A Study of Influence, Structure, and Performance in Messiaen’s Préludes (1928-29)

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Graduate Department of Music
University of Toronto

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Abstract
The Préludes (1928-1929) of Olivier Messiaen are central works of his early career which have surprisingly received much less attention and recognition than his other piano compositions. They serve as a guide towards understanding Messiaen's early compositional style, and detailed musical analysis of them can provide performers with an arsenal to perform the Préludes with authenticity as well as individual flare.

The introductory chapter provides some background information on Messiaen's early style and his treatise Technique de mon langage musical to give the reader a general orientation on which to draw during the detailed analytical chapters. Chapter 2 discusses Messiaen's analyses of a few of Debussy's respective Préludes, and this provides insight on how Messiaen analyzed music, and how he perceived and organized all of the various elements. Chapter 3 outlines common performance practices of Messiaen's music. Most of the material is drawn from interviews with Yvonne Loriod, Peter Hill, and a few other pupils who worked extensively with Messiaen.
Chapters 4, 5, and 6 contain a thorough analysis of Préludes 2, 6, and 8. These discussions include a detailed formal analysis, as well as an exploration of prominent aspects unique to each Prélude (regarding thematic treatment, formal structure and modal use). After each analysis, there is an examination of performance practice drawing upon recordings by various artists and evaluating choices in such matters as dynamics, tempi, phrasing, and voicing. All of this information offers performers a guideline upon which they can draw inspiration, and a basis for making interpretative decisions grounded in analysis.

The last chapter summarizes the topics discussed in the previous chapters, and it then provides a brief analysis of a short piece by Messiaen titled Prélude composed in 1964. Although this analysis is not extensive, it reveals some similarities to processes observed in his earlier set of Préludes, and yet again provides a framework whereby performers can base their own interpretations when approaching Messiaen's music.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Ryan McClelland for his continuous guidance and support throughout the process of writing this dissertation. I would also like to thank my husband for instilling within me an interest in the music of Olivier Messiaen. Lastly, I would like to thank my family for their unwavering support and encouragement, which has allowed me to progress to this stage of doctoral studies.
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Chapter 1: An Overview of Messiaen's Compositional Style and Technique in Préludes (1928-29)

Part 1: Introduction

One cannot deny that Olivier Messiaen’s music has been widely recognized, and firmly established in the modern classical music repertoire. Unlike many of the post-romantic composers of the twentieth century, Olivier Messiaen was able to push beyond the boundaries of conventional Western music and create a very personal musical language, while still maintaining an aesthetic of beauty and introversion. His music is ingenious in that its intellectually conceived processes are sophisticated and unique, yet is able to extend into the realm of imagination and profound expression. Among his prolific compositions, outstanding works such as the Quatuor pour la fin du temps ("Quartet for the end of time") for violin, cello, clarinet, piano (1940–41), Vingt regards sur l’enfant-Jésus ("Twenty gazes on the Christ-child") for piano (1944) and Turangalîla-Symphonie for piano solo, ondes Martenot solo, orchestra (1946–48), to name a few, are most commonly associated with his name. These pieces capture Messiaen at the point in his career where he was developing a stronger fluency in his unique musical language. They are certainly fascinating in their own respects, and have been extensively subjected to musical speculation, analysis and research. Although a large literature on Messiaen already exists, it mostly concerns his mid-late career\(^1\) when his style had fully matured. However, pieces from Messiaen’s early career seem to be overshadowed by his later works and are relatively unexplored. His collection of piano Préludes is a substantial work for a burgeoning composer, where one can see the early experimentation of incorporating modes in conventional harmonic

\(^1\) There are already dissertations in existence on Messiaen’s major piano works of this time by, for example, Shane Anderson, Christopher S. Bowlby, Diedre Hatch, Alan Gerald Ngim, David Rogosin, Charles Ernest Seifert, and Michael Stephens.
writing (there is a particularly strong influence from Debussy). There are further characteristics that would be fascinating to explore, and my aim in this dissertation is to conduct such an analysis of three of the Préludes and relevant issues in their performance; this would ultimately enable pianists to make better informed decisions regarding performance practice.

Messiaen's Préludes are amongst his first published works and were composed shortly after the devastating loss of his mother. These eight pieces are each given an evocative title: La colombe, Chant d'extase dans un paysage triste, Le nombre léger, Instants défunts, Les sons impalpables du rêve, Cloches d'angoisse et larmes d'adieu, Plainte calme, and Un reflet dans le vent. As Christopher Dingle has observed, they "don't form a suite in the usual sense of the word, but are essentially a collection of successive states of the soul and of personal feelings."²

The title itself suggests a connection to the Préludes (1909-1913) composed by Claude Debussy. Messiaen was definitely influenced by Debussy, which is not surprising, considering that both composers share the same cultural background, worked roughly within the same musical epoch and trained at the Conservatoire de Paris. Similarities also exist (although mostly quite subtly) regarding the theoretical elements of their compositional techniques. The most evident example would be the use of modes, and how each composer treated certain modes in order to achieve a specific aesthetic or evoke an exotic atmosphere. An invaluable resource is Messiaen’s own treatise, Technique de mon langage musical (1944). Although written slightly later than the Préludes, the work offers very detailed information regarding his modes of limited transposition, his strictly controlled use of rhythm as well as other aspects of his writing.

Conducting an analysis of Messiaen’s *Préludes* will provide a clear documentation of his harmonic language, including his experimentation with modal scales and different sonorities. Ultimately, these findings will enable performers to make better informed decisions regarding performance practice.

This introductory chapter opens with a brief review of Messiaen's early life leading to his composition of the *Préludes*. I will next begin to discuss the most commonly recognized qualities of Messiaen's musical writing, and then discuss specific chapters in his treatise *Technique de mon langage musical*. Brief musical examples will be included in order to provide more clarification for the reader. The chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the eight preludes and outline of the chapter organization of this dissertation.

The second chapter examines Messiaen's analysis of certain Debussy *Préludes*. In volume 6 of his later treatise, *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie* there is a substantial section that compiles Messiaen’s analyses of several of Debussy's *Préludes*, and his approach as a theorist would be indispensable in my own analyses of Messiaen's respective works. I provide a complete translation of Messiaen's analysis of *...Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest*, along with some of my personal observations in regards to Messiaen's analytical approach.

Chapter three focuses specifically on the interpretation of Messiaen’s music, especially described by his wife, Yvonne Loriod. Being so closely associated with Messiaen, on both personal and professional levels, she possesses the rare privilege of being the first to perform many of his piano compositions. Her intimate relationship with him further enables her to approach his music with an authenticity that goes beyond scholastic conjecture, since she knew him so thoroughly as both the man as well as the musician. What she reveals regarding
performance practice, as well as Messiaen's philosophy, can be extrapolated and applied to virtually all of Messiaen's music. The chapter also reviews comments by pianist Peter Hill, who worked extensively with the composer.

Chapters four, five and six include my analysis of *Chant d'extase dans un paysage triste*, *Cloches d'angoisse et larmes d'adieu*, and *Un reflet dans le vent*, where there will be observations regarding musical form, harmony and thematic material, as well as possible options for performers with regards to the interpretation of the piece. Perhaps the most fundamental purpose of intensive analysis of any composer and his music is to contribute to a successful performance interpretation. This area of my research will be a study of performance practice regarding the *Préludes*. I compare recordings of the *Préludes* by several pianists (Peter Hill, Pierre Laurent-Aimard, Angela Hewitt, Kyoko Hashimoto, and Håkon Austbø) and relate interpretive choices to my earlier analytical observations.

The final chapter provides a summary of the dissertation, and it briefly considers one of Messiaen’s later piano works. That discussion suggests that many of the style features present in the early *Préludes* continue to inform his later works, and that similar analytic methods can be productively employed across a wide range of the composer’s works.

The highly subjective nature of music makes it an exceedingly difficult area to discuss. Even from the composer’s perspective, he may attempt to use all the tools available to him in his compositional palette, yet the meaning, which is conveyed to the listener, cannot be fully controlled.

