"<sup>195</sup> which commonly grace the magnificent city cathedrals and even the humbler village churches. Allusions to his interest in stained glass windows have already been made in the chapters on modes and harmony<sup>196</sup>. This fascination is re-affirmed in his handling of musical forms. Apparently France's contribution in the field of stained glass artistry, far outweighs that of any other nation. In absorbing the influence of this medium into his work, Messiaen therefore reveals a particular 'Frenchness'. There are three ways in which Messiaen's forms resemble stained glass windows.

#### 8.3.1 Similarity of intention

This quotation, taken from the book *French Stained Glass*, explains:

"Light is the symbol of the glory of God, His might, His greatness, and the Salvation. In the Old and New Testaments and in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, God is often addressed as light. Christ is called *sol salutis*. The windows of the gothic cathedrals have given this a unique expression. In Chartres Cathedral a mysterious light seems to emanate from the ancient stained glass windows, *whose glowing colours tell of Christ, the apostles and the saints*".<sup>197</sup>

Witzleben

In the same way, Messiaen harnesses the colours of his mind and his music, to glorify God. The composer himself, described stained glass windows as "Nature's most

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<sup>195</sup>Witzleben, p9.

<sup>196</sup>See sections 6.3 and 2.1.

<sup>197</sup>Witzleben, p11. My italics.

extraordinary manifestation", "light captured by man to glorify the most noble of functional sites, that intended for worship".<sup>198</sup>

### 8.3.2 Collage-like forms

A mosaic form, related to the patterns of stained glass windows, is to be found within the micro- and macrostructures of Messiaen's song cycles. The forms are categorical rather than developmental i.e. new images are juxtaposed, rather than evolved or blended from one to the other. Bell compares this formal technique to that favoured by Debussy i.e. a sectional arrangement of material, in which new images are linked, but only by the progression of thoughts in the composer's own imagination<sup>199</sup>. This approach, Tremblay concludes, produces a grouping of musical events into a mosaic of tempos, densities and timbres in a manner not unlike that found, surprisingly, in music of the Serialists and Aleatorics<sup>200</sup>. In all these cases, the atypical use of harmony, militates against the use of traditional harmonically-generated forms.

Messiaen's musical forms most closely approximate the 'rose window' formation of stained glass windows. This is not a design exclusive to stained glass. Since antiquity, the circular composition has been thought a credible means of representing connected ideas and this 'rose' image was much used by medieval authors of scientific and mystical works<sup>201</sup>. Great cosmic themes could be expressed in a wheel formation, in which the immovable hub, that which sets everything in motion, is God. The transferral to Messiaen's music is an easy one. His most advanced application of this idea is to be found in the orchestral composition, *Couleurs de la cité céleste* (1963).

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<sup>198</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p13-14.

<sup>199</sup>Bell, p14.

<sup>200</sup>Tremblay, *DTC*, p475.

<sup>201</sup>Witzleben, p31.

The centrality of God allows not only for the usual co-existence of dissimilar mosaic pieces, but also for the juxtaposition of otherwise incompatible fragments, seeing as, for Messiaen,

"by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,... all things were created by Him and for Him... and in Him all things hold together."<sup>202</sup>

In the cycles, songs strongly contrasted in musical style and subject often lie alongside each other. Interest is assured for the listener, who never quite knows what is coming next! In *Poèmes pour Mi*, an aggressive-sounding, quasi-Surrealistic vision of hell (*Épouvante*), is placed beside a gently undulating commentary on the inseparability of husband and wife (*L'Épouse*). The underlying connection between the two is the perception of hell as a state of separation from the Beloved and from God. A corresponding pairing of seeming 'opposites' occurs many times in *Harawi*: the quietness of *L'amour de Piroutcha* alongside the vigour of *Doundou tchil*; the peaceful, rippling lyricism of *Bonjour toi, colombe verte* and the loud, incantatory, 'primitivism' of *Montagnes*. Although drama is often followed by repose, arousing interest by contrast, this is not by any means an absolute rule. The incantation describing the abandonment of self in love (*Montagnes*), is followed by an equally 'primal' presentation of a ritual, celebratory dance in *Doundou tchil*.

This same principle of 'cataloguing' rather than developing ideas, applies on a smaller scale too. Material of great diversity and, to the casual listener, dubious correlation, co-exists within the space of a few bars in *Syllabes*. Repetitive, monotone, animal noises; onomatopoeic sounds; jagged melodic lines emulating human cries; and the warm lyricism of a love song, are heard in just 21 bars. The inclusion of all these elements can be explained and satisfactorily justified. As the song is addressed to the Beloved, it features tender lyricism. The setting is the Peruvian Andes of the Inca days, hence the use of primitive cries and the onomatopoeic sounds imitating the sound of traditional dancers' costume. The animal cries refer to a legend in which apes warned

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<sup>202</sup>Colossians 1: 16 -18, New International Version.

an Inca prince, saving him from imminent danger<sup>203</sup>. In this way, Messiaen reminds the listener that love brings not only joy, but also the 'dangers' of self-sacrifice. Whilst some other songs are equally fragmentary, the changes from section to section are usually less dramatic.

### 8.3.3 Transformation

There is another more subtle aspect of affinity between Messiaen's forms and stained glass windows. The play of light on the unchanging objects of the windows highlights different aspects and colours at different times. In a similar way, Messiaen contemplates the diverse musical images aroused by a single stimulus. In *Harawi*, the union of the lovers in death, elicits three dissimilar responses expressed in three consecutive songs: exuberant passion (in a joyous, varied and fast-moving *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*), quiet wonderment (in the tranquil and simple *Amour oiseau d'étoile*) and finally cosmic commotion (in the incantatory *Katchikatchi les étoiles*). Again, this aspect of transformation, the same situation looked at in different ways, is to be found in the microstructural design of single songs. In *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*, Messiaen deals with the extremes of emotion awakened when love is fulfilled: from moments of quiet awe to outbursts of overwhelming joy.

## 8.4 Symmetrical forms

The desire to remain faithful to Nature has been an ever-present influence in Messiaen's life and music. One of Nature's most compelling attributes for him, is the simultaneous presence of symmetry and asymmetry. The naturally symmetrical images of butterflies, leaves and people; the contrived symmetry of Persian carpets; and the symbolic symmetry of the cross and ancient magical formulae (which read the same both ways), are some of the examples Messiaen quotes in his discussion of the subject

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<sup>203</sup>See reference to text, section 12.1.9.2.

with Samuel<sup>204</sup>. In a temporal sense, he speaks of the combination of symmetry and asymmetry experienced in the passage of days, years, and seasons. With Nature thus as his guide, Messiaen attempted to transfer these ideas to his music. His modes of limited transposition and non-retrogradable rhythms are symmetrically constructed, whilst the added values and added note chords provide asymmetrical components. Griffiths has explained Messiaen's penchant for symmetrical forms, as a consequence of his unique technique<sup>205</sup>. Although his new methods of composition may have necessitated the use of alternative forms, the change to symmetrical ones was, no doubt, consciously and deliberately made.

The most common shape of a plainsong melody suggests another possible reason for Messiaen's fondness for arch forms<sup>206</sup>. This is corroborated in the song cycles: the initial hints at symmetrical form occur in conjunction with plainsong. In his first song cycle, *Poèmes pour Mi*, the recall of similar material from first to last songs, implies an overall arch design to the cycle. The recurring melodic shapes are, significantly, plainsong *alleluias*. The second cycle, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, begins with a melody derived from the *Alleluia* of the *Easter Vigil* and the outer design of that song, *Bail avec Mi*, is symmetrical. Palindromic forms are found with increasing frequency thereafter in the song cycles.

The endeavour for symmetry and balance in *Harawi* is unmistakable. The external design is probably best explained diagrammatically:

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<sup>204</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p44.

<sup>205</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p16.

<sup>206</sup>As outlined in section 5.1.5: rising to a high pitch, remaining for a while, then descending again i.e. resembling a symmetrical arch-shape.

	1	2	3	{4	5}	6	7	8	{9	10}	11	12	
I N T R O		*					*					*	
			↑	←-----→								↑	
		*					*					*	
		*					*					*	
		*					*					*	
		*					*					*	
	G	E- flat		E- flat	G		E- flat	G	E- flat	F- sharp		E- flat	

The first short song, *La ville qui dormait, toi*, is an introduction to the whole cycle. The key of G, one of the important keys of the cycle, is introduced.

The other songs of the cycle are 'supported' by the three E-flat 'pillars': number two, *Bonjour toi, colombe verte*, number seven, *Adieu*, and number twelve, *Dans le noir*. These songs are based on the cyclic theme.

Song six, *Répétition planétaire*, seven, *Adieu*, and eight, *Syllabes*, are the longest songs in the cycle and together form a central core to the work. *Syllabes* is a clever *précis* of the cycle: both song and cycle begin and end lyrically; the same cadence terminates the first, middle, and final sections of both; and in the middle, material of great variety, including the lyrical, the incantatory and the unusual cry, occurs.

Either side of the central core, are two symmetrical pairs of songs. Number four, *Doundou tchil* and number nine, *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*, are 'balancing partners' in the formal design of the cycle. Both are vibrant, energetic songs, paired with, and followed by, quieter, more lingering songs: *L'amour de Piroutcha* and *Amour oiseau d'étoile* respectively. *L'amour de Piroutcha*, is written in G, the key of desire. *Amour oiseau d'étoile*, its opposite number in the arch form, is in F-sharp, the key associated with the mystical. The key associations intimate that by the later song, earthly passions have been replaced by sacramental fulfilment.

The second (if one excludes the introduction) and penultimate songs, three, *Montagnes*, and eleven, *Katchikatchi les étoiles*, are in correlating incantatory style.

As in the outer scheme, Messiaen shows a great fondness for symmetry in internal structures. Individual songs such as *Montagnes*, *Doundou tchil*, *Répétition planétaire*, *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil* and *Syllabes*, all begin and end with the same material. In each case, recurring content is used to create a 'frame' around the unrepeated central portion of the songs. All the songs making use of primitive cries, from the earliest, *Épouvante* [*Poèmes pour Mi*] onwards, use the cries as the frame, rather than as the core of the song. A diagram of the formal structure of *Doundou tchil*, gives a typical example of Messiaen's manipulation of a song comprising many sections:

A - B - C - D - C - B - A.

## 8.5 Conclusion

Messiaen's methods of generating form have brought down storms of praise and protest on his head. Hodeir, for example, sees Messiaen as an eminent technician brought stumbling down by form. Every composer since Bach, he insists, has

"..taught us that the highest form of musical expression is evolutive contemplation"<sup>207</sup>.

Hodeir feels that, in shunning developmental forms for "frozen contemplation", Messiaen took retrogressive steps<sup>207</sup>. Armfelt, on the other hand, feels that Messiaen's peculiar excellence is manifested in the form of his works<sup>208</sup>! In the face of such overwhelming diversity of opinion, the evaluatory guidelines proposed by Drew are helpful in attempting to arrive at a balanced assessment<sup>209</sup>. He suggests the efficacy of any form be judged according to (a) the consistency or otherwise, of application; and (b) its content and expressive purpose.

Both mosaic and palindromic forms are increasingly consistently applied, both on a

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<sup>207</sup>Hodeir, p114.

<sup>208</sup>Armfelt, p857.

<sup>209</sup>Drew, *The Score II*, p62.

micro- and macro- level in all three cycles, and especially in *Harawi*.

In his music, Messiaen ponders immense, often unexplored, subjects in his new language. Consequently, a corresponding new conception of form becomes essential. In terms of content and expressive purpose, his forms have a uniquely close relationship with the content. By their design, they communicate (a) an ideology which accepts the cyclic and balanced character of life and nature if viewed from God's supreme perspective; and (b) a belief in the centrality of God to the many-sided experiences of life. It becomes obvious that Messiaen's forms are probably the most appropriate vehicles for conveying his intentions. The lack of developing form, or evolution, in his music (perhaps also indicative of influence from the East), creates a stasis entirely appropriate for the vastness of the religious images he favours. Thus his 'retrogressive' 'frozen contemplation'<sup>210</sup>, can be seen instead as Messiaen's rising to the Surrealist challenge of re-inventing the world according to the pattern of his own mind<sup>211</sup>. Instead of representing reality as revealed by history and by the senses, new realities are created from within. The clue to the danger of an attitude such as Hodeir's, is printed at the beginning of his own book:

"if we carry respect for the past too far, we are in danger of detaching ourselves from the present".<sup>212</sup>

The function of musical form is surely to promote an understanding of the work in progress. The design of Messiaen's compositions elucidates not only his music, but also his philosophies.

Forms are defined, in part, by clever timbral contrasts.

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<sup>210</sup>Hodeir, p114.

<sup>211</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p243. See also section 12.1.2.

<sup>212</sup>Hodeir, p11.

**CHAPTER 9            TIMBRE AND TEXTURE****9.1    Timbre**

For Messiaen, like Debussy before him, timbre assumes a structural function in his music i.e. contrasting timbres highlight the sectional outlines of the work<sup>213</sup>. This method reaches something of a climax in Messiaen's work, in the 1960 composition, *Chronochromie*. As the title indicates (*chronos*, time and *chroma*, colour), the work emphasizes in its architecture, the importance of duration and timbre. A 'chromatic scale' of durations from demi-semiquavers to semibreves is numbered from one to 32. The 32 durations are then ordered according to the composer's choice. Varied interversions are obtained by reordering the chosen number system and in each case, instrumental colour is used to underline these processes. Although such an orchestral work is obviously a better vehicle for a full study of Messiaen's use of timbre than a song cycle, the prevailing timbral principles of his music remain constant, regardless of the number of instruments involved.

**9.1.1    Timbre in the song cycles**

In the song cycles, contrasts of timbre are used to punctuate, or demarcate sections within songs. The most obvious contrast is that of the voice as an alternative to the piano. In *Épouvante*, shown in the following example, the piano and voice finish simultaneously in bar 5 and the voice begins alone in bar 6 with a new section.

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<sup>213</sup>Boucourechliev, *NG*, vol.12, p206.

ha, hol

8ª bassa

*Un peu moins vif*  
*N'enfouis pas tes souvenirs dans la terre, tu ne les retrouverais plus. Ne tire pas,*

*Un peu moins vif*

*p sec cresc.*

*Épouvante, Poèmes pour Mi, b4*

By virtue of his ingenuity however, Messiaen is not restricted to contrasting only the conventional timbres of voice and piano. Specific new timbres **within** the piano and vocal ranges, sought out by the composer, are contrasted with each other. There is no such thing in the song cycles, as a single vocal timbre. Strikingly different sounds are produced by singing a legato, bel canto line; shrieking or screaming in a high register; or by chanting repeated low-pitched patterns<sup>214</sup>. Most often, it is, as can be seen in the next example, these different colours within the vocal spectrum which are contrasted from section to section:

<sup>214</sup>These specific vocal effects are discussed at length in Chapter 13.

Musical score for the piece "Mange en tournant". It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics "Mange en tournant, Mange en tournant." The piano part includes a complex rhythmic pattern with fingerings (1, 4, b1, b4, 4, 6, 1, 4, b1, 2, 3, 5, 1) and a fermata over the first measure. A small asterisk is placed below the piano part.

Musical score for the piece "Répétition planétaire". It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is marked "Modéré, un peu vif" and includes the word "Ahlil" repeated three times. The piano part includes a fermata over the first measure and is marked "Modéré, un peu vif". The piano part includes a complex rhythmic pattern with fingerings (1, 4, b1, b4, 4, 6, 1, 4, b1, 2, 3, 5, 1) and a fermata over the first measure. The piano part is marked "ff" and "Red.".

*Répétition planétaire, Harawi, b150*

Goldman finds the piano incapable of gross contrasts of timbre and therefore concludes that Messiaen's technique for that instrument must be completely ineffective<sup>215</sup>. Messiaen on the other hand, no doubt 'charmed by the impossibilities', finds the piano an instrument "sans timbre"<sup>216</sup> and therefore an object worthy of investigation. He claims that it is possible to make sounds on the piano more orchestral than those of the orchestra<sup>217</sup>! A lengthy discussion of the specific pianistic effects Messiaen achieves appears in Chapter 14, but the following examples will illustrate how he uses these timbral differences.

Contrasts of register are common. In *Doundou tchil*, as shown below, a lone, low piano

<sup>215</sup>Goldman, p291.

<sup>216</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p28.

<sup>217</sup>Nichols, *Messiaen*, p314.

voice is used in the outer 'framing' sections of the song. The next section of the song is introduced by the unmistakably, contrasting timbre of clusters of high, clattering sounds.

The musical score for 'Doundou tchil, Harawi, b18' consists of two systems. The first system features a vocal line in the upper staff with lyrics 'Doun, dou tchil, Doun,dou tchil, doundou tchil, doun,dou tchil.' and a piano accompaniment in the lower staff. The piano part includes a low-pitched figure marked 'x9 b' and a section marked 'fff'. The second system, labeled 'VII', shows a continuation of the piano accompaniment with a high-pitched clattering pattern marked '162 alta' and 'ff'. The piano part is marked 'Vcl. (comme du verre)'.

*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b18*

These specific and easily distinguishable instrumental timbres recur at structurally significant places in the song. *Doundou tchil* is in palindromic form, so after the central section of the song, the high-pitched clattering pattern this time precedes the initial low-pitched figure which had demarcated the first section:

The musical score for 'Doundou tchil, Harawi, b69' features a piano accompaniment in the lower staff and a vocal line in the upper staff. The piano part includes a high-pitched clattering pattern marked '162 alta' and 'pp legato'. The vocal line has the lyrics 'Un peu vit' and 'Un peu vit pp legato'. The piano part is marked 'pp staccato' and 'x9 bassa'.

*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b69*

The 'outer parts' of the central section of the song given below (i.e. the C sections in the design A - B - C - D - C - B - A), are written for the middle register of the piano:

Modéré

Pi-rou - tcha te vol-là, ô mou à - moi, la dau - se des é - toi - les,

Modéré

*mf staccato, un peu louré, comme des cors*

*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b22*

Messiaen does not rely only on differences of pitch to create timbral contrasts. The small D section reverts again to the high reaches of the treble register, but it is impossible to confuse it with the high pitches of section B. The attack is completely different and the dynamic level this time is *piano*. Compare this example from bar 38, with bar 69, two examples earlier.

Même mouvement, berceur

Tou - gou, tou - gou, ma - pa, na - ma, ma -

Même mouvement, berceur

*p*

*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b38*

In conversation with Samuel, Messiaen speaks of a "grouping of timbres" and although this has obvious limitations with only two instruments, he nevertheless makes use of the concept in the song cycles<sup>218</sup>. In *Doundou tchil*, there are moments in which

<sup>218</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p25.

different, clearly distinguishable timbres are 'layered'. In the next example, the low piano part, is overlaid with a chanting vocal part and with a very high piano part representative of birdsong.

*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b86*

The layering of the timbres here suggests the solemn ritual of a ceremonial dance and the implicit joy of the pending love-union<sup>219</sup>: the typical stratification of musical and philosophical ideas found in Messiaen's music.

With the seemingly limited timbral resources of voice and piano, Messiaen manages to produce compositions which are structurally coherent, aurally interesting and extremely varied.

## 9.2 Texture

### 9.2.1 Heterophony

As a result of the simultaneity mentioned in the preceding section, Messiaen's music is best suited to the texture known as heterophony. Heterophonic textures are those in which distinct and independent musical strands, often moving at different speeds in

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<sup>219</sup>Birdsong is representative of joy in Messiaen's music.

different directions, occur concurrently. Each 'strand' may consist of any number of parts. In the following example, the upper two strands comprise mostly three or four parts, whilst the lower has two parts. Their independent rhythmic movement makes notation and reading difficult and so to clarify his intention, Messiaen has placed each strand on a separate staff. Note that each strand is further individualized by its own dynamic instruction.

The image shows a musical score for 'Adieu, Harawi' by Messiaen. It consists of three staves. The top staff is marked 'Très modéré' and 'dr' (dotted rhythm). The middle staff is marked 'piu f' (pianissimo forte) and 'g' (forte). The bottom staff is marked 'p' (piano) and 'f' (forte). The score is in 3/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns with many accents and dynamic markings.

*Adieu, Harawi, b59*

It is interesting to observe at this point, that, with the advent of diatonic harmony in Western music, the co-existence of such autonomous strands within a texture had been banished<sup>220</sup>. Thereafter the components had been ordered into a single co-operating thread moving together through time. This can be seen in Bach's harmonisation of a chorale melody.

The image shows a musical score for 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden' by J.S. Bach. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music is in C major and 4/4 time. The lyrics are written below the top staff.

Mein Gmüth ist mir ver - wir - ret, das macht ein Jungk - frau zart, bin  
gantz und gar ver - ir - ret, mein Hertz das kränckt sich

*O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden, harm. J.S. Bach*

<sup>220</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p16.

Even in contrapuntal music, a degree of harmonic, rhythmic and melodic accord prevails. This is not so in heterophonical textures, where the strands are quite independent.

Heterophony also accommodates Messiaen's unusual notions of time. Retrogression in one or more strands can be used texturally, to suggest a reversal in the flow of time. Because of his religious beliefs in an Eternal God, in the gift of Eternal Life conferred on Believers and therefore, in the existence of those long departed from earthly lives, he attempts to convey in his music, not only a timelessness, but also a free movement, backwards or forwards, in Eternity<sup>221</sup>. The use of formal devices like overlapping variations and rose-window formations, discussed earlier, have already implied a certain liberty in this respect.

### 9.2.2 Monody

Monody, as an alternative texture to his highly favoured heterophony, also has philosophical implications. It was possibly suggested for Messiaen, by Medieval plainsong. Mellers notes that monody conveys an impression of oneness with the Universe and is often to be found in music of a religious nature<sup>222</sup>. The singer or composer becomes the medium of God's timeless expression, conveyed through rhythmic fluidity, absence of cadential finality and lack of regular metrical accents. The concentration on a single line free of harmonic tension, as occurs in plainsong, is also found in some music of the East.

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<sup>221</sup>See section 10.1.

<sup>222</sup>W. Mellers, *Music in Society*, Dobson: 1950, p34-37; quoted in Bray, p108.

et mon à --

This musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line with the lyrics "et mon à --". The middle and bottom staves are piano accompaniment. The music is written in a key with two flats and a 4/4 time signature. The piano part features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with many beamed notes and slurs.

*Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi, b6*

### 9.2.3 Homophony

Although counterpoint does not feature in Messiaen's music, homophonic textures, do occur.

Très modéré

CHANT

Bon - jour toi, co - lom - be

Très modéré

PIANO

*p* *f* *mf*

This musical score is for a vocal and piano piece. The top staff is labeled "CHANT" and contains the lyrics "Bon - jour toi, co - lom - be". The tempo is marked "Très modéré". The piano accompaniment is on two staves below, with dynamics *p*, *f*, and *mf* indicated. The piano part features a steady, rhythmic accompaniment with many beamed notes and slurs.

*Bonjour toi, colombe verte, Harawi, b1*

Messiaen seeks to present a totally integrated structure in each of his compositions. His preferred textures, heterophony and monody, project the idea of Eternity unfolding interminably, with all directed, like the lone voice of most monody, to God.

## CHAPTER 10      RHYTHM

### 10.1 Eternity

For Messiaen, life is a religious experience. Because religion and religious truths are presumed to operate throughout Eternity, meditation on religion has inevitably led him to meditate on time. Having done this, he felt compelled to accommodate within his music, notions of Infinity and of a free movement in Time. This atypical attitude, Messiaen explains, was acquired from a Biblical quotation in which Christ dispels the absolutes of time and place:<sup>223</sup>

"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world and I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep in Your name them whom You have given Me, that they may be as one, as We are one."<sup>224</sup>

Instead of a forward moving thread to be sustained by regular pulse and accents, rhythm becomes an element to be inhabited.

#### 10.1.1 Extremely slow tempos

In an attempt to suggest an immobile Eternity, Messiaen sometimes resorts to tempos so slow that causal links between adjacent notes and chords are weakened. Armfelt suggests that the characteristic effect of such a passage is to soothe the listener into a trance-like state of heightened response to each moment<sup>225</sup>. This unique temporal quality of contemplation, though unfamiliar in Western contexts, is not strange to

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<sup>223</sup> Messiaen, *Messiaen*, p6.

<sup>224</sup>Quotation from Jesus Christ's prayer, recorded in the gospel of John, chapter 17, verse 11 (Amplified version).

<sup>225</sup>Armfelt, p858.

Eastern mysticism<sup>226</sup>. In the following example, the effect of the slow tempo is exacerbated by the increasing time intervals between each sound and the next.

The musical score consists of two staves: CHANT (Vocal) and PIANO. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo/mood is indicated as "Presque lent, avec charme et tendresse, très pur". The vocal line features a series of notes with increasing intervals, circled in red, with the lyrics "Oiseau d'étoile". The piano accompaniment starts with a dynamic of *p* and includes a section marked *pp* "comme un oiseau". A "Ped." marking is present at the bottom of the piano staff.

*Amour oiseau d'étoile, Harawi, b1*

At the other extreme, but less novel, are the savagely propulsive speeds and rhythms Messiaen uses to communicate urgency or danger. This example is taken from a song dealing with the descent into the abyss of hell:

The musical score consists of two staves: CHANT and PIANO. The tempo is marked "Très vif". The piano accompaniment is highly rhythmic and propulsive, featuring many triplets and pairs of notes, with markings such as "(pour 2)" and "(pour 3)". The dynamic is marked *ff*.

*Montagnes, Harawi, b1*

<sup>226</sup>Deri, p425.

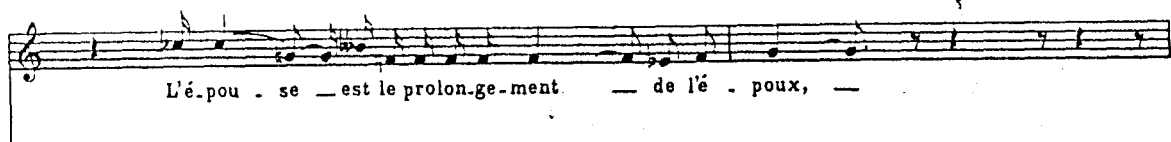
### 10.1.2 The Individual Duration

Messiaen perceives each moment, and therefore each duration, to be significant in its own right.

"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 duration. That is the birth of rhythm".<sup>227</sup>

"Rhythm is first and foremost the change of number and duration".<sup>228</sup>

The conventional notion of the beat is replaced in his music, by the shortest note value from which a basic pattern can be built. The ancient Greeks called it the *chronos protos* and it has become the quaver in modern notation. The importance or stressing of that duration has nothing to do with its position in the bar. Percussive accents play no part and notes exist as long amongst short, rather than weak amongst strong. This is the so-called 'quant principle' of *arsis* and *thesis*, or impulse amongst rest, which is found in ancient Greek poetry and melody, Indian music, and plainsong<sup>229</sup>.



*L'Épouse, Poèmes pour Mi, b7*

The accents which subsequently appear in the vocal music, as in the next example from *Harawi*, are concerned primarily with the enunciation of the words. The rhythmic construction can still be seen to be long values amongst short.

<sup>227</sup>From *Lecture in Brussels* by Oliver Messiaen at the *Conference de Bruxelles 1958*, Alphonse Leduc et Cie, Paris, 1960; according to Bell, p5.

<sup>228</sup>Johnson, p32.

<sup>229</sup>Bell, p4.

Extrêmement lent, en rêve

CHANT *ppp*

La vil - le qui dor - mait, toi. \_\_\_\_\_ Mn

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

## 10.2 Rhythmic Groupings

In order to compose melodies, Messiaen adds rhythms to one another in patterns of short and long notes, for example 3 + 1 + 2, where the basic value is the quaver. Meter can therefore be described as quantitative, an **aggregation** of durations, rather than a division of time into units. Sometimes, individual values are combined into recognizable rhythmic cells (not necessarily corresponding to bars), which are used repeatedly as entities. This can be seen in the first four phrases of *La ville qui dormait, toi*, which all use the same rhythmic cell:

Extrêmement lent, en rêve

CHANT *ppp*

La vil - le qui dor - mait, toi. \_\_\_\_\_ Mn

malin sur ton cœur par toi \_\_\_\_\_

plein mi - nuit le banc, toi. \_\_\_\_\_

La vio - let - te dou - ble

toi. \_\_\_\_\_ L'œil im - mo - bi - le, sans dé -

*La ville qui dormait, toi, Harawi, b1-9*

Baur has properly described this as a 'motivic' use of rhythm.<sup>230</sup>

Messiaen has definite ways of creating such rhythmic cells. In this, he has been influenced by the rhythmic systems of ancient India and Greece.

