

Intuition and Rationality in Olivier Messiaen's *La Nativité du Seigneur*

Abstract. The purpose of this work is to demonstrate the blend of the intuitive and rational compositional methods used by Olivier Messiaen. The organ works of Messiaen transcend both the rational and intuitive thought and experience process. He practices a highly developed cogent design of harmonies, melodies and rhythmic structures in his music. Using original modes of limited transposition that dictate harmonies, birdsong as a model for melody and Hindu tālas rhythmic structures that emulate the rhythmic flow in nature, Messiaen weaves an original fabric of music. In this investigation, the reconciliation of these two compositional techniques in Messiaen's *La Nativité du Seigneur* (1935) is a seamless illustration of this balance. The perceived dichotomy of intuition and rationality in musical composition is investigated with the writings of Gaston Bachelard, Elijah Chudnoff and others. Messiaen prefaces each movement in *La Nativité du Seigneur* with a sacred scriptural quote. Being a believer of Catholic teaching, Messiaen manifests this belief through his music. This doxastic disposition and a brief discussion of the proof of time, regarding instinct versus reason, could conceivably illuminate, in a new way, the genius of Messiaen's compositional manner.

Keywords: music, organ, intuition, reason, rationality, philosophy, Messiaen, composition.

Introduction

This article examines the early organ work of Olivier Messiaen in *La Nativité du Seigneur* (1935). According to Griffiths, Johnson, and Schloesser, this piece is an important early organ work and continues to be analyzed by numerous authors. This article presents a restricted examination of the intuitive and rational compositional approaches used by Messiaen. His organ works transcend both the rational and intuitive thought and experience process, practicing a highly developed cogent design of harmonies, melodies, and rhythmic constructions. Using his inventive modes of limited transposition that dictate harmonies, birdsong as a model for melody, and Hindu deçî-tālas rhythmic structures that emulate the rhythmic flow in nature, Messiaen weaves an original fabric of music. In this investigation, the reconciliation of these two compositional techniques in *La Nativité du Seigneur* is a seamless illustration of this balance.

Messiaen prefaces each movement in *La Nativité du Seigneur* with a sacred scriptural quote. Being a follower of Catholic teachings, Messiaen manifests his beliefs through his music (Samuel 1967). This doxastic disposition is a necessary lens through which to view Messiaen's compositional techniques. The perceived dichotomy of intuition and rationality in musical composition is examined with the writings of Henri Bergson, Gaston Bachelard, Elijah Chudnoff (1946, 2013, & 2013) and others. These theorists and others present various facets regarding intuition and reason. Although it is complicated to distinguish intuition and a rational approach in composition, because of the interconnectedness, I will try to distinguish them with the following definitions and observations.

Intuition and Reason

Intuition is the ability to obtain knowledge while lacking verification of actualities and may or may not be a conscious experience. Plato describes intuition as a pre-existent form of knowledge residing in the "soul of eternity". It is a phenomenon through which one becomes conscious of pre-existing knowledge. Influences and environment can shape intuition.

Reason is the ability to construct deliberately the conventions and/or views grounded in original or current information. Reasoning is associated with the process of thought or cognition. Deductive, inductive, and abductive are various approaches to logic through which one seeks a formal proof. The Standard Picture, a normative standard, maintains that good reasoning adheres to a set of rules or principles that support correct logic (Hung and Lane 2017).

Rationality in musical composition appears throughout history but, during the early 20th century, was particularly prevalent with the music of Schönberg and the cultural phenomenon of *musica artificialis*, or a constructed musical rationality (Fulka 2017: 52). Although Messiaen's composition is unrelated to *musica artificialis*, it is highly rational and constructed; however, it is all contained within the intuitive consciousness. The illusive quality of intuition and rationality is evident in the concrete outcome of compositions that interlace the two phenomena into a unified totality. One may or may not preclude the other. As Armstrong (1914: 430) notes, "The writer or the artist experiences his art, as by living experience we penetrate to the vision of our inner selves. But, in the event, intuition proves the instrument of metaphysical knowledge."

