

https://dspace.org/

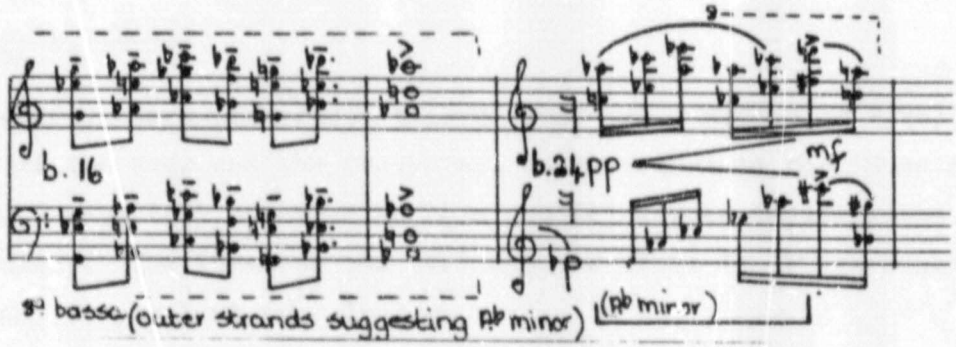
Olivier messiaen "vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jesus" : an analysis

Laureen Cali, Di Bisceglie

2015-01-16
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/16572

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Despite the predominant sense of chromaticism throughout this movement, the very nature of the MLT allows occasional references to tonality as in b. 16 and 24:



This is a characteristic feature of his modes. Messiaen qualifies this by saying: "There are tonal passages in my works, but they are precisely blended with these modes which colour them, and finally they have little importance." [11, p.23] The technique revealed in b.24 is typical of Messiaen's harmonic language. He frequently adds chords above or below melodic notes in order to colour them with resonances, using harmony in much the same way as an organist uses registration.

The formal structure of this movement may be summarized in the following way:

Section A: b.1-17

a: Introductory bars. b.1-5. Modere (♩ = 96)

3 identifiable motives (i) Upward surge based on clusters - b.1. ('f')

(ii) Arising out of (i) the 2nds are now inverted (7ths) or compounded (9ths) - b.2. ('ppp'). Emphasis on extreme high register of piano.
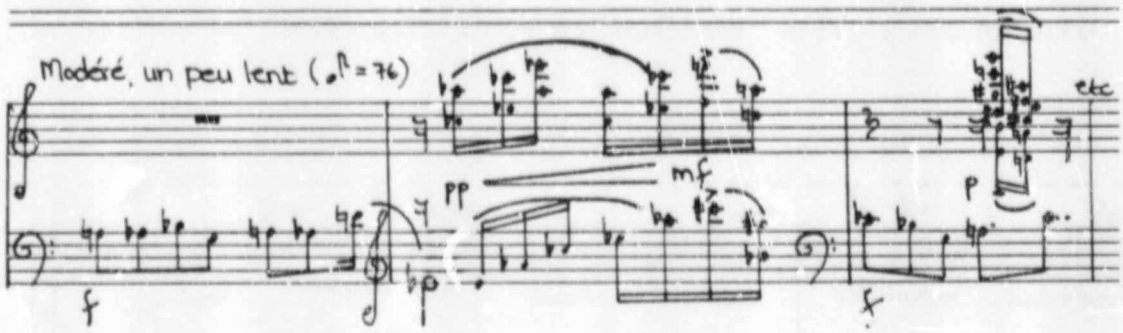
(iii) Bell-like chords - b. 3-5 ('ff') which announce the Theme of the Star and the Cross.

b: Section based on Theme of the Star and the Cross. b. 6-17. 'p'. Modere, un peu lent (♩= 76). Messiaen introduces neumes and Greek metres with subtle variations.
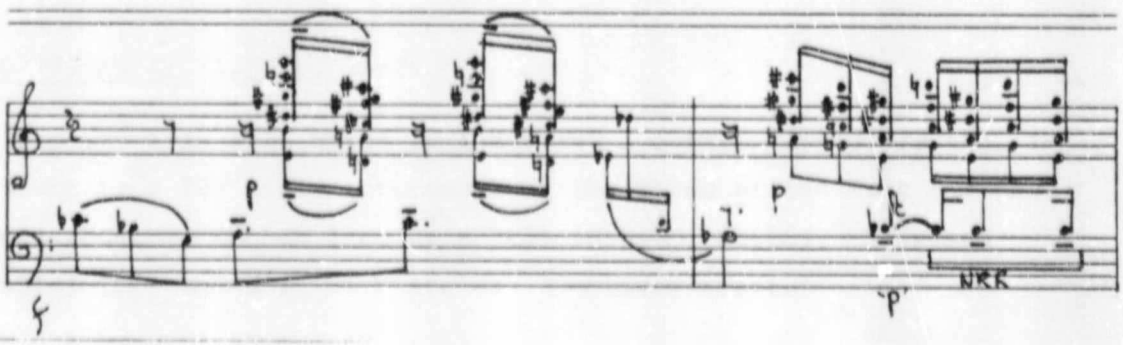
Section B: b. 18-34

a: Introductory bars repeated. b.18-22 = b. 1-5. Modere (♩= 96)

b: Theme of the Star and the Cross returns this time in the LH as a cantus firmus (cf) accompanied by a chordal figure implying the key of A minor. The Theme of the Star and the Cross is 'f' throughout. (Modere, un peu lent (♩= 76))
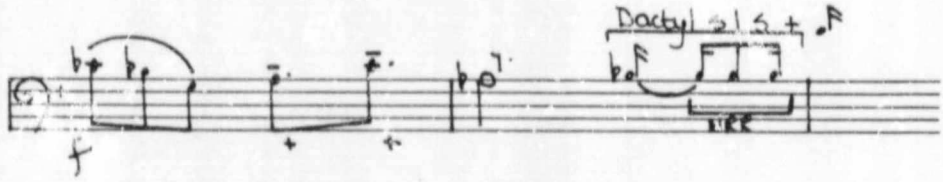


b. 23-24 = b. 6-7 with added harmonies above cf.



b. 2[illegible]-25 = b. 8-9 with added chords of 4ths and 5ths. Introduction of a new cell - a Dactyl rhythm (sls) which is also a NRR and a palindrome.

Messiaen lengthens the cell by the addition of an added value:
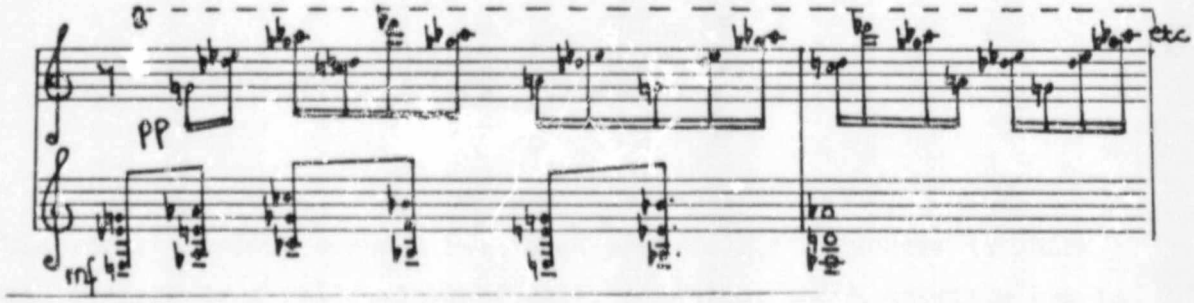


b. 27-28 = b. 10-11 with the same added harmonies above a cf.

b. 29-30 = b. 12-13 with same added chords of b. 25 and new rhythmic cell.

b. 31-32 = b. 14-15 with chords from b. 24 and 25.

b. 33-34 = b. 16-17 with a new accompaniment arising out of b.1:
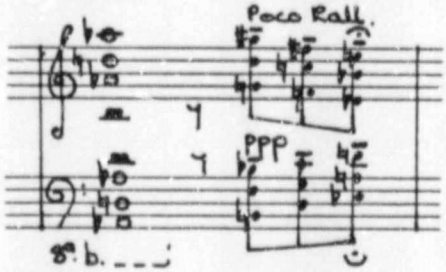


CODA/FINAL SECTION: b. 35-39

This section is also based in the first 5 bars. Bars 35-39 = b. 1-5 (Modere (= 96) with a statement of the Theme of the Star and the Cross (Modere, un peu lent (= 76)) in b.40 (=b.16). Messiaen doubles this theme in both staves, 3 octaves apart:



Again, as in "Regard du Pere", the music has come full circle. The chords presented in the last bar, like the first bar, contain all 12 notes of mode 7.



