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OLIVIER MESSIAEN. "VINGT REGARDS SUR L'ENFANT-JESUS": AN ANALYSIS.

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Arts
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OLIVIER MESSIAEN: "VINGT REGARDS SUR L'ENFANT-JESUS". AN ANALYSIS.

DI BISCEGLIE, Laureen Gail, M.Mus. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1987.

Olivier Messiaen, composer, teacher, musical theorist and ornithologist, is one of the most important composers to emerge from France since World War II. He has arguably proved to be one of the most original voices in French music since Debussy. As an innovator Messiaen has made many contributions, exemplified in his use of compositional devices such as: asymmetrical augmentation; non-retrogradable rhythms; rhythmic palindromes; modes of limited transposition; instrumentation and harmony as tools for colour; timbre as a functional tool for structural purposes. These innovations are evident throughout "Vingt Regards..." and are discussed as they appear.

The research is presented in three main sections. The introduction is in three sub-sections, the first of which deals with biographical details of Messiaen's early childhood and education (1908-1930), his early appointments and private research (1931-1939), his appointment at the Paris Conservatoire as professor (1942-1947), and his international standing as a composer. The many and varied influences on the composer are then discussed, including his Christian faith practised in the Catholic Church, nature and birdsong, colour and stained glass windows, numbers and their symbolism, Greek modes, Indian rhythms and the exotic music of the East, with special reference to the Balinese gamelan. A brief description of his own system of modes of limited transposition is also included. The third section deals with the background to "Vingt Regards...". The work is placed in the context of his total musical output and its inspirations are traced.

The second section forms the greater part of this dissertation and comprises an in-depth analysis of all twenty movements. Each analysis

pays particular attention to the following aspects of Messiaen's musical language:

(i) The influence of Messiaen's religious and philosophical beliefs as revealed in the accompanying text, and in his "Notes by the composer" which appear in the preface to the score.

(ii) The composer's use of modes of limited transposition, and the colours associated with them.

(iii) The unusual features of his harmonic language which emphasise its static nature and lack of progression, harmony as colour, and the use of the "chord on the dominant" and "chord of resonance". The composer's choice of notes are often dictated by their timbre rather than their traditional harmonic function.

(iv) Rhythm, including his use of Indian deci-talas, Greek metres, non-retrogradable rhythms, palindromes, asymmetrical augmentation, and rhythmic characters.

(v) Although this work does not feature birdsong prominently, there is evidence of its use, and the "style oiseaux" in several movements.

(vi) Structures which make use of circular repetitive and symmetrical form.

(vii) The composer's preoccupation with durations is reflected in his fascination with numbers and mathematical equations. Prime numbers are frequently used and their relevance and symbolism are discussed.

The third and final section comprises a comparative discussion and conclusion resulting from the analysis.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Music in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

L. G. Di Bisceglie

31st day of January, 1987.

To my parents and Adrian with deep gratitude

PREFACE

I should like to acknowledge with deep gratitude the assistance of Professor Carl van Wyk in offering advice, encouragement and constructive criticism across many miles of ocean. Robert Sherlaw Johnson also provided valuable insights into aspects of Messiaen's music. The following persons and organizations also provided helpful assistance in my research :

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The Curator of the Cathedral of Angiers, Jean Tortiger, and of Notre Dame, Francois Girard.
The Right Reverend, Bishop Timothy Bavin.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A - Answer
CS - Counter Subject
Dom. - Dominant
I - Inversion
LN - Leading Note
min. - Minor
maj. - Major
MLT - Modes of Limited Transposition
NRR - Non-retrogradable Rhythm
p - Perfect
S - Subject
st - Semitone
t - Tone
T - Tonic
+ - Augmented
- - Diminished
(II) - Reference to a specific movement, in this case the second movement

References have been acknowledged as shown here, [1, p.5] where the first number refers to the reference, and the second to the page number of that reference.