As mentioned earlier, Messiaen needed to conduct analysis of his own music in order to fully grasp its processes. However, not only is this intellectual endeavor true for us, but we are
also challenged to open up our perception of sound in order to hear music differently. Such an invitation for exploration is not only beneficial in furthering the understanding and appreciation of Messiaen’s music, but also the entire musical repertoire.
Part 2: Messiaen’s Early Life, Musical Training, and Emerging Compositional Style

The compositional output of a composer is highly reflective of his or her psychology, personality as well as the events that have played an important role in his or her development. It would therefore be pragmatic to include a portrait of Messiaen`s life, encompassing his childhood to roughly when the Préludes were composed, in order to fully grasp the significance of the work in its context.

Olivier Messiaen was born in the Provençal town of Avignon on December 10, 1908. Interestingly, his mother wrote a set of twenty poems titled, “L’Âme en bourgeon” (The soul in the bud), approaching the time of his birth. This gesture deeply moved and influenced Messiaen, as he later commented that, “There has been only one influence in my life, and it happened before I was born...thus before my birth there was [in L’Âme en bourgeon] this exchange between mother and child, and I believe it was that which influenced my entire destiny.”3 His father was an English literature teacher, so it is no surprise that Messiaen nurtured a keen appreciation of literature from a very early age. As soon as he learned how to read, he began consuming vast amounts of stories, particularly those by Perrault and Madame d’Aulnoy. He was also well known at his school as the brightest pupil in his class. At the onset of the war in 1914, he relocated with his mother and brother to live with his grandmother in Grenoble, where

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he developed a lifelong fondness for his surroundings. This sentiment was later confirmed by Messiaen: “The mountains of the Dauphiné...are his true home.”

Messiaen’s first introduction to music began with improvisation and exploration using an old piano in his grandmother’s home. A solitary child who loved books, he began to request operatic scores for Christmas. Within three years, his collection already included Don Giovanni and The Magic Flute (Mozart), The Damnation of Faust (Berlioz), Die Walküre and Siegfried (Wagner) as well as Alceste (Gluck). In regards to particular piano pieces, he was especially fond of Debussy’s Estampes and Ravel’s Gaspard de la nuit. He was also reverent to and familiar with nearly all of the compositions by Bach and Beethoven. His compositional skills developed simultaneously with his self-taught pianist capabilities, beginning with simple two-part canons. Messiaen also paid special attention to melodic lines, strongly influenced by Grieg’s Peer Gynt. The composer reflects that the “beautiful Norwegian melodic lines with the taste of folk song...They gave me a love of melody.” In reference to his literary interest, Messiaen developed an avid passion for Shakespeare. He was attracted in particular to the “magical and mysterious” aspects of Shakespeare, claiming that, “I prefer everything that frightens.”

This led to him creating a self-constructed toy theatre (a rough imitation of the Globe) where he performed Shakespearean plays with cardboard characters. The special effects were colored lighting created by cellophane wraps placed in front of the windowpane. This childish experimentation with color and light is significant, because it is seen in his later fascination with stained-glass windows and how he incorporated their qualities into his music. Messiaen later remarks that

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6 Ibid., 8.
7 Ibid., cites Sauvage, Oeuvres completes, 244.
Stained glass is one of the most wonderful creations of man. You are overwhelmed. And I think this is the beginning of Paradise, because in Paradise we are overwhelmed. We won’t understand God, but we will begin to see Him a little...Real music, beautiful music - you can listen to it without understanding it: you don’t need to have studied harmony or orchestration. You must feel it. And here, also, one is overwhelmed – by the shock of the sound.\(^8\)

Messiaen began attending the Paris Conservatoire when he was ten years old. It was also during this time when he developed his ardent Catholic faith and began learning how to play the organ. He quickly became fluent with the instrument as well as very versatile with the standard organ repertoire (reinforced by the fact that he was soon awarded the premier prix in organ and improvisation). The deuxième prix in harmony followed when he was fifteen and studying under Jean Gallon. Although he was encouraged to pursue the path of a concert pianist, Messiaen showed much more interest in composition. His teachers Maurice Emmanuel and Marcel Dupré, were especially important at this point because they encouraged him to probe the possibilities of unconventional modes. Dupré encouraged him to be methodical in his improvisation and Emmanuel (his history teacher) initiated the “the possibility of using the meters in Greek poetry to musical ends.”\(^9\) Emmanuel describes Messiaen’s eagerness and interest in the following quotation:

Messiaen, who was already tremendously interested in modes (he had in his pocket some small bits of numbered paper on which he noted harmonic formulas, modal turns, sequences, and certain Debussyan collections), had to improvise on Greek rhythms.\(^10\)

Messiaen composed *Esquisse modale* (Modal sketch) for organ in 1927. This work was significant because it showed Messiaen’s budding fascination with modal scales (not unlike his predecessors Debussy and Satie). Apart from only using the modes of plainchant melodies and

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\(^9\) Ibid., 16.
\(^10\) Ibid., 19.
modes of antiquity, he also discovered modern modes and utilized their distinctive qualities. This led to his development of the modes of limited transposition, stemming from his realization that the symmetrical nature of their construction resulted in only limited possibilities of different versions. However, it is ironic that these limitations sparked Messiaen’s creativity because he saw them as being symbolic of freeing melody and harmony from their traditional constraints.

Since Messiaen composed largely through improvisation, it would actually be necessary for him to analyze his own music in order to discern the technical elements of his work.

...he was a very gifted composer, but he did not know his system. He told me later on: he discovered his system by analysing his works. He discovered the scales and everything. So he did not decide before – he discovered afterwards.\textsuperscript{11}

The most significant event which followed in August 1927 was the death of his mother. With her passing, the family moved to Fuligny to grieve her death. It was during this time that Messiaen cultivated his deep reverence for nature. In 1928, he composed his eight Préludes for piano.\textsuperscript{12} Traces of influences from Debussy, Ravel, Mozart, Liszt and Mussorgsky can be seen within these works. One example would be Prelude no. 3 (\textit{Le nombre léger}) which bears similarities to \textit{Pictures at an Exhibition} (Mussorgsky). Furthermore the titles, \textit{Un reflet dans le vent} and \textit{Les sons impalpables du rêve}, can be attributed to two of Debussy’s piano preludes. In Messiaen’s first Prélude (\textit{La colombe/The dove}), we find his first musical depiction of a bird. Although there are no direct references to any bird calls (he was still in the very early stages of attempting any sort of notation), the introverted simplicity of the piece sets the tone for the entire


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 22-23, source cites José Bruyr, \textit{Olivier Messiaen in L’Écran des musiciens, seconde série} (Paris: José Corti, 1933), 124-31, cited PHNS, 38.
collection. On the contrary, Messiaen was still not entirely comfortable with being extroverted in his music. *Un reflet dans le vent* comes across as having a few too many sections forced with activity. Having recently suffered the loss of his mother, the *Préludes* are permeated more deeply with a profound sense of melancholy.

Despite Messiaen’s conservative background as a devout Catholic, church organist, and rigorous training in traditional harmony at the Paris Conservatoire, he was never encumbered or hindered from experimenting with new harmonies and ideas. Indeed, his respect for religion in combination with his deep sense of spirituality fueled his creativity and vision for creating a rich palette of sound in order to convey another dimension of the divine order.

Such a concern for spirituality is rare in modern composers, yet Messiaen did not separate the architectural elements of musical composition from the purposes of emotional expression and programmatic connotations. Furthermore, he was able to take the music into a highly contemplative, introverted state as well as deliver powerful moments of delirious ecstasy. Another attribute of Messiaen’s music is the unique signature of sonorities permeating his compositions. This can be partially accounted for in his use of modal scales as well as exotic harmonies influenced by Asian music. I believe that as one delves deeper into his *Préludes*, one will not only gain insight into the technical elements of Messiaen’s early style, but also an understanding as to how the composer was able to demonstrate his awareness of tradition in combination with creativity and expression.