This formal outline shows a sectional symmetrical structure in which each section is a self-contained unit, a concept which Messiaen was to take much further in his works of the 1940's and 1950's and which later became known as Moment Form.*

---

* This form applies to music consisting of a succession of self-contained sections which are unrelated to one another in any functionally implicative way. The concept of moment form was first articulated by Stockhausen in his article (1960) entitled "Moment Form", in which he explained the compositional procedures used in "Kontakte" (1959-60). These procedures derive ultimately from the practices of Debussy, Stravinsky, Webern, Varese, and Messiaen. Stockhausen wrote: "Every moment counts, as well as no moment at all; a given moment ..... [is to be regarded] as something individual, independent, and centered in itself, capable of existing on its own." Since moment forms "verticalize" time, render every moment a NOW, and avoid climaxes, they are not beginning-middle-end forms. Moments are defined as self-contained entities, capable of standing on their own, yet in some sense belonging to the context of the composition. They may comprise a static entity, for example harmony (as with Messiaen) that last throughout the moment, or they may contain a process that completes itself within the moment. If moments are defined by internal consistency, it follows that they can be of any length. Thus proportions are important in moment form pieces. Proportional lay-outs often depend on the Fibonacci series. [45]

In contrast to "Regard du Pere", this movement employs nontertian structures. Traditional chords and spellings are used, but only in brief passages. Whilst the first "Regard" was characterized by consistency of texture, "Regard de l'etoile" reveals frequent and striking textural contrasts possibly in keeping with the symbolism of the number 2. Recurrence of the various motives at their original pitch serves to unify the work.

4. L´ECHANGE (III): The Exchange

"A descending cascade, an ascending spiral, the awesome exchange of the human and the Divine; God becomes man to make us God-like."

For the third time, Messiaen turns to the subject of the Incarnation in the accompanying text. Marmion explains this peculiar exchange between God and man as follows: "We ask to be partakers of that divinity to which our humanity is united. It is like an exchange. God, in becoming incarnate, takes our human nature and gives us, in return, a participation in His Divine nature. ..... God takes our nature so as to unite it to Himself in a personal union. ..... What the Word Incarnate gives in return to humanity is an incomprehensible gift; it is a participation, real and intimate, in His Divine nature: ´Largitus est nobis suam deitatem.´ ..... And thus is accomplished the most wonderful exchange which could be made." [20, p.116f]

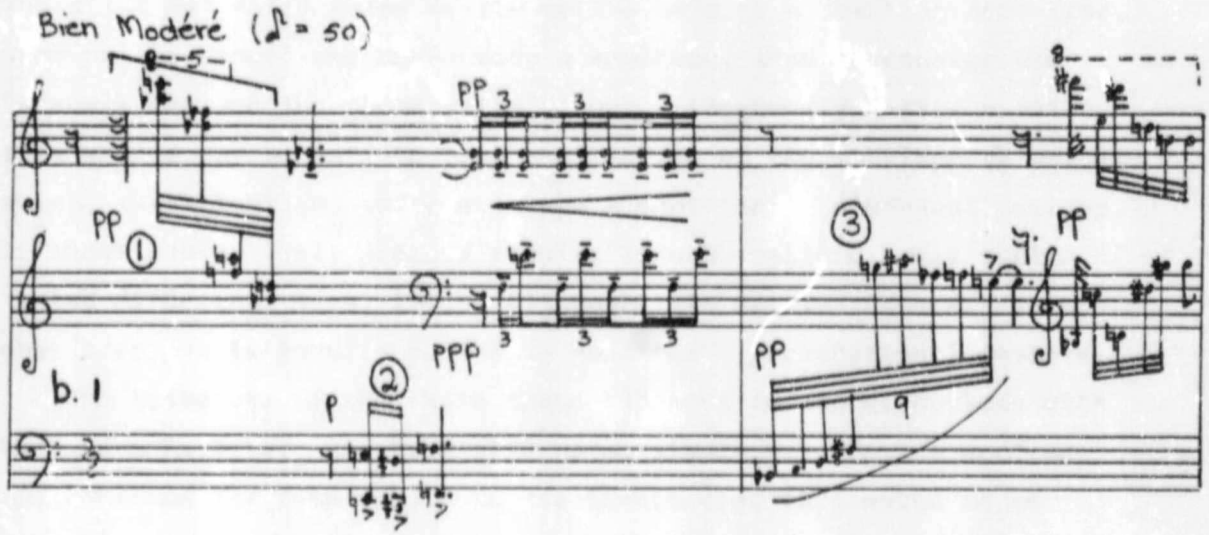
It is this awesome exchange which is the subject of contemplation in this movement. Messiaen, in his introductory notes to the score mentions that ´L´echange´ was inspired by the following text in th Roman Missal:* "How wonderful is the dwelling here! The Creator of mankind, taking on a body and soul, has deigned to be born of the Virgin, in order that we might share in His Divinity." In the above quotation from the Missal, this unique relationship between man and God is emphasized.

---

* The Roman Missal, dating back to 1570, is the liturgical book of the Catholic Church containing the complete rite of the Mass for every day in the year, and for all other occasions. In other words, it contains everything that is said or sung by the celebrant at the altar, by other ministers, as well as that which is said or sung by the choir and the congregation.

This union is further strengthened by the Trinity in that man is related to God the Father through His Son and the Holy Ghost. The Trinity thus is the secondary inspirational source for this movement, and is reflected in Messiaen's choice of 3 staves, 3 themes, 3 dynamic levels in the opening bar ('ppp', 'pp' and 'p'), the interval of the 3rd, triplets, and multiples of 3, such as nonuplets, and 12 statements of the 3 themes (3x4).

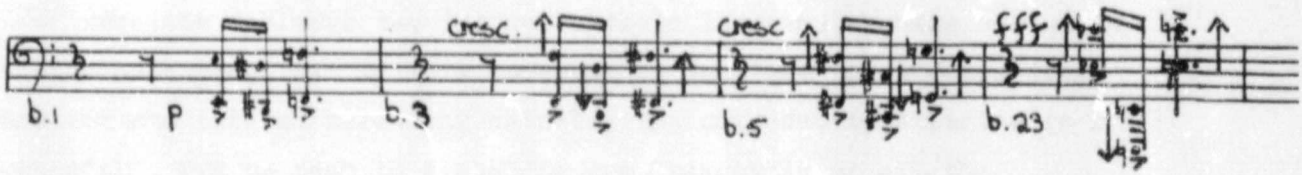
The musical image of this exchange is simply a succession of balancing interval changes calculated in a 2-bar statement, revealing the three motives, two of which then undergo a series of variations. [6, p.121] This is the first movement not based on one of the cyclic themes, and thus marks a departure from the first two movements. The entire material of "L 'echange" is contained in these first two bars.



The first motive (1), like God, is changeless, and throughout revolves around E flat minor. As such it forms an ostinato which creates some melodic impulse by its repetition throughout this movement. The symbolism surrounding the number 3 is further revealed in the major and minor 3rds which make up this motive, as well as the 3 x 3 (triplets) repetitions of the last note.