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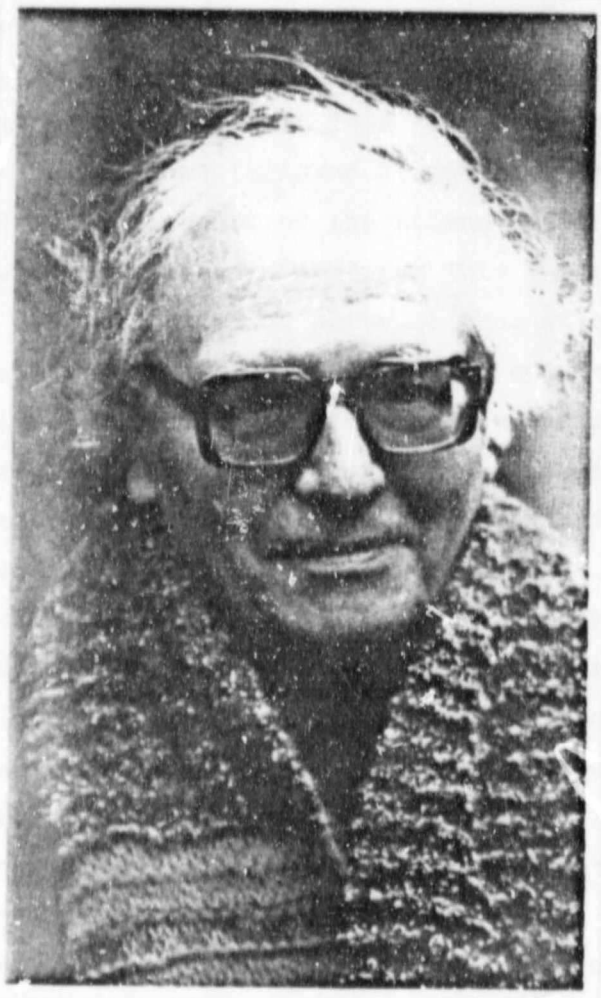
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"After having asked for a true music, that is to say, **spiritual**, a music which may be an act of faith; a music which may touch upon all subjects without ceasing to touch upon God; an original music, in short, whose language may open a few doors, take down some yet distant stars, I stated that there is still a place, plainchant itself not having told all. And I concluded: '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.'" [1, p.1]

"The first idea that I wished to express, the most important because it is placed above all else, is the existence of the Truths of the Catholic faith..... This is the main aspect of my work, the most noble, without doubt the most useful, the most valid, the sole aspect which I will not prehaps regret at the hour of my death." [10, p.11]

OLIVIER MESSSIAEN



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Biographical details.

Olivier Messiaen, composer, teacher, theorist and ornithologist, is one of the most important composers to emerge in France since World War II. He has proved to be one of the most original voices in French music since Debussy, as well as an innovator of considerable worth.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the emergence of new trends in music. Two in particular stand out as being totally diverse, yet very significant in light of developments since World War II. One, the Second Viennese School of serialists, represented by Schoenberg, Webern, Berg and their followers, has its roots firmly embedded in the symphonic tradition. This school emphasized unity of idea. The other trend was that followed by Debussy, Stravinsky and Varese, who opposed the ideologies of the Second Viennese School, and the excesses of the late nineteenth century. This group of composers was more concerned with diversity of material than with unity of idea. They stressed the importance of the relationship between, and significance of, pitch-structures, rhythm, timbre and other parameters. Messiaen definitely lies outside the symphonic tradition of the Second Viennese School, and although many see him as the successor to Debussy, he really is totally independent of both schools. Occasionally he has drawn parallels between his own compositional techniques and those of the symphonic tradition of the Second Viennese School but these are few and far between. Paul Griffiths in his book "Olivier Messiaen and the Music of Time" states: "Messiaen is the first great composer whose works exist entirely after, and to a large degree apart from, the great Western tradition."

Messiaen was born on the 10th December 1908 in Avignon, France, with a strong literary inheritance. His father, Pierre Messiaen was a distinguished English scholar, who translated the entire works of Shakespeare into French; he was also a scholar of the English Romantic poets. His mother, Cecile Sauvage, was a poet and wrote a

collection of poems "L'ame en bourgeon" whilst pregnant with Messiaen, which he claims "certainly influenced my character and my whole destiny." [7, p.19]

During the years of the first World War Cecile Sauvage took her sons Olivier and Alain (born 1913) to Grenoble. Here the boys were brought up "in a climate of poetry and fairytales ..... such as enormously develops a child's imagination and leads him towards thinking in immaterial terms, and so to music, the most immaterial of the arts." [11, p.20f] At the age of eight Messiaen was known to be able to recite whole sections from Shakespeare's works. These literary predilections acquired in childhood have remained throughout Messiaen's life, especially those for fantasy and magic, and have influenced his own creative style both musical and literary. At this time he was already experimenting with composition. Having taught himself to play the piano, he soon began composing canons at the octave, at the age of eight. Only later did he receive professional instruction from a Mlle. Chardon.

During the next few years he received the many musical scores as Christmas presents, at his own request. These included Mozart's "Don Giovanni" and "Die Zauberflote", Gluck's "Alceste" and "Orfeo", Gounod's "La damnation de Faust" and Wagner's "Die Walkure" and "Siegfried". These he sang and played through at the piano. [11, p.122] His musical collection also included such works as Debussy's "Estampes" and Ravel's "Gaspard de la nuit". [11, p.10] At an early age therefore, he was in touch with, and had experienced the magic realm of opera and drama, with all its imagery and sense of the fantastic. He had also experienced some of the most significant repertoire of French music. At this early age Messiaen had already shown a preference for the supernatural and the marvellous in his choice of literature and music. This was to be further expressed in his music and in his Catholic faith.