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Part 3: *Technique de mon langage musical*

The *Préludes* offer a glimpse of several budding attributes of Messiaen’s music that later became substantial and idiosyncratic characteristics of his style. During the early stage of his career (represented by his *Préludes*) one can already see Messiaen’s interest in modality, an interest later manifested in his development of the modes of limited transposition. According to his first treatise, Messiaen defines the modes as:

> Based on our present chromatic system, a tempered system of 12 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, giving exactly the same notes as the first.\(^\text{14}\)

He even moved as far as incorporating polymodality in some passages. Messiaen likewise bore a fascination with non-diatonic writing and exploration of pitch and rhythmic modes, particularly from India and other Eastern cultures. Although his treatment differs from that of Debussy, he strove to achieve similar effects in terms of escaping the Wagnerian chromatic tonality. In other words, he was not striving for dramatic surges towards climaxes and extreme tension. Rather, he preferred a more static atmosphere, which would better lend itself to a contemplative and also more improvisatory character. In large part, Messiaen created his unique compositional palette through his seven modes of limited transposition. What is interesting is that Messiaen actually strove to transfer some conventional rules of diatonic harmony upon his modal schemes. An obvious example would be the falling tritone resolution which he employs quite often as part of a melodic cadence. He defends this treatment, as being within the same vein of logic as a non-chord note resolving downwards to an adjacent chordal

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note. However, since he is not composing within a major/minor tonality, this may therefore apply to one of his modes. He also goes further into illustrating how dominant seventh chords can resolve to tonic triads, in the context of several foreign notes contingent upon the current mode.

The unique chords which he employs are also significant, as Messiaen is later known as “having an extensive repertoire of unusual chords.”\textsuperscript{15} As mentioned earlier, Messiaen is able to create highly evocative and mysterious atmospheres largely because he was, “unrelentingly dedicated to the construction of innovative sonorities. His music is full of new chords: small chords, medium-size chords, gigantic chords; chords in pairs, chords in short progressions, long strings of chords. They are extraordinary in their diversity.”\textsuperscript{16}

Messiaen also bore a strong sensitivity to sound and color, which he strives to portray in the musical sounds of his works: “Messiaen considered himself a sound-color composer. The special effects of jewels, percussion, bells, chimes, wind and birds found in his Préludes are suited to the idiom of the piano.”\textsuperscript{17} He also frequently assigned “colors” to chords, describing the effect as resembling that of a stained glass window, as mentioned earlier.\textsuperscript{18} Messiaen was also highly sensitive to the natural overtones produced by notes and chords, and he sought to make use of this attribute for added color and effect in his music. He thus created the concept of chords of resonance:

In his \textit{Téchnique de mon langage musical}, Messiaen also referred to the chords of resonance, or his perception of the upper partials of an acoustic note. This is done in

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Madeleine Hsu, \textit{Messiaen the Musical Mediator} (London: Associated University Presses, 1996), 32.
contrast to “inferior resonance,” a term which Messiaen conceived as a contrast to the resonance of the upper partials of a sounding note.\footnote{Ibid.}

Although Messiaen delves into the area of rhythm in much greater detail during his later career, the \textit{Préludes} do not exhibit any outstanding qualities in this area. However, he does use a few interesting techniques such as non-retrogradable rhythm in \textit{Instants défunts}.

Messiaen wrote his first treatise, \textit{Technique de mon langage musical} in 1944, upon his return from the war. Although he had reservations about describing his own music ("It is always dangerous to speak of oneself."\footnote{"Il est toujours dangereux de parler de soi," \textit{Technique de mon langage musical} (Messiaen), 5.}), Messiaen felt it necessary to write a treatise regarding his compositional style in order to answer many of the inquiries which were being posed to him regarding his musical writing. The book contains a total of nineteen chapters, each devoted to a specific subject: rhythms, harmonies, form, melodies, birdsong and the modes of limited transposition. Due to the vast range of topics available, it would be most pragmatic to focus on the particular chapters that deal with characteristics found in the \textit{Préludes}. Therefore, I will be discussing Chapter 13 (\textit{Harmony, Debussy, Added Notes}), Chapter 14 (\textit{Special Chords, Clusters of Chords, and a List of Connections in Chords}), Chapter 16 (\textit{Modes of Limited Transposition}), and Chapter 19 (\textit{Polymodality}).

In Chapter 13 (\textit{Harmony, Debussy, and added notes}), Messiaen mentions how Debussy was known for unresolved appoggiaturas, and how they were already abundant in his early works (for example, \textit{Pelléas et Mélisande}, \textit{Estampes}, \textit{Préludes}, \textit{Images}, etc.) Messiaen observes that they have no particular preparation or resolution or expressive accent but rather become part of the
harmony; they add a color and perfume to the music. Examples of added 6\textsuperscript{th}s, 9\textsuperscript{th}s, and augmented 4\textsuperscript{th}s to a major and minor chords are illustrated. \textsuperscript{21}

Example 1.1: Examples from Messiaen’s treatise explaining used of chords with added notes in both Debussy’s as well as his own music

\textsuperscript{21} Olivier Messiaen, \textit{The technique of my musical language} (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1944), 62.
In his own music, Messiaen specifically uses the added 6th and augmented 4th. He claims that the added 6th was also used by Chopin, Wagner, Massenet, Chabrier, Debussy and Ravel. The augmented 4th is justified by Messiaen as being naturally present as the highest overtone heard above the fundamental. He goes further to say that the augmented 4th is naturally attracted to the tonic. Therefore he sees this as a sort of melodic cadential resolution.

In Chapter 14 (Special Chords, Clusters of Chords, and a List of Connections in Chords), Messiaen discusses the different sorts of chords that he favours in his compositions. First, he introduces The Chord on the Dominant. This is actually not a dominant or dominant 7th chord, as one would expect when one literally interprets its name. It is instead a collection of diatonic notes built on top of the dominant note of the scale. Although Messiaen does not specify a set of intervallic relationships between the notes, one can usually find the pentatonic collection close to the bottom note of the chord. He also presents this chord with an appoggiatura (in the top two voices a perfect fourth apart), resolving stepwise down a major second. Messiaen also shows how these chords and whole tone appoggiaturas can be used in a sequence.
Example 1.2: Chords built on a dominant

The next chord discussed is *The Chord of Resonance*. Messiaen states that a very fine ear can detect the notes of this chord from a low register. The *Chord of Resonance* is basically derived from the notes of the third mode of limited transposition. In terms of our conventional harmonic language, we can see this chord being a dominant 7th on the bottom staff with a half-diminished 7th chord built on the major 3rd below of the dominant 7th root on the upper staff. In other words, it is a dominant 7th with a sharp-7, 9, sharp-11, and flat-13 above. A prominent example can be found in *Prélude* 6 (m. 34).

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Example 1.3: Examples of chords of resonance

He then introduces *The Chord of 4ths*, which is literally built as its name suggests. This chord is derived from the 5\(^{th}\) mode of limited transposition and is built up from the bass with alternating perfect 4\(^{th}\) and augmented 4\(^{th}\) intervals.

\[23\]

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Example 1.4: Examples of chord of fourths

In Chapter 16 of his treatise, Messiaen describes the seven modes of limited transpositions, which he uses in many of his compositions. The modes of limited transposition refer to a collection of pitches based on a specific intervallic sequence of tones and semitones. They can only be rearranged for a limited number of times before the same sequence is repeated and they can only be transposed chromatically a limited number of times before the same sequence is repeated.

His first mode, is the whole tone scale, and has only 2 transpositions and 1 sequential rearrangement (referring to the number of combinations in which the intervals can be rearranged before the same series is repeated):

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His second mode is the octatonic scale, meaning that the intervallic sequence between the notes alternate between whole tones and semitones. This mode has 3 transpositions and 2 sequential rearrangements.