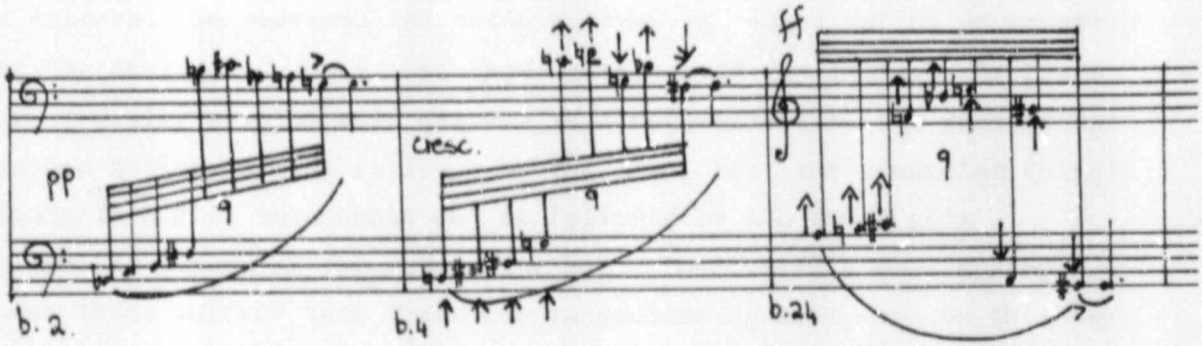
The second motive (2) widens in opposite directions by a semitone with each reappearance, revolving around its 'E' axis, and in 12 statements this process of 'agrandissement asymetrique' is completed,

and the original pitch structures restored. This technique of asymmetrical augmentation results in a very gradual growth, whereby certain notes are consistently altered upward or downward, or remain the same in successive repetitions of a given pattern. By applying this technique to this second motive, Messiaen has suggested the expansion of Divine Unity by the inclusion of man in this experience of the human-Divine exchange. Symbolically significant is the fact that this motive is comprised of three notes.
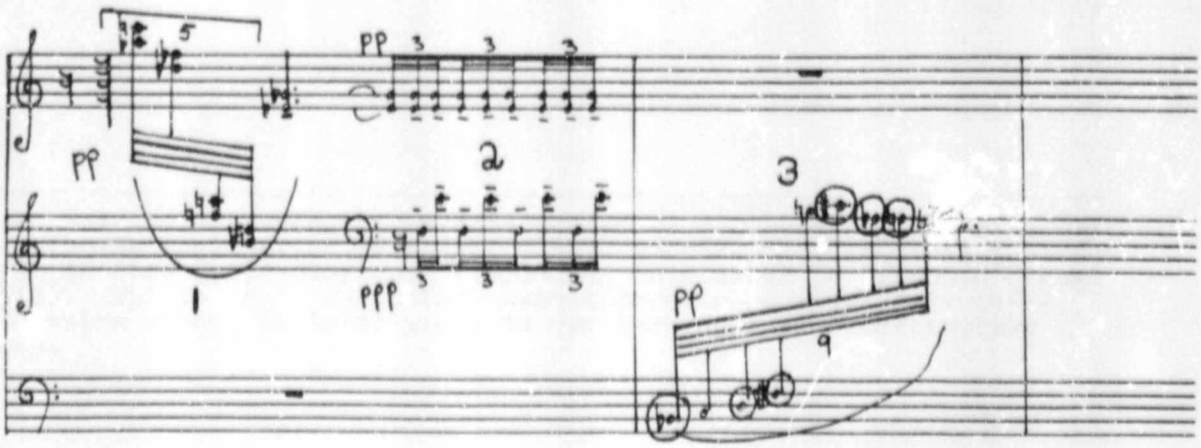


The first and third notes of the motive move up a semitone each time, whereas the second one moves down a semitone, thus increasing the interval between the consecutive notes. Apparently a single voice, this motive may be said to be a combination of two overlapping voices which, throughout the movement, take symmetrically divergent courses as shown above. This process results in a homophonic wedge series of twelve different notes. [41] Although this motive lacks any thematic character, it is ideally suited to Messiaen's permutational devices.

The nonuplets of the third theme (3) move in two directions with each reappearance: the bass (LH) notes simply move down a semitone (↓), whereas its counterpart in the Treble clef (RH) moves in an opposite direction, flattening and partly inverting itself by unusual manoeuvres in which the first and third notes move progressively down a semitone, and the last two notes move progressively up (↑). The third note remains the same (S) throughout, thus serving as an axis in much the same way as the 'E' of the first motive.



Messiaen includes two further symbols in these opening bars. In the accompanying text to this movement he mentions (i) a descending cascade and (ii) an ascending spiral. The cascade, if alluding to a waterfall, may be seen to symbolise the "reservoir of all the possibilities of existence." [19, p.10f] Water also symbolizes 'as fons et origo', the spring and origin of life. Moreover, Christ offers believers "living water" as a source of eternal life. Seen as such, the cascade ties up with the meaning of the spiral which has been connected with birth and life since the earliest times. The spiral also manifests itself in nature, in the fronds of ferns, in the shell of snails, in sea shells, whirlwinds, whirlpools and so on. In the Christian context the spiral was used to illustrate the regenerating and sustaining power of Christ and the gospel. [Ibid] Thus in "L'echange" these symbols represent the birth of the Word made flesh in Christ and are musically manifested in the first and third motives.



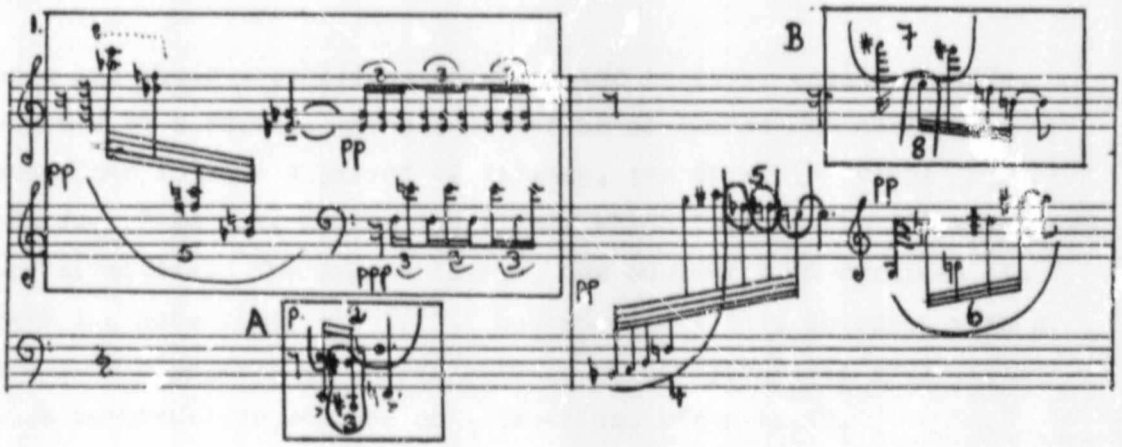
As in the two preceeding "Regards", Messiaen introduces a change in texture. He overlaps the three motives in such a way as to create varying textures. The second theme enters half way through the first bar, creating a polyphonic texture in combination with the descending cascade motive in 3rds followed by the triplets. The ascending spiral figure in b.2 is monophonic and is followed by the converging polyphonic figure at the end of the bar. Despite this overlapping, these three motives have their own respective dynamic, and in this way are distinguished from each other. They are further distinguished from each other by register, so that even though the second motive is always designated a louder dynamic level, and a lower register than the other two, the first motive, and second half of the third motive are still clearly heard because of their register.

