

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

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

Musical notation for Example 1, showing a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a sharp sign above the final note. The bass staff contains a harmonic accompaniment.

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

Musical notation for Example 2, consisting of three staves of music in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals, with some notes marked with a sharp sign.

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

mode 2

Musical notation for Example 3, mode 2, showing a scale in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The scale consists of whole notes with various accidentals.

mode 3

Musical notation for Example 3, mode 3, showing a scale in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The scale consists of whole notes with various accidentals.

Example 3 cont'd.

mode 4                      mode 5

mode 6                      mode 7

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.

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with three staves. The first system (measures 16-18) includes the following markings: *f* *legato* in the upper staff, *staccato* in the middle staff, *p* in the lower staff, and *mf* at the end of the system. The second system (measures 19-21) includes the marking *mf* at the beginning. The notation is dense, featuring many triplets and complex rhythmic patterns. The piano part is written in treble and bass clefs, while the upper staff is in treble clef.

Example 7. "Les Bergers," section themes.

A section

Musical notation for the A section, consisting of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system features a piano (pp) part in the upper voice and a mezzo-forte (mf) part in the lower voice. The second system continues the texture with similar dynamics. The music is characterized by dense, block-like chords and rhythmic patterns.

B section

Musical notation for the B section, featuring a mezzo-forte (mf) piano accompaniment. The upper voice contains a melodic line with a wavy line indicating a continuation or a specific articulation. The lower voice provides harmonic support.

C section

Musical notation for the C section, consisting of two systems of piano accompaniment. The music features a melodic line in the upper voice and a supporting line in the lower voice, with various articulations and dynamics.

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

*f, staccato*

*mf*

*fff*

*fff*

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

*ff*  
*f*

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

*pp*  
*legato*  
*staccato*

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

*mf*  
*staccato*

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

Musical score for Example 12, measures 27-28. The score is written for piano and consists of three staves. The top two staves are grouped by a brace on the left and represent the right and left hands of the piano. The bottom staff is a separate line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music features complex chordal textures with many accidentals. The top staff has a treble clef, and the middle and bottom staves have bass clefs. A slur is present under the first two notes of the bottom staff.

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

Musical score for Example 13, measures 39-40. The score is written for piano and consists of three staves. The top two staves are grouped by a brace on the left and represent the right and left hands of the piano. The bottom staff is a separate line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music features complex chordal textures with many accidentals. The top staff has a treble clef, and the middle and bottom staves have bass clefs. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is placed above the first measure of the middle staff. A slur is present under the first two notes of the bottom staff.



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

Musical notation for Example 14, measures 1-3 of "Les Anges". The score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and contains a melodic line with a 7-measure rest at the beginning, followed by a series of eighth notes with slurs. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with eighth notes and slurs. The word "legato" is written above the lower staff.

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

Musical notation for Example 15, measures 36-37 of "Les Anges". The score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and contains a complex melodic line with many beamed notes and slurs. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with eighth notes and slurs.

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

The image displays a musical score for two systems of staves, likely representing a piano and a violin or flute. The notation is highly complex, featuring a dense arrangement of notes, rests, and accidentals. The first system consists of two staves, with the upper staff containing a complex melodic line and the lower staff providing a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system also consists of two staves, with the upper staff continuing the melodic line and the lower staff providing a rhythmic accompaniment. The notation is written in a style that suggests a high level of technical difficulty, with many beamed notes and intricate rhythmic patterns. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is not explicitly shown but appears to be 3/4 or 4/4 based on the note values. The overall impression is one of a highly technical and expressive musical passage.

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.

The musical score is written for piano and organ. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a single bass clef staff. The second system includes a grand staff and a single bass clef staff. The score is marked with various dynamics and articulations: *fff* (fortissimo), *staccato*, *mf* (mezzo-forte), *legato*, *ff*, *ffiff*, and *f*. The piece features three distinct themes: the first theme is marked *fff* and *staccato*; the second theme is marked *mf* and *legato*; and the third theme is marked *ffiff* and *f*. The organ part is characterized by a series of chords and melodic lines, often with a *staccato* or *legato* articulation. The piano part provides a harmonic and melodic accompaniment, with various dynamics and articulations. The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a time signature of 4/4.