The third mode contains three augmented triads, and can be seen as being divided into three groups of four notes. Like the augmented triad, it contains four transpositions, and it has three sequential rearrangements. In the version shown below, the intervallic relationship between the notes is: tone-semitone-semitone.

The fourth mode contains 4 tritones and has 6 transpositions and four sequential rearrangements. In the version shown below, the intervallic relationship between the notes is: semitone-semitone-minor third-semitone. All of these are symmetrical, so the interval pattern repeats halfway through, as shown by the slurs in the examples.
The fifth mode has 6 transpositions and 3 sequential rearrangements, and contains:

semitone-major third- semitone.

The sixth mode has six transpositions and four sequential rearrangements and contains:

Tone-tone-semitone-semitone.

The seventh mode has six transpositions and five sequential rearrangements. The intervallic pattern between the notes is: semitone-semitone-semitone-tone-semitone.
Chapter 19 deals with *Polytonality/polymodality*, which discusses the use of different modes simultaneously. As Messiaen observes, a prominent example is from *Prélude* no. 6 (combining mode 6 and mode 2):

Example 1.5: An example of polymodality in *Prélude* 6. The top staff contains material written in mode 6 and the middle staff contains material written in mode 2.

I do wish to point out that one cannot fully analyze Messiaen’s music using traditional tonal language, because his music contains so many modal passages and non-diatonic chords. But I wouldn’t go so far as saying that his music is atonal because these are his earliest works, and there are still strong tonal references seen by his use of key signatures (as well as how they shift in relation to different sections) and prominent pedal points (as can be seen in *Prélude* 6 with the ostinato). Therefore, I will be conducting my analysis identifying tonal key areas, but will also include references to his use of modes.
Part 4: A General Overview of Préludes

Despite the strong Debussyan influence in Messiaen’s Préludes, one quality which sets them apart most distinctively is Messiaen’s incorporation of traditional form. He was very sensitive to symmetry, but would also incorporate asymmetry to achieve a certain affect. His use of form still reflects his background training in traditional music:

...a few exercises in form; there may be found in these Préludes a sonata form, an A-B-A form in which all the phrases are ternary, and a prelude built like those of Bach’s fugues. Debussy never used form like this. Because of the modes used and perhaps also by reason of my being a pupil of Paul Dukas...the Préludes present a kind of sound-color relationship.25

La colombe (The dove), which begins the collection, is the shortest and most basic work of the set (it is written in binary form), where Messiaen explores different functions of diatonic chords and merges major/minor tonalities with the octatonic modal presence. In the second Prélude, Chant d’extase dans un paysage triste (Song of ecstasy in a melancholy landscape), Messiaen employs a ternary form (ABA) which he perceives to symbolize the Holy Trinity because of the symmetry. In Le nombre léger (The light number), Messiaen uses three-part form again with the first two sections being homophonic and the last canonic. There are further hints of binary forms in Instants défunts (Dead Instants). In the fifth Prélude, Les sons impalpables du rêve (The impalpable sounds of the dream), the form is a rondo with a song-form enclosed in the A and C sections. Prélude no. 6, Cloches d’angoisse et larmes d’adieu (Bells of anguish and tears of farewell), is perhaps one of the pieces with a more personal implication, because it contains moments of great tragedy and melancholy, which can be seen as a reflection of Messiaen’s grief for the passing of his mother. This piece will be discussed in depth further in

chapter 5. The seventh piece is *Plainte calme* (Quiet complaint), where he uses what Peter Hill describes as a tiny self-contained binary statement enclosed by a pair of balancing cadences (similar to that in ‘La colombe’). Prélude no. 8, *Un reflet dans le vent* (A reflection in the wind), is considered as one of the favorite pieces of the set among performers. The writing of this piece encompasses a large portion of the virtuosic elements of piano playing, including “velocity, chromatic patterns, independence of hands and of fingers, repeated notes, trills, wrist rotation, finger strength, double notes, chords, arpeggios, interlocking octaves played with set hands and solid arms, endurance and bravura.” This piece will also be further discussed in chapter 6. The diversity represented not only exhibits Messiaen’s fluency with the instrument, but also his resourcefulness in using all of the tools available to achieve a musical effect.

In this paper, I will be focusing specifically on Préludes 2, 6 and 8. Prélude 2 has a very clear formal layout and is very introverted in character, Prélude 6 is very emotionally dense and rich in thematic material, and Prélude 8 is the most extroverted and pianistically virtuosic of the set. I have selected these particular Préludes because they are the most contrasting in style and character, and I feel they best represent the entire range of the Préludes. Hopefully, this will provide performers with a thorough understanding of these pieces, as well as a useful resource for further research regarding the other Préludes of the set.

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Chapter 2: An Examination of Messiaen’s Analysis of the Debussy Préludes

As implied by the title, Préludes, one cannot deny the strong influence of Debussy’s Préludes on the creation of Messiaen’s own piano work. Although clear differences between the two sets exist it would nevertheless be pertinent to conduct a brief examination of how Debussy approached his Préludes and of how Messiaen received them.

Debussy’s Préludes host a wide array of the composer’s tendencies, ranging from substantially developed tonal structures to post-tonal palettes. The way he viewed harmony was revolutionary: he incorporated modal scales within a major/minor system, employed chromaticism which could be tonally functional (would resolve according to conventional practices of tonality) or tonally non-functional (which would not resolve and perhaps exist within an octatonic or whole-tone collection), avoided goal-directed harmonic writing, employed non-resolving seventh and ninth chords, and used parallel thirds and open fifths for textural effects.

Debussy’s Préludes exhibit some of his most obvious experimentation with post-tonal writing. The best example would be ‘Voiles’, in which “the negation of tonal reference is enforced by experiments with pitch-class restriction.”\(^1\) This is most evident in the outer sections, where the “pitch-class content is restricted to a single transposition of the whole-tone scale.”\(^2\) The entire focus of his Préludes is also unconventional; his music often is “non-climactically orientated, creating a static context in which he evokes a

\(^2\) Ibid.
harmonically ambiguous atmosphere.”³ Such an instance is apparent in ‘Brouilliards’, where “the C major tonic is constantly shrouded in chromatic mist.”⁴ This work represents Debussy’s modernist practices where he employs “a non-functional triadic structural basis. The octatonic collection (also present) serves to create a dissonant surface.”⁵ With this background information in mind, one can better perceive the context of the musical development in Messiaen’s time and recognize the similarities as well as the differences between the two composers.

Messiaen’s treatise, Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d’ornithologie (1949–1992), consists of a set of eight volumes published posthumously by his wife, Yvonne Loriod. Although Messiaen did not compile these materials himself, the discussion below assumes that their presentation is an accurate reflection of the approach Messiaen took in his teaching. Unlike his earlier treatise, these volumes encompass a much wider range of topics, discussing techniques found in his later compositional style (e.g. synaesthesia, birdsong) and offer the unique opportunity to study Messiaen’s own method of analysis regarding the works of other composers. In this particular case study, it is of interest to observe how Messiaen analyzed selected pieces of Debussy’s Préludes. This may reveal particular elements that he viewed with more importance, as well as how he conceptualized musical form and its organization.

It is therefore appropriate to observe his analysis of particular Préludes which bear resemblances to his own titled works. Messiaen analyzed a fair number from Debussy’s first and second books, which are:

³ Ibid., 166.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
**Book 1:**

3. …Le vent dans la plaine

4. …Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir

7. …Ce qu’a vu le vent d’Ouest

8. …La fille aux cheveux de lin

9. …La sérénade interrompue

10. …La Cathédrale engloutie

**Book 2:**

1. …Brouillards

3. …La puerta del Vino

4. …Les fées sont d’exquises danseuses

5. …Bruyères

8. …Ondine

9. …Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C.

10. …Canope

11. …Les tierces alternées

12. …Feux d’artifice
In the interest of examining specific Préludes which seem most relevant to Messiaen’s works, I have chosen to summarize Messiaen’s analysis of: ...*Ce qu’a vu le vent d’Ouest*, ...*Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir*, and ...*Feux d’artifice*. My emphasis will primarily be the examination of Messiaen’s method of analysis more than the actual works being studied.

