

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Messiaen and Plainchant**

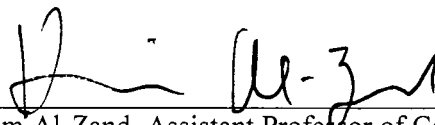
by

**Jason M. Hardink**

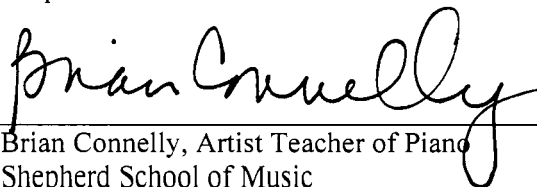
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## **Abstract**

Messiaen and Plainchant

by

Jason Hardink

This paper discusses the varying levels of influence that Gregorian chant exerted on the music of Olivier Messiaen. The religious symbolism of Catholic theology dictated the programmatic elements of Messiaen's works, and the music of the Roman Catholic liturgy functioned as an important symbol within his compositional language. This paper offers both a comprehensive discussion of the relationship between Gregorian chant and the music of Messiaen, as well as an examination of important chant paraphrases within his compositions.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Messiaen's connection to the Roman Catholic tradition of Gregorian chant exerted a profound and powerful influence over his creative life. His exposure to this music runs deep, for as a devout Catholic living in Paris, he would have heard plainchant in church every week. As the organist of *l'Eglise de la Trinité*, he responded to the chant repertory in a creative manner with organ interludes, often improvised, during certain parts of church services (communion, prelude, postlude, etc.).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Messiaen's education as an organ student of both Marcel Dupré and Maurice Duruflé gave him a background in the tradition of improvising pieces based on chants, chorales, and hymns.

It is no surprise that a French Catholic composer with a strong interest in theology and symbolism would find himself attracted to the ancient tradition of the sung liturgy. In portraying the mysteries of Catholicism, specific liturgical chants serve as theological symbols. A reference to one of these symbols in a piece of music does more than convey the serious nature of the subject matter or its ritualistic connotations for worship; a musical allusion to a specific chant provides a relationship to a written text, whether biblical or strictly liturgical. In addition to the important textual correlations that are possible, a chant melody's relationship to its text has always been viewed in a mystical sense by those who practice plainchant according to the principals of the nineteenth-century revival at the Solesmes monastery. The purpose of Gregorian chant within this

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<sup>1</sup> Claude Samuel, *Olivier Messiaen: Music and Color, Conversations with Claude Samuel* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1994), p.25.

tradition is to “uplift the soul and enlighten the mind.”<sup>2</sup> Singing the texts of the liturgy represents the highest form of prayer, and it is within this context that Messiaen hoped to achieve meaning in his compositions.<sup>3</sup> It is only through a musical interpretation that the texts of these prayers communicate their utmost spirituality.

Messiaen is part of a long lineage of organists and composers who have used chant within their compositions. Despite this heritage, Messiaen composed very little music intended to be performed liturgically. He regarded the liturgy and theology as subjects to be explored in music intended for the concert hall, not a church service. In fact, he viewed Gregorian Chant as the only true liturgical music. Messiaen writes,

Music can adapt itself to what is sacred in different ways. There is first, liturgical music. This follows the structure of the Office strictly. It finds its true meaning only in the context of the Office. Viewed from this perspective, there is only one kind of liturgical music: Gregorian Chant.<sup>4</sup>

My initial design for this paper was to simply discuss either direct quotes or more abstract evocations of plainchant within Messiaen’s music. French organists of the early twentieth century frequently composed and improvised pieces built upon chant melodies. Based on my knowledge of this repertory, I expected to see two characteristics in Messiaen’s use of chant. First, in music designed to celebrate a specific event in the Christian calendar, one finds obvious correlations to chant melodies from the Mass of that day. For example, in a piece whose subject matter is the Nativity, a composer would undoubtedly use chant melodies from the Mass for Christmas. Messiaen does this occasionally, but the theological symbolism in his music is usually more sophisticated.

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<sup>2</sup> Justine Bayard Ward, *Gregorian Chant Practicum* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), p. x.

<sup>3</sup> Ward, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Ward, p. 53 (Olivier Messiaen, *International Colloquium of Musicology*, Louvain, 1980).



For instance, the *Vingt Regards sur l'enfant-Jésus* is a work that celebrates the Nativity, but the only direct chant paraphrase in this piece is taken from the Easter Mass. The second trait I expected to see involved the compositional treatment of chant melodies. In an organ work of Marcel Dupré or Charles Tournemire, two of Messiaen's mentors, the treatment of a chant melody is very straightforward and rigorous, even if the harmonic language is modern. The original chant melody may be treated as a cantus firmus, harmonized in a homophonic texture, treated contrapuntally, etc. Messiaen rarely applies such techniques to chant. His preferred setting of chant is that of monody, a melodic presentation in a single solo voice. This draws attention to his rhythmic and modal alterations of the melody, and it also evokes the sound of chant because, after all, chant according to the Solesmes restoration is monody.

An eclectic and intensely systematic artist, Messiaen was the first composer to assimilate the language of Gregorian chant and feature it in composition in much the same way as we speak of other composers absorbing folk idioms into their compositional style. Messiaen so completely understood the subject matter that he could incorporate it without any departure from his own style; the chant has passed through the “deforming prism of [his] language.”<sup>5</sup> The result is that Messiaen can describe passages in his music as being in “alleluia style,” or title a movement of a work “Antienne de la conversation intérieure” (Antiphon of the Internal Conversation).<sup>6</sup> In fact, if one defines folk music as “the music of an ethnic community uninfluenced by popular and art music and transmitted through oral tradition,” it is probably a fair assessment to characterize chant

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<sup>5</sup> Olivier, Messiaen, *The Technique of My Musical Language*, trans. John Satterfield (Paris: A. Leduc, 1956), Volume I, p. 32-33.

<sup>6</sup> Olivier Messiaen, *Messiaen Edition*, compact disc (Warner Classics: 2564 62162-2, 2005), p. 75.

as the “folk music” of Messiaen’s world.<sup>7</sup> It is revealing that Messiaen discusses folk melodies and plainchant one after the other in *The Technique of My Musical Language*, but gives the latter far more attention.

This paper proposes to discuss the unique and various ways Messiaen incorporated Gregorian chant into his compositions. The scope of the repertoire I will examine focuses on the earlier stages of Messiaen’s career (up to 1950), with special attention given to examples of plainchant appropriation that Messiaen points out in *The Technique of My Musical Language*. Chant paraphrases in the early works have not been discussed in great detail in musical scholarship, including by the composer, while the Gregorian quotes in his later works have been examined to a limited degree elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> Important works in Messiaen’s output are sometimes only briefly discussed or even omitted in an effort to focus the discussion on salient and representative examples relevant to this paper. Emphasis will be given not merely to Messiaen’s chant paraphrases but also, and perhaps more importantly, to the aspects of chant that affected his compositional style in a fundamental sense. Thus, the paper will reach beyond examples that derive simply their melodic shape from a chant or chant type; it will also show how Messiaen developed rhythmic and structural procedures from his careful study of the music sung in Catholic liturgical practice.

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<sup>7</sup> Morehead, Phillip D., ed, *The New American Dictionary of Music*, (New York: Penquin Books, 1991), p.168.

<sup>8</sup> David Lowell Nelson, “An Analysis of Olivier Messiaen’s Chant Paraphrases,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1992.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE “CHARM OF IMPOSSIBILITIES” AND PLAINCHANT

Messiaen begins *Technique of My Musical Language* (hereafter *TML*) proper with an explanation of his compositional aesthetic in terms of the “charm of impossibilities.”<sup>9</sup> Messiaen sought to write music that accomplished two aims simultaneously. First, his language aims to develop the earthy primitivism of early Stravinsky as well as the sensuality and richness of Debussy and Ravel. He seeks a “glistening and voluptuous” music that appeals to the senses in an immediate, visceral manner.<sup>10</sup> This heady sensuality may seem to contradict what is the second goal of his aesthetic. Messiaen always aims to express a higher sentiment in his music, often in the form of a program which illuminates the “truths” of the Catholic faith. He understood these truths to be the highest goal of his art, a view from which he never wavered throughout his long career. In a sense, Messiaen inherited Mahler’s universalistic, all-encompassing vision of music. Mahler created a pluralized, all inclusive “world” in each symphony, striving to attain an elevated spiritual plane by dwelling on earthly as well as celestial matters.<sup>11</sup> Messiaen’s music inhabits a world of multiplicities much like Mahler. Catholicism is the dominant force in Messiaen’s world, but he does not limit himself to a one-dimensional perspective.

Messiaen expressed his religious beliefs through a musical language which embraces an aesthetic of multiplicity. His goal was to create music “which may touch

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<sup>9</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Robert Layton, ed., *A Companion to the Symphony* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1993), p. 174.

upon all subjects without ceasing to touch upon God.”<sup>12</sup> The pluralism implied by this statement is aptly found in the wide array of both compositional techniques and sources of inspiration that lie at the heart of Messiaen’s music. The list includes the ragas of Indian music, meters of ancient Greek poetry, ornithology and birdsong, sound-color relationships, gamelan music, Gagaku, Noh drama, surrealist art and poetry, non-retrogradable and ametrical rhythms, modes of limited transpositions and other symmetrical permutations of pitch material, etc. All of these techniques and sounds serve one purpose in Messiaen’s music, which is to “illuminate” the mysteries of the Catholic faith.<sup>13</sup> Gregorian chant belongs on this list, and its role in Messiaen’s music resides at varying levels of influence. Plainchant is one type of music which Messiaen chooses to evoke or quote on occasion; when this occurs, plainchant functions as one of many tools the composer uses to construct a multifaceted sound. In such cases, chant’s relationship to the charm of impossibilities appears to be limited to a role of one technique among the many that create plurality in Messiaen’s music.

Messiaen continues his discussion of the charm of impossibilities in *TML* with illustrations of specific compositional techniques. The influence of plainchant becomes more apparent at a fundamental level of conception as Messiaen expresses his compositional aesthetic as one that embraces stasis. Messiaen does not define but rather describes the charm of impossibilities in *TML*; he characterizes “this charm” as being simultaneously “voluptuous and contemplative.”<sup>14</sup> His explanation attempts to lend terminology to the type of eclecticism found in Messiaen’s music. His description of the charm of impossibilities encompasses other components of his compositional style as

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<sup>12</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 13.

well, particularly as his music seeks out certain mathematical “impossibilities” in music.<sup>15</sup> In the domain of melody, this is achieved by the modes of limited transposition, while the rhythmic equivalent is conveyed by nonretrogradable rhythms. The modes of limited transpositions are scales that can only be transposed a few times before the pitch material repeats itself. Nonretrogradable rhythms are rhythmic patterns that are identical to their retrograde form. These two focal points of Messiaen’s technique serve to thwart a sense of a teleological progression of time. His music does not evolve temporally as a development of motives towards a climactic goal. Messiaen’s music intentionally resides in a state of contemplation or stasis, and the relationship between sections or movements of his compositions is cumulative, not linear.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of stasis in Messiaen’s output, while it is foreshadowed in works by other composers of the early twentieth century, owes its aesthetic to Gregorian chant. And although textbooks begin the history of western music with plainchant, this repertory is decidedly non-Western in many ways. Chant lacks the tonal and rhythmic focus that one associates with Western music, and this is perhaps due to its close ancestry in other non-Western music, particularly that of the Jewish rite. Although Western polyphony evolved from plainchant, chant itself is more closely related to the religious and folk music traditions of the Middle East.<sup>17</sup> Gregorian chant itself, however, has been important to composers for over a thousand years because it can be easily quoted and manipulated in other compositional styles. Few composers have applied the melodic and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed examination of Messiaen’s “charm of impossibilities,” see Roberto Fabbi’s article, “Theological Implications of Restrictions in Messiaen’s Compositional Process,” in the anthology *Messiaen’s Language of Mystical Love*, edited by Siglind Bruhn. Fabbi discusses the vagueness of Messiaen’s own explanation of the term as well as the importance and meaning of compositional restrictions in Messiaen’s output.

<sup>17</sup> McGee, *The Sound of Medieval Song* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

rhythmic styles of Gregorian chant to composition as meticulously as Messiaen. His return to the ametrical rhythms and modal melodic constructions of plainchant provided the foundation of his style, and therefore indirectly, the foundation of the sea-change in modern music demonstrated by both Messiaen's works and those of his students during the 1950s.<sup>18</sup>

The musical form of Gregorian chant, despite its expressive power and shape, is essentially static.<sup>19</sup> To some degree this is due to the sameness of rhythm as seen in its "basic pulse."<sup>20</sup> Lack of tonal focus through modality also weakens the possibility of tension and release as seen in Western, goal-oriented structures. In church modes, there are pitches that fulfill functions similar to that of the tonic and dominant: the final and reciting tone. However, these pitches exert far less influence over the melodic language found in chant than the corresponding relationship of tonic and dominant scale-degrees of in tonal music, and several factors contribute to this. All but two of the modes have a flatted seventh scale-degree, and when compared with tonal harmonic practice, this lack of a leading tone diminishes the importance of the dominant/tonic relationship. Another factor that weakens this relationship is the fact that of the eight modes, only three have a reciting tone (dominant) a fifth above the tonic. As Anthony Pople has stated,

All that is necessary for music to be modal is that it should adhere to the notes of a mode, and, this being so, it is hardly surprising that the most telling characteristic of both diatonic and non-diatonic modal music

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<sup>18</sup> I must clarify the use of the term "ametric." Messiaen uses the term to describe music that lacks a *regular* metric pulse. This term is sometimes confused with the word "arhythmic," which describes music which has no perceivable pulse whatsoever.

<sup>19</sup> The discussions of Gregorian chant in this paper, unless otherwise stated, always examine this repertory from Messiaen's perspective. For most of his life, the restoration of chant by the Solesmes monastery was thought to be the last word on the scholarship and performance practice of plainchant. This is no longer the case, but I am intentionally limiting my discussion to the Solesmes interpretation of plainchant simply because this is the only interpretation Messiaen embraced.

<sup>20</sup> See discussion of Mocquereau's theories in Chapter III.

is a sense of improvisation-- whether contemplative or frenetic-- within a static atmosphere.<sup>21</sup>

The melodies of Gregorian chant have sophisticated structures, and the pitch material does more than simply “adhere to the notes of a mode.” In addition to the final and reciting tone, which realize important functions in chant melodies, plainchant utilizes a number of melodic formulae to signal phrase endings and beginnings. These factors do not equal the importance of their counterparts in tonal music, however, and the resulting ambiguity present in plainchant’s melodic language creates stasis.<sup>22</sup>

Other features of plainchant help to create stasis. While formally chant may trace a shape that involves repetition or even recapitulation (ABA), that shape lacks the tension and resolution associated with tonal harmonic practice. The contrasting melodic styles of chant, from syllabic to melismatic settings of text, are not different enough from one section of chant to another to create structural tension. Also, the rhythm of chant is asymmetrical and entirely free. There is no meter to speak of in chant, only free distribution of two- and three-note groupings of a basic pulse.<sup>23</sup> The result is identical to Pople’s assertions about modal music quoted above; the rhythm of chant sounds improvisatory and static. Messiaen’s modal harmonic and melodic language and rhythmic asymmetric style represent a return to this aesthetic of stasis.

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<sup>21</sup> Messiaen, *Messiaen Companion*, pp. 18-9.

<sup>22</sup> This discussion would appear to be approaching the subject of chant and tonality from the wrong angle. Plainchant is pre-tonal music. I am using the standard of Western tonal harmonic practice for two reasons. One is simply because the audience for this paper will undoubtedly relate more to the features of Western harmony than those of Gregorian modality. The second is that I will later wish to show that Messiaen’s appropriation of plainchant melodic styles and rhythms helps him to achieve aesthetic aims that are post-tonal but very similar to those of Gregorian chant.

<sup>23</sup> This rhythmic interpretation is part of the Solesmes legacy. For more recent scholarship on the rhythmic interpretation of chant, see Timothy J. McGee, *The Sound of Medieval Song: Ornamentation and Vocal Style according to the Treatises* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

In the second chapter of *TML*, Messiaen pays homage to Maurice Emmanuel's research into the rhythmic patterns of ancient Greek music and poetry. While these patterns are a very important feature of Messiaen's music, they, like the Hindu Râgavardhana, are imported into his language as an exoticism. Greek and Hindu rhythms are important to Messiaen only in an abstract sense; he never discusses the music from which these rhythms originate. Their function is almost always to provide the composer with short, ametrical rhythmic formulae that are then manipulated into larger phrases, rhythmic pedal points, etc. In the cases where Messiaen composes a melody with "Hindu melodic color," such as "l'Ange aux parfums" (*Les Corps glorieux*) or "Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes" (*Quatuor pour la fin du temps*), the tie to the melodic source is abstract and not symbolic.<sup>24</sup> Certainly such purely referential examples exist with regard to plainchant in Messiaen's output, but one could argue that the difference between the two is cultural. Greek and Hindu rhythms are exotic imports into Messiaen's language; they are crucial to his style, but he appropriates melodic and rhythmic formulas from this music without extensive exposure to the sounds of the music in performance.

Messiaen does not make arbitrary reference to a chant or chant type. His association with this music is profoundly spiritual. Messiaen revered the role of plainchant within the liturgy, and he interpreted his own music as a further expression of the mysteries of the Catholic faith. In *TML*, he states that he wishes to compose "a *true* music, that is to say, spiritual, a music which may be an act of faith... There is still a place, plainchant itself not having told it all."<sup>25</sup> He was constantly exposed to the sound as well as the liturgical and theological meaning of Gregorian chant and its texts, to the

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<sup>24</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. 1, p. 33, and the corresponding musical examples provide an illustration of this.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. 1, p. 8.



point where any reference to a chant carries with it a special symbolic weight. When Messiaen uses a chant in a piece of music, he can capture its very essence, its musical and theological soul, so to speak. That process is of course very subjective, much like his interpretations and transcriptions of birdsong. Messiaen is not merely appropriating surface features of the music because he is drawn to them as a composer. Plainsong is Messiaen's folk music; it is the cultural and musical reference point for his Catholicism.

When discussing the various ways in which Messiaen brings chant into his works, it is necessary to identify certain technical features of the music in order to gain a deeper understanding of the compositional processes involved. The following chapters will discuss Messiaen's appropriation of various parameters of plainchant, while the final chapter will analyze the differing degrees to which Messiaen paraphrased actual chant melodies. I will discuss the theological significance of Messiaen's use of specific chants or chant types, but I will always give focus to the compositional aspects of his music's relationship to chant rather than to the religious and theological connotations inherent in his use of chant.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PLAINCHANT AND RHYTHM

#### **The Restoration of Plainchant**

Composers of both sacred and secular music have found inspiration and source material in plainchant from the Middle Ages through the present day. Gregorian chant itself, however, has not always been considered fashionable music. One might generalize with the following statement: as the evolution of polyphony and tonal harmony progressed, plainchant became increasingly manipulated within the liturgy itself. This includes both polyphonic and homophonic settings of chant, which concurred with the style of the day. Also, the rhythm of chant melodies became subject to varying interpretations. All of these treatments served to embellish chant's texture, monody, and its rhythm, which consists of even note values.