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

The musical score is presented on a grand staff. The left hand part, written in the bass clef, is marked *legato* and *f*. It consists of a series of chords and single notes, with a prominent sixteenth-note pattern in the lower register. The right hand part, written in the treble clef, is marked *staccato* and features a similar sixteenth-note pattern in the upper register. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system covering measures 31 and 32, and the second system continuing the right hand part.

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

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 59-62) features a grand piano accompaniment. The left hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, marked *staccato* and *fff*. The right hand plays a melodic line with a *fff* dynamic. The second system (mm. 63-64) continues the piano part with a *ffff* dynamic. The right hand part includes wavy lines indicating tremolos. The score is in G major and 3/4 time.

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: abbc'd'd'b'"amen" (ABC)
- V. A section:  $\overline{2+2+3}+\overline{2+2+3}+\overline{2+2+2+6}$  (ABC)  
B section: 2+2+2+2+2+2  
C section: 5+6
- VI. monosectional:  $\overline{4+2+4+2+2+2+2+2+1}+\overline{3+4+1}+\overline{3+3+3+3+4+1}+\overline{2+2+2+2+1}+\overline{2+3+3}$
- 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 rhythmic) 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").

70

The added sixth and  
Added augmented fourth

183

184

185

186

187

188

Chord on the dominant

201

202

203  
Accord sur  
dominante  
appoggiaturé

205 *p*

206

207 *Résurrection* *Modéré* *Piano*

208  
Accord de  
la résonance

209

210  
*Arc-en-ciel  
d'innocence*

*Piano*

211

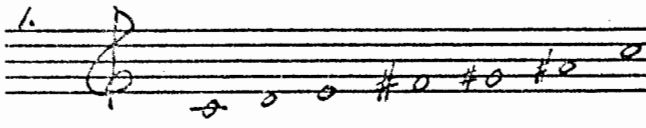
212 *pp*

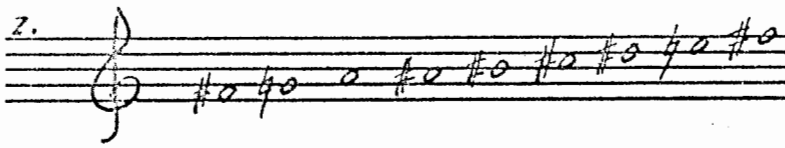
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en quarts

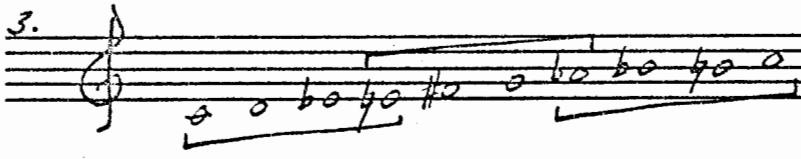
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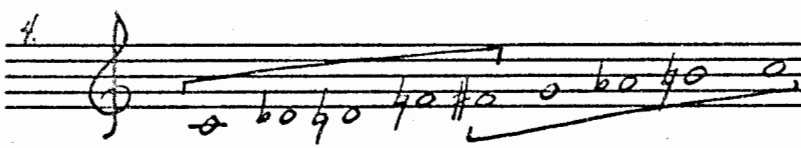
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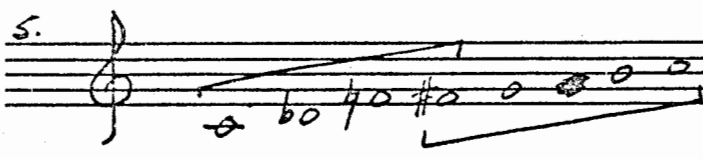
# Modes of limited transpositions.

1. 

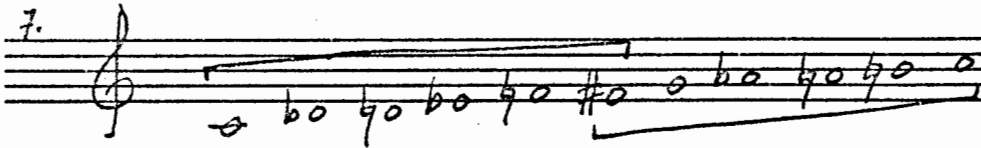
2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

6. 

7. 

Blank musical staves for additional practice or notation.