It was my initial expectation that Messiaen’s writing would be heavily laden with complex theoretical analysis and detailed form diagrams. However to my surprise, his analyses were much more accessible and covered programmatic elements alongside the theoretical. He would begin by including quotations of poetry (e.g. quoting verse by Baudelaire in his analysis of “...*Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir*”) or other literary works and even providing a brief explanation of the programmatic context of the Prélude. It was a very effective choice, creating the atmosphere of the piece and also informing the reader of the inspirational background, as Messiaen draws frequent parallels between techniques used by the composer and the dramatic effects they achieve. This can be seen in “...*Ce qu’a vu le vent d’Ouest*”, where at Section III Messiaen writes: “At measure 15, the Bridge begins. This is a rising wall of water. The waves are becoming more and more menacing: on the bass F-sharp, there are little triplets within the larger triplets.”

Evidently, Messiaen would experience the music in visual terms; he would hear tonal effects as images from the programmatic context. Likewise, in “...*Feux d’artifice*”, at Section II, measure 25, Messiaen writes: “This is the exposition, the showers of sparks,

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descending and soaring, in arpeggios alternating between the hands: 14 64th notes in the
time of 16, at each time, in the second-inversion dominant 6/5 chord above G with an
added 6th.”

Apart from these notable characteristics, Messiaen approaches his analysis with
clarity and balanced symmetry (in regards to laying out the form of the piece at the
outset); the larger skeletal structure of the music would therefore never be obscured by
details. He uses traditional methods of dividing pieces into sections: with upper-case
Roman numerals, labeling themes with upper-case letters as well as using terms such as
bridge, reprise, and coda. He would often state the number of sections contained in the
piece at the beginning of his analysis. Then, he lists each section with descriptions
attached to specific measures, which are musically significant. Unsurprisingly, the modal
uses employed by Debussy are essential to Messiaen, and are thus outlined to better
understand the harmonic flavour. In "...Les sons et les parfums", Messiaen points out that
Theme “A” is centered around A on a Hindu mode. Likewise in “...Ce qu’a vu le vent
d’Ouest”, he notes that “…we find F-sharp once again, the initial tone, and Mode 2 at
measure 62.”

The analyses are certainly thorough in terms of discussing all the crucial formal and
theoretical elements of the Préludes. Yet the language is neither dry nor excessive; rather
the writing becomes very real in a sense that Messiaen strives to draw a connection
between all the compositional elements and musical effects. It is as if the intentions of
Debussy to evoke images and sounds to appeal to the senses is paralleled in Messiaen’s

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7 “C’est l’exposition, les fusées en gerbes, descendantes et montantes, en arpèges à mains alternées: 14
quadtruple croches pour 16, à chaque temps, dans l’accord de sixte sensible sur sol + 6.” Ibid.,176.
8 Ibid., 140.
9 Ibid., 149.
colourful descriptions. The experience is very illuminating and inspires one to approach an examination of Messiaen’s respective works with a similar attitude of awareness and musical insight.

In the following section, I have included a translation of Messiaen’s analysis of Debussy’s …*Ce qu’a vu le vent d’Ouest*. It is my aim to provide the reader with a specific example of Messiaen’s analysis, in order to clarify and substantiate my general observations about Messiaen's analytic approach towards Debussy's *Préludes*.

**Messiaen’s Analysis:**

7. ...*Ce qu’a vu le vent d’Ouest*

He saw the Ocean, the storm, the furious waves, the cries of agony from those who are shipwrecked. Immense and terrifying fresco on the stormy Ocean; close to the third movement of ‘‘La mer’’: ‘‘Dialogue of the wind and sea’’.

**Seven Sections:**

**Section 1:**

Introductions (on the bass note F-sharp)

a) The waves. 6/5 chord on f-sharp. Little by little the minor ninth (E-flat) follows the augmented fourth (a-flat) going to introduce itself, taking the big wave which climbs and goes back down at measure 5.
Measure 5: Arpeggios alternated between the hands. This mix of dominant 7th on A-flat and dominant 7th on D natural gives the polytonality of “Petruchka” (F-sharp major on C major), here, A-flat on D.

Measure 7: b) Calm menacing – the “immobile rage” described by Berlioz. F-sharp major chord, in the serious, whole note and should be played as if by trombones and tuba. These parallel major chords suggest mode 2:

Section 2:

Theme A enters at measure 10. This is a theme of seconds (scale by tones). Notice the augmented fourths and diminished descending fifths. It is preceded by a snatching effect of the two hands towards the low F-sharp (in the tremolo pedal). If I would orchestrate this, I would use an oboe, English horn, and muted trumpets. For the bass I would use contrabasses, kettle drums and bass drum.

Analysis of Theme A:
The second accent is an echo of the first accent and is its silent letter, but it is longer and less intense (5 quarter notes long instead of 2 quarter notes).

**Section 3:**

At measure 15, the Bridge begins. This is a rising wall of water. The waves are becoming more and more menacing: on the F-sharp bass, there are little triplets within the larger triplets. Notice this kinematic process: goes on in a tempo slower than the original tempo. Look at the theme from the third movement of “la Mer” which uses the same practice, at number 46 and at the seventh measure of 54:

![Musical notation](image)

The expansion of intervals in the bass, after the outer parts mix in passing major chords, create the movements of waves.

The 32\(^{\text{nd}}\) note in the bass which should come before the last sixteenth note of the triplet within another triplet, comes in reality afterwards, at the location of a 64\(^{\text{th}}\) note [but] with the length of a 32\(^{\text{nd}}\) note.
Measure 19: we have a scale by tones. The expansion of intervals, united with whole tone glissando, imitate the rising of the waves. The embellishing sixteenth note (instead of the 32\textsuperscript{nd} note) [further comment on notation not included in translation].

Section 4:

Theme B enters at measure 21: dominant 4/2 chords of 8 notes above the F-sharp pedal. A powerful Theme, with a gust of wind whistle on four octaves during the long values.

Measure 23: the fifth chord: scale of tones, in its first transposition. It is also a 4/2 with an added minor 6\textsuperscript{th}. The same analysis at the following measure, with the second and third chords. The last chord following it, is in the second transposition of the whole tone scale.

Measure 23: always in the whole tone scale, in its first transposition. It is in 4/2 with an added 6\textsuperscript{th}. In the right hand, a gust of wind played in broken octaves by substitution of the fourth finger (or the fifth finger) and the thumb. At the place indicated “strident”, there is a trill with two hands, fortissimo, very powerful, which makes one think of the famous high pitched trill of “La Campanella” by Liszt. By the second time, the trill has exhausted itself before diminishing to become a moderately sonorous background.

A kind of trembling accompanying anguished cries.
Section 5:

Development, beginning at measure 26:

a.) Cries of agony from the shipwrecks. An anxious passage in groans of 2 in 2, on the interval of an octave; the melodic motive of the groans is made up of diminished and perfect descending fourths.

Measure 29: on the trembling C to D (dominant 4/2 chord) the B is the added major 6\textsuperscript{th} (an irregular appoggiatura of F-sharp).

Measure 31: The trembling has ascended at the preceding measure chromatically and in 32\textsuperscript{nd} notes, and here are E and F-sharp in sextuplets. The dominant 4/2 chord on E sustains the groans, the D-sharp is again an added 6\textsuperscript{th}, irregular appoggiatura of A-sharp.

Measure 33: Stringendo and crescendo simultaneously (levels of dynamics and kinematics).
The rising chromaticism of the sextuplets shared between the two hands give a melodic movement with a return

The sonority is a whole tone scale

The acceleration of these 2 measures provokes such a rapid movement that quarter notes will become equal to eighth notes in the following measure.