Modally speaking this movement is chromatic and revolves around mode 7, with a tinge of E flat minor inherent in the first motive. The nature of the compositional devices used here by Messiaen are not conducive to harmonic significance. Harmony here is essentially a by-product of linear materials which are treated in a systematic mathematical fashion throughout.* [6, p.122] Because the three motives overlap each other in this movement, there is a continual metamorphosis in which the 'exposition' is continually reproducing itself in varied form. This process is again related to Messiaen's experience of colour in music, inherent in his modes, and ever changing like a kaleidoscope.
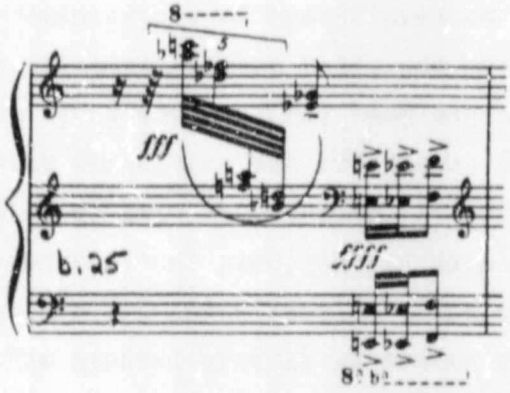
---

* Increasingly, during his middle period of composition, Messiaen was to seek the destruction of tonality through chromaticism. This process began in "Les Corps Glorieux" (1939) and culminated in "Livre d'Orgue" (1953). Whilst in "L'Ascension" each chromatic step was felt as an expressive event, in later works is was seen more as a destructive force.

Messian has tended to equate intervallic structures with rhythmic structures (duration), and has used the term "chromaticism" to describe both. Intervallic chromaticism dominates "L 'echange". If one examines the converging motive in the upper two staves at the end of b. 2, it will be noticed that it reproduces in miniature, purely as intervals, the thematic pattern of the movement. The static 'E' natural, which remains unchanged throughout, like its somewhat large counterpart, the first motive, is opposed by two dynamic forces, one ascending and the other descending:
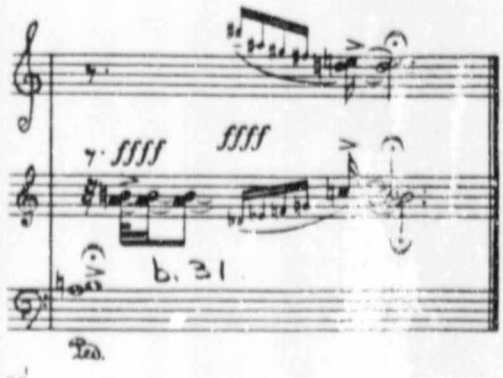


Numbers 1 and 8 remain unchanged throughout. Cellules 2,4,6 and 9 rise a st. whereas cellules 3,5 and 7 descend a st. at each repetition.

Structurally this movement takes the form of one long crescendo ('ppp' - 'ffff') structured around the process of asymmetrical augmentation culminating in a Coda (b. [illegible]) which centres around a condensed version of the first and second motives, the second at its original pitch. The accompanying triplet figure of the first motive has been omitted, and the second motive is doubled at the octave:



There are t[illegible]ee repetitions of these two motives, again symbolic, followed by a further three repetitions of the second mo[illegible]. Thereafter follows a period of silence, the first in "V[illegible] Regards..." so far, making the climax which follows (b[illegible]) that much more effective. The second motive, now augmented in duration, is heard one more time, at "fff". Messiaen ends this movement with a series of clusters, so characteristic of his pianistic style, but which nevertheless come as an anti-climax after b. 30.



What stands out in this "Regard" is Messiaen's deliberate attempt to destroy traditional melodic thematicism, and replace it by rhythmic

thematicism. This explains his interest in the use of musical permutations. Messiaen's attitude to chromaticism has been linked to the desire to rid his compositions of traditio al tonality.[41] The process revealed in its elementary form here, was to pervade much of Messiaen's later music. This movement has been harshly criticized and labelled naive, musically worthless, and primitive. [Ibid] David Drew has the following opinion of it: "'L 'echange' is not so much a composition as a pre-compositional plan, and as such it embodies certain principles that are not inapplicable to the serious task of composition." [Ibid] The gradual process of change involved in this movement depends on a temporal progress. Messiaen, in so deliberately calculating each step in this process of change, has created music which "does not merely concur with the clock, but actually becomes the clock itself." [6, p.123]

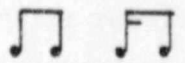
5. REGARD DE LA VIERGE (IV): The contemplation of the Virgin Innocence and tenderness ..... the Pure Woman, the Woman of the Magnificat, the Blessed Virgin contemplates her child .....

Great emphasis is placed on the Virgin and her role as the Mother of Christ in the Catholic Church. It is fitting therefore, that after Messiaen had dealt with the contemplation of the Father, and on aspects of the Incarnation, including the Awesome Exchange, that the Woman chosen to bear this Incarnate Word should be placed next in the twenty contemplations.

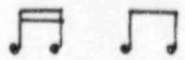
God ordered His Son into the world and caused Him to be born of a woman. Human consent was necessary in order for the Exchange to take place and the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to deliver the Divine proposal. In this solemn moment, the exchange was concluded and the Word became Incarnate through the Holy Spirit, and the Blessed Virgin became "the Ark of the New Covenant between God and Man." [20, p.155] In the Magnificat Mary sings within her heart a canticle of love and gratitude: "My soul doth magnify the Lord because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid, because He that is mighty, hath done great things to me." [68] In the contemplation of her son, she realized that this child was like no other child because He was the very Son of God. Mary's soul was filled with immense faith, which went far beyond the faith of all the just of the Old Testament. In her Son she saw her God. This faith according to Marmion "translated itself outwardly in an act of adoration. As soon as she looked upon Jesus, the Maiden-Mother adored Him with an intensity we cannot conceive. .... [and] to this intense faith, this deep adoration, were added the transports of an incommensurable love, a love both human and supernatural." [20, p.157] Symbolically the abstract beauty and loving kindness of the Deity were realized in the person of the Virgin. [17, p.viii] "Regard de la Vierge" revolves around these facts.

The significance of the number 4, associated with the 4 winds, the 4 elements, the 4 seasons and the 4 rivers, represents the number of the mundane sphere. Just as the first three days of the Creation are seen to foreshadow the Trinity, so the fourth is the "type of man", or humanity. [17, p.83] Thus there is a connection between the subject of the Virgin, who represents humanity, and the number 4. It is therefore not surprising to find that the interval of the 4th dominates the harmonic structure throughout this movement.

In comparison with the very powerful and dramatic material presented in "L'echange", the composition here is of a much quieter, gentle nature and relatively less dissonant. This is in keeping with the innocence, purity and tenderness of the Virgin. This movement revolves around an A B A C A B A (+coda) structure, and the recurring 'A' section is based thematically on the alternation of two Greek metres, the third Epitrite and the Ionic minor:

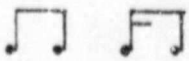


Third Epitrite

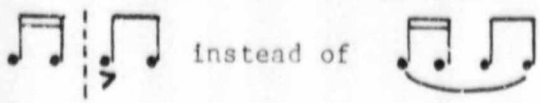


Ionic Minor
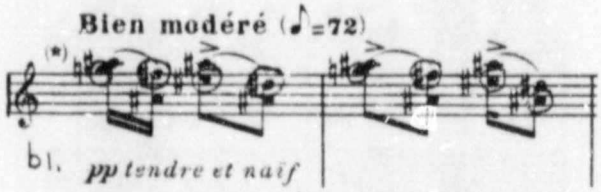
The third Epitrite consists of 3 long and 1 short value totalling 7 , a prime number, which may be said to symbolise here the unstained nature of the Virgin. The placing of the long and short values is variable allowing various permutations of the original formula. Messiaen uses the following pattern:
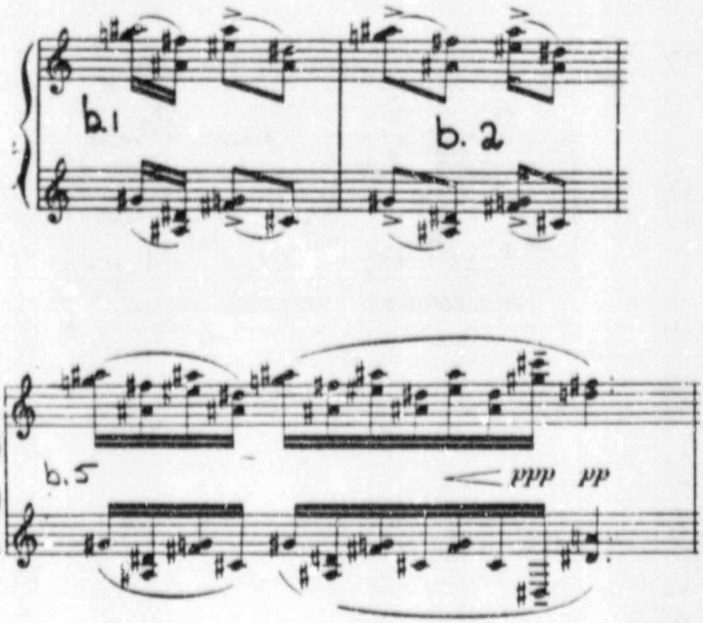


