OLIVIER MESSIAEN

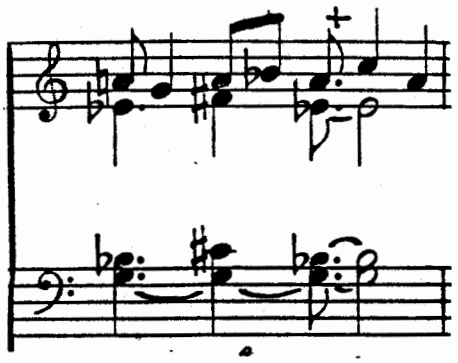
HIS MUSICAL LANGUAGE AND
LA NATIVITÉ DU SEIGNEUR

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

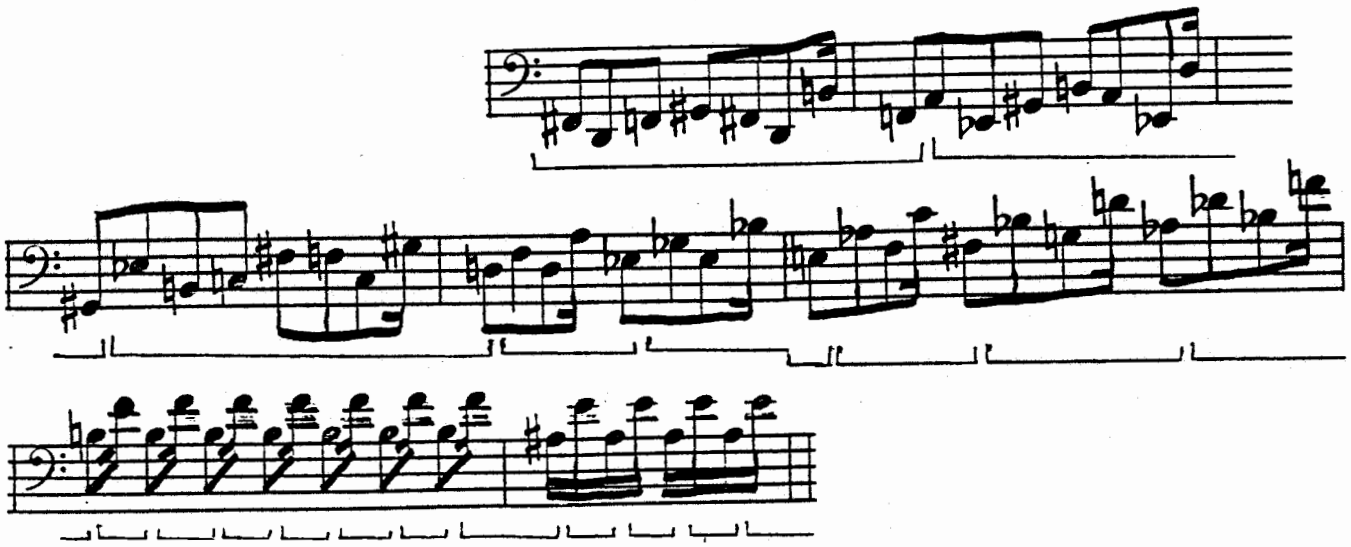
14 NOVEMBER 1978

by
Thomas J. Mathiesen

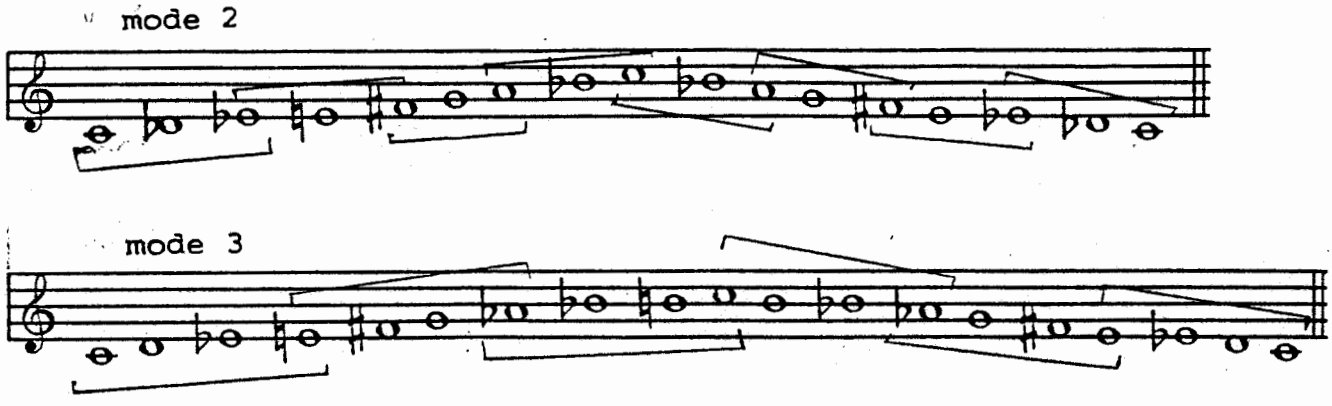
Example 1. "Dieu parmi nous," m. 4.



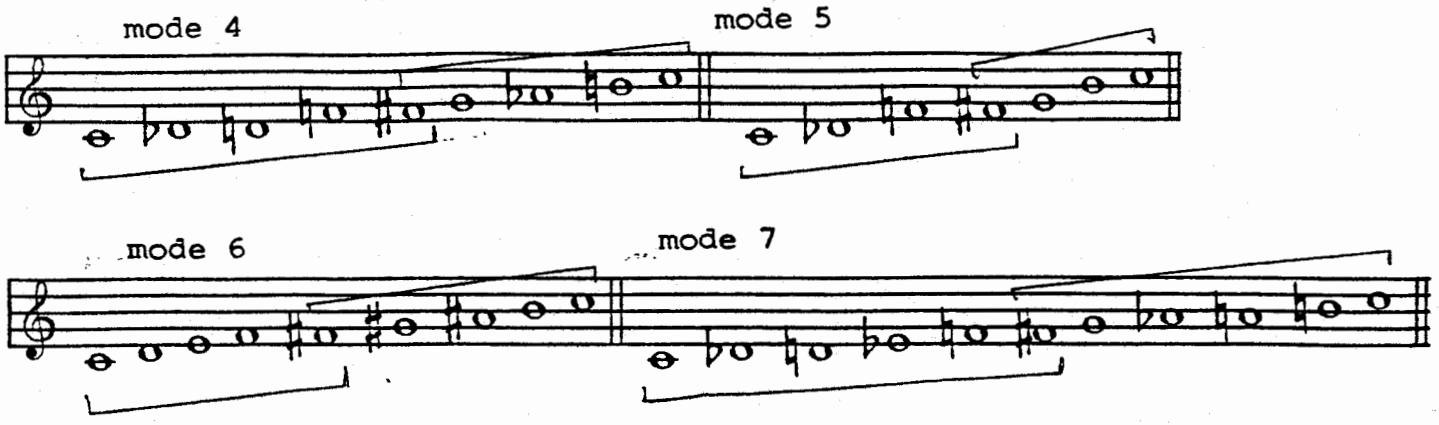
Example 2. "Combat de la Mort et de la Vie"



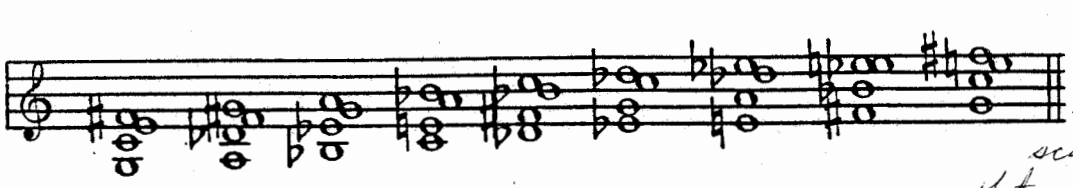
Example 3. Modes of Limited Transposition. mode 1 = whole tone scale.



Example 3 cont'd.

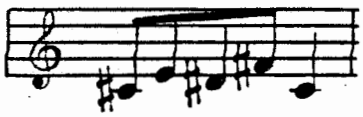


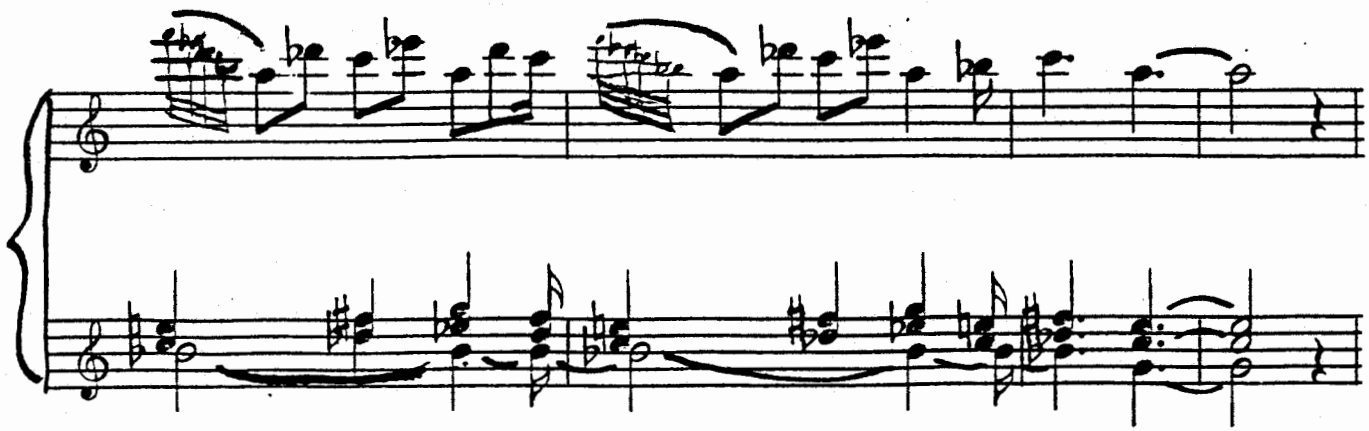
Example 4. Mode 2, chord row.