Measure 35: (eighth equals quarter note) The play of octaves at the right hand by substitution of the fourth finger and the thumb on C-sharp (very easy on the black keys) is now a sextuplet of 32\textsuperscript{nd} notes.

b.) This is Theme A, in seconds, which was stated for the first time at measure 10, which is played, forte, by the left hand, in double major seconds above a B pedal, the entirety producing the whole tone scale.
Measure 38: The gushing/bubbling of water in the crescendo-diminuendo, and alternating between the two hands, is on the chord D-sharp, E-sharp, G-sharp, B, in sextuplets of 32\(^{nd}\) notes. The same four measures (35 to 38) are played a second time.

Measure 43: Following the gushing/bubbling. For keeping the same tempo, there are sextuplets of 16\(^{th}\) notes (in the same rapid tempo as the preceding measures). Therefore, Debussy wrote: (quarter=eighth preceding).

The writing of the alternating hands (the left hand leads on the beats by a single note while the right hand plays 3 note chords), makes one think again of the “Tic toc choc” of Couperin, and the Toccata by Ravel.

Measure 46: chromatic ascent with crescendo.

c.) At measure 47, Theme B in the left hand is in parallel motion: 6/5 and 4/3, while the right hand plays a shrill tremolo. Theme B is replayed 2 measures later fortissimo, doubled in both hands, on D-sharp pedal, and with an upward rocket motion on D-sharp. The ending of this theme (by descending fourths) played twice, a tone lower than the second time, gives a general sonority of the whole tone scale.

Measure 53: In the bass, E-sharp, passing note within the tremolo, brings the F-sharp (tonic).
Section 6:

Reprise of the Introduction, at measure 54

a.) The waves and the swirling of water. The F-sharp is embellished in the bass, alternating with the G-natural and G-sharp (notes made perceptible by a small crescendo). The right hand makes short rockets towards the low register, for retrieving the notes of the waves at the beginning of the piece) and the chord 6/5 on the F-sharp – see this setting gives the polytonality of “Petrouchka”.

Measure 57: “Furious and rapid”: this is the big wave which rises up and goes back down, it will end this time in the bass: C-natural.

Measure 59: b.) The calm menacing, the “immobile rage” and its major chords in parallel motion (trombones and tuba), but this time transposed, gives Mode 3 (except the A-natural). In the bass, from the C-natural (by passing through D and E) we find F-sharp once again, the initial tone, and Mode 2 at measure 62.

Section 7:

The Coda. This measure 63 sees a sarcastic and demonic effect, by the super pizzicato writing, giving a dry, broken sonority in a new rhythm.
Punctuated by furious chords in the right hand (always on 6/5) with the pedal on F-sharp in the extremely low register.

Measure 67: Repetition of the sarcastic element on the first two beats, rising four times by an octave, accompanied in its ascension by a trill embellishing F-sharp once again.

Measure 69: Theme A, alone, is enunciated in a held back tempo and in changing registers. A kettledrum punch on C-sharp brings the conclusion in F-sharp major, although the overall key of this piece is F-sharp minor. The last two measures, on the first chord of Theme A – insisting on C-sharp and D-sharp – make an enormous crescendo: rolling kettledrums and bass drum leading to F-sharp major proclaimed by a snatched chord, sforzandi, imperious and dramatic in its brevity.

Once having thoroughly read through this analysis, one may begin to develop a general understanding of Messiaen’s thought process, even though he did not assemble the materials into their present organization. Messiaen notices textures, small pianistic gestures, changes in registers, and timbres (often hearing things orchestrally) among several other details. He also likes to relate small excerpts to other musical works, so as to place Debussy’s pieces into the musical context of the time.

Messiaen’s analysis does not contain any particularly outstanding eccentricities; it is certainly credible and thoroughly discusses all of the major aspects of the piece. His attention in this specific Prélude to the pianism and choreography of the hands, can be interestingly related to how he composed his respective Prélude no. 8. Writers such as Peter Hill, have observed similarities between Messiaen’s “Un reflet dans le vent...” and
Debussy’s “…Ce qu’a vu le vent d’Ouest”. Virtuosic effects such as alternating arpeggios between the hands, prolonged trills, swift 32nd note figurations as well as embellishments can be found in both works. A prominent harmonic similarity is the modal flavour; both composers favour using dominant seventh harmonies (as well as their inversions) alongside the whole-tone scale (Mode 1) and the octatonic scale (Mode 2).

Messiaen also makes one interesting observation in regards to a rhythmic anomaly in Debussy’s writing. At measure 17, he notes that the 32nd note is written to be played in the time of a 64th note, while being held for the duration of a 32nd. This may be interpreted as an implied rubato, since the time in the measure would need to be prolonged in order to accurately execute the written rhythm.

There are also several instances in this Prélude where Messiaen would make references to similar musical passages in works by other composers: “This mix of dominant 7th on A-flat and dominant 7th on D natural gives the polytonality of “Petrouchka”…”10 Similarly “At the place indicated “strident”, there is a trill with two hands, fortissimo, very powerful, which makes one think of the famous high pitched trill of “La Campanella” by Liszt.”11 And again: “The writing of the alternating hands (the

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10 “C’est mélange de 7/+ sur la bémol et 7/+ sur ré bécarrre, donnant la polytonalité de “Petrouchka” Ibid., 146.
11 “A l’endroit indiqué “strident”, c’est un trille à 2 mains, fortissimo, très puissant, qui fait penser au célèbre trille aigue de la “Campanella” de Liszt.” Ibid., 148.
left hand leads on the beats by a single note while the right hand plays 3 note chords), makes one think again of the “Tic toc choc” of Couperin, and the Toccata by Ravel.”

Messiaen also draws a lot of attention to places where Debussy would have a prolonged pedal in the bass, with different material occurring in the upper voices. This texture most likely influenced Messiaen in his own compositions and can probably even be attributed to his “chord of resonance.”

Pianistic effects such as tremolo and embellishments seem to also capture Messiaen’s interest; they provide the composer with the means of creating more drama and imagery in the music. At moments such as these, one cannot help but relate Messiaen’s appreciation for theatrics to his childhood fascination with creating stage lights out of cellophane and directing plays. It serves as a reminder that all of his ingenious musical details are fueled by a larger presentation of visual effects and drama.

As we progress further into our examination of Préludes 2, 6, and 8 from Messiaen’s collection, we will likewise attempt a similar approach to analysis. We have gathered from the composer’s previous analysis that there is a strong emphasis on form, harmony and scales, which will also be a strong focus in the analysis of the following chapters. However, we can also observe that there is a considerable relationship between tonal modulations and visual imagery. Rhythmic patterns and pacing are reflective of dramatic intensity, and gestures in the music (for example, rapid changes in tempo, changes in texture, other special pianistic effects) evoke live movements, which further enhance the

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12 “L’écriture à mains alternées (la main gauche mène sur les temps par une note unique tandis que la main droite joue des accords de 3 sons), fait encore penser au “Tic toc choc” de Couperin, et à la Toccata de Ravel.” Ibid., 149.
experience of the music. We can therefore safely assume that Messiaen likewise strives to have every detail of his writing contribute significance towards his overall vision of his music. With this in mind, it will hopefully enliven our analysis, so we can move beyond the dry theoretical components and begin to draw potential possibilities in our interpretation. There will also be a discussion at the end of each of the analysis chapters, comparing the different performances of notable Messiaen interpreters, in order to draw connections with the preceding musical analysis. This will hopefully serve to provide options regarding performance practice for any aspirant artists who wish to perform these pieces.
Chapter 3: Performance Being Put into Practice

Performers frequently overlook the importance of conducting a thorough musical analysis in order to assist them with creating their own interpretation of a work. As a matter of fact, most performers often convey the structural concept of a piece without conducting a conscious analysis and create an effective performance through intuition. Composers are faced with the limitation of musical notation regarding dynamic and tempo indications; they can specify \( pp, p, mp, mf, f, \) and \( ff, \) yet the degree and manner to which these are executed may vary greatly among different performers. There are so many aspects of performance practice that are near impossible to specify to the degree where all performances will be identical (such as articulation, timbre, dynamics, vibrato, pitch, duration, and so forth). The ways in which to execute these different musical elements are vast in their variety, and include sequence, motive, development, ornamentation and diminution. With so many variable factors, performers must make decisions in order to deliver a convincing performance, based on the structure of the piece as well as its harmonic fabric, without sounding stylistically inappropriate and/or overly clinical.