### 10.2.1 Indian rhythm patterns

The documentation of Hindu rhythmic practise by Sharngedeva, a 13th century Indian theorist, is probably the most important and extensive classification of its kind<sup>231</sup>. In it, the rhythms of the Indian provinces are organized into 120 *deçi-tâlas*, mostly dedicated to the gods Shiva and Pavati<sup>232</sup>. Messiaen studied these at length and then, without precursor in Western music, applied them to his own music<sup>233</sup>. Because of his Christian convictions, the study and use of the patterns is entirely academic and therefore free of any Indian religious significance.

Many of these *deçi-tâlas* are ametrical<sup>234</sup>. One of Messiaen's 'favourites' is number 93, the *râgavardhana*, and it often occurs in his music in retrograde. *Deçi-tâlas* can be joined together to form composite rhythmic patterns, or *tâlas*. The following *tâla*, for example, comprises three *deçi-tâlas*: the favoured *râgavardhana*(93), *candrakalâ*(105), and *lakskmîça*(88):



*râgavardhana*(93), *candrakalâ*(105), and *lakskmîça*(88)

<sup>230</sup>Baur, p283.

<sup>231</sup>Bell, p6.

<sup>232</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p45.

<sup>233</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p46.

<sup>234</sup>See Appendix II.

It occurs in many works from *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*<sup>235</sup> onwards and is seen in the following excerpt from *Harawi*.

Même mouvement, berceur

Tou - - gou, tou - - gou, ma - - pa, na - - ma, ma -

- pa, na - - ma, - - ma - pa, - - kahl - - pl - - pas.

*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b38*

Rhythmic cells thus constructed, reappear in his works in varying harmonic and melodic guises. The following *tâla*, made up of the *deçi-tâlas*: *karanayati*(84), *shattâla*(94) and *ekatâlî*(67), is used first in *Le Mystère de la Saint Trinité [Les corps glorieux]* (1939) and later, as a monotone chant in *Harawi*<sup>236</sup>.

*pp*

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

*Répétition planétaire, Harawi, b18*

In spite of the above examples, relatively few of his works use Hindu rhythms unaltered<sup>237</sup>. Nevertheless the influence of the *deçi-tâlas* in Messiaen's whole concept of rhythm, is developed and used with great imagination.

<sup>235</sup>Johnson, p37.

<sup>236</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p130.

<sup>237</sup>Boucourechliev, *NG*, vol.12, p205.

### 10.2.2 Greek rhythm patterns

Like the Indians, the Greeks also formed composite rhythmic groupings by joining sequences of small values. The *chronos*, or short note, combined with the *longa* (crochet, equal to two quavers) were classified into groups according to the ratio of lengths to given feet<sup>238</sup>. Although Greek patterns are not readily identifiable by the layman in the song cycles, Messiaen has been known to make use of them and has even identified them in later scores such as *Couleurs de la Cité céleste* (1963).

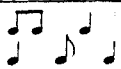


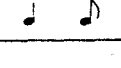



### 10.2.3 Prime number groupings

Since steady pulse and regular groupings aurally impel one forward in time, Messiaen prefers prime number groupings for his rhythmic cells. He believes that there are laws other than the law of meter to be obeyed:

Rhythmic music is ..

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<sup>238</sup>The *chronos protos* is usually grouped into threes, fours, fives or sixes to form feet. The feet are then grouped to form measures. All kinds of feet can be combined into two-three-, or four-foot units. Thus the *chronos protos* forms the nucleus of the larger rhythmic patterns. Below are some of the most common divisions of time in Greek practise (Bell p4):

Name	Ratio	<i>Chronos Protos</i>	Pattern
Anapaest	1:1	2 + 2	
Cretic	3:2	3 + 2	
Dactyl	1:1	2 + 2	
Iamb	1:2	1 + 2	
Spondée	1:1	2 + 2	
Tribrach	2:1	2 + 1	
Trochée/Chorée	2:1	2 + 1	

"inspired by movements in Nature, which have free and unequal [sic] durations".<sup>239</sup>

Therefore, for Messiaen, rhythmic music ...

"..is that which disregards repetition, squareness and regular durations".<sup>240</sup>

There are also certain mathematical impossibilities inherent in prime numbers, which no doubt for Messiaen, add to their 'charm'. Irregular groupings in a rhythmic cell, often have the effect of sending a meter 'awry'. In the next example, the prime number group makes the rhythm (according to Messiaen) "limp deliciously".<sup>241</sup>

The image shows a musical score for a voice and piano piece. The top staff is for the voice (CHANT) and the bottom two staves are for the piano (PIANO). The tempo is marked 'Presque lent' and the dynamics are 'p avec charme'. The lyrics are 'Fe . nè . tre plei . ne d'a . près - mi .'. The piano part features a complex, irregular rhythmic pattern in the right hand, while the left hand plays a more regular accompaniment.

*Ta voix, Poèmes pour Mi, b1*

His preoccupation with number and proportion is not only part of his musical language, but seems to be a constituent of his theological thought as well. The indivisibility of prime numbers is an attribute shared by the Christian Godhead: Three, but One. Like the Medieval monk, Messiaen incorporates number symbolism into his music. Duality is sometimes symbolic of the two natures of Christ: human and Divine in one person. Three obviously represents the Trinity. Five is the number of the Indian god Shiva,

<sup>239</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p66.

<sup>240</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p63-64.

<sup>241</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p48.

who represents the death of death and therefore could be seen as a type of Christ<sup>242</sup>. Seven is considered the number of perfection.

Number symbolism can be used musically with varying degrees of subtlety. It may take the form of a textual reference, a textural implication (e.g. a three stranded texture used in a passage about God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost), or a rhythmic inference. A referral to the rhythmic cells of the introductory number of *Harawi: Bonjour toi, colombe verte*, illustrates the latter. The song begins by expressing the perfection of the Beloved in a rhythmic cell numbering seven. The death of death is a main theme of the cycle (cell numbering five), and this ultimately leads to union and to oneness with God and the Universe (cell numbering three). The incorporation of such symbolism on different levels shows the precise integration of Messiaen's musical language.

#### 10.2.4 Non-retrogradable rhythm patterns

The 'charm of impossibility' in Messiaen's modes, which can only be transposed a limited number of times, has a rhythmic parallel: the non-retrogradable or palindromic rhythms. These rhythmic cells cannot be used in retrograde because they are symmetrically constructed about a central point, typically, as in the next example, as augmenting symmetry:

The musical score shows a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is marked 'Très modéré' and has a tempo of 120. The piano accompaniment is marked 'p' and 'f'. The score shows a rhythmic cell that is symmetrically constructed about a central point, illustrating augmenting symmetry. The cell is circled and labeled with 'dr' and 'g'.

*Adieu, Harawi, b59*

<sup>242</sup>Johnson, p41.

The very simple 'non-retrogradable rhythms' to be found in Sharngedeva's table may have been the original inspiration for those of Messiaen. Not only does Messiaen create cells of rhythm, he also has particular ways of manipulating them.

### 10.2.5 Stravinsky's *Personnages Rhythmique*

In the following quotation from an address he delivered to an International Conference in Brussels in 1958, Messiaen explains one method of allowing the same rhythmic fragment used in different parts or places, to interact with itself. This *personnages rythmiques* procedure is derived from his study of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.

"Imagine a stage: three characters are on the floor; the first is active, he controls the scene; the second is moved by the first; the third is present sans taking any part in the conflict; he watches and does not move. In the same way, three rhythmic groups are facing each other; the first is in augmentation; the second is in diminution; and the third never changes, the motionless person".<sup>243</sup>

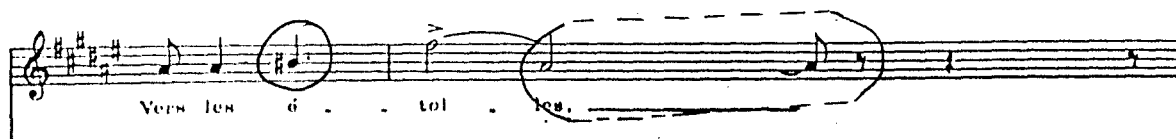
*Turangalîla I*, the third movement of the symphony of the same name, has, as its three *personnages rythmiques*, the 'growing' bass drum, the 'diminishing' maracas, and the 'motionless' wood block.

## 10.3 Added Values

Messiaen's use of added note chords has a rhythmic counterpart: added values. These abound in Messiaen's music. The technique is rooted in Indian practise and involves the addition of a short value to any rhythm by means of a rest, a dot, or a note, as seen in the following short phrase:

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<sup>243</sup>Messiaen, *Lecture in Brussels*, quoted in Johnson, p12.



*Amour oiseau d'étoile, Harawi, b5*

In early works, such as *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, these added values usually have the effect of 'displacing' the rhythm by stretching or contracting the time values in a passage which is essentially metrical. This is particularly obvious in the following example, where a regular pulse has been established in the preceding bars:

*Le collier, Poèmes pour Mi, b27*

Not unexpectedly, this artifice arouses both acclaim and ire from critics. Bray perceives these additive rhythms as growing naturally out of Messiaen (and Stravinsky's) rhythmic style. They are, therefore, not to be considered in any way artificial<sup>244</sup>. He believes that they exist in their own right, and cannot be described as 'perversions' or even 'alterations' of 'normal' ones. Ansermet on the other hand, feels strongly that one cannot 'make' a rhythm by adding a quaver and a semi-quaver to a dotted quaver<sup>245</sup>. Messiaen apparently thinks otherwise.

<sup>244</sup>Bray, p102.

<sup>245</sup>M. Ansermet quoted in Drew, *The Score II*, p68.



A later development of this augmentation and diminution of rhythmic values can be seen in *Harawi*: progressively increasing or decreasing values. The recurring refrain in *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil* is progressively augmented in bars 77-80, to fuse the middle section to the final verse. The augmentation at this point communicates the change in the lover's mood from rapturous exuberance to quiet wonder.

*L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi, b77*

The example in section 10.4, gives another particularly good example of a phrase constructed of progressively augmenting rhythmic values.

### 10.5 Adherence to speech rhythms

Messiaen's aim in the song cycles was always to allow the voice first to sing, then to turn to the exigencies of the text and the imitation of speech inflections<sup>246</sup>. In spite of all the ingenious rhythmic devices he applies in his compositions, the vocal works retain a faithfulness to the accents of the spoken word, reminiscent even of the works of Mozart<sup>247</sup>. This phrase illustrates:

*Adieu, Harawi, b11*

<sup>246</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p45.

<sup>247</sup>Tremblay, *DTC*, p476.

He found it easier to cope with the demands of singability **and** intelligibility when he had written the texts himself.<sup>248</sup>

### 10.6 Use of silence

Messiaen is as unafraid of silence as John Cage and uses it with powerful impact on many occasions in his works. Typically, the music is built up to a frenzied climax, with increasing speed and volume, perhaps fragmentation and repetition of the phrase and then .... silence. The effect is most dramatic. In the example below, the atmosphere created is especially spine-chilling: the unexpected silence is followed again by the final anguished cries, which have punctuated the piece from the beginning.

*Répétition planétaire, Harawi, b150*

This pregnant use of silence occurs in six out of the twelve songs in *Harawi*.

### 10.7 Independence of rhythm

Although Messiaen vows supreme allegiance to melody<sup>249</sup>, he describes himself as "compositeur et rythmicien"<sup>250</sup>. The separate designation "and rhythmician", draws

<sup>248</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p45.

<sup>249</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p31.

<sup>250</sup>Boucourechliev, *NG*, vol.12, p205.

attention to his belief that rhythm can "exist above and beyond tonal values"<sup>251</sup>. In this, he is distinctly revolutionary. From as far back as the Renaissance, rhythm had been dominated by melody. In his opera *Wozzeck* (1925), Alban Berg began to loosen the ties. Messiaen followed his lead and eventually freed rhythm from all melodic constraints<sup>252</sup>. Isorhythms and rhythmic canons are manifestations of this rhythmic independence.

### 10.7.1 Isorhythms<sup>253</sup>

In the isorhythm, melodic patterns (colors) and separate rhythmic patterns (taleae), are superposed and repeated. The length of the rhythmic pattern need not necessarily coincide with the length of the melodic one. Messiaen sometimes uses what Apel calls "panisorhythms": isorhythms in more than one part<sup>254</sup>. A complex example occurs in the last movement of *Harawi, Dans le noir*. Here the number of chords does not coincide with the number of rhythmic values per strand. A series of six chords in mode six, is combined with 11 rhythmic values in the upper strand. In the lower strand, seven chords in mode seven, are combined with 11 rhythmic values. Each rhythmic value of the lower strand is one-and-a-quarter times that of the upper. The dynamic marking gives a slight prominence to the lower strand. This means that the listener's attention is divided equally between the quicker moving values of the upper and the louder ones of the lower. The resultant effect is that of two strands moving at different tempos: a polyrhythmic layering. Messiaen frequently inter-relates the elements of a polyrhythm in this way.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>251</sup>Drew, *The Score I*, p47.

<sup>252</sup>Bell, p13.

<sup>253</sup>A term used to describe a structural principle frequently occurring in fourteenth century motets, in which the cantus firmus (often in the tenor part) is heard in a repeating scheme of time values.

<sup>254</sup>Apel, p427.

<sup>255</sup>Drew, *The Score I*, p48.

Bien modéré

Loin - - loin d'a - - mour.

Bien modéré

pp

p

*Dans le noir, Harawi, b17*

Bell points out that he may have assimilated this technique from Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*<sup>256</sup>, but it could also be related to the multilayered structure of Javanese music<sup>257</sup>. The operation of several time patterns at once, as often occurs in heterophonic textures, is also an effective method of dispelling the awareness of forward motion.

<sup>256</sup>Bell, p17.

<sup>257</sup>Characteristically, in the gamelan, a nuclear theme is played simultaneously with several layers of elaboration on the theme in different registers, at varying paces, and on instruments with very distinctive timbres. Messiaen emulated the sound of the Javanese gamelan in some of his orchestral works and was known to be fond of the style of music.

### 10.7.2 Rhythmic canons

A special type of panisorhythm, is the rhythmic canon. Canons applied to pitch patterns were much in the spirit of contrapuntal French music around 1400<sup>258</sup>. In Messiaen's music, the rhythmic pattern is given 'canonic' treatment. As in the melodic variety, the repeated pattern (here rhythmic), is heard in different voices, beginning at different times, but not necessarily tied to any particular melodic material.

*Adieu, Harawi*, b59

## 10.8 Conclusion

Drew describes all Messiaen's rhythmic elements as being like different-sized cogs in a machine<sup>259</sup>. This is Messiaen's own description of his rhythmic practise:

"My rhythmic language is a mixture of all these elements: durations distributed in irregular numbers, an absence of even beats and of symmetrical measures, love for prime numbers, presence of non-retrogradable rhythms, and the actions of Personnages Rhythmiques. All this evolves, is mixed and super-imposed".<sup>260</sup>

With his wealth of inventiveness, Messiaen has been responsible for some of the most

<sup>258</sup>Bell, p12.

<sup>259</sup>Drew, *The Score I*, p48.

<sup>260</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p88.

significant developments in rhythmic practice in the last 300 years. Although many new possibilities become apparent in his music, perhaps his most significant contribution is the idea that rhythm could form the most important point of interest in a composition<sup>261</sup>. It is a sign of his divergent thinking powers and immense creativity, that he has combined rhythmic ideas originating from widely differing sources, into a language unique and new.

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<sup>261</sup>Bray, p106.

## CHAPTER 11 NOTATION

Obviously the rhythmic practises outlined in the preceding chapter pose notational problems for both composer and performer. Messiaen has arrived at four methods of notation to facilitate faithful presentation of his music. In all, he stresses the necessity of exact execution of the values marked.

The first method and that used in the solo vocal works, is particularly suited to one or a few performers. Messiaen favours this method above the others, as he feels it is the most exact representation of the composer's ideas<sup>262</sup>. Here exact values are written without time signature or beat. Bar lines are used only to nullify accidentals or to indicate phrases or periods.

*L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi, b7*

In the orchestra-and-voice version of *Poèmes pour Mi*, Messiaen used a different method of notation. As shown below, signs appear over each note value to give its true duration. He may have derived this from the Indian method of notation, where a sign placed over the note indicates its value<sup>263</sup>. The numeral at the beginning of the measure indicates the number of beats therein.

<sup>262</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p28.

<sup>263</sup>Bell, p6.



<sup>(1)</sup> Vaut means "is worth"; or "has the value of".

*Technique*, nos.63, 64, 66

Where there are many musicians playing in different superimposed rhythms, the easiest and most indispensable method of notation, is the third. Normal meter is deployed, but is heavily marked with accents to indicate the true 'meter'. As far as the composer is concerned, this is a false representation, but it 'works' if everyone adheres closely to what is written. This example is taken from *Les Offrandes oubliées*.



*Les Offrandes oubliées*, *Technique*, no.67

The fourth method resembles traditional barring, but accommodates the rhythmic variations by means of constantly changing time signatures. As above, this is useful where groups of people are involved in reading a complex score. It has been used in vocal music, such as *Cinq Rechants*, the third member of the *Tristan Trilogy*.<sup>264</sup>

<sup>264</sup>The *Tristan Trilogy* is a set of three works based on the myth of *Tristan and Isolde*. It comprises the *Turungalîla Symphony*, *Harawi* and *Cinq Rechants*. See Appendix VI.

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

1<sup>er</sup> Sopr. *P* um

2<sup>e</sup> Sopr. *P* um

3<sup>e</sup> Sopr. *P* um

1<sup>er</sup> Contr. *f* les a-moureux s'en - vo - lent Brangien dans l'es-pa-ce tu souf - fles

2<sup>e</sup> et 3<sup>e</sup> Contr. *f* les vo - lent pa-ce souf - fles

3 Tén. *f* reux s'en - vo Brangien dans

1<sup>re</sup> Basse *f* les a-moureux s'en - vo - lent Brangien dans l'es-pa-ce tu souf - fles

2<sup>e</sup> et 3<sup>e</sup> Basses *f* les vo - lent pa-ce souf - fles

## PART III

The preceding review of Messiaen's complex musical language, with its multiple associations and allusions, reveals quite how much may have been overlooked or misunderstood by embarking directly on a study of the song cycles. Furthermore, the reader has had the opportunity to become acquainted with the songs, which provided the illustrative material for most of Part II.

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## CHAPTER 12 THE SONG CYCLES

Messiaen's love for theatricity manifested itself early in his composing career, in a proclivity for instrumental works with programmes. Later, texts were actually included in the music, as in the first set of songs, *Trois Mélodies* (1930). Six years passed before his interest in the genre revived and he was able to expand on his initial ideas. Subsequent work in the medium produced the three great song cycles:

<i>Poèmes pour Mi</i>	-	1936
<i>Chants de Terre et de Ciel</i>	-	1938
<i>Harawi, chant d'amour et de mort</i>	-	1946

12.1 The poetry<sup>265</sup>

Hutchings observes that great song writers rarely make successful settings of poetry other than those by their contemporaries, or near contemporaries<sup>266</sup>. In Messiaen's case, no such problem arises. He penned all the lyrics of his three major song cycles,

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<sup>265</sup>The poetry of all three song cycles is contained in Appendices III, IV and V.

<sup>266</sup>Hutchings, p274.

frequently conceiving both words and music simultaneously. His poetry has rarely been praised and sometimes even denigrated. Since the texts, however, are such an integral part of his thought in the song cycles, criticism of the poetry in isolation hardly seems justifiable.

### 12.1.1 Apocalyptic imagery

In Chapter two, it is noted that in his music, Messiaen focuses on the spectacular and splendid aspects of his faith. An appraisal of the apocalyptic literature in the Christian Bible reveals that much of the symbolism of the three song cycles is drawn from this source, especially the vision of St. John as recorded in the book of Revelation<sup>267</sup>. The meaning of the various Biblical symbols is often explained by references elsewhere in that book and these, when applied to Messiaen's texts, are very illuminating. Much of his poetry suddenly becomes more intelligible and accessible.

The book of Revelation contains a vision of the Final Judgement of the World and of the Celestial City awaiting those redeemed by God. It opens with John's vision of Christ, whose first words endorse Messiaen's cherished ideals concerning Time, Everlasting Life and Eternity<sup>268</sup>:

"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 sound of this majestic voice is "like the sound of rushing waters" (Revelation 1:15). A "river of life" is seen to be flowing from the throne of God (Revelation 22:1) and whoever is thirsty for Life, is admonished to "take the free gift of the water"

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<sup>267</sup>All future references in this section, unless otherwise stated, refer to the New International version.

<sup>268</sup> Heterophonic and monodic textures	Sections 9.2.1 and 9.2.2
Palindromic forms	Section 8.5
'Static' tempos	Section 10.1
Non-progressing rhythms	Section 10.3.4

(Revelation 22:17). One of the most oft-repeated elements in all three cycles, is water. This can now be understood as representing a source of life, not only in the physical, but, as used in Revelation, in a spiritual sense. The cleansing and redemptive powers of water are, elsewhere, attributed to the blood of Jesus:

".. and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from every sin<sup>269</sup>"  
and  
"in Him we have redemption through His blood<sup>270</sup>"

References to blood assume a new meaning in the poetry of the songs when seen in this light. For example, in *Résurrection* [*Chants de Terre et de Ciel*], the "single river of life in his side", no doubt refers to the blood which flowed from the side of Christ after the crucifixion and which, for the Christian, 'purchased' Eternal Life.

References to the bread of the Eucharist, the symbol for the body of Christ (Mark 14: 22)...

"Jesus took bread.. and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body"."

...occur in *Action de grâces* [*Poèmes pour Mi*] and in *Résurrection* [*Chants de Terre et de Ciel*].

On either side of the heavenly river which flows from the throne of God, is the tree of life bearing fruit every month (Revelation 22:2). The presence of this fruit implies fecundity and the abundance of God's provision. It is significant that in Revelation 2:7, the Christian is promised the "right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." Fruit is much mentioned in *Harawi*.

To the faithful, are also promised a "new name written on a white stone" (Revelation 2:17). This stone may be the one which appears in the words of *Résurrection* [*Chants*

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<sup>269</sup>1 John 1:7, Revised Standard Version.

<sup>270</sup>Ephesians 1:7.

*de Terre et de Ciel*]. The victorious Christian is guaranteed a position of security in the new order, as a pillar, or portal, in the temple of God. (See Revelation 3:12 and *Résurrection* [*Chants de Terre et de Ciel*]). Steadfast disciples are likewise, assured of new clothes (Revelation 3:4). In conjunction with this image, Messiaen alludes, in *Action de grâces* [*Poèmes pour Mi*], to the story contained in Ezekiel 37 wherein dead, dry bones become clad in flesh and are miraculously brought to life.

In John's vision, the glorious throne of God is encircled by a "rainbow, resembling an emerald" (Revelation 4:3). In Ezekiel 1:28, this prophet too, describes the radiance around the Lord, as "like the appearance of a rainbow". Messiaen's references to rainbows in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* (*Arc-en-ciel d'innocence*) and *Harawi* (*Doundou tchil*), as well as in his treatise *Technique de mon langage musical*, take on a new significance<sup>271</sup>. Bearing in mind the conspicuous use of the colour green in *Harawi*, it is of interest to note that the rainbow resembles an emerald.

Jesus holds in His right hand "seven stars" (Revelation 1:20). This is obviously one of Messiaen's favourite Biblical symbols, as there are many references to stars in the poetry of all three cycles. The numerology will be dealt with in section 12.1.11, but the relevance of the stars themselves is explained further on in the scripture verse "the seven stars ..are the angels of the seven churches". There is another reference to a star, in Revelation 2:28: the gift of "the morning star" is promised to those who endure hardship. In Revelation 22:16, Jesus describes Himself as the "bright Morning Star". The star therefore, comes to represent the presence of God Himself, or at least His angelic Host. It may not be inappropriate too, to follow on the reasoning of Cockburn in his discussion of the organ piece *La Nativité du Seigneur* (1936)<sup>272</sup>. In *Les Bergers*, the star shed its light on the stable, as Christ was to shed his moral and spiritual light on the world. The star led the shepherds and subsequently the Wise Men to Christ<sup>273</sup>. It would therefore, not be beyond credulity to suggest that the star could also be used

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<sup>271</sup>See also sections 4.1 and 6.3.

<sup>272</sup>Cockburn, p37.

<sup>273</sup>Matthew 2: 9-10.

as a symbol for that which leads people to Christ. In *Harawi*, it can be noted that prior to the sacrificial death, the star is an 'enchained' one. After death, when joy and unity are confirmed, the star is no longer 'enchained'.

The culmination of the prophetic vision is the description of the Holy City. In *La ville qui dormait, toi* [*Harawi*], the Beloved Bride herself is described as a city, surely the new Jerusalem. The presence of the city gates is remarked on in *Les Deux Guerriers* [*Poèmes pour Mi*] and one notes in Revelation 21:21, that these twelve gates are single pearls. Pearls recur frequently in the poetry of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and *Harawi*.

All the joy and protection of the Lord, however, are not achieved without a struggle. In Revelation 8:1, just prior to the opening of the seventh seal before Armageddon, there is "silence in heaven for half an hour". *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil* [*Harawi*] sings of this "new silence". The ensuing cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil, is graphically represented in each of the cycles. Images are drawn from the chapters in Revelation which deal with: the Beast of the Abyss (chapters 11 and 19), the woman and the dragon (chapters 12 - 13), the fall of Babylon (chapters 17 - 19) and the lake of burning sulphur (chapter 20). So in *Poèmes pour Mi*, there are warriors and sulphur (*Les Deux Guerriers*); in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* there is that "unheard of beast that devours" (*Minuit pile et face*); and in *Harawi* the enchained angel is cast down to the abyss in the midst of cosmic chaos (*Bonjour toi, colombe verte; Montagnes; Répétition planétaire; Katchikatchi les étoiles* and *Adieu*).

All three cycles abound in the aforementioned religious and also love symbolism, conceived and combined in Surrealist terms. It is therefore relevant, to briefly discuss Surrealism.

### 12.1.2 Surrealism

Surrealism does not seem to be a concept tied only to an historical age in the Arts. Certainly its birth was associated with, and influenced by, psycho-analysis and the

studies of Freud and it came to its first full maturity between 1925 and the outbreak of World war II<sup>274</sup>. Nevertheless, it may appear at any time in the work of those who, according to Gaunt "value the liberty of imagination"<sup>275</sup>. He explains that Surrealism was never really a school, only an expression in a particular kind of freedom.<sup>275</sup>

### 12.1.2.1 Surrealism and the Supernatural

Surrealism was initially intended to be a new art which transcended boundaries, particularly those between the conscious and the sub-conscious: the real and unreal worlds of waking and dreaming<sup>276</sup>. According to Aragon, an alliance between the two 'worlds' was expected to yield greater work than that in which the two were kept separate<sup>274</sup>. By evoking repressed material through free association, as advocated by Freud, Surrealists were encouraged to discard pure logic and to explore instead, alternative states of consciousness.

Gaunt associates Surrealism with the supernatural<sup>277</sup>. In support of this assertion, he quotes the following from Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* and notes the special meaning ascribed to the word faith:

".. to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of the imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith."

Victor Hugo describes the supernatural, not as something different from reality, but as

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<sup>274</sup>Gaunt, p25.

<sup>275</sup>Gaunt, p47.

<sup>276</sup>*Pears Cyclopaedia*, ed. C.Cook, Great Britain: Chaucer Press, 88th Edition, section L, p116.

<sup>277</sup>Gaunt, p7.

the "reality normally hidden from view"<sup>278</sup>. Messiaen then, following the lead of such Surrealist poets as Breton, Eluard, Reverdy and Hello, also gave free reign to his imagination to suggest a different level of experience, in his case, spiritual.<sup>279</sup>

#### 12.1.2.2 New Associations

Modern Surrealism has taken two broad directions: the first towards complete fantasy; and the second towards the unusual juxtaposition of objects<sup>280</sup>. It was envisaged that a free association of words and images would reveal new hybrids of thought, which would, in turn, have the power to evoke powerful psychological associations<sup>281</sup>. Some of the forms of association formerly neglected, but suddenly considered to be a wonderful and fresh source of inspiration and even a superior reality, were, as mentioned, dreams and the disinterested "play of thought"<sup>282</sup>. The result was intended to be a form in which the narrative and literary principles of correspondence through conjunction, would be superseded by the new power of non-specific metaphors.<sup>283</sup>

*Poèmes pour Mi verges* on the Surrealistic in its first 'tumbling' of unexpected images. Except in one or two cases, however, there is always the readily discernable 'translating' connection of Christian symbolism. In *Action de grâces*, the gentle description of Nature and the two lovers, is interrupted by the rather grotesque image of a "garment of flesh and bone which will germinate for the resurrection". Although the description startles, the logic is not difficult to follow. The invisible soul becomes clad in the resurrection

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<sup>278</sup>Gaunt, p7.