In nineteenth-century France, there was an effort to restore the monastic tradition within the Catholic Church. This took place within a larger movement among intellectuals who sought to restore a connection with an idealized, "romantic" vision of the past. A young seminarian named Prosper Guéranger reestablished an order of Benedictine monks in an abandoned priory at Solesmes in the 1830s. A central priority of the Solesmes monastery was research into the practices of medieval monastic life. The most important of these practices involved the singing of the Divine Office as established by Saint Benedictine in the sixth century. The research of Gregorian chant at Solesmes took several generations to accomplish, and these findings were published in two ways. Solesmes released a series of publications which standardized the chant repertory of the

liturgy. The most famous of these books is the *Liber Usualis*. The Solesmes monks also issued a series of treatises on the performance of plainchant. André Mocquereau's study *Le Nombre musical grégorien*, written in 1908, was the most important of these treatises, both to the chant restoration movement and to Messiaen. Messiaen makes frequent reference to Mocquereau in his writings, and he made a special effort to reproduce Mocquereau's theories in his last compositional treatise, *Traité de Rythme, de Couleur, et d'Ornithologie* (hereafter *Traité*).

Dom André Mocquereau (1849-1930) was the choirmaster at the Abbey Sainte-Pierre de Solesmes from 1889 to 1914. He created and developed a standardized approach to the practice of performing plainchant, often referred to as the "Solesmes method." His most important treatise, *Le Nombre musical grégorien*, was published in 1908. Dom Joseph Pothier's text *Melodies grégorien* (1880) was a pioneering document of the chant restoration, but it had failed to account for the rhythmic interpretation of chant in any detailed or systematic way. Thus during the early years of the chant revival through the turn of the century, choir members often experienced rhythmic confusion when singing plainsong. The following passage, written in an article by Canon Gaborit in 1903, is quoted at the beginning of *Le Nombre musical*.

We seem to hear... one boy observing a *mora vocis*, while the boy next to him continues the movement without pause; another boy puts in duplex group while his neighbor firmly makes it a triplex- and to complete this delightful harmony and unity, the *organist* places his *chords* on the *up beat* instead of the *ictus*!... [italics original to Mocquereau]<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Dom André Mocquereau, *Le Nombre musical grégorien*, trans. Aileen Tone (Sablé-sur-Sarthe, France: Solesmes, 1989), p. 23.

The restoration of chant had in fact freed Gregorian chant from a “pounded out unrhythmical rendering,” but it had failed to establish a reliable interpretation of a more nuanced approach to rhythm.<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that the adjective “unrhythmical” in this case is very much in the spirit of Messiaen’s own thoughts on rhythm.

“Unrhythmical” here means a succession of uninflected equal note values. In interviews with Claude Samuel, Messiaen says that an “uninterrupted succession of absolutely equal note values... [is the negation of rhythm].”<sup>28</sup> When Samuel then asks Messiaen for an example of strongly rhythmic music, he answers,

First, remember the definition of rhythm I gave a moment ago, namely “the ordering of movement”; this involves the alternation of rises and falls that the Greeks so aptly called *arses* and *theses*. Now, all well-written music contains this constant alternation. Plainchant, to cite only one case, is an uninterrupted succession of *arses* and *theses*, elevations and drops, rises and falls, as was perfectly delineated by the greatest theoretician of plainchant, Dom Mocquereau.<sup>29</sup>

In numerous other instances, Messiaen refers to Mocquereau’s theories of chant rhythm as essential to the study of ametrical or “rhythmical” music. In Volume IV of the *Traité*, Messiaen spends twenty pages summarizing the practice of chant rhythm as found in *Le Nombre musical*. An explanation of these theories is necessary here if we are to understand how they affect Messiaen’s oeuvre.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel, p. 68.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

### *Le Nombre musical grégorien*

Mocquereau begins *Le Nombre musical* by invoking a division of the arts according to Greek antiquity. The arts of repose were represented by architecture, sculpture, and painting. Although “movement is not absolutely foreign” to these disciplines, motion “can be suggested only by the fixing of a single moment.”<sup>30</sup> The arts of repose therefore exist in relation to space, while the arts of movement, which are music, poetry, and dance, exist in relation to time. The arts of movement were all subject to “the laws of a common rhythmic.”<sup>31</sup> Mocquereau envisioned the basic rhythmic laws of the Greeks as fundamental to all music and poetry in existence. The object of Mocquereau’s treatise is thus to illuminate the rhythm of Gregorian chant by applying these rhythmic laws to the realization of plainsong.

Mocquereau goes on to categorize the “phenomena of sound,” also according to Greek models, under the following hierarchy: duration (rhythm), intensity (dynamics), pitch, and timbre.<sup>32</sup> Mocquereau goes through great pains to argue that rhythm is the “primordial element” of music.<sup>33</sup> As a basis for understanding and performing chant, he proposes to approach this subject through “rhythm using elements of the greatest suppleness and simplicity.”<sup>34</sup> Mocquereau proceeds to analyze chant melodies in various degrees, from small impulses of two to three notes that define local rhythm to the large scale grouping of these events into phrases analyzed in terms of arsis and thesis.

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<sup>30</sup> Mocquereau, p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* points to a similar hierarchy of sound characteristics by its title. Pitch is no less important than the other factors that undergo serial procedures. In Messiaen’s own words, “The durations, dynamics, and attacks are on the same level as the sounds.” (*Messiaen Edition*, p. 20.)

<sup>33</sup> Mocquereau, p. 44. This term is actually a quote by Mocquereau of D’Indy.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

The supremacy of rhythm in Mocquereau's hierarchy of the elements of sound is so powerful that the author adds a fifth phenomenon of sound called the "Rhythmic Order."<sup>35</sup> To both Mocquereau and Messiaen, a rhythmic order of movement is meaningless without an understanding of a phrase's "élan" and "repos," or "arsis" and "thesis." While smaller rhythmic groupings must be analyzed and discussed, the phenomenon of the Rhythmic Order provides a language by which to understand "all the sonorous undulations, which are so varied, so living, and so expressive in their rhythmic phrase."<sup>36</sup> The arsis and thesis of melodic shapes is critical to not only the way in which Messiaen understood plainchant, but also to the manner in which he understood the melodic shape, contour, and rhythm of other music, particularly that of Mozart.<sup>37</sup>

Mocquereau first describes the concept of a basic value of rhythm in the following way: "time moves from one individual ictus to the next by a series of basic pulses, and is called elementary or simple time."<sup>38</sup> In music other than Gregorian chant, this basic pulse is frequently subdivided into sixteenth notes, thirty-second notes, etc., and enlarged into quarter notes, half notes, etc. In Gregorian chant, however, the basic pulse is indivisible. The approximate value of the basic pulse can be adjusted to the poetic intent of the text, whether by the chosen tempo of a particular chant or even with localized rubato.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the basic pulse is enlarged only in special circumstances. This occurs at phrase endings quite regularly as well as in heightened melismatic

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See *Traité*, Vol. 4.

<sup>38</sup> Mocquereau, p. 48. The ictus under consideration is represented by a punctum, a single square note-head. This value is always transcribed by Mocquereau, and therefore Messiaen and myself, as an eighth-note.



<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

passages as an expressive device. In sum, the rhythm of chant is governed by a constant reiteration of the basic pulse.




In Gregorian chant the basic pulse is always grouped into a composite pulse comprised of either two or three basic pulses, designated duplex and triplex respectively.

*Example 3-1 The Two Composite Pulses*

The duplex has two forms.

■ ■ =		distinct form
a e		
■ · =		contracted form
a		

The triplex has three forms in chant.

■ ■ ■ =		distinct form
a e i		
■ ■ ■ (tied) =		contracted form
a		
■ · ■ =		mixed form
a e		

In chant there exists no composite pulse beyond three notes; everything can be parsed into one of the composite duplex and triplex forms shown above. The grouping of these composite pulses is dictated by the rhythmic group-ictus, the first note of any composite pulse.<sup>40</sup> Canon Gaborit, speaking of the “pounded out unrhythmical rendering of plainchant before its restoration,” reveals the fundamental difference between pre- and post-restoration chant. Pre-restoration plainsong was performed as a straight series of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

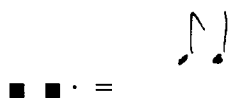
basic pulses, rather than a series of grouped, composite pulses. The effect of the former is best described by Mocquereau at the beginning of Chapter 5 in *Le Nombre musical*.

*Sterility of a series of simple units in the production of rhythm.* – A series of simple units or basic pulses, each with its individual and isolated ictus, of which each sound is equal to its neighbor in intensity and duration, – such a series can never constitute a *rhythm*. No relation is established between such sounds. They are spread out in mere juxtaposition, without any soul or life, in other words, without rhythm. In this case, the individual ictus exhausts its power in the production of its own pulse. Something more is required and of a different nature, for the creation of rhythm.<sup>41</sup>

*Le Nombre musical* was written precisely to avoid such interpretations of chant. A greater synthesis of musical expression, from the groupings of smaller composite rhythms to the shapes of a larger phraseology, gives plainchant its true life and spiritual expression.

In discussing the inflection of composite rhythm, Mocquereau first uses an iambic rhythm, composed of a short (◡) and a long value (–), to discuss the nature of arsis and thesis.

#### *Example 3-2 Iambic Rhythm*



The first note, arsis, is in motion and finds repose in the second note, thesis. The arsis functions as a “pick-up” note to the second, within a modern notational equivalent, creating a stronger rhythmic ictus on the second note of this gesture. Earlier we

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 53.



identified the rhythmic group-ictus as the “first note of any composite pulse.”

Mocquereau expands this definition by stating “the ictus... is not a strong beat necessarily. It is merely the point at which the rhythm alights... whether to take a fresh impetus and continue on, or whether to terminate a movement.”<sup>42</sup> In chant, the contracted form of a composite rhythm (the second note of Example 3-2) is always interpreted as a strong ictus. The theory of arsis and thesis generates expressive melodic shapes which, almost without exception, generate arsic movement towards a phrase’s final thesis expressed by a contracted composite form.

Mocquereau continues this line of reasoning to spondaic rhythm, two basic pulses equal in duration. Despite the rhythmic equality implied by this rhythm, the same upbeat/downbeat, arsis/thesis movement is critical to the point of the author implying rubato. In the following passage, he makes clear that plainchant requires accents of duration (agogic accents) as well as those of dynamics.

In a duplex (spondaic)... rhythm we find *one* pulse at the *élan* and *one* at the repos or thesis, this pulse being either slightly lengthened, or else merely carrying an ictus or rhythmic touch.<sup>43</sup>

As Mocquereau’s treatise unfolds, we begin to increasingly understand Gregorian rhythm as a plastic and flexible vehicle for the expression of the fundamental arsis/thesis gesture. The arsis and thesis shape “is the *form*, the *soul* of rhythm; it is rhythm itself. *Intensity* can only complete it, affirm it, establish it. *Melody*, without it, loses all character. *Harmony* itself, follows and keeps step with it.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

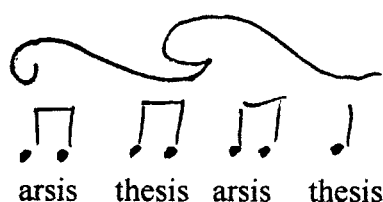
<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

Rhythm can be organized in “measured” form of either constant duplex or triplex movement, or, as in Gregorian chant, rhythm can consist of “free and mixed” combinations of duplex and triplex rhythms.<sup>45</sup> Mocquereau argues, much like Messiaen, that measured rhythm arbitrarily shackles and constrains music, while free rhythm is more natural and expressive, echoing the irregular and non-mathematical shapes and sounds of nature.

Mocquereau expands the notion of arsis and thesis to cover gestures involving a series of composite pulses.

*Example 3-3*



This example illustrates one interpretation of a rhythmic phrase. Mocquereau will later show how an interpretation is derived from melodic shapes and text setting. The graphic symbol above the example is Mocquereau’s interpretation of this gesture through chironomy. Mocquereau’s attempts to communicate the concept of fluidity and lightness in chant led him to describe melodic shapes in terms of chironomy, which he defines as the “plastic expression of rhythm through gestures of the hand.”<sup>46</sup> He combines the element of physical movement, thus completing the Greek triumvirate of the arts of movement, with the music and poetry of Gregorian chant to fully elucidate melodic shapes and forms. In ancient times plainsong was always “conducted” (to use the

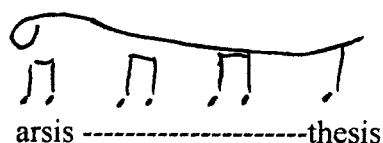
<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 67-8.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 115. The root *chiro* comes from the Greek word, *kheir*, for hand.

modern term) by a leader who outlined the movement of a melody and its rhythm with his hand for the choir to follow. Mocquereau encourages this practice in modern performances of chant, but he also insists on the beneficial aspects of each student giving physical manifestation to melodic and rhythmic shapes in his or her own practice. Like the graphics of Mocquereau's arsis/thesis gestures pictured in Examples 3-3 and 3-4, there is nothing angular or stiff about this technique. In fact, the graphic notation featured in *Le Nombre musical* represents the movement of one's hand which realizes the chironomy of a given melody. One particular "chironomy" only represents a specific analysis or interpretation of a given phrase. This technique provides a way of interpreting musical shapes; it is furthest in the Mocquereau's mind from a conductor beating out repetitive metrical patterns.

As we begin to group larger structures, variable groupings can apply to the same rhythmic pattern depending on the melodic shape and textual accentuation. In Example 3-4, the same rhythm as the previous example is interpreted as an arsis of three composite groups, followed by a thesis on the last note.

*Example 3-4*



Mocquereau is ultimately using the terms arsis and thesis in order to indicate musical stress while avoiding modern terminology. He equates the metrical force of modern music with the blow of a hammer on an anvil, whereas the rhythmic ictus of Gregorian chant is guided by a delicate and nuanced concept of rhythm and phrasing. There are no accents or downbeats in this music, even if they exist semantically.

The artist... controls and directs with complete freedom [the music's] various qualities of duration, force, pitch, and expression. He broadens at will the length of his élans and repos, he distributes the intensity of sound in its infinite shadings, as a painter distributes his colors... We are already far beyond the mechanical movement of the hammer on the anvil..."<sup>47</sup>

Chironomy is a type of notation that is related to the earliest manifestations of neumatic notation in the ninth and tenth centuries. The earliest neumatic notation consisted of graphic symbols which physically represented the sounds of plainchant, and it is now thought that the ornate shapes of neumes corresponded to an ornate style of singing chant.<sup>48</sup> In particular, ancient cursive neumes depicted the shape and length of phrases with a continuous line, very much unlike the square notation found in the *Liber usualis*. While Mocquereau's symbols for chironomy do not trace the shape of a chant melody in terms of pitch, his symbols to outline the dynamic and rhythmic shape of chant phrases.

Twentieth-century composers have returned to graphic styles of notation on occasion, and Messiaen resorts to the graphic notation very similar to chironomy to dictate the shape of a musical line at several moments in *Des canyons aux étoiles...* Example 3-5a is Messiaen's chironomic interpretation, as it appears in his *Traité*, of a segment of the Alleluia sung on the first Sunday in Advent, followed by a page of *Des canyons* with graphic notation for the buzzing of a trumpet mouthpiece and the sound of the eoliphone.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>48</sup> See McGee, *The Sound of Medieval Song*.

### Example 3-5

#### A. Messiaen's chironomy for Alleluia, First Sunday of Advent (excerpt)

The musical score for the Alleluia excerpt features a vocal line with French lyrics: "de no-bis Dó-mi-ne mi-se-ri-cór-di-am tu-". Above the staff, chironomy notation is used, consisting of wavy lines and letters 'A' and 'T' indicating accents and breaths. A legend at the top right shows a wavy line with 'A' and 'T' above it, and a symbol resembling a less-than sign followed by a slash and a greater-than sign (</>) below it. The word "Ostén-" is written above the staff near the end of the excerpt.

#### B. *Des canyons aux étoiles...*, excerpt

The musical score for the excerpt from *Des canyons aux étoiles...* includes three staves: 1<sup>re</sup> Trompette, III<sup>e</sup> P<sup>te</sup> Cymb., and V Eoliphone. The tempo is marked "Modéré (ad libitum)" with the instruction "(jouer avec une embouchure seule) (sons approximatifs, rapides, chromatiques ou disjoints)". The Trompette staff has dynamic markings *f* and *sf*. The Cymbale staff has a *pp* marking. The Eoliphone staff has a *ppp* marking and a series of dynamic markings: *ppp*, *sf*, *pp*, *f*, *p*, *sf*, and *ppp*. The Eoliphone staff also features a series of wavy lines representing pitch contours.

In the *Des canyons* example, Messiaen wants the trumpet and eoliphone (wind machine) to recreate the shapes, dynamics, and a generalized sense of pitch which his notation conveys, not specific rhythms. He therefore uses notation similar to chironomy and

cursive neumatic notation, which trace shapes and not specific information like named pitches and precise rhythms.

### **Messiaen and Rhythm**

Messiaen pioneered many techniques in composition, some of which started revolutions (*Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* and the wave of total serialism which followed in Europe) and others which are wholly unique to Messiaen (birdsong, sound-color complexes). Messiaen was particularly proud of his achievements as a rhythmician, and his comments to Claude Samuel on the subject echo Dom Mocquereau's own statements on the importance and dominance of rhythm in musical thought.

I feel that rhythm is the primordial and perhaps essential part of music; I think it most likely existed before melody and harmony, and in fact I have a secret preference for this element. I cherish this preference all the more because I feel it distinguished my entry into contemporary music.<sup>49</sup>

The pride Messiaen took in his rhythmic language as a contemporary composer is perhaps even more fascinating when we become aware of the degree to which Mocquereau and plainchant influenced his style and compositions.

Messiaen's discussion of rhythm in *TML* begins by introducing the reader to the concept of ametrical music.

Dom Mocquereau knew how to illuminate... the variety of rhythmic patterns... of the neumes of plainchant. That variety will instill in us already a marked predilection for the rhythms of prime numbers (five, seven, eleven, thirteen, etc.). Going further, we shall replace the notions of "measure" and "beat" by the feeling of a short value (the

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<sup>49</sup> Samuel, p. 67.

sixteenth-note, for example) and its free multiplication, which will lead us to a music more or less “ametical,” necessitating precise rhythmic rules.<sup>50</sup>

These ideas are fundamental to Messiaen’s complete output, and the most important pre-existing musical source for these compositional procedures is found in Gregorian repertory. *Le Nombre musical* clearly states that these criteria are elemental to the construction of plainchant; one could perhaps describe both the rhythm of chant and Messiaen’s music as “free rhythm” in the form of irregular patterns of duplex and triplex composite forms constructed over an indivisible basic pulse

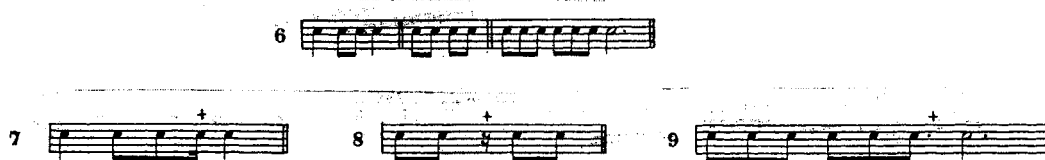
Perhaps plainchant’s greatest influence on Messiaen’s style is manifested by his avoidance of regular and square metrical beat patterns. Messiaen’s language, particularly during the first twenty years of his career, is built on the foundation of a basic, indivisible pulse, often the sixteenth-note. From this pulse he constructs various ametical patterns via composite pulses. In certain rare instances, Messiaen writes music which corresponds very closely to the rate at which chant would incorporate distinct composite pulses (“Regard de l’Esprit de joie,” for example, which will be discussed in Chapter VI). Messiaen generally uses contracted pulses with much greater frequency than chant, however, and he inflects the original chant with a greater mixture of note values.

One of Messiaen’s favorite methods of distorting a square rhythm is the use of the added value. In Chapter 3 of *TML*, he gives examples of ordinary, metrical rhythms which he disrupts by adding a short value, whether by note, rest, or dot.

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<sup>50</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 14.