After the war Messiaen left Grenoble and the mountains of Dauphine to join his father and family in Nantes. Here his music studies continued, and he also began harmony lessons with Jehan de Gibon. It was de Gibon who gave Messiaen the score of Debussy's

"Pelleas et Melisande" at the age of ten. This work was one of the most decisive influences on him. After only a short period in Nantes, Messiaen's father accepted a post at the Lycee Charlemagne in Paris, and at the age of eleven Messiaen entered the Paris Conservatoire.

This was Paris in the 1920's, the age of Stravinsky and neo-classicism, of jazz and cabaret, of Cocteau and Les Six, of the Ballets Russes. Here he studied harmony, counterpoint and fugue (receiving the "premier prix" in 1926), piano accompaniment (receiving the "premier prix" in 1928), the history of music (receiving the "premier prix" in 1929), and composition (receiving the "premier prix" in 1930). His teachers included J. and N. Gallon, Georges Caussade (counterpoint and fugue), Marcel Dupre (improvisation and organ), Maurice Emmanuel (history of music) and Paul Dukas (composition). He also studied timpani and percussion with Joseph Baggers.

In 1930, on completion of his studies, Messiaen was appointed the principal organist at the church of La Trinite in Paris, a position he was to hold for over 40 years. In 1936 he joined the staff of the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris and also of the Schola Cantorum. It was in the same year that Messiaen joined forces with Lesur, Baudrier and Jolivet to form the group "La Jeune France" in 1936. What this group of diverse characters was seeking was "a living music, having the impetus of sincerity, generosity and artistic conscientiousness".[10, p.6] As a group they attacked the frivolity they associated with Parisian neoclassicism, rejecting much of Cocteau's manifesto "Le coq et l'arlequin" of 18 years before. They sought a music that was more personal and serious.

The second World War interrupted the activities of the "La Jeune France" group. Messiaen was taken prisoner of war in 1940 and while captive in Stalag VIII at Gorlitz in Silesia composed the "Quator pour la fin du temps". After his liberation in 1941, Messiaen was appointed professor of harmony at the Paris Conservatoire. Messiaen now embarked on ten years of rapid growth in his art surrounded by a group of music enthusiasts including Pierre Boulez, Serge Nigg, Jean-Louis Martinet, and Maurice Le Roux with pianists Yvonne Loriod and Yvette Grimaud. This creative burst was associated with the

stimulation around him, and in particular by Yvonne Loriod, an exceptional pianist of great virtuosity. As a result of this relationship with Loriod the piano became the central instrument in nearly every work composed by Messiaen in the next fifteen years. His "Visions de l'amen" for two pianos (1943) and "Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jesus" (1944) date from this period. "Visions de l'Amen", "Trois petites liturgies" and "Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jesus" represent a triptych, the related keys of each respectively linking them (the A major of the first two replaced in "Vingt Regards..." by its favoured 6th, F♯ major). All three were written for Yvonne Loriod. "Visions de l'Amen" was the first work however in which Messiaen consciously used the piano to achieve orchestral effects on a grand scale. It was also the first to make use of a cyclic theme, which was to become an important feature in all his works in the mid-forties. He likewise introduced rhythmic pedals extensively in this work. Although from a compositional point of view Messiaen broke no new ground in "Visions de l'Amen" he did crystallize techniques used in earlier works, expanding on their rhythmic structure and harmonic resonance. In its subject matter however, this work did represent a departure. Instead of obtaining insp'ration directly from scriptural sources as he had in "L'Ascension", "La Nativite de Seigneur", "Les corps glorieux" and the "Quatour la fin du temps" Messiaen was inspired by the writings of the mystical writer Ernest Hello, from whom he derived the four meanings of the word "amen".

In "Trois petites Liturgies de la Presence divine" (1944) Messiaen exploited new sonorities through the use of unusual instruments or by new combinations of traditional instruments. The piano is used in a semi-solo capacity. It is in this work that Messiaen made use of the relatively novel timbre of the ondes martenot. The orchestration also reveals an innovation in the arrangement of the instruments in the concert hall. The string section is placed at the rear, on either side of the choir, with the remaining instruments at the front. This pattern follows that used by Stravinsky and Varese. In this work Messiaen has also described his desire "to achieve a liturgical act, that is to transport a sort of office, a sort of organized praise into

the concert hall." [10, p.13-14] The work is scored for strings, ondes martenot, piano, celeste, vibraphone, maracas, Chinese cymbal, tam-tam and a choir of 18 female voices. The pseudo-gamelan of tuned percussion was for Messiaen an extension of his piano writing in "Visions de l'Amen". This work did much to establish Messiaen's reputation.

