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Olivier messiaen "vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jesus" : an analysis

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Section (b.61-67). A massive Stretto (b.130-203) then leads to the climax of the movement. So too the first half of the ragavardhana rhythm is a retrogradable rhythm and its second half a diminution of the first, with an added value on the second . On closer examination an even closer resemblance to this rhythm may be found in the formal outline of this movement. The first section of "Par lui tout a ete fait" has three symmetrical sections:

A	Modere, presque vif (♪=160)	b. 1-48
B	Un peu moins vif (♪=132)	b. 49-79
A	1er mouvement (♪=160)	b. 80-130

It will be seen that these sections are 205.5, 269 and 205.5 ♪ long, at 160,132 and 160 to the minute respectively. This gives an effective total of approximately 1'17", 2'2", and 1'17" for each section, which reflects almost exactly, the proportion of the ragavardhana: 2:3:2.

The Stretto and Coda of this movement are shorter than the main body, and whilst the final duration of the ragavardhana rhythm is longer than the whole of the first cell, and as Robert Sherlaw Johnson has pointed out, the accent provided by the climax in the Coda, has its counterpart in the accentual effect of the last long value of the ragavardhana. [8, p.39] In other words, in a rhythm where all the notes are given equal stress, the longer ones will tend to sound accented. Messiaen was not aiming towards perfect mathematical precision in the proportions of this fugue. He was however, aiming towards total structual balance suggested by the shape of the Ragavardhana.

The "fugue" here may be seen as successful in that the basic idea behind it is more of a dynamic and rhythmic nature, rather than a tonal one. It is this driving rhythm which propels Messiaen's music forward. Besides the occasional fugato style and use of canon, the superimposition of self-sufficient harmonic strands replaces conventional polyphony. Rather than working the S and CS towards a grand climax, Messiaen has destroyed them by interval displacement. The Theme of Joy has been transformed into the mystical "Theme of

Love". Musically it is the move away from fugue-style into an exultant toccata-style ostinato which makes this movement successful. Messiaen's means of conveying the interruption of time by timelessness include formal patterns of symmetry, such as that of the Ragavardhana, NRR and palindromes, and repetition of the Themes of God, Joy and Love which are insistent and ecstatic throughout.

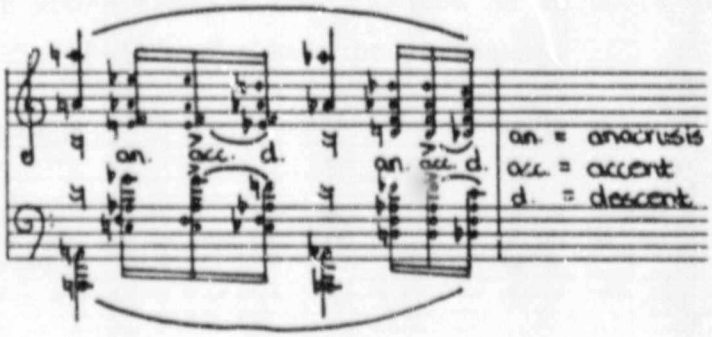
8. REGARD DE LA CROIX (VII): The Comtemplation of the Cross
The Cross said to Him: "You will be a priest in my arms."

The Cross has become the focal point of the Church and of Christianity. Christ's sacrifice on the Cross was meant as the sacrifice through which Christians were to be saved. From the outset Christ made His purpose on earth very clear. In the words of St Paul, "And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him, called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec." [69] The transcendent messiaenic view of Jesus appears in the following statement made by Jesus Himself: ".... the Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." [70] All the mysteries of His earthly existence converge towards His sacrifice on the Cross. It is from the Cross that all the states of His life derive their splendour; through His resurrection Christ was victorious over death. St Paul said: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." [71]

The number 7 is the traditional number of sacrifice. Much has been written on this sacred integer in both the Old and New Testaments. It is also featured widely within the Church, from the seven gifts of the Spirit, seven Beatitudes, seven Virtues, seven outpourings of Christ's blood, seven Sacraments, to the seven words of Christ on the Cross. The number 7 has also become associated with wisdom, godliness, universality, and perfection. The concept of seven steps to perfection was a common medieval notion, whether by the seven arts, the seven virtues, or more specifically the seven stages of contemplation. [17, p.19] Seven is also the number of servitude, goodness, and completeness. Its prominence in the Bible, as well as in the macrocosm and microcosm, is explained by its archtetypal position as "Lord of the Universe", the image of God, "being one, eternal, lasting, immovable, Himself like Himself, and different from

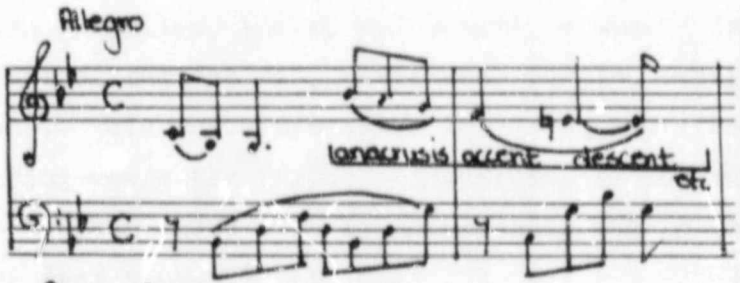
all other beings." [17, p.48] According to Pythagorean number theory, 7 was especially the number of harmony. It was the sum of the first odd (3) and equal (4) numbers. Thus according to St. Augustine it was the symbol of all numbers and therefore meant "perfect completeness". Seven is the number of the Sabbath and Salvation but also of Sin. The symbolism surrounding this sacred number therefore provides a solid background for the contemplation of the Cross and the events surrounding it. For Messiaen this number represents Divine repose in addition to the number of sacrifice.

It therefore comes as no surprise to find that the interval of the 7th dominates the harmonic structure of this movement, or that the entire movement is based on several appearances of the cyclic Theme of the Star and the Cross, previously heard in "Regard de l'etoile" (II). The simple character of the theme in the second movement becomes more expressive and tragic in "Regard de la Croix". This is due not only to the chromatic nature of the melody and harmony accompanying the Theme of the Star and the Cross, but more specifically to the compositional device of the anacrusis-accent- de-accent/descent:

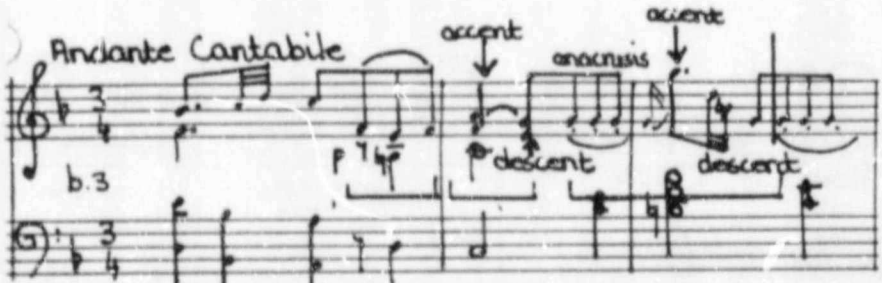


Messiaen acknowledges the influence of Mozart and Dom Mocquereu in this regard. "The greatest rhythmician in classical music is certainly Mozart. Mozartian rhythm dons a kinematic aspect, but it belongs above all to the field of accent, and from word and speech." [11, p.35] Mozart differentiated between masculine and feminine groups, the latter being the more characteristic. This

feminine group includes a preparatory period (anacrusis), an apex (accent), followed by a weak falling back (de-accent/termination). Mozart used this device to great effect in many of his works, to such an extent that it has become one of the most characteristic features of his style:

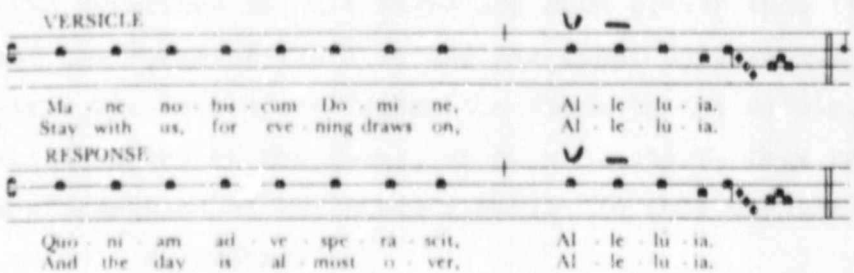


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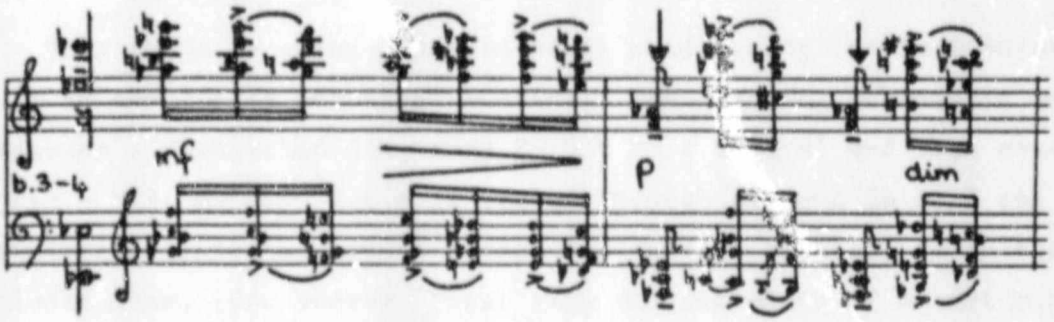