Example 3-6 Examples 6-9 from *TML*<sup>51</sup>



Here we begin to see differences between the basic pulse of chant and that of Messiaen's music. Messiaen's "feeling of the short value" is still operative here, as he expects the performer to practice such rhythms feeling the subdivision of basic pulses underneath the larger rhythms.<sup>52</sup> The sixteenth-note is still indivisible, but it is no longer perceived as the primary unit of pulse. In much of Messiaen's music, the basic pulse in this regard is crucial to accurate performance but not to a listener's perception of larger rhythms. In a piece like "Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes" from the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*, the basic pulse as perceived by the listener is the eighth-note and perhaps momentarily the dotted eighth-note as formed by added rhythms.

Example 3-7 "Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes," beginning (piano part)



In some cases, like "l'Ange aux parfums," the added value really is a note added to a pre-existing model. Examples 111 and 112 of *TML*, reproduced here as Example

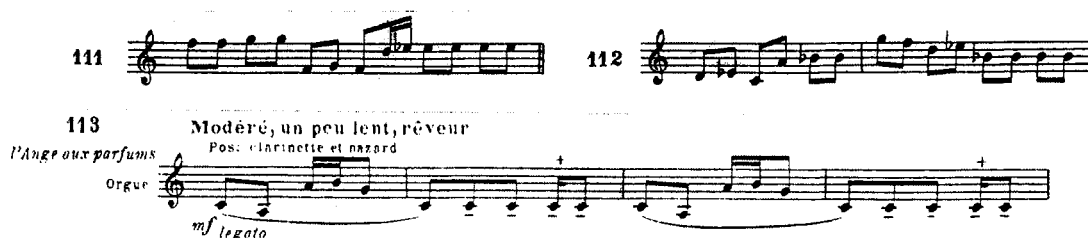
<sup>51</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 16, and Vol. II, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 28. He says this regarding *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*.



3-8, are two Hindu melodic fragments that Messiaen felt particularly drawn to. Both end with a refrain pattern of four repeated notes. Messiaen uses this refrain, but with an added sixteenth-note before the last of the original four notes.

*Example 3-8* Examples 111, 112, and 113 (1<sup>st</sup> 4 bars) of *TML*<sup>53</sup>



The sixteenth-note is the basic pulse of this excerpt of “l’Ange aux parfums,” and the added sixteenth-note value in question only heightens the importance of this underlying concept. The basic rate of movement in this example is the eighth-note, though, and the rhythm, despite its connection to the basic pulse of Mocquereau, takes on another life than that of plainchant. The proportion of contracted composite pulses to distinct composite pulses favors the former, as in much of the last example cited, “Danse de la fureur.”

Added values in melodic passages are often purely rhythmic interpretations of a given melody in Messiaen’s music and do not add any corresponding pitch material. In the opening movement of *Les corps glorieux* (“Subtilité des Corps Glorieux”), Messiaen is basing his music on a pre-existing melody.

*Example 3-9* Salve Regina and “Subtilité des Corps Glorieux,” excerpts



<sup>53</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 33, and Vol. II, p. 16-7.

The use of the added values does not constitute any addition to the pitch material of that melody to achieve ametricality. He simply builds the added rhythms into his paraphrase of the original.<sup>54</sup>

In passages of monody or rhythmic homophony, Messiaen's use of free rhythm divided into composite pulses of varying quantity remains easy to comprehend without the aid of traditional time signatures. When Messiaen introduces rhythmic polyphony, it becomes necessary to notate these more complex structures under a simple meter.<sup>55</sup> Messiaen makes sure to stress that in these instances, his rhythms bear no relationship to the meters. In order to fully communicate points of stress and ictus, he often adds phrasing and dynamic indications to achieve the desired emphasis. Example 3-10 shows two different ways to bar a melody; the first represents the rhythm as Messiaen conceived it, while the latter shows its re-barring into a "normal" meter as necessitated by the practical concerns created by ensemble writing.

*Example 3-10 Examples 68-9 in TML*<sup>56</sup>

68 Clarinette en Sib  
Liturgie de cristal  
p expressif

69 Clarinette en Sib  
Liturgie de cristal  
p expressif

We shall encounter varying degrees of this phenomenon in Messiaen's appropriation of chant. Particularly with orchestral works, it is often necessary analytically to remove a melody from its context and re-bar it to understand the structure of its free rhythm.

<sup>54</sup> See discussion of "Subtilité" in Chapter V.

<sup>55</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 22.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 11.

Messiaen explicitly interpreted the rhythm implied by neumes of plainchant in “Neumes rythmiques,” the third of the *Quatre Études de rythme*. He states in *Traité* that

Regarding the different figures of plainchant, I became fascinated with the idea that I could find rhythmic equivalents for corresponding neumes. In an attempt to develop a neumatic rhythmic language, I made a table which consisted of the neumes and the groups of durations which their sinuous melodies indicated.<sup>57</sup>

Part of this table is reproduced below as Example 3-11. Messiaen attaches fixed dynamics to each gesture; the shape of each figure is based on the dynamic gesture Messiaen interpreted as natural and inherent to each neume-type.

Example 3-11

*Neumes*

Podatus *ff* clivis *p* scandicus *mf < f* climacus *f*

torculus *f < sf > f* *f < sf > f* *f < sf > f*

correctus *più f* *ff* *mf* *f p*

Messiaen has elsewhere described this piece as a “rhythmic transposition of the melodic curves of plainchant.”<sup>58</sup> Messiaen interprets only the melodic shape of these neumes to generate this table of rhythmic equivalents. In the example above, the rhythmic value of each pitch within a neume is equal according to a strict interpretation of the Solesmes method, but Messiaen does not “transpose” this concept. Mocquereau encouraged an interpretation of chant which shaped both the rhythm and the dynamics of a phrase, and

<sup>57</sup> *Traité*, Vol. IV, p. 62.

<sup>58</sup> Messiaen, “Neumes rythmiques,” No. 3 of *Quatre Études de rythme* (Paris: Durand, 2000), composer’s preface.

Messiaen uses this reading of plainchant as a way to generate his table of “rhythmic equivalents.” In some cases, one finds that Messiaen’s rhythmic and dynamic assignment for a neume does closely relate to a rhythmic and dynamic shape implied by the neume itself. In Example 3-11, Messiaen’s first interpretation of the “torculus” is expressive of this neume’s inherent rhythmic and dynamic shape (crescendo to a longer, accented middle note, followed by a diminuendo to another short value). His next two examples of “torculus” are consistent with this initial shape, but here Messiaen’s rhythmic/dynamic interpretations are becoming more flexible. He interprets many of the neumes in a manner that resembles the Solesmes method to some degree, and the resulting table unites this tradition with a great deal of imagination from the composer.

Messiaen describes each of his “rhythmic equivalents” as a “succession of arsis and thesis.”<sup>59</sup> Each of Messiaen’s “rhythmic neumes” therefore begins with an impetus and then comes to rest on the last note, although in his own analysis of this piece, Messiaen sometimes groups several “neumes” together as one arsic or thetic gesture.<sup>60</sup>

Messiaen’s “rhythmic neumes” also have fixed pitch material. Example 3-12 shows the first occurrence of these neumes in “Neumes rythmiques.”

### Example 3-12

Bien modéré (♩ = 96) (neumes rythmiques, avec résonances, et intensités fixes)

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> *Traité*, Vol. IV, p. 63.

The correlation between the original neumes and Messiaen's "rhythmic neumes" becomes increasingly abstract with the composer's addition of pitches. Most of the melodic shapes seen in Example 3-12 do not relate to the melodic shapes of the original neumes. For example, the first measure of Example 3-12 uses the rhythm of the "podatus" of Example 3-11. However, the podatus is a melodic gesture that ascends, while Messiaen's "podatus" is one that descends.

The rhythmic gestures are ultimately the most important compositional feature of this work. Messiaen describes the rhythmic neumes of this piece as "colored by music." The abstract level to which Messiaen "colors" these neumes strengthens each individual gesture, and each neume does not relate to those around it. Messiaen's juxtaposition of "neumes" generates the phrase structures of this piece, and the later "variations" present the neumes in different juxtapositions.<sup>61</sup> This piece represents a unique and inventive way of perceiving and "transposing" chant.

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<sup>61</sup> "Variations" is Messiaen's term; this signifies variations of the order in which the neumes appear, not any variation of the neumes themselves.


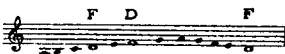



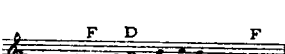

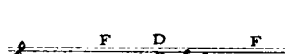
## CHAPTER FOUR

### PLAINCHANT AND MELODIC STYLES

#### Modal Theory of Gregorian Chant

Gregorian chant is classified by a system of four basic scales or modes (Example 4-1) which provide a tonal context for chant. This system only loosely relates to tonality as it later evolved in the Western tradition. Each mode has two pitches which exert influence over the modality of the scale: the final and the reciting tone. The terms “final” and “reciting tone” are often explained in relation to the modern equivalents of tonic and dominant. (In fact, both Mocquereau and Messiaen refer to the reciting tone as the dominant.) The final is usually the last note of a chant. The melody may come to rest upon this note at other important cadences within chant, but this is not always the case. The reciting tone is often featured to a far greater degree in plainchant. Melismatic passages tend to gravitate towards this pitch, and psalmody and other syllabic chant deliver much of the text using the reciting tone, hence its name.

*Example 4-1 The Melodic Modes of Gregorian Chant as found in Messiaen's *Traité**<sup>62</sup>

<p>Mode de Ré (authentique)</p> 	<p>Mode de Ré (plagal)</p> 
<p>Mode de Mi (authentique)</p> 	<p>Mode de Mi (plagal)</p> 
<p>Mode de Fa (authentique)</p> 	<p>Mode de Fa (plagal)</p> 
<p>Mode de Sol (authentique)</p> 	<p>Mode de Sol (plagal)</p> 

<sup>62</sup> *Traité*, Volume 4, p. 33.

These four modes can be further categorized into pairs by their final, range, and reciting tone. A mode in its “authentic” form encompasses the octave above the final, and the reciting tone is a fifth above the final. Its “plagal” relative has the same final, but its range reaches a fourth below and a fifth above the final. The reciting tone for a plagal scale is a third below the upper note in ambitus. Exceptions to these rules occur with avoidance of the pitch “B” as a reciting tone in the Phrygian and Hypomixolydian modes.

The use of the terms tonic and dominant as analogous to final and reciting tone only suggests the concept of stability versus tension in plainchant. While this notion is certainly fundamental to chant, the modal system contains more ambiguity than tonal harmonic practice. All four modes use the same collection of pitches, those of a C major diatonic scale. The difference between one mode and another is based not on the actual collection of pitches, which is always the same, but their arrangement. In tonal music, the opposite is true; the collection of pitches for all scales differ. However, the arrangement of half-steps and whole-steps in all major and minor scales is identical.

The arrangement of half-steps and whole-steps within modal music is therefore critical to the sound and color of each mode. For instance, the initial interval of the Phrygian mode, a half-step, lends a unique sound to this mode, particularly at cadences. The raised fourth scale-degree of the Lydian mode is another singular feature which characterizes the sound of all music in this mode. Performers and scholars often speak of the subtle yet distinct qualities offered by these modes.

A great deal of chant was composed before theoreticians began to classify chant by mode in the eighth and ninth centuries. As modal theory gained prominence in medieval treatises, musicians and theorists often “corrected” ambiguities or deviations

from modal theory in the chant repertoire. The body of liturgical chant that Messiaen was familiar with, as represented by the *Liber Usualis* and other liturgical books issued by Solesmes, conforms quite closely to modal classifications. While exceptions to modal rules exist (particularly in the form of modal mixture), the mode of a given chant is a distinguishing feature, and each chant of the *Liber Usualis* is labeled by its mode.

### **Messiaen and the Modes of Limited Transpositions**

Messiaen had developed a unique and very personal compositional style by the time of his first published compositions. Both *Le Banquet céleste* and the *Préludes*, published in the years 1928-9, reveal an astonishing originality and many of the stylistic features of his later output. One of the most important features of this music resides in its harmonic language. Although Messiaen would not publish an explanation of his “modes of limited transpositions” until the preface of *La Nativité du Seigneur* (1935), this system is operative in his earliest compositions and remained a distinguishing feature of his music until the end of his career.

Messiaen’s music uses seven modes of limited transpositions (Example 4-2). In *TML*, Messiaen states that his modes of limited transpositions embrace “certain mathematical impossibilities.”<sup>63</sup> The symmetrical patterns created by these scales lend themselves to a limited number of transpositions before repetition of pitch material occurs. Messiaen makes it clear in *TML* that his modal system has nothing to do with that of Gregorian chant. Even so, the Gregorian modes and the modes of limited transpositions share some common ground. While the two sets of scales may have little in common regarding pitches (or even aesthetic), the connection, even if only one of

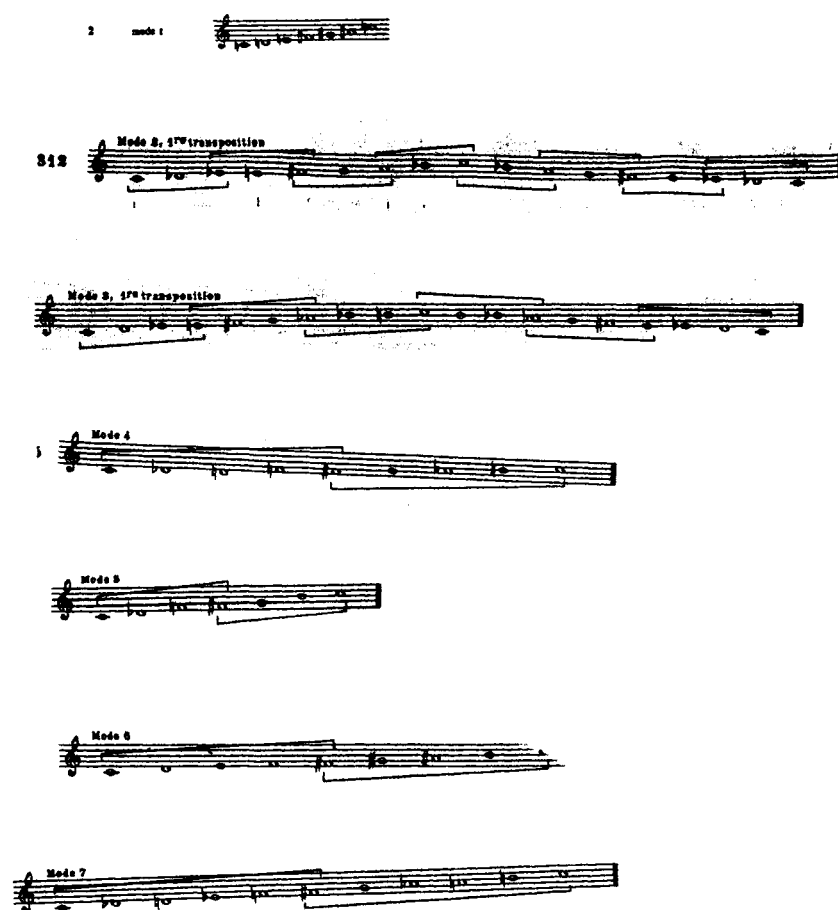
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<sup>63</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 13.



compositional procedure, is unmistakable. In Samuel's interviews with the composer, Messiaen calls himself a modal composer and soon thereafter points out that all the music of antiquity was modal.<sup>64</sup>

*Example 4-2 The Modes of Limited Transpositions*



Each of these modes can only be transposed a certain number of times before they repeat the pitches of a previous transposition. For instance, there are only three transpositions of mode 2 that are possible. (In *TML*, the “first transposition” of a mode is that which

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<sup>64</sup> Samuel, pp. 49-50.

begins on “C,” not the first transposition upward of the original.) The fourth transposition contains the same pitches as that of the first transposition (Example 4-3).

*Example 4-3 Mode 2, First and Fourth Transpositions*



Modes 2 and 3 receive the most attention in Messiaen’s music. As he states in *TML*, Debussy and Dukas “made such remarkable use of [mode 1, the whole-tone scale] that there is nothing more to add.”<sup>65</sup> Mode 2 is the so-called “octatonic” scale, and mode 3 contains the pitches of the whole-tone scale embedded within it. Modes 4 through 7 are each transposable six times, while modes 2 and 3, transposable three and four times respectively. All of these scales are ideally suited to the symmetrical melodic and harmonic constructions which occur in Messiaen’s music. Messiaen’s application of the term “mode” to his Modes of Limited Transposition does not carry any specific connotations associated with the church modes. There are, however, correlations between the ways in which these two very different scale-systems function.

Theorists have gone to great length to link Messiaen’s modes with specific sentiments or concepts. While certain patterns may exist within a specific piece or within the broader context of Messiaen’s output, the discussion of modal-musical symbolism within his music is tenuous at best. Generalizations, such as linking a movement’s predominant mode to theological subject matter- thus linking a later appearance of that

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 59.

mode to the same theological idea- are based in speculation only.<sup>66</sup> Like the modes of plainchant, Messiaen's modes can be used to color and create many different affects; the modes themselves do not represent any one explicit sentiment.

Messiaen's conception of the modes is one that lends ambiguity to traditional tonal thought. For example, the gesture reproduced in Example 4-4, which occurs at the opening of the "Première communion de la Vierge" from the *Vingt Regards*, is in the first transposition of mode 4.

Example 4-4 Opening of "Première communion de la Vierge," upper stave



In this case, Messiaen uses mode 4 in order to obscure traditional tonal thought through chromaticism. Messiaen chooses pitch material based on the modes, and he sometimes even labels these choices in his scores. One might venture to say that he even composed passages using a process not far removed from jazz improvisation. Scales were the root of his compositional thought and often dictated the pitch material of his music. Also, Messiaen's improvisations at *l'Eglise de la Trinité* gave him an opportunity to "work out" the compositional potential of his modes on a regular basis, in much the same manner as a jazz musician might search for possibilities within a limited framework governed by scales.

Another way in which Messiaen's modes obscure traditional tonal practice is by a multiplicity of tonal potential rather than an equalization of it through chromatic

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<sup>66</sup> See Siglind Bruhn's *Images and Ideas in Modern French Piano Music: The Extra-Musical Subtext in Piano Works by Ravel, Debussy, and Messiaen*, particularly her discussion of the *Vingt Regards* beginning on page 391.

saturation (as is occurs with the twelve-tone method). Each mode is “in the atmosphere of several tonalities, *without polytonality*, the composer being free to give predominance to one of the tonalities or to leave the tonal impression unsettled” (emphasis original).<sup>67</sup> Messiaen frequently creates chains of ascending or descending triads within a mode, or parallel chordal progressions, such as in Example 4-5. This particular progression comes to rest on a B-flat chord in second inversion, but this is perhaps the only clue as to the tonality of this passage. This progression of chords is in mode 2, second transposition; the symmetric arrangement of chords possible in the octatonic scale weakens the effect of one chord being more important than the other. Tonal relationships a third apart are often important in Messiaen’s music, since both the major and minor third symmetrically divide the octave. The fundamental diminished seventh chord existing in mode 2 and the augmented triad of mode 3 often govern these relationships. The chain of minor thirds in Example 4-5 provides an illustration of the spacing of chords outlining a diminished seventh possible in mode 2.

*Example 4-5* “Première communion de la Vierge,” measures 17-18, and the diminished chord outlined by the roots of these triads.<sup>68</sup>



<sup>67</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 58.

