

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ON TIME AND ETERNITY IN MESSIAEN

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I aspire towards eternity, but I'm not suffering while living in time, all the less so since time has always been at the centre of my preoccupations. As a rhythmicist, I've endeavoured to divide this time up and to understand it better by dividing it. Without musicians, time would be much less understood. Philosophers are less advanced in this field. But as composers, we have the great power to chop up and alter time.¹

Messiaen's interest in time and eternity is frequently cited, and approaches to understanding his music from the perspective of its temporality are all-pervasive. One might justifiably claim that to appreciate his music at all one must understand it in light of its relationship with time, a relationship which arguably differs from that of much earlier Western music.² Yet such a complex and multifaceted topic as time does not admit easy consideration, and the precise nature of the time and eternity invoked in Messiaen scholarship is not always clear. Both terms, for instance, have multiple, often quite distinct definitions, and as a result commentary on his music from this perspective is liable to become confusing if these concepts are insufficiently defined. It is also unclear as to what extent this musicological discourse is based on demonstrable attributes of Messiaen's music, or draws rather upon his own comments on it, and if from the latter, the epistemological validity of these. The present chapter appraises the views on time Messiaen professed, their relationship to his music, and to subsequent accounts of his music. It does not seek to provide a detailed analysis of his music from a temporal perspective (a topic already covered in some detail), but focuses rather on the use of philosophical conceptions of time and their applicability to Messiaen's music.

I Conceptions of Time and Eternity

Messiaen's views

Given how ubiquitous discussions of Messiaen's music from the perspective of its temporality are, one might expect to find within them a reasonably clear definition of the notion of time. Such a demand is on one level unjust, as time is a concept notoriously intractable to define. "What is time?", St Augustine famously mused—"Provided that no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know"—and Messiaen himself left the pointed remark cited above as to the superiority of a musical, as opposed to philosophical, understanding of time.³ The topic may be approached from differing philosophical, theological, physicist and psychological perspectives, and even within each discipline (let alone between them) there is no overall consensus as to a correct viewpoint. Yet it is relatively straightforward to align the composer's own understanding of time to the philosophical position termed reductionist or relational. This position, taken by Messiaen primarily from Aquinas, sees time after Aristotle's definition as "the measure of motion", "the number of movement in respect of the before and after".⁴ Time is not the same as movement, but the two are interdependent; by implication, without any movement or change in the universe there can be no time. This definition is traditionally opposed to an absolute conception (such as that found in classical Newtonian physics), which sees time as an external, independent entity.⁵ Messiaen's reductivist temporal perspective certainly lends itself more immediately to the possibility of a musical manipulation of time, in that (putting to one side for the moment potentially problematic niceties of cognitive perception) differing types of rhythmic movement or stasis would, on the face of it, appear to have a higher epistemological status as constituting a genuine manipulation of time within a conception which sees time as dependent upon movement.

Growing out of this conception of the contingent nature of time is the particular notion of eternity that Messiaen holds. Eternity is not something often considered as a concept, and thus it is not always appreciated that there are two quite distinct notions that can be indicated by this word. First, eternity may imply infinity of time, everlasting duration, something without beginning or end. This may be contrasted with timeless, unchanging extra-temporal being, something

outside and not measurable by time. Despite the etymological root of the term eternity implying the first concept (*aevum*, time or age), the term “sempiternity” is often used to distinguish the former notion of infinite duration from the second one of timeless eternity. This second definition of eternity is characteristic especially of religious and mystical thought, and is that with which Messiaen concerns himself. This is clarified at the start of the *Traité de Rythme, de Couleur et d’Ornithologie*, through citation of Aquinas’ consideration of the distinction between time and eternity: “Eternity and time are two absolutely different measures of duration.” “Eternity is simultaneously whole. But time has a ‘before’ and an ‘after’.”⁶ Similarly, in the conversations with Claude Samuel, this viewpoint is amplified:

all of God’s creations are enclosed in time, and time is one of God’s strangest creatures since it is totally in conflict with his eternal nature, he who is without beginning, without end, without succession.⁷

And speaking of the *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*, Messiaen elaborates

I did not want in any way to make a commentary on the book of Revelation, but only to justify my desire for the cessation of time....for the ending of concepts of past and future: that is, for the beginning of eternity....my initial thought was of the abolition of time itself, something infinitely mysterious and incomprehensible to most of the philosophers of time, from Plato to Bergson.⁸

It is clear then, that the notion of infinite time is antithetical to Messiaen’s own thought. Time has a beginning and an end, being created (and ultimately ended) by God, who exists outside time, unchanging and immutable.

Problems of mixed temporal conceptions in scholarship

Messiaen’s own position, particularly with regard to his conception of timeless eternity, is often recognised by commentators on his music. It should be emphasised that this perspective on time is not necessarily the only one applicable to his music, indeed that it is not necessarily correct as a theory, but it is certainly what the composer professes, and any account that seeks to interpret his music

in terms of his own beliefs should take account of this. Yet even given the well-known statements by Messiaen aligning his conception of eternity with atemporal, timeless being, Messiaen scholars are at times liable to mix the two conceptions without further clarification of the differences involved. Paul Griffiths, in the introduction to a work that thematises Messiaen's relationship to time, speaks in the same paragraph of the stasis and iconic being of Messiaen's music and then of the "image of eternity" produced by "the long time it must take" for the completion of rhythmic cycles and the possibility of their "constant repetition".⁹ The temporal sempiternity of the latter, however, has little in common with the atemporal eternity implied by the former and Messiaen's religious beliefs. Timothy Koozin, too, after contending that "it is important to understand Messiaen's rhythmic processes in the context of his religious thought", goes on to speak of "Time itself, undifferentiated and infinite"—a conception that Messiaen could not have shared.¹⁰ Even Robert Sherlaw-Johnson, who correctly notes the distinction between these two types of eternity, similarly conflates the idea of endless repetition of long temporal cycles with the timeless eternal.¹¹

These accounts cited are generally sensitive explorations of Messiaen's music, and the conceptions of time and eternity that underlie these statements are not necessarily false, but it is undeniable here that conceptions of time that are inimical both to Messiaen's stated beliefs and to each other are often mixed or at least unclearly interchanged. The sense of extremely long durations (approaching a sense, negatively perceived, of potential everlastingness) can be used metaphorically for sempiternity, but this is not strictly speaking the eternity that Messiaen's religious belief can sustain.