<sup>279</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p243, has described Christianity as the greatest Surrealist conception of all: "a body of thought and imagery grown in the minds of some of the most outstanding geniuses of two millenniums".

<sup>280</sup>*Pears Cyclopaedia*, section L, p117.

<sup>281</sup>Haslam, p6.

<sup>282</sup>Gaunt, p48.

<sup>283</sup>Haslam, p7.

body. As the cycle progresses, the use of Surrealistic language increases. See especially the texts of *Épouvante* and *Le collier*.

*Chants de Terre et de Ciel* moves closer to *Harawi* in the Surrealism of the text. Delightful, sometimes frightening images are 'strewn' across the music in tenuously connected sequences. In *Danse du bébé-Pilule*, the words give the impression of the excited play of a small boy: the alphabet, the surprise at the corner of the doors, birds, blue fish, blue moons, cream, a little nose, the horizons of a glass and leapfrog. This is markedly similar to the intense Surrealistic 'childhood' poetry penned by an English poet of the 1940's, Dylan Thomas. He too was criticized for 'empty rhetoric and obscurantism', but also received adulation for original and creative use of words<sup>284</sup>. Compare the following impressions of childhood by Dylan Thomas, with those of Messiaen:

*Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs  
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,  
The night above the dingle starry  
Time let me hail and climb  
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,  
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns  
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves  
Trail with daisies and barley  
Down the rivers of the windfall light.*

*And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns  
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,  
In the sun that is young once only,  
Time let me play and be  
Golden in the mercy of his means,  
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves  
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,  
And the Sabbath rang slowly  
In the pebbles of the holy streams.*

From *Fern Hill*, by Dylan Thomas

In *Minuit pile et face*, the images are a lot less savoury, but just as evocative: streets

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<sup>284</sup>M. Heese and R. Lawton, *The Owl Critic - An introduction to literary criticism*, Cape Town: Nasou, 1983, p80.

all rotten under the hard street-lamps, stinking eye, cross-road of fear, cloak of madness and pride. Nevertheless, as in *Poèmes pour Mi*, there persists a strong and obvious insistence on the Christian symbols of bread, Resurrection, angels, God and the Son.

*Harawi* is not narrative at all in the conventional 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, mountains. All are used to evoke images in a reality beyond that of the everyday and for Messiaen meant to represent a reality that is spiritual. The images at first reading appear to be far more disjointed than before and so are, in that sense more Surrealistic. Nowhere is the listener assisted by the obvious references to God, the Eucharist, or the perfume of incense found in the earlier two cycles. In fact the only concrete help the listener gets with unravelling some of the imagery of the text, is the Surrealistic painting by Sir Roland Penrose, on which Messiaen based *Harawi*.<sup>285</sup>

For the first time too in *Harawi*, the Surrealist juxtaposition of the unusual and the unlikely is not limited to the text, but is also apparent between voice and instrument. Nichols finds the lyricism of the vocal line in *Adieu* and the percussive use of the piano, a "stringent test of compatibility"<sup>286</sup>. 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.

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<sup>285</sup>The painting is reproduced later in this chapter, in section 12.1.10.

<sup>286</sup>Nichols, p42.

Musical score for "Adieu, Harawi, b30". The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo markings are "Très modéré" and "Très lent". The lyrics are "A dieu toi, lu miè re".

*Adieu, Harawi, b30*

Sometimes the juxtaposition of the unexpected occurs in the relationship of words to music. In *L'Amour de Piroutcha*, [Harawi], the young man's part expresses very 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.

Musical score for "L'Amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b7". The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo marking is "Même mouvement". The lyrics are "pour toi." and "Ton œil tous les ciels, dou, dou tchil. Cou-pe-moi la tête, dou, dou tchil.".

*L'Amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b7*

Similarly in *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*, 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

Il ne par - le plus,

*Vif, joyeux et passionné*

PIANO

*f* *mf* *molto*

Red. Red. Red. Red.

*L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi, 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.

### 12.1.2.3 The primordial

By adapting the technique of free association to art, the Surrealists developed a creative method which produced images, sometimes fantastic, or occult, and which seemed to spring from some lost archaic consciousness<sup>287</sup>. The powerful content of the two fundamental drives of the savage mind: love and death (identified by Freud as *eros* and *thanatos*<sup>287</sup>), became areas of primary concern. Messiaen's three song cycles all deal with love and death, but *Harawi*, is specifically sub-titled *chant d'amour et mort* (song of love and death). The entire cycle is set in some long-lost, Peruvian Inca culture and represents primordial elements in its savage rhythms, ritual dances, incantations and human sacrifices.

<sup>287</sup>Haslam, p7.

#### 12.1.2.4 Eroticisim

Eroticisim was embraced as a great liberating force in Surrealism. The eroticisim present in *Harawi* and to a lesser extent in *Poèmes pour Mi*, is 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. Three songs in the second book of *Poèmes pour Mi* symbolize the consummation of the marriage. The unconventional nature for a song notwithstanding, the subject is treated by Messiaen, with a guileless pleasure, Griffiths perceives as akin to the guilt-free eroticisim of Hindu sculpture.<sup>288</sup>

#### 12.1.2.5 Tastefulness

The pursuit of the fantastic and the desire to be free of the deadening influence of everyday rule and reality, caused the Surrealists to shun the pedantries of mere good taste. Griffiths maintains that it is this refusal to be bound by what is normally considered appropriate, rather than the dream or nightmare imagery, which makes *Harawi* one of the few Surrealist masterpieces in music<sup>289</sup>. These breaches of 'good taste' will be further discussed in section 12.5.

#### 12.1.3 Love

Messiaen has stated that the first and noblest aspect of his work, is the presentation of the truths of the Catholic faith<sup>290</sup>. As a human being, however, he is naturally sensitive to human love. This presents no conflict of interest to the composer who perceives the latter as a reflection of the one true love: Divine love. *Poèmes pour Mi*

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<sup>288</sup>Griffiths, *Avant-garde*, p131-132.

<sup>289</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p128.

<sup>290</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p2.

and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* deal with the sacramental aspects of love, marriage, and parenting. *Harawi*, deals with the Tristan-like notion of the fulfilment of love in death.

In *Poèmes pour Mi*, Messiaen borrows words and images from the Bible to convey the parallels he perceives between marital love and the love of Christ for His bride, the church<sup>291</sup>. Johnson has described *Poèmes pour Mi* as ‘a document of marital affection’ and a ‘tract’ comparable to the Song of Solomon, in its parabolism between human and Divine love<sup>292</sup>. The nine songs of the first cycle are divided into two books. The four songs of *Livre une* deal with the preparation for marriage and the five of *Livre deux*, with the fulfilment of marriage.

The second cycle, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, is linked to the previous one, by the first song *Bail avec Mi*, sub-titled *pour ma femme* (for my wife)<sup>293</sup>. It focuses on parenting and childhood and was written to celebrate the birth of Messiaen’s son, Pascal. As the title suggests, this cycle also deals with both the physical and spiritual aspects of love: *Chants de Terre* (songs of the earth) *et de Ciel* (and the sky).

Although there is no explicit mention of Divinity in *Harawi*, the love is celebrated on a cosmic scale.

#### 12.1.4 Sacrifice

Love and death are man’s links with the Eternal. All true acts of love, whether Divine or human, involve sacrifice. Christ’s sacrificial death enables the Christian to contemplate a Life Eternal. Donington, in the book *Wagner’s Ring and its Symbols*,

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<sup>291</sup>See chapter 2, footnote 83.

<sup>292</sup>Johnson, p78.

<sup>293</sup>Mi was apparently a pet-name for Messiaen’s wife and does not refer to the third degree of the solfa.

explains that the quotation from the Christian Bible<sup>294</sup>, 'I die daily'<sup>295</sup>, applies not only to a physical death such as Christ's on the cross, but to the necessary sacrifice of self in relationships. This, he asserts, can afflict one like a "shocking violence and distress of the spirit".<sup>296</sup>

In *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, references to love, sacrifice and death are expressed specifically within such a Christian context i.e. with references to the bread (of the Eucharist) and the cross. In *Harawi*, the themes of love and sacrificial death are retained, but symbolism and subject are expanded to include those not specifically associated with religion.

The final song of each cycle considers the triumph of love in sacrificial death. *Poèmes pour Mi* ends with the resurrection of man, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* with the resurrection of Christ and *Harawi* with the presumed continuation of love in the "peace of the eternal night"<sup>297</sup>. The corollary to death and sacrifice, for Messiaen and other Christians, then, is ultimate victory and joy. The exultant outpouring of *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil* [*Harawi*] delights in "how simple it is to be dead". The lovers, released from earthly ties, embrace the whole universe: the danger is passed, the sacrifice made and once-painful experiences of the past can be forgotten in the experiences of a new life.

#### 12.1.5 Hell

The delights of heaven become more meaningful if there exists an equal and opposite state of hell. In *Épouvante* [*Poèmes pour Mi*], Messiaen presents a quasi-Surrealistic

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<sup>294</sup>1 Corinthians 15:31.

<sup>295</sup>R. Donington quoted in Johnson, p77.

<sup>296</sup>Johnson, p77.

<sup>297</sup>Johnson, record sleeve notes for *Harawi*, ARGO, ZRG 606.

vision of Hell: the loss of God's love put alongside the torment of losing the love of the Beloved. In *Harawi*, the pain of losing the Beloved precipitates into the parallel pain of abandoning oneself to love or death (see 12.1.3). This is the theme of *Montagnes*, where the above experiences are represented as the descent into an abyss or chasm. This is a familiar subject for Messiaen. In *Livre d'Orgue, Les mains de l'abîsme* (1951), as in *Harawi*, the sick vertigo produced by such an experience and the mighty gulfs separating human misery and Divine Pity are implied. Messiaen finds justification for references to the abyss below (death behind him) and the abyss above (life above) in the Biblical book of Habakkuk<sup>298</sup>.

#### 12.1.6 Tristan and Isolde

The Biblical concepts of love, sacrifice and Eternity are mirrored, to an extent, in the myth of Tristan and Isolde. In this "representative of all the great love stories of time"<sup>299</sup>, death and separation become the initiation from this world into a world of greater, purer love. Messiaen felt inspired by these noble sentiments to compose a trilogy of works loosely based on the tale<sup>300</sup>. The following passionate declarations made by Isolde in the supreme ecstasy of her *liebestod*, provide an accurate summary of the message of *Harawi*. In Wagner's operatic version, Isolde dies with Tristan clasped to her breast:

"Thus might we die, that together, ever one, without end, never waking, never fearing, namelessly enveloped in love, given up to each other, to live only for love"<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>298</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p79.

<sup>299</sup>Messiaen, cited by Samuel, *Conversations*, p9.

<sup>300</sup>The Tristan trilogy comprises the *Turungalîla Symphony, Harawi, Cinq Rechants*. See Appendix VI.

<sup>301</sup>R. Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act II, scene 2, libretto p70.

"yearned for, longed for death-in-love! in your arms, consecrated to you,  
sacred elemental quickening force, free from the peril of waking"<sup>302</sup>

In *Harawi*, Messiaen retained this idea of a fatal and irresistible love which transcends the limits of body and mind. His poetic expression of the ideas is, like Wagner's, Surrealistic rather than dramatic.

In the text of *Harawi*, Messiaen alluded specifically to some of the imagery used in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. The recurrent interplay of light and dark (and the related images of eyes, sight, stars, and sun), could conceivably, in both works, be symbolic of good and evil. The descriptive phrases of *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil [Harawi]*, listed below, are particularly reminiscent of many used in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.

"..its eye is desert"  
 "..light in secret"  
 "..clear sun"  
 "..the water's eye"  
 "..the eye of time"  
 "..we sleep in your gaze"  
 "..our gaze, seen by death"  
 "..Heaven's eye"

The lover of *Tristan und Isolde* glows brighter

"...raising himself amidst the stars".<sup>303</sup>

In *Harawi*, Piroutcha, the Beloved, is

"...all the birds of the stars".<sup>304</sup>

The phrases "Eyes, mouth, heart on heart" from *Tristan und Isolde*<sup>305</sup>...

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<sup>302</sup>Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act II, scene 2, libretto p72.

<sup>303</sup>Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act III, scene 3, libretto, p96.

<sup>304</sup>*Amour oiseau d'étoile [Harawi]*.

<sup>305</sup>Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act II, scene 2, libretto, p68.

are recalled in *Harawi* in such phrases as ...

"My hands, thine eye, thy neck, the sky"<sup>304</sup>; and  
"My hand on thy heart by thee".<sup>306</sup>

The green dove in the dark (*Dans le noir*) experiences the peace of the eternal night; the ...

"Ewige nacht, süsse nacht" of Act II of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*.<sup>307</sup>

Both works mention the fatal love potion. In the song cycle this occurs in *Adieu* and *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil* and in the opera, in Act I. Messiaen's depiction of the languid, warm world of the lovers, the drowsy garden of *La ville qui dort, toi*, is suggestive of the meeting place of *Tristan und Isolde* in Act 2, scene 2. The bank of flowers on which the lovers recline, is also common to both composers' interpretation. Here is Messiaen's description of the scene:

"the two lovers 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"<sup>308</sup>.

### 12.1.7 Nature Imagery

The symbiotic relationship of lovers and garden in the preceding paragraph, highlights Messiaen's great fondness for Nature and Nature imagery. In the poetry of *Poèmes*

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<sup>306</sup>*Bonjour toi, colombe verte* [*Harawi*].

<sup>307</sup>An interesting, if not necessarily related observation, is that a *triste* (a word which closely resembles the name of the mythical hero), is the name given to a melancholy love-song of Peruvian origin, adopted in Argentina by the second half of the nineteenth century. *Triste* melodies were predominantly pentatonic and their texts often a combination of Indian and Spanish words. This may be coincidental, but the close relationship with *Harawi* is striking: Peruvian origin, melancholy love-song, pentatonic mode and mixture of languages! Contained in Apel, p868.

<sup>308</sup>Johnson, p88.

*pour Mi*, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and *Harawi*, stars, earth, birds, water, pearls, sky, colours and mountains feature prominently in the texts.

Pearls are probably associated in Messiaen's mind, with the beads of the Rosary<sup>309</sup>. Mountains too, have a religious significance for the composer. Considered to be a display of God's majesty, his use of them as a backdrop for many songs probably arises from a childhood spent near the mountains of the Dauphine. In *Harawi*, the mountains referred to, would be the Peruvian Andes. In *L'amour de Piroutcha* their presence is implied by the description "...Chains of red, black, mauve..". In *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*, they rise as "natural temples (or shrines), pointing heavenwards". The association between mountains and religion is less overt in *Montagnes*. Here the trees on the mountainside appear to Messiaen, to be wearing monks' hoods. This delightful image conjures up a mental picture of dark cowled heads, perhaps peaked like the tops of fir trees. Significantly, this song is in the style of incantation, derived from the reciting tone technique of plainchant<sup>310</sup>.

The use of descriptive Nature metaphors and similes in the poetry changes as one progresses from *Poèmes pour Mi* to *Harawi*. The expressive potential inherent in the language is exploited more fully in the later, than in the earlier two cycles. In the first two cycles, they are used and 'discarded', with little noticeable repetition of imagery from song to song. In *Harawi*, images recur frequently and with an urgency which compels the listener to notice the symbolism. Johnson describes the poetry of *La ville qui dormait, toi*, the introductory song of *Harawi*, as ultra-Symbolist<sup>311</sup>. Here, as on many other occasions in the cycle, images of the world are no longer applied to descriptions of the Beloved; they are transferred to the Beloved. She is the town who is sleeping, as yet unawakened to a life of love; she is the double violet, symbol of

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<sup>309</sup>The string of beads used to assist the memory in the recitation of prayer.

<sup>310</sup>See section 15.3.

<sup>311</sup>Johnson, p43.

modesty (also associated with the truth of love<sup>312</sup>); and he is the immovable eye: the lover gazing at her steadfastly. In *L'amour de Piroutcha*, the young man is a large, stable tree with "...your green arms".

Nature imagery is prominent in the three cyclic theme songs which form the 'pillars' of *Harawi*. The now-familiar sky, water, pearls, birds and stars of the earlier cycles are further adorned with flowers and fruit. The return of the cyclic theme in *Adieu* is a pivotal point in the cycle signifying the farewell and death of the lovers. The images from the first rendition remain: the limpid pearl, the enchained star, the fruit, night, sky; but to these are added: the weeping desert, and the mirror with no breath of love. Terms of endearment in *Harawi* are all associated with Nature and are persistently reiterated: my green dove, my limpid pearl (cyclic theme songs: *Bonjour toi, colombe verte, Adieu, Dans le noir*); my sweet fruit (from *Doundou tchil*); my little cinder (from *L'amour de Piroutcha*); the enchained star (from *Répétition planétaire*) and Star-bird (from *Amour oiseau d'étoile*). In *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*, Nature's elements: sky, water, and time are repeated as a refrain throughout the song. The evolutionary forces of Nature, here joining the lovers into one creature, are symbolized by the awakening of a green Springtime<sup>313</sup>.

### 12.1.8 Colours

Colours are mentioned in *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, but, like the Nature metaphors, assume a far greater descriptive and symbolic importance in the text of *Harawi*. In *Poèmes pour Mi*, the Beloved is once described as blue and green (*Paysage*), the two colours of nature. Green is also identified with rebirth (Springtime) and with Hope<sup>314</sup>. In *Harawi*, Messiaen combines the colour green with the image of the bird, *colombe*, in the term of endearment addressed to the Beloved: *colombe verte*.

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<sup>312</sup>See section 6.3 for the significance of colour.

<sup>313</sup>Johnson, p81.

<sup>314</sup>Messiaen calls green "the colour of my hopes". Johnson, p81.

This affectionate expression occurs at least five times in the cycle. She is also thrice called the double violet, a reference to Messiaen's favourite colour complex and to the Truth of their Love<sup>315</sup>. These two colours occur most often in the cycle.

Other colours associated with the violet complex, such as red, blue and mauve, also feature in *Harawi*. Black occurs as part of the contemplation and evocation of death in *Montagnes* and *Répétition planétaire*. Gold is used in *L'amour de Piroutcha* to describe the precious life-breath of the lovers.

### 12.1.9 Folk Influences

Just prior to writing *Harawi*, Messiaen was much intrigued by d'Harcourt's writing on the folklore of the Andes<sup>316</sup>. Always fascinated by mountains, religions and ancient cultures, Messiaen found inspiration here for his third and final song cycle.

#### 12.1.9.1 Quechua words

Quechua is the indigenous Indian language of Peru. The name, *Harawi*, is a Quechua word referring to a genus of love song, which ends with the death of the lovers. Like many great love stories of the past, it is intensely tragic, notwithstanding the mythological symbolism of sacrificial death as the fulfilment of love (see section 12.1.5).

*Piroutcha*, the name of the Beloved, is probably extracted from folk song number 31 in the d'Harcourts volume of Peruvian folksong<sup>317</sup>. Its literal meaning is a spinning top, but by extension it could be associated with a fantastic dancer. This seems plausible, especially as the Beloved is first called *Piroutcha* in *Doundou tchil*, a

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<sup>315</sup>See section 6.3.

<sup>316</sup>Johnson, p79.

<sup>317</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p127.

celebratory courting dance. The possibility cannot be discounted that Messiaen may simply have been attracted to the euphony of the name<sup>318</sup>.

*Doundou tchil* is an onomatopoeic word imitating the sound made by the ankle bells of Peruvian traditional dancers. Other actual Quechua words, *kahipas*, *mahipas*, also appear in the text of this song. As in *Syllabes*, they are probably used more for their sound than their meaning<sup>319</sup>.

The symbolic ritual dance of the stars in *Doundou tchil* and the celestial vision advanced in *Répétition planétaire*, become reality in *Katchikatchi les étoiles*. *Katchikatchi* is the Quechua word for grasshoppers and the music of this song represents the activity suggested by the title. Johnson<sup>320</sup> describes it as a Surrealistic nightmare, in which the lovers become the stars, the atoms, and the whole cosmos, jumping and dancing like grasshoppers.

#### 12.1.9.2 Peruvian folklore

The three songs using the cyclic theme (*Bonjour toi, colombe verte*; *Adieu* and *Dans le noir*) are addressed to the *Colombe verte*, the green dove. This bird is a sacred Maya symbol for the Beloved, and one sanctioned by many Indian love songs<sup>321</sup>. It may be coincidental, but the dove is also used in Christian symbolism to represent the presence of God, or the Holy Spirit. All these happily coincide with Messiaen's well-documented fondness for birds.

*Syllabes* re-enacts musically the traditional Peruvian dance of the Apes. This ritual

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<sup>318</sup>The title of the *Turangalîla Symphony* was chosen partly because of the beautiful sound of the word.

<sup>319</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p127.

<sup>320</sup>Johnson, p81.

<sup>321</sup>Rostand, chapter 6.

dance commemorates the occasion when an Inca prince was saved from great danger by the timely warning cries of a troop of apes<sup>321</sup>. In order to suggest the apes in the music, Messiaen created an onomatopoeic word, dependant on a prolonged vowel sound, which, when repeated gives the effect of a troop of barking animals.

### 12.1.9.3 Peruvian folksong

*L'amour de Piroutcha* is an exchange between the young girl and the young man of the cycle. There are examples of dialogue songs in the Western repertoire with which Messiaen would have been familiar, but it is possible he was motivated in this instance, by the dialogue song in the d'Harcourts' collection. The interchange of *L'amour de Piroutcha* is structured in the same way as song number 37 in the folk anthology<sup>322</sup>. No similar conversation technique is used in the other two cycles.

The derivation of Harawi's cyclic theme from the Peruvian folksong, *Delirio*, has been dealt with in some detail in Part II, section 6.1.

### 12.1.10 The painting

Although Messiaen had been inspired by physical images and icons in the cycles before *Harawi*, these always had strong familial or religious connections. *Harawi*, Messiaen declares, is symbolized by Sir Roland Penrose's Surrealistic painting, *L'Île Invisible* (1937).<sup>323</sup>

The 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) gives precise clues to references not only in the whole cycle, but specifically to the song *Amour*

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<sup>322</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p127.

<sup>323</sup>Rostand, chapter 6.

*oiseau d'étoile*. The poetry of this song, selectively quoted below, is based expressly on the painting (p153).

"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."

#### 12.1.11 Number symbolism

Messiaen's fascination with numbers and number symbolism is well known. It may be significant, therefore, that the number of songs in *Poèmes pour Mi* is nine, the number of maternity. Further number symbolism in that cycle, is the use of the number two, (two children, two warriors and two arms.) These allude to the mystery 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 (the number of perfection) are mentioned in the final two songs. In *Harawi*, number references, unlike those in the earlier two cycles, are repeatedly mentioned at strategic places: the first song, the eighth (one of the 'core' songs) and the last. The violet, always a double one, and the figure five, associated with a Christ figure and the death of death<sup>324</sup>, are used to describe the Beloved throughout the cycle. The number twelve and its multiples, like the number seven, is used persistently in 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 was Christ's choice to select 12 disciples, the number seems to

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<sup>324</sup>See section 10.3.3.



denote an entire and whole body: an ideal presentation. It is therefore open to conjecture that it has a similar significance in *Harawi*, which comprises twelve songs.

At this late stage in his composing career, it may be possible to speculate further on the number symbolism of the composer. Three is, after all, the number of completeness, the number of the Trinity and the number of song cycles he has composed.

## 12.2 Relationship of words to music

Hutchings maintains that simplicity of syntax is an essential feature of a good song lyric<sup>325</sup>. The demands made on the listener's attention by the music, he continues, do not allow for puzzling over problematic linguistics. Messiaen is obviously not concerned with syntax in the conventional sense, yet he is at pains to ensure the audibility of his message. Particularly in the early cycle, the declamatory style of some of the songs maintains a singular devotion to the text. Such explicit deference to the poetry could be criticized as symptomatic of a decline in the intimacy between text and music<sup>326</sup>. In Messiaen's case, however, the presentation of 'sacred' words with a typically sparse 'plainsong-type' accompaniment seems to be entirely appropriate.

Not only are the words intelligible, but Messiaen assists our comprehension by 'word painting': the expression through music, of ideas presented or suggested by the text of the song<sup>327</sup>. This technique, though usually rejected by modern composers as naive, played a prominent role in Baroque music<sup>328</sup>. Most often this treatment is applied to the portrayal of single words or phrases, rather than the rendition of the 'general

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<sup>325</sup>Hutchings, p266.

<sup>326</sup>Hutchings, p189.

<sup>327</sup>Apel, p928.

<sup>328</sup>Apel, p929.

mood' of the poetry. Certain words obviously lend themselves more to this means of expression than others.

- i) Activity: Rising musical phrases in the music are used to illustrate forward or upward motion in the text. Hence references in Messiaen's 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 in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower two staves. The lyrics are "et de ré .. sur - reo - tion!". The music features a prominent ascending melodic line in the voice part, starting with a forte (f) dynamic and moving towards a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. The piano accompaniment consists of complex, rhythmic patterns in both hands, with the right hand often playing chords and the left hand playing a more active line. The overall mood is one of upward motion and hope.

*Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi, b26*

Conversely the descent into the fires of Hell in *Épouvante* [*Poèmes pour Mi*], or into the Abyss in *Montagnes* [*Harawi*] is conveyed by downward motion.

In *Arc-en-ciel d'innocence*, the music 'plays games' with the little boy. Hither and thither motion communicates musically, 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":

The image shows a musical score for a voice and piano. The voice part is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower two staves. The lyrics are "ver ? Viens, que je te ca.ta.pul.tes dans le jour". The music features a prominent ascending melodic line in the voice part, starting with a forte (f) dynamic and moving towards a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. The piano accompaniment consists of complex, rhythmic patterns in both hands, with the right hand often playing chords and the left hand playing a more active line. The overall mood is one of upward motion and hope.

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

A meandering melodic line in *L'Épouse*, can be seen to accompany the words "Va où l'Esprit te mène" (go, where the spirit leads):

CHANT

Presque lent

Va où l'Esprit te mène,

*L'Épouse, Poèmes pour Mi, b1*

A sharply jagged line in the next example, from *L'amour de Piroutcha*, sketches the outline of a mountain range:

Ah! Chânes rouges, noires, mauves, amour, la mort.

*L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b13*

ii) Sound: Mention has been made in section 12.1.9.1 of Messiaen's use of onomatopoeic words. In *Prière exaucée*, the words 'frappe, tape, choque' [beat, knock, shock/thump] are set to music which does precisely that:

Frappe, tape, choque pour ton roi

*Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi, b20*

Cries at the beginning of *Répétition planétaire* are preceded by, what can only be described as, an instrumental attempt at the same. The following excerpt illustrates:

CHANT  
Modéré, un peu vif  
Ahil ————— Ahil

PIANO  
Modéré, un peu vif  
ff  
(pour 4)  
6  
6  
6

*Répétition planétaire, Harawi, b1*

A different sound is suggested in this example from *L'amour de Piroutcha*: "Our breathes" is written as if to suggest a 'musical sigh'.

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

*L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b10.*

iii) Time: Messiaen does not limit his pictorial representations to the dimension of pitch. Such words as *prolongement* are, as in the next example, augmented in value:

L'é.pou - se — est le prolon.ge - ment — de l'é - poux, —

*L'Épouse, Poèmes pour Mi, b7*

The passing of time into Eternity is conveyed in the final songs of both *Poèmes pour*

*Mi* and *Harawi*, by an ongoing series of descending chords. The ending given here, is from the former:

*Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi, b30*

Such graphic musical depictions of the text occur consistently and relatively unchanged from *Poèmes pour Mi* to *Harawi*.