<sup>68</sup> This progression is a series of triads in 6/4 position spelled enharmonically. In this progression, the voices a third and a fifth above the root of each triad outline the same diminished seventh chord; this is because these two voices are a minor third apart. This diminished chord is different from the one depicted in Example 4-5, which outlines the chord formed by the roots of these triads

Perhaps the most important connection between these two types of modal music resides in their relationship to Western tonality. Modal music, as witnessed in both chant and Messiaen, uses a tonic without adhering to traditional tonal harmonic practice. Anthony Pople describes Messiaen's use of modes as related to Bartok's, and he describes the features of modal music in the following way:

The melodies are sharply characterized by recurrent intervals, often those which are but rarely found in diatonic music, and there is a pervasive 'atmosphere.'... Whereas the melodic and harmonic patterns that underlie Romantic tonal music- scale and arpeggio formulae in the melodic lines, 'functional' chord progressions in the harmony-- have a quality of temporal articulation that contributes strongly to the sense of phrasing, the concept of mode implies far less of this kind. All that is necessary for music to be modal is that it should adhere to the notes of a mode, and, this being so, it is hardly surprising that the most telling characteristic of both diatonic and non-diatonic modal music is a sense of improvisation-- whether contemplative or frenetic-- within a static atmosphere.<sup>69</sup>

Several additional factors, inherent in the modes of plainchant and those of Messiaen, contribute to this tonal ambiguity. Gregorian chant lacks the melodic focus provided by the raised seventh scale degree and, in most cases, a reciting tone a fifth above the final.<sup>70</sup> Messiaen's modal system avoids the scalar interval structure of tonality, but through symmetrical divisions of the octave. Messiaen's music often creates the sense of a tonic, but one whose strength is weakened both by the increased chromaticism offered by the modes as well as the diversity of tonalities possible in a single mode.

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<sup>69</sup> Peter Hill, ed., *The Messiaen Companion* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 18-9.

<sup>70</sup> The Lydian and Hypolydian modes are exceptions; the seventh scale degree is a half-step below the final in both cases.

## Monody

Monody plays a special role in the music of Messiaen. It is striking that a composer who creates such complex structures and textures, sometimes to the point of heterophony, will often also present an unaccompanied melody as a solo or in unison with other voices. Messiaen composes in this manner to evoke several different types of music, reflected in the examples that follow.

It should be first noted that there is a type of monody found in Messiaen's music that does not really enter into this discussion. The "solo cadenza," as seen in the "Abîme des oiseaux" of the *Quatuor*, is often found in Messiaen's music as an expression of virtuosity through stylized birdsong. Messiaen's birdsong music, particularly in his early works for the piano, is written in a style that does reflect that of some of his chant paraphrases. The music of "Le merle et tous les oiseaux" in the "Regard des hauteurs" as well as the piano cadenzas in *Reveil des Oiseaux* are written for the piano in octave doubling. However, Messiaen's birdsong style quickly evolved away from these examples in the 1950s to include contrapuntal writing as well as a highly colorful, chordal style designed to capture the overtones and sometimes even the personality of a bird. This relates to several chant paraphrases in Messiaen's later music, which amount to homorhythmic harmonizations of the original source intended to "color" the subject.<sup>71</sup>

Examples of monody found in the works of Messiaen can be divided into three categories. First, there are instances where Messiaen is clearly evoking the sound of plainchant. Second are the examples where he writes a monodic melody in order to

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<sup>71</sup> See discussion the chant paraphrases in *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste* discussed in Chapter VI.

evoke a type of non-Western music. And finally, there are occasions where Messiaen combines the two ideas by quoting a chant melody in a non-Western style.<sup>72</sup>

The first category of monodic melodies found in Messiaen's works, melodies that evoke plainchant, is the primary concern of this paper. Chant exerted an influence on Messiaen's rhythms, melodies, and to a lesser extent, his compositional forms. Beyond all these influences, perhaps the most important trait by which an audience would recognize a reference to chant is through the music's texture. A chant melody found in polyphonic music does not evoke the sound of the original. Even if a listener recognizes that melody, the quotation takes on a symbolism characterized by the music that surrounds it within the texture. In contrast, when Messiaen presents "monody," a texture that deliberately evokes the Roman rite, his intentions become obvious to the listener. Reference to chant through music's texture is the most direct way to communicate the affects of piety and ritual that one associates with the Catholic liturgy.

In the strictest sense of the word, perhaps monody should exclude that which is doubled by one or more voices in different octaves. In chant, such doublings are rare; choirs generally sing plainchant in unison. In Messiaen's music, however, it is critical that we include such examples. Messiaen's evocations of chant sometimes imitate the sound of a soloist, but most often monody in Messiaen is meant to emulate the sound of a choir. Especially in music for piano, octave doublings of a single line create the illusion of multiple voices singing together (See Example 4-7 below.) In other cases, such as the "Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes," octave doubling becomes a necessity, particularly at the loudest moments. The range in which the cello and violin could play

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<sup>72</sup> See discussion of "Regard de l'Esprit de joie" from the *Vingt Regards* in Chapter VI. Here Messiaen describes the melody as "Thème de danse orientale et plain-chantesque."

in unison is greatly limited, and the movement would certainly lack power if the piano did not cover the entire register.

Example 4-6 “Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes,” letter O

Presque lent, terriblo et puissant

Vln

Clar.

Vcl

Presque lent, terrible et puissant (♩ = 76 env.)

8<sup>a</sup> bassa

8<sup>a</sup> bassa

The pitches of this example are the main theme of the movement (as seen in Example 3-7) in octave displacement. The strings and clarinet play in three different octaves, while the piano presents the same theme over the full range of the keyboard. The “monody” of this movement is therefore expanded over several octaves to increase the dynamic and expressive range available.

Several examples of monody that evoke plainchant can be found in the *Visions de l'Amen*. The sixth movement, “Amen des Anges, des Saints, du chant des oiseaux,” begins with monody which Messiaen describes as “Song of the purity of the Saints.”<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Messiaen, *Messiaen Edition*, p. 33.



Example 4-7 Opening of “Amen des Anges, des Saints, du chant des oiseaux”

The musical score is for two pianos, labeled '1er PIANO' and '2e PIANO'. It begins with a tempo marking 'Très modéré (♩=92)' and a dynamic marking 'f chantant'. The music is in 2/4 time and features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like 'f cresc.' and 'ff'. The piece concludes with a 'Rall. molto' marking and a final 'ff' dynamic.

This melody is not based on any specific plainchant melody. The melodic style of the line reproduces that of both sung melisma and psalmody. The legato slur marks (and the indication “chantant”) at the beginning contrast with the more spoken, syllabic music found in the repeated E’s and D’s of measures 6 and 8. Rather than use one of his modes of limited transposition, Messiaen draws on one of the Gregorian modes. The tonal center of this melody is E, and the mode used is Mixolydian. The rhythms progress mostly by eighth-notes, with some of the values lengthened, as in measures 2 and 4, while some are shortened to sixteenth notes (measures 3, 5, and 7). In many passages like this, Messiaen’s statement in *TML* is clearly operative: “Plainchant is an inexhaustible mine of rare and expressive melodic contour. We shall make use of them,

forgetting their modes and rhythms for our own.”<sup>74</sup> In *Example 4-7*, however, we see that this pronouncement only applies to the rhythm, as Messiaen uses a Gregorian mode rather than one of his own.

Examples of monody in Messiaen’s music often occur at or towards the beginning of a movement. When the melody reappears later in a work, it is often accompanied, harmonized, or presented with new material superimposed over it. In the case of “Amen des Anges, des Saints, du chant des oiseaux,” the opening melody returns with an accompaniment reminiscent of Ravel.

*Example 4-8* “Amen des Anges, des Saints, du chant des oiseaux,” measures 150-3.

The second type of monody, namely monody meant to convey exoticism, occurs at the opening of “Amen des étoiles, de la planète à l’anneau.” Messiaen describes this movement as a “brutal and savage dance.”<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. 1, p. 33.

<sup>75</sup> Messiaen, *Messiaen Edition*, p. 32.

Example 4-9 “Amen des étoiles, de la planète à l’anneau,” beginning.

This music, as well as other movements like it (“Danse de la fureur” from the *Quatuor*, for example), exemplifies Messiaen’s music at its most earthy and primitive. The composer describes this music as a dance, but it does not resemble the dance music of any one culture. He uses a monodic texture to help convey a primal simplicity. The driving rhythms of these melodies, sounded without accompaniment, create an exuberance that expresses great tension. This lies in opposition to examples of “Gregorian” monody in Messiaen, which, as in “Amen des Anges, des Saints, du chant des oiseaux,” almost always express tranquility and spiritual repose.

The third type of monody, the occasions where Messiaen combines the two ideas by quoting a chant melody in a non-Western style, is best illustrated by “Regard de l’Esprit de joie” from the *Vingt Regards*. Messiaen directly quotes the “Haec dies” from Easter Mass in a style that he calls “danse orientale.”<sup>76</sup> The term “orientale” here does not refer specifically to the music of a specific Asian culture; it is synonymous with the word “exotic” for Messiaen.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup> See full discussion of this movement in Chapter VI.

<sup>77</sup> Messiaen uses Hindu rhythms, but as I have stated before, these rhythms tend to represent abstract formulae within the composer’s vocabulary. He does not use them to make his music sound like that of India.

Example 4-10 “L’Esprit de joie” and “Haec dies,” beginning

Presque vif (♩=160)

PIANO *f staccato*

8<sup>e</sup> basse  
(Thème de danse orientale et plain-chantesque)

*ff (violent)*

Haec dies,

Before leaving the topic of monody, one must mention the subject of Messiaen's works for chorus and orchestra. The *Trois petites liturgies de la Présence Divine* (1943) is a work for female choir, piano solo, and orchestra. There is no music sung “a cappella” in this work, and yet Messiaen suggests a liturgical act by writing most of the choir's music in unison. *La Transfiguration de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (1969) is a monumental work for mixed choir of 100 voices, a group of seven soloists (piano, flute, clarinet, cello, vibraphone, marimba, and xylophone), and orchestra. Much of the text comes from the narrative of the Transfiguration of Christ in the Gospel. Messiaen sets the Gospel text for the choir in unison, in what Robert Sherlaw Johnson describes as a “neo-plainchant style.”<sup>78</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Robert Sherlaw Johnson, *Messiaen*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 172.

## Neumes

Mocquereau divides *Le Nombre Musical* into two halves, respectively entitled “The Origin of Rhythm” and “Melody.” The first half of this treatise was discussed at length in my own examination of the influence of Mocquereau’s rhythmic theories on Messiaen. Mocquereau’s discussion of Gregorian melodic style also deeply affected Messiaen’s thoughts on melodic shape. When Messiaen calls plainchant an “inexhaustible mine of rare and expressive melodic contours,” we might expect those melodic shapes to influence his own melodies. What is perhaps more surprising is the degree to which Messiaen thought of melodic contours as neumes.

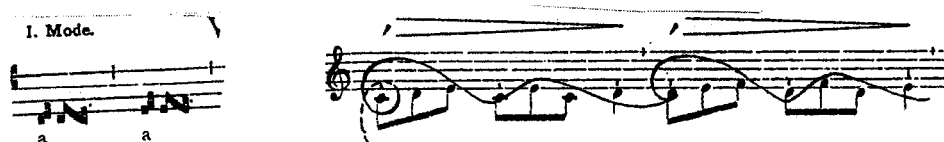
After a brief history of chant notation, followed by a cursory chapter on Gregorian modal theory, Mocquereau devotes his discussion of Gregorian melodies to neumes and their realization in performance. He unites what he has already taught about rhythm (as well as larger shapes dictated by arsis and thesis) with an examination of the expressive implications of different types of neumes. One way in which he explores these implications is by examining the different expressive and rhythmic realizations of examples that are identical in pitch but consist of different types of neumes.

For instance, Mocquereau has an exercise that realizes two neumes, a *torculus resupinus* followed by a *porrectus praepunctis* (Example 4-11). He explains the interpretation of this gesture both verbally and with a version of the exercise in modern notation.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> The examples provided by Mocquereau often take the form of exercises which he intended the reader to sing.

Example 4-11 Mocquereau, *Le Nombre Musical*, pages 284-5



In the above example, there is a principal accent placed on the first note, and therefore the gesture is drawn with chironomy which depicts two arses and one thesis.

Mocquereau follows this with a contrasting example that interprets three neumes: the *pes*, *clivis*, and the *porrectus*. While these neumes contain the same pitches as the last exercise, they dictate a different rhythm, expressive shape, and therefore chironomy.

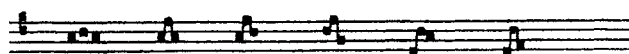
Example 4-12 Mocquereau, *Le Nombre Musical*, pages 286-7



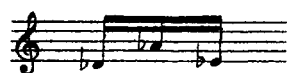
As he did with Mocquereau's rhythmic theories, Messiaen transcribes and summarizes much of what Mocquereau said about neumes and their expressive shapes in his *Traité*. He catalogues the most basic neumes and their implied interpretation in his text. He also goes to great lengths to examine the appearance of certain "neumes" throughout the works of the great composers of the Western classical tradition. In fact, by the third page of his discussion of plainchant, Messiaen illustrates Debussy's use of the *torculus* in *Reflets dans l'eau*.

Example 4-13

A. *Torculus*



B. Debussy's "*Torculus*" according to Messiaen



C. *Reflets dans l'eau*, beginning.

Andantino molto  
(Tempo rubato)

PIANO

Messiaen later includes a table of neumes as they appear in important melodies throughout the music of the Western classical tradition under the heading, "Here are some examples of neumes which have inspired the great composers."<sup>80</sup> It is curious that Messiaen would go so far as to say "which have inspired." Despite the similarities in shape, certainly Messiaen did not suppose that the *porrectus* actually inspired the melody of Ravel's "*Alborada del gracioso*." Perhaps he is making a larger point; Messiaen views

<sup>80</sup> Messiaen, *Traité*, pp. 35-8.

these neumes and the musical shapes they represent as an intrinsic, inevitable aspect of Western music.

Messiaen's commentary on his own music, particularly later in his life, makes frequent reference to neumes. Some of his references to neumes within his music are revealing, as in his discussion of *Les offrandes oubliées* included in the *Messiaen Edition*. He describes the opening melody as "Lamentation on the strings, the sorrowful 'neumes' of which divide the melody into groups of uneven duration."<sup>81</sup>

*Example 4-14 Les offrandes oubliées, beginning (strings)*

The image shows a musical score for the beginning of 'Les offrandes oubliées' for strings. The score is for five parts: I. Violons, II. Violons, Altos, Violoncelles, and Contrebasses. The tempo/mood is 'Très lent, douloureux, profondément triste' with a metronome marking of quarter note = 44. The music is in 4/4 time and features a unison melody with beaming and slurs, accompanied by a sustained dyad (E and G) in the winds (not shown). The string parts are marked 'con Sord.' and 'ff'.

This opening unison melody is accompanied by a sustained dyad (E and G) in the winds (not shown). As I showed in Chapter III, the rhythmic structure of Gregorian chant greatly influenced Messiaen's own approach to rhythm. Messiaen confirms this by portraying his conception of this melody as a series of neumes creating eighth-note groups of uneven duration ( $|2 + 3 + 3 + 2| 2 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 2|$  etc.). Messiaen groups his "neumes" with beaming and slurs in modern notation

Messiaen's analysis of *Île de Feu I*, the first of the "Quatre Études de rythme," provides another example of the composer using the terminology of neumes to explain

<sup>81</sup> Messiaen, *Messiaen Edition*, p. 34.



melodic shapes. He describes a gesture in the right hand as “bringing to mind the *climacus resupinus* of Gregorian chant.”<sup>82</sup>

Example 4-15 *Île de Feu I*, measure 18, and an example of *climacus resupinus*



This is an example where Messiaen’s commentary links his music to neumatic notation, but the connection is not vital to his conception of the music. While it is possible that he deliberately composed this gesture with the *climacus resupinus* in mind, it is more likely that he simply noticed the correlation after the fact. As we have seen in the *Traité*, Messiaen saw connections between neumatic notation and composers who certainly did not conceive of their melodies in such terms. Under the heading of *climacus resupinus* in the *Traité*, Messiaen lists melodies from Chopin’s Etude Opus 10, No. 3, the Andante from Mozart’s “Jupiter” Symphony, and Berlioz’s *Roméo et Juliette*, among others. In another instance, Messiaen even points out the *climacus resupinus* in the song of the blackbird in the first and fourth movements of the *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*.<sup>83</sup> Gregorian chant influenced Messiaen to such a profound level that he saw the shapes of neumes even in transcribed birdsong. This is another example where the neume-type mentioned probably did not play a vital role in the composition of the relevant passage, unless, of course, birds can read neumes! Such commentary, however, remains a

<sup>82</sup> The “Quatre Études de rythme” were reprinted by Durand in the year 2000. This new edition contains commentary and analysis by Messiaen as a preface to each piece.

<sup>83</sup> Messiaen, *Messiaen Edition*, p. 28.

remarkable testament of the profound impact Gregorian chant made on Messiaen's musical thought.

### Melodic Styles of Plainchant

There are four styles by which a text may be set to music in Gregorian chant: recitational, syllabic, neumatic, and melismatic. These styles are differentiated by the amount of music associated with a word or syllable. Some chants exist wholly within one style, while it is more likely that several methods of text setting will appear within a single chant. Such matters concern all composers of vocal music, and a listener will hear quasi-spoken recitative versus arioso singing in any opera. Gregorian chant addresses these issues in unique ways, however, and Messiaen's adaptation of these methods, particularly in his vocal music, is striking.

The simplest style of chant involves the recitation formulas of the psalms and is called liturgical recitative. Much of the Divine Office consists of psalm singing; in any given liturgical week, the complete book of psalms is sung. When psalm verses appear in other chants, they are set with the same format of reciting tone and cadential formulas. Other quasi-spoken chants, like the Epistle and the Gospel, are of even simpler construction.

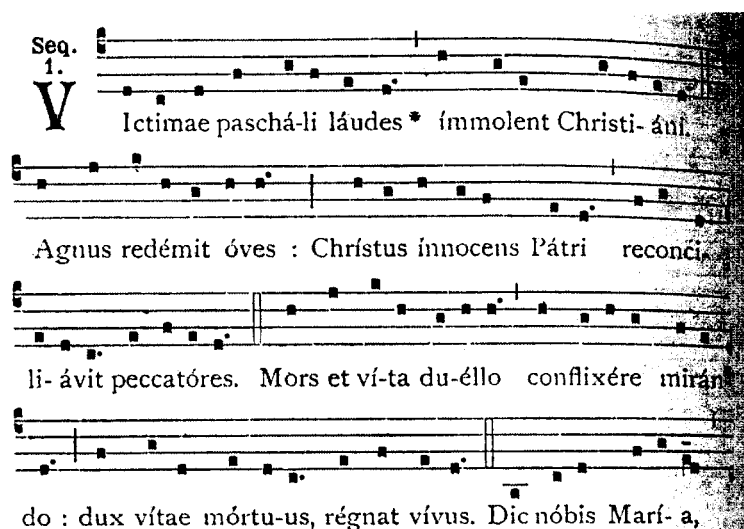
#### Example 4-16 Tone for the Gospel, beginning (from the *Liber Usualis*)

D Ominus vobiscum. R. Et cum spi-ri-tu tu-o. Sequenti-a san-  
Full stop.  
cti Evange-li-i secundum Mattha-e-um. R. Glo-ri-a ti-bi Domine.  
In illo tempore : Dixit Jesus discipu-lis su-is : Vos estis sal terrae.

In this excerpt, all of the chant is sung on the same pitch except for the last syllable before the name of the Gospel's author (Matthew) and the second syllable of the word "tibi." While recitational style may include more complex starting and cadential formulas than this example, it is nonetheless representative. The speed at which the text is declaimed is flexible, to adjust to nuances of the text. Rubato is implied in the performance of this style, in order to avoid a rigid rhythmic interpretation, and much of the music in this style is sung by a soloist.

Syllabic text setting is similar to recitational style in that each syllable of text is sung to only one basic pulse of chant. The difference between the styles is that in syllabic style, the pitches change.

