

## THE EXOTICISM OF OLIVIER MESSIAEN

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**SUMMARY.** In the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, exoticism and orientalism contributed greatly to the evolution and innovation of Western music composition. Using the rules and techniques of Western music, composers incorporated in their works elements pertaining to or inspired by foreign cultures and their music. The current study continues the investigations brought to attention by the authors in their previous articles: it desires to reveal and analyze the way exoticism and orientalism influenced the creation of various composers, pointing to those aspects that represented innovation brought about by the contact with the music and culture of other cultures than the Western world. The musical language of Messiaen is deeply rooted in the universal musical heritage, comprising elements belonging to the music of the Ancient Greeks, the Orient, Africa, or Europe. The present paper presents and offers examples regarding the way rhythm and melody are organized and employed by Messiaen using means that are inspired by Hindu music: the correspondence between the *deçî-tâlas* (Hindu rhythms) and Messiaen's use of rhythm, as well as the similarities between the Hindu *rāga* and the modes of limited transposition. Apart from the Hindu influences on rhythm and melody, Messiaen was also inspired by the Japanese *Gagaku*, its instruments, and relation between harmony and melody, as well as Indonesian music (Balinese and Javanese), both having an important influence on the way the composer perceives and creates timbre. But apart from striving to create new means of musical expression using exotic elements, Messiaen desired to unveil certain spiritual and theological truths, mirrored in his music and the construction of his musical discourse.

**Keywords:** exoticism, Hindu, Japanese, Bali, Messiaen

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## Introduction

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by scientific discoveries and social revolutions that had an important influence on the evolution of visual arts and music. Certain ideas belonging to the Romanticist view on art were maintained, but a new mentality replaced the aesthetic ideals of the previous century, a mentality which altered the meaning of artistic expressiveness. Foreign elements continued to be employed in Western music, but the idea behind exoticism was not as much related to the concept of *authenticity*, but rather to the *invention* of a novel musical language, that could offer composers the possibility of exploring new compositional techniques, thus striving to equal the scientific innovations of the day. This imaginary exoticism is linked to the representations of alterity, but proves to have a deeper, more complex perspective on this topic. Exoticist features were employed by composers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to emphasize the differences between East and West, however beginning with the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century exoticism offered composers the pretext for inventing their own musical “folklore”. Regarding the product of this compositional perspective, Ton de Leeuw argues “*that modern music is not the result of wanting to be different*”, but rather is considered *normal* by the authors of these compositions.<sup>3</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> century gave birth to numerous musical masterpieces, that were unprecedented regarding aspects pertaining to performance, as well as construction, proving the exceptional evolution of music theory and composition. An important figure of the French musical landscape was Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992), composer, pedagogue, and performer. Member of the group *La jeune France*, along with André Jolivet (who founded the group in 1936), Daniel Lesur, and Yves Baudrier, Messiaen shared the ideas of his colleagues, reacting against what was perceived to be extremism, and aiming to create compositions that were less abstract, with a more lyrical and mystical message. Among the composers of *La jeune France*, Olivier Messiaen would gradually come to occupy an important position in the French musical landscape.

## Olivier Messiaen’s Perspective on the Musical Discourse

Messiaen was deeply interested in various topics related to music, this fascination manifesting in his compositions: Asian art, Greek music, Mediaeval isorhythm, primitivism (perceived as a return to an ideal state of being), and the song of birds, were all sources of inspiration, contributing to

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<sup>3</sup> Ton de Leeuw. *Music of the Twentieth Century: A Study of Its Elements and Structure*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005, p. 11-12.



alteration: *rhythms with added value, augmented and diminished rhythms, nonretrogradable rhythms, polyrhythm and rhythmic pedals, rhythmic characters, serial rhythm, duration series*. These techniques unquestionably broadened the meaning of the concept of *rhythm*, partly because the composer addressed rhythm with the same importance as melody or harmony.

Apart from being a prodigious composer during a period of continuous change and search for novel means of musical expression, Messiaen was also a good theoretician, establishing the foundation of a new school of music composition, renowned worldwide. In 1944 he published his theoretical work *Technique de mon langage musical*, a treatise that comprises musical examples and thorough explanations regarding the compositional techniques he employs in his music (the modes of limited transposition, the chords with added notes, the rhythms with added value and nonretrogradable rhythms, the rhythms of the Ancient Greek and Hindu rhythm, plainchant, or bird song).