Piano Sonata KU 330

Messiaen regards Mozart as "the greatest rhythmician in classical music..." The above example from "Regard de la Croix" also shows the influence of the arsis and thesis of plainsong.
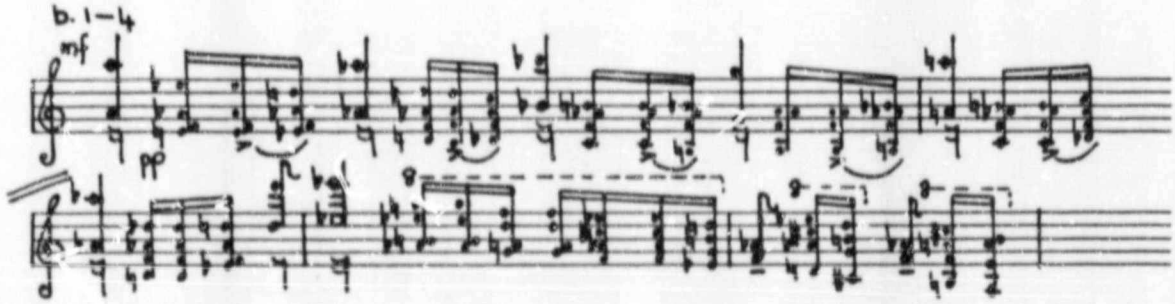


The entire movement grows out of the first four bars, and the extension, modification and variation of these. Messiaen describes this movement in the following way: "The Theme of the Star and the Cross is accompanied by a perpetual chromatic wailing, which is transformed between each phrase of the theme into a sorrowful, though colourful modality: Mode 6^4 (whose general colour consists of vertical bands of yellow, violet and black) is super- imposed on mode 4^6 (reflections of carmine red, violet-ish purple, orange, grey-mauve and grey-pink). This superimposition is set against the blackish grey of the recurring chromatic figure - converging at the end of each phrase on to a minor chord with an added major 6th (a chord which has the colour of deep violet.)" [5, p.4]



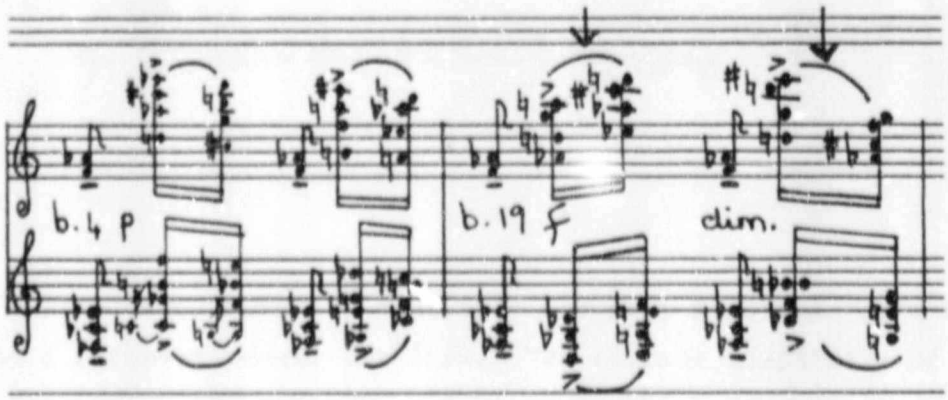
Since the durations of this Theme are much slower than in "Regard de l'etoile" the Theme of the Star and the Cross appears only once in its entirety. Messiaen often begins the Theme in the middle, or extends certain notes of the Theme, or cuts it short, thus causing slight transformations of the theme itself. In this way the Theme undergoes melodic development.

In contrast to "Par lui tout a ete fait" (♪=160) this movement (♪=40) is much slower in tempo, and is simply based on one recurring theme from which the rest of the movement is derived:
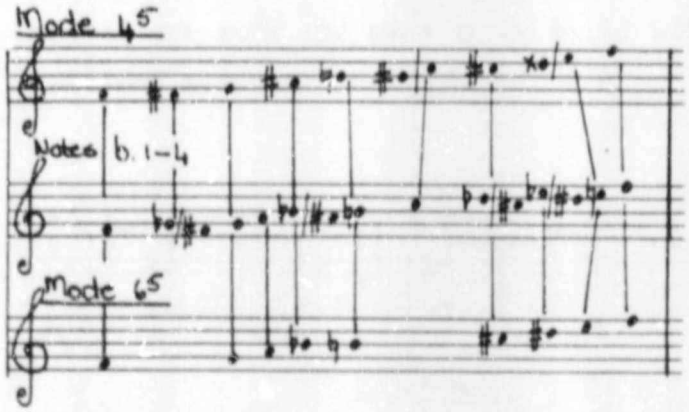


This theme is quiet and subdued in mood rising to 'fortissimo' only in the middle and final section. The "wailing, chromatic motive" descends a diminished 5th, from E flat to A natural and then ascends again - this melodic curve is varied throughout, and in b. 3 the metrical pattern (anacrusis-accent-descent) is altered, as is the melodic line. (see above) These show the influence of Mozart and plainsong respectively.

The minor chord with the added major 6th remains constant throughout, serving as a unifying device, although the chords following it are somewhat modified.

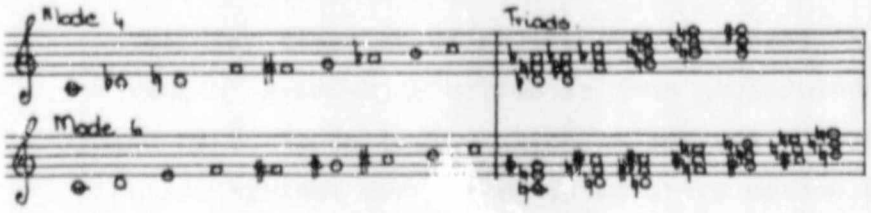


The separation of melody and harmony makes it possible for Messiaen to harmonize a melodic motive such as this in different ways, without losing the coherence of the movement. Other transpositions of the modes mentioned by Messiaen appear within these opening 4 bars: traces of modes 4^5 and 6^5 are to be found thus:



These modes give rise to triads related not by 5ths but by the tritone, the tritone or diminished 5th substituting the conventional dominant.

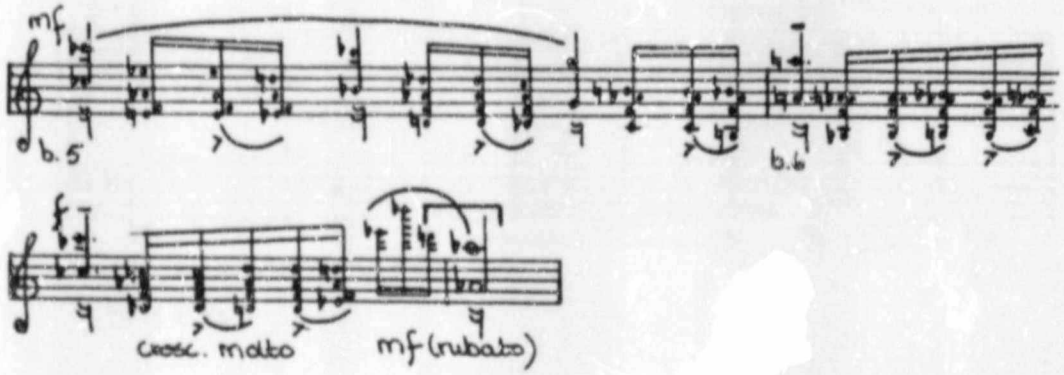
The triads resulting from these modes are:



From a structural point of view this movement revolves, once more, around a circular repetitive form. The extreme simplicity of this structure is wholly typical:
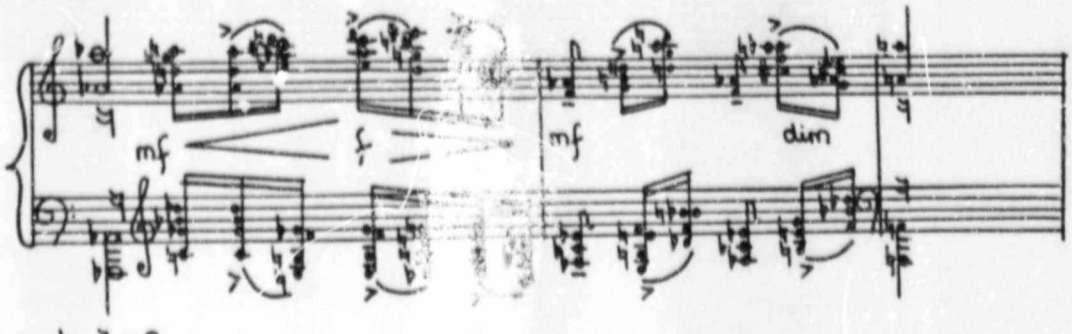
A b. 1-4 Theme of the Star and the Cross heard in entirety, accompanied by the chromatically expressive "wailing" motive, centred on modes 4 and 6. Messiaen uses the agogic and more aggressive "attack" form of accents in b. 4.