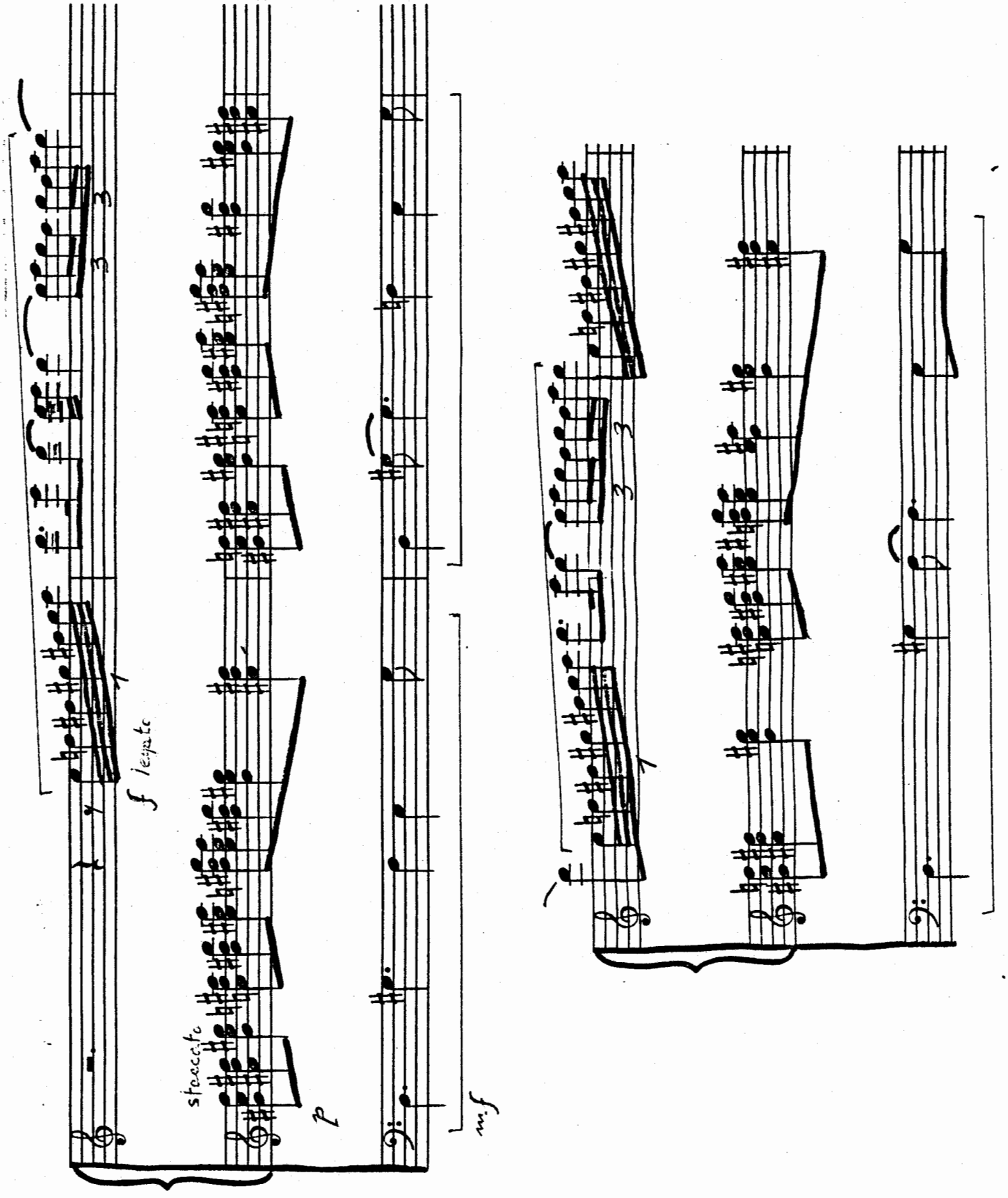
each chord note simply follows the scale of the mode from that note's particular position therefore the mode generates the harmonies.

Example 5. "Boris" theme and "Le Vierge et l'Enfant," mm. 1-4.

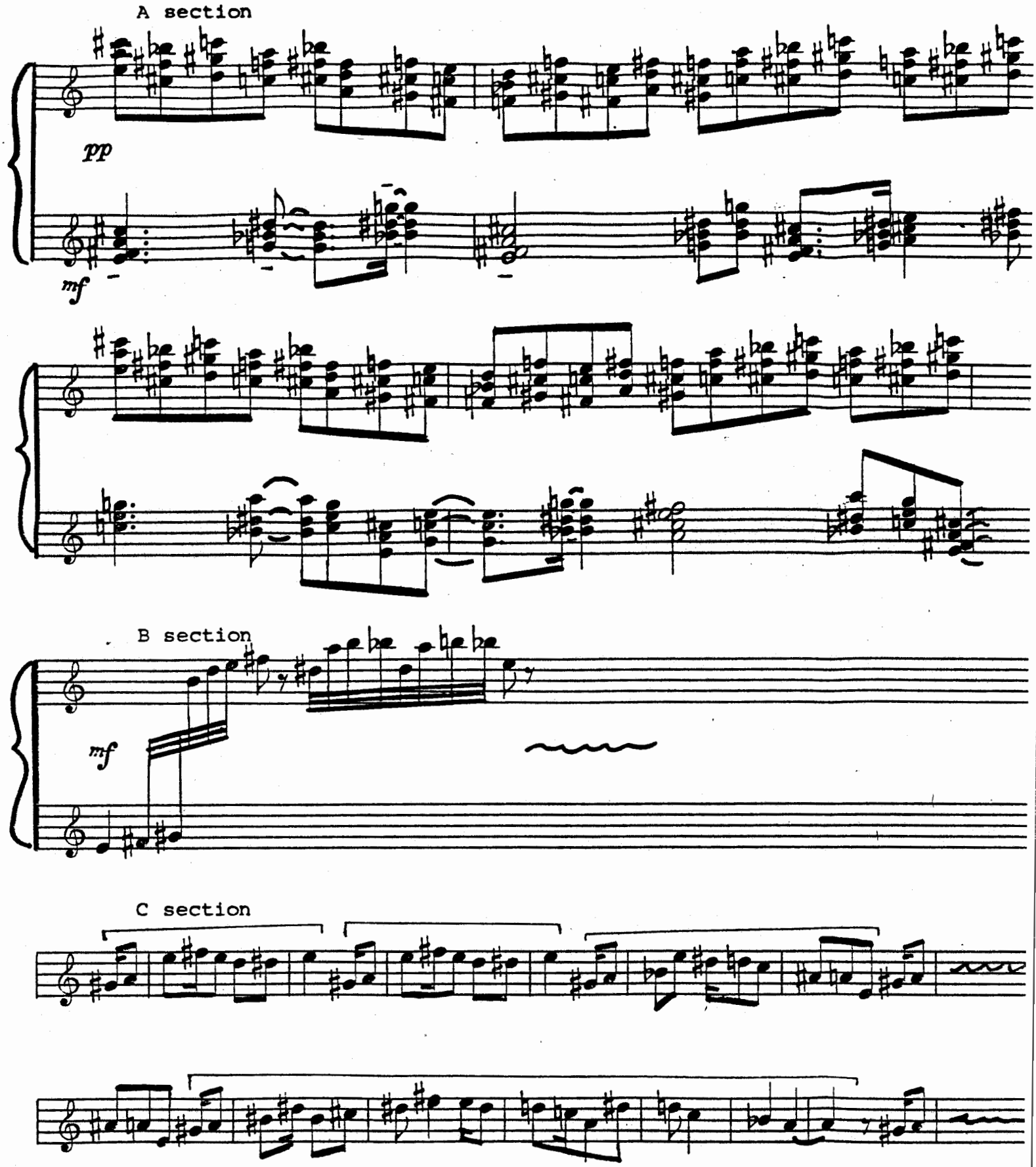




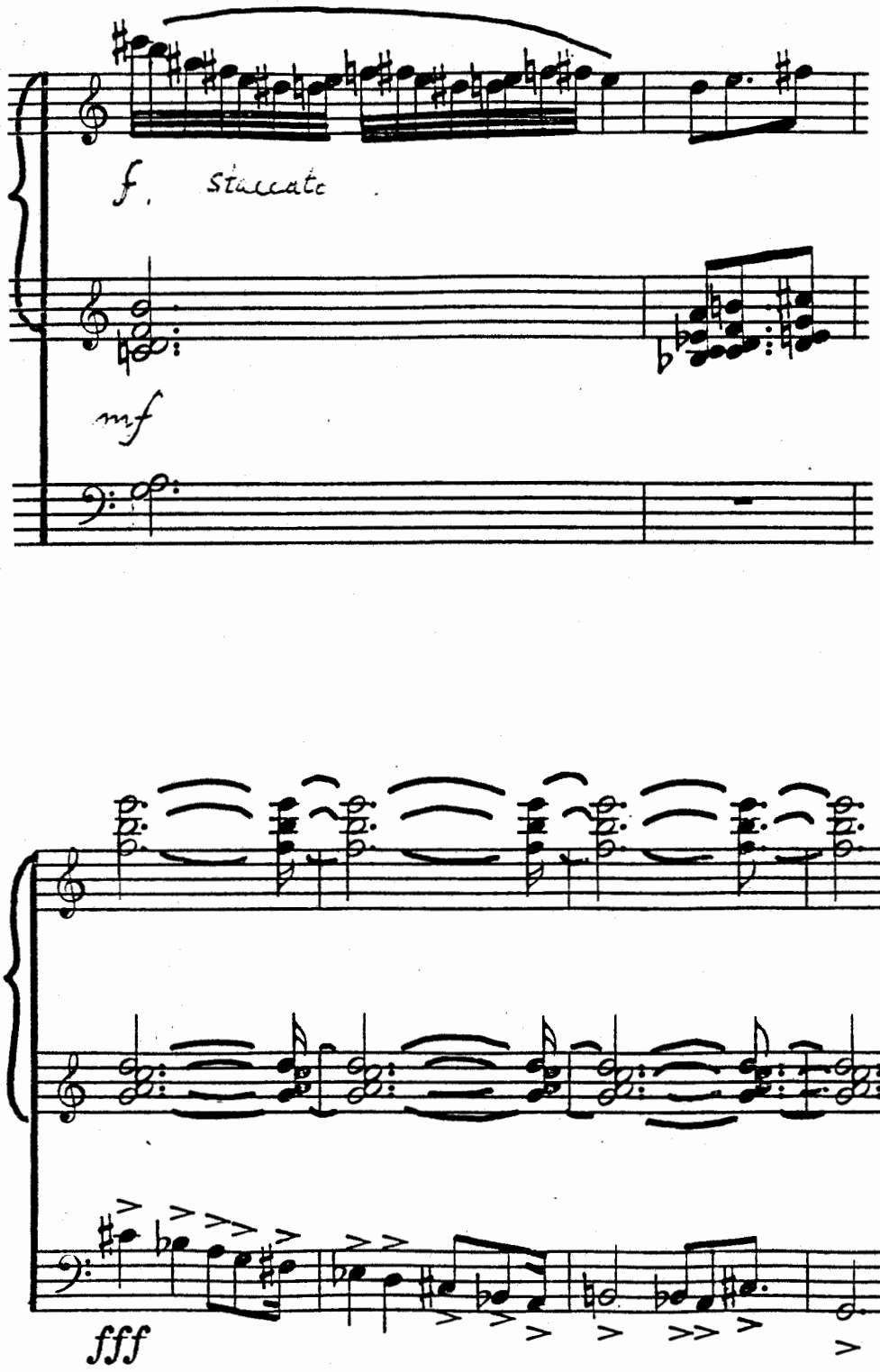
Example 6. "La Vierge et l'Enfant," mm. 16-18.