### 12.3 Co-operation between singer and pianist

There is an increasing necessity for close co-operation between singer and pianist as one moves from *Poèmes pour Mi* through to *Harawi*. On a fairly simple level, this rapport is required in those songs in which voice and piano begin simultaneously. Two songs in *Poèmes pour Mi* begin in this way, compared to eight in *Harawi*. Constant communication is even more essential in those songs where the music suddenly falls silent, to be resumed again by both instruments simultaneously in full voice. In *Ta voix* [*Poèmes pour Mi*], a single rest separates the final phrase from the rest of the song. In later songs, particularly those of *Harawi*, this procedure occurs more frequently and sometimes more than once in a single song. The following three lines from *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil* convey the capriciousness of the lovers' feelings by this method:

moufruit, ma part de té. nè. bres, tu es là, — toi  
 L'a - mour, la — — — — — Jol - - - - - el

*Très lent*  
*pp*  
*fff*  
*Très lent*  
*Red.*

*L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi, b77*

The final song of *Harawi, Dans le noir*, requires much empathy between vocalist and pianist, as they quietly, with sensitively placed pauses, ritardandos and diminuendos, bring the work to a close.

#### 12.4 Articulation of the cycles

The cyclic nature of *Poèmes pour Mi* is emphasized primarily by the similarity in style of the first and last songs. Both *Action de grâces* and *Prière exaucée* are addressed to the Beloved and to God, and both emulate the psalmody and vocalise of plainsong. Textual cross references are not especially noticeable in the cycle beyond the 'eye', which recurs in the first three songs, and references to the number two. Although Messiaen uses F-sharp for the first *alleluia*, that key is not recalled in the *alleluia* of *Prière exaucée*. Griffiths suggests that the songs are linked tonally, but in the following unusual way: both mode two and mode three can contain within their structure, a two

semitone - four semitone - two semitone - four semitone edifice e.g. A-sharp - C - E - F-sharp - A-sharp - C etc. He perceives the tonality of all but the last song, as being drawn from this system. Perhaps the last song moves outside the key scheme because the composer permits himself, at least initially, to ponder the possibility of separation from the Beloved through Death<sup>329</sup>. There is no evidence of any palindromic or circular pattern of keys usage.

The first song of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* acts as a link between it and *Poèmes pour Mi* and repeats the 'eye' image from the first cycle. Thereafter the image is dispensed with. *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* deals with cyclic aspects in much the same way as *Poèmes pour Mi*. The first and last songs again have associations with plainsong, but this time the key of F-sharp from the central section of the first, *Bail avec Mi*, is recalled in the last, *Résurrection*. The central two songs, *Danse du bébé-Pilule* and *Arc-en-ciel d'innocence*, both emphasise joyful 'play' imagery and mention the pet name, *Pilule*, but these aspects are not developed or re-used. *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* shows a movement towards the formal design of *Harawi*, in which the longest songs are placed at the centre of the cycle.

The overall logic and unity of *Harawi* is far superior to that of the earlier two cycles. *Harawi* is a cleverly thought out, closely-integrated unit, in which the formal design underscores philosophy and message<sup>330</sup>. The means by which one song is linked to another are various. The most obvious memory cue for the listener, is the repeated theme. *Harawi* has a cyclic theme which recurs at three strategic points in the cyclic, to comment on the evolving world of the Beloved. The theme from another central song, *Syllabes*, is quoted again in the final song. On a smaller but no less significant scale, the same melodic phrase introduces and concludes the cycle. Life would appear to have moved its full circle.

Instrumentally certain features recur. Birdsong is heard in the second (*Bonjour toi*,

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<sup>329</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p82 - 83.

<sup>330</sup>For more detailed discussion, refer back to sections 8.3 and 8.4.

*colombe verte*), the ninth (*L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*) and the tenth songs (*Amour oiseau d'étoile*). Ritual dances are found in both *Doundou tchil* and in *Katchikatchi les étoiles*.

Keys, in the loose sense in which they can be applied here, are also used as a means of association. Although the introduction to the cycle is in G, every rendition of the cyclic theme is in E-flat, which means the 'first' and last songs of the cycle are in the same key. For a more detailed look at the tonal structure of the cycle, see section 8.4.

Textual cross references are too many to enumerate and many have been dealt with in sections 12.1.6, 12.1.7 and 12.1.10. Particularly significant is 'the sleeping town' (with which the cycle begins and ends) and, of course, the 'green dove'. Textual links other than the recurring Nature or colour imagery, include subtle transformations of words from one song to another. The gentle low-pitched *Ahis* of *L'amour de Piroutcha* become the fearful howling *Ahis* which 'frame' the next song, *Répétition planétaire*. *Répétition planétaire* repeats the *tchil* sound from *Doundou tchil*. These *doundou tchils* are heard again, with other material from *Répétition planétaire* (*kahipas mahipas*) in *Syllabes*. The song *Doundou tchil* has a 'lullaby' section which repeats the word *toungou*. The love song which follows *Doundou tchil*, *L'amour de Piroutcha*, begins with those same words but transforms them with new music.

All these aspects contribute to the unity of the presentation.

## 12.5 The cycles in performance

Although the vantage point of these cycles is male, all were written for the female voice. This unconventional choice of interpreter could be Messiaen's attempt to preserve inviolate, the feelings he expresses in his poetry<sup>331</sup>. Should a man sing the songs, he would appropriate Messiaen's passions for himself.

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<sup>331</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p78.

The choice of subject brings one to Messiaen's first breaches of those boundaries normally dictated by the 'good taste' mentioned in section 12.1.1.5. *Poèmes pour Mi* first displeased conservative Catholics by its 'vulgar' treatment of sacred ideas<sup>332</sup>. Johnson aptly describes the cycle as a 'concert liturgy'<sup>333</sup>. Unfortunately, the unlikely alliance seems to please neither parties. The unsuspecting concert audience is affronted when exposed musically to the ecstasies of Spiritual Love. Church congregations are similarly outraged with musical renditions of the physical joys of carnal love. Because words in the cycle are generally syllabically treated and often preceded by a single resonating chord, sentences and arguments can be easily heard and followed. With the text thus clearly presented, the possibility of ignoring the composer's intentions as one might in an organ work, is precluded.

The use of language too, is sure to offend the sensibilities of some of the more tender-spirited of the audience. In his bid to respond to the Surrealist mixture of stimuli which comes to his mind, such 'impolite' images as ...

a "triangle of vomit" (from *Épouvante, Poèmes pour Mi*),

"unheard of beast. That slobbers inside my chest. Head, what sweat!" (from *Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel*),

"Cut off my head, its number is rolling in blood." (from *Katchikatchi les étoiles, Harawi*),...

...occur audibly in the text.

Griffiths explains that Messiaen's work had already suggested a dissatisfaction with Western views of music as polite, social entertainment and indeed, very little in his music heeds public conventions of politeness<sup>334</sup>. Despite this disregard for nicety, *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* appear regularly in the concert hall

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<sup>332</sup>Johnson, p11-12.

<sup>333</sup>Johnson, p78.

<sup>334</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p49.

repertoire<sup>335</sup>. *Harawi* is somewhat different. With its interspersions of forest calls, religious incantations, primitive dances, melismatic ululations and percussive patterns, amongst more conventional song material, it makes even more of an assault on the performing platform. By using the human voice in unusual, even primitive-sounding ways, Griffiths suggests Messiaen makes an attempt to return human vocalisation to its ancient and long-forgotten function of expressing 'pure' emotion<sup>336</sup>. This use of the voice is sometimes very distant from the 'civilized' norms of Western tradition up to that time. Perhaps Messiaen was striving to make the concert hall into what Antonin Artuad undertook to make the theatre: a place where minds could be radically changed by exposure to that unmediated by 'good taste'.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>335</sup>Bell, preface.

<sup>336</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p40.

<sup>337</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p128.

## CHAPTER 13      VOCAL ASPECTS

Before embarking on his major song cycles, Messiaen had already shown in *Trois Melodies* (1930) and *Vocalise* (1935) a preference for the timbral qualities peculiar to the soprano voice. It was in 1936, specifically with the dramatic soprano Marcelle Bunlet, in mind, that he commenced with *Poèmes pour Mi*.

Messiaen speaks with authority and sensitivity on the problems for the singer of diction, the phonetic values of vowels and consonants, the use of different registers of the voice, the importance of breath control and the necessity of sympathetically placed breathing marks<sup>338</sup>. This empathy is apparent in the songs, but he nevertheless, by the nature of the works, demands certain minimum vocal standards for performance. Controlled breathing, the ability to produce a wide range of sound qualities and a flexible voice with extended tessitura are basic pre-requisites.<sup>338</sup>

Progressively through the three song cycles, there is an exploration of the possibilities of vocal timbre and technique. With Messiaen, however, the starting point for experimentation is not late Romantic lyricism, but plainsong.

### 13.1 Recitative<sup>339</sup>

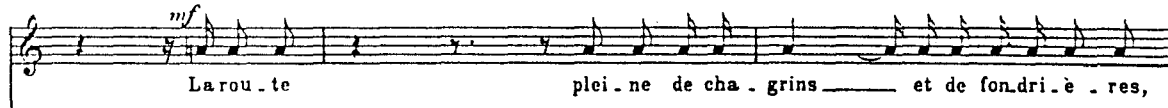
*Poèmes pour Mi* begins with plainsong. This style with its repeated pitch notes, small interval melismas and subsequent wide-ranging *alleluias*, is transported into the twentieth century by Messiaen's unusual accompaniments. For the singer, clarity and fluidity of verbal presentation and the ability to maintain, unaided, the repeated pitches, are assumed. Although Messiaen shows a keenness for following the natural rhythms of speech, in order to present his intentions faithfully, the singer needs a

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<sup>338</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p82.

<sup>339</sup>A vocal style designed to imitate and emphasize the natural inflection of speech. Apel, p718.

formidable sense of rhythm. Typically, he presents declamation with great rhythmic suppleness, avoiding regular beats and accents and including his new notions of added values and irregular augmentation. The following example illustrates:



*Paysage, Poèmes pour Mi, b4*

Much effort is required to imprint such rhythms in one's mind, but as Dallin points out, once heard and learned, they become as powerful and logical as tonal melodies expressed in regular rhythm<sup>340</sup>. Some prior experience with the parlando styles of Debussy and Ravel may be an advantage in approaching the reciting techniques of Messiaen<sup>341</sup>.

Emotionally, in his use of reciting lines, Messiaen requires the imperturbable detachment of a church cantor:

"The sky, and the water which follows the variations of the clouds" - from *Action de grâces* [*Poèmes pour Mi*], marked *p, très modéré*,

...as well as the fervency and passion of a lover pleading with his Beloved,

"Here is your day of glory and resurrection. Joy has returned." - from *Prière exaucée*, [*Poèmes pour Mi*], marked *ff*, becoming *exubérant*.

The tendency to use material closely related to plainsong gives way to other related styles in subsequent cycles, but is never totally forsaken.

Messiaen was intrigued with the idea that incantation<sup>342</sup> may be capable of wielding

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<sup>340</sup>Dallin, p47.

<sup>341</sup>Johnson, p57.

<sup>342</sup>A formula of words spoken or chanted to produce a magical effect, *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, vol.1, p1042.

magical power. In *Harawi*, the singer is required to modify the reciting techniques of plainsong, to those of incantation. This adaptation affects not only the melodic material, but also the style of singing to be adopted by the performer. A sustained, legato tone, such as that used in *Action de grâces*, would be wholly inappropriate in an incantatory song like *Montagnes*. As before, melodic material is kept to a minimum, but the correct attack in the latter, is sharp and detached. The following example from *Montagnes* shows the singer limited to four pitch classes (here C-sharp, E, F and G), in a relatively low register. Note the word painting on the occasional flights of 'vertigo'.

mf  
Mon.tagne,é.cou.te le cha.os so.lui.re du(ver.

Modéré, un peu vif mf  
u . . . . . ge.)

mf  
La pierre n . ge.nouil.léo por.te ses mal.tres noirs.

*Montagnes, Harawi*, b11 -, 33

*Katchikatchi les étoiles*, the symmetrical 'mate' of *Montagnes* in the arch-design of the cycle, is in similar incantatory style. The entire song consists of one line with two alternating endings. The singer's task for the first ten phrases of the song, is to maintain interest with this minimal melodic material. The beginning of the first phrase is shown below. Despite the fact that the phrase is repeated, it is technically far from easy. Rhythm, accents and staccato marks have all to be scrupulously observed to achieve the sought-after effect, which reaches a powerful climax in the phrase "cut off my head".

(poco staccato)  
Ka - tchi - ka - tchi - les é - toi - les,  
fal - tes - les sau - ter, Ka - tchi - ka -

*Katchikatchi les étoiles, Harawi, b5*

### 13.2 *Bel canto*<sup>343</sup>

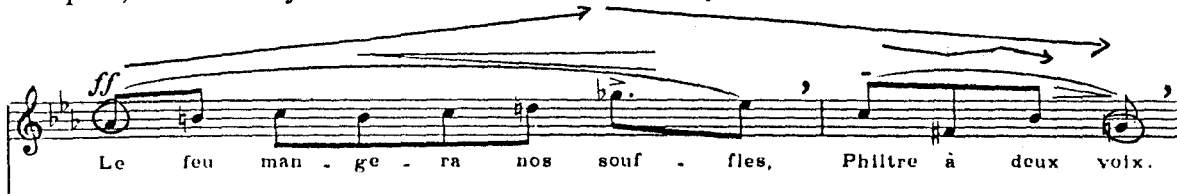
In their attempts to sever connections with 'decadent' or 'depleted' Romanticism, some twentieth century composers felt the need to discard totally, the sort of lyricism found in the arias and lieder of Mozart or Schubert. Messiaen felt no such constraints. It is a tribute to the sense of identity he possessed, that he never felt the need to repudiate for the sake of principle, that which had created beauty in music other than his own. So beginning with *Poèmes pour Mi*, beautiful flowing and arching 'Mozartian' lines occur. The example below from *Le collier* shows the following characteristics which can be found in any number of Classical and Romantic vocal lines: a broadly triadic outline with passing notes interspersed to decorate, an approximate octave range and a slow, lingering cadence.

Ah! mon collier! Ah! mon col - lier! Tes deux bras  
pp *tendre*

*Le collier, Poèmes pour Mi, b38*

<sup>343</sup>According to Apel, p88, *bel canto* is a highly artistic technique which places great emphasis on beauty of sound and brilliance of performance. It originated in Italy in the 18th century and is considered the only technique suitable for the performance of Italian opera and the vocal works of Mozart.

The passionate, expansive melodies in *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil* [Harawi] exude the same spontaneous joy and effectiveness for voice frequently found in the vocal writing of Mozart. Note the similarity of melodic contour and range of these two examples, the first by Messiaen and the second by Mozart.



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

ARIA

All my love on him I... la-vish'd, on him I..... la-vish'd,  
Mi tra-di quell'al-ma ingrata, quell' al - ma in-grata:

*Don Giovanni, Mozart, aria by Donna Elvira, b1*

In such *bel canto* singing, the vocalist is required to preserve a warmth and evenness of tone throughout the range. In the illustration below, the singer is called on to execute a vocal sweep of almost two octaves in six bars, maintaining this flawless constancy of tone.

A - dieu toi, dé - sert qui pleu - re,  
mi - roir sans souf - fle d'a - mour, De fleur, de  
nuit, de fruit, de ciel, de jour, Pour tou - jours.

*Adieu, Harawi, b71*

The difference between Messiaen's vocalisations and earlier *bel canto* singing, lies in

the intervals contained within the line. In typical twentieth century fashion, he creates lines fraught with the hazards of narrow intervals (an irregular admixture of tones and semitones), followed by unusual and wide leaps. *L'amour de Piroutcha* presents particular difficulties for the singer in preserving the legato line whilst judging the intonation of these widening 'Debussy<sup>344</sup>' patterns: perfect fourth up, tritone down, minor second down, diminished seventh up, diminished octave down, perfect fifth up, major seventh down, tritone up, augmented octave down, then minor fifteenth up!

Cou, pe-mol la tē, te, dou, dou tchil. Nos souf-fles, nos souf-fles, bleu et or.

Ahl! Ahl!

Chal, pes rou-ges, nol-res, mau-ves, a-mour, in mort.

*L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b25*

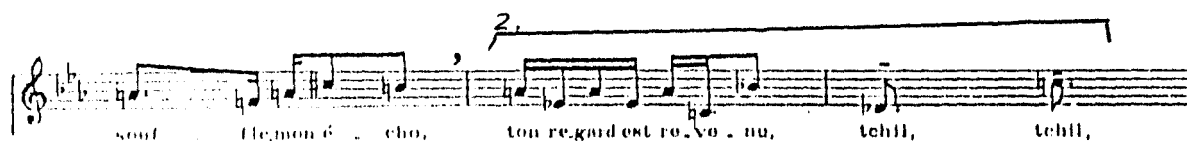
A further complication is added when a repeated phrase is slightly modified the second time around, as in this example:

souf-fle, mon é-cho, ton re-gard est re-ve-nu.

tchil, tchil. Pl-rou-tehn, te vol-lâ,

*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b31*

<sup>344</sup>See section 5.4.



*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b60*

*Bel canto* singing also implies the flexibility to ornament a line with apparent ease and unwavering tone. Messiaen treats the second 'stanza' of *L'amour de Piroutcha* like the repeated section of a *da capo* aria<sup>345</sup>, giving the singer the opportunity to display *bravura*. The following example gives first, the opening six bars of the song, and then the repeated, decorated version for comparison.

CHANT

Lent, tendre et berceur  
LA JEUNE FILLE

*L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b1-6*

Lent, tendre et berceur  
chant *pp*  
LA JEUNE FILLE

*L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b17-21*

<sup>345</sup>Apel, p51 - 52. The *da capo* aria, established in the timespan 1650 - 1750, consists of two sections followed by a repetition of the first. Wallace Berry, *Form in Music*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1986, p284, states that in a performance of the *da capo* aria, the return of the first part is often modified. Extemporized ornamentation of the repeat by the singer was practically standard practise in Baroque opera.

### 13.3 Primitive cries

The invention of sounds portraying mood or activity, is aptly described by Mellers as "the dissolution of meaning into musical sound images"<sup>346</sup>. Beginning in *Poèmes pour Mi* with *Épouvante*, the vision of Hell, Messiaen begins to explore such possibilities for vocalisation in songs. The ten bars of repeated 'ha-s' with which the song begins, are to be delivered in a panting or breathless manner, which is most effective if correctly executed. Note the composer's instructions at the head of the example:



*Épouvante, Poèmes pour Mi, b1*

The idea of using vocal sounds other than pure 'singing', is developed slightly in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel. Danse du bébé-Pilule*, a delightful 'play' song about the little boy, Pascal, ends with joyful laughter in a descending scale passage.



*Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b120*

In the same song, Messiaen uses for the first time, a completely meaningless word, simply to convey an emotion. The phoneme *io*, expressing unspeakable or inarticulate joy, is interspersed in the song and preceding the final happy chuckles. The same technique reappears in *Harawi* in a similar felicitous context. In the gentle love-song, *L'amour de Piroutcha*, a deep-throated *Ahi* expresses the lover's contentment. Later, in the lullaby of *Doundou tchil*, the expression *toungou, toungou*, is repeated to suggest crooning.

<sup>346</sup>Mellers, p102.

In *Répétition planétaire*, Messiaen communicates anguish by wordless sounds. The frenzied contemplation of the approach of death is expressed in plaintive howls. This is, at first, like all preceding examples, notated in exact pitch. Subsequently, a more elongated cry is made. Although this is carefully written out in sequences of tritones, Messiaen's written instructions actually indicate that only an approximation of pitch is intended: '*fff, à pleine voix, un peu faux, comme un appel en forêt*' (very, very loud, full voice, a little out of tune, with appeal and intensity). Absolute accuracy of the phrase at the required speed, would probably be impossible anyway! Both cries are given in the next two musical examples:

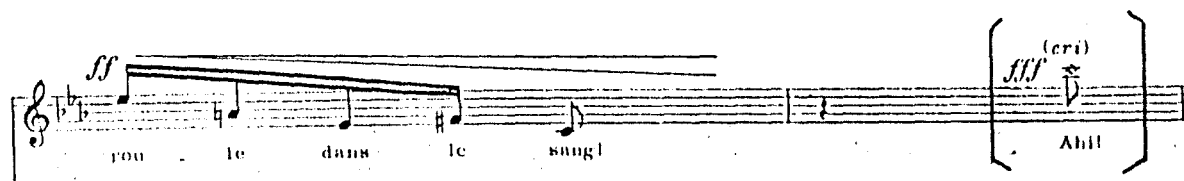


*Répétition planétaire, Harawi, b1*

*Répétition planétaire, Harawi, b9*

This type of expression reaches its logical conclusion as shown in *Katchikatchi les étoiles*, where the song ends with a *fortissimo* scream on *c''*.<sup>347</sup>

<sup>347</sup>System of notation taken from Otto Karolyi, *Introducing Music*, Great Britain: Jarrold & Sons Ltd., 1967, where middle C is referred to as *c''*.



*Katchikatchi les étoiles, Harawi, b35*

Messiaen broadens the singer's repertoire of sounds still further in *Harawi*. In *Syllabes*, phonemes or onomatopoeic words simulate animal noises. The composer provides detailed instructions to achieve his desired end: '*presque parle, très sec, en faisant claquer chaque syllabe*' (almost speaking, very thin/hard/sharp, 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 repetition continues for 21 'bars' at an average of nine *pias* per bar: amounting to about 189 *pias*! - and that is only in one section of the song. To add to the impact, as shown in this example, Messiaen builds up both speed and volume dramatically through the repetitions.

*Syllabes, Harawi, b96*

In *Doundou tchil*, the vocalist is required to emulate, not the emotive cry of human or beast, but the sound made by an inanimate object: rattling beads. The middle-register pitch of the animal cries is replaced by a slightly more subdued, lower pitch. The emphasis is obviously to be placed on the gently percussive, consonant sounds in the word i.e. *tchil*. The vocal pattern below is repeated for 19 bars at either end of the song:

*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b3*

Of further significance is the fact that the sound made by the voice no longer has pre-eminence in the music. The voice becomes the accompaniment, rather than the more conventional, accompanied part. The piano plays the melody of a ritual dance and the voice adds in the sound made by the ankle beads of traditional dancers: *doundou tchil*. By the end of the song, the voice has assumed a role similar to that of the voice in a Wagnerian texture i.e. just an equal strand within a total web of sound. The ritual dance is heard in the lower piano register, bird song in the right hand piano part and bead sound in the voice.

A similar, but much more complex example occurs in *Répétition planétaire*. Here the voice takes over a part earlier performed by the piano. It happens as follows and is illustrated, in part, below: an intricate piano interlude comprising a repeating 24-note pattern in the right hand part and a 14-note one in the left hand part, begins. This evolves into a three voiced, four-bar pattern in which the outer two voices remain constant but in which the inner one is varied. Eventually the soprano replaces the inner voice, while the outer two continue unchanged in the piano as before. Gradually the upper instrumental melody is transferred to the voice, which now has 'real' words to sing. Initially the voice blends with the piano, but, with the advent of the words, the vocal attack becomes more aggressive and clearly articulated. Note in the following excerpts, the relative dynamic directions given for each thread in the texture and the 'minor' role played by the voice. The second example appears thirteen bars later in the song, where the voice 'usurps' the role of the right hand part. The *f* melody from the

right hand part of the first example, is now in the vocal part:

*Répétition planétaire, Harawi, b68, 81*

While not totally revolutionary, Messiaen's use of humming is nevertheless unusual in an art song. The last phrase of *Harawi*, in *Dans le noir*, effectively recalls the sleeping village mentioned in the introductory song. Instead of completing the phrase with 'toi' as in *La ville qui dormait, toi* (the sleeping-village, thou), the singer merely hums the final ascending sixth interval: *toi* (thou) is no longer there. The two phrases are illustrated below.

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



*Dans le noir, Harawi, b88*

#### 13.4 Variety within any one song

A noticeable progression is evident in the song cycles, both in the lengthening of songs and in the use of widely disparate material within any single song. In the songs of *Poèmes pour Mi*, the earliest cycle, any particular style established at the beginning, is maintained for the duration of that song. So, for example, *Action de grâces* and *Prière exaucée* consistently maintain the language of plainsong, *L'Épouse* is lyrical throughout and *Les deux guerriers* is essentially incantatory.

In *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, the longer songs begin to explore more than one mood. *Minuit pile et face* begins with words intoned on one note and then moves into a section which unmistakably, by both word and music, suggests dancing. A subsequent passage in the song implies a lullaby. This approaches the interpretative demands of such great arias as Mimi's *Mi chiamano Mimi* from *La Bohème*<sup>348</sup>.

In *Harawi*, however, not only is the singer frequently required to alter the spirit, but also to alter the style of singing within the song. These changes occur sometimes within the space of a few bars, or even a single rest. *Doundou tchil* begins with repetitive low chant. After 21 bars this changes to the jaunty, but lyrical address to *Piroutcha*. At bar 38, the intensely sweet, crooning of the lullaby follows, with a flamboyant rhapsodical interlude interjected before the resumption of the final chant. These constant changes of mood, speed and dynamic are most taxing and may be the area in *Harawi* in which the greatest demands are made on the singer.

<sup>348</sup>Opera by Puccini (1896). This aria is characterized by frequent changes of mood.

A relatively minor point, but one nevertheless worth mentioning, is the vocal entry in many of the songs. Although none of the songs in *Harawi* begin with the voice alone (unlike *Les deux guerriers* [Poèmes pour Mi] and *Résurrection* [Chants de Terre et de Ciel]), eight of the twelve songs begin simultaneously with both voice and piano. The singer is therefore, seldom afforded the luxury of the slight relaxation between songs that an instrumental introduction would provide. Continuous concentration and acute listening must be maintained throughout as minimal help is given from the ending of one song to assist in pitching the first note of the next. *Katchikatchi les étoiles* for instance, ends, as indicated below, with a scream. The next song, begins solemnly on an E-flat:

fff rou - le dans le sang!

fff (cri) Ahh!

fff Red. \*

*Katchikatchi les étoiles, Harawi, b35*

CHANT Très lent, solennel

Dans le noir, co - lom - be - ver -

PIANO pp legato

Red. Red. Red.

*Dans le noir, Harawi, b1*

### 13.5 Performance instructions

Performance instructions in *Harawi* are more demanding and more explicit than those of the earlier cycles.

Tempo directions are fairly detailed in *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, with speeds varying from *vif* (lively) to *très lent* (very slow), with many *modéré's* (moderate). In *Harawi*, both ends of the spectrum are extended: '*extrêmement lent*' (extremely slow) to '*un peu vif*' (a little fast), accelerated through a '*pressez*' (pressing on) and a further '*pressez beaucoup*' (pressing on a great deal). Interestingly, Messiaen never supplies any guiding metronome indications.

Vocal dynamic markings in *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* range from *pp* to *fff*. In *Harawi*, the singer is expected to have the additional facility required to shade to a *pppp*. Consider the control and variety of dynamic colour necessary to interpret the following phrase from *La ville qui dormait, toi*:



*La ville qui dormait, toi, Harawi, b9*

In *Action de Grâce* [*Poèmes pour Mi*], consequent phrases of *alleluias* are to be sung at dynamic levels from *p* to *f*. As one reaches the longer songs of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* i.e. from *Danse du bébé-Pilule* onwards, dynamic variations occur almost from phrase to phrase. In *Les deux guerriers* [*Poèmes pour Mi*], *crescendos* and *decrescendos* are marked within short phrases. The situation changes in *Harawi* where *decrescendos* and *crescendos* are required on individual notes. Such nuances, as illustrated here,

enrich the listening experience<sup>349</sup>.



*Adieu, Harawi, b81*



*Montagnes, Harawi, b38*

Descriptive words such as '*expressif*' (expressively), '*avec une joie sereine*' (with a serene joy), '*gracieux*' (graciously), '*haletant et plaintif*' (breathless and pleading), '*mystérieux*' (mysteriously), '*avec charme*' (with charm), '*joyeux*' (joyfully) and '*exubérant*' (exuberantly) in *Poèmes pour Mi*, give way to more conventional directions of speed and dynamic in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*. In *Harawi*, all the evocative and imaginative directions of the preceding cycles recur, with additional new commands: '*tendre*' (tenderly), '*solennel*' (solemnly), '*soutenu*' (sustained), '*joyeux et passioné*' (joyously and passionately), '*berceur*' (lullaby), '*intense*' (with intensity), '*à pleine voix, comme un appel en forêt*' (in full voice, a little out of tune, with appeal and penetration), '*très pur*' (very pure), '*cri*' (scream), '*très emu*' (very agitated) and '*rêve*' (dreamy).