### Hindu Influences on Rhythm

Plainsong and Greek rhythm were among the first “exotic” influences in Messiaen’s works, which he began to analyze while still a student at the Paris Conservatoire. However, of utmost importance was Messiaen’s acquaintanceship with the writings of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Indian musicologist, Śārngadeva (1175–1247), author of the *Sāngita Ratnakara*, considered one of the most important treatises on Indian classical music, comprising information regarding both the Hindustani and Carnatic traditions. The discovery of the 120 Indian *deci tala* (Indian *talas* – rhythms) would influence the compositional techniques and theoretical innovations brought about by Messiaen. The composer studied these rhythmic patterns and compared them to the patterns existing in Western music. He observed that most Hindu *talas* are based on the number five or fifteen, and are dedicated to Shiva or his wife, Parvati.<sup>5</sup> The discovery of Hindu rhythms was of utmost importance, for it aligned with Messiaen’s preference for the rhythmic dimension of the musical discourse, enabling the composer to create novel sound structures that could underline the mystical message beyond his music.

Messiaen considered that the Hindus were the first to recognize and employ the principle of nonretrogradation in rhythm and music, at the same time pointing to other principles generated by the *talas*, such as *the addition of a dot, the increase and decrease of one value out of two, the inexact augmentation, the disassociation and coagulation*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel, Claude. *Olivier Messiaen: Music and Color. Conversations with Claude Samuel*. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994, p. 77

<sup>6</sup> Samuel, Claude. 1994. *Op. cit.*, p. 76.

In his work, *Technique de mon langage musical* (*The Technique of my Musical Language*), Messiaen remarks the unexpected, curious melodic outline of Hindu music, as well as the manner in which improvisers repeat and vary these melodic contours, according to certain compositional rules.<sup>7</sup> In the work *L'Ange aux parfums*, for organ, the composer unites Hindu melodic contours with added values – marked by a cross (E.g., 2).

In another theoretical work, *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie*, an ample treatise published after the composer's death, the composer pays considerable attention to Hindu dance, explaining that through movement the entire body is exposed to various and overlapping rhythms, where every detail is important. Hindu dance becomes a genuine language, where each movement expresses the hidden meaning beyond the words. This manner of understanding dance as a language is closely connected to the way in which Messiaen handles the musical discourse, as a language that operates with various symbols or formulae.

E.g. 2

**Modéré, un peu lent, rêveur**  
Pos: clarinette et nasard

*L'Ange aux parfums*  
Orgue  
*mf legato*

The musical score consists of five staves of music in a single system. The tempo and mood are indicated as 'Modéré, un peu lent, rêveur'. The instrumentation is for organ, with a position for clarinet and nasard. The music is marked 'mf legato'. The melody is characterized by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with several notes marked with a cross (+) above them, representing 'added values'. The score includes dynamic markings 'dim.' and 'dim. sempre' at the bottom.

**Olivier Messiaen: *L'Ange aux parfums*, as included by the composer in  
*The Technique of my Musical Language* (vol. II)<sup>8</sup>**

<sup>7</sup> Messiaen, Olivier. *The Technique of my Musical Language*. Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1944, p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Messiaen, Olivier. *Technique de Mon Langage Musical – Vol. II*. Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1966, p. 17.

The rhythmic units listed by Śārṅgadeva were a source of inspiration for Messiaen, who uses certain *talas* in his works.<sup>9</sup> In the following, the compositions used within the present research will be enumerated, mentioning the sections or parts of the works that were analyzed, principally those where Hindu rhythms are employed: *La Nativité du Seigneur, neuf méditations pour orgue* (1935), *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1942; 1<sup>st</sup> movement), *Visions de l'Amen* (1943; 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> movements) – *suite of seven pieces for two pianos, Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* (1944; 5<sup>th</sup> movement) – for solo piano, *Turangalîla-Symphonie* (1946-1948; Introduction, 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> movements), *Cinque rechants* (1948), *Cantéyodjayâ* (1949), *Livre D'Orgue* (1951-1952; 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> movements), *Oiseaux Exotiques* (1953 – 1965).

A careful analysis of the above-mentioned works has led to the conclusion that Messiaen uses Indian *talas* in three distinct manners:

1. In their original form, periodically repeated throughout the work.
2. Modified, through augmentation, diminution, recurrence, addition of value etc.
3. Altered due to their combination with rhythmic patterns invented by the composer, or with patterns from other sources.