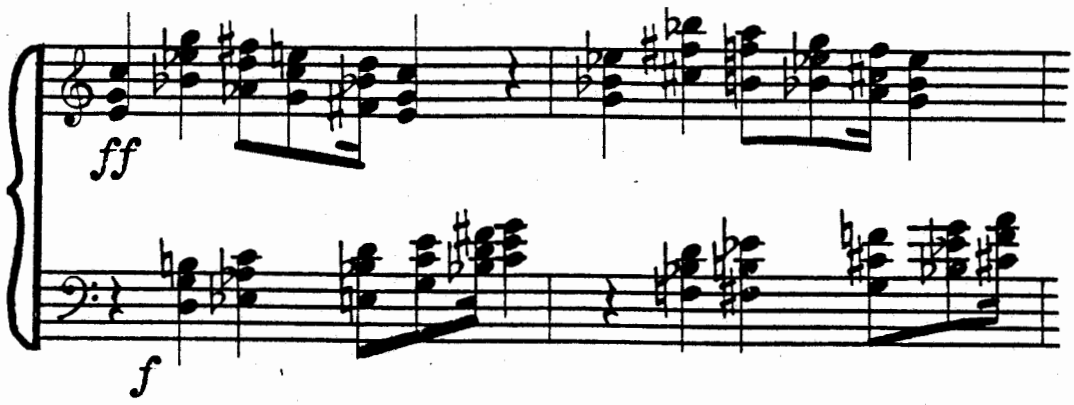
Example 7. "Les Bergers," section themes.



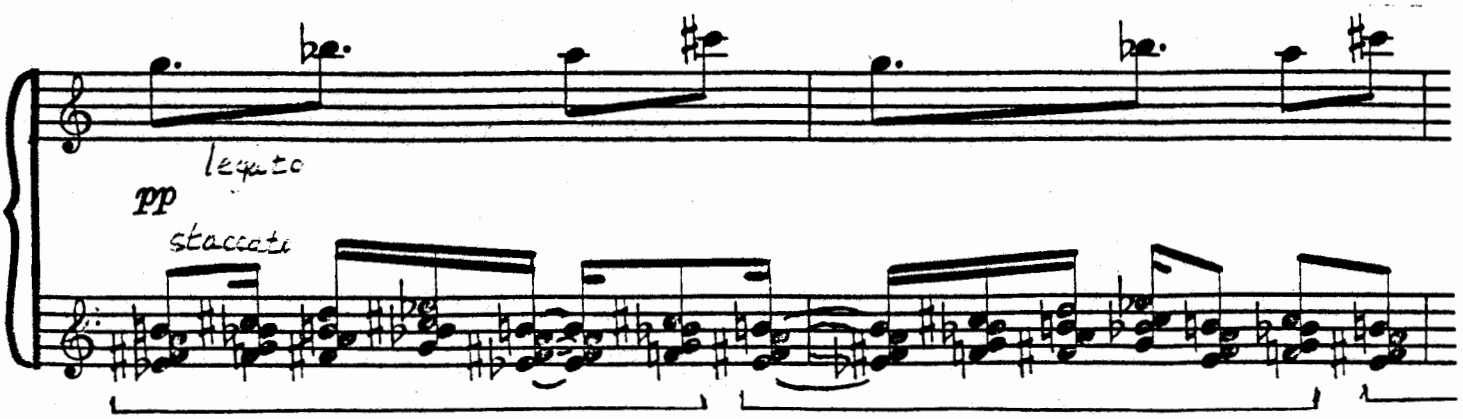
Example 8. "Le Verbe," mm. 1-2 and mm. 8-11.



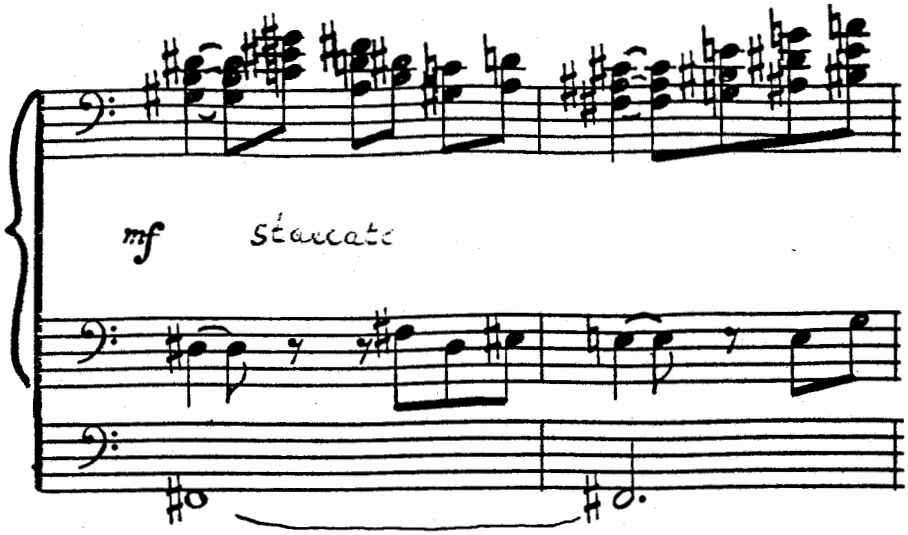
Example 9. "Le Verbe," mm. 26-27.



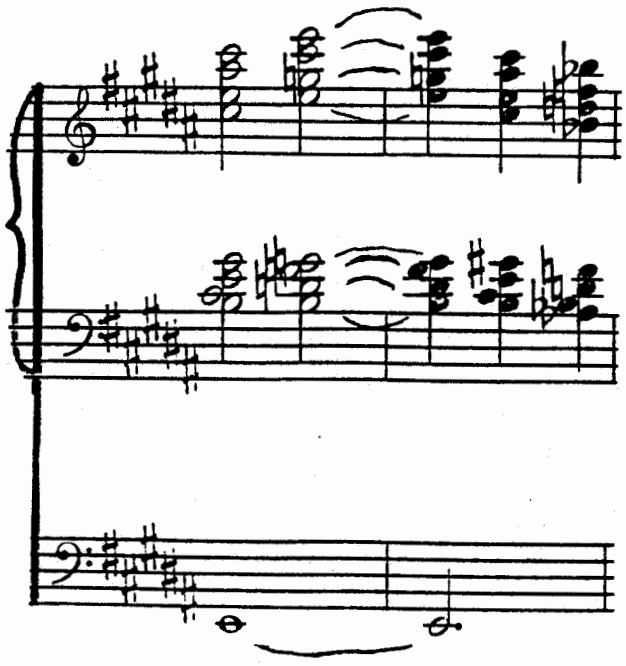
Example 10. "Le Verbe," mm. 31-32;



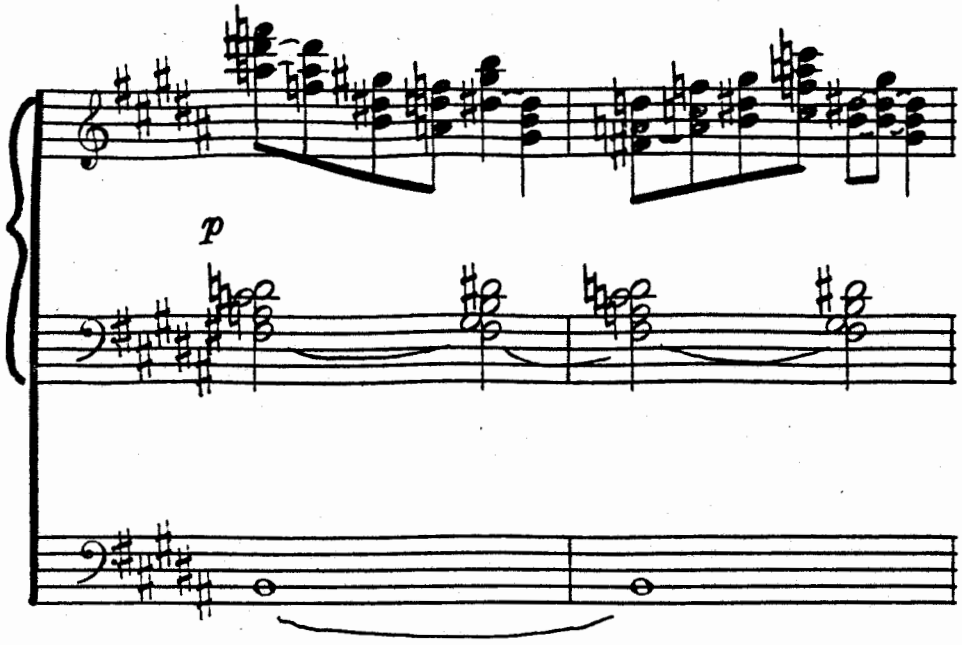
Example 11. "Les Enfants de Dieu," mm. 1-2.



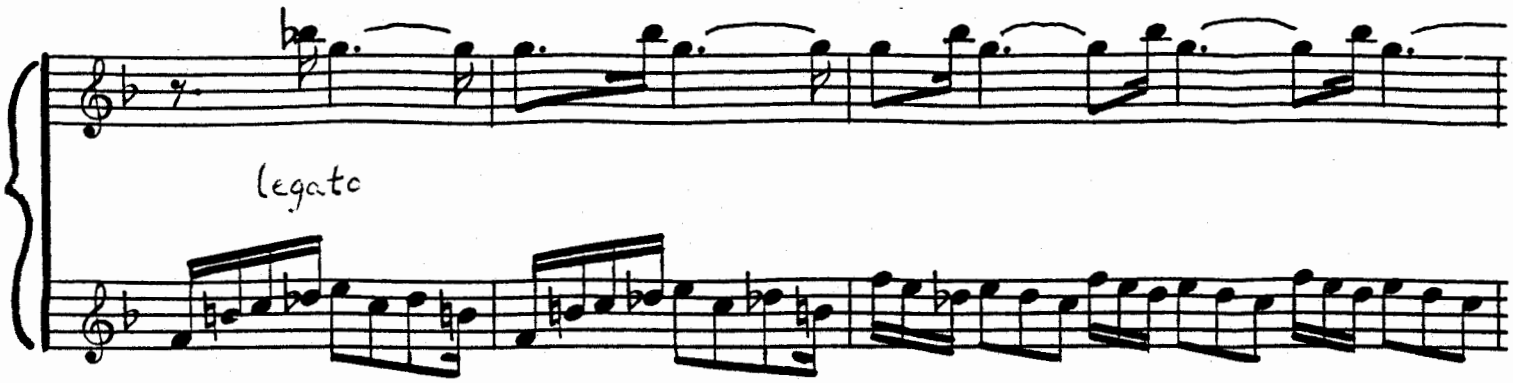
Example 12. "Les Enfants de Dieu," mm. 27-28.