In 1944 Messiaen published his first theoretical work, "Technique de mon langage musical" which sums up his musical ideas at that time. From 1943 to 1947 he gave semi-private instruction in the home of Guy-Bernard Delapierre - these took the form of seminars in analysis and composition and attracted many young composers amongst whom were Pierre Boulez, Yvonne Loriod, Yvette Grimaud, Jean-Louis Martinet and Maurice Le Roux. It was in these sessions that Messiaen first used his own in-depth analysis of Stravinsky's use of "Rhythmic Characters in "The Rite of Spring" as a teaching guide.* He then began to teach outside France, for varying periods of time in Budapest (1947), Tanglewood (1948), Darmstadt (1950-53), Saarbrucken and elsewhere. In recognition of his dedication to teaching, Messiaen was appointed to teach a class of musical analysis specially created for him at the Paris Conservatoire. Over a period of more than twenty years his teaching went beyond traditional Conservatoire courses, covering such diverse topics as Greek metres, Indian rhythms and birdsong. These classes in analysis achieved a wide-spread reputation, and young musicians from all over the world flocked to Paris to attend them. Messiaen's Turangalila Symphony was composed between 1946 and 1948. Commissioned by Koussevitzky, it was given its first performance in Boston in 1949 with Leonard Bernstein conducting.

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* Messiaen had also published a brief essay on Stravinsky's rhythm in the "Revue Musicale" in 1939. Here, drawing a parallel with his Indian formulae, he praised Stravinsky's conscious manipulation of rhythmic figures, changing one element whilst the other remains the same. This technique, first apparent in "Petrushka" reached its climax in "The Rite of Spring" and "The Wedding", and then disappeared completely when Stravinsky turned to Neoclassicism and Bach in his "Symphony of Psalms".

During the 1950's Messiaen concentrated on composing and he was keen to strengthen his ties with promising young composers, many of them his own students. He enthusiastically supported the concerts of the Domaine Musical, founded in 1954 by Boulez, and it was at these concerts that many of his works received their first performance, including 'Catalogue d'oiseaux' played by Yvonne Loriod in celebration of Messiaen's 50th birthday. Messiaen finally married Yvonne Loriod in 1962, after the death in 1959 of his first wife, Claire Delbos.

Official recognition for his work came in 1965, when the French government commissioned his 'Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum', dedicated to the dead of the two world wars. It was peformed in the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, and in Chartres Cathedral on 20 July 1965 with General de Gaulle in attendence. Later it was performed at the Domaine Musical with Boulez conducting. After a trip to Finland in 1966 Messiaen was appointed professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire, and in 1967 he was elected a member of the Institut. An international piano competition in his name was established in 1967 as part of the Royal Festival. In 1971 he won the prestigious Erasmus Prize for composition. On 5th August 1978, nine miles fror Parawan, Utah, the White Cliffs, also known as Lion's Peak, were renamed in honour of Messiaen. Mount Messiaen, (8 000 feet) is now a state monument commemorating Messiaen's visit to the canyons of southern Utah which inspired him to write 'From the Canyons to the Stars' in 1973. In 1978 Messiaen retired from his post at the Paris Conservatoire. Since then he has continued to compose, the most significant work being the four-hour opera 'Sainte Francois d'Assisse'.

1.2 Influences on the development of the Musical Language of Olivier Messiaen.

(a) Christianity

The major influence on Messiaen's life and work has been his Christian faith practiced in the Catholic church. Messiaen himself has said: "The first idea that I wished to express, the

most important because it is place above all else, is the existence of the truths of the Catholic Faith .... This is the main aspect of my work, the most noble, without doubt the most useful, the most valid, the sole aspect which I will not perhaps regret at the hour of my death." [10, p.11-12] Messiaen chose the Catholic faith himself as his parents were not particularly religious. In this faith Messiaen found something to touch his sense of the mysterious very deeply. If some of the works listed above had provided him with "super-fairy tales", [10, p.18] he found in his religion " this attraction of the marvellous multiplied a hundredfold, a thousandfold". [10, p.19] His desire to subseqently portray Christian mythology and theology in his music had given him a reason to compose, and had also presented him with the challenge of attempting to describe in music the most bewildering, awe-inspiring aspects of the Catholic Faith such as the Incarnation, and the Resurrection. But even more importantly for Messiaen, the meditation on the mysteries of religion has been for him a meditation on time, because religious truths are perhaps unique in being universal in time and space; to portray them in music therefore necessitated a new conception of time, one that went against all that Western music had stood for, a sense of forward projection in time. Messiaen sought thus to achieve a sense of stasis in his music. Mystics may often be projected "beyond time" during a state of heightened awareness. Similarly then, music in which the harmonic movement has been slowed down, is often seen as being "religious" or mystical in nature.