The following analysis aim to reveal the Hindu influences in Messiaen's works. The *Nativité du Seigneur, neuf méditations pour orgue* (1935), for example, brought about important changes in organ music, due to the compositional effects employed by Messiaen: the composer employs modes of limited transpositions along with Hindu rhythms.

In the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1942), the composer desires to draw his audience closer to such concepts as eternity and infinity, abolishing time, and drifting away from the idea of past and future, as Messiaen himself confessed in the Preface of his work. The musical language he employs for this purpose is thus “*essentially immaterial, spiritual and Catholic*”. The meaning of the work's title should not be understood in a negative sense, for from Messiaen's perspective *the end of time* refers to an infinite space and time, where temporality is set aside. The infinity beyond the end of time refers to the eternal relation with God, an experience that cannot be related to the physical experience of time. The mystical ideas that lies at the core of this work are supported by the compositional techniques employed by the composer.

The rhythmic patterns and structures used by Messiaen in the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* are varied. The composer employs three Hindu rhythmic patterns in succession: *rāgavardhana* – 19/16, *candrakalâ* 4/4, and *lackskmiçâ* 17/16, in the measure of 3/4.

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<sup>9</sup> Samuel, Claude. 1994. *Op. cit.*, p. 75-78.



The three Hindu rhythms individually depicted

a) *pp legato (très enveloppé de pédale)*

Olivier Messiaen: *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1942)I. *Liturgie de cristal* (excerpt, m. 1-5)

## Rhythmic pedal comprising the above described three Hindu rhythms

These rhythms have been generated in Messiaen's works in different ways for implementing the techniques of augmentation and diminution. The most effective method the composer used was that of the *constant proportions*, adding a fixed value to all the notes of the original succession. More flexible applications of this method are also encountered, for example the *progressive addition of values* (which renders the discourse variable). The techniques of augmentation and diminution are at times applied in a free manner. Even though these techniques do not seem to be subordinated to an organized system, a careful analysis will reveal a certain degree of mathematical rationalization.<sup>10</sup>

The above mentioned rhythms were later employed by Messiaen in the *Turangalīla-Symphonie*, movements 4, 5, 7, and 10, and in the fifth movement from the *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus*. In the latter, in *Regard du Fils sur le Fils*, the *rāgavardhana* pattern appears modified:

<sup>10</sup> Sherlaw, Johnson, R. *Messiaen* – revised edition, London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1989.

Très lent (♩ = 76)  
(Polymodalité et canon rythmique par ajout du point)

*m.dr.* Modified *râgavardhana* *candrakalâ*

*pp* *m.g.* *ppp (doux et mystérieux)*

(Thème de Dieu) *P* *lumineux et solennel*

*laksmiçâ*

*v.*

**The main themes Olivier Messiaen  
*Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* (1944):  
*V. Regard du Fils sur le Fils*, measure 1-8 with the modified *râgavardhana***

explored by the composer in this work are the *theme of God* (the pattern of modified *râgavardhana*), the theme of the cross, and that of the bells. Musically these are depicted through novel techniques of composition, which are based on melodies presented on multiple levels, in the form of a mosaic. The polymodal structure of the work – consisting of three different modes used simultaneously – combined with rhythmic canon and bird song, creates the same atmosphere of timelessness and imponderability like the *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*. The main theme is based on the second mode of limited transposition and unfolds in cycles in the lower register of the left hand, accompanied by the discant, two harmonic layers in strict rhythmic canon, that will gradually dissolve into the idealized bird song beginning with the

development of the main theme. A perfect symbiosis may be observed between the meaning of the title and the musical discourse employed by the composer in this work.

In his suite for two pianos and ondes Martenot, *Visions de l'Amen*, Messiaen employs polyrhythm and polymodality, in Hindu style: the overlapping of rhythms and timbre creates the impression of organized chaos.<sup>11</sup> In the second part, a Hindu *raga* is included, along with complex rhythmic patterns, harmonic colors, and timbres (bells, birds); in the final section the first piano plays an ornamental discourse, while the second piano plays the Hindu rhythms in succession – *râgavardhana*, *candrakalâ*, and *lackskmiça*.

In *Oiseaux exotiques* (1953-1965), for piano and small orchestra, the composer employs ancient Greek rhythms along with Hindu *talas*, like *Nihcankalîla* or *Gajalîla* (*the rhythm of the elephant's step*). The composer studied the *talas* listed in Śārṅgadeva's work, unveiling certain rhythmic rules that lie beyond their construction, as well as the symbolism behind them, related to religious and philosophical concepts.