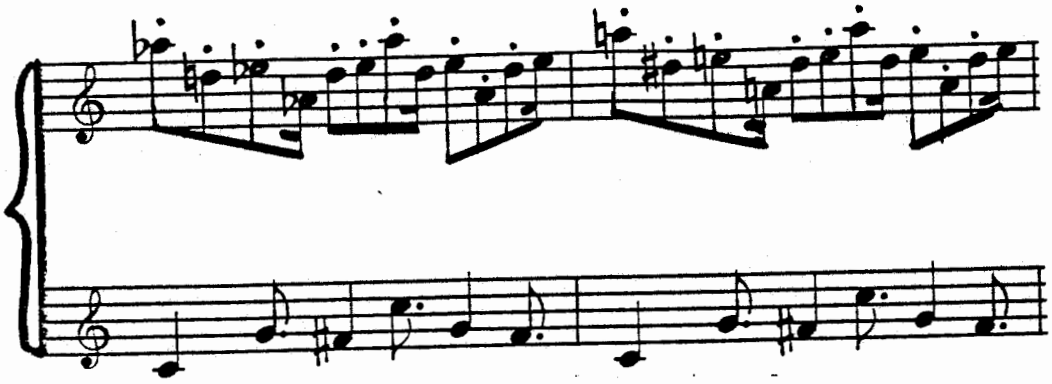
Example 13. "Les Enfants de Dieu," mm. 39-40.



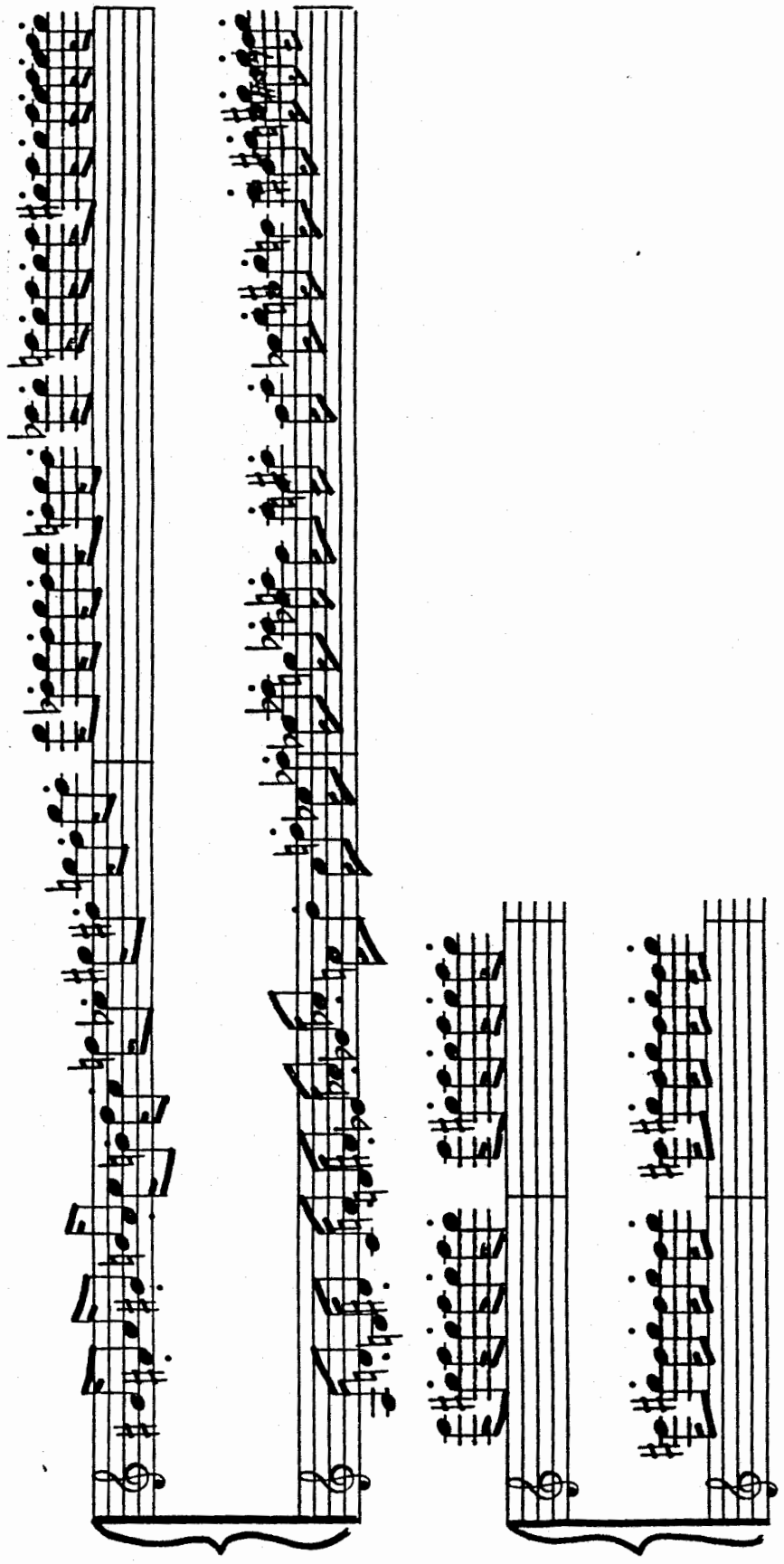
Example 14. "Les Anges," mm. 1-3.



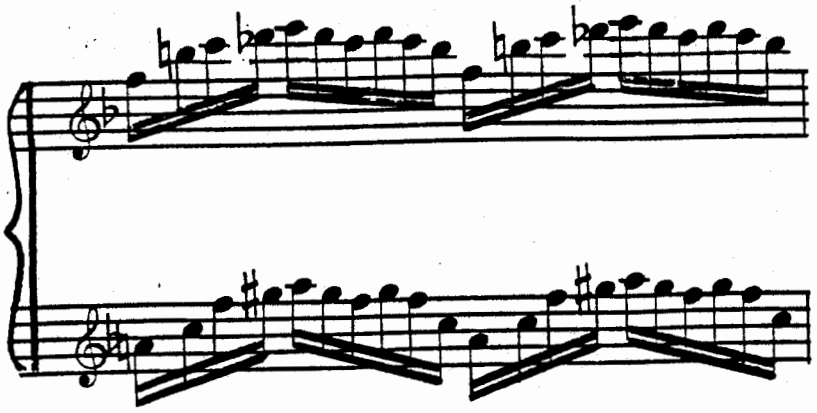
Example 15. "Les Anges," mm. 36-37.



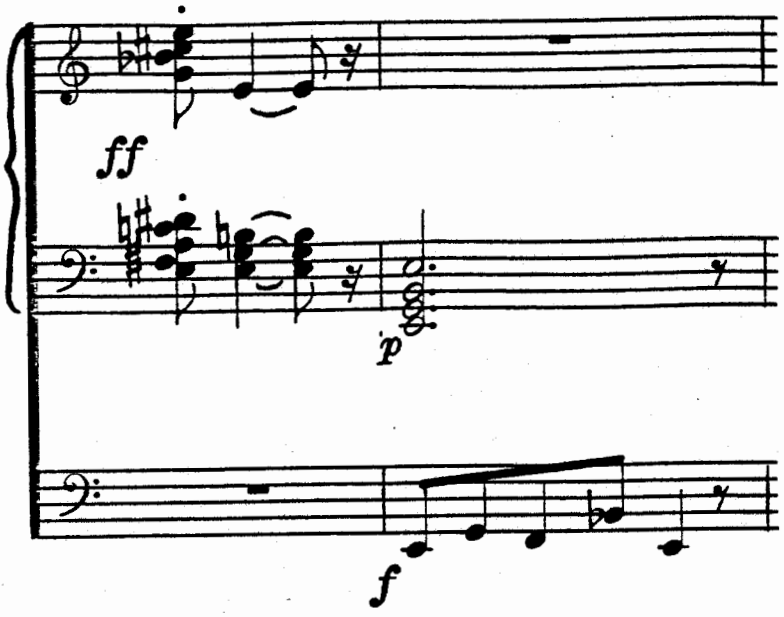
Example 16. "Les Anges," mm. 42-45.



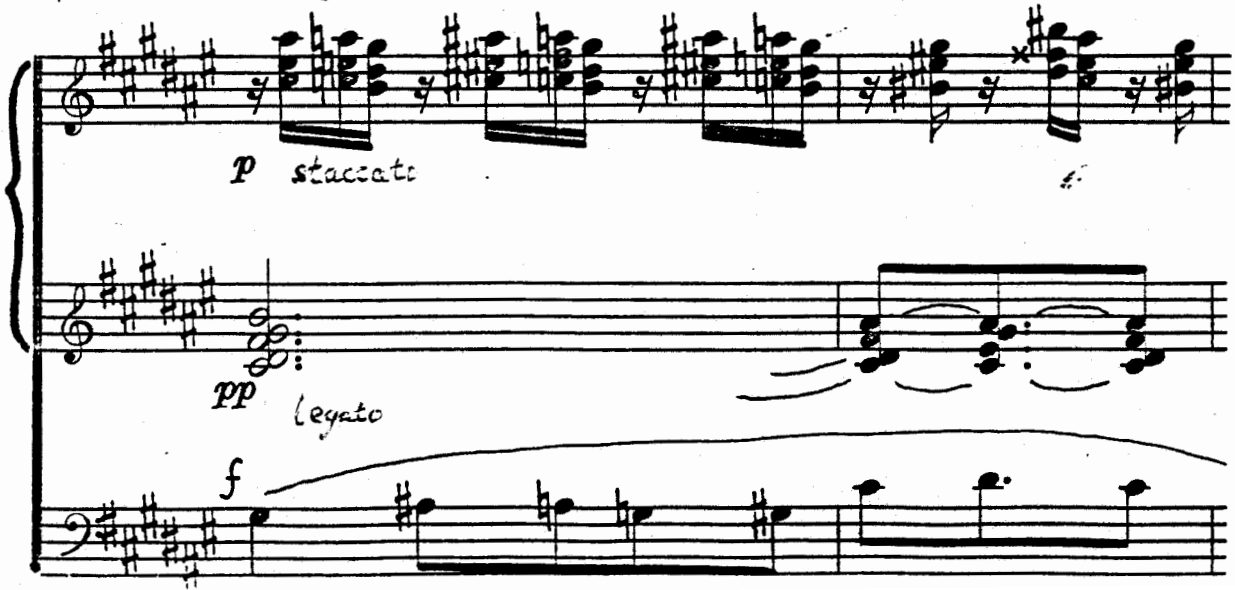
Example 17. "Les Anges," m. 49.