Messiaen had been powerfully inspired by the Nativity, and all the mysteries surrounding Christ's birth, the Transfiguration, the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, and the glories of man's unique affiliation to God through the birth of His son. It is his constant focus on God that gives Messiaen's music its raison d'etre. The basic truth revealed from all these mysteries however is one amenable to musical expression, "it is the

presence of the eternal within the temporal, the unmeasurable within the measured, the mysterious within the known." [7, p.18] As a composer who aspires to convey a Christian message, Messiaen is unusual and perhaps unique in that he has seldom expressed his religious views and feelings through such forms as oratorios, masses, cantatas, or settings of biblical or liturgical texts. His only conventionally liturgical compositions have been a mass for 8 sopranos and 4 violins composed in 1933 and "O Sacrum Convivium" (1937), a communion motet. The Roman Missal is the liturgical book containing the complete rite of the Mass for every day of the year, and for all occasions; that is, everything that is said or sung by the celebrant at the altar, by the other ministers as well as by the choir and congregation. This Missal was to exert a profound influence on Messiaen as active member of and organist at the church of Sainte Trinite in Paris.

In his search for a deeper faith, Messiaen turned to the great Catholic scholars and philosophers. Since the 13th century Thomas Aquinas' philosophy, known as Thomism, has represented one of the most significant movements in Western thought, particularly in the Catholic Church. Messiaen is particularly interested in the teachings of Aquinas concerning the logic of unity within diversity. Aquinas' thesis was that God must be a concrete thing, not a human thought. God must be proved by the senses like any other concrete thing "nihil est in intellectu quin prius fuerit in sensu". This statement was considered exceedingly bold and dangerous in his time; even the greatest logicians shrank from trying to prove unity by multiplicity.

Dom Joseph Columba Marmion was recognised as a master of the spiritual life and his numerous books are classics on spiritual life. His teaching was drawn essentially from the Gospels, the Epistles of St. Paul, and the Rule of St. Benedict. Emphasizing the doctrine of the adoption of the children of God, Marmion exalts the person of Christ, the centre of the whole interior life. Messiaen had read and meditated on his book "Christ and

His Mysteries" and this work may be said to have been the major source of inspiration behind "Vingt Regards...". In his book Marmion covers all the mysteries surrounding Christ, His Birth, His life and His death. Starting with His Incarnation, Nativity and the circumstances surrounding them, Marmion deals with issues such as the Divine Relationship between the Eternal Father and His Only Son, God's Sanctifying Grace, the Sacraments, the mystery of the Blessed Virgin and the Immaculate Conception, Christ's Passion and the Church as the Body of Christ. Throughout, Marmion stresses the importance of meditation and contemplation of these mysteries, and thus it is necessary to distinguish between these two terms. Meditation implies discursive reasoning, whereas contemplation allows this reasoning to enter into the heart and the soul. One does not consciously use one's mind, or the process of logic, but simply enjoys basking in the presence of God.

In composing "Vingt Regards..." Messiaen took Marmion's contemplations of God the Father, of the beings present in the Nativity (the Virgin, the Angels, the Shepherds and the Magi), of objects associated with the Incarnation (the Star, the Cross and the 'awesome Unction' of human flesh taken on by God) and extended them to include several of his own meditations. He contemplated musical concepts such as time, silence, and 'hauteurs' in the sense of both 'heights' and 'pitches', and finally the wonder and awe he himself felt. In "Les douze Regards" Maurice Toesca deals with similar issues, and this work was likewise an important inspirational source for "Vingt Regards...".

Not only did Messiaen read religious meditative works by spiritual writers of the Catholic Church, he also read people such as Paul Claudel whose "Logic of Metaphor" foreshadows the language experiments of the surrealist writers. The French philosopher Henri Bergson's concern with the importance of the intuitive process is also an important link with Messiaen's concern for the workings of the subconscious, the roles of

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intuition and intellect and the relationship between faith and reason.*

His introspective and visionary approach has given the composer a reputation for mysticism. Messiaen feels that his approach is more theological and concerned with the truths of the Catholic Faith "which relate to God's act of redemption in the world by the Incarnation and Sacrifice of Christ. It is the expression of God's relationship with man that gives music its theological, rather than a mystical orientation." [6, p.64] There are however, exceptions to this rule, and "Je dors, mais mon coeur veille", the nineteenth movement of "Vingt Regards..." is a case in point.