For the first time in *Harawi*, specific directions are given to the singer regarding attack: '*a bouche fermée*' (with the mouth closed), '*presque parlé, très sec, en faisant claquer chaque syllabe*' (almost speaking, very dry, with a rotten crack on every syllable) and '*poco staccato*' (a little detached). Although accents and slurs are always clearly marked, it is only in *Harawi* that staccato marks are indicated for the singer.

<sup>349</sup>The Dorothy Dorow recording of *Harawi* is to be especially recommended in this respect.

The implication is, that even in the early cycles, Messiaen had specific ideas in mind. The singer is not left with much lassitude in interpretation and is clearly there to present the composer's ideas. Nevertheless, his increasingly graphic and detailed instructions, lead the way to an exciting and colourful exploration of the possible sounds which can be created by the human voice.

## CHAPTER 14 INSTRUMENTAL ASPECTS

The piano accompaniments to Messiaen's songs are like no others yet encountered. This is obviously due, in part, to his unique musical language, but it is also due to the interest he invests in the piano part. One could say he follows on from the song cycles of Schumann in the sense of creating duets for voice and piano. Yet Messiaen goes further and in *Harawi*, the piano is not only used as an equal partner to the voice, but occasionally assumes pre-eminence it, to become the 'solo' part and no longer the accompanying one.

Once accustomed to the unusual sound of Messiaen's piano parts, certain recurring ways of accompanying become apparent to the listener. Some of these persist unchanged from cycle to cycle, whilst others have been varied or developed.

## Types of accompaniment

14.1 Upper register isorhythmic<sup>350</sup> chords

The first song of the first cycle begins as follows:

The musical score shows two staves. The upper staff is marked 'Très modéré' and the lower staff is marked 'pp'. The music consists of a series of complex, multi-note chords that repeat in a rhythmic pattern, characteristic of Messiaen's isorhythmic technique. The chords are primarily in the upper register of the piano.

*Action de grâces, Poèmes pour Mi, b1*

<sup>350</sup>See section 10.8.1. The combination of repeating chords and repeating time values, where the two patterns do not necessarily coincide.

This is characteristic of Messiaen's piano writing generally and is aurally quite unmistakable. Commonly, in the song cycles, chords of this nature are not often used to accompany the voice, but frequently precede or follow it. The final chord of the pattern in this example, becomes the 'neutral' background, the static, resonating chord, over which the voice recites. Further on in the song, the pattern recurs as a short interlude of five bars. In *Harawi*, this type of piano writing occurs in *Montagnes*, *Dans le noir*, and *Adieu*. In every case, as before, the writing is confined to the upper half of the piano, creating a chiming effect. In *Harawi*, however, the passages are much more complex and extended, taking on the nature of genuine interludes or postludes of about 20 bars. In *Montagnes*, two separate isorhythmic patterns occur in consequent passages.

Those acquainted with Messiaen's famous quartet *Quatour pour la fin de temps* (1941), will recognise this type of writing in the piano part which accompanies the strings in the movement entitled *Vocalise, pour l'ange qui annonce la fin du temps* (vocalise, for the angel who announces the end of time). The piano's upper register chordal patterns apparently represent "the ineffable harmonies of heaven" which surround the angel, the plainsong-like recitative of the violin and cello.<sup>351</sup>

## 14.2 Repetitive chord patterns

Another much-used and related technique, occurs first in *La Maison [Poèmes pour Mi]*. The repeating chordal patterns here are not used in the panisorhythmic<sup>352</sup> way spoken of above, but instead, are constructed to form repeating patterns of chords: the right hand part co-operating with the left, to form small units. The illustration below is from *Ta voix*, of the same cycle.

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<sup>351</sup>Messiaen, record sleeve, *Quatour pour la fin du temps*, RCA, ARLI-1567-Stereo, 1976.

<sup>352</sup>Isorhythms in more than one part occurring simultaneously.

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The tempo is marked 'Presque lent' and the dynamics are 'PIANO' and 'p avec charme'. The music features complex, dense chords in the right hand and more rhythmic, chordal accompaniment in the left hand. There is a double bar line in the middle of the score.

*Ta voix, Poèmes pour Mi, b1*

Other examples can be found in *Le collier* [*Poèmes pour Mi*], at the end of *Minuit pile et face* [*Chants de Terre et de Ciel*] and in *L'amour de Piroutcha* [*Harawi*].

A mood very different from the gentle indolence of *Ta voix* is created by means of the same technique in *Syllabes*. The instrumental chords, shown below, are complex and subtly altered from beat to beat, requiring considerable care and accuracy from the pianist at high speed. Aural interest becomes focused on the dynamic gradations (which grow to an aggressive *fortissimo*, fall to *piano* and finally increase back to *fortissimo*) and on the percussive and novel timbres created. Messiaen not only persists with repetition and swelling volume, but also demands an increase in speed.

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The dynamics are marked 'ff' (fortissimo). The music features complex, dense chords in the right hand and more rhythmic, chordal accompaniment in the left hand. There are several dynamic markings and accents throughout the score.

*Syllabes, Harawi, b22*

Confusingly for the pianist, the basic pattern is varied in a number of ways. In places, it is condensed to the emphatic alternation of just two chords, 24 times. The third occurrence of the pattern is much extended and the piano has a new set of chords which repeat only after seven bars. On the third repeat, that pattern breaks down and

features instead shorter patterns of repeating chords: two chords used six times, then a four chord pattern repeated eighteen times to the penultimate bar.

*Adieu* bears special mention for its ending. The instrumental postlude of seven bars (prior to the three bar coda), consists of no less than 23 alternations of the same two chords in various rhythmic patterns of augmentation and diminution. This is portentous of Messiaen's growing belief in the independence of rhythm and in its ability to sustain interest. The chords recur in such a variety of rhythms that one is scarcely aware of the dearth of melodic and harmonic material.

The image shows a musical score for the ending of 'Adieu, Harawi'. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The treble staff has a melodic line with several triplet markings: '(pour 8)' over a group of 8 notes, '(pour 2)' over a group of 2 notes, and '(pour 2)' over a group of 2 notes. The bass staff has a rhythmic accompaniment with a triplet marking '(pour 8)' and another '(pour 2)'. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4.

*Adieu, Harawi*, b88

Yet another innovative application of this repeating chord formula occurs in *Répétition planétaire*. A restated piano bar (marked *f*) becomes 'accompanied' by a chanting voice (marked *mf*) i.e. the piano assumes a role of superior significance to the voice.

The image shows a musical score for 'Répétition planétaire'. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in the treble clef and has the lyrics 'Ma - pa, na - ma, ma - pa na - ma II - In.' The piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. The tempo and mood are marked 'Modéré, mystérieux'. The piano part starts with a dynamic marking of *f legato* and later changes to *pp legato*. There are various rhythmic markings and fingerings indicated in the piano part.

*Répétition planétaire, Harawi*, b42

A similar process can be seen in *Doundou tchil*, where the repeating instrumental part is confined to a monodic bass melody<sup>353</sup>. Such novel uses of repetitive material do not occur before *Harawi*.

### 14.3 Heterophonic melodic lines

In the second half of *Action de grâces* (the *alleluia*), the voice is accompanied by two strands of single instrumental 'voices'. This is true heterophony: the parts move independently of each other, to produce an ethereal, other-worldly effect, in which the instrumental part is significantly confined to the treble section of the keyboard. In this case, the repetitive patterns are considerably extended and therefore not easily perceived aurally. The differing lengths of the individual patterns and the consequent changing points of intersection, further obliterate a repetitious aspect. The voice is in no way assisted by this accompaniment, but is rather like another thread in the gently undulating continuum of sound. The same effect recurs in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* in *Antienne du silence*. The piano part is extremely intricate, evidence of the increasingly complex piano technique used in the two cycles subsequent to *Poèmes pour Mi*. The heterophonic style of 'accompanying' depicted below, is maintained for the entire duration of this song.

CHANT

Très modéré p expressif

An - ge - si - len - ci - eux,

PIANO

Très modéré très lié

pp(m.d.)

expressif

P(m.d.)

léger, un peu détaché

pp(m.g.)

(mettre un peu de pédale)

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

<sup>353</sup>See section 13.3.

Perhaps because there is no specific reference to the *alleluia* in *Harawi*, there are no songs which make use precisely of this type of accompaniment.

#### 14.4 Bare octaves

To be found first in *Action de grâces*, is a device Messiaen uses fleetingly and only occasionally in extended passages. The voice part is doubled by the piano to create a monodic texture. The next example from *Prière exaucée*, shows octaves used in this way to follow the *alleluiatic* meanderings of the word "soul". In this instance, the choice of texture may be particularly apt, bearing in mind the significance Mellers attaches to monody<sup>354</sup>.

*Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi, b6*

On other occasions, open octaves are used to convey emphasis or agitation, as in *Les deux guerriers* [*Poèmes pour Mi*] and in some songs in *Harawi*. An example from the latter is shown below:

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<sup>354</sup>See section 9.2.2.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Syllabes, Harawi, b41'. It consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics 'pi - rou - teha' and 'mi - ni'. The middle and bottom staves are for the piano accompaniment. The piano part includes markings such as 'ff martelé' and 'Rit.' (Ritardando). The score is written in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The piano part features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings.

Syllabes, *Harawi*, b41

#### 14.5 Doubling the pitch class of the vocal melody

Highly favoured by Messiaen is the technique of accompanying which includes a doubling of the pitch class<sup>355</sup> of the vocal melody, somewhere in the instrumental part. This first occurs in the second song of *Poèmes pour Mi, Paysage* and subsequently appears in many ingeniously varied guises.

A simple application is found at the beginning of *Harawi* in *La ville qui dormait, toi*. The piano part doubles the pitch class of the voice throughout, assisting and supporting the singer in the pitching of some of the more difficult intervals. The piano moves homo-rhythmically with the voice, but the instrumental 'voice' is coloured by clusters of added note chords and inferior resonance<sup>356</sup>. Note, however, that it is pitch class which is doubled, and in this song, Messiaen alternates octaves sometimes to create movement and variety in the instrumental part.

<sup>355</sup>Notes of the same alphabetical letter but not necessarily of the same frequency e.g. c', c'', c'''.

<sup>356</sup>An harmonic-timbral device Messiaen uses, whereby a note or chord is played quietly above a principal note or chord. See section 14.9.

Extrêmement lent, en rêve  
*ppp*

CHANT  
 l'a . . . vil . . . le . . . qui . . . dor . . . mait, . . . toi . . . Min

Extrêmement lent, en rêve  
*ppp*

PIANO

*ppp*

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

The altered colouring of repeated melody notes in the accompaniment of the next example, bears out Griffiths' assertion that the harmonies in *Harawi* become denser than those used in previous cycles<sup>357</sup>.

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

CHANT  
 OI . . . seau . . . d'é . . . toi . . . le,

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

PIANO  
*pp comme un oiseau*

Red. \*

*Amour oiseau d'étoile, Harawi, b1*

In the next example from *Syllabes*, the outermost lines of the two chords double the melody, whilst soft, delicate chords fill the space in between.

<sup>357</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p124.

CHANT

*Très modéré*  
*p très expressif*

(pour 2)

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

PIANO

*Très modéré*  
*p très expressif*

(pour 2)

(marquez le chant à la basse et à la partie supérieure)

*Syllabes, Harawi, b1*

Messiaen does not always double the voice in the upper piano part. In *Bonjour toi, colombe verte*, the vocal melody occurs in the chords of the lower part and is decorated in the upper with birdsong.

*Très modéré*

Non jour toi, per - te Him - pi

*Très modéré*

*p* *f* *mf* *p*

*Bonjour toi, colombe verte, Harawi, b11*

The second rendition of the cyclic theme, *Adieu*, retains the identical chords from *Bonjour toi, colombe verte*, but moves them to the right hand part. The joyous ripples of birdsong from the latter, are replaced in the former with slow, solemn chords representative of funeral bells and tam-tams.

*Très lent*

A.dieu toi, per.le ilm . pl . . de, So . lail gar . dien. —

*Très lent*

*Un peu vite*

*Un peu vite*

*Red.*

*Adieu, Harawi, b11*

*Dans le noir*, the final cyclic song, pitches the same melody-doubling chords an octave lower, adds resonating octaves below and slowly descending, scalar chords in the upper reaches of the keyboard.

*Très lent, solennel*

CHANT

Dans le noir, co . lom . be . ver .

*Très lent, solennel*

PIANO

*pp legato*

*Red. Red. Red.*

*Dans le noir, Harawi, b1*

In the central section of *Doundou tchil*, the vocal melody is heard, as shown in the following example, in a series of repeating chords.

Même mouvement, berceur

Tou - gou, tou - gou, ma - pa, na - ma, ma -

Même mouvement, berceur

*p*

*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b38*

An air of excitement is created at the beginning of *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*, by the activity of chords tossed hastily from hand to hand with the melody still faithfully doubled in the upper part of the accompaniment. The little 'twitter' at the end of each phrase in this song is reminiscent of the triplets of birdsong shown earlier in the accompaniment of *Bonjour toi, colombe verte*.

Vif, joyeux et passionné

CHANT

Il ne par - le plus,

Vif, joyeux et passionné

PIANO

*f* *mf* *molto*

Red. Red. Red. Red.

*L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi, b1*

*L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil* features a more conventional means of accompanying a doubled voice: with arpeggios. This accompanying technique, though fairly common in the work of many other composers, is not found often in Messiaen's songs. The flowing

vocal phrases in the next example (doubled in the right hand part), are accompanied by arpeggio-like lines in the left hand piano part, which follow the broad directional contour of the voice. However, even this simple technique is treated differently by Messiaen: the arpeggios are displaced rhythmically, from the chords and the melodic voice, by a semi-quaver. The effect is, supposedly "passionate and intense".<sup>358</sup>

*L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi, b44*

Occasionally, in doubling the vocal melody, Messiaen 'dislocates' the instrument slightly from the voice. Sometimes the piano preempts the voice, as in the following example, and sometimes it follows the vocal line. This is one of Messiaen's persistent compositional traits, to be seen in the songs from *Poèmes pour Mi* to *Harawi*.

*L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi, b26*

<sup>358</sup>Performance direction at the beginning of the song, *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*.

#### 14.6 Rapid arpeggiated flourishes

The first appearance of this Messiaen 'trademark' occurs at the beginning of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*. Quick, high, scintillating, treble figures (often left to resonate as chords), are used as 'punctuation marks' in the songs. In *Bail avec Mi* [*Chants de Terre et de Ciel*], they are used to separate phrases of the symmetrical outer sections of the song. In *Arc-en-ciel d'innocence*, a flourish introduces the song. In *Harawi*, the application is pictorial. A fast flourish of the two hands in *Répétition planétaire*, precedes the savage screams of the vocalist, almost like a scream itself<sup>359</sup>. In *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil* (see preceding example), the flourish follows the words "staircase of water" in a graphic demonstration of ascent: the pianist sweeps towards the top reaches of the keyboard, with a crescendo en route.

Elsewhere, as in the next example, the single notes of the punctuating flourish are replaced by chords. The speed and dynamic volume of the instrumental sounds sustain the atmosphere of excitement between the exuberant lines of poetry.

*L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil, Harawi, b40*

A similar effect to this is created by rapid figurations of both hands in very close proximity, either, as in the next example, a mere tone apart or as in the subsequent one, a semitone apart. Careful positioning of the hands for accuracy is necessary and the effect is novel and not unpleasant.

<sup>359</sup>See section 12.2.2.

A musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The music is written in a fast, rhythmic style with many sixteenth notes. There are several slurs over groups of notes, and some notes are marked with a '6' above them, indicating a sextuplet. The piece starts with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano). There is a 'Red.' marking at the beginning of the bass staff and a '\*' at the end of the piece.

*Bonjour toi, colombe verte, Harawi, b28*

A musical score for a piano piece, continuing from the previous one. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has two flats. The music is written in a fast, rhythmic style with many sixteenth notes. There are several slurs over groups of notes, and some notes are marked with a '6' above them, indicating a sextuplet. The piece starts with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano). There is a 'Red.' marking at the beginning of the bass staff.

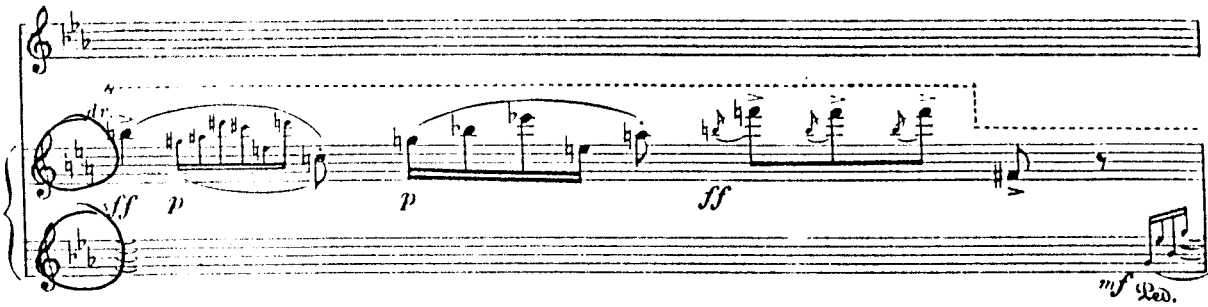
*Bonjour toi, colombe verte, Harawi, b30*

#### 14.7 Birdsong

Bell cites *Liturgie de cristal* [*Quatour pour la fin du temps*] (1941) as the first occasion on which Messiaen uses birdsong<sup>360</sup>. It may be the first piece in which he actually indicated his intention, but there are identifiable traces of birdsong in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* (1938)<sup>361</sup>. Birdsong is more obviously and extensively used in three songs of *Harawi*. For the pianist, the birdsong presents awesome difficulties. To be convincing, it needs to be played in fast flurries of sound. Along with the accuracy, delicate trills and great speed, a wide dynamic range (from *sff* to *p* within a phrase, as seen in the following example) is required. Note that the right hand part representing the bird, is notated without key signature, as if the natural meanderings of the bird line could not be contained within the confines of a key. The left hand part remains in E-flat.

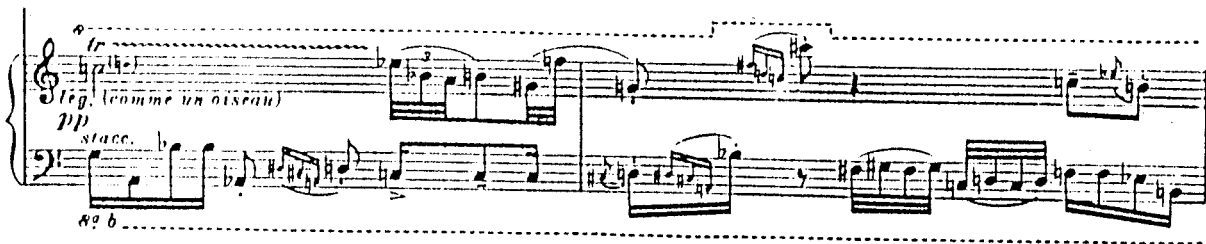
<sup>360</sup>Bell, p20.

<sup>361</sup>See section 5.2.



*Bonjour toi, colombe verte, Harawi, b20*

In *Doundou tchil*, birdsong is superimposed over a ritual dance, requiring two totally different approaches by the pianist's two hands:

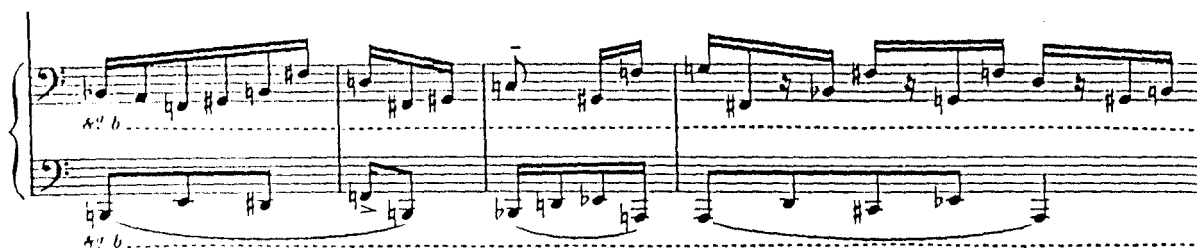


*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b71*

#### 14.8 Extended range

A feature of much of Messiaen's music is the wide ranging spectrum of sound, in terms of pitch and timbre, used. The muted whine of the Ondes Martenot from the bottom to the top of its register in the *Turangalîla symphony (Introduction)* (1948), is echoed from the clarinet of *Quatour pour la fin du temps (Abîme des oiseaux)* (1941), to the solo piano writing of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1956). One of Messiaen's contributions to the expansion of piano technique, includes this extension of the working range of the instrument to both upper and lower limits. Long passages in extreme registers (especially the upper), gave Messiaen a wider range of colour than had been previously exploited on the instrument. As a general rule, he seems to prefer patterns which tinkle

or even clatter/shatter in the high registers to those which rumble in the bass. Although he does use low registers, they are far more infrequent. In *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, high pitched sounds are used extensively and it is only really in *Harawi* that greater use is made of the bass register. In *Répétition planétaire*, Messiaen writes in a deep register to contrive a sound like thunder, perhaps an indication of the activity and disturbance in the cosmos.



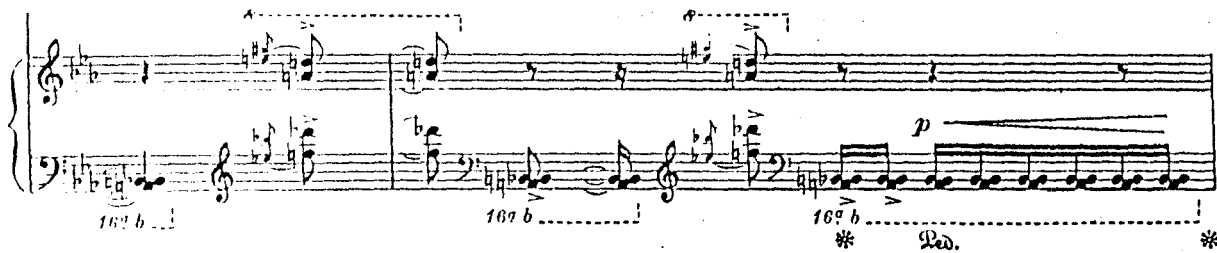
*Répétition planétaire, Harawi, b51*

As well as writing lengthy passages in unusually high or low registers, Messiaen is not averse to covering vast areas of the keyboard within the space of a few chords. The following example from *Adieu* encompasses over six octaves:

*Adieu, Harawi, b20*

Sometimes this is done with particularly graphic intent as in *Montagnes*, where the rapid flourish of descending chords creates the impression of an abyss. In *Katchikatchi les étoiles*, the wide-ranging, staccato activity of the pianist on the keyboard is probably meant to suggest the jumping activity of grasshoppers. Messiaen begins with a widely spaced accompaniment, making no attempt to include the middle registers. The right hand part anticipates the entry of the voice (two octaves higher) and the left hand part

rumbles away with cluster chords two octaves below the bass stave.



*Katchikatchi les étoiles, Harawi, b7*

The flamboyant and dramatic effect of a glissando, is not often encountered in the accompaniments of song cycles, but is, for Messiaen, another way of quickly traversing the keyboard. In the next example, from *Danse du bébé-Pilule* [*Chants de Terre et de Ciel*], the accompaniment leads directly into a glissando in one hand, whilst the other hand simultaneously picks out specific notes.



*Danse du Bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b47*

In *Katchikatchi les étoiles*, the song builds up to a climactic and brutal *fff* with 'coupez moi la tête', recalling the moment of death. The piano part dramatically supports the crescendoing vocal cry (*p* to *sff*), with a double-handed glissando and culminates forcefully in a chord.

#### 14.9 Resonance

A timbral innovation of Messiaen's own inventing, is the concept of superior and inferior resonance. This may take the form of a note or chord played quietly above a

principal note or chord (superior resonance), or of a chord played loudly in the bass register of the piano against other material (inferior resonance). The sound of the resonating notes should, according to Johnson, who has performed the music in collaboration with Messiaen, be absorbed as much as possible 'into' the sound of the principal notes, making the device essentially a modification of timbre<sup>362</sup>. As shown in the following example, the tender atmosphere of *L'amour de Piroutcha* is generated in this manner: the pitch class of the vocal line is doubled in soft chords and followed by superior resonance.

CHANT

Lent, tendre et berceur  
LA JEUNE FILLE

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

PIANO

Lent, tendre et berceur

*p* *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp*

*ped.* \**ped.* \**ped.* \**ped.* \*

*L'amour de Piroutcha, Harawi, b1*

The conventional application of the sustaining pedal is used by Messiaen for realising special blurry effects. In *Épouvante*, illustrated here, the pedalling produces the impression of fiery flames:

*fff*

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

*fff* *p* *m.d.*

*p* (*confus et très brouillé de pédale*)

*Épouvante, Poèmes pour Mi, b28*

<sup>362</sup>Johnson, p18.

His interest in the piano as a source of resonance becomes increasingly apparent as one moves on from *Poèmes pour Mi* to *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and *Harawi*. Resonating bells recur in all three of the cycles, so it is possible to compare how he portrays them from cycle to cycle. Each representation is different. In the first example, from *Poèmes pour Mi*, the effect of reverberating bells is simulated by rapidly repeated patterns of treble chords blurred with the pedal.

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system has a vocal line with the lyrics "Donnez-moi votre grâce... ce..." and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features rapid, repeated treble chords, some of which are blurred with the pedal. The tempo markings are "Rall. - - - molto" and "Très vif". The second system has a vocal line with the lyrics "Ca - ril - lon... ne, mon" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features rapid, repeated treble chords, some of which are blurred with the pedal. The tempo marking is "Très vif". The piano part is marked "pp" and "(brouillé de pédale)".

*Prière exaucée, Poèmes pour Mi, b13*

The next two examples are from *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*. In the first, the resonance represented is the tongue of a little paschal bell. To suggest this, Messiaen uses dissonant ninths in the right hand part, but in such a high register that the dissonance loses its harshness. The left hand part plays a minor third within the right hand chord. All parts are strongly accented in order to resound longer. The second example has the pedal again sustained through a treble chord pattern, then silence, followed by a *sforzando* chime.

Musical score for 'Arc-en-ciel d'innocence'. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The right hand has a melodic line with a crescendo marked 'cresc. molto' and a fermata over a measure. The left hand has a bass line with a fermata over a measure. The score concludes with a section marked 'Au mouv!' and 'ff'.

*Arc-en-ciel d'innocence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b42*

Musical score for 'Minuit pile et face'. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The right hand has a melodic line with a tempo marking 'Bien modéré' and a dynamic marking 'mf'. The left hand has a bass line with a tempo marking 'Bien modéré' and a dynamic marking 'p'. The score concludes with a section marked 'Cloche,' and a circled measure in the right hand.

*Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b56*

In *Adieu [Harawi]*, the attack of the 'funeral bells' is much more percussive and the chiming more irregular, than the bells in the preceding examples. As in the earlier representations, the 'bells' are left to resonate.

Musical score for 'Adieu, Harawi'. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The right hand has a melodic line with a tempo marking 'Un peu vif (comme des cloches)' and a dynamic marking 'più f'. The left hand has a bass line with a dynamic marking 'p'.

*Adieu, Harawi, b7*

## 14.10 Symmetry

In *Minuit pile et face*, Messiaen applies an ingenious aspect of symmetry to the accompaniment. Firstly, one notes that the song is constructed in a loosely symmetrical form. The accompaniment begins with a chordal pattern arranged in an ascending arc, as in the next example. When the material recurs later in the song on the other side of the arch form, the pattern is arranged as a descending arc, as seen in the second example.

CHANT

Bien modéré

*mf*

Vil - le, œil puant,

PIANO

Bien modéré

*sf*

*sf*

*Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b1*

Bien modéré

*mf*

Olo - che,

Bien modéré

*sf*

*sf*

*Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b56*

In *Harawi*, the application of symmetry on all levels is even more rigorous than before. The following excerpts from the symmetrically constructed song *Syllabes*, will illustrate. For explanatory purposes, the accompaniment can be divided by the rests, into four small groups. These have been bracketed and numbered 1 to 4. The second line, taken from later in the song, shows that the material has been exactly reversed, chord for chord.