Intuition, not theoretical rational thought, takes us into benevolent association with rational reality. Free improvisation is deeply-rooted in intuition whereas composition is grounded in rational thought. According to Bergson (1946: 130), “Of these departures toward an affirmation and these returns to the primary intuition are constituted the zigzaggings of a doctrine which ‘develops,’ that is to say which loses itself, finds itself again, and endlessly corrects itself.” A great improviser on the organ, Messiaen often allowed his inspirations in improvisations to spill over into or become a source of sonic material used in his written compositions. Perhaps a primal seed of inspiration was the impetus for Messiaen’s work but the compositions themselves were not spontaneous. Messiaen says, “I’ve never improvised in my work” (Samuel 1976: 6). One may consider untainted original and unique improvisation a pure form of intuition supported by both technical skill and an abundant ability to creatively react to sonic material. Messiaen demonstrates in his compositions no improvisation but, rather, a disciplined organization of his compositional elements.

Discussing the compositional process of any composer prompts the researcher to delve into the mind of the composer, expecting to glean whatever information about the individual that might spark a musical composition. In what type physical environment, rural or urban, did the composer develop as a youth? What sounds, literature, situation did the composer experience that might have predisposed him or her? Which security factors, religious beliefs, or lack thereof, influenced the individual? These minutiae become the fount for intuition and instinct. The duration or time, inevitable when discussing experience, cannot be separated from the intention to acknowledge the intuition. Both intuition and its conscious recognition become the basis for knowledge and rational advancement.

In his writings, Bergson, a contemporary of Messiaen, he argues that action is a constant progression that suggests a fundamental length of time between a choice and its intended end. Bergson notes:

The most essential of the primary instincts are really, therefore, vital processes. The potential consciousness that accompanies them is generally actualized only at the outset of the act and leaves the rest of the process to go on by itself. It would only have to expand more widely, and then dive into its own depth completely, to be one with the generative force of life (Bergson 1911: 166).

These “vital processes” are the foundation within the realm of the conscious realization of intuition making the portrayed product a likeness of the conscious direction of expression. Conceivably, without intuition, the vigorous process of composition would not be complete. The balance of intuition and reason within the creative process binds intellect with instinct. Intuition itself might mirror the intellect identifying that life, as intuitions, cannot casually be categorized. Bergson expounds,

On the one hand, it will utilize the mechanism of intelligence itself to show how intellectual molds cease to be strictly applicable; and on the other hand, by its own work, it will suggest to us the vague feeling, if nothing more, of what must take the place of intellectual molds. Thus, intuition may bring the intellect to recognize that life does not quite go into the category of the many nor yet into that of the one; that neither mechanical causality nor finality can give a sufficient interpretation of the vital process (Bergson 1913: 177).

Early Life Vital Influences

Initial dynamic living circumstances, environment, and beliefs are important developmental aspects for all. Messiaen, in his younger years, recounts the time that he spent in Grenoble, where the mountains influenced his development. The plays of Shakespeare, *Don Giovanni* by Mozart, *La Damnation de Faust* by Berlioz and *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Debussy, along with nature, birdsong, and Catholic theology, all had a profound influence on Messiaen (Johnson 2008: 9). These influences, these flecks of creative realities, are the seeds that would later grow into the material that was Messiaen’s intuition. Roupnel, in his important work, *Siloë*, equating instinct with intuition, eloquently states,

Our acts of attention are extraordinary episodes extracted from that continuity called duration. But the continuous fabric where our mind embroiders the discontinuous designs of act is itself no more than the laborious and artificial construct of our mind. Nothing entitles us to posit objective duration. Everything in us contradicts its meaning, and undercuts its logic. Our instinct is indeed better informed about this matter than is our reason (Roupnel 1927: 109).

The importance given to intuition in the rational thought process is noted. According to Roupnel (1927), the conscious realization of these moments in the continuum of time dwells in the realm of intuition. The free nature of intuition feeds the appetite of reason. An additional consideration of the conscious intuitional process of Messiaen is his devout belief in the teachings of Catholic Church and his love of nature as a perfect creation. In an interview with Claude Samuel, Messiaen states that

I have an absolute horror of cities, a horror of the one I live in, despite its many beauties – I speak of the French capital – and a horror of all the bad taste man has accumulated around him, whether for his needs or for various other reasons. You’ll notice, as I do, that there are never any errors of taste in nature; you’ll never find a fault in lighting or colouring or, in birdsong, an error in rhythm, melody or counterpoint (Samuel 1976: 11).