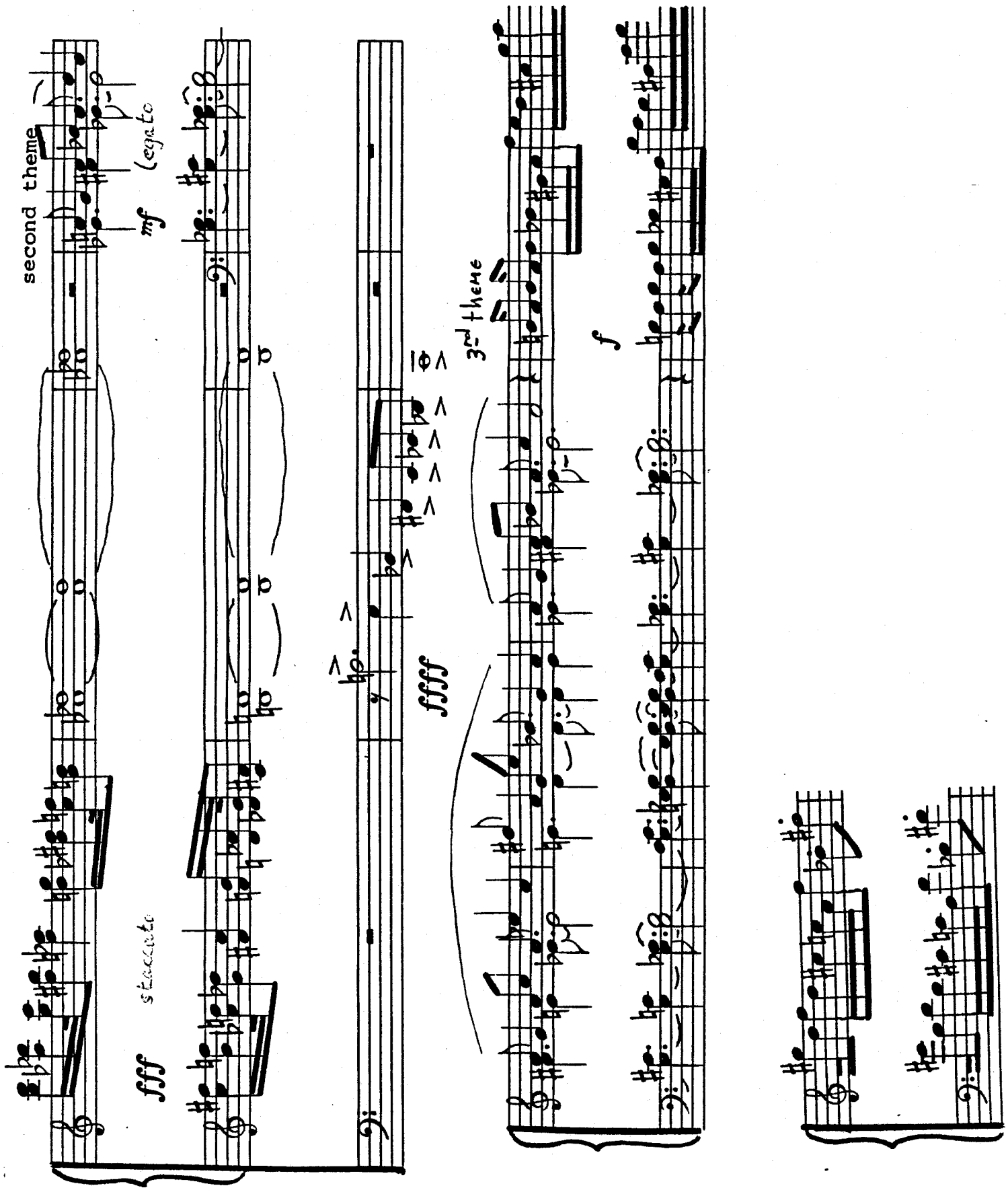
Example 18. "Jésus accepte la souffrance," mm. 1-2.



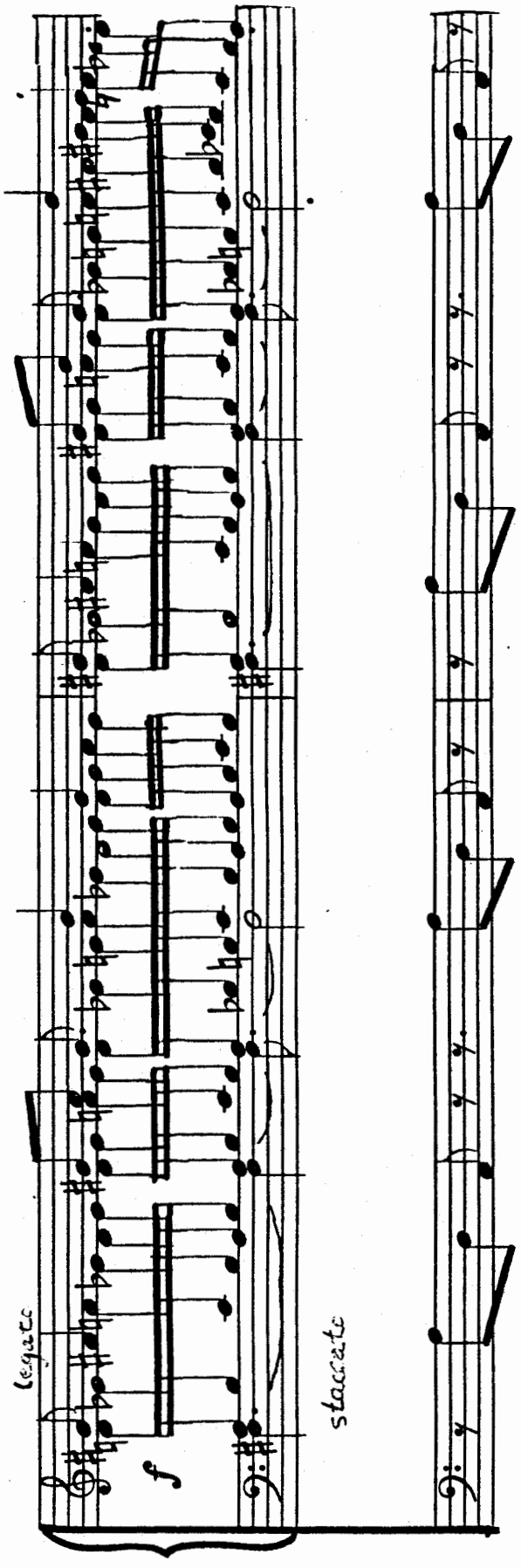
Example 19. "Les Mages," mm. 1-2.



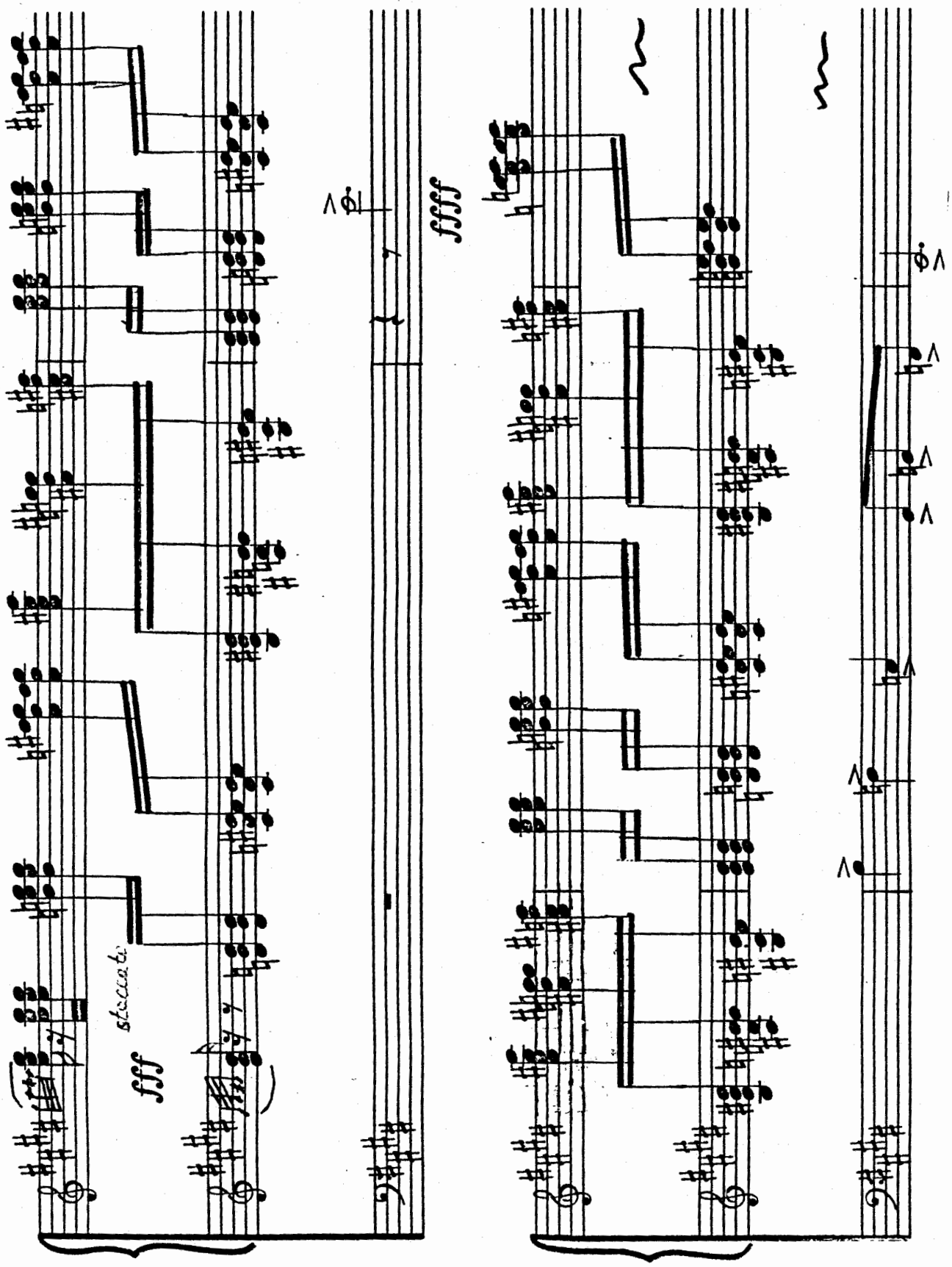
Example 20. "Dieu parmi nous," mm. 1-8.