Part of the problem lies with Messiaen's own statements, which do seem liable for confusion.

When we say 'God is eternal', do we think about the significance of these words? 'God is eternal' signifies not only that he will never end, but that he never had any beginning. Here is where the temporal notions of 'before' and 'after' encumber us. To conceive of something without a beginning absolutely overwhelms us.¹²

This is not actually incompatible with timelessness, but

certainly gives more the impression of speaking of everlasting time. And surely the notion of something existing outside time is more overwhelmingly difficult to comprehend than something without a beginning?¹³ Similarly, speaking of the *Quatuor*, the composer blends spatial and temporal metaphors and the eternal, infinite and atemporal:

Its musical language is essentially immaterial, spiritual and Catholic. Modes which achieve a kind of tonal ubiquity, melodically and harmonically, here draw the listener towards eternity in space or the infinite. Special rhythms, beyond metre, contribute powerfully in dismissing the temporal.¹⁴

The recourse to symbol

A noticeable feature of writing on Messiaen and time is, indeed, how often particular features are spoken of through metaphors or attributed symbolic qualities, where the precise nature of the relationship is not clear. A result of this lack of clarity is that the metaphors or symbols used do not always fit the purported meaning as much as is sometimes assumed. A case in point is the connection often made between eternity and the circle (or more precisely, something of which circular properties are predicated). Circular movement, even its everlasting repetition, does not necessarily imply timeless eternity; the relational view of time taken from Aristotle and Aquinas sees time as generated from the circular rotation of the heavens, and indeed Aristotle's account, the first extended consideration of the topic in Western philosophy, views this as sempiternal, without beginning or end.¹⁵ Only in a weak sense in the latter is the cosmos as a whole eternal in a non-temporal sense, as being immutable.¹⁶ Still, it has been suggested that circular or cyclical processes may be in some sense akin to Messiaen's eternity in that before and after, or cause and effect, appear mixed.¹⁷ As Messiaen claimed concerning nonretrogradable rhythms, this creates "a certain unity of movement... where beginning and end are confused because identical".¹⁸ And at one level, since the movement described in a circle is complete and self-contained, one could argue at a symbolic level that such circular movement might imply a view of the totality of time from the perspective of an atemporal observer (God) outside time and space, without being itself strictly timeless. However, the connection here is still weaker than is

often assumed.

Such use of metaphor and symbol in discussing Messiaen's music is well established, and arguably appropriate concerning its relation to an intended religious meaning, as a reflection of the impossibility of speaking directly of things above and beyond our limited standpoint.¹⁹ As Aquinas argued, it is in the nature of God and eternity to be defined negatively: "As God, although incorporeal, is named in Scripture metaphorically by corporeal names, so eternity, though simultaneously whole, is called by names implying time and succession."²⁰ After all, Messiaen's endeavour in such works as the *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* is rather paradoxical—attempting to express the inexpressible, representing the unrepresentable, the atemporal through a medium that is essentially concerned with time. In eternity there can be no music.²¹

What our experience of an unchanging eternity might actually be like, and whether this is indeed a desirable state, is also not self-evident. Messiaen speaks of the duration of consciousness in eternity:

Regular time moves towards the future—it never goes backwards. Psychological time, or time of thought, goes in all directions: forward, backwards, cut in pieces, at will... In the life of the Resurrection we will live in a duration malleable and transformable. The ability of the musician, who retrogrades and permutes his durations, prepares us, in a small way, for that state.²²

The psychological duration spoken of by Messiaen (considered at greater length in the next section) implies at least some internal change, which suggests the passing of time—itsself incompatible with the eternity posited. Yet the alternative, duration without change, also presents conceptual difficulties.²³ The writer and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno, a Catholic and proto-existentialist, considered at length the idea of eternity, concluding that although the idea of annihilation was terrifying, the only idea of a changeless eternity one could conceive from our worldly terms of reference was almost equally frightening in its apparent deadly boredom.²⁴ It would, perhaps, be uncharitable to Messiaen to suggest that the effect of some of his music gives rise to a similar feeling, yet the apparent virtue of changelessness seems

in need of reconsideration when presented within the terms of time and space. Nevertheless for a religious believer we should withhold logical objections to this idea of eternity drawn from the phenomenal world, to the extent that such a hypothetical state transcends any conceptualisation. Aquinas himself (against the beliefs of most philosophers, prior and subsequent), attempted to argue that emotions such as delight were not in their essence temporally contingent, and by implication that participation in the eternity of the resurrected could be one of enduring joy.²⁵

Such contradictions are neatly encapsulated in Messiaen's oft-quoted "charm of impossibilities".²⁶ Roberto Fabbi puts it nicely in his claim that "all of Messiaen's work is profoundly characterised by a yearning of something, which is the music, towards something else... 'the leap outside time'... unobtainable for the living.... Since music is the stuff of the living, it is what it is, precisely because what it yearns for is unobtainable—the charm of a metaphysical impossibility."²⁷ However, our inability to conceptualise fully such religious claims and the recourse to metaphor and symbol does not mean that all metaphors and symbols are appropriate to this music or the religious truths it is claimed to convey.

II Issues concerning the phenomenology of time Messiaen's theoretical positions

An important question not yet addressed concerning Messiaen's understanding of time is whether it is an external, objective aspect of the world or an internal aspect of consciousness. From this question stem wider issues concerning the phenomenology of certain temporal characteristics he attributes to his music—in other words, to what extent they are available to audible perception, or, as seen with the symbolic aspects discussed above, are intellectual conceits that speak more to the composer or analyst than listener.

A statement Messiaen makes early in the *Traité* suggests a broadly Kantian view of time as being, with space, a necessary form of apprehending the world: subjective in the sense that it is within us, objective in that it is an a priori condition of perception—we can never have access to anything without it.