For Messiaen, the perfection in nature is connected to his Catholic beliefs, yet it is autonomous. His raw intuitive process is both filtered and grounded in these two important entities. Observed nature is a wellspring of inspiration and model for his writing. His faith in Catholicism acts as both a tether and a liberating journey. Messiaen is able to draw continually from Catholic teachings to shape his music thematically, yet he is free to formulate modes, manipulate rhythms, and mimic birdsong in his compositions. When asked about the relationship between his faith and nature Messiaen responds:

Linked, yet at the same time independent. I love nature for itself. Certainly, like St. Paul, I see in nature a manifestation of one of the aspects of divinity, but it’s equally certain that God’s creations are not God himself. Moreover, all God’s creations are enclosed in Time, and Time is one of God’s strangest creatures because it is totally opposed to Him who is Eternal by nature, to Him who is without beginning, end, or succession (Samuel 1976: 11).

Doxastic logic is pertinent regarding Messiaen the artist and Messiaen the believer. His fervent belief in the teachings of the Catholic church become the fabric or framework that weaves his compositions. There is an evolution in the expression of his beliefs evidenced by maturity in his later works. “If an intuition is a doxastic justifier, then it plus the fact that you base a belief on it make it the case that your belief is justified” (Chudnoff 2013: 146). The rational role associated with intuition is the justifier role where intuitions and rational composing validate beliefs. Intuition could also focus on yet another rational role based on evidence. In this latter form, intuitions are indications for beliefs. Bachelard notes:

As for knowledge of the creative instant itself, where is it most certainly attained if not in the experience of a sudden burst of consciousness? Isn’t the *élan vital* most active in that instant, that sudden burst? Why attempt to return to some muted and buried power that has more or less lost its own thrust, unable to realize it fully or even to continue it, when we can witness before our very eyes, in the active present, the myriad accidents of our own cultural growth, the countless attempts to renew and to create ourselves? So let us return to the starting point of idealism, and take our own mind, in its efforts toward knowledge, as our field of experimentation. Knowledge is preeminently the work of time (Bachelard 2013: 10).

Time is experienced as a continuation of events that are irreversible where an individual attempts to understand the past through the present, radically different from trying constantly to elucidate the present through the past. “Duration is made up of durationless instants, just as a straight line is made up of dimensionless points” (Bachelard 2013: 11). These points in time or events are the material that construct knowledge. The instant is the experience of an action or decision. The various events or instants in Messiaen’s work form a continuous expression that, when analyzed, are rich durations of time. Each moment, each event, is full of content that addresses the influences that Messiaen transports as his intuition revealed in a rational expression.

Unification of Reason and Intuition

Messiaen addresses the usage of time or duration in his compositions with a system of developed structures taken from Hindu rhythms. Messiaen states, “I consider that rhythm is the primordial and perhaps essential part of music: I think it probably existed before melody and harmony, and in fact I’ve a secret preference for this element” (Samuel 1976: 33). He elects to use nature and its apparent chaotic rhythms as a model for his compositional style. “Rhythmic music is music that scorns repetition, straightforwardness and equal divisions. In short, it’s music inspired by the movements of nature, movements of free and unequal durations” (Samuel 1976: 33). Durations or events in time are similar for Messiaen. Specifically, the structural plan that he employs is from a collection of 120 *deçî-tâlas* found in a treatise written by thirteenth century *Çârngadeva* in the *Sangîta-ratnâkara*, which roughly translated means Ocean of Music. This is a concise explanation of this system’s general rules in Messiaen’s words, “the principle of the addition of a dot; the principle of the increasing and decreasing of one value in two; the principle of inexact augmentation; and that of dissociation and coagulation” (Samuel 1976: 43). These rules appear in *Çârngadeva*’s writing along with religious, philosophical and cosmic symbols.

Messiaen has methodically integrated these rhythms in his music to convey sensations related to Catholic teachings and, in particular, eternity. Messiaen was overcome with interest in these 120 *deçî-tâlas*. He studied them, analyzed them, and combined them into his composition but never with an explanation why, except for the statement that he thought that they were the pinnacle of Hindu and human rhythmic construction.

The actual stimulus is unclear: “It is impossible to maintain any kind of synchronism between the rhythm of the stimulus and the rhythm of sensation” (Bachelard 2013: 49). His use of *deçi-tâlas* as rhythmic constructions, the expansion of his modes of limited transposition, and the use of or imitation of bird song are all rationally scrutinized and systematically dissected.