*Example 4-17 "Victimae paschali laudes," Easter Sunday Mass, beginning*



Instead of a single reciting tone, there is a composed melody whose shape mirrors the spoken inflection of the text very closely.

A melody in neumatic style has one to several neumes of music set to every syllable of text.

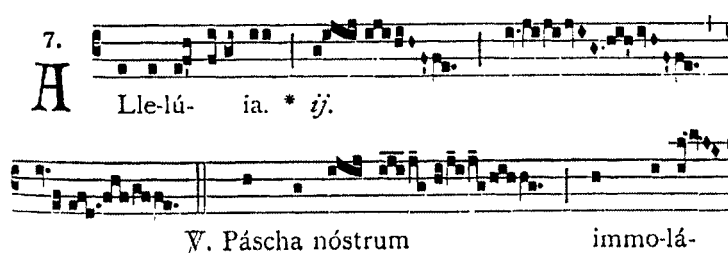
*Example 4-18 Offertory, Easter Sunday Mass, beginning*



The music takes greater artistic license with the text than in the previous examples. Here each syllable of text is colored by melodic gestures from one to as many as eight notes. While Gregorian chant rarely involves expressive text painting, neumatic style offers a more satisfying and elevated musical experience than the more spoken syllabic or recitational styles.

The fourth style of setting text in Gregorian chant is known as melismatic. The melisma is an ornate and florid melody given to one syllable of text, and it is most often associated with the Alleluia.

*Example 4-19 Alleluia, Easter Sunday Mass, beginning*



In the above example, the first measure is a neumatic setting of the word “Alleluia;” the rest of this melody is sung to the final syllable “-ia.” A long melisma at this point in an Alleluia chant is known as a jubilus, which translates as “song of joy.” The Alleluia is the most joyous of all chants in the liturgy, and the abandon and enthusiasm of the jubilus represents this emotion best. The Alleluia and jubilus were very important stylistic

references for Messiaen, both for the sentiment they embody as well as the imaginative musicality they express.

### Melodic Styles of Plainchant in Messiaen's Works

When Messiaen turns to plainchant for compositional models, the music he writes usually evokes the source material. While his composition teachers and predecessors often paraphrased chant using classic techniques like cantus firmus and fugue, Messiaen used the styles, forms, and rhythms of chant within his compositions. One of the ways Messiaen evokes chant is by using the melodic styles of plainchant just discussed.

“Action de graces,” the first song of the cycle *Poèmes pour Mi*, uses two of these chant styles extensively. During the opening section of the song, the singer recites the text on a single pitch, and the same cadential pattern occurs at each comma in the text. This pattern, like the Tone for the Gospel above (see Example 4-16), involves a melodic descent before the last word of every phrase, where the melody then returns to the reciting tone.

Example 4-21 “Action de graces,” beginning

CHANT *Très modéré*

PIANO *Très modéré* *pp*

Le ciel,

Et l'eau qui suit les variations des nuages, Et la terre, et les montagnes qui attendent toujours.



In the above example, Messiaen evokes the sound of recitational chant rather than that of operatic recitative. The declamation of text on a single note and the cadential formulae are compositional devices which have ritualistic connotations associated with the liturgy. Operatic recitative generally has more melodic shape. While Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande* is a notable exception to that rule, the uniform cadential patterns of "Action de graces" resonate with those of recitational-style plainchant, not with any operatic models.

The speed at which the text is declaimed in "Action de graces" varies, lending to this music an improvisational quality which imitates the singing of psalms in Gregorian chant. The insistence of the reciting tone, coupled with unchanging pattern of cadence, make this piece unmistakably reminiscent of the recitational chant, particularly the simple style as seen in the Tone for the Gospel. Furthermore, Messiaen uses this passage as an example of psalmody in *TML*.<sup>84</sup>

The melismatic flourish at the end of this excerpt on the word "transforme" is also reminiscent of Gregorian chant in several ways. While a recitational chant would never end with a melisma, syllabic or neumatic settings of chant sometimes end with a short melismatic setting of the word "Amen" or "Alleluia." And while it is difficult to generalize about chant shapes regarding text setting and styles, many neumatic phrases of

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<sup>84</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 45, and Vol. II, p. 31.

Gregorian chant begin with syllabic or small neume-value settings and move towards a melismatic cadence, as does the phrase “Et la lumière qui transforme.”

The opening music of “Action de graces” is repeated several times; with each repetition, the final melisma becomes longer. Much of the initial sung material in this song is unaccompanied, imitating the sound of a soloist chanting psalmody. The fourth verse, as seen in Example 4-22, has increased activity in the piano building up to the climactic melisma of measure 42 (Example 4-23).

*Example 4-22 “Action de graces,” fourth verse (measures 36-9)*

The musical score for Example 4-22 consists of two systems of staves. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The tempo markings 'Très modéré' and 'Modéré' are placed above the vocal line. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings such as 'pizz', 'p', 'ff', and 'molto'.

The singer follows the recitational pattern found at the beginning of “Action de graces,” but the music is becoming more impassioned. The repetitions of the recitational pattern are rising in pitch, and the crescendo of the piano adds sweep to the escalating emotions of this passage. The affect is no longer that of the calm, ritualistic tone of the beginning, but a transition to the joyous, energetic melisma of Example 4-23, the culmination of the fourth verse.

Example 4-23 “Action de grâces,” measures 40-5

The musical score for measures 40-5 of "Action de grâces" is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the tempo marking "Presque lent" and the dynamic "pp". The lyrics "Et dans un Pain plus doux que la fraîcheur des étoiles" are written below the vocal line. The piano accompaniment follows the same tempo and dynamic. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the tempo marking "Modéré" and the dynamic "pp". The piano accompaniment includes the tempo marking "Modéré" and the dynamic "pp". The score concludes with a long melisma on the word "étoiles".

The long melisma on the word “étoiles” functions as a jubilus-style ending for this phrase. This melisma is sung with the same vowel sound, “ah,” as the “-ia” of the jubilus, which perhaps explains why Messiaen prefers to set the melisma on the penultimate syllable of the word “étoiles.”<sup>85</sup> This long melodic flourish contains motives that relate both to the initial melisma of “transforme” (measure 43) as well as to the cadential formula of the recitational music at the beginning of the song (the descending half-step motion in measure 45). Here the melodic line is accompanied and doubled by the piano. The piano in fact begins the melody of this melisma while the singer sustains a

<sup>85</sup> The stress of the spoken word “étoiles” falls on the second syllable, another reason Messiaen chooses to “accent” this part of the word.



G in measure 42. In setting this melisma as an ensemble (two octaves in the piano plus voice), Messiaen may be evoking the response portion of a responsorial chant.

The coda of this movement begins with a soft accompaniment in F-sharp Major colored by Messiaen's mode 2. The soprano sings seven "Alleluias" over this texture, also in mode 2.

*Example 4-24 "Action de graces," coda (measures 46-57)*

The musical score for the coda of "Action de graces" (measures 46-57) is presented in F-sharp Major and Mode 2. The score is divided into two main sections: "Au mouvement" and "Très modéré".

**Section 1: Au mouvement (measures 46-57)**

- Tempo:** Au mouvement
- Key:** F-sharp Major
- Mode:** Mode 2
- Instrumentation:** Piano and Soprano
- Lyrics:** Mon Dieu.

**Section 2: Très modéré (measures 58-65)**

- Tempo:** Très modéré
- Key:** F-sharp Major
- Mode:** Mode 2
- Instrumentation:** Piano and Soprano
- Lyrics:** Alleluia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

The piano accompaniment in the "Très modéré" section is marked *mf* and *expressif*, with a note "(très brouillé de pédale)". The vocal line is marked *mf* and *expressif, avec une joie sereine*. The score is numbered 7 at the end of the first system.



The jubilus of Messiaen's coda (measures 54-6) resembles that of a Gregorian "Alleluia." It consists of three phrases, denoted by slurs and breath marks; a chant jubilus usually consists of several such groups. Messiaen also sets this jubilus as a re-articulation of the last syllable of the text, as a Gregorian jubilus would be sung. It is also worth noting that most "Alleluias" are tonally closed; they start and end on the same pitch. In Messiaen's coda, the singer does begin and end on the same note, although an octave higher.

Messiaen uses the "Fourth Rhythmic Notation" in this passage, meaning that the pianist and singer's rhythms are conceived in different meters but barred the same for reasons of ensemble.<sup>86</sup> The rhythmic structure of the piano consists of groupings of four sixteenth-notes into seven quarter-notes per measure. The number seven is obviously symbolically important here, for the soprano sings Alleluia seven times over a texture which groups bars into seven quarter-note beats. The tied notes and apparent syncopations of the soprano line appear to be at odds with Messiaen's instructions "expressive, with a serene joy." Based on Messiaen's explanation of rhythmic notations in *TML*, we know that this melody is not constructed as a series of syncopations over the

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<sup>86</sup> See discussion of Rhythmic Notations in Chapter III.

regular metric patterns of the piano part. The rhythm of the vocal melody is better reflected in the notation of Example 4-25; the notation of this rhythm in “Action de graces” (Example 4-24) addresses the practical concern of matching the meter of the vocal line to that of the piano. The conclusion therefore would be to sing this line as it sounds in free rhythm, not as syncopations to the regular pulse of the piano’s quarter-note groups.

*Example 4-25* “Action de graces,” First Alleluia in Rhythmic Notation One



As outlined above, Messiaen discusses the affect and style of chant types under the heading “Plainchant Forms” in *TML*. He discusses the style rather than the form of psalmody, and he uses an excerpt from “Action de graces” (Example 4-21) as an example of this style within his own composition. Another topic under the same heading centers on the character of the Alleluia chant. “Résurrection,” the last song of the cycle *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*, represents an excellent example of Messiaen transcribing the style, affect, and to a certain extent the form of a Gregorian chant. While Messiaen discusses this excerpt in *TML* under the heading of plainchant, his description amounts to more of a “play-by-play” account of the music than an detailed examination of the similarities between his example and Gregorian chant.

“Résurrection” is subtitled “For Easter Day.” This song clearly represents Messiaen’s interpretation and expansion of the Alleluia sung at Easter Sunday Mass. There is also a pun on his son Pascal’s name, which is not alluded to here but in the

fourth song of the cycle with the text “Tu t’agites comme un battant de cloche pascale” (You wriggle like the clapper of an Easter bell).<sup>87</sup>

Messiaen models his music on the Easter “Alleluia” on multiple levels. First, he follows a modified form of a generic Alleluia. The singer twice sings “Alleluia,” followed by a melisma. This follows the practice of the repeated Alleluia, soloist followed by choir, but Messiaen does not imitate the proportionate length of the jubilus. He follows this with music that corresponds to a “B” section verse. The setting is syllabic and neumatic, and provides commentary on the liturgical theme of the day. There is a coda which he describes as, “volleys in bird style contrast with the powerful solemnity of the chords... last volley, like an instantaneous blow of light!”<sup>88</sup> The singer takes on a more declamatory style at this point; similarities to the Alleluia, aside from a generalized affect of great joy, end with this coda, and so it is not reproduced below. This entire sequence is then repeated with transposed pitch material and new text.

*Example 4-26 “Résurrection,” measures 1-17*

The image displays a musical score for measures 1-17 of 'Résurrection'. It consists of two systems, each with a Chant part (soprano line) and a Piano accompaniment (grand staff). The Chant part is marked 'vif' and 'f' (forte). The lyrics 'Al - le - lu - ia' are written under the Chant line. The Piano part features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with various chords and melodic lines. The score is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The first system ends with a double bar line, and the second system continues the music.

<sup>87</sup> The Paschal Mystery is another term signifying Christ's Resurrection, and Eastertide is also referred to as Paschaltide.

<sup>88</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 45.

Il est le premier, le Seigneur Jésus. Des morts il est le premier-né.  
He is the 1<sup>st</sup>, He is the 1<sup>st</sup>-born of the dead.

30 7 stars at love to the trans fixed, put on your garment of  
Sept étoilés d'amour au trans-per-cé, revêtez votre ha-bit de clar.

Je suis res-sus-ci-té, Je chan-te: I sing:  
I am risen, "Je suis res-sus-ci-té,"

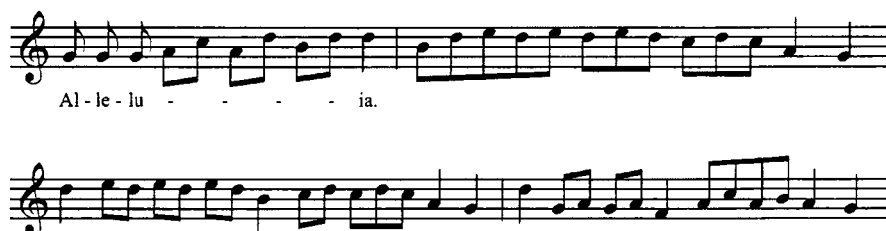
For you my Father, For you, my God, I pass fr. death to life!  
pour toi, mon Père, pour toi, mon Dieu, al-le-lu-ia. De mort à vie je pas-se."

The modal language employed by the vocal line is that of Gregorian chant, not Messiaen's modes of limited transpositions. The opening "Alleluias" are in Dorian mode with a final of A-sharp. The music then shifts to Hypodorian with a final of G-sharp at

the text “Il est le premier.”<sup>89</sup> The vocal line briefly uses Messiaen’s mode 7 in measure 10, but this immediately gives way to Hypomixolydian with a final of C at “Je suis ressuscité.” The vocal writing at this point exerts tremendous tonal power. While there is a low bass D in the piano, coupled with an upper chord which sounds like a D minor chord with added chromaticism, the cadential figures in the vocal line (which always cadence on C or G) manage to tonally overpower the piano chords. The passage thus sounds like it is in C major with a flatted seventh scale degree. In this context, the piano chords take on the function of a dominant, and the top note G in the chord helps suggest that.

The original chant, the opening of which is reproduced below, is the source of some important motivic material.

*Example 4-27 Alleluia, Easter Sunday Mass, beginning*



The opening gesture of the chant climbs a fifth, as does the melody of Messiaen’s first measure. In “Résurrection,” Messiaen makes great use of cadences arrived at from a whole-step above in measures 1 and 4 on the dominant (E-sharp), and in 7 and 8 on the tonic (A-sharp). The original chant also cadences three times using this interval.

The most striking motivic connection to the chant is found in all of the gestures which oscillate around, both below and above, the dominant. Messiaen’s “half cadence” in measures 1 and 3 echoes this, as does the writing in measure 9. But with the

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<sup>89</sup> These are obviously all transposed modes.

appearance of the Hypomixolydian mode in measure 12, this oscillating motive becomes more insistent, culminating with the repeated F-G figure at “De mort à vie je passe.”

Both Messiaen and the original chant source make use of this motive with pitches other than the dominant and its neighbors.

The section of “Résurrection” beginning with the text “Il est le premier” paraphrases the Tract from the Mass on the Fourth Sunday of Lent.

*Example 4-28* Tract, Mass on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, excerpt as it appears in *Traité*<sup>90</sup>



During Lent, the Alleluia of Mass is replaced by the Tract. The form and style of the Tract resemble the Gradual; the excerpt of Example 4-28 is taken from the beginning of the verse, and Messiaen’s music mirrors this. The section of “Résurrection” which begins with the text “Il est le premier” functions as a “verse” in relation to the opening settings of “alleluia.” The style of the original Tract is highly melismatic, and by adding text to the melisma which sets the word “Montes” in the Tract, Messiaen creates a “prosa.” A prosa in plainchant occurs when a composer sets new text to a melisma of an existing chant. This was fashionable at various points during the Medieval era; it is thought that the Sequence of the Mass originated as a jubilus with a prosa from the Alleluia.<sup>91</sup> The text of the prosa is always set syllabically, roughly one syllable for every note of the old melisma. Messiaen does not alter the mode of the original, and as in many of his paraphrases, he uses the same named notes as the original.<sup>92</sup> The Tract of Example

<sup>90</sup> Messiaen, *Traité*, Vol. IV, p. 14.

<sup>91</sup> The Sequence occurs after the Alleluia in Mass.

<sup>92</sup> Messiaen’s key signature in “Résurrection” raises the original chant by a half-step. My point is simply that when Messiaen paraphrases a chant, he often uses many of the same notes and manipulates the

4-28 features the same “oscillating” motive found in other melodies of “Résurrection,” and Messiaen exploits this motive to thematically unify the different sections of this song.

The paraphrase in the example above enriches the religious symbolism of “Résurrection.” Lent is a penitential season in the Christian calendar, and the absence of the Alleluia during Mass represents an effort to curb celebratory affect in the liturgy. The Alleluias sung on Easter morning therefore have a tremendous musical and spiritual impact, as no Alleluia has been sung in the liturgy during the forty days of Lent. By quoting the Tract from the Fourth Sunday of Lent in a song which culminates with the Resurrection (“Je suis ressuscité”), Messiaen is retracing features of the Roman liturgy. Messiaen’s trope is the most reflective moment in “Résurrection,” a musical reference to the penitential and somber time of Lent. The respite afforded by the Tract paraphrase, before the enormous buildup to “Je suis ressuscité,” imparts a shape to “Résurrection” which traces both the emotional and musical journey experienced by Christians from the Lenten season through Easter.

While Messiaen most often evokes chant by using the melodic styles of plainchant, there are exceptions in his output. An example of this occurs in “La Vierge et l’Enfant,” the first movement of *La Nativité du Seigneur*. Messiaen discusses the central section of this movement in *TML* as a transformation of the Introit to Christmas Mass.

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interval structure by adding the accidentals necessary to conform the modal language of the original to his own. In this instance, he is simply transposing a church mode, not altering it to one the Modes of Limited Transpositions.



Example 4-20 Examples 108 and 109, *TML*

**108**  
Noël, Introit  
de la Messe du jour

Pu - er na - tus est no - bis, et fi - li - us da - tus est no - bis. —

**109**  
La Vierge  
et l'Enfant

Un peu vif

G. (montre 8, bourd. 16) 7/8

f legato

R. (gamba, voix cel.)

p staccato

Péd. (fl. 4, nazard, 8<sup>ve</sup>, piccolo)

mf legato

The melody in the top staff of the organ is a free paraphrase of the Introit. Messiaen embellishes the original with scales and rhapsodic, ornamental arabesques. The free style of this paraphrase is not typical of Messiaen. The elaborate ornamentation of this music does not relate to the rhythm, the form, or the style of the Introit upon which it is based.

Messiaen composed in what he called “alleluia style” on many other occasions. These examples take on varying degrees of abstraction. For example, the final movement of *Livre du Saint Sacrement* is entitled “Offrande et Alleluia final.” The “Offrande” is a brief monodic, chromatic melody in neo-plainchant style. The “Alleluia final,” which comprises the bulk of the movement, is entirely in Messiaen’s birdsong style. Here the Alleluia is a figurative concept, not a literal link to a Gregorian Alleluia; the great joy with which the birds sing personifies the meaning of the word “Alleluia” in Messiaen’s world. Birdsong plays an important role even early on, in his religious works of the

1940s, and so perhaps it is no surprise that he would stretch this concept into a birdsong movement entitled “Alleluia.”

A less abstract rendition of Alleluia style occurs in “Alléluias sereins d’une âme qui desire le ciel” (*L’Ascension*). Messiaen describes this movement as “in a disembodied alleluia style, whose neumes are even more free than those of plainsong.”<sup>93</sup>

*Example 4-29* “Alléluias sereins d’une âme qui desire le ciel,” beginning

**Bien modéré, clair (♩ = 63)**

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system includes parts for Flutes (1, 2), Hautbois, Cor Anglais, Clarinettes en Si bémol, Clar. Basse en Si bémol, Bassons (1, 2, 3), Cors en Fa (1, 2), and Trompette. The second system includes parts for Violoncelles (1, 2) and Contrebasses (1, 2). The music is in 4/4 time and features a complex, layered texture with many notes and rests, characteristic of Messiaen's style. The tempo is 'Bien modéré, clair' with a quarter note equal to 63 beats per minute.