Time and space are intimately related. Their perception is of great importance for the construction of human consciousness. They are the two intellectual instruments that permit our construction of the world. For the musician and rhythmician, the perception of time is the source of all music and all rhythm. A musician must be a rhythmician....He should refine his sense of rhythm by a more intimate knowledge of experienced duration, by the study of different concepts of time and different rhythmic styles.²⁸

This demonstrates as well how Messiaen views time from multiple perspectives—in the *Traité* running successively through biological, relative (Einsteinian), superimposed, quantum, physiological and psychological time. With the exception of the brief foray into quantum time (that conflicts with much else), the general emphasis is on the relative nature of all these times, largely consistent with the reductionist interpretation indicated before. Such plurality is an accurate reflection of the complexity and multifaceted nature of the topic, yet is also rather confusing in trying to grasp Messiaen's beliefs and justifications more precisely. Such an assortment of theories inevitably contains internal inconsistencies and mutually incompatible viewpoints, and Messiaen's exegetical writing, both in his substantial consideration of time in the *Traité* and throughout his life, reflects these tensions.

At the largest level, Messiaen aligns himself with the theories of Henri Bergson, who assumes in the *Traité* an importance greater than any other philosopher (including Aquinas). Following Bergson, Messiaen divides time into subjective *durée réel* or *durée vécue*—"real" time, heterogeneous, qualitative, immeasurable; and objective *temps espace* or *mathématique*—homogenous, quantitative, measurable, seen after Bergson as an abstraction or spatialisation of real time. On one occasion (pp. 11-12) Messiaen suggests the former should be called duration (*durée*) and the latter time (*temps*), though this is inconsistently applied and indeed conflicts with much of his writing elsewhere. Despite the composer's (and Bergson's) focus on the former, it is the latter that is most important for realising many of the temporal properties Messiaen attributes to his music. It is arguable, indeed, that Messiaen confuses Bergson's two types of time throughout his consideration of musical temporality; at the very least, he uses incompatible terms interchangeably, and readily subsumes subjective,

experienced time into its opposite, abstract time, with problematic consequences for attempting to make sense of his pronouncements on music's temporality.

Problems of rhythmic perception in Messiaen's theories

We recall that for Messiaen, "the perception of time is the source of all music and all rhythm"; Andrew Shenton has called this "both a statement of fact and a statement of compositional philosophy, and as such it is of paramount importance to any engagement with Messiaen's music."²⁹ It is also clear that for the composer such perception is equivalent to Bergsonian experienced time: the idea Messiaen proposes that the silence after a note sustains its duration is evidently not an objective feature of music, and he spends some time detailing how different modes of attack or articulation may affect the perception of chronometrically equal durations. "Experienced duration is not measurable" he concludes, following Bergson.³⁰ Messiaen's entire theory of rhythm, however, depends upon an abstract, homogenous, measurable and numerable time. And rhythm, as the composer is keen to stress, is "the first, essential element in music". If musical perception, as occurring in heterogeneous *durée vécue*, is free from measure, Messiaen's conception of rhythm can play no part in our audible experience of his music.

The one place where Messiaen appears to try to address this apparent contradiction is in the final section of the consideration of time in the *Traité* ("Temps Bergsonien et Rythme Musical", pp. 31-36). Here Messiaen notes Bergson's view of the capacity of the human mind through memory to spatialise past events heard in experienced time, thus enabling their numeration (pp. 32-33). This, Messiaen seems to take it, sufficiently justifies the unmediated turning of experienced time into its opposite, abstract time, and thus the heterogeneous and immeasurable into the homogenous and measurable. Through this equating of opposites, he is able to move freely between antithetical concepts. Yet the argument given by Bergson does not go as far as this proposal would suggest.

Bergson adduces his example of the striking of a clock to demonstrate how we can numerate the events perceived in internal *durée*, thus partially spatialising it and to this extent turning our

heterogeneous, subjective real time into an abstract type of time that approximates space.³¹ This is not quite the same as the retrospective subdivision of past musical durations into multiples of a fixed smallest unit that Messiaen proposes. Numeration of events is not equivalent to fixing a durational value to each. Messiaen's contention already presupposes an underlying regularity of time (if not, a basic unit could not be used to measure longer note durations), which is especially problematic given that he himself has stated how note durations that are equal when measured by clock-time can appear dissimilar to perception depending upon the type of attack or articulation used.³² Put simply, measuring a non-homogenous medium with a non-homogenous unit will not result in a meaningful value.

This reducing of duration to number is evident in a well-known comment Messiaen made on the birth of time and rhythm, which has rightly been seen as problematic. This quotation contains several pertinent features illustrating Messiaen's views on time: on the finitude of time (its creation); its interdependence on movement (the beat—the event that establishes change); on rhythm as the comparison of duration.

The first, essential element in music is Rhythm, and Rhythm is first and foremost the change of number and duration. Suppose that there were a single beat in all the universe. One beat; with eternity before it and eternity after it. A before and after. That is the birth of time. Imagine then, almost immediately, a second beat. Since any beat is prolonged by the silence which follows it the second beat will be longer than the first. Another number, another duration. That is the birth of rhythm.³³

"Time and duration: two words treated as synonymous, often used interchangeably. Philosophers, however, strongly oppose this and establish them practically as opposites."³⁴ After having first professed their difference, Messiaen goes on to identify them once again. Duration here becomes interchangeable with number. For Messiaen's listener, it appears, every subjective duration must be spatialised, numerated, turned into what he claims is its opposite, abstract mathematical time.