E.g. 5

**Olivier Messiaen: *Oiseaux exotiques* – pour piano solo et petit orchestre (1955)  
Excerpt**

**The use of *Gajalîla tala* in the rhythmic pattern of the measure marked with 3**

<sup>11</sup> Păduraru, Anca Elena. *Analiză și viziune interpretativă în lucrarea Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jesus de Olivier Messiaen*, București, Editura Muzicală, 2020, p.58.

Messiaen explained that the name and symbolism of certain *talas* is reflected in their construction, as is the case with the *Gajalīla tala*, employed in his *Oiseaux exotiques* (E.g., 5): the name of this *tala* means *the rhythm of the elephant's step*, it has four note-values, the fourth dotted, which suggests the heaviness of the elephant's steps.<sup>12</sup>

In *Oiseaux exotiques* the composer juxtaposes Hindu rhythms, the duration of which he alters at times (he diminishes the duration of certain rhythmic patterns when repeated), with Greek rhythms, which he keeps unchanged, opposing this entire measured discourse to the freedom that characterizes the song of the birds, which he also incorporates in the work.

In *Cinque rechants* (1948), a choral work for 12 *a cappella* voices, tribute to the Renaissance composer Claude Le Jeune (1528/30 – 1600), a dark world is revealed, seemingly Expressionist, but obviously surreal in its rhetoric. The work explores the composer's attitude when faced with the harsh, often troubling realities of human and Divine love. Messiaen makes extensive use of Hindu rhythms and nonretrogradable rhythms, thus expressing his admiration because Le Jeune employed rhythm in his works. At the same time, the use of an invented language (resembling Sanskrit and Quechua, the ancient Peruvian language), reflects the preoccupation among 20<sup>th</sup> century composers to create novel musical languages. The vowels and consonants of Messiaen's invented language correspond to certain rhythmic patterns. The Hindu rhythms identified in this work are the following: *gajajhampa*, *simhavikrama*, *candrakalā*, *rāgadhavana*:

E.g. 6

Gajajhampa      Simhavikrama      Candrakalā      Rāgavardhana

*Rechant*  
**Un peu vif (brutal)**

1<sup>er</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> Sopr.      1<sup>er</sup> Sopr.      1<sup>er</sup> Sopr.

fleur      du bour - don      tour - ne      tour - ne

tourne a mort      la

pieuvre et      la      mort

Olivier Messiaen: *Cinque rechants*,  
Excerpt from the V<sup>th</sup> part

<sup>12</sup> Samuel, Claude. 1994. *Op. cit.*, p. 77-78.

Perhaps one of the most important works of Hindu influence is Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie* (1946-1948). The title of this monumental symphony in ten parts, oversized in its exceptional length and dimension of the orchestra, stems from two Sanskrit words, *turanga* and *lila*, the meaning of the first referring to the flowing of time, while the second, *lila* – *play*, refers to the divine act of creation, destruction, and reconstruction. Thus, Messiaen's work has a multiple semantic structure: it represents the relentless flow of time and the transitory aspect of life, but at the same time it's the song of eternal love, a hymn dedicated to the act of Divine creation, destruction, and reconstruction (rebirth) of man through love (an idea that reflects Messiaen's fascination with the myth of *Tristan and Isolde*). Here as well a series of *tala* patterns can be recognized, however the present analysis would like to draw attention to the role of the rests within the musical discourse. In Messiaen's conception the rests have the role of highlighting the musical events surrounding these brief moments of silence. Apart from the various themes encountered within the ten parts of the work, four cyclic themes of greater dimension dominate the musical unfolding – among these, the third, the theme of love, is the most relevant. Within these themes all the compositional techniques that are characteristic of Messiaen's style can be recognized: rhythmic characters, nonretrogradable rhythms, rhythms with added value, the modes of limited transposition, etc.

Silence in music may be compared to the empty spaces within a painting, it represents a sound one may feel and understand, even though it cannot be heard. In the following example, within the nonretrogradable rhythmic pattern, except for the first and last notes, the rests replace durations of three-quarter beat and one beat, thus creating the impression of active silence in music – a moment of rest, gained after a process of accumulating tension and relaxation.