<sup>93</sup> Messiaen, *Messiaen Edition*, p. 75.

Aside from a propensity for melodic gestures that ascend, this melody bears no resemblance to any chant sung either on Ascension Thursday or the following Sunday. The opening melody is presented in octaves and returns several times later in the movement with other material layered over it. When Messiaen says that these neumes are “even more free than those of plainsong,” he is perhaps referring to two things. First, there is very little melodic motion by step in this excerpt. Flourishes of arpeggios and dissonant leaps characterize the sound of this music. (The entire passage is in mode 3, and “F” is the tonal center.)

Second, the rhythm of this passage does not at all relate to the rhythm of chant practiced at Solesmes. These melodic gestures lack the principal of a “basic pulse,” and the addition of quintuplets gives the passage a feeling of rubato and freedom that reaches beyond the interpretive freedom implied in the writings of Mocquereau. In the late nineteenth century, some scholars interpreted chant in a free rhythmic style, which heightened the music’s inherent ornamental qualities. While Messiaen considered the Solesmes method the proper way to interpret plainchant, he was likely familiar with other schools of thought. The following example illustrates one theorist’s interpretation.

*Example 4-30 Transcription of Alleluia Pascha nostrum by Dechevrens (1898)<sup>94</sup>*



<sup>94</sup> David Hiley, *Western Plainchant: A Handbook* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 380.

The opening melody of “Alléluias sereins” (Example 4-29) does in fact resemble the type of whimsical arabesques found in Example 4-30. Here Messiaen conveys the joy and excitement present in an alleluia, and while this melody has the hallmarks of Messiaen’s unique compositional voice, he most certainly had models for the manipulation of chant beyond the strictness of Solesmes. “Disembodied alleluia style” perhaps refers to this tradition of rhythmic distortion in chant performance and transcription as seen in *Example 4-30*.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PLAINCHANT FORMS

Messiaen devotes several pages in *TML* to a topic entitled “Plainchant Forms.”<sup>95</sup> This title is misleading; all but one of the examples Messiaen provides to illustrate his use of plainchant forms extensively quote or paraphrase existing chants from the liturgy. There are few examples in Messiaen’s output where he composes strictly using a plainchant form without lifting significant melodic and rhythmic material from a specific chant of that form. Upon realizing this, one might be tempted to simply relegate these examples to the category of direct chant paraphrases without special regard for their formal structures. The architecture of these chants was precisely what Messiaen was interested in, however, and his employment and adaptation of these forms offer insight on his music’s relationship to Gregorian chant.

Messiaen first discusses several of his works which he considered to be in “anthem” form. The term “anthem” is synonymous with antiphon, of which there are two types: psalm, and votive. The two examples Messiaen provides in *TML* to illustrate anthem form are modeled on votive antiphons. However, Messiaen does not detail the formal structures of the two types of antiphons, either as they exist in the chant repertoire or in his own output.

A psalm antiphon is a phrase or verse that precedes a psalm tone; a double antiphon is one that both precedes and follows the psalm verse. The text setting for both is generally in neumatic style, while the psalm is always set in a recitational or syllabic

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<sup>95</sup> Messiaen also discusses the character and style of different types of chant in this section; this subject is dealt with separately in this paper under the heading “Melodic Styles of Plainchant.”

manner. Psalm antiphons are normally quite brief, while votive antiphons are more extended, independent compositions. The texts of votive antiphons are always devoted to an important Christian personage other than Christ. The most significant votive antiphons, both to the liturgy and to Messiaen, are devoted to the Virgin Mary and are known as Marian antiphons. The four most important Marian antiphons are “Alma redemptoris mater,” “Ave Regina caelorum,” “Regina caeli,” and “Salve Regina.”<sup>96</sup> The two examples Messiaen offers in *TML* to demonstrate anthem form are “Antienne du silence,” the second song from the song cycle *Chants de terre et de ciel*, and “Subtilité des Corps Glorieux,” the opening movement of the organ work *Les Corps Glorieux*. “Antienne du silence” only loosely paraphrases an existing chant, while “Subtilité des Corps Glorieux” is closely modeled on a setting of the text “Salve Regina.”

#### **“Antienne du silence,” from *Chants de terre et de ciel***

“Antienne du silence” is subtitled “For Guardian Angels’ Day,” which is a Feast in the Roman calendar occurring on October 2. Messiaen describes this composition as follows: “I superposed the principal sentence given to the voice upon a melody in anthem form, surrounded by a quasi-atonal double counterpoint.”<sup>97</sup> The melody in anthem form occurs in the middle staff of the piano part. Messiaen highlights this melody with a louder dynamic marking than the surrounding “quasi-atonal double counterpoint.”

#### *Example 5-1 “Antienne du silence,” beginning*

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<sup>96</sup> There are two versions of each of these Marian antiphons. The first is more ornate, while the second is a simpler syllabic and neumatic setting called the “Simple Tone.” Unless otherwise noted, I will only be discussing the more ornate versions of these antiphons.

<sup>97</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 44.

CHANT

Très modéré *p expressif*

Très modéré An - ge si - len - ci.eux,

PIANO

*très lié*

*pp(m.d.)*

*expressif*

*p(m.d.)*

*léger, un peu détaché*

*pp(m.g.)*

(mettre un peu de pédale)

*write silence in my hands,*

é - cris du si - len - ce dans mes mains,

The form of a votive antiphon is subject to variation within the chant repertoire. While Messiaen provides examples of two different votive antiphon structures within his own music, he does not define or describe the differences between the two. A votive antiphon may be entirely through-composed, as in the “Alma Redemptoris Mater.” The “Salve Regina” and the “Ave Regina caelorum,” on the other hand, repeat phrases of music with slight variations to accommodate different text. The fourth Marian antiphon, “Regina caeli laetare,” represents an amalgam of the two types. It is through-composed, but the phrases that end each half of this chant contain repeating melismas, which add emphasis to the final cadence. In addition, each phrase of text ends with a setting of the word “alleluia.” This functions as a type of textual refrain, as the music is different each time.

The melody in anthem form of “Antienne du silence” (piano, middle staff) is through-composed. While “through-composed” may not be a formal structure per se, this

melody exhibits an important characteristic found in Marian antiphons via Messiaen's phrase structures. The opening words of a Marian antiphon are set with a phrase divided by a breath mark; the second half of this phrase is usually somewhat longer than the first half. A rising motion from the final up to the reciting tone and then back again is characteristic. The first two systems of "Antienne du silence" follow this model. The phrase is divided in two by the slurs; there is a rising gesture from the tonic, F, to the dominant, C. The second half of the phrase is slightly longer than the first, and the rhythmic style of this melody concords with Messiaen's instrumental transcriptions of neumatic-style chant. The composer continues in this "neumatic" style for the rest of the movement, which mirrors most Marian antiphons. With the exception of the "Regina caeli laetare," these antiphons do not progress towards a melismatic text setting but maintain their neumatic style throughout.

Messiaen composes a phrase structure in the manner of a Marian antiphon. However, the melody does not consistently follow the tonal shape of the first phrase, and other pitches, notably the third above the tonic, are highlighted at cadences. Also, the phrase lengths vary a great deal within each binary statement. Each sentence of text is the same length in a Marian antiphon, but the division of these sentences varies greatly according to the text. Sometimes these two halves are relatively equal in length, but it is also possible for one half of the phrase to receive considerably less text and music than the other. Messiaen varies the length of each binary division in order to emulate this phrase structure.

The last phrase of Messiaen's anthem departs from this structure; during the final statement, the second half of the melody is twice as long as any phrase heard so far. This



final statement mirrors two very different features found in Marian antiphons. The “Regina caeli laetare” ends with a long repeated melisma on the word “alleluia.” This vocalization extends the final phrase considerably, and the length of Messiaen’s last phrase echoes this same feature. At this moment in “Antienne du silence,” the singer is spinning out a long melisma on the word “alleluia,” and Messiaen may have conceived of this passage as providing a musical and structural parallel to this melisma.

On the other hand, the structure of this last phrase, although it falls under one slur, is comprised of three short subsections, and in this regard, the phrase follows the model of the “Salve Regina” (see Example 5-5). The final sentence of text, “O clemens: O pia: O dulcis Virgo Maria,” departs from the structure of the previous phrases, and the subsections within Messiaen’s last phrase echo the division found in the “Salve Regina.” While Messiaen’s slur over this phrase could indicate a prolongation through melisma, he does not shorten the note values to achieve the illusion of melisma as he often does in instrumental transcriptions of chant. The cadences of Messiaen’s melody dictate the lengths of phrase throughout this movement, and such being the case here, the perception of the final phrase is one of prolongation through an accumulation of short subsections as heard at the end of the “Salve Regina.”

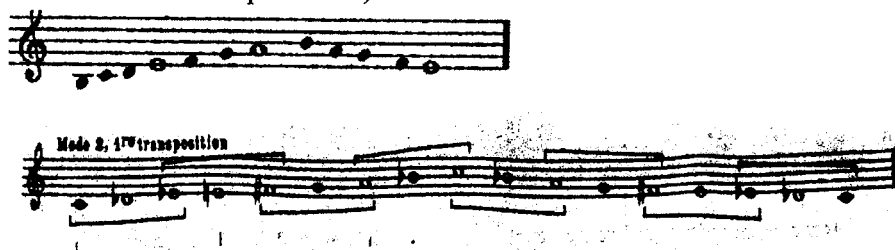
Messiaen’s “anthem” melody resembles the shape of the Alleluia from the Mass of Guardian Angels’ Day.

*Example 5-2 Alleluia, Mass of Guardian Angels' Day, beginning, and "Antienne du silence," beginning*



Messiaen relates to the mode of the chant, Hypophrygian, through the use of the second mode of limited transpositions, that is, the octatonic collection (see Example 5-3). The tonal center in the piano melody is F, making this scale the sixth transposition of mode 2. All motion to the tonic occurs with a half-step, the characteristic cadence of the Phrygian mode.

*Example 5-3 Hypophrygian Mode and Mode 2, (Modes of Limited Transpositions)*



The connection to the original chant ends after the opening phrase (Example 5-2), and the rest of the melody is through-composed using the same motives and cadences. Despite the lack of phrase repetition, Messiaen creates the same coherence and unity as found in Gregorian chant, where there is also a lack of literal repetition but consistency at phrase endings. His cadential gestures in this movement create punctuation not through a

motivic process but rather one which creates regularity through melodic approach as well as through emphasis by lengthening of the final note(s).

As Messiaen stated earlier, the vocal line of “Antienne du silence” is superimposed over the piano melody in anthem form. While the singer’s part does not replicate the anthem form found in the piano, it does exhibit many traits associated with antiphons and chant in general. The vocal part creates a clear binary structure in this movement. While the four phrases of the piano “anthem” would not naturally lend themselves to a binary interpretation, the vocal line provides clarity and structure to the through-composed form of the piano material. Each half of this form resembles the opening of a psalm antiphon. More specifically, psalm antiphons sung during Easter season have a short text, which is always followed by a setting of the word “alleluia.” This setting is syllabic and neumatic, and Messiaen’s melismatic setting of “alleluia” is therefore a reference to other chant types. The “Alleluia” sung at Mass is the first example that comes to mind. In the second half of “Antienne du silence,” Messiaen composes a jubilus-- a long, melismatic vocalization on the last syllable of “alleluia,” such as one finds at the end of the “Alleluia” at Mass. And perhaps even more than the piano melody discussed above, the first vocal “alleluia” paraphrases the Alleluia from the Mass of Guardian Angels’ Day.

*Example 5-4 Alleluia, Mass of Guardian Angels’ Day, and “Antienne du silence,” first “alleluia”*



Messiaen alters the interval structure of this melody but leaves its shape intact.<sup>98</sup>

The vocal line of “Antienne du silence” also resembles the form found in the Marian antiphon, “Regina caeli laetare.” In this antiphon, every phrase of text ends with the word “alleluia.” The setting of these “alleluias” becomes increasingly melismatic as the composition progresses. There is also a long melisma at the end of the first half of this antiphon, before the cadence on “alleluia.” This melisma balances its long counterpart at the end of the chant, thereby creating a binary structure. The vocal part in “Antienne du silence” reflects both the large-scale organization of this chant as well as the localized phrase structure.

The neumatic settings of the texts “Ange silencieux,” “écris du silence dans mes mains,” and “Que j’aspire le silence du ciel,” are statements of the same melody with rhythmic variations. This type of formulaic repetition is found in the Marian antiphon “Salve Regina,” and Messiaen may be reiterating this music in order to provide coherence to the non-repeating, “quasi-atonal” texture of the piano. While “Antienne du silence” contains varied references to different chant types, the following examples, taken from Messiaen’s discussion in *TML*, are all direct paraphrases of important chants from the liturgy.

### **“Subtilité des Corps Glorieux,” from *Les Corps Glorieux***

Messiaen composed *Les Corps Glorieux* during the summer of 1939. It was the last work he completed before being called to serve in the French army in September of that year. He would not play this work on the organ at La Trinité until the summer of 1941. The theological subject matter of this work concerns the “life of the resurrected.”

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<sup>98</sup> For a similar treatment, see discussion of “L’Esprit de joie” in Chapter VI.

The first movement, “Subtilité des Corps Glorieux,” is prefaced by two excerpts from the Gospel According to Saint Matthew and Saint Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. The two excerpts are changed slightly and combined by Messiaen to read, “Our body is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. And it is like the angels of God in heaven.” Thus the resurrection of the “Glorious Body” is not simply the resurrected Christ but the resurrection of the dead prophesied to occur at the second coming of Christ. The two subjects are one and the same, for the raising of Christ from the dead makes possible humanity’s subsequent salvation and resurrection. Like that of Christ, the resurrection when Christ returns is a re-animation of one’s body, an occurrence that is at once physical and spiritual. The passage Messiaen quotes from Corinthians I is Paul’s description of the excellence and perfection of the risen body. The music of Messiaen’s *Les Corps Glorieux* symbolizes the various qualities and states of the resurrected body. Although preceded by scriptures that describe the post-Apocalyptic life of the resurrected, “Subtilité” is a discourse on the incarnation of Christ within Mary’s womb. Like the theology of *L’Ascension*, Messiaen begins the journey of *Les Corps Glorieux* with the events which make the ultimate resurrection of the dead theologically possible. The model for the melody of “Subtilité” is a setting of the Marian text “Salve Regina.” “Subtilité” and the Salve Regina are reproduced below.

## Example 5-5

## A. Salve Regina

Sal - ve, Re - gi - na, ma - ter mi - se ri - cor - di - ae:

Vi - ta, dul - ce - do, et spes nos - tra, sal - ve.

Ad te cla - ma - mus, ex - su - les, fi - li - i He - vac

Ad te sus - pi - ra - mus, ge - men - tes et flen - tes in hac la - cri - ma - cum val - le

E - ia er - go, Ad - vo - ca - ta no - stra, il - los tu - os

mi - se - ri - cor - des o - cu - los - ad - nos con - ver - te.

Et Je - sum, be - ne - di - ctum fruc - tum ven - tris tu - i,

no - bis rost has ex si - li - um os - ten de

O - cle - mens: O - pi - a:

O - dul - cis vir go mar i - a.

B. "Subtilité" as it appears in *TML*

170  
*Subtilité des Corps glorieux*  
 Orgue

Bien modéré  
 G. cornet

*A<sup>1</sup> legato*

Pos. cornet

*mf*

*A<sup>2</sup>*

Pos.

*mf*

*B<sup>1</sup>*

Pos.

*mf*

*B<sup>2</sup>*

Pos.

*mf*

*A<sup>3</sup>*

Pos.

*mf*

*C*

Pos.

*mf*

*G.*

Pos.

*mf*

*G.*

*A<sup>4</sup>*

Pos.

*mf*

*G. (+ fl. 4)*

*D*

(+ prestant 4)

*più f*

(+ montre 6)

*ff*

cornet seul

*f*

Pos.

*mf*

(+ principal 8)

*E*

X

R. cornet

*p*

Pos. cornet seul

*mf*

R.

*p*

Pos.

*mf*

R.

*p*

Messiaen follows the formal structure of the first four phrases of the *Salve Regina* quite closely. “A<sup>2</sup>” of the Messiaen example changes far less of his original “A” section than the corresponding chant does, but the difference between the two “B” sections does mirror the use of related but varied material between the two “B” sections of the chant. Thereafter, Messiaen continually brings back the “A” material in the form of a refrain.

The “C” section of “Subtilité,” while significantly altering the original gestures, retains much of the phraseology of the corresponding *Salve Regina* passage. There is no repeated scheme to the “C” section, and Messiaen follows it with another statement of the refrain.

From “D” on, however, Messiaen’s allusions to the *Salve Regina* are less specific. “D” perhaps mirrors the related melismas that set the text “O Clemens: O pia.” The melismas of “D,” particularly the third, fortissimo flourish, certainly suggest this interpretation. The “A” material is heard for the last time at the marking “cornet seul” without the head motive with which it commences in every other instance. The long descending figure at “E” perhaps relates the first phrase of “O dulcis.” Certainly the figures marked “X” in both scores relate very closely, and as Messiaen brings this movement to a close, he finally forgoes the usual tritone cadence for that of a major second, concluding with the last interval of the chant.

Besides using the “A” material as a refrain, Messiaen provides further punctuation to the end of each phrase. He achieves this with a repeat of each phrase’s cadential gesture at a lesser dynamic. This echo clearly separates one phrase from the next, and it also provides symmetry for each phrase. Each statement of the “A” material (except for the section in “D”) begins with the head motive, set in relief by a comma. The cadential



echo is a less agitated, more compact version of the head motive, and it is also set in relief by commas.

The rhythm and style of this chant are closely tied together. The basic pulse is the sixteenth-note, and there is a great mixture of longer note-values (eighth-notes to a whole-note). This mixture of pulse types, aside from being characteristic of Messiaen, may also be seen as a solution to the limitations of the organ. If this music really did progress only by basic pulses, with the occasional composite pulse as in chant, this movement would lack expression. Articulation could be used to separate the music into neumes or by syllables of text, but the effect of continuous sixteenth-notes would make the whole piece sound melismatic. There would hardly be a way to differentiate those passages that are more spoken versus those that are sung. Messiaen's rhythm creates pacing not otherwise possible with chant transcriptions on the organ. Eighth-notes and quarter-notes replicate the neumatic passages of chant; in contrast, the groups of sixteenth-notes sound more ornate and melismatic. The accumulation of longer melismas creates an expressive arc that climaxes later in the movement.

**“Le mystère de la Sainte Trinité,” from *Les Corps Glorieux***

Other chant forms discussed by Messiaen in *TML* are the Kyrie and Sequence. Here Messiaen does more than reproduce a basic structural map of a chant type; in both instances, he paraphrases salient examples of each “chant” form. These forms were important to Messiaen's conceptions of several compositions, and since he makes no mention of the source melodies in *TML*, I will touch upon each briefly.

Messiaen illustrates the Kyrie form with “Le mystère de la Sainte Trinité,” the final movement of *Les Corps Glorieux*. The texture of this piece has three voices, in homage to the Holy Trinity. The bass is a descending line, which occurs, with slight variations, a total of five times. The upper voice is an independent melody that undergoes subtle intervallic and rhythmic distortions with each presentation. The middle voice, much like the middle voice of the three-part texture in “Antienne du silence,” is louder than the other two and heard as the main melody. It is through this voice that Messiaen shapes his Kyrie form.