Messiaen's contention of audible rhythmic subdivision seems only the more ambitious when it is taken into account that the listener

encountering his music is not presented with a simple two-note rhythmic unit heard on its own with ample time to numerate its rhythm (as in the *Traité*) but with an ongoing succession of highly complex musical rhythms, often superimposed. Even a relatively simple passage of Messiaen surely presents an information overload if needing to be processed in the manner the composer advocates, let alone something like the Epode to *Chronochromie*. “Rhythm is a matter of intelligence; the more perfect the human brain becomes, the more one will be able to use complex rhythms”, Messiaen would claim. “One will be able to appreciate more easily the difference between very short values of only slight divergence, and, more difficult, between very long values of only a slight divergence. Everyone can achieve this with patience and study.”³⁵ This seems optimistic. To be sure, it is quite possible that Messiaen’s rhythmic irregularities may be perceived *qua* irregularity by the listener, but this is likely to be in a qualitative sense as a general feeling of metric irregularity (heard against the cultural expectations drawn from previous metrically regular music), not as something that can be easily quantified and numerated in the manner Messiaen suggests.³⁶

Problems of Time and Symbol

The disparity between time as Messiaen believes it is perceived and how he presents it as an attribute of his music is further noticeable in the numerous comments he left concerning the ability of a composer to manipulate the direction of time. A typical example:

The musician possesses a mysterious power: by means of his rhythms, he can chop up time here and there, and can even put it together again in the reverse order, a little as though he were going for a walk through different points of time, or as though he were amassing the future by turning to the past, in the process of which, his memory of the past becomes transformed into a memory of the future.³⁷

Practically, this can be taken as referring to technical procedures such as palindromes (“non-retrogradable rhythms”) and symmetrical permutations that are found within Messiaen’s music. A procedure for which the term retrograde may be used evidently has something to do with going backwards. Similarly, a non-retrogradable rhythm

is one that is the same backwards as forwards. Such orientation can easily be represented spatially, on paper. Yet the precise relationship of these with time—especially if time is something Messiaen is rather ambiguous in defining—is more complicated.

Music is not in time, but rather time is in Music...The rhythmician...has the advantage of moving at will through the past and the future, and of chopping time up by retrograding and permutating it.³⁸

At face value, this statement is consistent: if time is *in* music, then rearranging musical order in some sense could be thought of as rearranging temporal order. The idea is undoubtedly attractive. However, as soon as one begins to question how this music is perceived, either within the terms of reference Messiaen provides or indeed outside these, this notion rapidly becomes fraught. Most commentators are understandably hesitant to assign too great an audible reality to such techniques, preferring instead to focus on their symbolic qualities.³⁹ But Messiaen, as we have seen, ascribes an unrealistic amount to the capacities of his listener and is somewhat coy in acknowledging the purely metaphorical or symbolic nature of these techniques.

Recall again that for Messiaen “the perception of time is the source of all music”; if time perception is a precondition for music, it now arguably becomes circular to suggest that time is *in* the medium that requires it for its very perception. Time is assumed to be an internal part of consciousness in the latter quotation, yet something external in the former. At the very least, it would be more reasonable to suggest that if the perception of time is the source of all music, music is to this extent in time.

The best solution to this impasse is probably to recall that for Messiaen there are different types of time—here the internal time of consciousness (Bergson’s *durée*), the external time of musical events, and an abstract, mathematical time that allows the numeration of external events and durations for consciousness (which assumes greater importance for his thinking than Messiaen admits). Musical temporality might therefore be created from the interaction of these different times; that the precise relationship between them is unclear

is understandable given the complexity of the subject. However, Messiaen does not actually say this, or clarify why he needs to cite so many different types of time without divulging their relationship.

Messiaen's writings are also contradictory in that although in the quotations above the word time (*temps*) is used, elsewhere he uses this same idea interchangeably with duration (*durée*)—as we have seen, supposedly an internal, non-measurable continuity of conscious states. In the *Traité*, for instance, he states, for the musician, duration [*durée*] is a weapon, by which he attacks and convinces the listener⁴⁰, and similarly, in the passage from the Third Tome cited earlier, “The ability of the musician, who retrogrades and permutes his durations [*durées*], prepares us, in a small way, for that state [of eternal life].”⁴¹

First, if by *durée* Messiaen means something like Bergson's *durée vécue* (as it would seem given his discussion earlier in the *Traité*), this is incapable of being chopped up: it is continuous and unique to each listener. If, rather, he implies the perception of differing durations of external events by a perceiving subject, these are still heard (according to Bergson's phenomenology) as subject to successive presentation, with no apparent indication of implied reversal. Even repetition, in the strict sense, is impossible for *durée*, as the internal experience of a repeated external event is modified the second time in light of the first. In our subjective, experienced time, everything is evolving, accumulating.⁴² A palindrome is not heard as a palindrome. It is only a palindrome on paper, or when removed from time by being spatialised in consciousness.

It is the same with his claims of chopping up and reordering time. Messiaen proceeds as if each differentiable musical event had its own ordinal position according to a hypothetical regulative diachronic succession, which remains with the recurrence of this event, even when this succession is reordered. I.e., for the events that can be ordered:

$$\{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8\}$$

when subject to symmetrical permutation from the centre, are subsequently heard as:

$$\{5, 4, 6, 3, 7, 2, 8, 1\}$$

But it is highly questionable whether musical events are

audibly marked as bearing an order like this. This is particularly the case with Messiaen's music, in distinction to that of earlier composers. As a consequence of having excluded such features as metre, functional harmony, thematic development and other culturally determined tropes of phrasal position (such as generic opening or closing gestures) from playing a significant role in his musical language, and by further dissociating rhythm from other musical parameters through the use of isorhythm, Messiaen's music is largely without potential aural markers of temporal position.⁴³ In other words, there is little sense of an underlying putative true temporal order to have as a reference against which to judge the temporal reordering, in the way that previous common-practice Western music arguably had, or indeed literary and cinematic narrative has.⁴⁴ Messiaen quite effectively removes the sense of causality and temporal progression from his music, but as a consequence cannot easily play it off against any perception of reordering.

The only real means for determining such a referential order is by allotting a numerical order to the musical events in the score and following their manipulations. This chops up time in a symbolic way, but at such an abstracted level that it has more or less nothing to do with time as most of us understand it, and certainly not how (and as) we experience it. How the listener can be attacked, let alone convinced by these procedures, remains unclear. Essentially, despite professing his allegiance to Bergson, the reality of the internal experience of time and its relative, qualitative nature (both subjectively and across nature), Messiaen appears to reduce time and duration here to no more than a spatialised quantum, an abstract pattern of semiotic relationships on paper. Stefan Keym, in a thorough and detailed survey, concludes that "Messiaen's mirror-image reversal of time is a purely symbolic art and represents a clear-cut paradigm of the surrender to spatial categories that Bergson denounced, which are irreverent for subjective experience."⁴⁵ Ironically the time Messiaen manipulates has little to do with real time.