*Syllabes, Harawi*, b17-18

*Syllabes, Harawi*, b44-45

In fact, symmetry exists within the individual sections shown above. The bars given below, from the second rendition (example two above), are constructed symmetrically about bar 46 (in the same way as section one forms a 'palindrome' around bar 16). Notice that the number of semiquavers in the second half of the bar increases from one to four and then from four to one.

The musical score consists of four systems of piano music. The first system begins with a treble clef and a bass clef, marked *ff marcato*. It features a complex rhythmic pattern of 12 semi-quavers per bar. The second system continues the piece, marked *f staccato* and *ff*. The third and fourth systems maintain the same rhythmic complexity and dynamic intensity. The score includes various performance instructions such as *Red.* (Reduction) and *A b* (Allegro), along with fingerings and articulation marks.

*Syllabes, Harawi, b43*

#### 14.11 Rhythmic effects

Despite Messiaen's protestations that truly rhythmic music is that which defies beat and meter, he is not ashamed to use a regular pulse where appropriate. Because of its infrequent use in his music, its impact is greater. Throughout the ritual dance of *Doundou tchil*, Messiaen retains a constant 12 semi-quavers in a bar. The lyrical section of the same song, which addresses a message to *Piroutcha* the Beloved, reverts to his more favoured freedom of metre and asymmetrical divisions. Further on in the song, a lullaby effect is contrived and there is a return to regular metrical groupings in the

piano part (here 8 semi-quavers).

Messiaen's effective use of silence has been mentioned in the chapter on Rhythm<sup>363</sup>. As one moves through the song cycles, he becomes increasingly bolder and more 'lavish' in its use, particularly towards the ends of songs. The last section of *Adieu*, comprising seven bars, has three bars of total silence. This has the effect of drawing much attention to the final words, rather like the special interest paid to the last words of a dying person. In *Ta voix* [*Poèmes pour Mi*], the familiar accompaniment of the song ceases, the voice drops out altogether, a rapid instrumental passage follows, silence (here, only a crochet rest), then quietly, the last words of the song are breathed. The ending of *Arc-en-Ciel d'innocence* [*Chants de Terre et de Ciel*], gives a later example of the same scheme: a rapid and energetic passage followed by a piano interlude and finally a gentle entry of the voice.

In *Harawi*, various applications of this idea occur in eight of the twelve songs: *Bonjour toi, colombe verte*; *Montagnes*; *Doundou tchil*; *Répétition planétaire*; *Syllabes*; *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*; *Katchikatchi les étoiles* and *Dans le noir*. The following example is from *Syllabes*. Characteristically, at a climactic point, where the repeated *pias* and chord patterns have reached a frenzied *fortissimo*, there is sudden absolute silence (bar 49). The song is then concluded by a *pianissimo* reference to the first section of the song: the ascending sixth cadence, sung in hushed melodious tones.

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows a vocal line with the lyrics 'pia pia pia pia pia pia pia pia pia pia pia' and a piano accompaniment of repeated eighth notes. The tempo is marked 'Très modéré' and the dynamics are 'pp'. The second system shows the vocal line with the lyrics 'Tout bas.' and the piano accompaniment of chords. The tempo remains 'Très modéré' and the dynamics are 'pp'. The score ends with a final cadence.

*Syllabes, Harawi, b98*

<sup>363</sup>See section 10.7.

The opposite effect is achieved in the next example, taken from bar 74 of the same song. The sounds drift into silence, then a *sforzando* aggregation of bass notes hurls the listener straight back into the world of crying animals from which he has just emerged.

dou-ble-ra, Très loin, tout bas, Très loin, tout bas, Le chiffre cinq à...  
 poco ritto.  
 poco ritto.  
 ppp  
 ppp

Modéré, un peu vif  
 ff  
 Pia pia pia pia pia pia pia pia pia pia pia  
 Modéré, un peu vif  
 ff  
 Ad.  
 Ad.  
 Ad.  
 \*

*Syllabès, Harawi, b74*

#### 14.12 Graphic instructions

As one progresses through the cycles, Messiaen's instructions to both singer and pianist become increasingly detailed, pictorial and specific. Some of the more unusual charges occur in *Répétition planétaire*. Here the piano melody is instructed to be 'black', to sound like a bass clarinet and later to 'hammer' out the notes. In *Doundou tchil*, shown here, the piano is meant to make a sound like 'shattering glass':

*Doundou tchil, Harawi, b20*

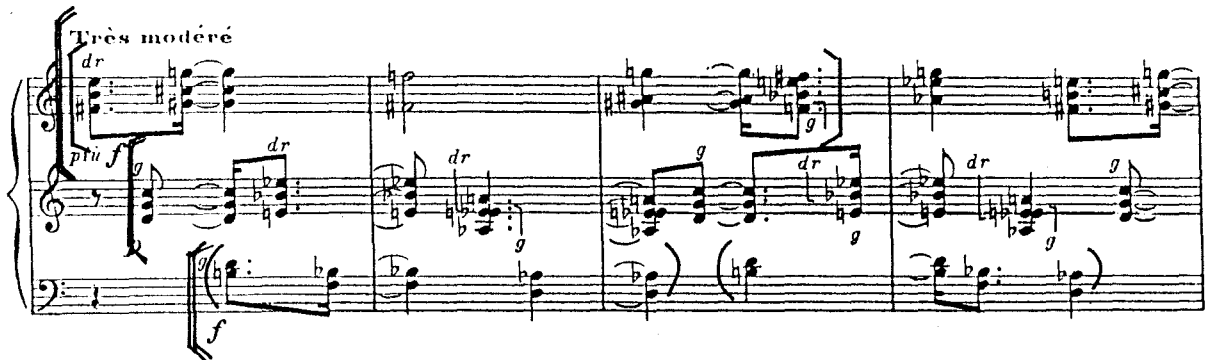
Further on, the directive is to 'sound like horns', possibly a reference to the type of instrumentation which would have been used to accompany a primitive dance. In *Adieu* the pianist is to aim for a tam-tam-like sound. Messiaen obviously has very specific timbres in mind! It is not only the original effects he creates, but also the care with which they are incorporated into communicating the message of the song, which justifies Bray's description of Messiaen's instrumental writing as masterly<sup>364</sup>.

#### 14.13 The role of the piano in the song cycles

Firstly, it is clear that the writing for piano increases in complexity over the years from *Poèmes pour Mi* to *Harawi*. The fifth piano interlude of *Adieu*, for example, is depicted on three staves to facilitate reading and comprehension by the pianist. Although three staves have been used earlier in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, they were used to accommodate three melodic strands of single notes (as in *Antienne du Silence*), or chords on two staves followed by a quick flourish or resonating chord in the third (as in *Bail avec Mi, Minuit pile et face* and *Résurrection*). In *Harawi*, as can be seen below, the procedure is advanced to include simultaneously progressing chord structures in each of the staves. The complex nature of the excerpt (including as it does non-retrogradable rhythms and isorhythms in each staff, as well as a rhythmic canon between the three), also indicates the characteristic concern for detailed craftsmanship

<sup>364</sup>Bray, p110.

in Messiaen's work.



*Adieu, Harawi*, b59

Griffiths suggests that the relative simplicity of *Poèmes pour Mi*, may be due to its having been written originally for the composer himself, rather than for someone training to be a concert pianist<sup>365</sup>. This may be the reason why *Poèmes pour Mi* is the only one of the three cycles to have been orchestrated<sup>366</sup>. In the other two cycles, the piano is used more 'orchestrally', exploiting a fuller timbral range and hence rendering an orchestrated version superfluous.

The greater prominence given to the role of the piano in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* anticipates, to some extent, the virtuoso role assigned to it in *Harawi*. In *Harawi*, the pianist is not only required to support and accompany the vocalist, but also, at times, to be the soloist. Passages played by the pianist alone are far longer than the odd solo bar or two of the earlier cycles.

The earlier two cycles favour instrumental introduction to the songs. This is fairly common practice, as a look at some of the cycles of Schubert<sup>367</sup>, Schumann<sup>368</sup>,

<sup>365</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p83.

<sup>366</sup>*Poèmes pour Mi* was orchestrated in 1937.

<sup>367</sup>*Die schöne Müllerin*.

<sup>368</sup>*Liederkreis* (Eichendorff), op.39; *Frauenliebe und Leben*, op.42; *Dichterliebe*, op.48.

Debussy<sup>369</sup>, Mussourgsky<sup>370</sup> and Hindemith<sup>371</sup> will reveal. In *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, the introductions are usually a bar or two in length and so cannot really be called preludes. In *Harawi*, only two songs begin with any extended introduction, but other pianistic passages within the cycle are considerably expanded. Long solo passages for the piano occur in: *Bonjour toi, colombe verte* (interludes and postlude); *Montagnes* (prelude, extended interlude and postlude - out of a total of 60 bars of music, the piano has 48 bars alone); *Doundou tchil* (interludes, and long passages where the voice 'accompanies' the piano); *Répétition planétaire* (extended interlude, and instances where the voice chants over a long piano passage); *Adieu* (interludes and extended postlude); *Syllabes* (no extended solo material, but an important role in the long passage of repeated animal cries); *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil* (short postlude) and *Dans le noir* (extensive interludes: 10 bars after the first line of poetry, 17 bars after the second, and 25 bars after the third).

The songs in *Harawi* which do not have extended piano solos of any description, tend to be those in which the voice and piano 'unite' to convey the message of the song. In *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*, the two participate as partners in a duet of joy and ecstasy. In places, voice and piano seem to become one instrument: an aural illustration of Johnson's assertion that the lovers have become one<sup>372</sup>. In the recurring 'refrain' illustrated here, the voice and piano perform the same notes, with the same accents, in the same rhythms on each occasion.

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<sup>369</sup>*Ariettes Oubliées* and *Fêtes Galantes*.

<sup>370</sup>*Kinderstube*

<sup>371</sup>*Nine English Songs* for soprano or mezzo-soprano and piano.

<sup>372</sup>Johnson, p81.

De l'eau, du temps, du ciel, l'es - ca - lier du ciel.

*mf* *Red.* *molto* \*

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

The piano part in *Harawi* plays the important role of 'commentator', in the manner of a Greek chorus. With each repetition of the cyclic theme, the accompaniment sets the scene in the story. In *Bonjour toi, colombe verte*, the accompaniment consists of the joyous birdsong associated with Spring and the dawning of love. In *Adieu*, the birds have been replaced with funeral bells as the moment of Death approaches. In *Dans le noir*, the melody is accompanied by slowly descending chords, representative of the peaceful, eternal union now achieved.

Through the three song cycles the role of the pianist blossoms both technically and emotionally. In the final cycle, the pianist contributes as accompanist, commentator and soloist.

## CHAPTER 15 CATEGORIES OF SONGS

Although some types persist unchanged, there are discernible lines of evolution evident in a grouped analysis of Messiaen's songs. The most obvious differences between the songs of *Poèmes pour Mi* and those of *Harawi*, are the tendencies towards increasing length, excessive slowness and the inclusion of widely divergent material within the confines of a single song i.e. the sectional song.

### 15.1 'Plainchant'

Typically the style of singing in the 'plainchant' song is either psalmody, or *alleluiatic* vocalise. The voice is confined largely to the middle and high registers, with psalmody most often in the middle and vocalise in the high register.

The vocal part is generally pre-eminent, particularly in the psalmody sections, where the piano provides the initial chiming chords to precede the 'recitation'. A different type of accompaniment usually occurs in the 'free vocalise' sections. In *Antienne du silence* [*Chants de Terre et de Ciel*], the psalmody section is omitted altogether, so the alternative accompaniment is maintained for the duration of the song. Here the vocal line unfolds equally with seamless piano melodies in a complex heterophonical texture. The melodic presentation is reminiscent of the *fortspinnung* of some Baroque music<sup>373</sup>. Although this flowing, high-pitched style of accompanying usually occurs at some point in all the 'plainchant' songs, not all display the same degree of complexity as that of *Antienne du silence*. Since this is associated more with free vocalise than recitative, it is the technique which usually draws the 'plainchant' songs to a close. They have no strongly punctuated conclusion, but rather 'trickle' to an end, as shown in the following example.

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<sup>373</sup>The process of continuation or development of melodic material, as opposed to repetition in a symmetrical arrangement. Apel, p329.

*Antienne du silence, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b9*

The presence of both psalmody and *alleluia* within a single song means that tempos may vary from *modère* (moderate) and *presque lent* (almost slow), to *très vif* (very lively)<sup>374</sup>. There is a certain amount of variation in dynamics, ranging from *pp* to an exuberant *ff* in some of the more ecstatic parts e.g. the ending of *Prière exaucée* (Answered prayer).

The texts of 'plainchant' songs deal, broadly speaking, with sacred subjects: the gift of self, compared to Christ's gift celebrated in the Eucharist (*Action de grâces*), Alleluia for the guardian angel (*Antienne du silence*) and the Resurrection (*Prière exaucée* and *Résurrection*).

The following songs fall clearly into this 'plainchant' category:

from *Poèmes pour Mi*:

*Action de grâces*

*Prière exaucée*;

and from *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*:

*Antienne du silence*

*Résurrection*.

<sup>374</sup>The *alleluia* in Messiaen's music is representative of joy.

These songs give rise to hybrid types, which incorporate some of the elements of the original. Related to the quiet, contemplative aspect of the 'plainchant' songs, are the meditative songs. The repeated notes and some melismas are retained, but more attention is given to the cultivation of an atmosphere of reverence, stillness and quiet ecstasy. *Poèmes pour Mi* begins and ends with 'plainchant' songs and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* ends with one. *Harawi* begins with a meditative song. The song with which *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* begins, is an intermediary between the plainsong and the meditative types and thus a 'bridge' between the introductory songs of the first and third cycles.

## 15.2 Meditative

The most distinctive feature of the meditative songs is their inclination towards immobility. *Amour oiseau d'étoile* [*Harawi*] is specified to be *presque lent, avec charme et tendresse, très pur* (almost slow, with charm and tenderness, very pure) and *La ville qui dormait, toi* [*Harawi*], as *extrêmement lent, en rêve* (extremely slow and dreamy). Because sound in the instrumental part is restricted to occasions when the voice is singing, there is no activity other than when the words occur. In some instances, as in the next example from *Amour oiseau d'étoile*, the slowness is exacerbated by notes which augment in value as the phrase unfolds.

To underscore the atmosphere of calm, the voice is confined to the middle register, with no extremes of pitch. Other than for the flights of birdsong, the piano too, is confined to the middle register and sustains a legato line. Although the bird twitters very softly at the end of each line, this does not disturb the feeling of stillness created by the oneness of piano and voice. The instrumental style of birdsong (a single, fast-moving line in a high register) is so different from the slow middle-register chords which move with the voice, that it is perceived as a separate instrument, something apart.

CHANT

Presque lent, avec charme et tendresse, très pur

*p*

Oi - seau d'é - - - toi - - - le,

PIANO

Presque lent, avec charme et tendresse, très pur

*p*

*pp* comme un oiseau

Ped. \*

*Amour oiseau d'étoile, Harawi, b1*

Much use is made of the sustaining pedal to create those "effects of pure fantasy" so dear to Messiaen's heart<sup>375</sup>. Conspicuous too, is the presence of tied notes and chords left to resonate, with or without inferior resonance. Generally, the dynamic level of these meditative songs, as one would expect, is *piano*. In *La ville qui dormait, toi*, Messiaen demands a *pppp* from both singer and instrument.

Songs indisputably in this category include two from *Harawi*: *La ville qui dormait, toi* and *Amour oiseau d'étoile*. *Dans le noir*, from the same cycle, has strong meditative characteristics, but will be separately discussed in section 15.7. This category evolved from the 'plainchant' songs, therefore there are no meditative songs in the first cycle. However, in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, as previously mentioned, there is an intermediary between the two types. The outer sections of *Bali avec Mi* proceed in a meditative manner, with the accompaniment doubling the voice in both pitch and rhythm, but in the central section the voice is preceded by a resonating chord in the manner of plainsong. *Bali avec Mi* is designated *un peu lent* (a little slow) and *plus lent* (more slowly) in the central section.

<sup>375</sup>Messiaen quoted in Boucourichliev, *NG*, vol. 12, p 206.

### 15.3 Incantatory

The incantatory song, as the name suggests, evolves the repeated notes of psalmody into incantation. Commonly, the attack in both piano and vocal parts is loud and forceful, with staccato effects and accents well marked. Although the voice is sometimes confined to a middle 'chanting' register (as in *Montagnes*), the piano, in all songs of this type, ranges freely over the keyboard, often crashing from one end to the other (see the final bar of the following example). Types of accompaniment used within any one incantatory song, are as variable as the speeds and dynamic markings found. These changes, along with unexpected and sudden silences, engender a feeling of agitation in the music. The punctuatory piano bars of the incantatory songs in *Poèmes pour Mi* (four bars is the longest one), evolve into considerably longer interludes in *Harawi* (approximately 20 bars in both *Montagnes* and *Répétition planétaire*).

Variations in dynamics are common, but the overall impression is one of loudness. These songs usually build to a climax by means of increasing speed and volume, with the drama heightened by rising pitch. Note that Messiaen intensifies the effect of propulsive rhythm in each of the incantatory songs by regular metrical groupings. This can be seen in the first bar of the following example, where the demi-semiquavers are grouped consistently in fours - and have been for the previous five bars - as opposed to his usual asymmetric or prime number groupings. Note also the increasing dynamic level followed abruptly by silence.



## 15.4 Lyrical

The true 'lyrical' songs have a vocal line which is no longer limited in pitch to plainsong, either in the form of psalmody or the *alleluiatic* vocalise. Although the intervals and flow of phrase remain unmistakably Messiaen's (due to his use of the modes of limited transposition and favoured intervals), the lyrical song at first glance, bears a resemblance to the lieder of other composers. The technique required of the singer in these songs is first and foremost, lyricism, as if here, Messiaen achieves his ambition of allowing the voice to 'sing above all else'<sup>376</sup>.

In all the lyrical songs, voice and piano begin simultaneously. Thereafter, the piano is often used to punctuate the song in little, delighted flourishes such as this one from *Danse du Bébé-Pilule*:

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics written below it. The middle and bottom staves are the piano accompaniment. The tempo marking 'Plus lent' is written above the vocal line and below the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'aux doigts de ta ma-man. Son... ou per-pé-tu-el... é-tait un lac tran-'. The piano accompaniment features arpeggiated chords and a flowing bass line.

*Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b12*

A wide variety of accompaniments is used within all the songs, but it is generally a 'moving' accompaniment which carries forward the emotions of joy and pleasure. Where the voice sustains a note, the piano proceeds. Chordal accompaniments are used, but not in a static manner. They are more likely to be fast arpeggiated accompaniments or chords tossed quickly from one hand to the other.

<sup>376</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p45.

Climax is created in these songs, as in the incantatory group, by the repetition of phrases or motives. In this category, however, the repetition is more likely to be combined with a corresponding upward transposition of the motive. The brackets in the next example highlight the transposed motive. Note also the busy and changing accompaniment:

ton cœur si pur. Chan - ter, chan - ter, -

chan - ter, ahl chan - ter, -

Pressez

ff cresc.

Rall. poco

Rall. poco

*Danse du bébé-Pilule, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b74-75*

The texts of the lyrical songs are concerned either with the expression of joy, or passion, or both. *Danse du bébé-Pilule* expresses the delight of childhood; *Bonjour toi, colombe verte*, the elation of awakening love; *Adieu*, a passionate farewell to the Beloved and *L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil*, an ecstatic outpouring of rapture at being united with the Beloved in Death. Messiaen associates birdsong with joy, therefore it is not unexpected to find that both textual and instrumental references to birdsong occur in these joyful, lyrical songs.

All the songs of this group feature repeated sections, such as the repeating line of

*L'Épouse*<sup>377</sup>.

The songs which are easily classified as lyrical are:

<i>Poèmes pour Mi:</i>	<i>L'Épouse</i>
<i>Chants de Terre et de Ciel:</i>	<i>Danse du bébé-Pilule</i>
<i>Harawi:</i>	<i>Bonjour toi, colombe verte</i>
	<i>Adieu</i>
	<i>L'escalier redit, gestes du soleil</i>

As with the other categories of songs, one encounters those in transition from the early to the late style. *Paysage*, the second song of the cycle *Poèmes pour Mi*, combines elements of the 'plainchant' song with those of the lyrical ones. Lines of monotone chanting are separated by repetitions of a more lyrical, but not *alleluiatic*, line. The chant becomes disqualified from the realms of pure plainchant psalmody by the variable accompaniment which occurs concurrently. Sometimes the repeating note sections are preceded by the patterns of cascading chords (shown in the following example - compare *Action de grâces*, mentioned in 14.1) and sometimes, as in the final recitation, shown in the subsequent example, the accompaniment is repeating counterpoint similar to that of *Antienne du silence* (compare the musical example of 15.1).

The musical score shows a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in G major and 7/8 time. The lyrics are: "comme un gros bi - jou bleu. Et la voi - là, ---". The piano accompaniment features a series of cascading chords in the right hand, with a dynamic marking of *mf* at the beginning and *pp* later. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment.

*Paysage, Poèmes pour Mi, b10*

<sup>377</sup>See section 5.7.6.



other through most of the short song, this retaining the effect of repetitive recitation, despite the enlarged pitch content.

The accompaniment of *L'Épouse* has more in common with the lyrical, than the meditative songs or 'plainchant'. There is no consistent rhythmic or pitch class doubling of the vocal line, nor does the piano precede the voice with resonating chords. Instead, as can be seen in this example, the accompaniment retains a fair degree of independence. The *presque lent* and ultimately the *très lent, mystérieux* instructions, nevertheless bring to mind the meditative songs.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The vocal part is on a single staff with a treble clef, marked 'CHANT'. It begins with the tempo instruction 'Presque lent' and the dynamic 'mf'. The lyrics are 'Va où l'Es - prit te mè - ne,'. The piano part is on a grand staff with treble and bass clefs, marked 'PIANO'. It begins with the tempo instruction 'Presque lent' and the dynamic 'expressif', followed by a forte 'f' dynamic. The piano accompaniment consists of chords and moving lines in both registers.

*L'Épouse, Poèmes pour Mi, b1*

The text of *L'Épouse* comments on the union of the husband, the wife and God, and exhorts the Believer to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

### 15.5 Tranquil

The tranquil songs are distinguished by a particular 'rocking' accompaniment initiated by the piano at the beginning of the song. Typically, the repeating patterns are made up of treble-register chords, regularly grouped. Equally typically, this regularity will be somewhere disrupted to create a rhythm which will "limp deliciously"<sup>378</sup>. The following example illustrates all these aspects:

<sup>378</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p48.

Modéré, un peu vif *p*

CHANT

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

PIANO

*Le collier, Poèmes pour Mi, b1*

This mode of accompanying is not sustained throughout the entire piece, but the serene nature of the composition remains largely undisturbed. The tranquil songs maintain a soft mien with no great excesses of pitch, dynamic, speed or metaphor and create a welcome respite from the activity of the incantatory and the 'plainchant' types. They are fairly short and occur in the central body of the cycle. It may be significant that these tranquil songs were excluded totally from *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and only briefly revived in *Harawi*. In the latter, the vocal style is slightly more wide-ranging and adventurous than in *Poèmes pour Mi*.

The tranquil songs are:

<i>Poèmes pour Mi:</i>	<i>La maison</i>
	<i>Ta voix</i>
	<i>Le collier</i>
<i>Harawi:</i>	<i>L'amour de Piroutcha</i>

Tranquil song texts deal with Eternity in the following senses: *La maison*, with the forsaking of our earthly bodies for eternally luminous, unblemished ones; *Ta voix*, with an Eternity where the Beloved will complete the number of incorporeal angels; *Le collier*, with the rosary and *L'amour de Piroutcha*, with the Eternity of Love.

## 15.6 Sectional

The sectional songs show a sophistication from their first appearance in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* to their later appearances in *Harawi*. Their *raison d'être* is the incorporation into a single song, of the different thoughts aroused by the same initial stimulus. Thus *Arc-en-ciel d'innocence* follows the sequence of thoughts which might arise in talking to a tired little boy: from games, to food, to his tiredness. In *Minuit pile et face*, the contemplation of the 'stinking city' leads to meditation on Christ the powerful Comforter and finally, to the sleeping little boy. Both songs are like mosaics with different pieces, connected together by bars of instrumental music. In the sectional songs of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, moods are not explored at any great length (no longer than 10 bars). Note the rapid changes of mood in the following few bars from *Minuit pile et face*:

The musical score shows three staves. The top staff is the vocal line with lyrics: "gueill", "Pressez beaucoup", "Poco rall.", "Ri - ro,", and "ai - gui - se - toi,". Above the vocal line are three circled markings: "Pressez beaucoup", "Poco rall.", and "Au mouvt". The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, with markings "cresc. molto" and "ff". The bottom staff is a lower piano accompaniment. The key signature changes from one flat to one sharp during the piece.

*Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b32-36*

In the sectional songs of *Harawi*, the average length of expression for any idea is longer (e.g. 21 bars for the animal cries in *Syllabes* and 19 bars of ritual dance in *Doundou tchil*). Obviously this extension results in songs which are, overall, much longer than before: 100 bars for *Syllabes*, compared to 73 bars in the case of *Minuit pile et face*<sup>379</sup>.

<sup>379</sup>The author is aware that the number of bars is not necessarily related to the duration of a song, but it does nevertheless, give some indication. The average length of songs in *Poèmes pour Mi*, is 30 bars.

Contrasted material within any one song, becomes more widely differing as one progresses from *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* to *Harawi*. In *Arc-en-ciel d'innocence*, the lyrical is contrasted with conversation or recitation. In *Minuit pile et face*, lullaby, passionate lyricism, *sprechgesang* and dance song, lie side by side. This is, incidentally, Messiaen's first use of a dance within a song. He takes up the idea again in *Doundou tchil* [*Harawi*], where dance co-exists with lullaby, lyricism and rhapsodic music. *Syllabes* diverges even further to include lyricism, chant, animal cries and human ululations. The new aspect introduced in the sectional songs of *Harawi* is the different types of vocalisations, in addition to the different moods, which the vocalist is required to produce.

Piano 'interludes' are initially vital in sectional songs, as they facilitate the changes of mood from one section to another. Therefore different dynamic levels and types of accompaniment follow one another in quick succession. The transitions are achieved in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* within the space of a few bars, as was seen in the previous example. In *Harawi*, although the treatment of each idea is more extensive, the juxtaposition of ideas becomes even more startling. The instrumental bridge is most often omitted altogether. Sometimes a brief breath for the singer and a single rest for the pianist is all which separates contrasting material. In this excerpt from *Syllabes*, the lyrical section in the first line is dwindling from *f* to *ppp*, and from *très modéré* to *poco riten.* The singer has a quaver rest whilst the pianist crashes out a punctuating *sff* chord, and they plunge straight into the animal cries: *ff*, strongly accented, and *un peu vif*:

*f* dou-ble-ra, *p* Très loin, tout bas, Très loin, tout bas, *poco riten.*  
*ppp* Le chif-fre cinq à... *poco riten.*

*p* tchil tchil tchil. *ff* Pia pia pia pia pia pin pia, dou-dou tchil tchil

*ff* \* *Ad.* *Ad.* *Ad.* *Ad.*

*Syllabes, Harawi, b74-78*

More energetic material is contained in the central sections of the songs in much the same way as the more robust songs are kept for the central parts of the cycles.

The sectional songs are:

*Chants de Terre et de Ciel:*

*Arc-en-ciel d'innocence*

*Minuit pile et face*

*Harawi:*

*Doundou tchil*

*Syllabes*

The songs end relatively sedately with the voice, as in the following example:

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Rall. - - - molto.' and the dynamics are 'pp'. The second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Rall. - - - molto.' and the dynamics are 'ppp'. The lyrics are '(ad lib.) u.avec u. ne tou. te pe. ti. te che. mi. se.'

*Minuit pile et face, Chants de Terre et de Ciel, b47*

### 15.7 A Synthesis

It may have been observed that the final song of *Harawi*, the last cycle, has not been classified into any of the above-mentioned categories. Essentially, *Dans le noir*, is a song apart. It cannot be comfortably 'squeezed' into any of these classes, but it nevertheless perfectly fulfils its function in the cycle, as will be explained forthwith.