La Nativité du Seigneur

An analysis of both the musical and theological importance, as well as the monumental scope of this work is beyond the possibility of this article. What follows is a brief reflection on this opus. As Paul Griffiths points out in his “Poèmes and Haïkai: A Note on Messiaen’s Development,” Messiaen’s early music is driven by a mystical image in which Messiaen personalizes his conception of God, while his later music is motivated by a more naturalistic idea in which the world is occupied with awe and joy. *La Nativité du Seigneur* is a work of a spiritual image of God.

La Nativité du Seigneur, produced in 1935, is an early work for Messiaen. This period was a tumultuous era marked by social unrest that led to both peril and prospect. The rightist Stavisky riots in February 1934 and the leftist victory of the Socialist Popular front in June 1936 signaled a time of significant uncertainty. Based on theological doctrine, Messiaen initiated a musical upheaval with *La Nativité du Seigneur* that was reflected in the formation of *La Jeune France*, “a musical alliance calling for a generational revolution and new ‘nonconformism’ in French musical aesthetics” (Schloesser 2014: 228). The renovation of the organ in Trinité during 1934–1935 included a 2 2/3 Nazard in both the Positif and Récit manuals, a 1 3/5 Tierce in the Positif and the III Cymbale in the Récit. These were new colors, new tonal possibilities, that inspired Messiaen to compose in a new style (Schloesser 2014: 229). This new style was uncharacteristic of the existing French musical aesthetic.

The structure of the work is a product of reason. The compositional choices might very well be an early display of Messiaen’s intuition. The individual movements not only have titles, but also include biblical inscriptions and an explanatory preface that precedes the *Technique de mon langage musical* (The Technique of My Musical Language). The preface introduces, for the first time, his modes of limited transpositions. He declares that these modes act as the principal means of expression in his composition. He presents the ideas of enlarged pedals, the added dot, the progressive widening of intervals, and the chord on the dominant.

The work contains nine compositions divided into four books. These nine movements symbolize the nine-month pregnancy of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Messiaen (1936: 1) notes, “Nine pieces in all to honor the maternity of the Blessed Virgin.” The first book contains *La vierge et l’enfant* (The Virgin and Child), *Les bergers* (The Shepherds), and *Desseins éternels* (Eternal Designs). The second book has two pieces: *Le verbe* (The Word) and *Les enfants de Dieu* (The Children of God). The third book is comprised of three pieces, *Les anges* (The Angels), *Jésus accepte la souffrance* (Jesus Accepts Suffering), and *Les mages* (The Magi). The fourth book has only one piece, *Dieu parmi nous* (God among Us).

In *La vierge et l’enfant*, Messiaen utilizes the added dot to upset a conventional meter by unbalancing the melodic phrases. He also uses the contour of the Gregorian chant, *Puer natus est* from the *Liber usualis*. The chant is used during the Mass on Christmas Day. The second movement, *Les bergers*, uses a type of ostinato with shifting chords up and down scales – a term “enlarged pedal” that was coined by Messiaen. A slower movement, *Desseins éternels*, again uses the added dot, but its effect is one that elongates time with a pulsation of long sonic gestures. The fourth work, *Le verbe*, uses the chord of the dominant, a harmony with all the notes of the diatonic major scale. The chord is played before the entrance the descent in the pedal. In the final section of this piece, the second mode is used in the extended final section. Here, too, the rhythmic unpredictability in the melodic and harmonic phrases have a great variety. The same rhythmic pattern uses different tones, or the same note, harmonized in another way with nine different harmonizations always ending on G. The bifurcation in the fifth piece, *Les enfants de Dieu*, is notable. Initially, it is agitated and animated, constructing metrically and swelling aurally, to a highpoint followed by a more tranquil peaceful ending.

Les anges, the sixth composition in this cycle, presents two autonomous melodies with dissimilar rhythms that come together. The final sonic gesture is a crystalline toccata of two melodies with the same rhythm ending in a sublime decrescendo that might symbolize angels twirling out of hearing range. *Jésus accepte la souffrance* is a piece that has a noticeably different character – one of profound darkness. The opening rhythmic gesture occurs 7 times through the composition. The number seven holds great symbolism and is related to rest; that is, the seventh day after six days of creation. It is a prime number valued by Messiaen and one that is representative of the sacred. This movement symbolizes the acceptance of Jesus’ suffering as a human.