E.g. 7



Olivier Messiaen:  
*Turangalila-Symphonie* – VI. *Jardin du sommeil d'amour*  
 Excerpt of the rhythmic pattern containing rests

As in the previously analyzed works, the compositional bases of the work for piano *Cantéyodjayâ* (1949), are Hindu rhythms. The composer includes certain terms that are borrowed from the Carnatic tradition – as is the name of the work. The figuration presented in the opening recurs throughout the work, often mixed with other patterns. Messiaen employs the *tala tribhinna* and the *tala lackskmiça*:

E.g. 8



*tala tribhinna*



*tala lackskmiça*

### Japanese Images and Sounds Evoked Through Timbre

Messiaen employed Greek and Hindu rhythms in works such as *Oiseaux exotiques*, *Couleurs de la cite celeste*, and even in the *Sept haïkaï – esquisses japonaises* for piano and small orchestra, a work that was inspired by the composer's visit to Japan in 1962. Apart from Hindu rhythms, these sketches were influenced by a type of Japanese classical music, Gagaku, by the music of the Noh theater, and birdcalls the composer had heard in Japan. The composer also strives to recreate the sound of traditional Japanese instruments.

Gagaku had a powerful impact on Messiaen, due to the modern sound and characteristics of this ancient music. The harmonic structure of Gagaku music is often opposed to the melodic line and is not placed under the melody. This feature of Gagaku (full of deep spiritual symbolism), among others, can be associated with Messiaen's approach of harmony in his *Sept haïkaï*.

The instrumental composition of the work is also important, the composer striving to depict through timbre the places he had seen in Japan and have impressed him, the birds he had listened to in the Japanese parks, as well as the sound effects of the instruments employed in Gagaku. *Sept haïkaï* is written for piano, woodwinds (piccolo, flute, oboe, English horn, clarinet, bassoon), brass instruments (trumpet, trombone), strings (violin), and percussion (xylophone, marimba, cencerros, crotales, triangle, Turkish cymbals, Chinese cymbals, gongs, tam-tams). All the instruments were chosen by the composer according to their capacity to evoke the song of various birds. Thus, the timbre of certain Japanese birds is represented by

the timbre of the woodwinds, while the brass instruments suggest the ringing character of certain birds' song.<sup>13</sup> Passages displaying exceptional technical skill, played on the xylophone and on the marimba, as well as the long cadenzas of the piano, may also suggest the sound of birds.

Messiaen's fascination with Gagaku is reflected in the central piece of the work, also entitled *Gagaku*. Here, the composer employs eight violins that should produce grating sounds, thus imitating the *sho* (mouth organ). The trumpet, oboes, and English horn were chosen to suggest the timbre of the *hichikiri* (ancient type of oboe), while the metallic percussion instruments are related to the idea of the bell. The entire construction of the work mirrors the static quality of Gagaku, which invites the audience to ponder on the hidden meaning of the artistic creation.

Messiaen argues that, while Arab music could be considered monotonous, Japanese music is moving and captivating, discovering similarities between his compositional style and Japanese music: "*Japanese music is static, and I myself am a static composer because I believe in the invisible and in the beyond; I believe in eternity. Now, Orientals are on much looser terms with the beyond than we are, and that's why their music is static.*"<sup>14</sup>

### **Balinese and Javanese Influences**

Apart from traveling, French musicians and artists could become acquainted with exotic cultures through the series of World Expositions held in Paris beginning with the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was at the 1889 Paris exposition that Claude Debussy (1862-1918) first heard the sound of the Javanese gamelan, an instrument that made a powerful impression on the composer and influenced his subsequent works. Messiaen was familiar with the compositions of Debussy and even though he doesn't make a clear statement about the influence of Indonesian music on his composition (in the work *The Technique of My Musical Language*), he explained in his conversations with Claude Samuel that certain effects he employed in his works can be recognized in the music from Bali.<sup>15</sup>

The editions of 1900 and 1937 of the World Exposition were also hosted by the French capital. Another important event organized in Paris was the Colonial Exposition of 1931, where the diverse cultures and resources of the colonial powers were displayed. During this exposition a pavilion

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<sup>13</sup> Samuel, Claude. 1994. *Op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>15</sup> Idem, p. 116.

dedicated to Indonesian culture was also built. Messiaen never recounted his participation at this exposition, but it can be presumed that he was familiar with the cultural and political events of his time.