B b. 5-8 Although the Theme of the Star and the Cross has been slightly modified and curtailed, the accompanying chords are much the same as in b. 1f with a shift in metrical accents:



b. 5-7
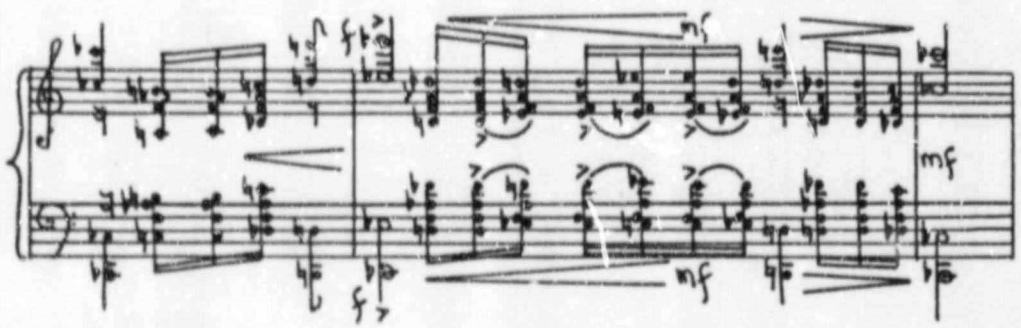
The progression from D♮ in b.6 to the A♭ an +4th lower (b.7) is unexpected in view of the chromatically ascending sequence of chords which preceed it. A 'rubato' grace-note motive is then introduced at the end of b. 5, following which he spreads a series of chords against each other in contrary motion before arriving at the added note chord. Whilst the added note chord is the same, the chords inbetween have been altered.



b. 7-8

The chromatic step-wise progression of b.4 has now been changed to include a leap of a 4th and a 6th.
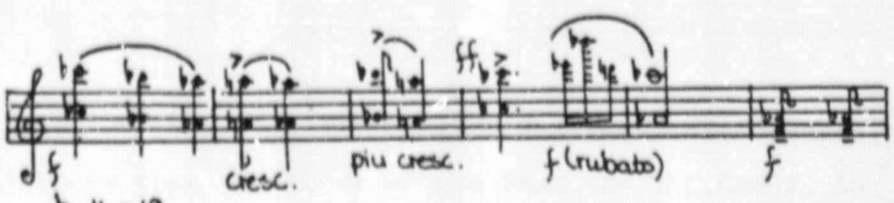
A b. 9-13 b.9 = b.1. In b.10 the Theme of the Star and the Cross is curtailed, and Messiaen inserts the C flat from b. 6 and then returns to the D E of bars 2-3, repeating these two notes of the Theme of the Star and the Cross in b.11-12, the accompanying "wailing" motive derived from the second half of b. 2.



b. 10 - 12
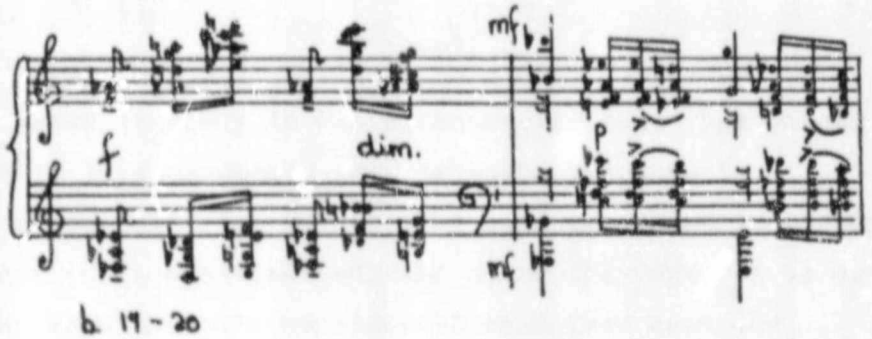
Chords from b.3-4 accompany the added note motive in b. 13 and this leads into the fourth appearance of the Theme of the Star and the Cross.

B b.14-19 b.14 = b.5 with a change in dynamic - the theme now sounds 'f' and the accompanying chords 'p'. The Theme of the Star and the Cross has been transposed a diminished 3rd higher and has been rhythmically and melodically transformed:
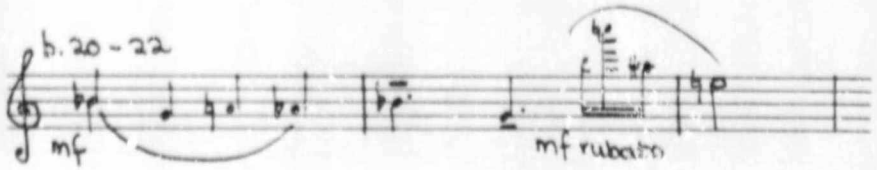


b. 14 - 19
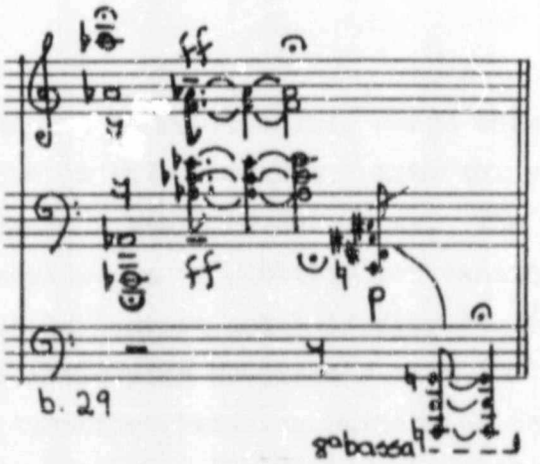
The accompanying chords are those from b.1 and in b.17 Messiaen introduces the grace note figure and the 2 chords preceeding it from b.6. The chords following this figure are from b.4. The added note chord reappears in b.19. The accompanying chords, although similar t: those in b.8, have been altered to include a rising chordal motive followed by one which descends an +4th:



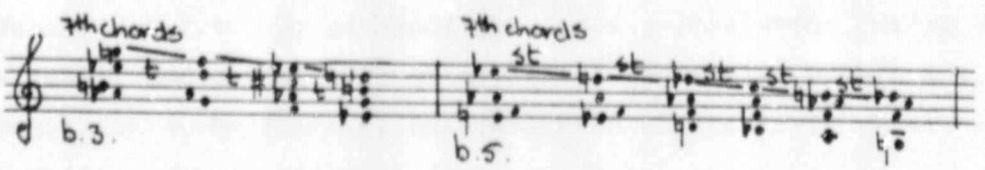
A b.20-23 The Theme of the Star and the Cross has again been curtailed, commencing on the third crotchet of b.1. The chords of the chromatic "wailing" motive are derived from b.1f. The grace note figure reappears at the end of b.21, and the chords following this are from b.8. The recurring added note chord appears in b.23, accompanied by chords from b.12.



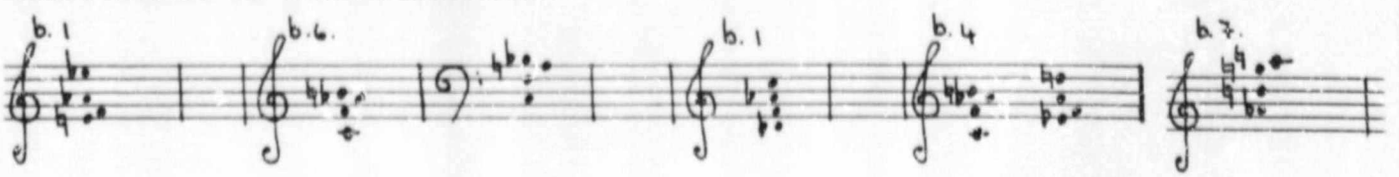
CODA. This ending is symbolic and the 7-note phrase, derived from the Theme of the Star and the Cross, is repeated 5 times, a number associated with the Indian god Shiva, the representative of the death of death, and therefore significant here, in that Christ Himself represents the victory over death. The movement ends with the minor chord with the added major 6th, supported by a chord in the lowest register of the piano:



The composer makes it clear in his accompanying text that colour is very important in this movement. His harmonic language is therefore an important colouring agent. The sevenths found in chordal structures are most often not resolved, and where they are, it is due to melodic, rather than harmonic considerations. Even here the resolution is unexpected, in that the sevenths often fall a tone, rather than the more conventional semitone (see b.3), onto another seventh chord as part of the descending sequence. The need for these sevenths to resolve ceases to be felt when resolution is so long and so often denied. The effect of this is that these chords float beyond the gravitational forces they would normally imply, producing the stasis so characteristic of Messiaen's harmonic language. The harmonic progression in general is governed by the melody of the outer voices:



There are chords by 3rds, 4ths, 5ths with added notes, and various combinations of these structures.