(b) Nature and Birdsong

In a lecture in Brussels in 1958 Messiaen stressed the importance of turning to nature for inspiration. He stated that in view of the many opposing schools, old styles and contradictory languages, "there is no 'human' music to restore the confidence". This is the reason he turned to nature, and more specifically to birds and birdsong. Messiaen sees in nature "an inextinguishable treasure house of sounds and colours, forms and rhythms, the unequalled model for total development and perpetual variation .....Nature is the supreme resource." [4] He has also stated that for him the only real music is that which exists in the sounds of nature: "the harmony of wind in trees, the rhythm of waves on the sea, the timbre of raindrops, of breaking branches, of stones struck together, the different cries of animals are the true music as far as I am concerned." [7, p.223]

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* Bergson wrote "that the object of art is to put to sleep the active, or rather resistant powers of our personality, and thus to bring us into a state of perfect responsiveness, in which we .... sympathise with the feeling that is expressed. In the process of art we shall find, in an awakened form, a refined and in some measure spiritualized verson of the processes commonly used to induce hypnosis. Thus, in music, the rhythm and measure suspend the normal flow of our sensations and ideas by causing our attention to swing to and fro between fixed points..." [15]

From an early age Messiaen had been extremely fond of birdsong, and he spent many hours walking through the forests of France notating birdsong directly manuscript without the aid of a tape recorder. His enthusiasm for birds grew progressively and he later became an ornithologist, as well as a member of several ornithological societies. Birdsong occupies a very important place in Messiaen's musical language, and although in "Vingt Regards..." there are only one or two passages of birdsong, it was to become an increasingly important feature in works after 1944. He sees birds as being the greatest musicians in the artistic hierarchy, and has devoted much of his time to the study and notation of birdsong. Perhaps Messiaen, like Keats, is attracted by what bird songs contain of the eternal, the fact that the song heard today is the same as it was thousands of years ago. Birdsong therefore may be seen as an image of the changelessness that is central to his musical and religious thinking.

Messiaen uses birdsong in two ways: by imitating the birdsong in an exact a way as possible, and by treating birdsong as malleable material, in which the transcription is inexact and is treated freely. Birdsong formed the inspiration for several important works, 'Reveil des oiseaux' (1953), 'Oiseaux exotiques' (1955-56) and the 'Catalogue d'oiseaux', and for many of his later works.

(c) Colour

The association of music and colour has been sensed since Aristotle. The language of musical discussion of necessity incorporates visual analogies. The word "chromaticism" for example, implies a kinship in experience between harmony and colour. Relations between the two can be traced back to Aristotle. However, detailed interest in these connections on the part of composers is a phenomenon of the twentieth century, beginnin with the work of Mikolajus Ciurlionis, and with Skryabin's notation of a part of light organ in his "Prometheus"

(1908-1910). This relation may be further traced in the stage compositions of Kandinsky ("Die Gelbe Klang", 1912), Schoenberg in "Die gluckliche Hand" of 1910-13, and Bliss in his "Colour Symphony" (1921-22) to Messiaen's precision in "Couleurs de la cite celest" in which single chords are marked as matching the colours of the celestial city's precious foundation stones. The creation of colour in Messiaen's music however, depends on the play of complementation. This may explain why Messiaen has been happier ascribing colours to his MLT rather than describing a direct correlation between harmony and colour.

Messiaen states that the most radical difference between himself and his contemporaries was the fact that he is a colouristic composer. He has auditory-visual synaesthesia which is defined as the "transformation of a sound stimulus to a visual experience." [55] Messiaen explains this sensation: "when I hear music, when I read music, not only do I hear it inside my head but I see these colours which correspond to the sounds heard. I do not see them with the eyes, but rather with an interior eye and intellectually. ..... I hasten to add that these colours are not simple, but complex and in movement; they move, they are complex just as music is complex and full of motion. In music you have sounds that change in register..... sounds that change in intensity,..... sounds that change in timbre..... so with these colours. They change in nuance, intermix with each other, superimpose." [49] Not only does Messiaen see and hear these colours, but he has deliberately tried to put colour into his music through his modes of limited transposition. For Messiaen certain sounds are related to certain complexes of colour, and he uses them as such, juxtaposing them and putting them in relief against one another, much as an artist underlines one colour with its complement. However, it cannot necessarily be expected that Messiaen's internal experience of colour will communicate itself to the listener although this idea of colour has been linked with music in the work of many of the great classical composers

including Mozart, Liszt, Wagner and Skryabin. For Skryabin, A major appeared green, E flat steel blue, and F# a vivid blue. [6, p.205] However, consideration of the intended colour effects does contribute to a better understanding of Messiaen's harmony and its symbolic meaning. Messiaen has attached specific colour combinations to specific passages in "Vingt Regards..." and these will be discussed where they are used.