Analyzing the works of Debussy and Messiaen, one may observe the influence of Eastern music on their composition. As other composers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, both Debussy and Messiaen felt restricted by the possibilities of Western tonal music and its limited rhythmic system, considering that their musical ideas needed a different approach to be expressed properly. “Exotic” music and its rhythms, as well as the timbres and instruments employed in the music of non-European cultures inspired European composers to create a novel musical language. They did so by using certain rhythmic patterns or modal structures, using authentic instruments, or striving to recreate the sound of these (see the works of Maurice Delage). Eastern music and philosophy also contributed to creating a powerful relation between the musical discourse and the spiritual domain, as Paul Griffiths observes: “[*Debussy and Messiaen had*] *the same feeling for time as static or circular and of shared goals in the presenting of mythical stories, the achievement of contact with mental material that has passed unchanged through generations, transcending time.*”<sup>16</sup>

A close analysis will reveal several similarities between Balinese art and the works of Messiaen. Freedom of expression is a particular feature of Balinese art, but ironically this freedom is the result of precise rules, that seem highly restrictive. In a similar manner, the works of Messiaen, despite their apparent freedom and complexity, follow precise rules of music composition. In Gamelan music resonance and timbre are of utmost importance. Analogous is Messiaen’s inclination towards the concept of *resonance*: the composer developed a series of special chords based on the overtone series and speaks about the effects of resonance in *The Technique of My Musical Language*, giving examples to this concept.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the use of gongs and tam-tams, Messiaen explains that beyond the exotic sound of these instruments, and the fact that their use allows modern composers to depart from Western traditions, these instruments “*with extended resonance are valuable above all for the harmonies they produce and the complexes of sounds they create*”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Griffiths, Paul. *Olivier Messiaen and the Music of Time*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> Messiaen, Olivier. 1944. *Op. Cit.* p. 51.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel, Claude. 1994. *Op. cit.*, p. 221.

The influence of the gamelan can be recognized in several of Messiaen's orchestral works, like *Trois Petites Liturgies* (1943–1944), *Turangalila-Symphonie* (1946–1948), and *Chronochromie* (1959–1960), as well as in his works for piano, such as *Vision de l'Amen* (1943) for two pianos, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* (1944) for solo piano, and *Quatre Études de Rythme* (1949–1950) for solo piano.

In the *Turangalila-Symphonie* the composer employed certain timbres (a small orchestra within the orchestra, comprising metallic percussion, glockenspiel, celesta, vibraphone, and piano) that recall the sound of the Balinese gamelan<sup>19</sup>, while in the *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* Messiaen combines *accelerando* and *rallentando*, obtaining a rare effect that exists only in Bali (E.g., 9), according to the composer:<sup>20</sup>

E.g. 9

(Valeurs progressivement accélérées)

8<sup>a</sup> bassa

(Valeurs progressivement ralenties)

Olivier Messiaen:

*Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* (1944)

The combination of *accelerando* and *rallentando* in "Regard de l'onction Terrible", which allows the composer to obtain a special effect, resembling Balinese music.

## Conclusions

In the compositions of Olivier Messiaen particularly tone color and rhythm received special attention. Certain elements distinguish themselves, such as rhythm in certain works, or sound and color in others. The asymmetrical rhythmic constructions employed by Messiaen in some instances evoke patterns that are older than the history of Western music, while the theoretical innovations brought about by the composer may be linked to the vitality of primitive arts, a source of inspiration for composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>19</sup> Bradbury, William C. *Messiaen and Gamelan: An Analysis of Gamelan in the Turangalila-Symphonie*, D.M.A. Thesis, Cornell University, 1991, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel, Claude. 1994. *Op. cit.*, p 116.

Messiaen strove to include novel influences in his music and *exotic music and arts* played an important role in shaping his compositional profile. The French composer considered that ancient musical traditions, among these the Hindu, Japanese, and Indonesian, revealed and referred to spiritual aspects that were unknown to Western composers. Apart from striving to create new means of musical expression using exotic elements, Messiaen desired to unveil certain spiritual and theological truths that marked his faith, as Roman Catholic. Human love (inspired by the myth of Tristan and Isolde) and the love for nature (manifested in his fascination with bird song) are the other two important themes that are mirrored in his music and the construction of his musical discourse.

Through the music of Messiaen the concept of *sound* is rediscovered. His music harmoniously blends the French rationalism with Oriental philosophies, the obsession for order and balance with the freedom of hazard. The composer's message, discernible in most of his creations, addresses universal truths, transfigured in musical metaphors of great intensity and great healing power. Nature, God, Love – these are the three dominant elements in the music and theoretical writings of Olivier Messiaen, the supreme values of humanity, which must be kept and guarded with spiritual and intellectual power.

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