The use of the final C# major chord is a clear divine admission of this role. The penultimate piece, *Les mages*, is symbolic of the lengthy voyage of the three magi. The registration that Messiaen seeks is none other than exotic. There are three distinct elements: (1) a melodic line in the pedal with a nazard, mostly descending chords with a bourdon 16', 4', (2) flute and gambe, and (3) a slower moving held chord with a gambe and flute 4'. These three elements come together at the end of the piece – the end of the journey.

The fourth book of *La Nativité du Seigneur* contains one piece, *Dieu parmi nous*, which is the ninth piece in the opus and is the culmination of the entire work, both theologically and symbolically. Messiaen uses three themes in the beginning of the composition. For Messiaen, the symbolic significance of the number three represents the Holy Trinity, which cannot be separated, signifying the undividable God. He views three as the first odd number and comments that it stands for the perfect symbol for divinity. The first theme is based on the two Çarngadeva patterns, lackskmîaç and râgavardhana rhythmic forms. The significance of using two rhythmic patterns offers the simplest representation of humanity, because it technically is a prime number. This brief analysis underlines the highly rational approach to specific choices of numbers to represent a belief system. This first theme includes a descending bass line using the râgavardhana in the pedal, as it represents the glorious descent of the second person of the Trinity taking on human form.

The image shows a musical score for two themes. The first theme, titled 'Très modéré', is in the treble clef and features a series of chords with a 'staccato' marking and a dynamic of 'fff'. The second theme, titled 'Lent et puissant', is in the bass clef and features a descending line with a 'staccato' marking and a dynamic of 'fff'. The score is for organ, with 'GPR' and 'R' indicating specific registrations.

Figure 1. Lackskmîaç and râgavardhana rhythmic patterns presented in the treble and bass respectively. *Dieu parmi nous* from *La Nativité du Seigneur* for organ (1935) by Olivier Messiaen, mm. 1–3

Râgavardhana appears in the pedal as an answer to the primary sonic gesture: ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩. This particular rhythm enlivens the melody. This second theme powerfully diverges from the first in its character and sound because the organ registration dramatically shifts. The warmth and slow-moving quality communicates the love of Christ for man.

The image shows a musical score for a second theme. It is titled 'Lent, avec charme (Fonds 8, gambe, voix cé.)'. The score is in the treble clef and features a melodic line with a dynamic of 'mf' and a 'legato' marking. The score is for organ, with 'R' indicating a specific registration.

Figure 2. Second theme symbolizing the love of Christ for man. *Dieu parmi nous* by Olivier Messiaen, mm. 4–7

The third theme, in birdsong style, does not directly quote a particular birdsong but is more elaborate and extravagant.

The image shows a musical score for a third theme. It is titled 'Vif et joyeux'. The score is in the treble clef and features a melodic line with a dynamic of 'f' and a 'G' marking. The score is for organ, with 'G' indicating a specific registration.

Figure 3. Example of birdsong style. *Dieu parmi nous* by Olivier Messiaen, m. 8

Messiaen has developed, for his compositions, a melodic and harmonic system that is based on what he calls the modes of limited transposition. A brief explanation of these modes follows.

Based on our present chromatic system, a tempered system of twelve sounds, these modes are formed of several symmetrical groups, the last note of each group always being common with the first of the following group. At the end of a certain number of chromatic transpositions which varies with each mode, they are no longer transposable... All the modes of limited transpositions can be used melodically, and especially harmonically, melody and harmonies never leaving the notes of the mode (Messiaen 1956: 58).

Messiaen's choice of his fourth mode of limited transposition is an interesting one.

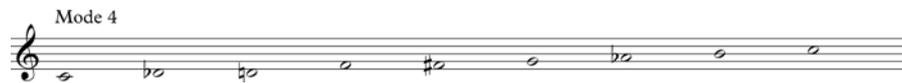


Figure 4. Fourth mode of limited transposition

One can analyze the intervals between scale degrees of mode 4 as 1 1 1 3 1 1 1 3. However, his choice of introducing *Dieu parmi nous*, with a descending version of mode 4, in which the intervals become 3 1 1 1 3 1 1 1 is fascinating. Messiaen begins with the perfect symbol for divinity, three, descending from above to into a human form. He chooses the number one because of its indivisibility, often signifying the indivisible nature of God.

