

MESSIAEN (11/09)

1. Leftovers: Shostakovich, excerpts from *Testimony*
2. Messiaen: Biographical details: Kevin Krsulich
3. *Quartet for the End of Time* ([note error] 1941, publ. 1942)
4. *Oiseaux Exotiques* ([note error] 1956, published 1959)
5. if time: *Quatre études de rythme, 2: Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* (1949)

Messiaen, *Quartet*: Style and theory

reading:

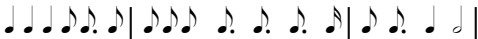
Anthony Pople, *Messiaen, Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997)

Rebecca Rischin, *For the end of Time: The Story of the Messiaen quartet* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell, 2003)


a. History

- i. Written in “Stalag VIIIA” at Görlitz (east of Dresden)
- ii. Messiaen was captured but retained a collection of pocket scores (including the Brandenburg Concertos of Bach and Berg’s *Lyric Suite*)
- iii. Other members of the prison camp: a violinist, cellist, and clarinetist.
 1. Hindemith had written for this same instrumentation in 1938, but owing to the war, it had not been heard about by Messiaen. i.e., independent discovery
 2. Pierrot ensemble minus flute.
 3. Only first, sixth, seventh and part of the second movements use all four instruments. Practical reasons (sixth can be rehearsed without the piano; no piano available until late in the composition)
- iv. Myths and new research:
 1. Intermède composed first. Well...
 2. Cello had three strings: hmm...
 3. Just happened to have these musicians at the prison camp: actually, clarinetist and violinist in same company with Messiaen and the clarinet movement was written before imprisonment.
 4. Cello movement reworking of *Fêtes des belles eaux* for *ondes Martenots* (1937) [Rischin, p. 19]; Violin movement from *Diplyque* [4] (1930)
 5. 5000 at premiere – probably 500

b. Isorhythm

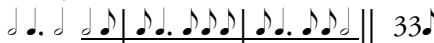
- i. Medieval (13th–15th c.) technique
- ii. Repetition of rhythm (often) independent of the melody
- iii. Cello and Piano of mvmt. 1
- iv. Piano: 

c. Rhythms and Non-retrogradable rhythms in particular

- i. 
- ii. Rhythmic structure from Greek meter and from Indian thought (*Sangitaratnakara*)
- iii. Freed Rhythmic music from being wholly dependent on Stravinsky
- iv. Adding a “point” to a note or removing one. etc.
- v. Emphasis on prime numbers.

- d. Synæsthesia
- i. Linkage among different senses, usually sight [colors] and hearing
- e. Spiritual dimensions
- i. One of the most important Catholic (or even overtly Christian) composers of the mid to late 20th century
 - ii. *La Nativité du Seigneur*
 - iii. *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus*
 - iv. Organ works
 - 1. Messiaen is the most important organ composers of the 20th century
 - v. Quatuor: program music inspired by Revelation:
 - 1. 1 *Liturgie de cristal*:

Between three and four in the morning, the awakening of birds: a solo blackbird or nightingale improvises, surrounded by a shimmer of sound, by a halo of trills lost very high in the trees. Transpose this onto a religious plane and you have the harmonious silence of Heaven.
 - 2. 3 *Abîme des oiseaux*:

Clarinet solo. The abyss is Time, with its sorrows and its weariness. The birds are the opposite of Time; they are our desire for light, for stars, for rainbows and joyous songs!
- f. Octatonic scales and “modes of limited transposition”
- i. Octatonic seen in Stravinsky, Mussorgsky, Bartók, others.
 - ii. Messiaen in the '40s, the most prolific user
 - iii. B-C-D-E_b-F-F#-G#-A (or a transposition or inversion of this scale)
 - iv. Mode of limited transposition – sets of pitches that cannot be transposed 12 times to give twelve different pitch sets
 - v. Employ some degree of symmetry
 - 1. Mode 1: Whole tone scale (2 forms)
 - 2. Mode 2: Octatonic scale [beginning with halfstep] (3 forms)
 - 3. Mode 3: All notes except the augmented triad (4 forms)
 - 4. Modes 4–7 less commonly used
- g. 1. “Liturgie de cristal”
- i. Cello: 15 note melody repeated continuously. Touch fourth harmonics (bottom note + two octaves); whole tone scale (Mode 1) minus A_b.  33
 - ii. Piano: Isorhythm: Seventeen note rhythmic set with a 29 note chord set.
 - iii. Violin: five patterns and their variants. mm. 3–4, m. 5, p. 2 m.5, p. 2 m. 8, and the new pattern on p. 6.
 - iv. Clarinet: birdsong, freedom from barlines
- h. 6. Dance of Frenzy for the Seven Trumpets (who announce the Apocalypse)
- i. Opening, mode 6 [or mode1 minus D and plus passing tone B), quickly moves to mode 2 (m. 5)
 - ii. rehearsal F: non-retrogradable rhythms.
 - iii. rehearsal I: technique of “Augmentation of amphimacric rhythm,” mm. 4–5.
 - iv. rehearsal O: coda:
- i. 8: Louange à l’Immortalité de Jésus: E-major, cello solo.