Messiaen's tendency to resolve this chord onto the root of the chord does not occur in this movement. Like the seventh chords, this chord merely floats in a state of catalepsy. The attraction of this chord has been described as 'inhibitory par excellence' because in a strange way it is half concord and half discord. [41] These factors exist side by side satisfying Messiaen's need for musical materials that "subvert the tension-relaxation pattern of traditional Western music, thus altering the relationship of the music to the time factor." [Ibid]

The fact that within this movement these chords appear repeatedly qualifies the point about the nature of Messiaen's harmony and MLTs. His MLTs and harmonies are made to sound like natural resonances. In this way Messiaen is able to accommodate the dissonances as high partials. His MLTs he claims, are resultants, not determinants of his harmony.

The music oscillates between treble and bass registers throughout the movement, but Messiaen reserves the treble register especially for the minor chord with the added major 6th, and its accompanying chords. He creates further contrasts by (i) thinning out the texture as in b. 15-16 where he omits the "wailing" chordal motive, (ii) frequent changes in dynamic and metrical accent, displaying sensitivity to register, dynamics and quality of texture.

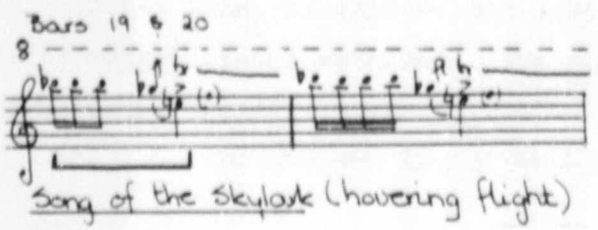
Throughout this movement the composer has emphasized asymmetrical phrase structures. By withholding diatonic resolution, using very slow tempi, and moving through cycles of repetition within a single harmonic field, he achieves an atmosphere of stasis in which he contemplates the sacrificial death of Christ.

9. REGARD DES HAUTEURS (VIII): The Contemplation of the Heights "Glory to God in the Highest".....the heights descend to the manger like the song of a lark.

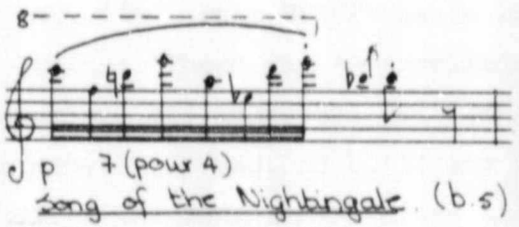
In this movement Messiaen turns from the solemn nature of the events surrounding the Crucifixion to the joy of Christ's birth. The Angels contemplating the Word made Flesh were filled with awe and wonder, but also joy: "Glory to God on high, and on earth peace, goodwill towards all men ....." [72] Joy is one of the most marked characteristics of the celebration of the mystery of Christ's birth. This joy and the 'heights' are symbolized here in birdsong.

As mentioned in "Regard de la Vierge" (IV), birds for Messiaen "are the greatest musicians existing on our planet." [11, p.51] Messiaen does not give a name to the birdsong in the fourth movement, but he begins to feel sufficiently confident in this movement to name them. This piece represents the most concentrated use of this device in "Vingt Regards...". Birdsong here has reached a new point of definition following the less generalized similar voices in earlier works, such as "La Nativite", the "Quatour" and "Visions de l'Amen".

In the preface to "Vingt Regards..." Messiaen lists eight different birds whose songs are found in this movement. Of these, only the song of the nightingale, song thrush, and lark are specifically identified in the score. The Skylark has the leading role throughout. Its song is characteristically divided between a long low note, which represent those moments when it is hovering in flight, and a dominant high note which accompanies the beating of wings. Its song is swift and very jubilant, and includes a "quasi vertical ascent, ... short stops in mid-air and [a] nose dive with closed wings" [11, p.5]



Then there is the nightingale who displays a "formidable virtuosity and a very powerful voice, often heard in the evening. It is also very demonstrative in its peformance." [Ibid]



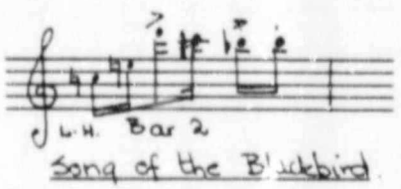
Heraldic emblems have here been replaced by real attempts at portraiture. The song thrush is one of nature's most inspired singers. Messiaen describes it thus: "Its song is of incantatory nature with strophes generally three times repeated, but each strophe varied .... within these strophes the rhythms are extremely marked and varied, and accompanied by melodies of timbres. At the heart of a rhythm you'll often find two or three timbres. Between the repetitions there are quite extraordinary flights of virtuosity, for example water drop glissandi, in which are heard a succession of very delicate sounds like pearls showering off a broken string, or water drops spraying into a fountain: one also hears [illegible] grating sounds and light pulsations." [11, p.57]



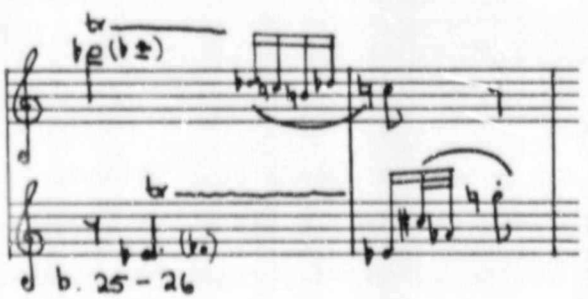
Its song appears in the form of a cadenza. These examples include numerous instances of the 3-note cell (bracketed in the above example) identified in "Regard de la Vierge", and which had also featured in two earlier works, "Chants de terre et de ciel" and "Visions de l' Amen". Messiaen has used its song, as well as the other birdsongs in this work, as malleable compositional material. The question then, is whether these transcriptions represent accurate portraits? Messiaen has admitted: "Of course, I am the one who is listening, and

involuntarily I introduce something of my manner, or my way of hearing and reproducing the songs." [11, p.112] The general consensus however, is that his transcriptions, within the framework of his MLT are as accurate as any. [46] Paul Griffiths in his book "Messiaen and the Music of Time" states: "There are no paralleis for Messiaen's exactness among [notations of] composers such as Jannequin, Couperin, Beethoven and Stravinsky." Indeed, in b.11f the lower part can easily be identified as that of the song thrush since it has many of the characteristics heard in the recording "A tapestry of British Bird Song" [78] with the soaring upward figure, the repeated note, and the recurring interval of the perfect 5th. (e above)

The blackbird also has a characteristic formula which is easily recognizable. Its song is characterized by wide leaps and the odd repeated note:



The song of the chaffinch appears in b.25 with its characteristic trill ending in a quick flourish:

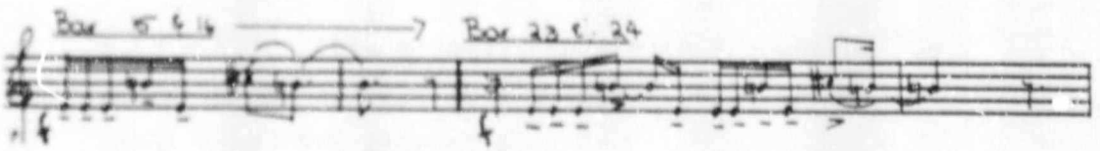


The structure of this movement may be described as follows:

A b. 1 Introduction in the form of a chorus of birdsong welcoming the dawn; the high treble register is emphasized; a gradual crescendo from 'ppp' to 'f' followed by a decrescendo back to 'ppp'; same motive consisting of secundal and tertian structures with added notes, is repeated 12 times.

B b. 2-9 Individual birdsongs identified: blackbird (b.2-3), nightingale (b.5f), and the song thrush (b.6). Silence plays an important role in this section (b.4, 9). Overall dynamic is 'p' with an emphasis on the extreme treble register.

C b.10-57 First Cadenza featuring the skylark and the song thrush with periodic hints of other birds' songs. (Chaffinch b.25-26, garden warbler b.34, blackbird b.44-45). Is written in intricate two-part counterpoint. Characteristically several motives recur throughout this section:
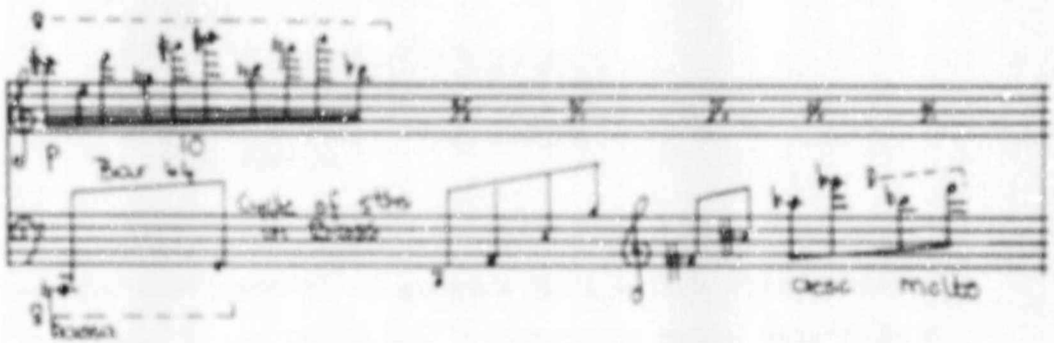


This section also shows increased use of contrasting dynamics. As in the fourth movement, the combination of staccato and legato, repeated notes, and frequent rebounding within narrow repertories of notes in the high treble register are characteristic of Messiaen's "style oiseaux".