Example 21. "Dieu parmi nous," mm. 31-32.



Example 22. "Dieu parmi nous," mm. 59-62.



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: aabccaabd (bracket represents pedal)

IV. C section: abbcdc'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

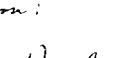
VI. monosectional: 4+2+4+2+2+2+2+2+1+3+4+1+3+3+3+3+4+1+2+2+2+2+2+1+2+3+3

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) raga -  justification of added values

barlines show duration of accidentals, not metric pulses.

2) non-retrogradable 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.

modes of limited transposition

bird song melodies

melodic respiration (term of Stravinsky), can be expanded by simply adding at points between beginning & conclusion

3) melody & harmony -

Olivier Messiaen (b. 1908)

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

b. tribute to him that his pupils haven't merely imitated his style, but has gone his own way.

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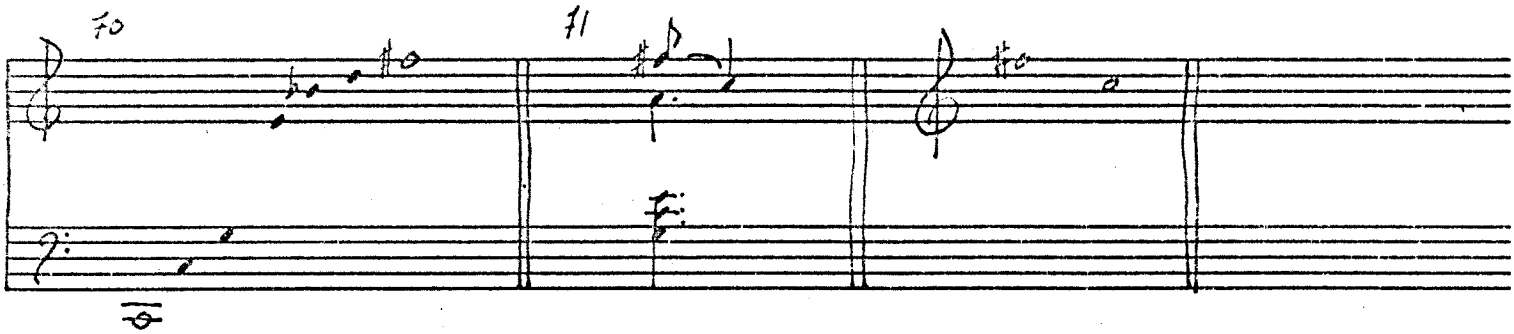
CHAPTER I

The Charm of Impossibilities and the Relation of the Different Subject Matters

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

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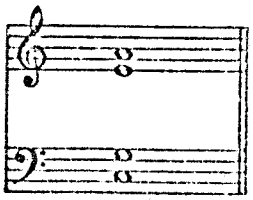

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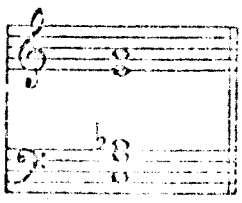

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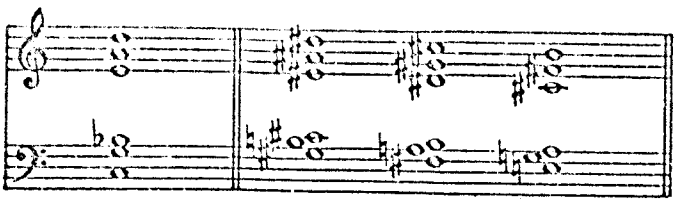

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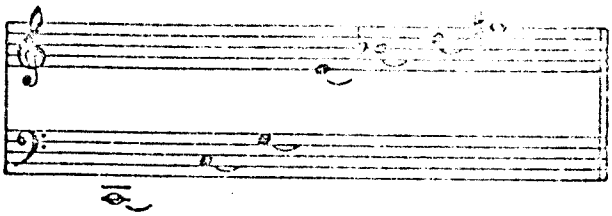

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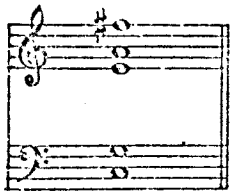

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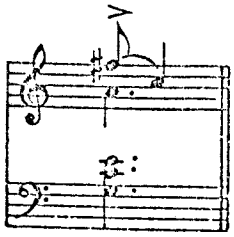

Chord on the dominant

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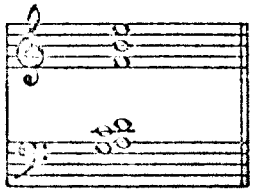

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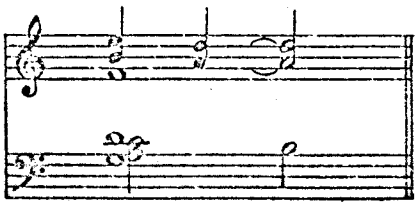

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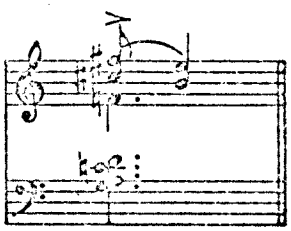
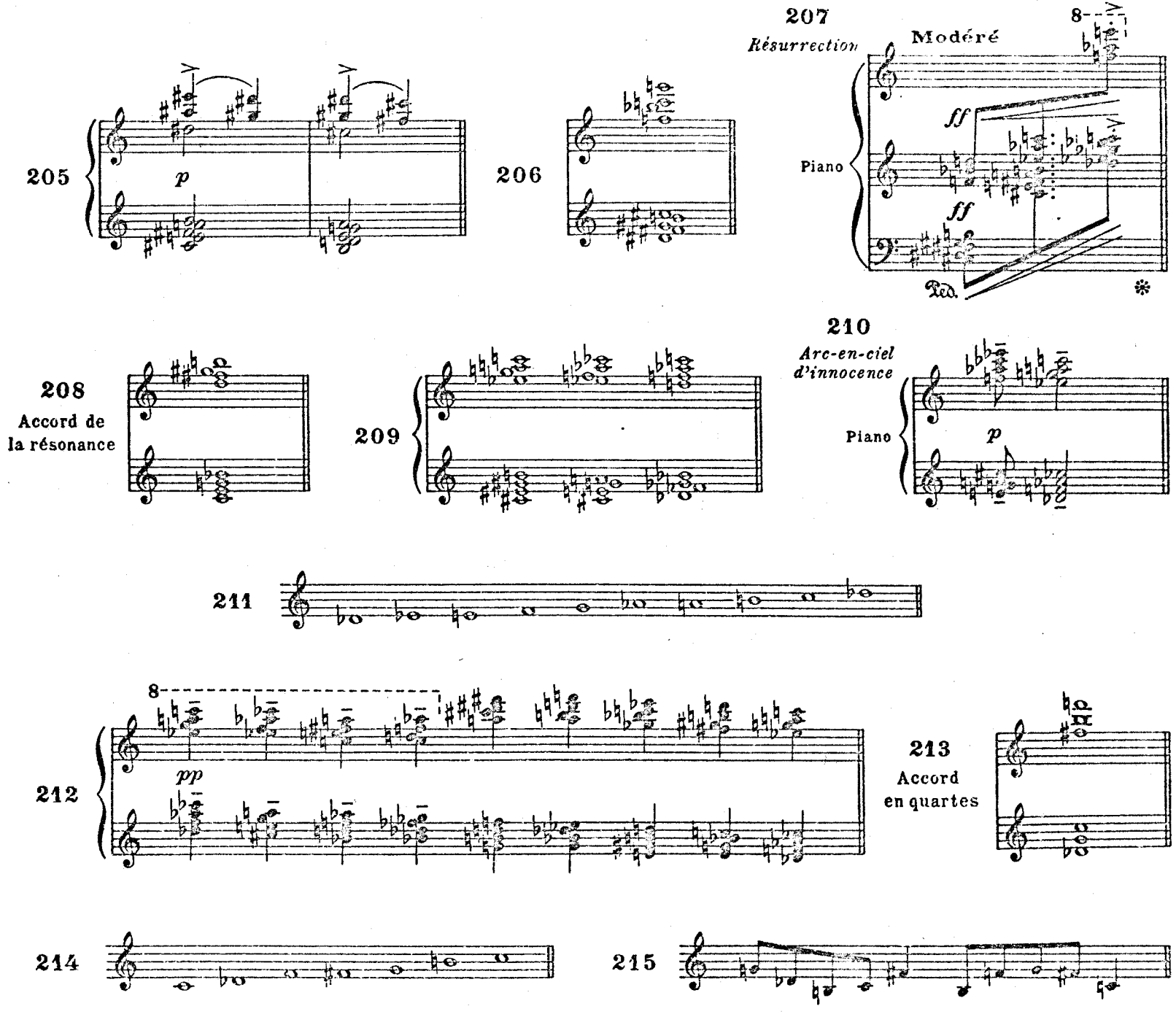
Accord sur
dominante
appoggiaturé




205
p
206
207
Résurrection
Modéré
8
Piano
ff
ff
Ped.
208
Accord de
la résonance
209
210
Arc-en-ciel
d'innocence
Piano
p
211
212
8
pp
213
Accord
en quartes
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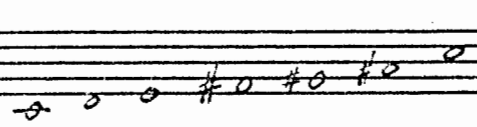
Modes of limited transpositions.

1.