III Audible and Abstract aspects of musical time in Messiaen's music

Despite the inconsistencies of his claims for the audible apprehension of certain temporal conceits in his music, Messiaen

also leaves a more realistic admission of their probable perceptual feasibility. In the *Traité* he notes the changing importance of different modes of temporal understanding dependent upon the manner of his music's perception. The cognition of duration for the listener in a concert hall is a mixture of mathematical and psychological time, he holds, whereas the score-reader, able to repeat the music at will, is able to "overcome all difficulties."⁴⁶ Following this distinction, one may distinguish between temporal features that form part of the listening experience and those that are more abstract, symbolic, accessible largely or indeed wholly through study of the musical score.⁴⁷

The compositional techniques Messiaen uses to convey an audible sense of temporality different from that of much preceding Western music have been amply documented in scholarship.⁴⁸ These include the enlargement of harmonic vocabulary accompanied by the weakening of harmonic grammar (i.e., the non-functional use of harmonic progressions); a sense of melodic/harmonic stasis emanating from the equidistance resulting from the use of symmetrical pitch collections (Messiaen's "modes of limited transposition"); the downplaying of thematic working characteristic of culturally embedded notions of development and organic growth; heterophony or the superimposition of different rhythmic layers in place of counterpoint; freedom from metre and other hierarchical systems of temporal ordering; the construction of non-progressive forms emphasising symmetry and enclosedness; and the seeming arbitrary succession of sections characteristic of what would later be termed "moment form".

Many of these features make their effect in conjunction; for instance, the freedom from metre, functional harmony and thematic development all contribute to downplaying the sense of temporal directionality obtained in previous Western music through the fusion of these different parameters.⁴⁹ Though much attention has been devoted in this paper to appraising theoretical claims of eternity and timelessness, one should note how much of Messiaen's music is actually concerned with the expression and defamiliarisation of different senses of time, rather than the impossible search for eternity.⁵⁰ Andrew Shenton recognises this quality in quoting Rowan Williams' observation that if music "is the most contemplative of the arts, it is not because it takes us to the timeless, but because it obliges us to

rethink time.”⁵¹

Abstract or symbolic aspects of musical time

Operations such as the retrograding and symmetrical permutation of musical material are perfectly reasonable ways of reordering temporal events, but their relationship with time is only present at a purely intellectual, abstract level.

Regular time moves towards the future—it never goes backwards.
Psychological time, or time of thought, goes in all directions:
forward, backwards, cut in pieces, at will.⁵²

This “psychological time” uses the intellectual capacity for memory to reorder events occurring (or conceived) within a regulative diachronic series. By spatialising in a mental conception events that may be played in diachronic time, a synoptic view of the music is obtained in which all events are rendered synchronic, to the extent that they are equally present to the imagination, in which connections can be formed based on criteria other than temporal succession, and which therefore to this extent also lies outside time.

These views on the intellectualisation of music, its use to deny its own time, recall Claude Lévi-Strauss’s famous claim that music is an instrument for the “obliteration of time.” “It follows that by listening to music, and while we are listening to it, we enter into a kind of immortality.”⁵³ There is the embrace of a certain Platonic quality here that suits Messiaen’s theoretical ideas better than Bergson does (who strives *against* this Platonic spatialising, though never denies its existence). However, one must note that what Messiaen does is not quite as intriguing as that which is observed in the music considered by his contemporary; Lévi-Strauss is here speaking of the spatialisation of something perceived through temporal experience, that which appears in time being transformed into something supra-temporal. These conceits of Messiaen’s are, on the other hand, not audibly perceptible in the first place, being far more abstract; a more relevant paradigm is of something perceived non-temporally being viewed supra-temporally.

For the philosopher J.E. McTaggart, notions of change with

respect to an event being successively in the future, present and past, are fundamental to what we mean as time; by implication, any account of time that does not include these features does not speak of time.⁵⁴ McTaggart goes on to suggest that, given internal inconsistencies in any adequate definition of time, time is unreal. (This thesis remains controversial; however, despite over a century of debate, it has not been satisfactorily refuted.) It is dangerous to insist on a comprehensive definition of time, but the intellectual apprehension of Messiaen's palindromes and permutations certainly has little to do with the flow of time McTaggart speaks of. In claiming that the perception of time is the source of all music, Messiaen is in danger of negating part of his own music's claim to being music. From this statement, if something is not to do with time, it is to this extent not music. To the extent then that Messiaen's music is to do with time, these procedures have little to do with either time or hence his music's musicality. Although a sceptic could easily argue that Messiaen's ideas on time are confused and his claims for his music's mastery over time are often devoid of any demonstratable meaning, we could, however, choose conversely to connect this very lack of temporal characteristics with the timelessness he ardently seeks, just as McTaggart understands the purported unreality of time not in a negative light but as part of a long line of mystical, religious and philosophical thought that views time as the phenomenal appearance of a supra-temporal noumenal reality.⁵⁵ Just as we have seen that there can be no music in eternity, to the extent that this part of Messiaen's music is not temporal, is it therefore eternal?

The answer is not necessarily so: the non-temporal is not *eo ipso* identifiable with the eternal. To claim that non-temporal attributes can be predicated of Messiaen's music does not necessarily mean that it is to this extent eternal. A lack of distinct temporal characteristics need not indicate God's eternity so much as something that simply has nothing to do with time, such as the proposition that the internal angles of a triangle add up to 180°, though they certainly can be viewed from this perspective if one wishes. But for Messiaen, the existence of properties belonging to an essentially temporal object that demonstrate a freedom from being tied to concepts of before and after might just constitute the eternity in which he believes.