A b. 56 = b.1

B b. 59-61 = b. 2-4 - section B curtailed.

C b. 62-63 Second Cadenza, a brilliant virtuosic section based again on the song thrush. Its song is played in both hands an octave apart. Messian notes that, "it is a scintillating section, the grace note figures providing a glistening, delicate contrast to the heavy figures [of the first cadenza]. This is the culminating joyous chorus heralding the song of praise: "Glory be to God on High".[3, p.5]
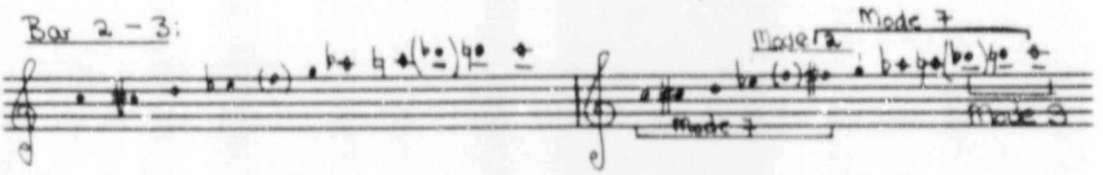
b.64-66 CODA: Messiaen now makes use of both extremes of the piano's register. The LH moves through a cycle of fifths (symbolically significant), whilst the RH ends this chorus in a brilliant rush of .



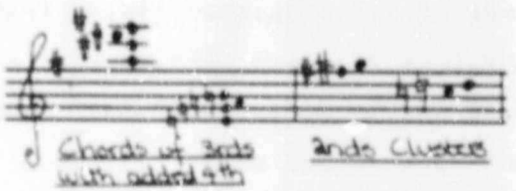
b.65 - b.9. This movement ends with a resonant 'pp' chord in the extreme bass register which is rather unexpected, but effective.



Since these birds and their song also symbolize freedom, Messiaen has used mode 7 in its various transpositions throughout, but also hints at modes 2 and 3:



In contrast to the chordal nature of "Regard de la Croix" this movement is more contrapuntal. Monophonic and polyphonic textures dominate, with the exception of those sections based on the chorus of birdsong in which the texture is thick and lush.
Chords of 3rds with added notes, and clusters dominate this section:
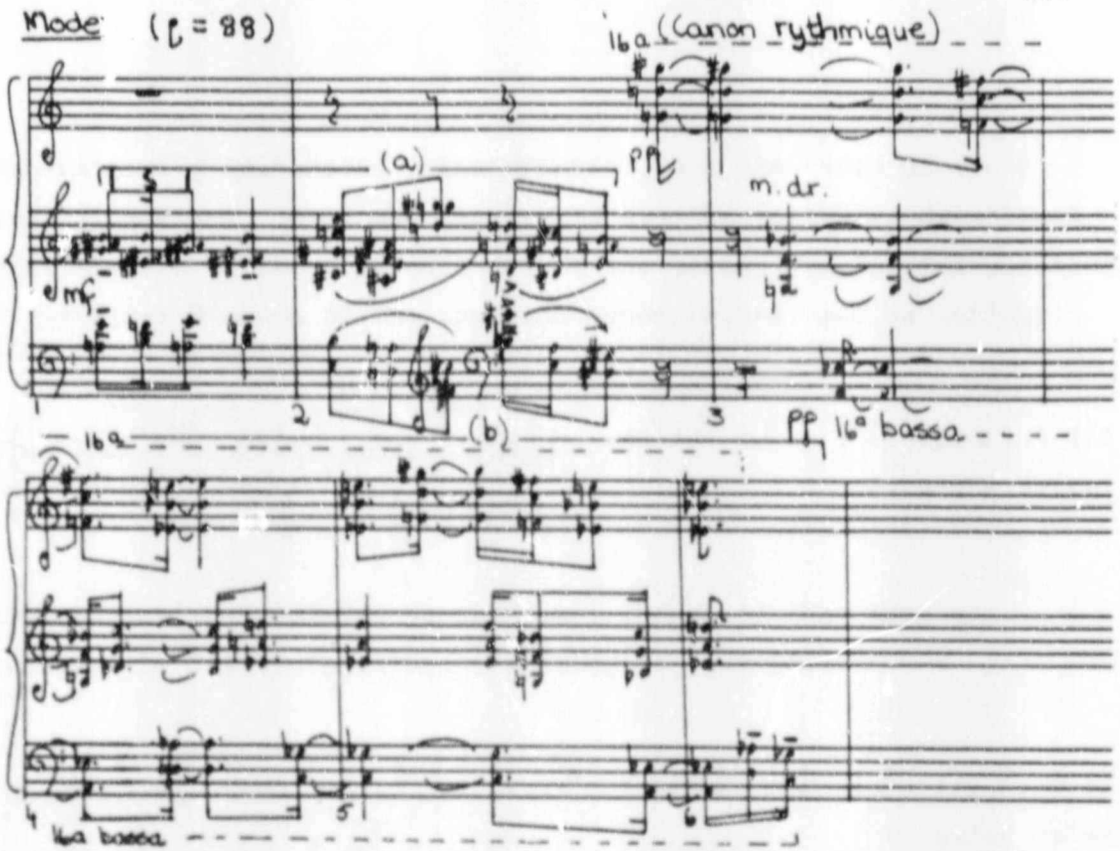


This is Messiaen the contrapuntalist at work in a medium where melody indeed reigns supreme. Since harmonically Messian's music exists in a state of suspension, it is not surprising that his melodies should emphasize intervallic relations, at the expense of implied harmony. Indeed, his most powerful and extended melodic ideas are those which have no harmonic support whatsoever. [38, p.42]

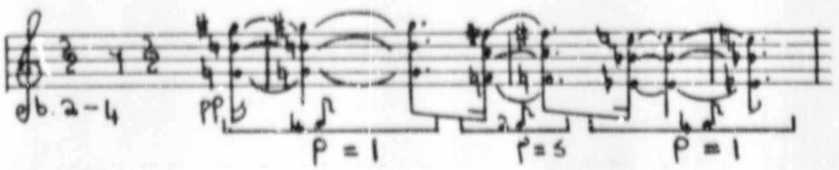
The importance given to birdsong in this movement marks an important step forward in Messiaen's 'style oiseau ' which was later to dominate so many of his works in the 1950's.

10. REGARD DU TEMPS (IX): The Contemplation of Time
(Mystery of the plenitude of time; into time is born He who is eternal ...)

The association of the number 9 with maternity and birth is well known and the ninth position of this movement within the twenty is therefore obvious. Messiaen here deals with one of the greatest and most mysterious of truths, but one which is particularly suited to musical expression; it is the presence of the eternal within the temporal, the unmeasuarable within the measured, the mysterious within the known, and as Paul Griffiths states "it is the truth of everything Messiaen has written." [6, p.18] Messiaen explains further in the preface to the score: "The Incarnation of the Word is like an Invasion of Time by Eternity: Time encompasses the birth of the Eternal One. We are here facing a mystery, which, for certain theologians is the greatest of all mysteries - a mystery which is mirrored in the strangeness of the musical material." The conflicting dualism which exists in this mystery is musically portrayed in the existence of two broadly contrasting themes, contrasted in character, rhythm, register, range, dynamic and harmonic/melodic structure. These two musical strands are presented in the opening measures and then alternately developed in 4 further appearances.

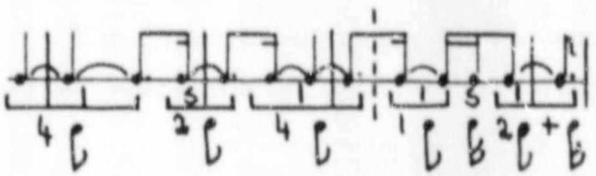


These six bars present a wealth of contrasting material: (a) sounds in the middle of the piano's register, written on two staves, sounding 'mf' and comprising closely-knit dissonances; (b) is spread over the entire range of the piano, with an emphasis on the two outer extremes, written on three staves, sounding 'pp' and comprised of widely spread intervals (perfect and diminished 5ths, perfect and augmented 4ths) compared to (a). The first two bars (a) may be seen as a chordal "verse", of varying phrase lengths, announcing the "Invasion of Time"; the third to sixth bar (b), a "refrain" of bell chords in the form of a 3-part rhythmic canon on a palindrome reflecting the "Timelesness of Eternity".



