OLIVIER MESSIAEN
HIS MUSICAL LANGUAGE AND
LA NATIVITÉ DU SEIGNEUR

MUSICAL EXAMPLES AND STRUCTURAL DIAGRAMS
FOR
A PRESENTATION TO THE ORGAN CLASS
OF
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

14 NOVEMBER 1978

by
Thomas J. Mathiesen
Example 1. "Dieu parmi nous," m. 4.

Example 2. "Combat de la Mort et de la Vie"

Example 3. Modes of Limited Transposition. mode 1 = whole tone scale.

mode 2

mode 3
Example 3 cont'd.

Example 4. Mode 2, chord row.


A section

B section

C section
Example 8. "Le Verbe," mm. 1-2 and mm. 8-11.

Example 10. "Le Verbe," mm. 31-32.


Example 15. "Les Anges," mm. 36-37.
Example 17. "Les Anges," m. 49.


Example 21. "Dieu parmi nous," mm. 31-32.
Structural patterns in *La Nativité du Seigneur*

I. A section: aabb'a'a'b'+8 free bars (ABA)

II. A section: 2+2+2+2+1+1 (ABC)
   B section: chant des oiseaux
   C section: aabcd (bracket represents pedal)

IV. C section: abcd'd'b"amen" (ABC)

V. A section: 2+2+3+2+2+3+2+2+2+6 (ABC)
   B section: 2+2+2+2+2+2
   C section: 5+6

VI. monosectional: 4+2+4+2+2+2+2+1+3+4+1+3+3+3+3+4+1+2+2+2+2+1+2+3+3

VII. A section: 2+3+2+4+2+1 (ABA)
    B section: 1+1+2+1+2
    A section: 2+3+6

VIII. A section: 2+2+4+17 (AA')
    A' section: 2+2+4+18+6 (coda)

IX. A section 1-30 (ABC)
    B section 31-58
    C section 59-103
1) rhythm:
   1) naga - DDSS justification of added values
      slashes show duration of accidentals, not metric pulse
   2) non-reversible rhythm - rhythm exactly the same whether in retrograde
      influence of eastern philosophy - time is unchanging, not forward driving
   3) unmeasured, unmeasured rhythms

2) melody - the supreme element
   mode of limited transposition
   bird song melody
   melodic inspiration (term of Stravinsky), can be expanded by simply adding at points
   between beginning & conclusion

3) melody & harmony
Olivier Messiaen (b. 1908)

1) His pupils have included Pierre Boulez & Karlheinz Stockhausen.

2) It's a tribute to him that his pupils haven't merely imitated his style, but have gone their own way.
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Knowing that music is a language, we shall seek at first to make melody "speak." The melody is the point of departure. May it remain sovereign! And whatever may be the complexities of our rhythms and our harmonies, they shall not draw it along in their wake, but, on the contrary, shall obey it as faithful servants; the harmony especially shall always remain the "true," which exists in a latent state in the melody, has always been the outcome of it. We shall not reject the old rules of harmony and of form; let us remember them constantly, whether to observe them, or to augment them, or to add to them some others still older (those of plainchant and Hindu rhythmics) or more recent (those suggested by Debussy and all contemporary music). One point will attract our attention at the outset: the charm of impossibilities. It is a glistening music we seek, giving to the aural sense voluptuously refined pleasures. At the same time, this music should be able to express some noble sentiments (and especially the most noble of all, the religious sentiments exalted by the theology and the truths of our Catholic faith). This charm, at once voluptuous and contemplative, resides particularly in certain mathematical impossibilities of the modal and rhythmic domains. Modes which cannot be transposed beyond a certain number of transpositions, because one always falls again into the same notes; rhythms which cannot be used in retrograde, because in such a case one finds the same order of values again — these are two striking impossibilities. We shall study them at the end of Chapter V ("Nonretrogradable Rhythms") and in Chapter XVI ("Modes of Limited Transpositions"). Immediately one notices the analogy of these two impossibilities and how they complement one another, the rhythms realizing in the horizontal direction (retrogradation) what the modes realize in the vertical direction (transposition). After this first relation, there is another between values added to rhythms and notes added to chords (Chapter III: "Rhythms with Added Values"; Chapter XIII: "Harmony, Debussy, Added Notes"). Finally, we superpose our rhythms (Chapter VI: "Polyrhythm and Rhythmic Pedals"); we also superpose our modes (Chapter XIX: "Polymodality").
The added sixth and added augmented fourth

Chord on the dominant

Accord sur dominante appoggiature
Modes of limited transpositions.

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

6. 

7. 

D.YAN
Vinot regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus (1944)

Thème de Dieu

Thème de l’étoile et de la Croix

MODES OF LIMITED TRANSPOSITION

I(2)

II(3)

III(4)

IV(6)

V(6)

VI(6)

VII(6)

CHORD ROWS CITED BY MESSIAEN

MUSIC 675

OLIVIER MESSIAEN

Thematic & Model Materials

Dr. Mathiesen
CHORD ROWS NOT CITED BY MESSIAEN

Alphabetical Series used in Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité (1972)

EXAMPLES OF ADDED RHYTHMS AND MULTIPLES
rhythmical pedal - a pattern to set up & use repeatedly
rhythmical canon - a sequence of pulses in 16th note
notes, 1 pattern of notes, he places another that is different — similar & different is usual
bird song - birds give "voice of birds"
appears @ climactic points
appears in all liturgical works
form- basis is an introductory association — motto or
text — ex. God Among Us. has 3 elements —
represents 3 parts of Trinity —
 avoids pieces that have contrapuntal
invention
play 3rd part of Ascension Suite
Le Varre — last section uses a "flying" melody with a characteristic rhythmical pattern that makes the phrases.
Dion Hurni Vow, good ex. for development of material —
Ce morceau utilise un mode de hauteurs (36 sons), de valeurs (24 durées), d'attaques (12 attaques), et d'intensités (7 nuances). Il est entièrement écrit dans le mode.

Attaques: \( \text{\textgreater} \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 5 \quad 6 \quad 7 \quad 8 \quad 9 \quad 10 \quad 11 \)

(avec l'attaque normale, sans signe, cela fait 12.)

Intensités: \( \text{pppp pp p mf f ff fff} \)

Sons: Le mode se partage en 3 Divisions ou ensembles mélodiques de 12 sons, s'étendant chacun sur plusieurs octaves, et croisés entre eux. Tous les sons de même nom sont différents comme hauteur, comme valeur, et comme intensité.

Valeurs:
Division I: durées chromatiques de \( \text{1 p à 12 p} \) (\( \text{etc.} \))
Division II: durées chromatiques de \( \text{1 p à 12 p} \) (\( \text{etc.} \))
Division III: durées chromatiques de \( \text{1 p à 12 p} \) (\( \text{etc.} \))

Au total 24 durées:

Voici le mode:

(la Division I est utilisée dans la portée supérieure du Piano)

(la Division II est utilisée dans la portée médiane du Piano)

(la Division III est utilisée dans la portée inférieure du Piano)