# 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 TRANSPPOSITION

I (2)

II (3)

III (4)

3 tri-chords

2nd & 3rd modes his favorite

have implication of

♭7

3rd mode repeats augmented triad

IV (6)

V (6)

VI (6)

VII (6)

CHORD ROWS CITED BY MESSIAEN

II

III

lots of variety in chords because integral - all different

IV

VI

VII

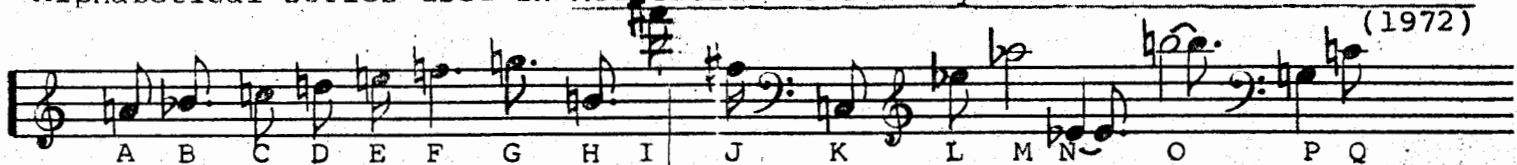
*Sometimes no more melodic & harmonic modes, but not very often*

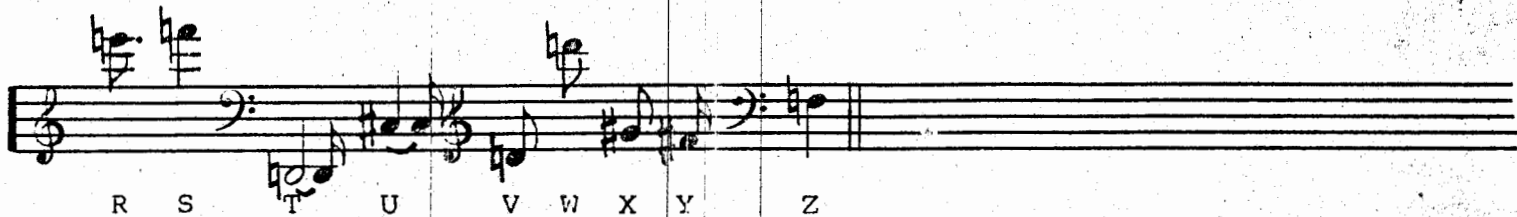
*In 1st 5th notes all are the same intervals are too closely spaced. Messiaen prefer not to use them*

CHORD ROWS NOT CITED BY MESSIAEN

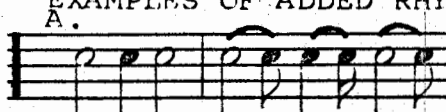
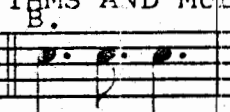
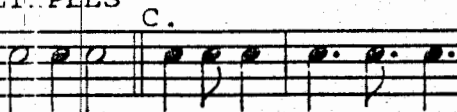
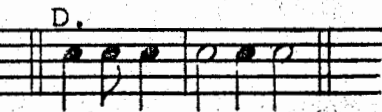
I  V

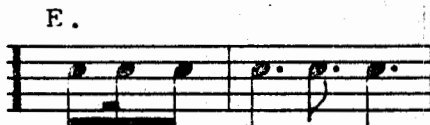
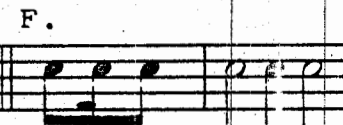
Alphabetical Series used in Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité (1972)

 A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q

 R S T U V W X Y Z

EXAMPLES OF ADDED RHYTHMS AND MULTIPLES

A.  B.  C.  D. 

E.  F.  G. 

*rhythmic match made 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 16ths  
against this a pattern of notes he places  
another that is different - similar to taken &  
color idea of motet form.

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

form: basis is an extramusical association - subtitles or  
text - ex. God Among Us. has 3 elements -  
represent 3 parts of Trinity -  
he implies pieces that have extramusical  
association

played 2nd mtg of Ascension Suite

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

Dieu Parmi Vous. 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:  $\gt$   $\vee$   $\cdot$   $-$   $\frown$   $\gtrsim$   $\gtrsim$   $\gtrsim$   $\dots$   $\overset{sf}{\gtrsim}$   $\overset{sf}{\gtrsim}$   
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11  
 (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:

I  *ppp ppp ff f mf ff f mf ff pp ff p*

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

II  *sf ff mf mf p pp p p f f f f*

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

III  *ff ff mf pp p f ff mf ff ff fff f fff*

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