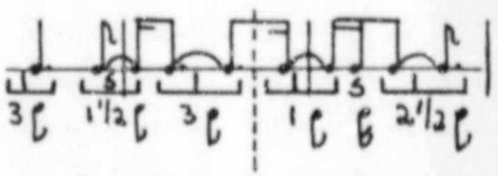
The palindrome is made up of the metrical foot, long-short-long (l-s-l). This movement once more reveals Messiaen's fascination with proportions and durations. The above rhythmic cell undergoes

mathematically calculated transformation, but the ratio of 1-s-1 remains constant. Messiaen has worked out the following durational relationships in the 5 appearances of the canon. The initial durations of the first 3 notes of the rhythmic canon (b.2-6) are as follows:



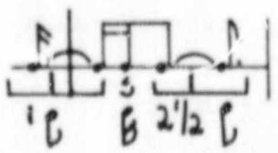
= 4♪ : 2♪ : 4♪ 1♪ : 1/2♪ : 2 1/2♪ (+ added value)

These values then undergo proportional change in that they are decreased by 1/4 their value, resulting in (b.9-10):



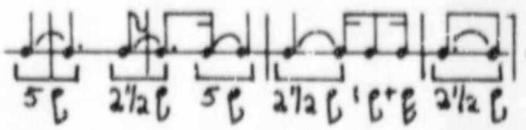
= 3♪ : 1 1/2♪ : 3♪ 1♪ : 1/2♪ : 2 1/2♪ (+ added value)

This is then reduced by 2/3 to (b.10-11):



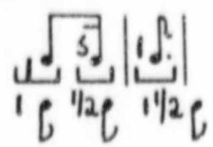
= 1♪ : 1/2♪ : 2 1/2♪

Messiaen then adds 4x the length to the previous cell, resulting in (b.14-17):



= 5♪ : 2 1/2♪ : 5♪ 2 1/2♪ : 1♪(+♪) 2 1/2♪

This is then reduced by 4/5 to (b.17-18):

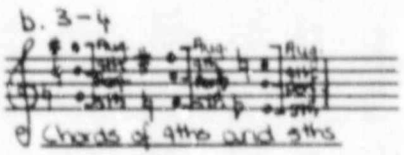


= 1♪ : 1/2♪ : 1 1/2♪

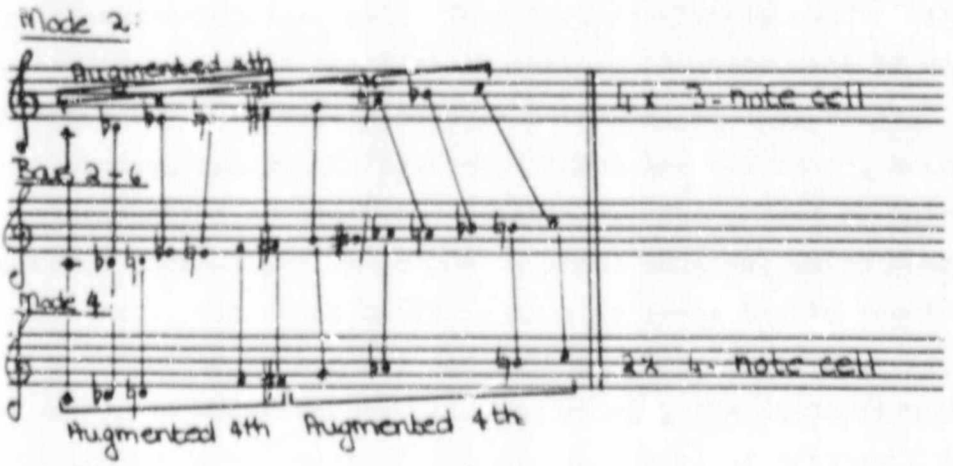
In this way Messiaen avoids the emergence of a background metre, again qualifying his belief that music is inspired by nature with its

movements of free and unequal durations. [11, p.33] Rhythmic canon is a subtle form of repetition through which these rhythms may be incorporated into the structural framework of the whole. Rhythmic canon also produces cross-rhythms, and Messiaen places much emphasis on the significance of the NRR and palindromes.
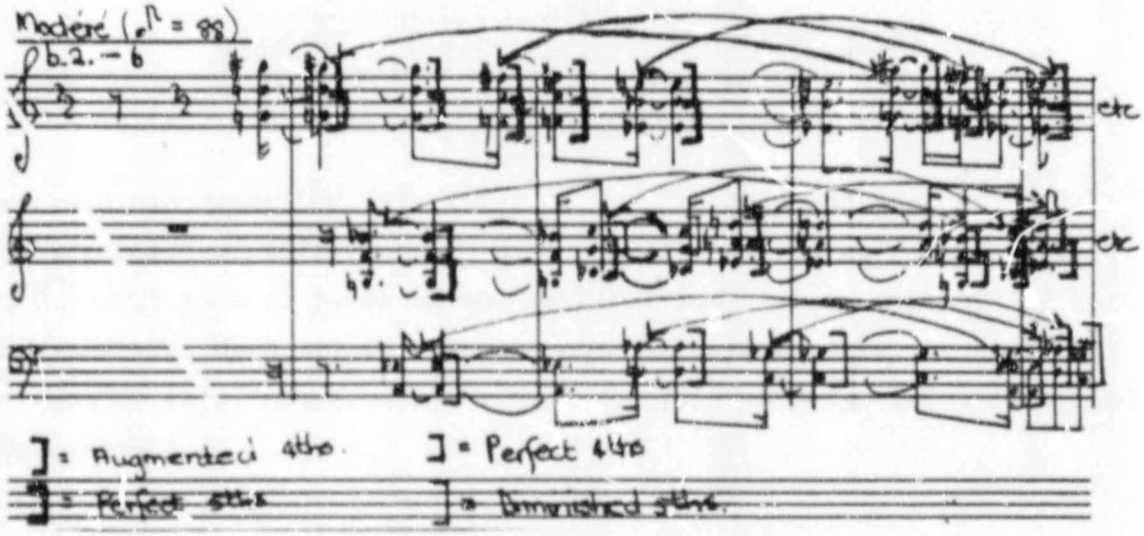
The chordal structure of the canon is comprised of the superimposition of perfect and +4ths, perfect or -5ths:



The ambiguous quality of these chordal components, as well as the conspicuous lack of resolution provides an atmosphere which David Drew describes as "a state of affairs that may be justifiably regarded as an Allegory for divine Order." [41] Atonality is for Messiaen a medium of mystery. The mode most identified with this feeling of mysticism, and which typically makes use of the +4th is mode 2, above which Messiaen superimposes mode 4 thus:
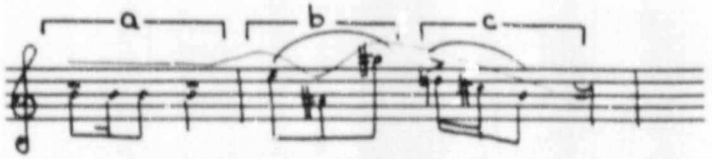


The works of the Middle Period show an inclination towards tonal fluidity emphasized by successions of triads in root or first inversion. This is apparent in b. 3-6:

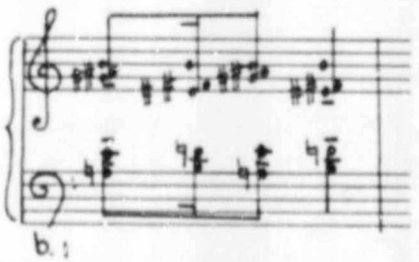


David Drew points out that like other mystically inclined composers such as Scriabin, Holst or Vaughan Williams, Messiaen is irresistably drawn to the tritone with its curious ambiguity and its acutely dissonant quality. [41] This fact is clearly evident in the above examples, in which the +4th dominates. A succession of chords such as these in b.3-5 has tremendous potential as they undergo continual change, change of register, timbre and structure, according to the relationships of tones and semitones. The effect of this kaleidoscopic chordal motion is one is great tension, which Messiaen rarely relieves. His chord building is also inextricably bound up with his association of harmony and colour. Intuition however, is the guiding factor in these structures, and as with the Impressionists, sensation is the goal. Nadia Boulanger once said of Debussy's music that it invoked in her "a paradoxical sense of mobility and immobility." [Ibid] This is also true of Messiaen's music.