The Ionic minor is a rhythm in 6  consisting of 2 short and 2 long values. Stravinsky had used this metre in the choruses of "Le Sacre du Printemps" which Messiaen had studied. The unusual feature of the metre is that it has within its structure a break, known as an anaclasis. This consists of a permutation of the long and short values at the intersection of the two values. The effect is one of a disruption or break in the sequence of the durations:



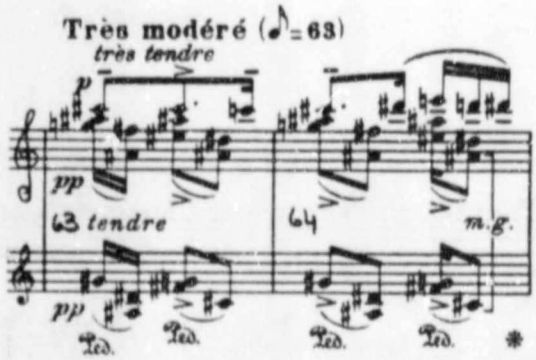
Messiaen refers to this technique as "a very modern structure." [9, p.38] Within these two bars is a melodic cell revolving around 'sol, fah, me ray' which has a certain bell-like quality to it, one which is characteristic of Messiaen's style of writing:
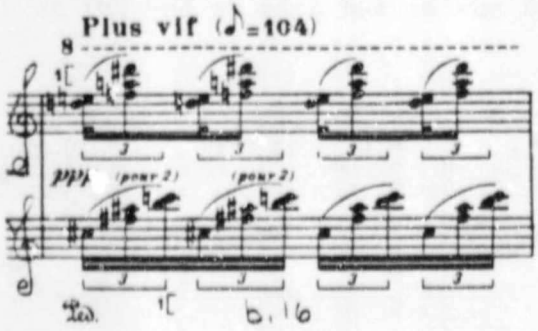


The intervals used in this section are primarily consonant, (perfect 4ths and minor 6ths) the only dissonant interval being the minor 2nd. In between appearances of these two metres Messiaen eliminates any feeling of expection through extension of these two motives, resulting in asymmetrical phrase structures. These extensions are of varying length, often resulting in prime numbers, but arise thematically out of material presented in b. 1-2:
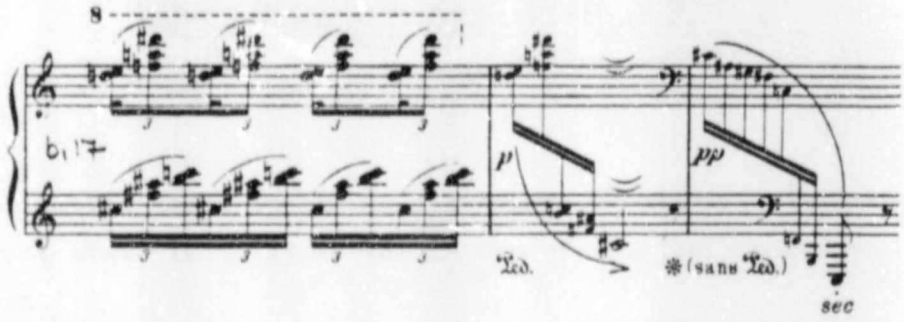


In the last appearance of 'A' Messiaen superimposes a permutation in the form of an added counterpoint above these two metres:
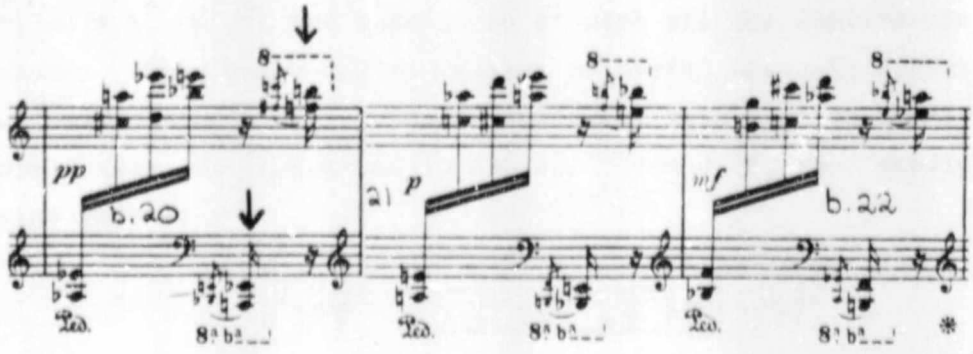


Section B (b. 16-24) is comprised of several motives, each distinct in its own right. The first motive (b.16) revolves around a series of triplets (3 x 4 ♪) high in the treble register. The dissonant intervals here (major 2nd, augmented 4th) lose much of their effect because of their register. The consonant interval of the major 3rd dominates the lower stave.
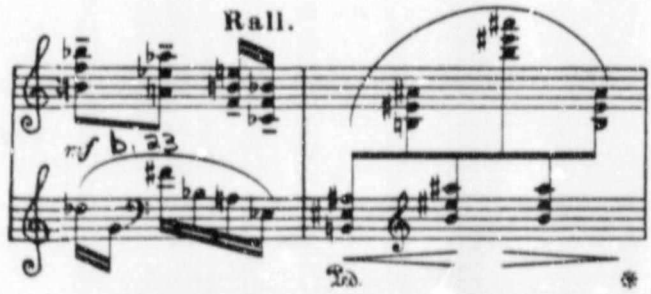


This motive is then repeated in b. 17 and is transformed in b. 18 into a descending "cascade" motive, reminiscent of the opening figure in "L'echange" and further into a descending flourish which covers much of the bass range of the piano:



Then follows an ascending motive balancing th[illegible] in b. 18-19; this motive is then repeated twice, the RH movi[illegible] semitone each time, the LH moving up a semitone, so that the [illegible] are drawn towards each other with each repetition. Again, t[illegible]th and -5th dominate the intervallic structure in this motive. Messiaen stresses extremes of register at the end of each bar in the following way:



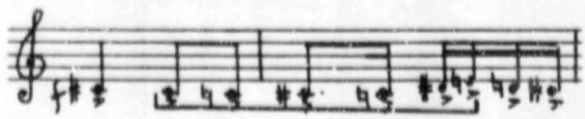
A further motive is structured around these intervals, which is expanded into a succession of chords by 4ths in b. 24 which lead back to the re-entry of Section A:



These unresolved +4ths create an atmosphere of stasis. The rhythm of the upper stave in b. 23 is the rhythm of the Ionic minor in retrograde.