Chiming chordal interludes in *Dans le noir* are reminiscent of, but far longer than, those of the 'plainchant' song introductions - the third interlude is 25 bars in length. The song is lyrical in the sense that voice and piano begin together and that the voice maintains a *bel canto* line, with no 'unusual' cries. Furthermore, the lyrical section of the earlier song, *Syllabes*, is quoted exactly, complete with original homo-rhythmically doubling, chordal accompaniment. The other cyclic material quoted, occurs with a repeating pattern not totally unlike the 'rocking' patterns of the tranquil songs. Unlike the typical tranquil song, however, the dynamic level of *Dans le noir* varies from *ppp* to a brief exuberant *fff*. The intense slowness of the piece allies it with the meditative songs, especially as the song ends with a quotation from the introductory song of the cycle, *La ville qui dormait, toi*, a meditative song. The effect of this quotation is to draw the listener the full circle: reminded of the genesis, yet pointed to the future. The other 'internal' quotations are happy reminders of what has transpired in the course of the cycle. The sensation of stillness created by the prolonged final phrases, as well as the indeterminacy of the cessation of the final sound, conveys a sense of the

immeasurability of Eternity. *Dans le noir* is a perfect summary of, and conclusion to, *Harawi*.

### 15.8 Length of songs

Mention was made at the outset, of the increasing length of songs from *Poèmes pour Mi* to *Harawi*. Although recording times vary depending on individual interpretations, overall deductions may nevertheless be made. The approximately six and three-quarter minutes of *Action de Grâces* with which *Poèmes pour Mi* begins, is exceptional. Of the eight songs in this cycle, only this one is longer than four minutes, three songs are longer than three minutes and the shortest is one and a half minutes. There does not appear to be any attempt to arrange the songs in order of length.

*Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, like *Harawi*, has the more weighty songs within the body of the cycle, towards the end. Of the six songs of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, the longest, at six and a half minutes, is the fifth song (*Minuit pile et face*). The six minutes of this song is not as exceptional to this cycle as the length of *Action de Grâces* to *Poèmes pour Mi*. Three songs in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* are longer than four minutes, with none under two.

*Harawi* has an even longer song in seventh position (i.e. just over half way in the twelve). *Adieu* takes about seven and a half minutes to perform. Four songs in the cycle are over five minutes, and none are shorter than two.

The perceivable trend through the song cycles is, indisputably, for greater length, both in the cycle as a whole and in individual songs. Aspects of symmetry in the design gradually feature more prominently, providing the central core to the works.

## 15.9 Conclusion

From an early obsession with the sound of plainsong, by isolating certain techniques, Messiaen has evolved classes of songs which scarcely resemble the original. The vocalise has not really persisted beyond *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, but has been replaced with a free and sweet lyricism, often emulating the typical arch-shape of plainsong. The scope of Messiaen's method of writing has broadened and thereby facilitated the expression of a wide variety of emotions and subjects.

## CHAPTER 16 CONCLUSIONS

Oliver Messiaen's song cycles present the world with a body of vocal literature, which, though not vast, is at once musically challenging, strikingly original and remarkably characteristic of his musical style as a whole. Their individuality notwithstanding, the cycles also concur with certain broader trends in twentieth century composition.

### 16.1 'No man is an island...'

This century has been characterised by unlimited freedom of experimentation in virtually every area of music-making. Messiaen has participated in the main areas of exploration and, although many of the solutions he arrived at remain markedly aloof, his lines of thought have intersected with those of other composers at various points. In their divergence from traditional tonality, regular rhythm, contextual harmony and conventional timbre, as well as in their individuality, Messiaen's song cycles are typical of twentieth century vocal literature and thereby merit attention.

#### 16.1.1 Expanded tonality

The three song cycles are written melodically and harmonically, within Messiaen's unique system of modes of limited transposition. Like other musicians, he too was pre-occupied with the problems of a devitalised tonality, but instead of adopting an established system like atonality, modality<sup>380</sup> or polytonality, he worked out his own scales. His method provided him with the flexibility to choose almost any of the above methods, including traditional tonality, if he so desired. In their own ways then, he and his contemporaries freed themselves from the time-worn patterns of traditional, contextual harmony.

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<sup>380</sup>Referred to here in the commonly accepted sense of the existing church modes.

### 16.1.2 Form

The crumbling bastions of tonality had a profound effect on musical forms which had relied on harmonic generation. Twentieth century composers were compelled to seek original and more relevant forms. Charles Ives, who seems to have anticipated almost all the developments in twentieth-century music, also anticipated Messiaen. Although Ives belonged to a lack-of-tradition far from Messiaen's, there are, surprisingly, interesting areas of similarity between the two composers. Ives noted in the writings of Emerson that:

"the underlying plan of a work seems based on a large unity of a series of particular aspects of a subject, rather than on the continuation of its expression".<sup>381</sup>

This non-developmental perception of form is akin to the sectional or cataloguing principle present in Messiaen's works.

Bartok, Stravinsky, Webern and Messiaen all experimented with palindromic musical forms. The cyclic themes and subtle thematic transformations which often accompany an arch-shaped design, occur in the musical schemes of all four composers. *Harawi*, of Messiaen's three song cycles, is most developed in this respect, though the other two cycles show a growth towards this mature application.

A more recent twentieth century composer, Nicole LeFanu, demonstrates in her work, a close affinity with the temporal concepts embodied in the forms of Messiaen. In her 1974 song cycle, *The same day dawns*, for soprano and five players, Chinese and Japanese texts are set in a circling or spiralling form, rather like Messiaen's 'rose-window' designs<sup>382</sup>. Songs return in her cycle, just as they do in *Harawi*, some varied and others unchanged by what has happened in between. The philosophy espoused by such forms is expressed verbally in LeFanu's sleeve notes quoted below.

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<sup>381</sup>Drew, *Score III*, p58.

<sup>382</sup>See section 8.3.

"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..."<sup>383</sup>

### 16.1.3 Rhythm

Rhythm this century, has been less restricted and more varied than in any period since time signatures and bar lines came into general use<sup>384</sup>. Nonmetric rhythms, shifting accents, asymmetric meters, changing time signatures and even metric modulation<sup>385</sup> have all been part of the experimentation. Messiaen provided his own solutions to the rhythmic crisis. His song cycles stand alone in the vocal repertoire in their novel deployment of added values, progressive augmentation, inexact augmentation, non-retrogradable rhythms, isorhythms and composite talas. Drawing on his knowledge of different rhythmic systems, he created a rhythmic language which gained a powerful new autonomy and invited imitation. His relationship to composers of the next generation is significant in this respect. Boulez pinpoints his importance to the avant-garde:

"To Olivier Messiaen we owe - in addition to the profound studies he made of plainchant, Hindu rhythm and Stravinsky - the creation of a conscious technique of duration (a new attitude towards rhythm). The fact is unquestioningly important, for aside from the inoperative mania, periodically recurrent, of wanting to reconstitute the Greek metric (classical Greek rhythm) one must go back to the 14th century to find a like pre-occupation in Occidental music."<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>383</sup>N.LeFanu, sleeve notes to *The Same Day Dawns*, perf. J.Manning, Gemini. Cond. N. LeFanu. England: Chandos, 1980. ABR 1017.

<sup>384</sup>Dallin, p55.

<sup>385</sup>A device used by Elliot Carter, in which a proportional change of tempo is accompanied by a change from one meter to another, the two being linked by a common meter. Dallin, p68.

<sup>386</sup>P. Boulez, *Eventuellement*, Revue Musicale, 1952, Knopf 1968, p173; in Bray, p101-102.

#### 16.1.4 Isolation of events

Messiaen's focus on the individual duration led him in the direction of new lingering tempos, as yet not exploited in music for voice. The non-developing nature of much of his music, as is found in his meditative songs, endows each moment with a special significance of its own. The resultant isolation of events, quite foreign to music before the twentieth century, is an aspect his music has in common with some serial compositions. This 'pointillistic' perception of harmony as essentially integrated sounds, has been shared by as unlikely a collection of composers as: Cage, the aleatoric; Webern, the serial atonalist and Stockhausen, the electronic composer.

#### 16.1.5 Timbre

Messiaen's experimental use of timbre is characteristic of a more general search this century, to widen the timbral spectrum of all instruments. Although restricted in his song cycles to the resources of voice and piano, he was stimulated within these confines to invent original tone colours. As previously stated, he can be accredited with combining aspects of traditional vocalisation with more adventurous ones. His distinctive way of writing for the piano has opened a hitherto unexploited world of sound inherent in that instrument.

#### 16.1.6 Interest in the East

Messiaen's fascination with exotic and primitive cultures, particularly Eastern ones, is symptomatic of a more widely held interest amongst contemporary Western composers. The visits from about 1909, of Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* and the occasional Eastern gamelan, proclaimed to Western musicians that a wider world of music awaited discovery. Ravel's 1926 set of *Chansons Madecasses*, referred to in section 1.5, is representative of this pre-occupation. Milhaud's *Incantations* for male voices, composed in 1944, i.e. one year before *Harawi*, is, like that work, set in Peru. Whereas Messiaen

created his own text incorporating traditional Peruvian Inca symbolism, the texts of *Incantations* are translations of Aztec poetry.

Up to 1924, no serious studies of Eastern music had been made in the West. Most often musical orientalism amounted to little more than the addition of Eastern features to music essentially Western in form and style. In the 1930's, John Cage and Olivier Messiaen began independently to interest themselves in a more profound study of the Orient. As a result of his research, Messiaen produced music which precipitated for him, the acclaim and censure, of being the "first great composer whose works exist ... to a large degree apart from, the great Western tradition"<sup>387</sup>. In this respect, his song cycles are quite unique.

## 16.2 "Away from time, always outside of time! Between East and West, ..."

D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, chapter vii

Messiaen appropriated several philosophical and technical features of Eastern music and used them in his own compositions.

### 16.2.1 Practical techniques

The Greek and Indian styles of additive rhythmic construction, which formed the basis for many of Messiaen's rhythmic discoveries, have been outlined in sections 10.2.1 and 10.2.2. Specific Eastern timbres, notably those of the Balinese gamelan, reappear with Western instrumentation in some of Messiaen's large orchestral compositions. Griffiths suggests that this gamelan sound is even recalled in the chordal accompaniments of songs in *Poèmes pour Mi*<sup>388</sup>. A structural principle of gamelan music, whereby the theme occurs simultaneously with thematic elaboration on several layers at different

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<sup>387</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p15.

<sup>388</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p83.

paces and in different registers, gives rise in Messiaen's compositions to a related principle: simultaneity. Section 9.1.1 deals with his method of layering a series of contrasted timbres.

## 16.2.2 Philosophies

Messiaen's application of Eastern features was perhaps more detailed and rigorous than that formerly used by Western composers, but it is probably his concurrent incorporation of both Eastern philosophical ideas and purpose, which makes his music so unusual. His understanding of time, for example, is distinctly more Eastern, than Western in origin.

### 16.2.2.1 Timelessness

Messiaen's contemplation of the vastness of Eternity, had the effect of trivialising for him, the passage of time as experienced by mortal man. Eternity appeared to him, to unfold in every direction. The ability to communicate this perceived timelessness in his music, is one of the triumphs of his genius. His musical language implies indifference to the passage and direction of time in the following ways:

- the peculiar sound quality of diatonic scales depends on the resolution of the third and seventh degrees by a semitone. Messiaen's modes of limited transposition convey a more 'settled' impression, because they are symmetrically constructed and thereby avoid such tension-relaxation patterns<sup>389</sup>.
- chords in Messiaen's music are not always built in a traditional tertian manner (i.e. in thirds) and even where this is the case, they are used independently of context. The need for resolution is, therefore, no longer imperative and much

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<sup>389</sup>See Chapter 6.

of the forward impetus of the music is nullified<sup>390</sup>.

- Non-pulsative rhythms and palindromic rhythmic patterns, which read the same from either end, further avoid the impression of progressing through time<sup>391</sup>.
- extra values 'added' onto existing rhythmic patterns, as in Messiaen's system of added values<sup>392</sup>, can prolong a sound virtually indefinitely. This makes it difficult to ascertain exactly the termination of that sound.
- the heterophonic textures favoured by Messiaen, have been described as "the music of many clocks, running fast and slow, forwards and backwards"<sup>393</sup>. With such a dissimilar collection of timepieces operating concurrently, the determination of an absolute and overriding flow of time is doubtful.
- reference has already been made in 16.1.2, to the implicit message of the forms Messiaen uses.

#### 16.2.2.2 Didactic

As well as this appreciation of time as being static, Messiaen and the composers of the East share a common goal: the presentation in music, of unchanging mythical or symbolic stories. All of Messiaen's songs can be considered as Christian didactic<sup>394</sup>.

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<sup>390</sup>See Chapter 7.

<sup>391</sup>See section 10.2.4.

<sup>392</sup>See section 10.3.

<sup>393</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p16.

<sup>394</sup>Although not part of a major trend, it is interesting that Messiaen's first works were composed at about the same time that some other composers were turning their attention to the Divine. Stravinsky's outpouring of religious works began in 1926 and Schoenberg returned formally to the Jewish faith in 1933.

The Indian composer conveys his message by means of extra-musical meanings attached to various elements of the music. In a similar way, Messiaen clarifies his messages by means of extra-musical symbolism, and also by texts and programmes attached to the scores. Of Messiaen's symbolism, some is universally accessible and some, fundamentally private. Immediately understood are his attempts at illustrative word-painting. Birdsong is equally easily recognizable and its connection with 'pure' joy is fairly obvious. Less apparent to the uninitiated ear, may be the many uses made of plainchant, with its strong religious associations. Other symbolism in his musical vocabulary would be understood only by a select few. Such would be the case with the 'language' of stained glass windows, colour symbolism or numerology. Musical characterisation, such as the representation of angelic beings by the tritone, or mode - key - colour correlations are more abstruse and arguably discernible by the composer alone.

Eastern performers have a distinct advantage over Messiaen, in that when they gather to enact a ceremonial, the significance and intent of their music and actions are clear to all. Messiaen, on the other hand, is confronted with the problem of presenting subject matter, which does not have widespread spiritual significance for much of his audience.

The communication of Eastern procedures and philosophies in a Western tongue accompanied by a Western instrument, indeed places his songs in a rare position in vocal music. More Western than Eastern in character, though, is the time Messiaen expends in advance, in meticulously composing his works in full. No allowance is made for the spontaneous improvisation which forms part of the Eastern performance.

### **16.3 Messiaen the Craftsman**

In the face of the controversy he arouses, the consistently applied and cleverly-wrought craftsmanship of his musical language is sometimes overlooked. Not only does Messiaen draw inspiration from an incredibly wide range of contrasting sources, but he also

seems to perceive relationships between them, where formerly none existed. This implies a broad field of knowledge, a lack of prejudice, a creative mind and the ability to synthesize things in new ways.

His pupil, George Benjamin, argues persuasively that Messiaen was responsible for freeing music from what was becoming a crippling state of tension and *angst*, the burden of a once magnificent, but also insular, heritage. This liberation was achieved in Messiaen's case, without making the "flippant or retrogressive compromises" made by other composers in the same situation<sup>395</sup>. He stood virtually alone in his persistent refusal to be caught up in the Anti-Romantic, neo-classic reaction which swept Europe and America in the 1930's-1940's.

In describing Romanticism, Warrack explains that it involved a turning away from the rational and explicable, to the mystic and supernatural<sup>396</sup>. Heart ruled head, as imagination dictated form. A fascination with the past and exotic civilisations, as well as an individual approach, characterised much Romantic art. Although he cultivated a musical language which was quite remote from that used by nineteenth-century Romantic composers, Messiaen shares many of their sentiments. He has therefore been labelled a 'neo-Romantic', a designation to which he responds with pleasure:

"I am not ashamed of being a romantic... They were aware of the beauties of nature, grandeur of divinity, they were grandiose and many of our contemporaries would gain from being Romanticized"

"The Romantics were magnificent craftsmen"<sup>397</sup>.

The craftsmanship of Messiaen is readily manifest when one 'dismantles' the song cycles for closer scrutiny.

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<sup>395</sup>Nichols, p87. Benjamin is presumably referring here to Satie and other Neo-classicists.

<sup>396</sup>Warrack, *NG*, vol.16, p141.

<sup>397</sup>Samuel, *Conversations*, p79 - 80.

### 16.3.1 'Structural' philosophy

Remarkable in his compositions, is the care with which detail **within** constituent parts endorses the whole. With Messiaen's music, one is always aware of the deeper, less overt meaning behind the more obvious one i.e. his use of a musical technique habitually reiterates 'non-verbally' what is present in the text or programme. Consider, for example, the mosaic and palindromic structures fundamental to his concept of form. Given Messiaen's philosophies and beliefs, these become the obvious, and virtually the only fitting form for much of his music<sup>398</sup>. The numerous ways in which Messiaen communicates his perception of time and Eternity within these forms, such as non-functional harmonies, non-retrogradable rhythms and added values, are discussed in section 16.2.2.1.

Life for all people has to be lived on many levels at once and every person, therefore, has to assume simultaneously, many different roles: working person, spouse, and offspring, to name but a few. For Messiaen, as for other Christians and philosophers, a spiritual dimension straightaway adds another plane to life. The heterophonic textures of Messiaen's music, whilst underscoring a free movement in time, also intimate this multi-faceted nature of life.

### 16.3.2 Structural correlations

Messiaen's musical structures not only fortify the non-musical message, but also demonstrate logical and integrated thought. For example, the symmetry evident in the macro-structure of a composition may be mirrored within the work. *Doundou tchil*, a song within *Harawi*, shows the same symmetrical arrangement of material to be found in the overall design of the cycle. On a yet more modest scale, the modes of limited transposition and palindromic rhythm patterns which constitute individual songs, exploit these same principles of symmetry.

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<sup>398</sup>See section 16.1.2.

The construction of both added note **chords** and added **rhythmic** values shows the application of a single idea in both rhythmic and harmonic/melodic contexts. The same methodology has been applied to augmented rhythmic patterns and augmented intervals. The melodic **and** harmonic use of preferred intervals further demonstrates the composer's concern for a consolidated presentation.

### 16.3.3 Ideological affinities

Messiaen's favoured ideas are as multifarious and complex as the musical language he uses. This enables him to use a single reference in order to imply much. To pursue the origins and implications of any one reference or technique in his music, is like working one's way through a maze: many roads lead to the centre:

The great love of Messiaen's life is God. Pertaining to his love for God, is his passion for plainchant, a fact evident in the melodic style of many of his songs. The typical arch shape of plainsong melody exhibits the symmetry he enjoys in Nature. Thus the two interests, religion and Nature, overlap.

The home of plainsong, the church, is also the home of his beloved stained glass windows. The mosaic forms of these windows and their gorgeous colouring have been influential in his musical language. However, the colour and colour symbolism in his music probably owes as much to the windows, as it does to the outdoor world of Nature, especially birds.

Messiaen's regard for plainsong highlights his reverence for the remote past. His studies of ancient civilizations (e.g. India, Peru and Greece) and their music, have stimulated him in other ways. Significantly, these systems have attributes which coincide with other of his cherished ideas: the symmetry and asymmetry of Nature, the prime numbers of which many are favoured in numerology, and the added values which suggest an extension of time.

It is patently not always possible in an analysis of Messiaen's compositions, to give a single source for many of his ideas or inspirations. The thoughts are often too intricately related to be easily confined to one category. This would precisely confirm the Surrealists' claim for the power of subliminal suggestion and hence justify the appearance of Surrealist texts in his songs. Although familiar enough in the world of visual art, Surrealism is uncommon in the world of music, particularly, as in Messiaen's case, where the Surrealist approach is not confined to the text, but extends to a conception of the whole work.

The more profound the study, the greater the realization that the music is carefully crafted together as the work of a man of great capacity, imagination and ability. Individual elements of his compositions, can be seen to have been carefully chosen to reinforce the subject matter to be communicated. The construction of *La ville qui dort*, the introductory song of *Harawi*, illustrates. It is a love song which introduces the main themes of the cycle and sets the scene: the colour 'violet' (which symbolises the truth of love and is one of the endearments persistently associated with the Beloved throughout the cycle) occurs in the text; the melody is written in mode two (the violet mode); the 'key' is G (representing the desire for fulfilment of love); the rhythmic cells in the song number seven (a tribute to the perfection of the Beloved), five (anticipating the death of Death to be achieved in the course of the cycle) and three (foretelling the ultimate union with a triune God).<sup>399</sup>

It is true that much preparatory research is necessary in order to appreciate these finer points, but the hidden allusions and associations which emerge, make the exercise a genuinely rewarding one. Should one pursue a study of Messiaen's music beyond the song cycles, the effort expended becomes even more worthwhile. Both the musical language and the symbolism persist largely unchanged from genre to genre.

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<sup>399</sup>See section 12.1.11 for number symbolism.

### 16.3.4 Consistency

A wide survey of his music demonstrates that Messiaen's musical language is instantly distinguishable aurally and even visually (in the case of a score), regardless of medium. Far flung registers (especially higher ones), clusters of lush chords, structural contrasts of timbre, birdsong, melodic tritones, the layering of simultaneous ideas, extremes of tempo and long pregnant silences are all recognizable from work to work.

The piano parts of both his solo and orchestral compositions, together with the vocal style of his recent opera, *Saint François d'Assise*, are congruous with the respective styles of the song cycles. The song cycles are therefore, representative of, and for the singer, an ideal introduction to, Messiaen's work as a whole.

## 16.4 The song cycles

The evolution of song cycles from *hausmusik* to music exclusively performed by highly trained and skilled performers, is scarcely more apparent than in these cycles of Messiaen. The challenges of operating within unique rhythmic, harmonic and melodic schemes, is further compounded by the physical demands placed upon the performers. The strength and enthusiasm necessary for the displays of *bravura* are offset by the disciplined approach required in passages of great slowness or prolonged silence.

### 16.4.1 The Pianist

For the pianist unfamiliar with Messiaen's music, there are specific new techniques to be mastered. The incorporation of birdsong into the instrumental part is as new to performance practice for the piano, as the use of inferior and superior resonance<sup>400</sup>. However, in spite of much that is new and unexpected, a detailed study of the song

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<sup>400</sup>Johnson, p18. See section 14.9.

cycles shows that the composer consistently uses an identifiable number of ways of accompanying. The recognition of these routine figures facilitates comprehension and thereby hastens the learning process. Since the level of virtuosity increases from *Poèmes pour Mi* to *Harawi*, the cycles can virtually be treated as a graded means of instruction on Messiaen's piano accompaniments. Satisfying for the pianist is the elevation of his role through the cycles from accompanist, to commentator (in extended interludes and postludes) and eventually, to accompanied soloist (where the piano assumes pre-eminence over the voice).

#### 16.4.2 The singer

For the singer, the fulfilment of performing Messiaen's cycles stems from the satisfaction of presenting innovative contemporary music, without foregoing the pleasures of 'singability'. Many composers of 'new music' felt the need to separate the poetry into disjointed syllables to serve their musical ends, but Messiaen's music retains a "truly singable line"<sup>401</sup>. This is not to deny the technical difficulties embedded in the score, but (quoting Barker as an experienced performer and teacher of these works), "it is the sheer physical enjoyment" which "carries the singer through"<sup>401</sup>. In other words, some of the delight in Creation and creativity which Messiaen feels, is experienced by the performer in the enjoyment of their own vocal instrument. Barker has noted that the singer who has had some background in the performance of improvised jazz or 'pop' music tends to feel a greater affinity with the music of Messiaen, than those who have had a purely 'Classical' training. She attributes this to an ability in singers of that ilk to "take risks, and let the imagination and sheer pleasure of singing take over"<sup>401</sup>. This lack of self-consciousness would be of great assistance in performing convincingly, some of the more unusual expressions of emotion to be found in *Harawi*.

*Harawi* is probably best approached by the singer (as with the pianist), via *Poèmes pour*

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<sup>401</sup>Barker, personal correspondence, dated 2/4/90.

*Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*. In that way, she will be gradually initiated into some of the more unusual aspects of Messiaen's vocal writing. In *Poèmes pour Mi*, the singer becomes acquainted with a twentieth century version of plainsong, distilled through his peculiar modes and rhythmic idiosyncrasies. Favoured intervals, melodic shapes, progressively augmented intervals and peculiarities of rhythm recur consistently through the three cycles and, if noted and mastered in a study of *Poèmes pour Mi*, will be more easily learnt in the successive works. The vocal approach broadens out in *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and by *Harawi*, new means of vocalisation co-exist with other already established 'Messiaen' mannerisms. The parallel existence of the old with the new in *Harawi*, necessitates the exercise of great resources of versatility on the part of the singer.

In the course of his song cycles, Messiaen expands the traditional role of the singer. Over the years, the solo singer has been accustomed to 'holding the floor', but Messiaen constrains a broadening of this perspective. In his song cycles, the voice also becomes, at times, a merging thread in an ensemble texture, or an 'accompaniment' to the piano. These are unusual functions for a singer and promote an atypical attitude to the voice as an instrument to be incorporated into music-making, rather than of a person to be accompanied.

A study of the categories into which the songs fall, will assist both performers in the interpretation of some of the later songs. For instance, analysis reveals that the plainchant songs subsequently give way to meditative songs. *Bail avec Mi*, the introductory song of *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, is in a transitionary stage between these two types and is therefore, a useful bridge inducting the singer from one type to the other. Particular features associated with certain categories of song will sometimes be more easily assimilated if seen in collaboration with other similar songs.

*Poèmes pour Mi*, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and *Harawi* can be viewed by the pianist and the singer, as a wonderful opportunity to experience at first hand, the musical language of Olivier Messiaen. Even if this highly individual language remains unimitated *in toto* by subsequent composers, the music stands as a powerful testimony to the

divergent creative abilities of a man who dared to be different.

**16.5 "To express with a lasting power our darkness struggling with the Holy Spirit, to raise upon the mountain the doors of our prison of flesh, to give to our century the spring water for which it thirsts, there shall have to be a great artist who will be both a great artisan and a great Christian".<sup>402</sup>**

Messiaen

This is Messiaen's heartfelt quest. The specific achievement of his three song cycles, *Poèmes pour Mi*, *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* and *Harawi*, is the expression of man's ongoing spiritual progress through life, in an art form crafted for the specific purpose of enlightenment and upliftment: that they simultaneously enrich and broaden the spectrum of vocal literature of this century cannot be doubted.

Drew notes that

"Whether a work of Messiaen's succeeds or fails, it is evident from the very start that the composer feels, in the depths of his heart and soul, the burning urgency of what he has to say<sup>403</sup>".

Armfelt adds that

"whether or not we share his Faith, we can welcome the richness and sincerity of its expression"<sup>404</sup>.

Messiaen's fervency is dominated by confidence and optimism, attributes sometimes sadly lacking in the twentieth century. This optimism, Whittall maintains, is one of the best signs that the musical future, whilst possibly owing little to the well-tryed techniques of the past, need not necessarily involve a total rejection of all its most cherished qualities<sup>405</sup>. It has taken the mastery of Messiaen to meld the tried and

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<sup>402</sup>Messiaen, *Technique*, p8.

<sup>403</sup>Drew, *Score III*, p61.

<sup>404</sup>Armfelt, p858.

<sup>405</sup>Whittall, p234.

tested ideals of the past onto the unfamiliar and innovative techniques of the present.

He can be considered a seminal composer in that some of his innovations and more revolutionary concepts have been taken up and developed by his students. His music however, presents a synthesis of so many apparently opposing elements present in the twentieth century, that it could conceivably become a starting point for some future generation. Perhaps the prince whom Praver longed for, to awaken the 'sleeping' world of song cycles<sup>406</sup>, is Messiaen.

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<sup>406</sup>Praver, p17.

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## APPENDIX I

## LISTENING PROGRAMME

- 1816 - **Beethoven** (1770 - 1827) - *An die ferne Geliebte*  
 [Perf. Dietrich Fischer-Diskau, voice; Jorg Demus, piano. Germany: Deutsche Grammophon, n.d. 139 197.]
- 1823 - **Schubert** (1797 - 1828) - *Die schöne Müllerin*  
 [Perf. Dietrich Fischer-Diskau, voice; Gerald Moore, piano. Germany: Deutsche Grammophon, 1972. 2530544.]
- 1834/41 - **Berlioz** (1803 - 1869) - *Les Nuits d'Été*, op.7  
 [Perf. Janet Baker, New Philharmonia Orchestra, cond. Sir John Barbirolli. England: EMI, n.d. ASD 2444.]
- 1840 - **Schumann** (1810 - 1856) - *Frauenliebe und leben.*  
 [Perf. Edda Moser, soprano; Erik Werba, piano. Germany: EMI, 1976. 1C 065-30238.]
- 1868-1884 - **Duparc** (1848 - 1933) - *Phidylé*  
 - *La vie antérieure*  
 - *Le manoir de Rosemonde*  
 - *Au pays où se fait la guerre*  
 - *L'Invitation au voyage*  
 [Perf. Janet Baker, London Symphony Orchestra, cond. A. Previn. England: EMI, 1978. ASD 3455.]
- 1882-92 - **Chausson** (1855 - 1898) - *Poème de l'amour et de la mer*  
 [Perf. Janet Baker, London Symphony Orchestra, cond. A. Previn. England: EMI, 1978. ASD 3455.]