The opening phrase (a), is characteristic of Messiaen's melodic handling in that it is ternary in structure:



Messiaen has described this theme as "short, cold and strange, like the egg-heads of Chirico." [5, p.5] The first 3 notes form an NRR (♪♪♪) and is also based on the metrical foot 1-s-1, symbolizing here the Incarnate Word. [Ibid] The chordal structure of (a) is different to that of (b). Clusters and superimposition of 2nds, 3rds, 4ths, and 5ths prevail:
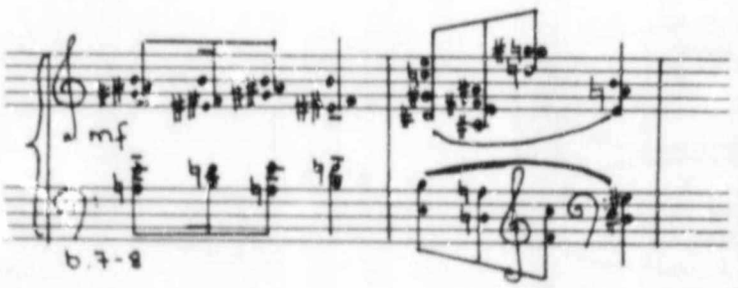


With each recurrence this theme undergoes transformation until it reaches its climax in b.33-38, and in its final statement in b.45. These transformations however are not mathematically calculated as in (b). The tunefulness of the this melody, especially in its final statement, in Roger Nichols' words "speak of the triumph of love and joy." [9, p.39]

Structurally this "Regard du temps" again revolves around elements of repetition and symmetry. The two contrasting themes are continually repeated as follows:

(a) b.1-2 Chordal 'verse' representing the Invasion of Time.
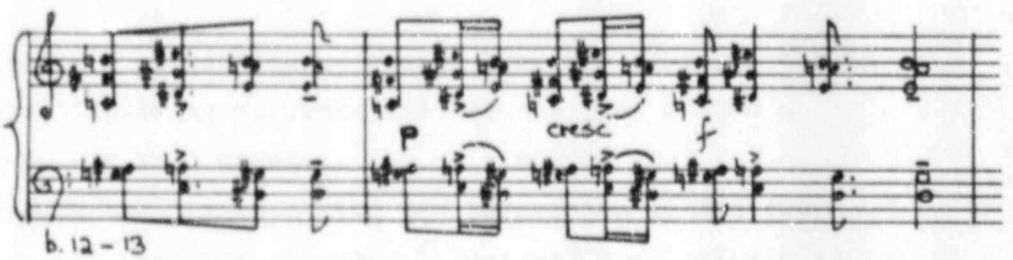
(b) b.3-6 Refrain of bell chords in the form of a 3-part rhythmic canon on a palindrome, representing the "timelessness of Eternity."

(a) b.7-8 Repetition of b.1-2 with modification in b.8:



(b) b.9-11 Repetition of b.3-6 with rhythmic and metrical transformation. (see b.11)
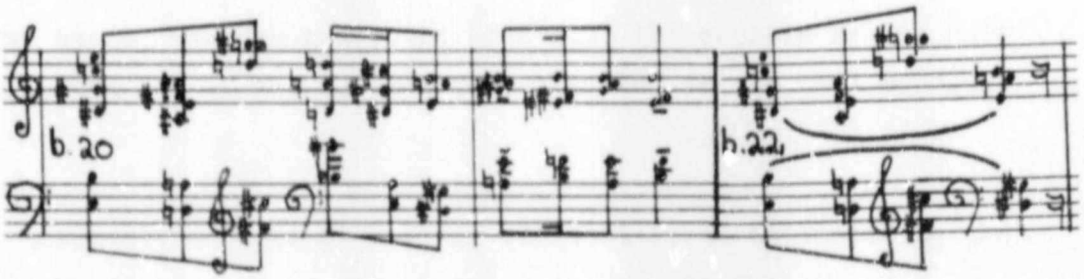
(a) b.12-13 Theme rhythmically and melodically transformed and extended.



(b) b.14-18 Theme metrically transformed. Melodically = b.3-6.

(a) b.19-22 Theme in b.19-20 same as in b.1-2 except 𝄽 rest omitted.

b.22 is based on b.8:



(b)	b.23-32	Theme as in b.3-6 but extended and then repeated.
(a)	b.33-38	b.33 = b.1; b.34 = b. 2 (minus 𝄽 rest); b.35 = b.33; b.36 = b.34; b.37 compares to b.13 with extension.
(b)	b.39-42	= b.4-6 with a 2-bar extension.
	b.43-44	Codetta based on b.12.

Within an atmosphere of continuous stasis Messiaen achieves motion by means of process, involving mathematical calculations around a palindrome. In this way this movement may be compared to "L' echange". Through the juxtaposition and repetition of the two contrasting themes, (in the form of chordal "verses" and "refrains") Messiaen creates a sense of progression or forward motion. Within each section the subtle melodic, rhythmic, and durational transformations, calculated or otherwise, are likewise another tool in the process of creating music of free and unequal durations, symbolizing here the mystery of time.

11. REGARD DE L´ ESPRIT DE JOIE (X): The Contemplation of the Spirit of Joy

A vehement dance, the drunken sound of horns, the rapture of the Holy Spirit..... the joy of the love of God, blissful in the Soul of Jesus Christ.

This movement, a piece of rousing virtuosity, is dedicated to the Holy Spirit. It also represents the longest of the twenty contemplations (234 bars), and has been assigned the tenth position. The number 10 is symbolic of finality, completeness and perfection. It is also the symbol of infinity and has long been recognized as the image of Unity. [17, p.10,29,85] It is also a multiple of 5, an important number in "Vingt Regards...". The first contemplation "Regard du Pere", dealt with the contemplation of the Father, the fifth "Regard du Fils sur le Fils" with the Son, and now the tenth with the Holy Spirit. Each of these movements deals with some aspect of Divinity represented in the Trinity. All three use the cyclic Theme of God.
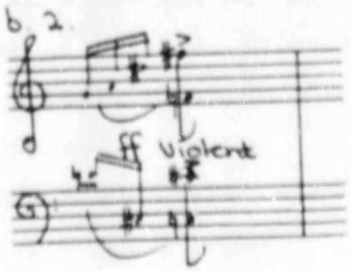
Messiaen explains the meaning behind his accompanying text: "I have always been struck by the fact that God is happy - and that this ineffable and continuous joy dwelt in the Soul of Jesus. A joy which transports me, a drunkennes in the maddest sense of the word ..... In the course of its earth life, the Soul of Christ enjoyed the lasting priviledge of beatific vision. God is eternally happy, and Christ possessed this same joy, this rapture, this spiritual intoxication which we express in the words "Thou alone art the Holy One". This joy leads to the permanent dwelling place of the Holy Spirit: hence the meaning of the piece." [5, p.5]

As Robert Sherlaw Johnson points out, this movement may be divided into seven sections (symbolically significant), each distinct in its own right, revealing again Messiaen´s sectional approach to form: [8, p.74]

Section	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Bars	1-32	33-40	41-59	60-132	133-186	187-219	220-234
Tempo	Presque Vif (♪=160)	Modere (♪=138)	Un peu plus vif (♪=160)	Bien Modere (♩𝅘𝅥𝅯=58)	Tres Modere (rubato) (♪=104)	Presque vif (♪=160)	Tres Lent (♪= 40)
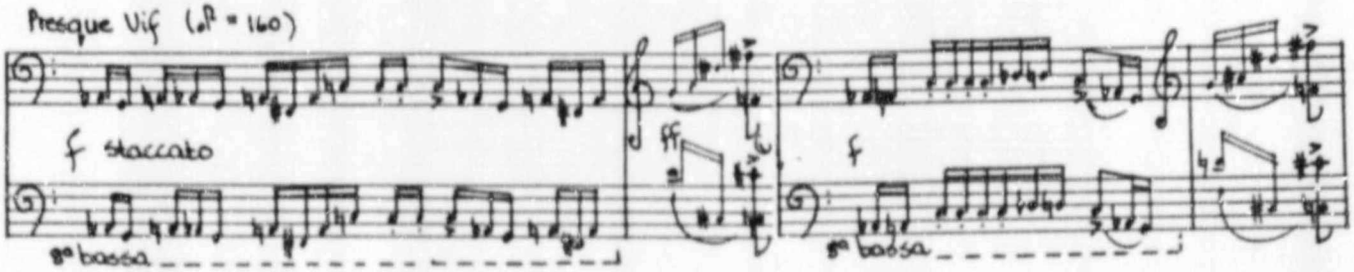
Within this structure Messian alternates two contrasting textures: (i) a monophonic or homophonic texture with (ii) a thicker chordal texture.

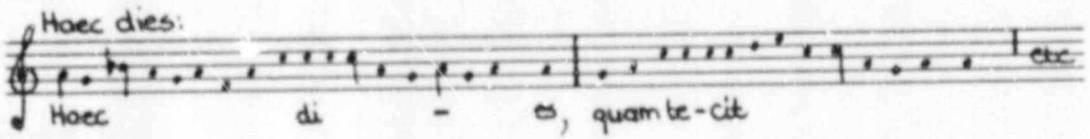
Section 1(Presque vif - ♪=160) takes the form of an "Oriental Dance" played at great speed in the extreme low register of the piano. At regular 1 to 2 bar intervals the dance, based on neumatic rhythms, is interrupted by a violent converging grace-note figure in which the hands of the performer move in contrary motion. This device is frequently used by harpists, but is used here to good effect on the piano. This is also seen to be one of Messiaen's innovations in pianistic style. [11, p.42]



The melodic contour of the intermediary bars follows the pattern of plainchant, which Messiaen admits has had a very important influence on his compositional output: "[plainchant] ... is an inexhaustible mine or rare and expressive melodic contours ..... More than to melodic contours of plainchant we shall apply ourselves to its forms: Anthems, Alleluias, Psalmodies, Kyries, Sequence etc."