To Claude Samuel's question "Is it Nature that has given you your love of colours?", Messiaen replied: "Nature, and also stained glass .... At the time when my father was appointed a teacher in Paris, I took great delight in visiting monuments, museums and churches: my first visits to Notre-Dame, Saint-Chapelle and later to the Cathedrals of Chartres and Bourges, certainly exercised an influence on my career. I've remained dazzled for ever by the marvellous colours of this medieval stained glass." [11, p.11-12] Stained glass for Messiaen represents one of Nature's most wonderful manifestations, in that it is the light caught by man. Its purpose is the most noble of all - to glorify God in His House of Worship. Medieval art is eminently symbolical and as an art form was almost always conceived as the embodiment of the Spirit. Chartres Cathedral has been described as "the whole thought of the Middle Ages made visible." [18, p.93] It should be realized that the statues and windows of the churches in the Middle Ages were means by which the clergy endeavored to instruct the faithful in the greatest possible number of truths. Messiaen was attracted to these stained glass windows not only for their symbolic and biblical importance, but also for their vibrant colours that seem to come alive with the rays of light shining through them. The sun streaming through the windows of Chartres Cathedral, of Bourges or any of the famous cathedrals in France, receives as it comes, the colour of the ruby, the amethyst, or the emerald in colours so rich that men have called the windows "jewelled glass".

The method used in making these stained glass windows, with all its weaknesses and imperfections, gives these works of art their unique attraction. The strips of lead, which so many people found unsightly, had a very important function - to hold the individual pieces of glass together. They also serve to refract the light streaming in through the glass, thus creating contrasts between light and shadow. When the various glass colours are brought close together, the dark lines of lead hold the colours apart, preventing their overflowing into one another. Thus in the great Rose Window of Notre Dame a splendid purple predominates. There is however, no purple in the window, but red and blue. The colour seen by the human eye results from refractions of the rays of light, as they pass through the uneven pieces of glass causing the red and blue to intermingle thus creating the illusion of purple. Messiaen draws a parallel in his music to the complementary colours in these windows.

The creation of colour in Messiaen's works would appear to depend on the play of complementation and this may be the reason behind Messiaen ascribing colours to his modes of limited transposition (MLT). Mode 2 revolves around certain violets, blues and violet-purple, whilst Mode 3 corresponds to an orange with red and green pigments, patches of gold, and also a milky white with irridescent opal-like reflections. Mode 4 revolves chiefly around the colour violet, Messiaen's favourite colour. Consideration of the intended colour effects in his works helps explain Messiaen's harmony and the symbolism attached to it.

Messiaen awareness of Medieval colour lore, by which reddish violet, or purple, represents the Love of Truth and bluish violet, or hyacinth, the Truth of Love, is evident throughout "Vingt Regards...". It is generally accepted that blueness is related to ecstatic joy. Messiaen's use of doctrine of colour complementation also provides another means of interpreting Messiaen's predilection for his MLTs and his technique of spacing chords so that smaller units, often with some feeling of tonality

can be distinguished. Messiaen was also influenced by the theories of colour put forward by Kandinsky and Delauney. Kandinsky expressed Messiaen's theories in reverse: the soul responds to a work of art in terms of vibrations, and the vibration produced by a colour can result in a musical sound. Robert Delaunay investigated the interaction of contiguous and contrasting colours. He was particularly interested in the effects of light for breaking up colour-space, and in the interconnections between colour and movement. This gave rise to the movement known as "orphism", and Delaunay coined the word "simultanisme" in opposition to the meaning given by the Futurists to the term. Thus when painting a green, there is a red which appears behind it and similarly when painting a red, green appears behind it. These are complementary colours. Messiaen draws a parallel in music: "...if you have a note a fifth above a yellow note, you'll see a violet; if you have a fifth at blue, you'll see an orange." [56]

(d) Number symbolism

Messiaen has also expressed a fascination with numbers, especially prime numbers and the symbolism attached to them, and this is very much in evidence in "Vingt Regards...". He enumerates several examples in his notes in the introduction to the score. The source, meaning and influence of these numbers can be traced back to medieval thought. Numbers were prominent in the sacred and profane writings of the middle ages, in cathedral architecture, in the ritual of the Mass and in the neumes of plainsong. Medieval number philosophy may be said to be a combination of three distinct modes of thought, and the number symbols themselves supplied from three major sources. The first is derived from man's original struggles to enumerate identifiable objects around him, for example, a "hand" is 5; 20 is a "man" (10 fingers and 10 toes). The second source is the ancient Babylonian science of astrology. Numbers derived from constellations, planets, and stellar revolutions were held in awe as being divinely ordained. For example, the seven days of the week were named for the seven planets. The third theory is the

Pythagorean, which fixed the relationship of the numbers to one another and, accordingly, the places of the astrological aggregates in the cosmic order.

Christianity dominated medieval attitude toward numbers, elaborated from the numerology of Augustine and his predecessors. For this reason the meanings of most medieval number symbols may be derived from Augustinian principles. Within the church all possible dissentions about number symbolism were resolved and reduced to the harmony of Ultimate Truth. It was the Church itself that fathered the axiomatic proposition of a finite and ordered universe so thoroughly coordinated that both spiritual and material truth were included in a single rigid cosmic plan. The sanctity and incorruptibility of the astrological numbers was made unquestionable by their presence in page after page of Holy Writings, there to be pondered over and expounded by generations of churchmen. The significance of Messiaen's use of specific numbers and combinations of numbers in "Vingt Regards...", and the symbolism behind them will be covered in each analysis respectively.