Lévi-Strauss, in his consideration of music, concludes that "the

musical creator is a being comparable to the gods, and music itself the supreme mystery of the science of man.”⁵⁶ Messiaen, similarly, sees the composer as a demi-god, standing above the phenomenal time of the musical work. The totality of the musical work in the composer’s mind is akin to the eternity of God:

Is not the composer-rhythmician a little demiurge, with total control over his work that is his creation, his microcosm, his child, his object? He knows in advance all the pasts and futures, which are all simultaneously present to his consciousness, is able to transform the present so that it grasps the past or future, and rearrange before and after...he can push his research in all ways offered by inversions or permutations of durations, forward motion, retrograde motion, movement from centre to extremes, from extremes to centre, and innumerable other movements that make a mockery of old Father Time.⁵⁷

The analyst is similarly able to conceive the whole as a synchronic totality, understand the symbolic reversals and permutations, though will not be able to realise new potential futures in the manner that the composer during the creation of the work could. But by implication, the listener without recourse to the score is often caught in time in the same manner as humans.

Messiaen’s theoretical exegesis of time and temporality in his music is undeniably confusing. This mystification is reflected in accounts of his music, which often draw upon the composer’s less-than-transparent commentary. Much of the problem is merely due to the sheer diversity of sources he draws on, which are inevitably contradictory. Aristotelian / Thomist time as “the number of movement” does not fit with Bergsonian *durée réelle*, and the continuity of these (and infinite divisibility of the former), along with relativity, jars with the positing of a quantum time particle (chronon), even though the latter suits Messiaen’s rhythmic thought and suggests for him an example, however infinitesimal in size, of duration outside time, without change or before and after, the timeless being he sees as a property of God.⁵⁸ It is clear that Messiaen is happy to cherry-pick theories that appear to suit one aspect of his music’s temporality, without building what could ever form a philosophically coherent system. From a sympathetic perspective one could say that perhaps any one rational system is incapable of fully explaining the temporality

of music; like God's creation, philosophers, theologians, scientists can create theories of time that are true for some aspects for his music but false for others. A more sceptical view, however, can easily be imagined.

The other problem is the inherent difficulty one encounters in attempting to understand time and eternity. Writing about music and time holds potential dangers, most obviously that this relationship may well not be capable of sufficient formulation in words; therein lies one of the attractions of music. Messiaen's contention that music can reveal aspects of temporality that philosophy (and by extension, discursive thought) cannot dream of is not an unreasonable proposition,⁵⁹ and to this extent one has to wonder whether Messiaen would not have been better served leaving his unwieldy intellectual justifications to one side. Yet any separation of musical meaning into a purely musical essence and an accidental surrounding discourse is nonetheless problematic, and the lengths to which Messiaen goes in order to explain his music in words (especially in his marshalling of philosophy, theology and science into his service) suggest his own ambivalence on this issue.⁶⁰ As a consequence, speaking of time in music, and examining the way the question of temporality in Messiaen's work has been treated in verbal discourse, is a legitimate activity, though it should not be forgotten that this may well not exhaust the meaning of his music—only provide a cautionary note as to how we may speak of it.

Notes

1. Claude Samuel, *Olivier Messiaen: Music and Colour. Conversations with Claude Samuel*, trans. E. Thomas Glasow (Amadeus Press, Portland OR, 1994), 34.
2. Paul Griffiths has gone so far as to claim that the denial of the "forward-moving time" found in Western music since the Renaissance "is the generative and fundamental substance of Messiaen's music". Paul Griffiths, *Olivier Messiaen and the Music of Time* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 17.
3. Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.xiv (17) [trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 230]. The absence of Augustine from Messiaen's considerations of time and eternity is surprising, not only given

the common religious perspective but also due to the importance of Augustine as a thinker on these issues (greater than Aquinas, who unsurprisingly draws on him).

4. Aristotle, *Physics*, IV, 11 (200^a34 & 25-26), translation taken from *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), I:374 & 373. Aquinas' account of time, derived principally from Aristotle (though significantly differing on the notion of eternity), can be found in the *Summa Theologica*, I 10.4. Messiaen uses Aquinas' definition in his *Traité de Rythme, de Couleur et d'Ornithologie*, Tome I (Paris: A. Leduc, 1994), 7-9. A quotation from the geologist Pierre Termier on p. 18 of the *Traité* further serves to support the reductionist idea of the interdependence of time, space and movement, and Messiaen's appeal to Einstein's relativity (pp. 14-17) is clearly incompatible with the opposing Newtonian conception of absolute time.

5. Cf. Isaac Newton, *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, trans. Andrew Motte, rev. Florian Cajori, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1934), 1:7: "Absolute, true or mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration: relative, apparent, and common time, is some sensible and external (whether accurate or unequable) measure of duration by the means of motion, which is commonly used instead of true time; such as an hour, a day, a month, a year."

6. Messiaen, *Traité*, I:7; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I 10.4. Aquinas' thesis is in turn derived from Boethius (*The Consolation of Philosophy*, V/6), itself indebted to Plotinus (*Enneads*, 3.7.3).

7. Samuel, *Olivier Messiaen: Music and Colour*, 34.

8. Goléa, *Recontres avec Olivier Messiaen* (Paris: Juilliard, 1960), 64, 70.

9. Griffiths, *Olivier Messiaen and the Music of Time*, 16.

10. Timothy Koozin, 'Spiritual-temporal imagery in music of Olivier Messiaen and Toru Takemitsu', *Contemporary Music Review*, 7/2 (1993), 193; also cf. 194.

11. Robert Sherlaw-Johnson, 'Rhythmic Technique and Symbolism in the Music of Olivier Messiaen', in *Messiaen's Language of Mystical Love*, ed. Siglind Bruhn (New York: Garland, 1998), 127 (cf. 139 note 17): "The background rhythm of *Liturgie de crystal*, taken to its logical conclusion, can be taken to be symbolic of eternity (especially if one considers that it could then be subject to endless repetition); in using only an incomplete portion of the whole process, Messiaen is giving us a glimpse into eternity. The eternal is brought into the world, into time". Endless repetition of temporal cycles is sempiternity, not atemporal eternity; a finite fragment of the sempiternal is just time.

12. Samuel, *Olivier Messiaen: Music and Colour*, 28.

13. Messiaen indicates this latter point in the *Traité* (I:33), using H.G. Wells' thought-experiment of an instantaneous three-dimensional cube (i.e. one existing in space but not in time).