The qualitative information regarding Messiaen's intuitive impact on his compositional style are apparent. The constructed quantitative machinations of the composer's modes of limited transposition, rhythmic polyphony, nonretrogradable rhythms, the procedure of augmentation and diminution, added or subtracted values, and birdsong all support Messiaen's highly developed rational approach to composition. In addition to the aforementioned techniques, the purpose and application of these systems act as a device to connect Messiaen's devout belief in the teachings of the Catholic faith. The intricacy of his rational method is astonishing.

Conclusion

As Chudnoff (2013: 146) states in his writing, *Intuition*, "Intuitions are inputs to theoretical reasoning." In the composition of music, there is an element of primacy implied in this statement. Intuition, or the creative spark, precedes an intention to describe or compose. Intuition also infers conscious awareness of the idea that, for a composer to write down a formulation, it might include the initial intuition. If indeed intuitions are contributions to a cognitive expression, then a conscious awareness at the instant an intuition is generated, supports whatever crafted thought processes composers endear. The wide and astoundingly creative palette that Messiaen used in his compositions causes the examiner of his music to ask, "Where does the ingenious brilliance in this music originate?" Messiaen's music is often analyzed and scrutinized using the systems that he deployed, such as his modes of limited transposition, rhythmic discourse, and melodic procedure. However, the real intuitive process is seldom addressed. The ambiguous concept of belief might be an area where inspiration originates, but it is more than his belief in the Catholic Church – more than the innovative modes, rhythms, melodic usage. Perhaps it is Messiaen's intuition that shines through his work.

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Intuicijos ir racionalumo apraiškos Olivier Messiaeno *La Nativité du Seigneur* vargonams

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje atskleidžiama Olivier Messiaeno taikytų intuityvių ir racionalių kompozicinių metodų sampyna. Kūriniuose vargonams Messiaenas peržengia racionalios ir intuityvios minties bei patirties procesų ribas. Jo muzikai būdingas itin rafinuotas struktūrinis planas. Kompozitoriaus intuityvios improvizacijos vargonais ar gamtos muzikinės reinterpretacijos praturtina susiformavusį racionalų požiūrį į kompoziciją. Pasitelkdamas originalius ribotos transpozicijosodus, paukščių giesmes kaip melodinius modelius ir indų talas gamtos ritminio judėjimo iliuziją sukuriančioms ritminėms struktūroms organizuoti, Messiaenas audžia savitą muzikinę drobę. Straipsnyje atskleidžiama, kaip tie du kompoziciniai principai dera Messiaeno opuse *La Nativité du Seigneur* (1935) vargonams; kūrinys pateikiamas kaip šio sklاندaus balanso iliustracija.

Opusas suskirstytas į keturias knygas, kurias sudaro daug įvairių kompozicijų, išskyrus ketvirtąją (paskutinę) knygą – joje yra tik viena kompozicija *Dieu parmi nous*; tai yra devynių kompozicijų kulminacija – tiek teologiniu, tiek simboliniu požiūriu. Messiaeno intuicijos įtaka jo kompoziciniam metodui nepaneigiama. Visgi konstruktyvios ribotos transpozicijosodusų operacijos, ritminė polifonija, neretrogradiniai ritmai, augmentacijos ir diminucijos technika, pridėtinės ar sumažintos ritminės vertės, paukščių giesmės, – visa tai liudija nepaprastai išplėtotą racionalų Messiaeno požiūrį į komponavimo procesą.

Numanoma dichotomija tarp intuicijos ir racionalumo kompozicijoje yra nagrinėjama pasitelkiant Henri Bergsono, Gastono Bachelard'o, Elijah'o Chudnoffo ir kt. tekstus. Intuicija, arba kūrybinė kibirkštis, yra intencijos rašyti ar komponuoti prielaida. Sąmoningai suformuluota idėja iš pradžių galėjo būti padiktuota intuityvaus impulso. Gamtos įvaizdžius ir tariamai chaotiškus ritmus Messiaenas pasirenka kaip savo kompozicinio stiliaus modelį. Be to, jis yra Romos Katalikų Bažnyčios mokymo sekėjas, giliai tikintis, tad savo tikėjimą išreiškia muzika. Intuityvius aspektus Messiaenas metodiškai integruoja į savo disciplinotą kompozicinę praktiką. Intuicija papildo žinojimą, o sąmoningas žinojimas vėl generuoja intuiciją ir visa tai susijungia jo kompozicijose. Ši priešingybių dispozicija – instinktas *versus* protas – naujai nušvinta Messiaeno, muzikos genijaus, kūryboje.