(e) Non-Western rhythms

Messiaen had discovered and subsequently studied the rhythms and modes of ancient Greece and India and the resonant heterophonies of Bali. In fact, Griffiths feels that the the rhythms and sounds of the Balinese gamelan are at the root of "Vingt Regards...". Marcel Dupre had stimulated in Messiaen an interest in the metres of Greek poetry, although the principal exponent of this art was Maurice Emmanuel. Messiaen has made use of these metric combinations throughout "Vingt Regards...". Dupre and Emmanuel also encouraged Messiaen to search for unconventional modalities. [7,p.223] Indeed, many young French artists of this generation, even Debussy, were drawn towards the exotic and the East. Maurice Emmanuel had written his Cello Sonata, Op 2 of 1887 in the Phrygian Mode. His Piano Sonatina No. 4 Op. 20 of

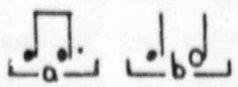
1920 uses Indian Modes. Messiaen recalls his own reaction after hearing a performance of Emmanuel's "Trente chansons bourguignonnes" Op. 15, of 1913: [I] ..."was amazed - and at once converted to modal music." [42] Messiaen then of course went further to develop his own system of modes.

Messiaen's idea of rhythm in terms chiefly of quantity goes back to what he had learned of Greek metre and of the rhythmic formulae, the 120 deci-talas. These are listed in the Lavignac encyclopedia and had been copied from the treatise of north Indian music in the 13th century, the "Sangita-ratnakara" attributed to Sharngadeva. The feature of these rhythms was their ametrical character and it is this feature which is the basic characteristic of Messiaen's rhythm. The idea of beat is replaced by the shortest note-value (the Matra in Indian theory), from which a rhythmic pattern is built. [8, p.32f] Thus Messiaen regards rhythm as an extension of durations in time rather than a division of time. One of the deci-talas most used by Messiaen is the Ragavardhana:
The 'b' cell is a diminution of 'a', with the addition of a dot on the second ♪. From this Messiaen derived his principle of added or subtracted values, in which a rhythm may be lengthened or shortened by the addition or subtraction of a note, a rest or a dot. The result is an ametrical rhythmic structure. Messiaen also makes use of the Candrakala, and Lackskmica rhythms in "Vingt Regards...":



'b' augmentation of 'a' + added value

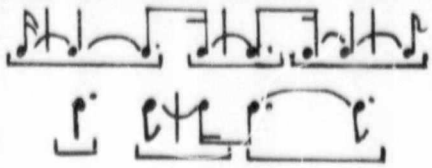
No. 105: Candrakala



'b' = augmentation of 'a'

No. 88: Lackskmîça

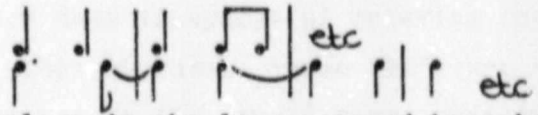
Thus Messiaen is able to augment or diminish rhythmic formuli in various ways: (i) by constant proportion (as in IX)



= 4♪:2♪:4♪

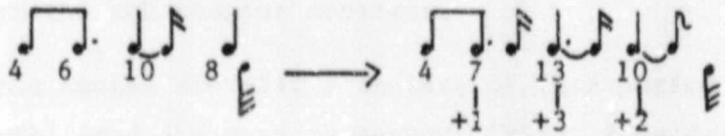
= 3♪: 11/2♪:3♪: = reduced by 1/4

(ii) by constant note value (as in the rhythmic canon of V)



The values in the lower strand have been augmented by half the original value.

(iii) by increasingly longer proportions (as in XVI)



(iv) Inexact agumentation or diminution, which represents the freest treatment.

As a result of this system of augmentation and diminution, a type of rhythm becomes very noticeable, especially in "Vingt Regards...". This rhythm features progressively increasing or decreasing values. Thus in the opening section of "Regard des Prophetes, des Berges et des Mages" there is a series of durations in the LH, which diminish in value from 16 𝅘𝅥𝅯 to 1 𝅘𝅥𝅯 by the successive subtraction of a 𝅘𝅥𝅯 from each value. This process is heard in retrograde form in the closing section. In "Regard de l'Onction terrible" the same rhythm is superimposed on its retrograde.

The next step was the simultaneous manipulation of the above processes into a device called "personnages rhythmique" in which there are three rhythmic strands. The first one undergoes increasing augmentation, the second increasing augmentation, whilst the third remains the same. Messiaen uses the first two devices in "Regard du Silence".

Non-retrogradable rhythms (NRR) and palindromes also feature in Messiaen's rhythmic vocabulary. The attraction of these NRR's lies not only in the charm of impossible retrogradation, but also

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