There are two types of Kyries in the Roman Catholic liturgy. The music of a simple Kyrie essentially follows the repetition scheme of the text. There are Kyries, however, that present a more involved repetition scheme. Messiaen oversimplifies his description of this form in *TML*, and the form of the Kyrie he paraphrases in “Le mystère” is outlined in *Example 5-6*.<sup>99</sup> The text is written out in full, while the letters represent sections of music.

*Example 5-6 Kyrie Form*

Kyrie eleison. A    A <sup>1</sup>	Kyrie eleison. B    A <sup>1</sup>	Kyrie eleison. A    A <sup>1</sup>
Christe eleison. C    C <sup>1</sup>	Christe eleison. D    A <sup>1</sup>	Christe eleison. C    C <sup>1</sup>
Kyrie eleison. E    C <sup>1</sup>	Kyrie eleison. D    A <sup>1</sup>	Kyrie eleison. E, E    A <sup>1</sup>

The nine invocations of the text are set to a highly formalized pattern of repetition. “A<sup>1</sup>” functions as a refrain within the structure of this chant. The music “E” is melismatic, and the repetition of this on the last Kyrie heightens its importance.

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<sup>99</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 45.

As in “Subtilité,” the opening movement of *Les Corps Glorieux*, “Le mystère” is modeled on an existing chant. And while this work as a whole concerns the life of the Resurrected, this movement, like “Subtilité,” is based on a Marian chant. Example 5-7 shows the middle voice of “Le mystère” alongside the chant upon which it is modeled, a Kyrie sung on Feasts of the Blessed Virgin.

Example 5-7 “Le mystère de la Sainte Trinité,” middle voice, and Kyrie II for Feasts of the Blessed Virgin

The musical score is written for a flute (P: flûte s) and a vocal line (Pos.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The flute part is marked *p legato*. The vocal line is marked *p legato*. The lyrics are: Ky - ri - e, e - lei - son, Ky - ri - e, e - lei - son, chri - ste.

Handwritten musical score for a vocal piece, page 86. The score consists of six systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The lyrics are "e - lei - son. chri - ste" and "e - lei - son. ky - ri - e". The music is in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The piano part features a complex, flowing melody with many accidentals. The vocal part is simpler, with long notes and some rests. The score ends with a "dim." marking and a "ppp" (pianissimo) instruction.

System 1: *e - lei - son. chri - ste*

System 2: *e - lei - son. ky - ri - e*

System 3: *e - lei - son. ky - ri - e*

System 4: *e - lei - son. ky - ri - e*

System 5: *e - lei - son.*

System 6: *e - lei - son. dim. ppp*

Messiaen's music begins in the second mode of limited transpositions, and with D as the tonal center. In the central section, the music modulates to a new transposition of mode 2, with a tonal center of A. In the final third of the movement, the music moves back and forth between these two tonal and modal polarities, finally cadencing on D. The original chant is in Dorian mode, so Messiaen's use of the octatonic collection here changes only the modality, not the final. The beginning of each gesture closely follows the shape of the original, and ornamentation occurs at cadences. As in "Subtilité," Messiaen prefers to cadence with intervals of a tritone or half-step.

**"Le Verbe," from *La Nativité du Seigneur***

The last of the chant forms discussed in *TML* is the sequence. The sequence evolved later in the Medieval era than the liturgy, and it represents some departures from much of the Mass as we know it. It became included among the liturgy but was never officially adapted by the church. The 4500 surviving sequences represent the bulk of chant that was composed from the year 800 through the Renaissance. The normative verse format of the sequence consisted of rhyming couplets by the twelfth century; the rhyme scheme is reinforced by repetition, and the whole text is set syllabically. The more popular style of the sequence, especially as found in its rhyme scheme and predictable meters, caused it to be almost entirely banished from the Mass by the Council of Trent of 1563. Five sequences were retained in the Mass, the "Dies irae" being the most famous.

The most important sequence of the liturgy is the "Victimae paschali," which is sung following the Alleluia in the Mass on Easter Sunday. The example of sequence

form given by Messiaen follows the musical scheme of ABBCCD; the five sequences retained in the liturgy consist of rhyming couplets, but not all follow this particular scheme exactly. He illustrates this sequence with the last section of “Le Verbe,” the fourth movement of *La Nativité du Seigneur*.

*Example 5-8 “Le Verbe,” measures 48- 52*

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: P: cornet, R: Fonds doux 8, and Péd: 16, 8. The tempo is marked "Extrêmement lent et solennel". The score includes dynamic markings such as "mf legato" and "pp". The music is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The P: cornet part has a long, flowing line with many slurs. The R: Fonds doux 8 part has a more rhythmic, chordal texture. The Péd: 16, 8 part has a simple, steady line. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system continuing the P: cornet part and adding a new part for the Péd: 16, 8.

This passage is extremely slow and solemn, and the long legato lines do not mimic the syllabic setting and musical sweep of a sequence. Though it would seem as if the structure of the sequence is all the composer is interested in, Messiaen’s use of the sequence is actually quite specific. In a similar style to the above Kyrie, Messiaen freely transcribes the sequence “Victimae paschali” in the parallel passage in “Le Verbe.” One factor does separate this paraphrase from the previous examples cited in this chapter. The music of “Le Verbe” considerably alters the tempo of the original chant as it would be sung according to the Solesmes method. The other pieces presented Messiaen’s evocations of chant at a moderate tempo. The excerpt from “Le Verbe” employs the language of Messiaen’s rapturous slow compositions, such as the two “Louange”

movements in the *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*. This is quite possibly Messiaen's only chant paraphrase in this style. As I have stated elsewhere, his appropriation of plainchant usually preserves its texture, shape, and tempo. This makes a reference obvious to the listener, and it draws attention to his manipulations of the original chant. Messiaen's paraphrase of "Victimae paschali" in "Le Verbe" is a gorgeous harmonization of an ornamented chant melody, and the tempo of this example draws attention to the chant quote indirectly. Many compositional traditions paraphrase a chant as a slow-moving cantus firmus, and this has perhaps attuned listeners' ears to hearing a quotation of plainchant in a slow-moving voice. While the melody of "Le Verbe" does not function at all like a cantus firmus, the reference to chant within this extremely slow tempo is not completely lost due to these traditions.

The above examples from *TML* show us that Messiaen appropriated melodic shapes and affect from original chant sources. Early in his career, Messiaen rarely pointed out specific chant models for any of his melodies, while his later works often cite the original chant in the score. On occasion, as with "Antienne du silence," the appropriation can be rather abstract. Despite the title of "Plainchant Forms" in *TML*, we see that Messiaen never applies a strict chant form to music that is not also related by affect or melodic motives. In the remaining chapters on form in *TML*, Messiaen discusses the structures of phrases and movements using more abstract methodology, not relating the character and affect of the music to architectural concerns. He is unable to separate these ingredients within his discussion of plainchant, demonstrating his holistic conception of this music. His mystical approach to the subject throughout his writings

reveals the deep reverence he held for the music of the Roman Catholic liturgy, a characteristic also apparent in his musical treatments and adaptations of Gregorian chant.

The titles of Messiaen's works are a reflection of his mystical attitude towards chant. While the subject matter of Messiaen's music is religious, very little of his music is strictly liturgical, that is, designed to be performed as part of the liturgy. As an earlier quote of Messiaen stated, he considered Gregorian chant to be the only "true" liturgical music.<sup>100</sup> His musical exploration of theological truths was intended to be performed in a concert hall, as he explains:

I've imposed the truths of the Faith on the concert hall, but in a liturgical sense-- so much so that my two main religious works played in concert are *Trois petites liturgies de la Présence Divine* and *Transfiguration de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ*. I didn't choose these titles idly; I intended to accomplish a liturgical act, that is to say, to bring a kind of Office, a kind of organized praise, into the concert hall.<sup>101</sup>

These motives extend to Messiaen's entire output, for all of his music represents a "liturgical act" according to the above statement. Every piece by Messiaen could be described as bringing a "kind of Office, a kind of organized praise, into the concert hall." References to the liturgy and liturgical music within titles of works by Messiaen emphasize this aspect of his compositions. Important examples include the "Liturgie de cristal" from the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*, "Alléluias sereins d'une âme qui desire le ciel" and "Alléluia sur la trompette, alleluia sur la cymbale" from *L'Ascension*, "Antienne de la conversation intérieure," "Séquence du Verbe, cantique divin," and "Psalmodie de l'ubiquité par amour" from the *Trois petites liturgies*. These titles relate Messiaen's

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<sup>100</sup> Above, p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> Samuel, p. 22.



music to the Roman Catholic liturgy to varying degrees. The title “Liturgie de cristal” embodies connotations of an abstract act of worship. The “Alléluia” movements from *L’Ascension* connect a more specific concept of the liturgy with Messiaen’s music; it is clear from these titles that the music of both movements paraphrases the affect, style, and perhaps even the form of the Alleluia as it appears in Mass. The movement titles of the *Trois petites liturgies* are even more lyrical and poetic in construction. The reference to each chant type is coupled with the theological concept that colors the spiritual and musical atmosphere of each movement. Messiaen sets his own surrealist poetry to plainchant forms and styles in the *Trois petites liturgies*, thereby accomplishing a “kind of liturgical act,” which reflects his reverential and mystical approach to the music of the liturgy.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES AND ANALYSES

This chapter includes four additional examples for examination of plainchant in Messiaen's music. All of the examples discussed so far have examined the relationship of a chant to a work by Messiaen with one specific compositional parameter in mind. The first two examples in this chapter were composed during the time period that is the focus of this paper, and they provide examples of two very different types of plainchant appropriation within Messiaen's early style. The two later examples provide a glimpse into the style of Messiaen's later chant paraphrases. The chant paraphrase in *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité* (Movement II) provides a representative example of Messiaen's use of chant in his late organ works. The chant paraphrases in *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste*, on the other hand, offer a glimpse into the new and varied methods Messiaen began to apply to plainchant quotations in his later orchestral works.

#### **“Majesté du Christ demandant sa gloire à son Père” from *L'Ascension***

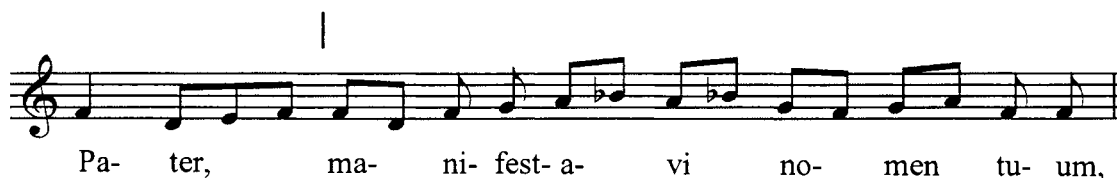
The first movement of *L'Ascension*, “Majesté du Christ demandant sa gloire à son Père” (Majesty of Christ asking for glory from his Father), contains both melodic, rhythmic, and textual allusions to the Magnificat Antiphon from the First Vespers of Ascension Thursday. Like many of Messiaen's works, *L'Ascension* depicts a theological journey. This work does not simply describe the Ascension of Christ with the vocabulary

of the Ascension itself. He touches upon other theological themes that manifest themselves in the liturgy of Ascension Day.

“Majesté” makes reference to John Chapter 17 in two different ways. The title of this movement is followed by a quote of the first words of Christ’s prayer after the Last Supper according to John 17:1: “Father, the hour is come. Glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you.” This prayer continues as both a description of Christ’s work on earth as well as a call to begin the events leading to his arrest, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension into heaven. The Ascension is the theological culmination of these events.

Messiaen’s reference to John 17 on the score of “Majesté” mirrors a similar use of that chapter in the liturgy of Ascension Day. During the First Vespers, a Magnificat Antiphon containing text from John 17 follows a brief opening verse and respond.

*Example 6-1 Opening of Magnificat Antiphon*



The text of this antiphon contains part of John 17:6 and a paraphrase of John 17:9: “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world. I pray for them, not for the world, for they are yours.” Messiaen derived the initial melodic shape of “Majesté” from this antiphon. By also invoking the liturgy’s use of John 17, Messiaen is aligning himself with both the theological ideology and liturgical rites as practiced by the Catholic church on Ascension Day.

The initial melodic gesture of “Majesté” contains allusions to both the melodic and rhythmic material of the Magnificat Antiphon already discussed. The following example reproduces the opening of this antiphon alongside the opening of “Majesté.”

*Example 6-2*

A. Opening of Magnificat Antiphon



B. Opening of “Majesté du Christ demandant sa gloire à son Père”

I. Majesté du Christ demandant sa gloire à son Père

*Père, l'heure est venue, glorifie ton Fils, afin que ton Fils te glorifie.*

*(Prière sacerdotale du Christ, Évangile selon Saint Jean)*  
**Très lent et majestueux** (♩ = 48)



**“Regard de L’Esprit de joie” from *Vingt Regards sur l’enfant-Jésus***

“Regard de L’Esprit de joie,” the tenth movement of the monumental *Vingt Regards* cycle, contains one of Messiaen’s most astonishing chant paraphrases. The opening section of the movement, as well as its later reprise, is practically a note for note transcription of the Gradual “Haec dies” sung during Easter Mass. A Gradual is ornate and melismatic; the text for this specific Gradual conveys the euphoria and rejoicing so characteristic of the Easter Mass. The text is:

This is the day which the Lord has made:  
Let us exult and rejoice in it.  
Praise the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy is forever.

The significance of this chant as it relates to “L’Esprit de joie” is obvious; the resurrection of Christ is the single most joyous event celebrated in the Christian calendar. In the words of Messiaen, “God is eternally happy, and Christ possessed this same joy, this rapture, this spiritual intoxication.”<sup>103</sup> “L’Esprit de joie” is one of Messiaen’s most exuberant attempts to communicate the joy that was so central to his faith.

The opening melody of “L’Esprit de joie” is marked “Thème de danse orientale et plain-chantesque.” At first glance one might suppose that while this melody bears some resemblance to the melodic shape of a particular chant, the concept of a “danse orientale” governs most of the other musical parameters, especially the rhythm. Upon closer examination of the original chant, however, we realize that the “Haec dies” precisely governs the rhythm of Messiaen’s version of the theme. So much credit is given to Hindu and Greek rhythms for Messiaen’s ametrical constructions; this is perhaps the best example of the influence chant’s non-symmetrical patterns exerted on Messiaen. The

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<sup>103</sup> Messiaen, *Messiaen Edition*, p. 42.

tempo, registration, articulation, and fortissimo punctuating chords (marked “violent”) all contribute to a perception of non-Western influence on this music. It is Western culture’s oldest surviving musical tradition, however, which informs the actual rhythmic structure of each phrase and gesture. The original chant suits Messiaen’s language so well, in fact, that he makes very little adjustment to the rhythmic structure of the theme as it appears in “L’Esprit de joie.”

The following example juxtaposes the entire opening of “L’Esprit de joie” with the chant on which it is based. Several issues of notation regarding the original chant must be noted. Separate syllables of text are stemmed accordingly. Because the text is reproduced below, stemming within a long syllable is broken up into small composite groups according to the neumatic notation and epismas. Repeated pitches under the same syllable are repeated in this transcription, even though in performance, all repeated notes falling under one syllable would be tied together as one note. This also allows one to differentiate between repeated and dotted notes in the neumatic notation. Messiaen sometimes repeats the pitches and sometimes ties them without establishing any clear criteria for his choices.

Example 6-4 "L'Esprit de joie" and "Haec dies"

**Presque vif (♩ = 160)**

**PIANO** *f staccato* *ff (violent)*

8<sup>e</sup> basse  
(Thème de danse orientale et plain-chantésque)

Haec di- es,

8<sup>e</sup> basse 8<sup>e</sup> basse

quam fe-cit Do-mi-nus:

8<sup>e</sup> basse 8<sup>e</sup> basse

exsul te-

8<sup>e</sup> basse

mus,

The musical score is written for piano and voice. It begins with a tempo marking of 'Presque vif (♩ = 160)'. The piano part is marked 'PIANO' and 'f staccato', while the voice part is marked 'ff (violent)'. The score is divided into several systems, each featuring a piano accompaniment and a vocal line. The vocal line includes the lyrics 'Haec di- es,', 'quam fe-cit Do-mi-nus:', 'exsul te-', and 'mus,'. The piano part consists of a continuous, rhythmic accompaniment. The score is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The piano part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs), and the vocal part is written in a single staff (treble clef). The piano part is marked '8<sup>e</sup> basse' and '(Thème de danse orientale et plain-chantésque)'. The vocal part is marked '8<sup>e</sup> basse' and '8<sup>e</sup> basse'.



10 *f* 11 *ff* 12 *f* 13 *ff*

8<sup>a</sup> bassa

et lae - te mur in e - a

14 *f* 15 *ff* 16 *f* 17 *ff*

8<sup>a</sup> bassa

18 *f* 19 *ff* 20 *f* 21 *ff*

8<sup>a</sup> bassa

19) Confi - te - mi - ni Do - mi - na,

22 *f* 23 *ff* 24 *f* 25 *ff*

8<sup>a</sup> bassa

24 -

26 *f* 27 *ff* 28 *f* 29 *ff*

8<sup>a</sup> bassa

ni - am bo -

8° bassa

nus: no - nam in sae - colum

8° bassa

mise - ricor -

8° bassa

dia e - jus.

X

8° bassa

court

court

Messiaen's punctuation of each phrase is a striking feature of this passage; the rhythm remains faithful to the original, with the fortissimo chords taking the place of the last note of each phrase. These chords are identical each time, increasing their percussive effect; it also means that the chords do not melodically relate to the "Haec dies." Occasionally, if a phrase ends with two long notes in the "Haec dies," Messiaen replaces them with two fortissimo chords (mm. 6 and 30).

There are several instances where Messiaen does not conclude a phrase with the chords just discussed. For instance, the passage that corresponds to the text "exsultemus" (measures 7-9) does not end each phrase with the percussive chords. The melodic line is preserved, while the grace-note "pick-up" figures retain the percussive gesture of the fortissimo chords. The continuity of this passage is not maintained in the long melisma on "in ea."

Because phrase lengths are so varied, Messiaen relates these punctuating chords to each phrase ending or breath mark. The original chant already has an unpredictable phrase structure, and Messiaen embraces this quality in his transcription. There are perhaps moments where he interprets phrase lengths beyond the markings in the original chant, such as in measures 20-23.

Messiaen's use of these chords enhances our perception of the larger architecture of the melody, but he is only articulating the structure already found in the chant itself. He does not manipulate phrase structures in order to make this music sound unpredictable or modern; the irregular nature of the rhythms and phrase lengths are innate to the "Haec dies" itself.

Messiaen groups the melody into small rhythmic groups by beaming much as one does when transcribing chant into modern notation. He often preserves the original rhythmic structures. Many of the differences in Messiaen's beaming pertain to a shift in metrical stress and accentuation. For example, the five-note gesture following the first four notes of measure 7 are divided 2 + 3 when the original is clearly 3 + 2. Such discrepancies matter little, since Messiaen does not violate any rules regarding rhythmic ictus here. In measure 12, on the other hand, he does adjust the rhythmic integrity of the chant. The penultimate note of this phrase in the "Haec dies" is a strong ictus and should almost be sung like an appoggiatura. This note is the weakest note, rhythmically speaking, in Messiaen's measure 12. There are other examples of this type of shifting of stress, notably in measure 28.

Messiaen's most important transformation of the original chant is through pitch material. He uses the seventh mode of limited transpositions. Despite the added chromaticism of Messiaen's mode, he follows the shape of the original chant very closely to the point where many of the note names are the same in each version. With Messiaen's added chromaticism, the interval of the tritone becomes a prominent melodic feature. He often constructs melodies which replaced the traditional dominant with the pitch a tritone away from the tonic. This is best seen in the opening and closing measures of Example 6-4. The oscillation between F-sharp and C at the end represents Messiaen's biggest departure from the original chant both rhythmically and melodically. In the final gesture of measure 31, Messiaen manipulates the original chant by repetition for the first and only time in this melody. The two notes at "X" in Example 6-4 are repeated four times, the last being an inexact rhythmic augmentation of the note values of the first

three. He does not need to make alterations to the rhythmic structure of this melody, for the asymmetric “free rhythm” of the original chant is as complicated and irregular a mix of composite pulses as any music Messiaen had so far composed.