Juxtaposition of motives, as seen in this section, is possible because of Messiaen's concept of modality, his use of sectionalized formal structures, as well as his attitude to time and duration in which the smallest unit (here the 𝅘𝅥𝅯) becomes the unit of pulse. This juxtaposition is very typical of Messiaen's style.*
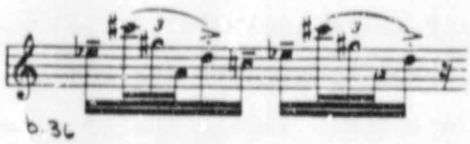
Whilst Section C is similarly comprised of several contrasting motives placed side by side, it also has several additional features. Messiaen has superimposed numerous modes in the following way: mode 4^4 on 3^1; mode 6^3 on 2^2; and mode 3^2 on 4^2 with all the implied mixtures of colours. This polymodality creates colourful harmonic structures. A particular melodic cell appears throughout this section appearing in various guises, but consistently centered around C♯, thus serving as a unifying factor:



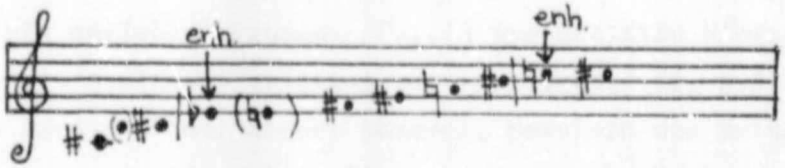
---

* The whole structure of Western music prior to the twentieth century had revolved around the assumption that one event led to another. However, the dissolution of triadic tonality after about 1910 removed the "a priori" of continuity. In his music Messiaen minimizes this concept of continuity, so that each section, and even each motive becomes a self-contained entity, capable of standing on its own, yet in a sense belonging in the context of the composition. This concentration on the present moment in the words of Karlheinz Stockhausen "can make a vertical cut, as it were, across horizontal time perception, extending out to a timelessness I call eternity." [14] It is this aspect of timelessness with which Messiaen is concerned in "Vingt Regards...".
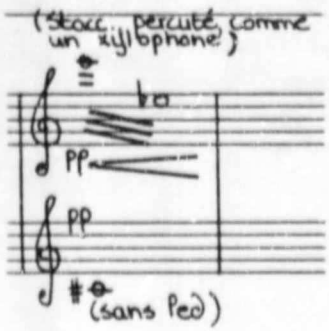
A repetitive percussive motive, centred around E flat, appears above this melodic cell:



Bars 34-37 hint at c♯ minor, if the enharmonic equivalents are taken into account:
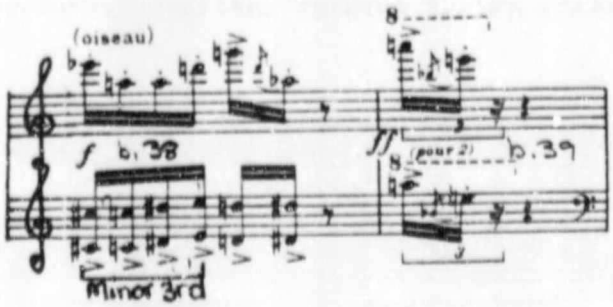


Then, for the first time in "Vingt Regards...", Messiaen gives specific directions to the performer to play a given motive "staccato, percussive ... like a xylophone":
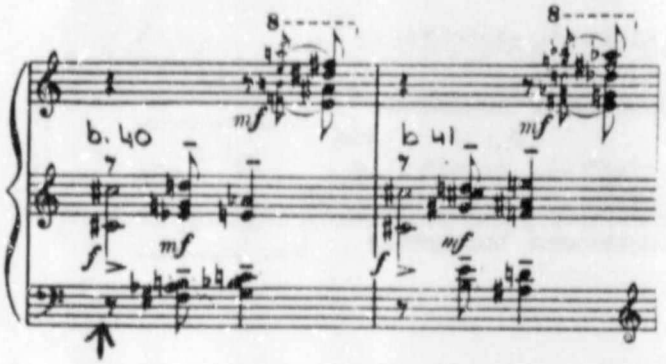


This marks an important feature in Messiaen's pianistic style. Not only has he compared the piano, as did Debussy, to a large orchestra with a whole range of timbres and accents, [11, p.73] but he has also acknowledged the influence of the Balinese gamelan, which he heard for

the first time at the Exposition Coloniale held in the Bois de Vincennes in 1931. A parallel may be seen between the attitude of Balinese musicians to duration and that of Messiaen, since both stress the static and circular aspect of time. This aspect is evident throughout "Vingt Regards...". Indeed, the whole tenor of Messiaen's work has revolved around a dissatisfaction with the European progression of time.
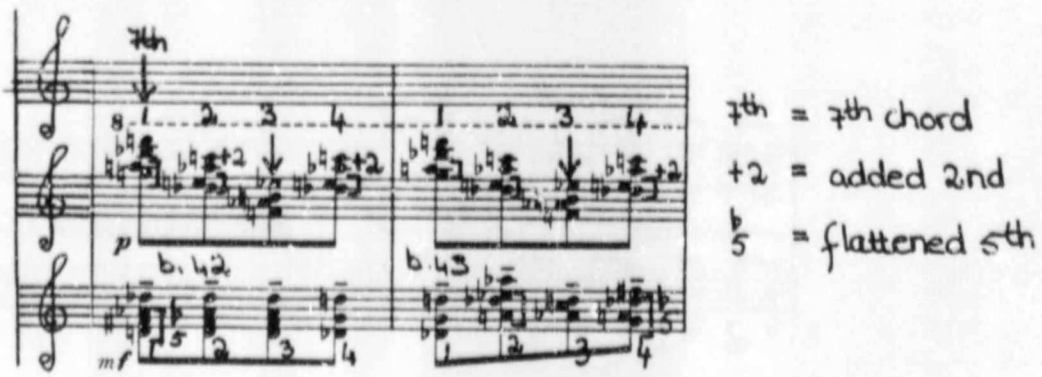
In the following bar (b. 38) birdsong makes its first appearance in "Vingt Regards...". Birds are symbols of freedom. Paul Dukas is known to have said "Listen to the birds! They are great teachers." [1, p.34] Messiaen appears to have followed that advice of his early teacher, because birdsong became an increasingly important element in his music, from "La Nativite du Seigneur" (1935) onwards. In his conversations with Claude Samuel, Messiaen spoke about the place of birdsong in his musical language. "...in the artistic hierarchy birds are the greatest musicians existing on our planet." [1, p.51] At this stage in his compositional career however, Messiaen was reluctant to label passages as specific birdcalls, and merely uses the word "oiseaux":



The accompaning motive is that identified in b.35, revolving again around C#. In b.40f Messiaen changes to 3 staves, the upper stave continuing in the "style oiseaux" whilst the lower two introduce a new motive again centred around C#:

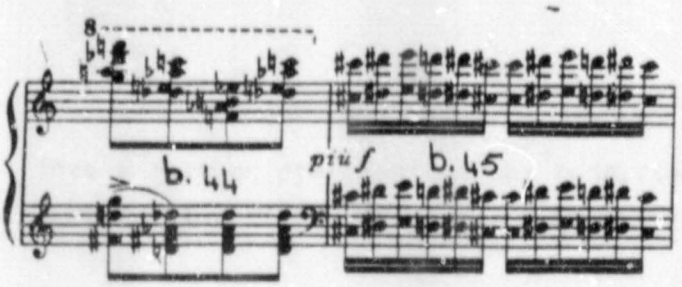


The motive in the bottom stave of b.42-44 arises out of that in b.40-41, but Messiaen now superimposes a series of chords with added notes in the high register of the piano, which are then repeated in the following two bars. Messiaen returns to two staves:

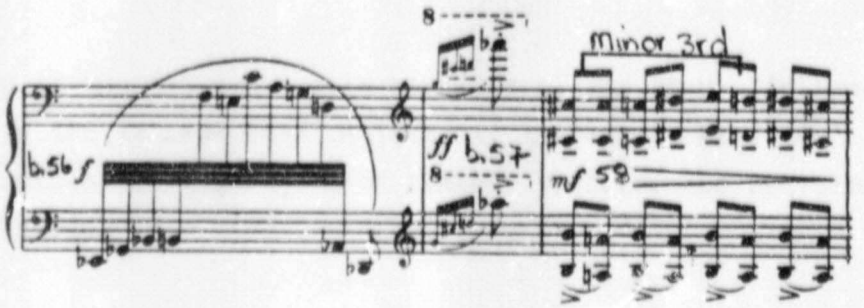


It will be seen that these chords are 7th chords which, in three cases out of the four, have a flattened 5th and an added 2nd. The third chord is quartal with an added minor 3rd. The 7ths are not resolved and should be seen as objects of contemplation, as a "rainbow of
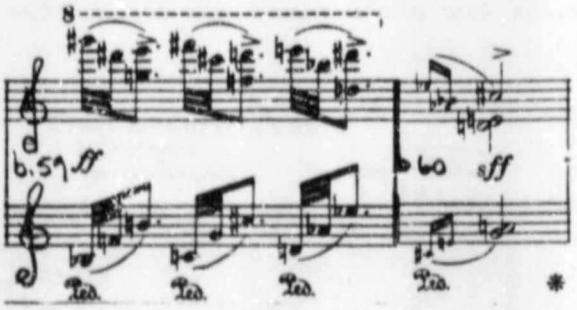
chords" above the more dominant motive on the lower stave. Two bars then follow, arising out of the recurring melodic cell of b.35. The motive is now doubled at the octave in both hands, and Messiaen uses both treble and bass registers:



Bars 40-44 are repeated and the recurring melodic cell figure of b.45-46 is extended by three 𝅘𝅥𝅯. A chromatic flourish in the bass register is followed by an ascending flourish in the extreme treble register leading into an augmented version of the recurring melodic cell, with an opposing motive in the LH.
The LH repeates the notes B and A natural in an ostinato fashion, whilst the RH outlines the melodic cell:



A motive then appears (b.59-60) which, through 3 repetitions, is gradually drawn closer together, until it finally converges on itself ('sff') in b.60, thus following a similar process to the motive in b.20:



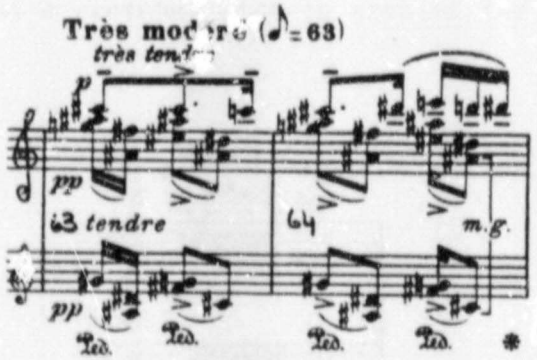
This then leads into a further statement of the recurring melodic cell in the LH in b.61, this time 'ff', with a new accompanying figure in the RH.

The climax of this central episodic section is reached in b.62 with a 'ff' cluster chord:
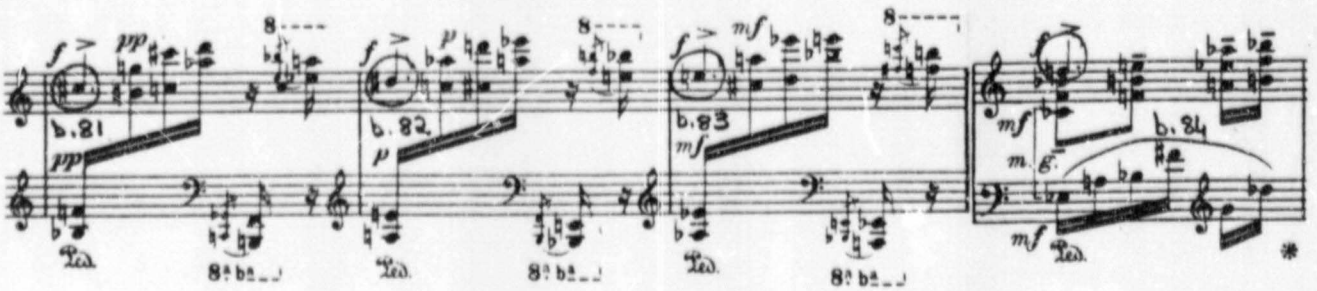


The chord in the extreme treble register of the piano, followed by the cluster in the extreme bass register is typical of Messiaen's style and emphasizes the importance of timbre, register and resonance in his musical language.

In the next appearance of Section A (b. 63) Messiaen superimposes a melodic counterpoint above the Ionic minor and third Epitrite:
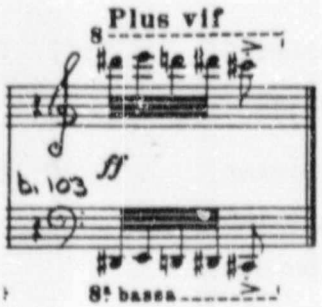


Bars 63-76 = b.1-15 with one repetition omitted. Where the extensions take place Messiaen likewise extends the added counterpoint. Section B is then heard in retrograde with a few changes. Bars 81-84 = b.20-23 but with the recurring melodic cell from Section C (b. 35f) superimposed:



A three bar link arising out of this same motive, supported by a chord by 4ths, leads into the final appearance of Section A in b.88. The melodic counterpoint of b.63f reappears here, and b.88-94 = b.64-70. Bar 95 = b.73 but with an extension resembling b.85.

The Coda or final section, is thematically centred on the material presented in the Central Episode (Section C), and b.96-100 = b.36-40, b.101-102 = b.60-61. As in the previous movement Messiaen again makes use of a crotchet rest to prepare for the ending to this "Regard":
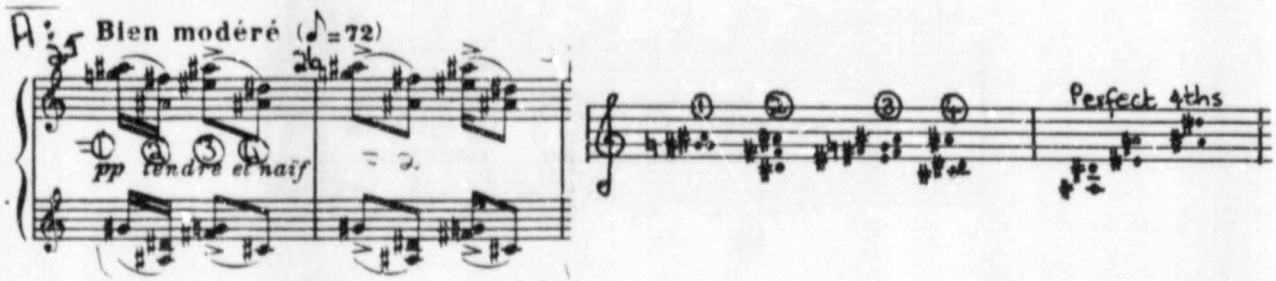


In this motive Messiaen makes one last reference to the recurring melodic cell, here at opposite extremes of the piano's register, ending on the C♯ so often heard in Section C.
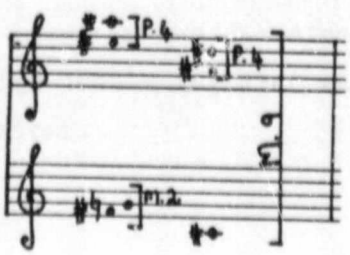
The formal structure of "Regard de l'Vierge" may be summarized as follows:

	Section A:	b. 1-15	Centred on Ionic Minor and Third Epitrite.
A.	Section B:	b. 16-24	Several motives juxtaposed.
	Section A:	b. 25-34	Repeat of b.1-15 with the middle 5 bars omitted.
B.	Section C:	b. 35-62	Several motives juxtaposed. Unifying motivic cell centred around C C# D D# E, the pivot being C#. First appearance of instruction to play motive like a xylophone. First appearance of birdsong.
	Section A:	b. 63-76	New melodic counterpoint appears above thematic material presented in b.1-12, expressing the tenderness of the maternal gaze.
A.	Section B:	b. 77-87	= b. 16-24 in retrograde, with an extension.
	Section A:	b. 88-95	b. 88-94 = b. 64-70; b. 95 = b. 73 with variation in the melodic counterpoint.
	CODA	b. 96-103	Based on section C.