14. Messiaen, Preface to miniature score of *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* (Paris, Durand, 1942).
15. Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, II.1 (283^b27-29); *Physics*, VIII.1 (251^b11-28).
16. Cf. *On the Heavens*, I.9 (279^a18-279^b3), II.1 (284^a11-12); *Physics*, IV.12 (221^b3-4).
17. See Mareli Stolp, 'Messiaen's Approach to Time in Music' (MMus Dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2006), 15; Eleanor F. Trawick, 'Order, Progression, and Time in the Music of Messiaen', *ex tempore*, 9/2 (1999), <<http://www.ex-tempore.org/Volix2/trawick/index.html>>.
18. Messiaen, *The Technique of My Musical Language*, 2 vols. trans. John Satterfield (Paris: Leduc, 1956), 1:21. The unspecified assumptions concerning the perceptual experience necessary for this statement to be true will be explored in the following section of this paper.
19. See on this point especially Camille Crunelle Hill, 'Saint Thomas Aquinas and the Theme of Truth in Messiaen's *Saint François d'Assise*', in *Messiaen's Language of Mystical Love*, ed. Siglind Bruhn (New York: Garland, 1998), 143-67, and Jean Marie Wu, 'Mystical Symbols of Faith: Olivier Messiaen's Charm of Impossibilities', in *ibid.*, 85-120. Recent development of metaphor theory would suggest that metaphorical description is indeed an intrinsic part of all language use.
20. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I 10.1. Also see I 10.3, where the loosely metaphorical use of the word eternal to describe long finite durations of time is indicated: "some things are called eternal in Scripture because of the length of their duration, although they are in nature corruptible; thus (Ps. 75:5) the hills are called 'eternal'". His argument, however, seems more designed to defend the validity of the loosely worded Biblical text, rather than a recommendation for subsequent practice.
21. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III sup. 77.4, 'Whether the resurrection will happen suddenly or by degrees', who points out that "all sound is measured by time" (Ob. 3) and that therefore the resurrection cannot occur before the last note of the trumpet of the Apocalypse.
22. Messiaen, *Traité de Rythme, de Couleur et d'Ornithologie*, Tome III (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1996), 353-54.
23. This notion of immutable duration does admittedly have a long pedigree, being present in Plato's theory of forms (*Timaeus* 37d; cf. *Definitions* 415a), and attested to again in a different manner later in the passage from Aristotle cited previously: "this word 'duration' [*αἰών*] possessed a divine significance for the ancients...the fulfilment of the whole heaven...which includes all time and infinity, is duration—a name based upon the fact that it is always [*αἰεὶ ὄν*]—being immortal and divine." *On the Heavens*, I.9 (279^a22-27), *Complete Works*, 463. One could note that this notion fits the semantic correlate of duration as indicating 'to endure', in this case enduring perfectly without change, though (as with Aristotle) it is hard to conceive this as not being within time (i.e., the lack of change of the enduring object is relational to an external environment that is subject to temporal change).

24. Miguel de Unamuno, *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1986), ch. 10.
25. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II.i 31.2. The point has also been raised as to why silence does not play a greater part in Messiaen's music, since this would seem to bear a closer relationship to aural stasis than music (even though taking this idea to its ultimate conclusion would obviously result in the negation of music as conventionally understood). In this context one could note that Aquinas holds that "although immobility is simply nobler than movement, yet movement in a subject which thereby can acquire a perfect participation of the Divine goodness is nobler than rest in a subject which is altogether unable to acquire that perfection by movement." (*Summa Theologica*, III.sup. 91.2 reply to ob. 10.) By implication, music (motion) is better than silence (immobility), especially when it attempts to glorify God or reach this end.
26. Olivier Messiaen, *Technique de mon langage musical* (Paris, Alphonse Leduc, 1944), 5.
27. Roberto Fabbi, 'Theological Implications of Restrictions in Messiaen's Compositional Processes', in *Messiaen's Language of Mystical Love*, ed. Siglind Bruhn (New York: Garland, 1998), 81. Messiaen himself confessed "One thing alone is important to me; to rejoin the eternal durations and the resonances of the above and beyond, to apprehend that inaudible which is above actual music...Naturally, I shall never achieve this." 'Who Are You, Olivier Messiaen?', interview with Bernard Gavoty, *Tempo*, 58 (1961), 36.
28. Messiaen, *Traité*, I:9.
29. Andrew Shenton, 'Observations on time in Olivier Messiaen's *Traité*', in *Olivier Messiaen: Music, Art and Literature*, ed. Christopher Dingle and Nigel Simeone (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 173.
30. Messiaen, *Traité*, I:9.
31. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson (London, 1910), 86.
32. Messiaen himself elaborates upon this following his discussion of rhythmic subdivision (*Traité*, I:33).
33. Messiaen, *Conférence de Bruxelles* (Paris: Leduc, 1958). This claim seems impossible. Since there are no events in this universe apart from the beats Messiaen conceives, there is no external calibration against which to measure them; the duration spoken of must either be internal, subjective, or absolute in a Newtonian sense. Although the claim for the prolongation of a beat by silence implies a subjective conception of duration (and if a provisional eternity follows the last beat, this cannot be measured by abstract time), subjective duration cannot be numbered. Ian Darbyshire claims "there is a confusion of ideas here": "the definition of rhythm is actually identical to the definition of time", and that given the distinction between eternity and time Messiaen makes, eternity "cannot be numbered an antecedent or consequent of change in relation to that single beat" ('Messiaen and the Representation of the Theological Illusion of Time', in *Messiaen's Language of Mystical Love*, ed. Siglind Bruhn (New York: Garland, 1998), 42). Messiaen might

have some defence on the latter point in Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*, I 46.1 Reply to Objection 8), though this is certainly a contentious matter. Robert Sherlaw-Johnson similarly suggests that what the composer really means here is the birth of duration; a third beat would need to be added for this situation to constitute rhythm ('Rhythmic Technique and Symbolism', 121; also see 139).

34. Messiaen, *Traité*, I:11-12 & 9.

35. 'Who Are You, Olivier Messiaen?', 35.