### ***Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité, Movement II***

The Alleluia from the Mass for the Dedication of a Church provides the model upon which Messiaen based the opening of the second movement of his organ cycle *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité* (1969). We have access to Messiaen’s transcription of this melody in two different stages. He translates this chant excerpt into modern notation in *Traité*, which deforms the chant in several ways.<sup>104</sup> His use of this melody in *Méditations* represents a further distortion of the original.

Messiaen’s adoption and transformation of plainchant within his works characteristically alters the material through repetition. Generally speaking, repeats in chant usually occur with use of a refrain in an antiphon. Other chants condense this form to an “ABA” structure where the opening material is recapitulated after a middle verse section. Repetition of phrases within a chant is a rare phenomenon. The melody within a given section of chant is almost always through-composed with no allusion to previous melodic shapes or motives. Cadential formulas are sometimes the exception to this rule. A notable example of repetition does occur in the second Alleluia of Ascension Sunday. After the initial “Alleluia” is sung, the following melisma is divided into three parts. The first two sections are identical, and the last resembles the first two but alters pitches and cadences on the final of the mode rather than on the dominant.

#### ***Example 6-5 Second Alleluia from Mass for Ascension Sunday (excerpt)***

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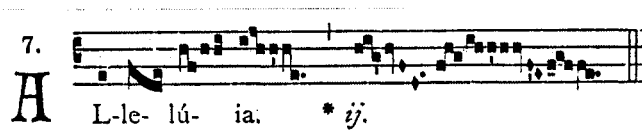
<sup>104</sup> Messiaen, *Traité*, Vol. VI, p. 20.

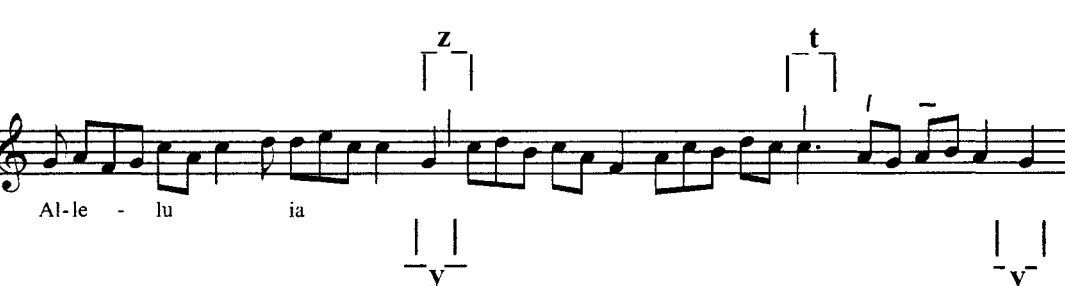


An example such as this is rare to the chant repertoire but common to Messiaen. When altering a chant to paraphrase within his musical language, his most frequent manipulation concerns its form. Messiaen's transformation of the Alleluia from the Mass for the Dedication of a Church in the second movement of the *Méditations* provides a excellent example of this.

*Example 6-6*

- A. The Alleluia from the Mass for the Dedication of a Church as it appears in the *Liber Usualis*, followed by a standard transcription into modern notation

7. 



- B. Messiaen's transcription into modern notation in *Traité*<sup>105</sup>  
*Alleluia (Messe de la Dédicace)*



<sup>105</sup> Messiaen, *Traité*, Vol. IV, p. 20.

The original chant example above is the “A” section of this Alleluia’s “ABA” form. As Messiaen shows in his transcription from the *Traité*, the initial “alleluia” is repeated (in the case of chant performance, in a solo/choir alternation), followed by the jubilus. In the corresponding quote in *Méditations*, Messiaen introduces even more repetition to give this version a regular, periodic structure.

*Example 6-7 Quote of Alleluia in Méditations, Movement II*

(Alleluia de la Dédicace) (Dieu est Saint)

Presque vif

MAN. GPR | ff PR | f

MAN. GPR | ff PR | f

MAN. GPR | ff PR | f

MAN. rall. - - - - - molto R | mf p

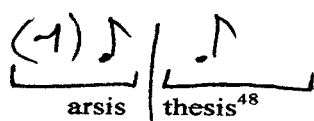
Messiaen’s dynamics reverse those heard as the chant is actually sung. His dynamics create an echo effect, which preserves the antiphonal character of the opening but does not reproduce the sound of a soloist responded to by full choir. Messiaen then repeats the first six notes of the jubilus in exactly the same manner as the opening “Alleluia,” which creates a parallel structure.

The ending of this phrase lacks the final cadential material of the original. Instead, Messiaen repeats a series of A's diminuendo. This phrase ending makes this entire opening section of music function as one large arsis by creating prolonged tension on the dominant.

The manipulation of plainchant text setting (recitational versus melismatic) becomes an interesting topic when analyzing an instrumental transcription of chant. The only way for an organ to separate the syllables as they are grouped in a chant is through articulation. Otherwise, if a passage were slurred, the effect would be like a melisma. Messiaen does not slur his *Méditations* version of this melody as in the original, but he does break the slur several times to give the impression of neumatic-style text setting. The repeated A's at the end of this excerpt present a contradiction, though. The repetition of a single pitch imitates recitational-style chant. This repeated-note gesture happens, however, in the jubilus, the most melismatic moment of all Gregorian chant. The rallentando and diminuendo, however, help prolong the arsic nature of this moment, and the effect is of the music here does not imitate spoken text.

The Alleluia from the Mass for the Dedication of a Church offers an introduction to the rhythmic similarity between chant and Messiaen's music. This alleluia begins with what appears to be an isolated basic pulse in the form of a pick-up note. Mocquereau explains that since all chant is a series of composite pulses, we interpret an isolated neume at the opening of a phrase as the second value in a composite pulse; the ictus of this composite pulse resides on an implied eighth-note rest as in the following example.



Example 6-8<sup>106</sup>

The shape of Example 6-6A is characteristic the “A” section of an Alleluia chant. An Alleluia is in “ABA” form; the “B” section is always a verse, whether psalm, scriptural, or otherwise, which relates to a particular Mass’s liturgical theme and affect. Often in the last melisma of the “B” section, there is a musical reference to or quote of some portion of opening “Alleluia.” The setting of both the word “Alleluia” and the “B” section text is not quite neumatic or melismatic but somewhere in between. The setting of the word “Alleluia” is followed by the jubilus, a melismatic flourish designed to heighten the joyous expression of the word “Alleluia.”

Like all chant, the Alleluia of Example 6-6A consists of an alternation of composite duplex and triplex pulses without regard for any greater metrical pattern. This alternation occurs with every one to two composite pulses, with the exception of the ending, where there are four duplex composite pulses in a row. When grouping eighth notes together, either in performance or transcription into modern notation, one looks to text underlay, neumatic figuration, and the rules established by Mocquereau in *Le Nombre musical*.

I have already discussed Messiaen’s distortion of the form of this melody. He also interprets several of the rhythms differently than might be expected. In the jubilus, the placement of epismas (small vertical dashes that indicate a strong ictus) makes the grouping of the composite pulses very clear. These epismas delineate the ictus of

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<sup>106</sup> Mocquereau, pp. 103-7.

composite groups at important interpretive moments as well as at places where various interpretations might be possible. In addition, horizontal epismas, like the dash at “X” in Example 6-6A, indicate a lengthening of the note as an expressive rhythmic device.

Messiaen regroups several composite pulses at the end of this phrase into patterns that differ from the original in both transcriptions. He also arbitrarily rearticulates the basic pulses of what should be, even in his interpretation, a composite duplex pulse; in the following example he reiterates the pitch in question, underlying it with staccato marks.

*Example 6-9*



Messiaen’s rhythmic distortion in this case disrupts the four repeated duplex composite pulses at the end of the phrase. Perhaps this more irregular grouping was more to his taste, but it seems highly unlikely that he would manipulate the chant at this juncture for such a reason. The chant excerpts that Messiaen provides in *TML* are sometimes rather square examples of Gregorian rhythm (that is, they tend to use several successive duplex or triplex pulses in a row). Messiaen chose these excerpts for their melodic contour, and they are not always the best examples of plainchant’s “free rhythm.” It seems odd that Messiaen would include such regular rhythmic examples of chant in one treatise and deliberately complicate the rhythm of a chant in *Traité*.

It is more likely that Messiaen's transcription of this Alleluia represents more than a translation of this chant into modern notation; within the scope of the *Traité*, this particular transcription functions as an intermediary between the chant itself and its appearance in *Méditations*. The two staccato notes in Messiaen's "modern transcription" provide us with a motivic understanding of the way he ends this phrase in *Méditations*. It takes little stretch of the imagination to comprehend Messiaen's interpretation; in the neumatic notation, the pitches appear to be repeated even though in performance these three notes would undoubtedly be interpreted as a composite triplex contracted form beginning with the note marked with an episma at figure "T." Messiaen's separation of the two notes marked staccato offers an analytical bridge between the neumatic notation and the *Méditations* excerpt, where this repeated two-note staccato gesture occurs eight times with diminuendo and ritard. This interpretation of the neumatic text translates well into an instrumental medium; furthermore, it also relates to Messiaen's use of Hindu rhythms, particularly the repeated note refrains of Hindu ragas that Messiaen quotes in *TML*.<sup>107</sup>

It is curious that Messiaen would preserve an accurate grouping of basic pulses at the opening of the *Méditations* version of this chant. The text underlay of the chant demarcates this rhythm clearly in performance; on an organ, however, no such textual or dynamic reinforcement is possible. Articulation could achieve the same effect, but Messiaen slurs the phrase. Only a listener who was familiar with either the chant or Messiaen's piece would interpret the rhythm as a sixteenth-note pick-up to a composite triplex pulse rather than four straight sixteenth-notes.

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<sup>107</sup> Messiaen, *TML*, Vol. I, p. 33, and Vol. II, p. 16. See discussion of these examples above, page 26.

In both of Messiaen's transcriptions of this Alleluia, it is clear that Messiaen hears the arsic and thetic shapes of the opening according to the principals of Dom Mocquereau. The two accents of Example 6-6B indicate critical points of thesis within this gesture. The first accented A is the first long note of the phrase, making all the motion before it arsic. As well, the episma in the original chant on the penultimate note denotes an important ictus, making the last two notes one thetic gesture. Messiaen also marks an accent on this note. The text underlay provides a subtler and more complicated rhythm to this phrase, however, and this is lost in a purely instrumental rendition, especially when slurred as Messiaen does in *Méditations*. The syllable "lu" of the word "Alleluia" receives the most stress in a Latin pronunciation. This means that while within the music of the syllable "lu" there may be a gesture of arsis and thesis, the accentuation of the word "Alleluia" places a strong ictus on the first note sung to the syllable "lu." Such subtlety of rhythmic inflection is completely lost in the *Méditations* example, where the slurring ensures that the first moment of thesis will only occur on the first long A of the phrase.

Another interesting notational matter occurs regarding the episma at "X" of Example 6-6A and the corollary moment in Messiaen's modern transcription in *Traité*. Does the manner in which Messiaen beams or flags the melodic notes imply any meaning to a passage's stress or rhythmic interpretation? The episma in the original chant calls for a rhythmic lengthening of the note. Messiaen does not notate this with any directive via intensity (dynamics, accents, etc.). However, he does separate the stems of the notes at this point in his modern transcription. Does this notation imply any subtle rhythmic separation of the notes (i. e., slight ritard)? Both Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod interpret

his scores with a great deal of rhythmic inflection and imagination. Perhaps in Messiaen's notational language, examples such as this are the composer's way of notating a rhythm not meant to be metronomic, but also not free or exaggerated enough to necessitate writing tenuto marks, ritard, etc.

Messiaen preserves the gesture of repose and breath at the ends of phrases particularly well in his *Méditations* score. According to Mocquereau, the last note of the phrase at "Y" would be lengthened in performance to musically emphasize the thesis or repose at this moment. When transcribing chant into modern notation, however, the implied note-lengthening is not notated in either Messiaen or Mocquereau. In addition, the dash at "Z" indicates the separation of the two parts of the phrase by a breath. Messiaen notates neither of these indications in his first transcription in *Traité*. In the *Méditations* example, however, he notates both the lengthening of the last note "Y" (as a quarter note) and the breath at "Z" (as a comma) in a manner that reproduces the rhythm of this phrase as performed by a choir very accurately.

The Alleluia from the Mass for the Dedication of a Church is in the Mixolydian mode. Therefore, the final is G and the reciting tone is D. The melodic structure of this chant, however, is modally ambiguous due to the prominence given the notes C and F, which lend this melody the sound of the Lydian mode. Messiaen's *Méditations* transcription exploits this ambiguity by lingering on an A at the end of this excerpt, and the modal effect in this case is certainly Lydian.

Messiaen reinforces this modal perception of the melody at the end of this movement, shown in Example 6-10.

Example 6-10 *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité*, Movement II, ending

(*\*Donnez-nous l'amour de votre Saint Nom!\**) (litanies du Saint Nom de Jésus).

Un peu lent

Pos: *p legato*

MAN. *pp legato*

Pos: *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

MAN. *pp* *(pp sempre)*

Bien modéré

(Pos: nazard 2  $\frac{2}{3}$ , flageolet 2, piccolo 1)

MAN. *ppp* *(Bruant jaune)* *(long)*

The statements of the chant have all each been identical to Example 6-7 in this movement so far. At the last appearance of this theme, Messiaen sets the melody differently. The affect is quieter, and the melody is harmonized. Messiaen's harmonies enhance the perception of a transposition of the Lydian mode with a final of D, but the harmonization of the final two notes of chant does at last cadence in the Mixolydian mode on a final of E. The repeated gesture on B-flat in the penultimate measure motivically relates to Messiaen's repeated-note figure at the end of Example 6-7, but he describes these final measures as "very high and away, the naïve repeated notes and sharp final twist of the yellowhammer."<sup>108</sup> While this movement consists of very disparate types of music, the composer creates a motivic relationship between two of his compositional ingredients, a Gregorian chant and a bird's song.

<sup>108</sup> Messiaen, *Messiaen Edition*, p. 87.

### *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste*

Messiaen composed *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste* in 1963, and it is scored for winds (mostly brass), percussion, and solo piano. Messiaen's treatment of chant melodies in this work represents significant departures from earlier examples I have discussed. While this discussion of *Couleurs* is not meant to be representative of all chant paraphrases in Messiaen's later works, the compositional procedures seen in this work do signify important developments in Messiaen's relationship to Gregorian chant.

The theological programmatic elements of this work are derived from biblical verses about the Apocalypse. Messiaen says that all the musical materials of the piece, be they birdsong, plainchant, or Hindu rhythms, are "put to the service of color, to the combinations of sound that represent and evoke it."<sup>109</sup> Messiaen experienced colored-hearing synaesthesia, meaning that he saw colors when he heard music. The colors which Messiaen saw were complex, usually consisting of a dominant color which was filled in with flecks of other, less important colors. A famous early example occurs in a series of chords played by the piano in the second movement of the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*. He describes this passage as "soft cascades of chords: blue and mauve, gold and green, red-violet, blue-orange- all of this dominated by steel grey."<sup>110</sup>

The process of "coloring" his musical ingredients resembles the treatment of plainchant we saw in "Neumes rythmiques." In that example, Messiaen was "coloring" each "neume" with pitches that heightened his interpretation of an abstract rhythmic gesture derived from a plainchant neume. In *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste*, he generally preserves the interval structure of the original chant, but he "colors" the melody in

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<sup>109</sup> Messiaen, *Messiaen Edition*, p. 71.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

different ways. While the object being “colored in” “Neumes rythmiques” was a fully transposed interpretation of chant materials, the object in *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste* remains consistent with the original in some way (usually interval structure).

Messiaen paraphrases four different Alleluias from the liturgy in *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste*. The relationship between the text of these chants and Messiaen’s program is best described by Robert Sherlaw Johnson:

All these Alleluias are relevant by the association their verse text with the symbolic content of the work. The first and last refer to the Holy City of the Apocalypse, and the other two refer to Christ’s redemption of mankind through death and resurrection, and through his Body and Blood.<sup>111</sup>

Messiaen treats these four Alleluias in different ways. These treatments include layering the chant within a heterophonic texture, harmonization of the original, and a division of the melody among instruments as in *Klangfarbenmelodie*. The latter includes both homophonic as well as pointillistic textures. The rhythmic treatment of the material ranges from interpretations that are faithful to the Solesmes method to extreme distortions by use of Greek and Hindu rhythms. There are no monophonic presentations of chant melodies in this work.

Example 6-11 illustrates an example of a paraphrase in *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste* which “harmonizes” the melody.

*Example 6-11 Couleurs de la Cité Céleste, paraphrase of Alleluia for Corpus Christi*

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<sup>111</sup> Johnson, p. 167.



## 5) Annexe (suite et fin).

**32** Lento (♩ = 50) Alleluia du Saint-Sacrement  
(batterie)

1<sup>re</sup> Trp.  
1<sup>re</sup> & 2<sup>e</sup> Trp.  
3<sup>e</sup> Trp.  
2 Cors  
1<sup>re</sup> & 2<sup>e</sup> Trbn.  
3<sup>e</sup> Trbn.  
Trb. basse  
Cenc.  
Cloches  
Gongs

1<sup>re</sup> Trp.  
1<sup>re</sup> & 2<sup>e</sup> Trp.  
3<sup>e</sup> Trp.  
2 Cors  
1<sup>re</sup> & 2<sup>e</sup> Trbn.  
3<sup>e</sup> Trbn.  
Trb. basse  
Cenc.  
Cloches  
Gongs

The Alleluia melody is present in the piccolo trumpet and chimes. The harmonization is dissonant and is characteristic of the harmonic language of this piece. As in “Neumes rythmiques,” Messiaen’s treatment of chant in *Couleurs* is highly subjective; he is not attempting to evoke the musical parameters of the original. The treatment of plainchant in *Couleurs* focuses on the correlation between the “colors” of the celestial city and the figurative colors Messiaen sees in these chants. The chant texts as well as the liturgical theme of the Masses from which these chants come most certainly affect Messiaen’s interpretation. The solemnity of the above example contrasts with the Messiaen’s jubilant rendition of the Alleluia from the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost in *Couleurs*. The programmatic impetus behind these treatments suggests a different conceptual approach to plainchant than we saw in earlier examples. The symbolism of the chant becomes more obscure to the listener due to the complexity of Messiaen’s chant paraphrases in *Couleurs*. Evocation of plainchant becomes subsumed within a language that interprets the symbolism of the chant through the dense textures found in *Couleurs* and other late works of Messiaen.

## Conclusion

We have seen that Messiaen uses plainchant in a manner unlike his teachers and predecessors. Chant was at the foundation of Messiaen's rhythmic practices, and this has far-reaching implications within Messiaen's compositional aesthetic. Messiaen also paraphrases plainchant at different levels of abstraction, from the direct evocation of chant in "Action de graces," to the more sublimated features of chant found in the "Neumes rythmiques." And with the transcription of the "Haec dies" in "L'Esprit de joie," we find that salient aspects of Messiaen's modernism already exist in Gregorian chant. It is not his transformation of chant that is so remarkable but his full embrace of its musical parameters. The rhythms, melodic shapes, phrase structures, forms, and modal attributes of Gregorian chant appear in Messiaen's music to varying degrees, and the consequences of the connections between plainchant and Messiaen's music embody profound spiritual and compositional significance.

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