- 1890 - **Chabrier** (1841 - 1894) - *Six Mélodies*  
 [Perf. Hugues Cuenod, voice; Geoffrey Parsons, piano. Great Britain: Nimbus, n.d. Nimbus 2112.]
- 1891 - **Fauré** (1845 - 1924) - *Après un rêve*  
 - *Mandoline*, op.58  
 - *Soir*, op.83  
 [Perf. E. Ameling, soprano; Rudolf Jansen, piano. West Germany: Philips, 1984. 412 628-2.]
- 1897 - **Mahler** (1860 - 1911) - *Lieder eines fahrenden gesellen*  
 [Perf. Christa Ludwig, Philharmonia Orchestra, cond. Sir A Boult. London: EMI, 1967 & 1988. CDM 7 69499 2.]
- 1898 - **Ravel** (1875 - 1937) - *Épigrammes de Clément Marot*  
 [Perf. G. Souzay, baritone; D. Baldwin, piano. Netherlands: Philips, 1982. 6527 154.]
- 1899 - **Elgar** (1857 - 1934) - *Sea Pictures*  
 [Perf. Janet Baker, London Symphony Orchestra, cond. Sir John Barbirolli. EMI, 1965. EMI ASD 2721.]
- 1902 - **Mahler** - *Kindertotenlieder*  
 [Perf. Christa Ludwig, Philharmonia Orchestra, cond. Sir A Boult, A. Vandernoot, O. Klemperer. London: EMI, 1967 & 1988. CDM 7 69499 2.]
- 1903 - **Ravel** - *Schéhérazade*  
 [Perf. Janet Baker, New Philharmonia Orchestra, cond. Sir John Barbirolli. England: EMI, n.d. ASD 2444.]

- 1907 - Ravel - *Histoires Naturelles*
- n.d. - Ravel - *Cinq Mélodies populaires grecques*  
- *Deux Mélodies hebraïques*
- [Perf. G. Souzay, baritone; D. Baldwin, piano. Netherlands: Philips, 1982. 6527 154.]
- 1909 - Vaughan Williams (1872- 1958) - *On Wenlock Edge*
- [Perf. Martyn Hill, tenor; Graham Johnson, piano; The Coull String Quartet. London: Hyperion, 1980-81. A66013.]
- 1909 - De Falla (1876 - 1946) - *Trois Mélodies*
- [Perf. Jill Gomez, soprano; John Constable, piano. England: SAGA, 1975. SAGA 5409.]
- 1912 - Schoenberg (1874 - 1951) - *Pierrot Lunaire*
- [Perf. Jane Manning, sprichstimme; Nash Ensemble; cond. Simon Rattle. West Germany: Chandos, 1978. ABR 1046.]
- 1913 - Debussy (1862 - 1918) - *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*
- [perf. M. Price, soprano; J. Lockhart, piano. London: Orfeo, n.d. SO 38831A DMM.]
- *Beau Soir*  
- *Mandoline*
- [perf. E. Ameling, soprano; Rudolf Jansen, piano. West Germany: Philips, 1984. 412 628-2.]
- 1914 - De Falla - *Seven Spanish Songs*
- [Perf. Jill Gomez, soprano; John Constable, piano. England: SAGA, 1975. SAGA 5409.]
- 1914 - Satie (1866 - 1925) - *Trois poèmes d'Amour*
- 1916 - *Trois Mélodies*  
- *Ludions*
- [Perf. Hugues Cuenod, voice; Geoffrey Parsons, piano. Great Britain: Nimbus, n.d. Nimbus 2112.]

- 1888-1918 - **Ives** (1874 - 1954)
- *Incantation*
  - *September*
  - *The sea of sleep*
  - *Requiem*
  - *The things our fathers loved*
  - *Old home day*
  - *Down East*
  - *They are there!* (Perf. and sung by C.Ives)

[Perf. H. Boatwright, soprano; J. Kirkpatrick, piano. New York: Columbia, 1974. (Set entitled 'Charles Ives remembered'. X2398.)

- **Roussel** (1869 - 1937) - *Réponse d'une épouse sage*, op.35

[perf. E. Ameling, soprano; Rudolf Jansen, piano. West Germany: Philips, 1984. 412 628-2.]

- 1920 - **Caplet** (1878 - 1925) - *Cinq Ballades Françaises*

[Perf. Hugues Cuenod, voice; Geoffrey Parsons, piano. Great Britain: Nimbus, n.d. Nimbus 2112.]

- 1920 - **Gurney** (1890 - 1937) - *Ludlow and Teme*

[Perf. Martyn Hill, tenor; Graham Johnson, piano; The Coull String Quartet. London: Hyperion, 1980-81. A66013.]

- 1920+ - **Poulenc** (1899 - 1963)
- *Poèmes de Guillaume Appolinaire*
  - *Poèmes de Paul Éluard*
  - *La fraîcheur et la feu*
  - *Chansons Gaillardes*
  - *Priez pour la paix*

[Perf. Pierre Bernac, voice; Francis poulenc, piano. France: Vega, n.d. Vega c 30 A 456.]

- 1926 - **Ravel** - *Chansons Madécasses*  
 [Perf. G. Souzay, baritone; D. Baldwin, piano; M. Larrieu, flute; P. Degenne, cello.  
 Netherlands: Philips, 1982. 6527 154.]
- 1928 - **Britten** (1913 - 1976) - *Quatre Chansons Françaises* for  
 soprano and orchestra  
 [Perf. F. Lott, Scottish National Orchestra, cond. B. Thomas. England: Chandos, 1989.  
 CHAN 8657.]
- 1930 - - **Quilter** (1877 - ) - *Four Shakespeare Songs*, op.30  
 [Perf. C. Keyte, baritone; R. de Lisle, piano. Kent: Pearl Records, 1976. SHE 531.]
- 1934 - **Ravel** - *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*  
 [Perf. G. Souzay, baritone; D. Baldwin, piano. Netherlands: Philips, 1982. 6527 154.]
- 1934 - **Webern** (1883 - 1945) - *Drei Gesänge*, op.23  
 [Perf. H. Lukomska, soprano; Charles Rosen, piano; dir.: P. Boulez. U.S.A.: Columbia,  
 1978. From 'Complete works of Webern', vol. 1. BU 35734.]
- 1936 - **Messiaen** (1908 - ) - *Poèmes pour Mi*  
 [Perf. Lise Argequest, soprano; Oliver Messiaen, piano. California: Everest, 3269, n.d.]  
 [Perf. Noelle Barker, soprano; Robert Sherlaw Johnson, piano. London: Decca, 1972,  
 ZRG 699.]
- 1938 - **Messiaen** - *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*  
 [Perf. Noelle Barker, soprano; Robert Sherlaw Johnson, piano. London: Decca, ZRG  
 699, 1972.]
- 1939 - **Britten** - *Les Illuminations* for soprano and  
 string orchestra  
 [Perf. F. Lott, Scottish National Orchestra, cond. B. Thomas. England: Chandos, 1989.  
 CHAN 8657.]

- 1941            - **Honegger** (1892 - 1955)            - *Saluste du Bartas*  
 [Perf. Hugues Cuenod, voice; Geoffrey Parsons, piano. Great Britain: Nimbus, n.d. Nimbus 2112.]
- 1943            - **Britten**    - *Serenade for tenor, horn and strings*  
 [Perf. P.Pears, tenor; B.Tuckwell, horn; London Symphony Orchestra; cond. B.Britten. London: Decca, 1970. SXL 6449.]
- 1945            - **Messiaen**    - *Harawi*  
 [Perf. Noelle Barker, soprano; Robert Sherlaw Johnson, piano. England: ARGO, n.d., ZRG 606.]  
 [Perf. Dorothy Dorow, soprano; Carl-Axel Dominique, piano. Sweden: Grammofon, 1977, AB BIS.]  
 [Perf. Jane Manning, soprano; David Miller, piano. London: Unicorn-Kanchana Records, 1989, DKP(CD)9034.]
- 1954            - **Menasce** (n.d.)                                    - *Letters d'enfants*  
 [Perf. H. Cuenod, voice; G. Parsons, piano. Great Britain: Nimbus, n.d. Nimbus 2112.]
- 1955            - **Boulez** (1925 - )                                    - *Le marteau sans maître*  
 [Perf. Y. Minton, mezzo-soprano; Ensemble musique vivante; cond. P. Boulez. Columbia Masterworks, 1973. BL 32160.]
- 1957-62        - **Boulez**    - *Improvisation sur Mallarmé II, from Pli selon Pli.*  
 [Perf. H. Lukomska, soprano; M. Bergman, piano; P. Stingl, guitar; H. d'Alton, mandolin; BBC Symphony Orchestra; cond. P. Boulez. Germany: Deutsche Grammophon, n.d. 6833 174.]
- 1969            - **Shostakovitch** (1906 - 1975)            - *Six Songs to lyrics by English Poets, op.62/140*

















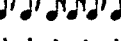


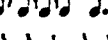








# Table of 120 deçī-tālas according to Sharngadera

No.	Names of the tālas	Notation
1	aditāla	
2	dvitīya	
3	tritīya	
4	catuṣṭhāka	
5	pañcama	
6	ṣaṣṭhāka	
7	darpana	
8	simhāvīkrama	
9	ratilīla	
10	śimbalīla	
11	kandarpa	
12	vīravīkrama	
13	ranga	
14	gīraṅga	
15	caccari	
16	pratyāṅga	
17	yatīlāga	
18	gajalīla	
19	hamsalīla	
20	varābhīna	
21	tribhīna	
22	rājacūḍamāni	
23	rāṅgodyota	
24	rāṅgapradīpaka	

No.	Names of the tālas	Notation
25	rājatāla	
26	trīyasra varṇa	
	miçra varṇa	
	catuṣrasra varṇa	
27	simhāvīkṛīḍita	
28	jaya	
29	vanamālī	
30	hamsanāda	
31	śimhanāda	
32	kuḍukka	
33	turāṅgalīla	
34	çarābhālīla	
35	śimhanandana	
36	tribhāṅgi	
37	rāṅgabharana	
38	mantha (1)	
	- (2)	
	- mudrīta (3)	
	- (4)	
	[There are six other forms of mantha]	
39	kokīlāpriya	
40	nīṣārūka	
41	rījavīdyādhara	
42	jayamāṅgala	
43	maīlikāmouā	
44	vījayānanda	
45	kṛīḍā[and]candanīṣārūka	

No.	Names of the tālas	Notation
46	jayaçrī	
47	makaranda	
48	kīrti	
49	çrīkīrti	
50	pratitāla	
51	vijaya	
52	bindumālī	
53	sama	
54	nandana	
55	manthikā	
	— [or]	
56	dīpaka	
57	udīkshana	
58	dhenkī	
59	vishama	
60	varnamanthikā	
61	abhinanda	
62	ananga	
63	nāndī	
64	mālatāla	
65	kankāla (1) pūrva	
	— (2) khanda	
	— (3) sama	
	— (4) vishama	
66	kandūka	
67	ekatālī	

No.	Names of the tālas	Notation
68	kumuda	
	[or]	
69	catustāla	
70	dombulī	
71	abhanga	
72	riyavankola	
73	vasanta	
74	laghucçekhara	
75	pratīpācçekhara	
76	jhāṣpā	
77	gajajhampa	
78	catunmukha	
79	madana	
80	pratimanthaka or kollaka	
81	pārvatilocana	
82	rati	
83	līlā	
84	karasayati	
85	līlita	
86	gīrugi	
87	rājanārāyana	
88	lakṣmīçā	
89	lalitapriya	
90	çrīnandana	
91	janaka	
92	vardhana	
93	riçavarūhana	

No.	Names of the tālas	Notation
95	antarakriḍā	
96	hamsa	
97	utrava	
98	vilokita	
99	gaja	
100	varṇayati	
101	simha	
102	karuna	
103	sārasa	
104	candatāla	
105	candrakālā	
106	laya	
107	śikanda	
108	addatāli or triputa	
109	dhattā	
110	dvandva	
111	mukunda	
112	kuvindaika	
113	kaladhvani	
114	gauri	
115	sarasvatīkantiābharana	
116	bhagna	
117	rājamrīgānka	
118	rājamrītanda	
119	niṣṣanka	
120	pārnagḍava	

## APPENDIX III

*Poèmes pour mi**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.*

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.

*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.*

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.

*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.*

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.

*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.*

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.

*Paysage*  
Landscape

*Le lac comme un gros bijou bleu.  
La route pleine de chagrins  
et des fondrières,  
Mes pieds qui hésitent*

The lake like a great blue jewel.  
The road full of sorrows  
and pot holes,  
my feet which hesitate

*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.*

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.

### *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.*

*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.*

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.

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.

### *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 irréparable  
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!

*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.

*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.  
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.*

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.  
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.

*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,*

Of two, behold, we are made one! Onward!  
Like warriors clad in steel!  
Your eye and mine among the  
marching statues,  
amid black howlings,

*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.*

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.

*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.

*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  
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!*

Shake the solitary, the  
ancient mountain of grief,  
let the sunshine work on the bitter  
waters of my heart!  
Oh Jesus, Living Bread,  
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!

*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.*

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.

## APPENDIX IV

*Chants de terre et de ciel**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.

*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.

*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*

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,

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!

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!

*Arc-en-ciel d'innocence*  
 Rainbow of innocence

Pilule, tu t'étires comme une  
 majuscule de vieux missel.  
 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:  
 le soleil t'écrira sur l'épaule  
 du matin  
 pour lancer des oiseaux dans ta  
 bouche sans dents.

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:  
 the sun will write to you on  
 the shoulder of the morning  
 to release birds in your  
 toothless mouth.

*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.*

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 avator-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.

*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 démente et  
d'orgueil!  
Rire, aiguise-toi,  
rire, avale-toi:  
ces flambeaux sont des montagnes  
de nuit.  
Noeuds bien serrés de l'angoisse.*

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.

*Bête inouïe qui mange. Qui bave  
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,*

*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.*

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,

débris 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.

*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. Nous l'avons  
touché, nous l'avons vu.*

*De nos mains nous l'avons touché.*

*Un seul fleuve de vie dans son  
côte,*

*revêtez votre habit de clarté.*

*"Je suis ressuscité, je suis  
ressuscité.*

*Je monte: vers toi, mon Père,*

Alleluia, alleluia! He is the first, the  
Lord Jesus.

He is the first-born of the dead.

Seven stars of love to the transfigured,  
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. 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

*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.*

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.

## APPENDIX V

*Harawi, chant d'amour et de mort**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</i>	Thy eye immobile, thy gaze
<i>ton regard, moi.</i>	unwavering, me.

*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</i>	Thou, of flower, fruit, sky
<i>et d'eau,</i>	and water,
<i>Chant des oiseaux.</i>	Song of the birds.
<i>Bonjour,</i>	Good morning,
<i>D'eau.</i>	Of water.

*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</i>	Mountain, listen to the solar
<i>du vertige.</i>	chaos of vertigo.
<i>La pierre agenouillée porte ses</i>	The kneeling stone bears his
<i>maîtres noirs.</i>	black masters.
<i>En capuchons serrés les sapins</i>	In tight monks'-hoods the firs
<i>se hâtent vers le noir.</i>	rush to the black.
<i>Gouffre lancé partout dans le</i>	An abyss cast on all sides
<i>vertige.</i>	towards vertigo.
<i>Noir sur noir.</i>	Black on black.

*Doundou tchil*  
Doundou tchil

*Doundou tchil. Doundou tchil.*  
*Piroutcha te voilà,*  
*A mon à-moi, la danse les étoiles,*  
*Doundou tchil.*  
*Piroutcha te voilà,*  
*O mon à-moi, miroir d'oiseau*

*Doundou tchil.*

*Arc-en-ciel, mon souffle,*  
*mon écho,*  
*Ton regard est revenu,*  
*tchil, tchil,*  
*Piroutcha, te voilà,*  
*O mon à-moi, mon fruit léger*  
*dans la lumière,*  
*Doundou tchil.*  
*Toungou, toungou, mapa, nama*  
*mapa, kahipas.*

Doundou tchil. Doundou tchil  
Piroutcha there you are  
O my own one, the dance of stars,  
Doundou tchil.  
Piroutcha there you are,  
O my own one, mirror of a tame familiar,  
bird,  
Doundou tchil.

Rainbow, my breath,  
my echo,  
Thy gaze has returned,  
tchil, tchil,  
Piroutcha there you are,  
O my own one, my fruit light  
in the light,  
Doundou tchil.  
Toungou, toungou, mapa nama  
mapa, kahipas.

*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."*

*Le jeune homme*  
*"Ton oeil tous les ciels, doundou*  
*tchil.*  
*Coupe-moi la tête, doundou, tchil.*  
*Nos souffles, nos souffles, bleu*  
*et or. Ahi!*  
*Chaînes rouges, noires, mauves,*  
*amour, la mort."*

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"

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."

*Répétition planétaire*  
Planetary repetition

*Ahi! Ahi! O*  
*Mapa, nama, mapa nama lila,*  
*tchil.*  
*Mapa, nama lila, mapa nama lila*  
*mika, pampahika.*

*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*

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.

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

*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.*  
*Adieu toi, lumière neuve,*  
*Philtre à deux voix.*

*Etoile enchaînée,*  
*Ombre partagée,*  
*Dans ma main mon fruit de ciel,*  
*de jour,*  
*Lointain 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.  
Farewell to you, new light,  
Love potion with two voices.

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.

*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.

*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*

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

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.  
 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.

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.  
 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.

*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.*

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.

*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*  
*au ciel.*  
*Tous les oiseaux des étoiles,*  
*Loin du tableau des mains*  
*chantent,*  
*Etoile, silence augmenté du ciel.*  
*Mes mains, ton oeil, ton cou,*  
*le ciel.*

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  
 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.

*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 Centuare, Betélgeuse*  
*Aldèbaran,*

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,

*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!*

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!

*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...

## APPENDIX VI

*Harawi* and the Tristan Trilogy

There are three works Messiaen describes as his *Tristan trilogy*:

- Turungalîla Symphony*: - composed 1946-1948,  
 - symphony for Ondes Martenot, piano solo, and large orchestra,  
 - comprising ten movements,  
 - performing time approximately an hour and a quarter.
- Harawi*: - composed 1945,  
 - song cycle for voice and piano,  
 - comprising twelve songs,  
 - approximately fifty to sixty minutes performing time.
- Cinq Rechants*: - composed 1948,  
 - choral work for twelve unaccompanied voices,  
 - comprising five movements,  
 - approximately twenty-five minutes performing time.

The composer's description of the three as a sort of three-act opera on the legend of *Tristan and Isolde*, is somewhat misleading<sup>407</sup>. There is no real dramatic or narrative continuity between them, nor are they intended for performance in the same programme. Each is a self-sufficient unit. The triptych can probably be better described as an exploration of the different aspects of love. Whittall describes them as a "theology of love" or a "formidable theologico-aesthetic statement"<sup>408</sup>

Note that these poems of love are composed: one for vocal resources (*Cinq Rechants*), one for instruments (*Turungalîla*) and one for both voice and instrument (*Harawi*). The text or programme for each work was written by the composer. *Cinq Rechants*, like *Harawi* uses a combination of French and Quechua, and in addition, a freely invented language resembling Sanskrit. The French part of the *Cinq Rechants* text contains the

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<sup>407</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p124.

<sup>408</sup>Whittall, p218.

same symbols of love found in *Harawi*: for example *étoile, coeur, les yeux*. Percussive patterns, incantations and melismatic ululations are common to both vocal works. As in *Harawi*, sounds are used or created in *Cinq Rechants*, for purposes other than semantics. In the former, syllables emulate onomatopoeic sounds. In the latter, Messiaen chose sounds either for the gentleness or violence of attack they provided, or for their capacity to communicate and accent certain musical rhythms<sup>409</sup>. Varieties of weight and timbre are achieved by this use of language and by voice grouping. Although there are no instruments in *Cinq Rechants*, the deployment of unusual and clever vocal effects, amounts virtually to orchestration.<sup>410</sup>

The *Turagalîla Symphony* displays in its name, a relationship with the other two. As a compound Sanskrit word, *Turagalîla* means 'song of love; hymn to joy, time, movement, rhythm, life and death'<sup>411</sup>; also play, in the sense of Divine action on the cosmos: acts of creation, destruction, reconstruction, and the play of life and death<sup>412</sup>. It can also mean love. *Lila* means time: that which runs like a galloping horse, or flows in an hourglass; also rhythm and movement. The title was chosen not only for its delightful meaning, but also for its euphonious sound. The *Turagalîla Symphony*, *Harawi*, *Cinq Rechants* and the original *Tristan und Isolde* all pay homage to the same garden of love.<sup>413</sup>

The melodic style and spirit of *Cinq Rechants* issues in part, according to Messiaen, from the *Harawi* or *Yarawi* of Peru and Ecuador<sup>414</sup>. Therein lies another link with the song cycle. Whilst all three 'Tristan' compositions make use of recurring cyclic

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<sup>409</sup>Messiaen's notes on Philips ABC 3400 recording of the work.

<sup>410</sup>Griffiths, *Messiaen*, p142.

<sup>411</sup>Messiaen's words on record sleeve SB 6761-2, quoted in Bray, p104.

<sup>412</sup>Johnson, p82.

<sup>413</sup>Refer to section 12.1.6.

<sup>414</sup>The other source is the Alba or Medieval dawn song of Western Europe. Messiaen in Johnson, p95.

themes, there are even some specific melodic references which recur from one work to the other. *Cinq Rechants*, composed last, can be seen to draw some of its material from subsidiary themes of the *Turangaîla Symphony* and *Harawi*.

(*furieux*)

1<sup>er</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> Sopr. III ha ha ha ha ha ha soif

3<sup>e</sup> Sopr. III ha ha ha ha ha ha soif (*souple*)

3 Contr. à 3 III ha ha ha ha ha ha soif à 3 *f* l'ex-plo-ra-teur Or -

1<sup>er</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> Tén. III ha ha ha ha ha ha soif

3<sup>e</sup> Tén. III ha ha ha ha ha ha soif

3 Basses à 3 III ha ha ha ha ha ha soif à 3 *f* l'ex-plo-ra-teur Or -

*Cinq Rechants 1, b13*

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

*p* *pp*

*p* *pp*

cres. \*

*La ville qui dormait, toi, Harawi1, b6*

For the first time, in these three works, Messiaen turned away from purely religious symbolism and subject. However, the persistent themes of love and sacrifice expressed, remain closely bound to the tenets of Christianity. Perhaps it is the 'human touch' with

the Divine Love that liberates Messiaen to express more of himself both textually and musically, in these three works, than anywhere else, either before or after<sup>415</sup>.

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<sup>415</sup>At least, this is the opinion of Austin, p391.

## APPENDIX VII

## List of vocal works

- 1921:        *Deux Ballades de Villon*  
voice and piano
- 1930:        *Trois Mélodies*  
soprano and piano
- 1930:        *La mort du Nombre*  
soprano, tenor, violin and piano.
- 1933:        *Messe*  
8 sopranos and 4 violins
- 1935:        *Vocalise*  
soprano and piano
- 1936:        *Poèmes pour Mi*  
soprano and piano
- 1937:        *O sacrum convivium*  
mixed chorus 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

In the above list, taken from Messiaen's *Technique de mon Langage Musical*, the composer marks with asterisks, those works he considers to be particularly characteristic of his own style. Significantly, both *Poèmes pour Mi* and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* are marked with two asterisks each. The following have been composed since that theoretical work was published.

- 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
- 1963-9: *La Transfiguration de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ*  
Choir, 7 soloists and orchestra
- 1975-83: *St François d'Assise*  
opera  
soloists: 2 baritones  
3 tenors  
1 soprano  
3 basses  
chorus: s,s,m-s,a,a,t,t,bar,b,b, 15 to each part.  
orchestra

## APPENDIX VIII

## Chronology

- 1908 Oliver Eugène Prosper Charles Messiaen born on Dec. 10, in Avignon, France, the first son of Pierre Messiaen and poetess, Cécile Sauvage.
- 1914 World War I. Pierre Messiaen joins the army and Cécile takes the two children, Oliver and Alain, to live with her mother in Grenoble.
- 1916 *La Dame de Shallot.*
- 1917 Has first piano lessons.
- 1919 Enters Paris Conservatory to study music.
- 1921 *Deux ballades de Villon.*
- 1925 Wins first prize for counterpoint and fugue at Paris Conservatory.
- 1927 Wins first prize for piano accompaniment at Paris Conservatory.
- 1928 *Le banquet céleste.*
- 1929 Wins first prize for organ, improvisation and history of music at Paris Conservatory. *Préludes.*
- 1930 Wins first prize for composition at Paris Conservatory. Publishes *Diplyque, Préludes pour piano;* *La mort du nombre, Les offrandes oubliées,* and *Trois melodies.*
- 1931 Becomes organist for Church of la Sainte Trinité, Paris. Hears Balinese gamelan at the Exposition Coloniale. *Apparition de l'église éternelle.*
- 1933 *L'Ascension.*
- 1934 Assumes appointment as teacher of chamber music and piano sight-reading at the Ecole Normale de Musique. *L'ascension* (organ).
- 1935 *La Nativité du Seigneur.*
- 1936 Marries violinist, Claire Delbos. Appointed to teach organ improvisation at Schola Cantorum. *Poèmes pour Mi.* Finds *La Jeune France.*
- 1937 Son, Pascal, born. *O sacrum convivium!*

- 1938 *Chants de Terre et de Ciel.*
- 1939 World War II and Messiaen enlists in the army. *Les corps glorieux.*
- 1940 Messiaen taken prisoner of war and imprisoned in Germany.
- 1941 Messiaen composes *Quatour pour la fin du temps* whilst in Stalag 8A in Silesia and the work is premiered there, before prisoners and guards. Messiaen subsequently freed and returned to France.
- 1942 Appointed Professor of harmony at Paris Conservatory.
- 1943 Begins harmony classes for *les flèches* at the home of Guy Bernard-Delapierre. *Visions de l'Amen.*
- 1944 Writes *Technique de mon langage musical. Trois petites liturgies de la Présence Divine* and *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus.*
- 1945 *Harawi, chants d'amour et de mort.*
- 1948 *Turungalîla Symphony.*
- 1949 Teaches at Tanglewood and the Darmstadt Summer School. *Cantéyodjayâ, Cinq Rechants* and *Modes de valeurs et d'intensities.*
- 1950 *Messe de la Pentecôte, Livre d'orgue* and *Le merle noir.*
- 1953 *Réveil des oiseaux.*
- 1955 *Oiseaux exotiques.*
- 1958 *Catalogue d'oiseaux.*
- 1959 First wife, Claire, dies after long illness. *Chronochromie.*
- 1962 Marries pianist, Yvonne Loriod. Visits Japan, where Seiji Ozawa conducts *Turungalîla Symphony. Sept haïkaï.*
- 1963 *Couleurs de la cité céleste.*
- 1964 *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum.*
- 1965 *La Transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ.*
- 1966 Appointed Professor of composition at Paris Conservatory.
- 1967 Guest of honour at Oliver Messiaen Festival held in Paris.

- 1968 Attends Messiaen week in Dusseldorf for his sixtieth birthday.
- 1969 *Méditations sur la mystère de la Saint trinité.*
- 1970 Tours United States and Canada. *La fauvette des jardins.*
- 1971 Receives Erasmus Prize at Amsterdam, presented by Queen Juliana and Prince Bernhard. *Des canyons aux étoiles.*
- 1972 Receives Sibelius Prize in Helsinki. Awarded *Doctor honoris causi* 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 65th birthday.
- 1975 *Saint Françoise d'Assise* begun.
- 1978 Tours major cities of United States, culminating in Messiaen week held at New York's Lincoln Centre, in honour of his 70th birthday. Retires from Conservatoire. White Cliffs in Utah re-named Mount Messiaen.