36. Cf. Anthony Pople, *Messiaen: Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4, who speaks of "the slower perceptible [metric] beat, which is delightfully uneven".

37. Almut Rössler, *Contributions to the Spiritual World of Olivier Messiaen, with Original Texts by the Composer*, trans. Barbara Dagg, Nancy Poland and Timothy Tikker (Duisberg: Gilles and Francke, 1986), 41.

38. Pierrette Mari, *Olivier Messiaen* (Paris: Seghers, 1965), 59.

39. See Sherlaw-Johnson, 'Rhythmic Technique and Symbolism', 136-38; Roberto Fabbi, 'Theological Implications of Restrictions', 60-61; Paul Griffiths, *Olivier Messiaen and the Music of Time*; Andrew Shenton, *Olivier Messiaen's System of Signs: Notes Towards Understanding His Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). A good example is Ian Darbyshire in 'Messiaen and the Representation of the Theological Illusion of Time', who wisely omits Bergson from his discussion. His emphasis on an alternative hypothetical connection between music and out innate mental construction of the world in temporal and spatial terms is a better argument for Messiaen's music as constituting a truly theological activity (although the grounding in etymological kinship is speculative). A sympathetic interpretation of this discrepancy via the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze is also given by Amy Bauer, 'The impossible charm of Messiaen's *Chronochromie*', in *Messiaen Studies*, ed. Robert Sholl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 159-67.

40. Messiaen, *Traité*, I:21

41. Messiaen, *Traité*, III:353-54.

42. Cf. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 200: "duration is something real for the consciousness which preserves the trace of it, and we cannot here speak of identical conditions, because the same moment does not occur twice." Messiaen appears to be aware of this notion (cf. *Traité*, I:22), though does not take it into account in conjunction with the rest of his temporal theories.

43. For illustration of this point, the pun with temporal order Haydn achieves in the opening of the String Quartet Op. 33 No. 5, where the first phrase is introduced by a closing gesture that returns at its end, thus questioning its initial position further, is more-or-less impossible for Messiaen.

44. Such as is found, for instance, in the early novels of William Faulkner or films of Alain Resnais. This is also the case with the time travel thematized in H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, which Messiaen on more than one occasion cites as comparable for his music.

45. Stefan Keym, *Farbe und Zeit: Untersuchung zur musiktheatralen Struktur*

und Semantik von Olivier Messiaens Saint Francois d'Assise (Hildesheim: Olms, 2002), 238. Ch. 4, 'Musikalische Zeit', especially pp. 232-330, provides an excellent overview of Messiaen's beliefs on musical time within his historical context. Instead of Bergson, Keym proposes Armand Cuvillier (also cited by Messiaen) and Gaston Bachelard (not cited) as more appropriate thinkers for the composer.

46. Messiaen, *Traité*, I:32. As we have seen, the difficulties for the former seem greater than the composer would admit. Still, at least he appears to admit here, however obliquely, that he might be ascribing simply too much for the capacities of the average concert-goer. Messiaen's ideal listener is the score-reader.

47. The division is not absolute; some aspects (such as isorhythms) may have a symbolic-hermeneutic character and yet arguably affect the aural perception of musical temporality, and the degree to which abstract features also have a basis in sonic perception obviously depends on the capabilities of the listener. Still, it is hardly too presumptuous to suggest that such features as symmetrical permutations are rarely, if ever, directly perceived by listeners.

48. See Griffiths, *Olivier Messiaen and the Music of Time*, esp. 15-18; Diane Luchese, 'Olivier Messiaen's Slow Music: Glimpses of Eternity in Time' (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1998), esp. ch. 2; Keym, *Farbe und Zeit*, 248-59; Sherlaw-Johnson, 'Rhythmic Technique and Symbolism'; Iain G. Matheson, 'The End of Time: A Biblical Theme in Messiaen's Quatuor', in *The Messiaen Companion*, ed. Peter Hill (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), esp. 236-42; Stolp, 'Messiaen's Approach to Time in Music'; Trawick, 'Order, Progression, and Time in the Music of Messiaen'; Anthony Pople, 'Messiaen's Musical Language: An Introduction', in *The Messiaen Companion*, ed. Peter Hill (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1995), 15-50; Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Norton, 1988), esp. 213-17.

49. See on this point Griffiths, *Olivier Messiaen and the Music of Time*, 15-18, Keym, *Farbe und Zeit*, 249-50.

50. The connection with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze is particularly apparent on this point, whose account of music seems highly (and almost solely) relevant for Messiaen. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaux* (vol. 2 of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*), trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), '1837: Of the Refrain', 342-86.

51. Shenton, 'Time in Olivier Messiaen's *Traité*', 174.

52. Messiaen, *Traité*, 3:352.

53. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked (Le Cru et le cuit, Mythologiques vol. I)* trans. John and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 16.

54. John Ellis McTaggart, 'The Unreality of Time', *Mind*, 68 (1908), 458-67. The comparison between the two—McTaggart's theory and Messiaen's music—is not precise, as McTaggart purports to demonstrate that time itself is unreal

as contradictory, whereas it is only the fact that certain of Messiaen's claims for the temporality of his music are contradictory (not other aspects of his music, or other music, or time itself), that is under discussion here.

55. McTaggart, 'The Unreality of Time', 457.

56. Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 18.

57. Messiaen, *Traité*, I:28

58. Messiaen, *Traité*, I:27.

59. The belief that music is able to convey meanings not articulable in words and is as such instructive for philosophy has been viewed in a positive light by philosophers since the early 19th century; Bergson himself uses music to explain his philosophy of *durée*, rather than vice-versa. Andrew Bowie considers music's importance for philosophy in his recent *Music, Philosophy and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); similarly, from a theological perspective, see Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

60. In this sense, it is pointless trying to argue what our appreciation of Messiaen's music would be like without the extra-musical context the composer provided: such notions as the Catholic religion, time, eternity and colour are an integral part of its cultural meaning. I would guess, however, given the culturally ingrained expectations drawn from most previous Western music, that Messiaen's work would be more often perceived in a negative light if this different relationship to time had not been verbally articulated and understood as a framework for its understanding.