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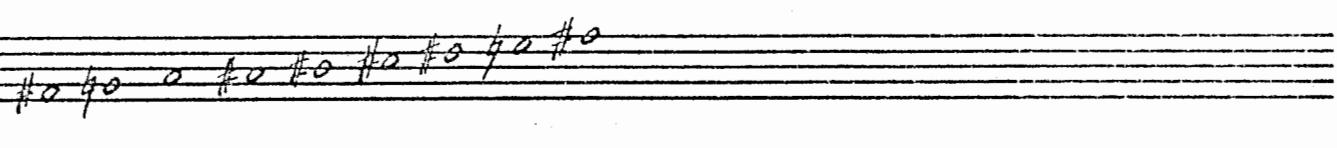

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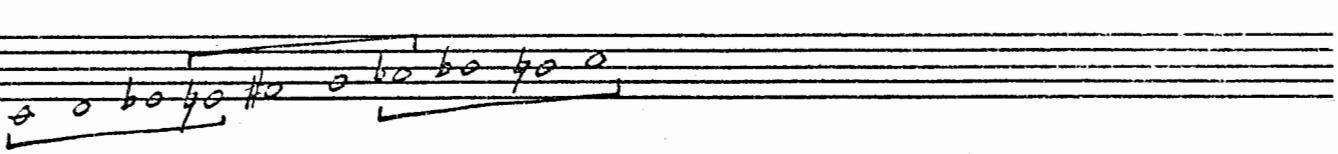

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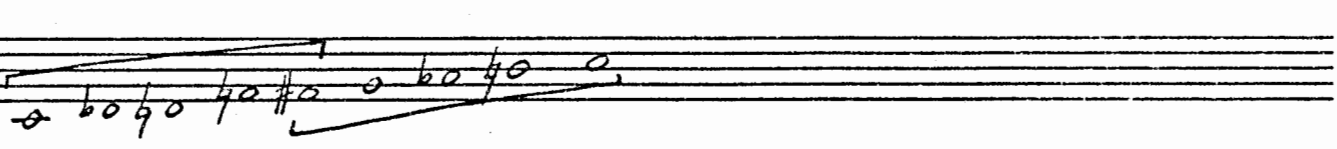

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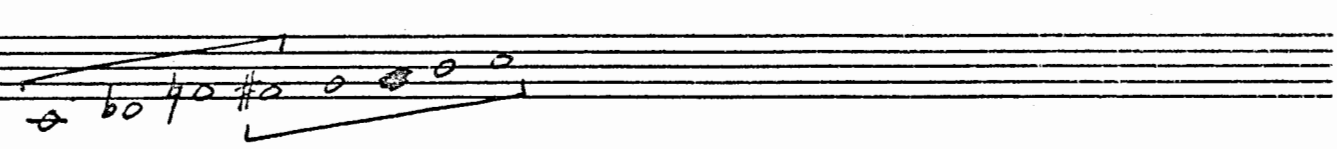

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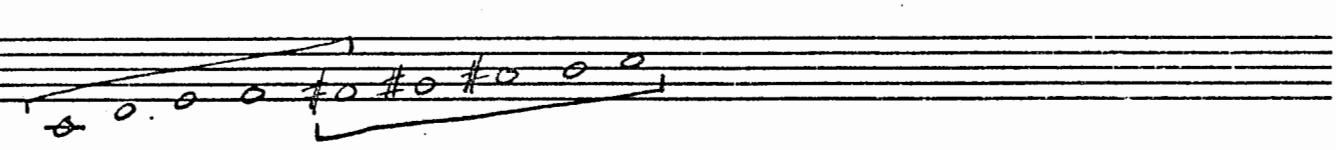

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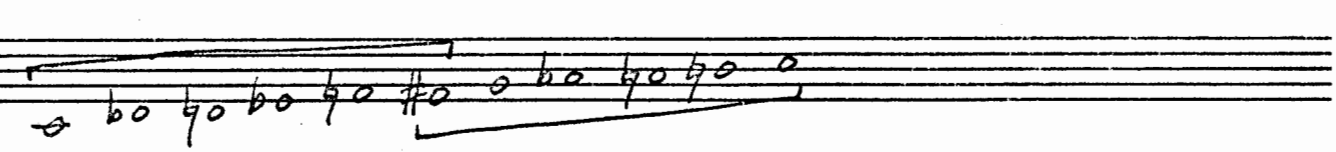


MUSIC 675

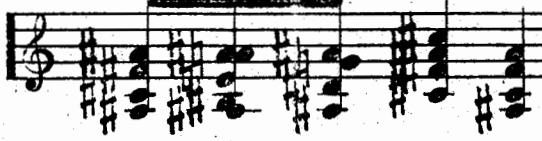
Dr. Mathiesen

OLIVIER MESSIAEN

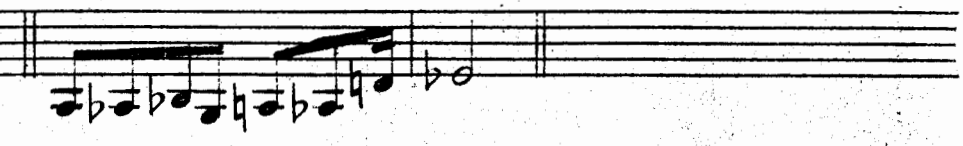
Thematic & modal materials

Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus (1944)

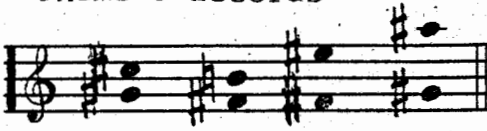
Thème de Dieu



Thème de l'étoile et de la Croix



Thème d'accords



MODES OF LIMITED TRANSPOSITION

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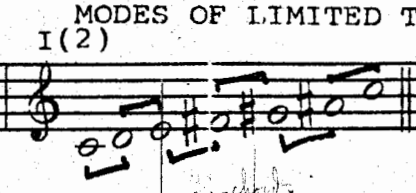

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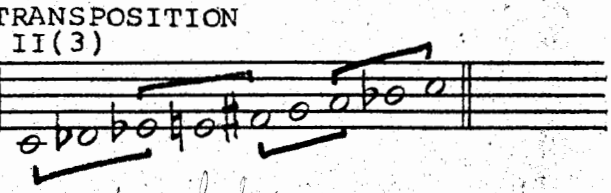
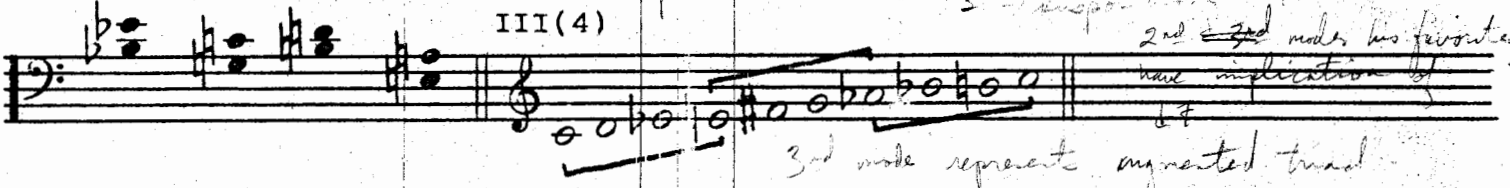


2 transpositions

3 transpositions

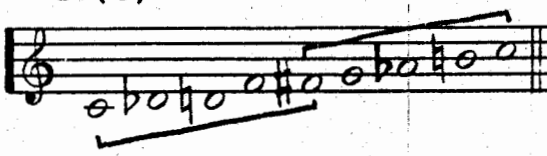
III(4)



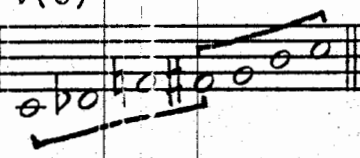
2nd ~~3rd~~ mode has favorite have implication of

3rd mode represents augmented triad

IV(6)



V(6)



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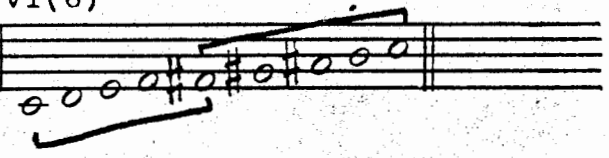
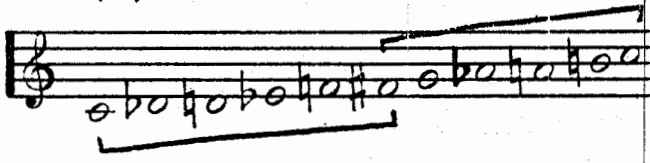
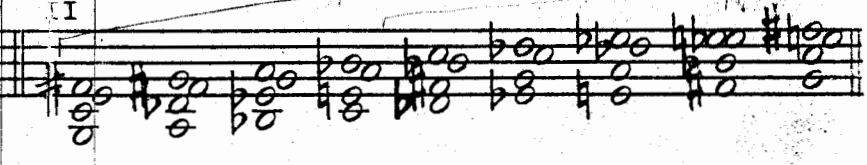


VII(6)