This movement is interesting from an harmonic point of view because each section has its own identity melodically, rhythmically and harmonically speaking. Section A revolves around the repetition of four chords throughout:



Whilst the perfect 4th is a predominant feature, the interval of the 2nd also plays an important harmonic role. Both are ambiguous in quality since neither is ever resolved. In its context here it may be said to function as both a consonant and dissonant interval, since the intervals surrounding it are: minor 2nd, +2nd, and the minor 6th. In the second chord it forms the bass for the second inversion chord on A# (A# D# A# F#), whereas in the third and fourth chords it forms part of a dissonant chord comprised of varying components, thus:



Since the harmonic tensions and resolutions of Western tradition are absent in his music, Messiaen uses repetition within a tonal framework of stasis to hold the structure together. Section A is an

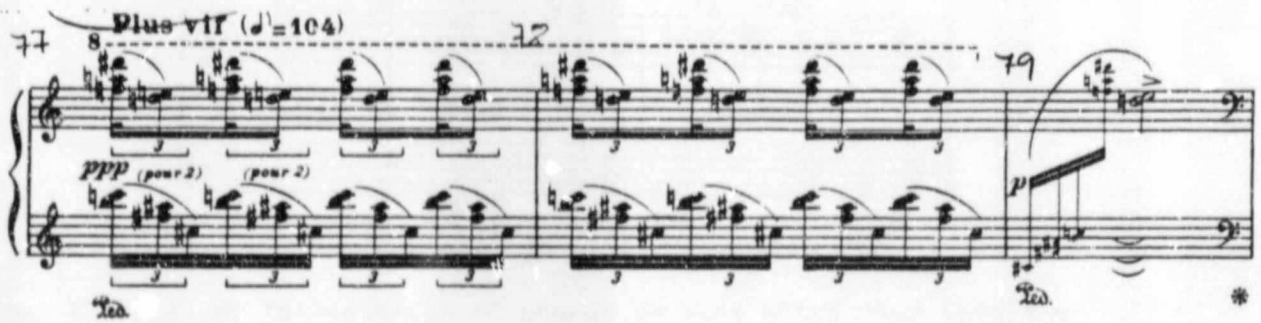
example of this technique. The harmony of the first bar is repeated three times, followed by an extension of the opening bar thus:



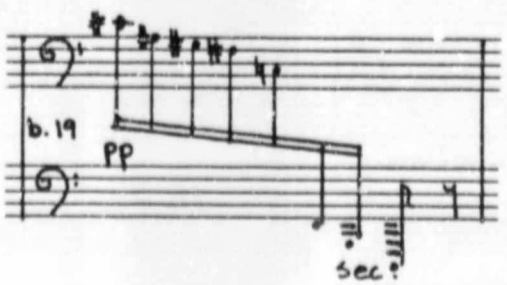
Throughout this section Messiaen shows a keen awareness of the importance of spacing, dynamic, timbre, attack (accent) and register in music. Dissonances placed in close proximity have a more biting quality (e.g. the 2nd in the lower part); used in the high treble register the dissonance is no longer as harsh (see b.1). In both cases Messiaen maintains a very soft dynamic level which also contributes to the relatively mellow quality of these dissonant intervals. With the absence of a fixed tonal centre these dissonances loose their effect. Dissonance is only dissonant when surrounded by consonance. This process (repetion and extension) is repeated twice, the "extension" in b.34 serving as the connecting link between Section A and B.

Section B is likewise based on chordal dissonances. Again, Messiaen has chosen the high treble register and a 'ppp' dynamic to minimize this dissonant effect.
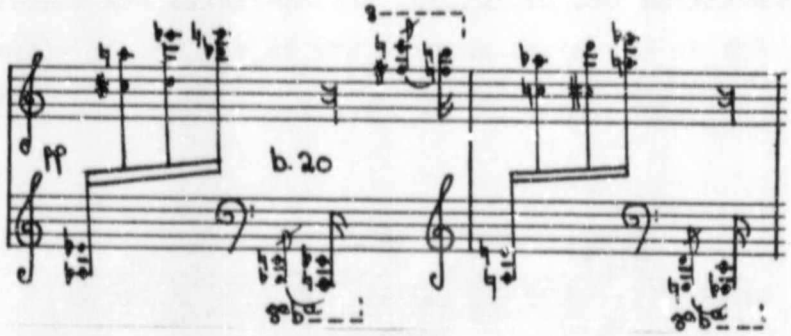
The two staves have also been spread an octave apart:



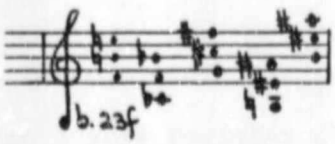
Again, the interval of the 2nd predominates; in the upper stave the 2nd alternates with a 'first inversion' chordal structure comprising a major 3rd and an +4th. On the lower stave the intervals revolve around the C♯, followed by a major 3rd and a minor 2nd. Put together these notes make up the chromatic scale with the exception of the 5th which has been omitted. In the following 5 bars Messiaen is more preoccupied with contrasts in range and register than with harmonic structures. In b.19 a sudden descending flourish is introduced in the bass which ends on:



There is then a return to the treble register for the four ascending semiquavers (b.20) and then both parts suddenly move in opposite directions to cover both extremities of the piano:

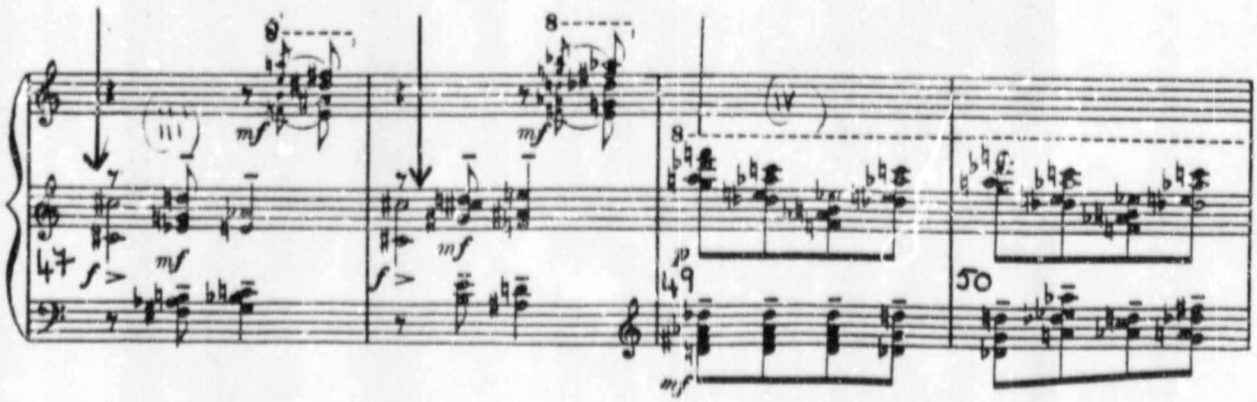


Bar 23 sees the introduction of chords by 4ths which lead into the return of Section A:



Section C consists of alternating homophonic, monophonic, and chordal passages.

The harmonic structures in these choral passages are mixed and varied - tertian and quartal structures combined with added note chords:



Messiaen's use of spacing, dynamics, register and resonance again reflect the influence of organ mixtures on his pianistic style. In b.42-44 he uses a repetitive sequence of chords above an ever-changing

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

PUBLISHER:
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
©2013

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg Library website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the Library website.