[1, p.42] As established in "Regard de l´ etoile" (II) Messiaen finds a correlation between the neumes of plainsong and the rhythms of Greek metres. Messiaen´s fondness for irregular melodic and rhythmic groupings so typical of plainsong can be seen in these opening bars. Robert Sherlaw Johnson has pointed out that these bars are actually based on the Gradual "Haec dies" for Easter Sunday:

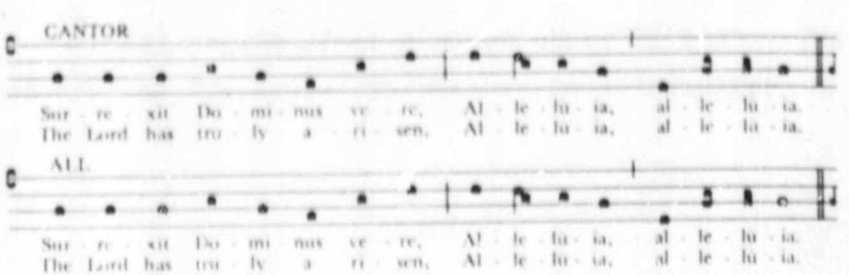




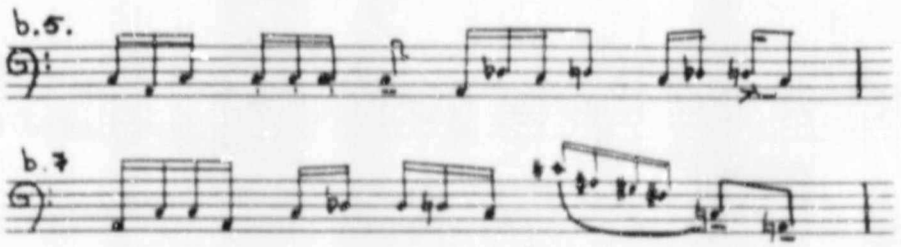
The similarity between the two is immediately apparent. Messiaen´s version however, is very much in his own personal style and language, and he has freely transformed the intervallic structure of plainsong to conform to his own modal system. For Messiaen melody based on plainsong is associated with a particular expressive idea - that of the Divine. Messiaen´s use of repeated notes may be compared to the intonation of a cantor or priest, which is then followed by the congregational or choir response.

Repeated notes, however, are also characteristic of plainsong itself.

An Easter responsory *Surrexit Dominus*

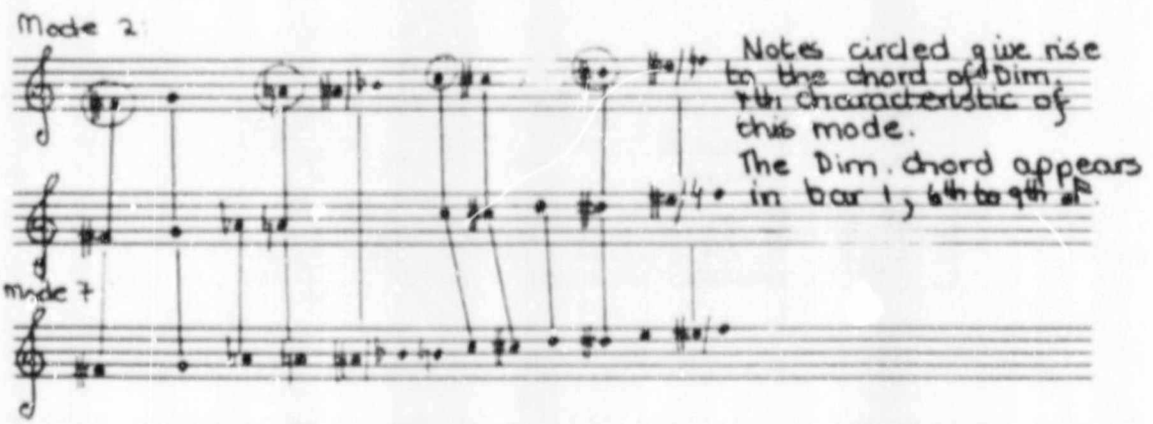


The inflections of plainsong are evident throughout this section. The basic melodic and rhythmic shape of the first bar is maintained throughout, with a few subtle changes in rhythm and melody. Compare b. 5 to b.7:



The entire section is monothematic, based on the opening 2-bar motive.
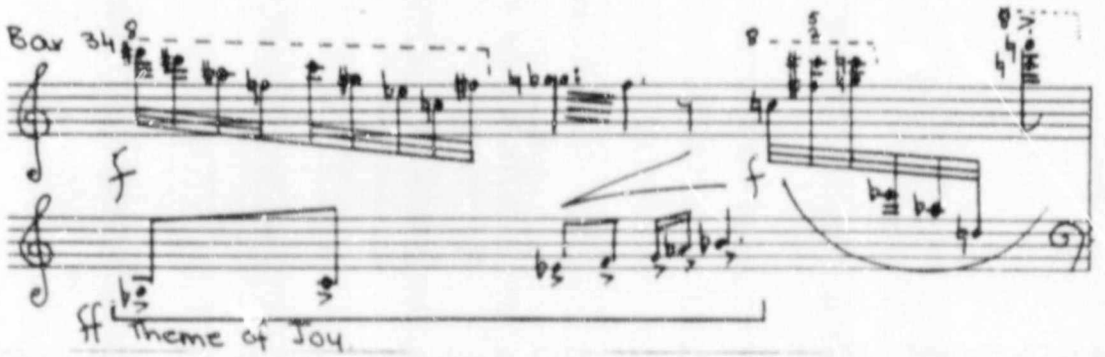
Messiaen combines mode 2 with mode 7:
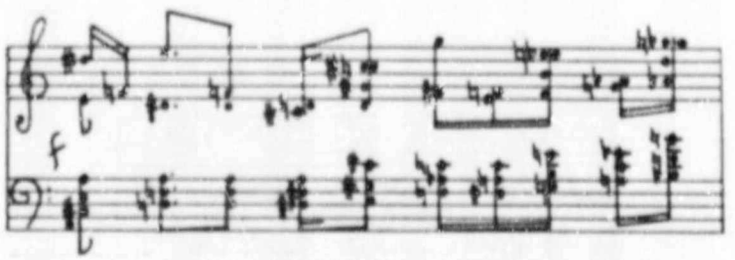


The oriental "flavour" is achieved through Messiaen's choice of interval, especially the alternation of major and minor 2nds, as well as the use of dynamic accent and percussive devices (see b.7 above).

Section 2 (Modere - ♩=138) begins after a short pause in b.33. The material presented here is "episodic" in that it is in complete

contrast to Section 1. The monophonic style of the first section now gives way to a chordal texture. The Theme of Joy (ii) appears for the first time in b. 34. Birdsong erupts above this theme symbolizing the ecstatic joy expressed in this movement.



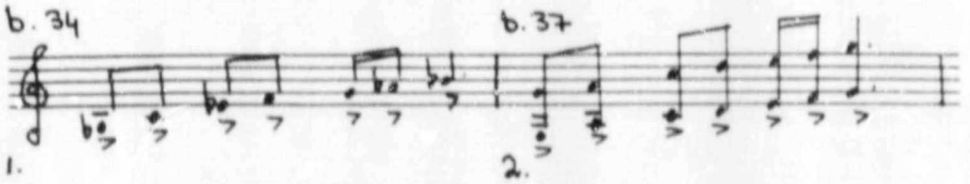
The Theme of Joy is preceeded in b.33-34 by motive (i) incorporating wide leaps and chords by seconds, thirds, fourths:



This is followed by a rush of (iii) starting at the extreme ends of the piano, and working inwards through a gradual crescendo ("p" to "ff"):

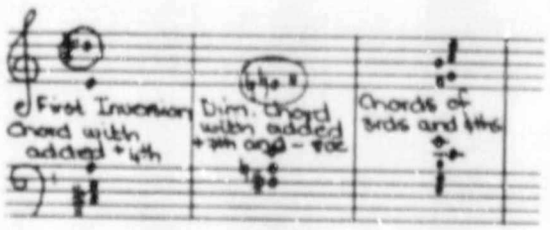


These three motives then undergo development and extension. The entries of the Theme of Joy appear in a succession of falling 3rds:





The rapid 𝅘𝅥𝅯 passages throughout this section (b.35-36, 38-39) display great virtuosity drawing attention to how much this owes to Yvonne Loriod. The interval of the 9th dominates, and the music here continues to be centred around mode 7 combined with mode 2. The chords in this section are typical of his pianistic language at this point:



A chordal upward surge on the Theme of Joy (b.40) leads into:

Section 3(Un peu plus vif - ♩=160) in b.41, again markedly different from the previous two sections. This section superimposes two musical strands [(a) and (b)] which undergo asymmetrical augmentation respectively:

Author Di Bisceglie Laureen Gail
Name of thesis Olivier Messiaen "Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jesus" : an analysis. 1987

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