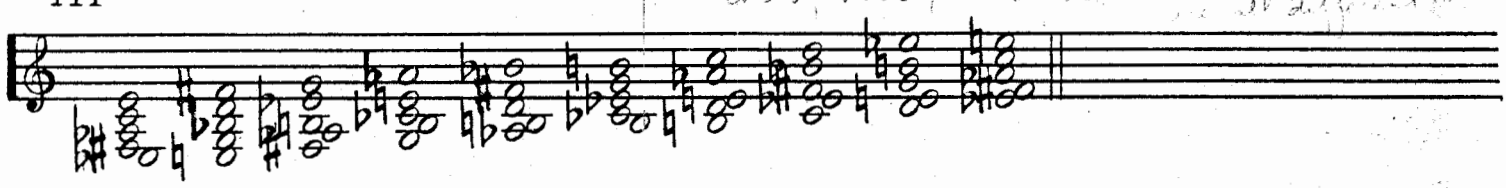
CHORD ROWS CITED BY MESSIAEN

I

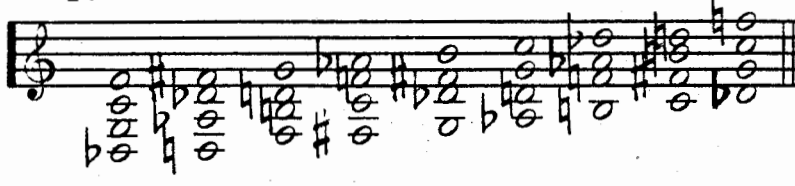


lots of variety in chords between intervals

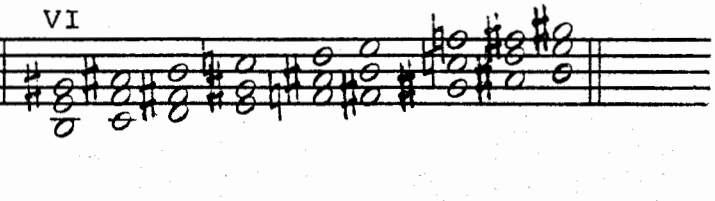
III



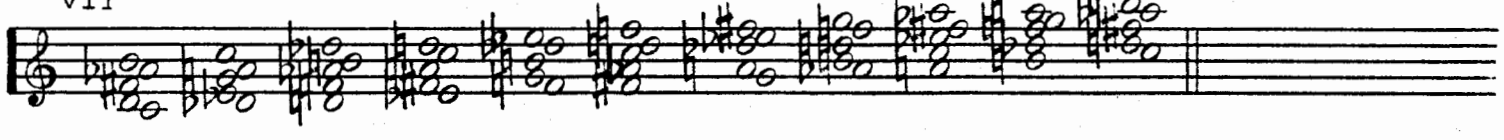
IV



VI



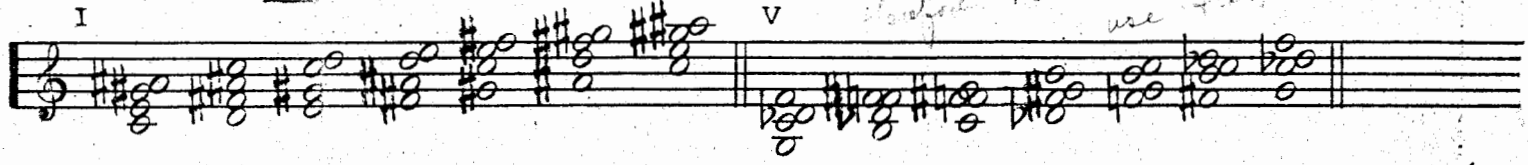
VII



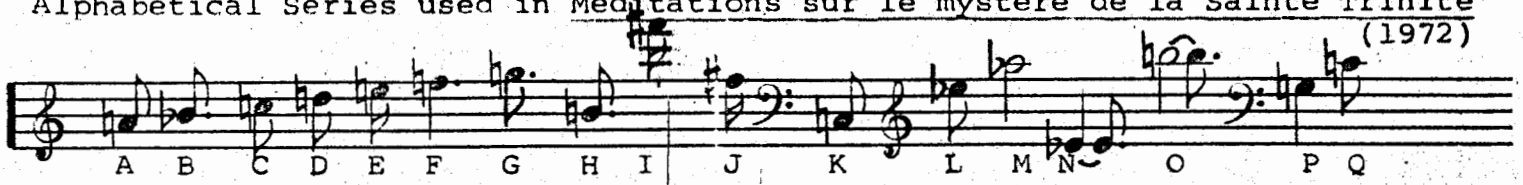
Sometimes he mixes melodic & harmonic modes, but not very often

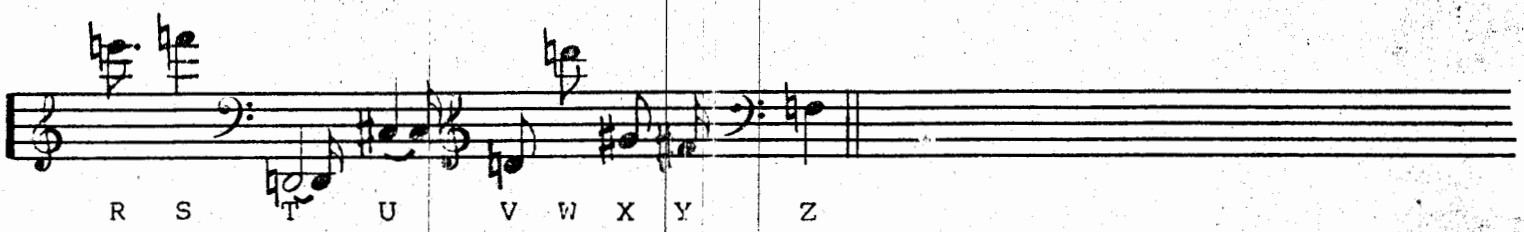
In 1st row all are the same 5th intervals are too closely spaced therefore Messiaen prefers not to use them

CHORD ROWS NOT CITED BY MESSIAEN

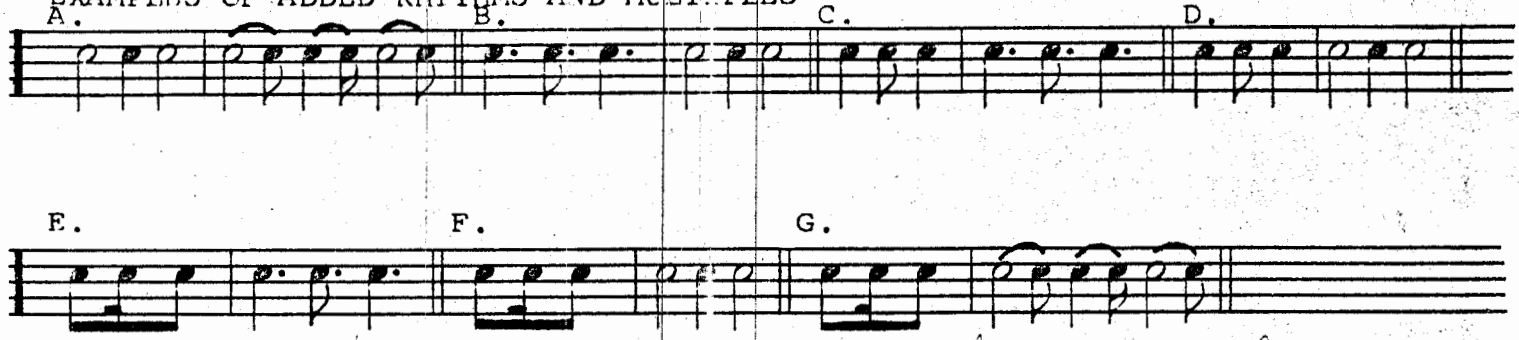


Alphabetical Series used in Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité (1972)





EXAMPLES OF ADDED RHYTHMS AND MULTIPLES



rhythms match modes in that they are completely symmetrical — they are non-retrogradable

rhythmic pedal - a pattern he sets up & uses repeatedly
usually 4 pulses

rhythmic canon - a sequence of pulses w/ 16 16th's
against this a pattern of notes he places
another that is different - similar to talea &
color ideas of isorhythm.

Bird song - birds give "voice of birds"
appear @ climactic points
appears in all the organ works

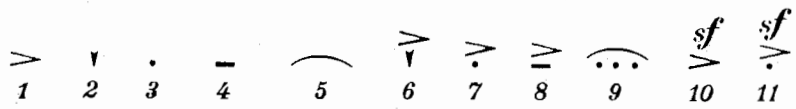
form basis is an extramusical association - subtitles or
text - ex. God Among Us. has 3 elements -
represent 3 parts of Trinity -
he unifies pieces thru these extramusical
associations

played 2nd mvt. of Ascension Suite

Le Verbe - last section uses a "breathing" melody w/ a characteristic
rhythmic pattern that marks the phrases.

Dieu Parmi Nous. 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: 

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

Intensités: *ppp pp p mf f ff fff*
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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.

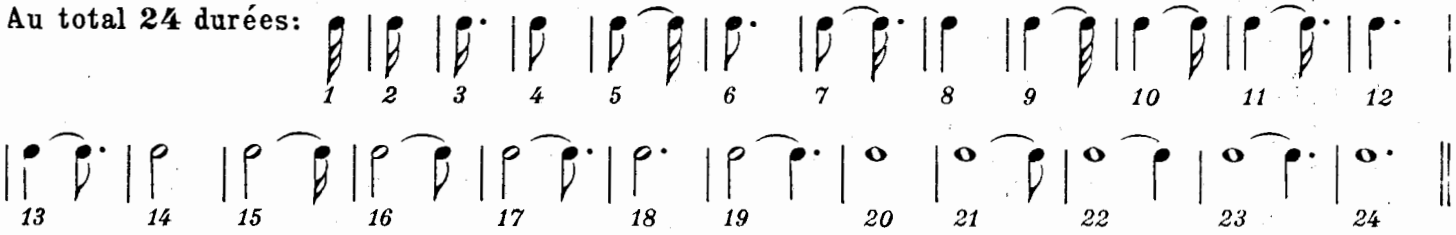
Valeurs:

Division I: durées chromatiques de **1** à **12** (etc.)

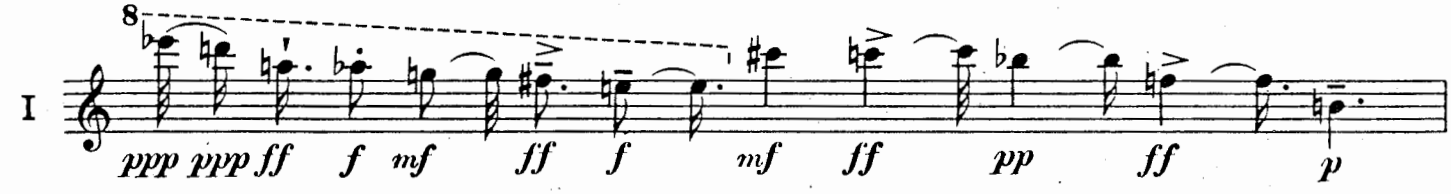
Division II: durées chromatiques de **1** à **12** (etc.)

Division III: durées chromatiques de **1** à **12** (etc.)

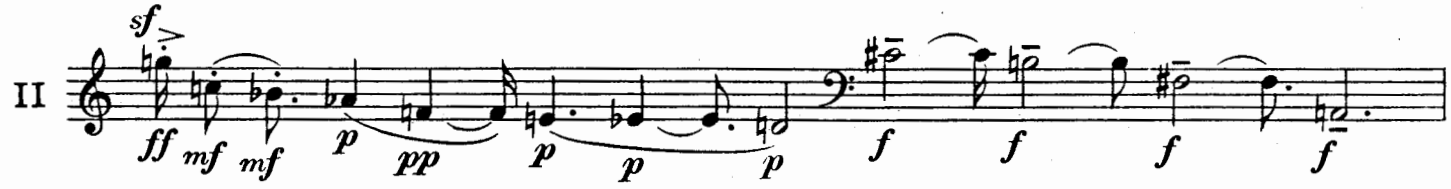
Au total 24 durées:



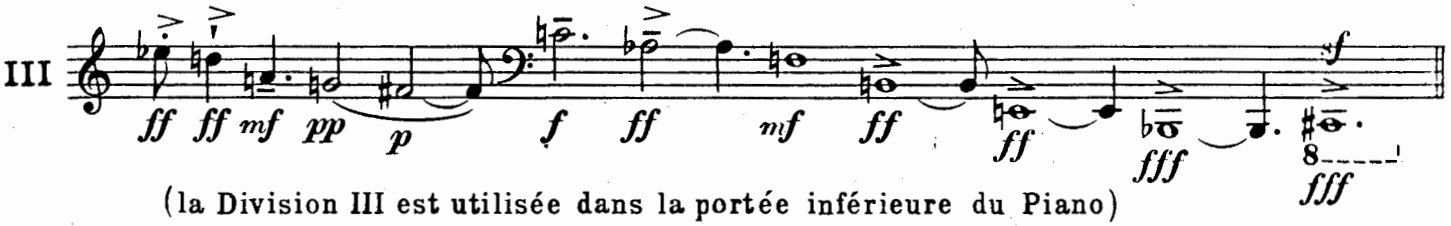
Voici le mode:



(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)