These and other topics will be pursued in chapters 4, 5, and 6 where specific Préludes will be discussed, along with observations made about recordings of various pianists. Aside from the wealth of analytical tools, it will be important to draw conclusions based on insights from those who worked personally with Messiaen, and that will be the focus of the present chapter. Through reviewing the writings of Peter Hill and Yvonne Loriod (which also include recollections from other students), we are able to draw some insight into Messiaen's teaching approach as well as his own interpretational preferences to his music.

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2 Ibid., 199.
It is perhaps best to start with the character of Messiaen as a person. He was much loved by his students and was well spoken of by many who have interacted with him. George Benjamin recollects that:

....what Messiaen gave him was the power to reflect, to think really deeply about music. He was indeed a master of thought, not only a teacher of specific techniques. Above all he created an environment where there was much love, enthusiasm, human generosity, and great richness, of resource.³

"...he wanted you to find your own aesthetic. None of his pupils repeat his style...."⁴

As mentioned earlier, Messiaen was very open-minded to new ideas and different approaches, and never strived to impose his thoughts or styles on his students. This attitude can be found even in the unique manner in which he would conduct some of his classes. George Benjamin recounts that:

It was a very open class. He would introduce a tuba player to explain new fingerings or flutter-tongue techniques. He would make us walk half-way across Paris in the snow to look at the newest cymbals.⁵

This enabled many of his students to pursue their own musical aesthetics in an intellectually fertile and creatively stimulating environment. Peter Hill describes that:

...he never showed the slightest inclination to impose an alien style on my playing...I realized, Messiaen had been helping me to know my own mind. Indeed what astonished me most about Messiaen was that he was at least as interested in me and my view of his music as

⁴ Ibid., 272.
⁵ Ibid.
I was to learn his. I think he saw what qualities I had to offer, and exploited these, enriching rather than altering my ideas and insights.⁶

Peter Hill further recollects that:

Such selflessness was typical of Messiaen as a teacher of composition, but is nonetheless remarkable in teaching his own music. Certainly neither of us had in mind producing an 'authentic' performance, if by that one means the performer copying with exact fidelity a composer's own perceptions of his music; and certainly there were times when (after due thought) I felt bound to disagree with Messiaen's views. Inevitably Messiaen was able to help in instances where I was completely off course, or passages where he felt the printed score inadequate to represent his intentions. But what influenced me most were the revelations which arose from Messiaen's frank discussions of his techniques and inspirations. Above all he emphasized that, despite their meticulous clarity, his scores are not an end in themselves. For Messiaen the 'music' was not in the notes, nor in the sounds they represent, but in the meaning which lies beyond and which through sound we hope to reveal.⁷

The music of Messiaen is quite unique in many different areas, therefore there is no particular "school" to which he adheres (nor is there one of which he is the founder), presenting a challenge for performers. This may seem ironic since Messiaen was renowned as a pedagogue (as well as an accomplished pianist, organist, composer and ornithologist). It is important to bear in mind that Messiaen’s first encounter with music was as a pianist. He managed to teach himself how to play Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit* before he entered the Paris Conservatoire at age 10,⁸ and during his early years at the school, he was encouraged to pursue a career of a concert pianist. He had to assert that his main interest was in composition.

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⁶ Ibid., 281.
⁷ Ibid.
However, it was clear that he had prodigious pianistic skills, which were showcased most often during his classes. He would often comfortably demonstrate with canonic repertoire at the keyboard:

...he would occasionally come to the piano; he had a beautiful touch, and those who regard Messiaen's music as lacking in subtlety should have heard the care with which he discussed the colors which could be obtained by slight adjustments of balance.9

On innumerable informal opportunities Messiaen's students heard him play a wide range of works, for he centred his class at the Conservatoire upon discussing works at the piano. These three weekly classes, each lasting four hours, allowed plenty of time for Messiaen to give complete performances, even of large-scale works such as Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* sonata. Nor should it be forgotten that Messiaen did much of his composition at the piano.10

Loriod offers further evidence of his skills:

Going back to the class, Messiaen would analyze everything that he played and he played marvelously. He did indeed play the 'Hammerklavier'…Messiaen had a great desire to hear contemporary music abroad, and in order to finance these trips, he and I played the *Visions de l'Amen* together in many countries on the Continent, and in England. And since we were not well known - at least, I wasn't known at all - the fees were absolutely tiny. Messiaen had to be able to pay his traveling expenses, so each time we went on a concert tour he kept the *Quatre etudes de rythme* for himself, to earn an extra fee to pay for the travel.11

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As mentioned previously, Messiaen held an appreciation for each of his students' different personalities, and allowed them to pursue contrasting musical styles. According to one of his students, George Benjamin:

He did not teach with rigid principles. That's the marvelous thing...Messiaen was benign, gentle, encouraging. He wanted to guide you to find your own voice, and to strengthen your gifts. He never imposed his ideas. He would be horrified if you copied anything of his. In fact he would only be stylistically censorious (although that is too strong a word) if he saw you were over-influenced by his musical world.  

Indeed, many of his students, including Xenakis and Boulez (to name a couple), composed in styles far removed from that of Messiaen. However, we are fortunate that many of Messiaen's piano compositions (if not all) were performed by his wife and former student, Yvonne Loriod, who not only interpreted his music with an intimate knowledge of his style, but was also his muse and offered insights on performance issues (such as fingering choices) for his works. Hill recounts a conversation with Messiaen where:

he said that no matter how difficult a passage was that he placed in front of you [Loriod], you always seemed to master it immediately without any problem, and that he'd therefore never had to worry about the difficulty of his music for piano.  

In response, Loriod states that:

Messiaen was an excellent pianist and an excellent organist, and everyone agrees that whatever he wrote, for whatever instrument, was always well written. If you ask clarinettists their opinion they will say 'Did Messiaen himself play the clarinet because this is so well written?' If you ask pianists they will say, 'It's difficult but it is playable.' In the piano music,

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which you yourself play so well, there are difficulties but they are difficulties which (as you
yourself understand marvelously) can be overcome. It's the same for organists.\textsuperscript{14}

Based on the following account, one may feel more at ease with more flexibility to interpret
Messiaen's music according to one's personal interpretation of his music. That is not to say that
one should take his score indications lightly; he was very meticulous and purposeful with all of
his indications. Messiaen also worked closely with the pianist Peter Hill, who not only studied
with the composer but published several scholarly works on the composer's life and music. Hill
recounts that:

...his knowledge was complete, and he showed little inclination to improve on what he had
written (any revisions were not so much of intention but of details of notation which had
proved misleading). Such confidence is rare, in my experience, among composers, a sign of
the essential unity of purpose and technique which runs the whole course of Messiaen's
exceptionally long career.\textsuperscript{15}

Messiaen was rightly proud of the accuracy of his scores, and any query had to be carefully
phrased. He was not closed to suggestion....Messiaen was punctilious over pedaling, and he
disliked any blurring of harmonies.\textsuperscript{16}

Therefore, we find a beautiful balance in the composer's attitude geared between the
purposeful delivery of his music (with respect to the way in which it was meticulously
constructed) with the organic emotional reaction which will naturally vary among different
performers. Nevertheless, Messiaen was very particular with what he felt was and was not
appropriate when playing his music. To better illustrate his preferences, one may observe his
approach to harmonic analysis and composition: the man was fascinated with the combined
effects of sound in a multitude of different chords and harmonies. This fascination is

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Peter Hill, “Messiaen on his own music,” in The Messiaen Companion, ed. Peter Hill (London: Faber and Faber,
1995), 273.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
intrinsically linked with his experience of colors (how they connected the senses of sight and sound) and his passion with God, nature and love. Hill recounts:

Nature was his great passion: he would vocalize birdsong imitations, his expression suffused with enchantment as he recalled the settings in which he had collected their song...\(^\text{17}\)

His passionate interest in these areas permeated into all fields of his various roles; even as a theoretist:

His detailed harmonic analysis was fascinating. He would describe the growth and development of specific chord types and their changing function through musical history. The analyses were free from all forms of stifling academism, and were presented with great passion.\(^\text{18}\)

Therefore, in the chapters to follow, we will be examining the harmonic structure of certain selections from his *Préludes*, in order to truly understand their significance within the context of the pieces. Although these works represent the earliest point of his career (when he did not yet label his experience as being synesthesia or draw specific connections between colors and chords), one can bear in mind that the seedlings of this trend can be found taking root in these early works. Peter Hill recounts that:

I was struck by Messiaen's evident concern to reinforce the sense of harmony as color, and so to share something at least of the connection which he himself felt so intensely.\(^\text{19}\)

Another example was from 'La rousserolle effarvatte', in which the listener should be able to 'feel' the different colors of sunset, not only in the change in harmony but in the emotional character, from glowing 'rose-pink' to the more ominous chords based on mode 5 which

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 274.
represent the darker hues of twilight (Messiaen asked me to imagine these in a sombre orchestration for low reed instruments).

Again, these particular examples are derived from Messiaen's later works, but it may still be beneficial for the performer to bear these ideas in mind when performing the Préludes, in order to give more dimension and meaning to various chordal passages. It is important to realize that in respect to Messiaen's perception of chords, he also pointed out that adjusting the internal balance of chords could be a way of discreetly emphasizing their tonality.

It is valuable for the performer to be able to decipher which pitches or intervals to bring out in order to further enhance the tonal palette of that particular context or foreshadowing something new to come (as will be discussed in the portion of performance practice in chapters 4, 5, and 6). Messiaen was not fond of conventional melody and accompaniment textures. According to Peter Hill:

Messiaen detested the gratuitous bringing-out of the top note, which he regarded as a persistent vice of pianists. What interested him were the effects produced by experimenting with the balance within the harmony.

Messiaen was also very particular with the clarity of the musical texture even though some of his writing is fiendishly difficult for the performer.

Messiaen wanted clarity: 'I must hear every note'; and even at the most tumultuous climax any muddying of the sound jarred him horribly.

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
The technical virtuosity in Messiaen's music is also a very prominent characteristic, yet it exists only because it is necessary for the sake of the musical impact. A performer should never make the difficulty the main point of focus, and the playing should never be too labored or bombastic. Virtuosic moments are most commonly moments of joy and ecstasy, which should be a passionate outpouring rather than a dreaded ordeal.

In virtuoso passages Messiaen was a stickler for clarity, yet even the most complex torrents of birdsong were to be shaped poetically - 'never like an etude', he frequently insisted. This shaping was often more fluid than the score suggests.24

There could be no let-up, since Messiaen was quick to pounce on any phrase remotely under-characterized...it was at once apparent that for Messiaen the intensity and vividness of feeling were paramount.25

Again, one should bear in mind that Messiaen was a capable pianist, and was well versed with what was possible and comfortable pianistically. As supported by Loriod:

At the beginning they [pianists] may tear their hair out when reading through the music, but after a few days' work the music is so well written that it becomes almost easy - and it all fits into place. I believe that Messiaen never wrote anything which was against the nature of the instrument, even for the voice. Recently in the performances of the opera Saint Francois which were given here in Paris, all the singers were saying, 'This music is so well written for the voice that we are never drowned by the orchestra'. I remember also that when I played the Vingt Regards in 1945 for their first performance it was clear that the work seemed extremely difficult to my generation, but to young people today - and you are a lot younger than I! - it's quite different, and now I have pupils who are only fourteen years old who can learn to play the great fugue 'Par Lui tout a été fait' in a fortnight.26

Therefore aside from wielding sound technical command at the keyboard, the performer should strive to always have the musical meaning of each passage be their utmost priority.

24 Ibid., 277.
25 Ibid., 274.
Sensitivity in listening is paramount, particularly with this music, in order to capture the soundscape which Messiaen has crafted. A helpful thought for performers to realize that:

...however transcendent the virtuosity (extended page after page), must remain cheerful and good natured - 'always relaxed' Messiaen wrote at several points in my score.27

and:

One general point is the balance to be struck between a principal line and the 'resonant' line which accompanies it, often in parallel motion, and which inflects its color.28

This concern undoubtedly raises the issue of pedaling Messiaen's music. As stated earlier, one should follow the pedaling markings on the score, but a fine ear is required in order to fully grasp the entirety of each harmony, so that their impact is not obscured by residual notes, especially in dense, quick passages.

In the Vingt regards he explicitly contradicted the instruction 'brouillé de pédale' which occurs several times in the score in passages of great musical (and pianistic!) confusion; instead he insisted I pedal sufficiently lightly for every note to be distinct.29

It is also interesting to note that using the middle pedal in Messiaen's music is completely permissible, as some may be led to believe otherwise when listening to his recordings. In interviewing Loriod, Peter Hill points out:

There's one curious thing about the recording, and that is that in Mode de valeurs et d'intensités Messiaen uses the sustaining pedal rather than the middle one.30

28 Ibid., 275.
29 Ibid., 279-280.
Loriod responds:

You must understand that there simply weren't any Steinways to be played in France at that time and we did all our performances on Erards or Pleyels. Of course Messiaen knew how to use the third pedal, and he used it in his own music, in the Catalogue d'oiseaux for instance. And he recommended that I use it on other music, in the ‘Hammerklavier’, for example, and in Schumann's eighth Novelette, but when he recorded the Quatre études de rythme it simply wasn't available.  

Therefore, despite the luxury of having recordings of Messiaen performing his own music, one should be aware of certain limitations of the time and not to be too literal with duplicating his interpretation.

Loriod nicely summarizes what she considers the main concerns for a performer of Messiaen's music:

I would say that complete fidelity to Messiaen's text is vital. And I would especially emphasize the importance of rhythm, which is perhaps the aspect of Messiaen's music that is most difficult for the performer. Also the balance of chords is very important because if this is wrong the whole color will change. So the pianist must have very even fingers.

We have further evidence of the strong emphasis Messiaen placed on accuracy of the score from the composer himself:

I'm a very meticulous man, and I note with great care on my manuscripts the tempos I desire, the dynamics, the bowing when it involves strings, articulation for the winds, fingerings for keyboard instruments. I demand simply that my indications be respected; but I'm always appreciative of the artists who play my music.

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31 Ibid., 296-297.
32 Ibid., 287.
Although this aspect doesn't rise too prominently in his *Préludes*, Messiaen had a very unique quality in the rhythmic design of his later pieces. Even though this does not present too much of a concern for his *Préludes*, it may be nevertheless important for performers to be aware of the extent to which he freed his music from regular meter in his later years.

Despite the complexity on the score, Messiaen didn't try to over-complicate the rhythm for the sheer challenge. He sought to have the rhythm feel more organic in relation to the main pulses and have it to be a unifying element in his music despite how far removed the musical content may become. According to Peter Hill:

Messiaen encouraged me not to be over-literal, for if too pedantic the pianist may miss the overall sense. Moreover I was constantly impressed by the latitude of tempo which (despite his very definite metronome markings) Messiaen would allow. He urged me always to phrase with flexibility, to allow the music to breathe.  

These accounts relate to Messiaen's disposition (as earlier discussed) to overlook minute details for the sake of permitting a more convincing performance of his music. However, this liberty is not to be taken out of context. Hill also reminisces:

I remember particularly the cruelly awkward first solo of *'La rousserolle effarvatte'* , in which Messiaen was absolutely insistent that the music should be continuous...the pianist must resist adding a rallentando to the diminuendo which Messiaen marks. 

According to Messiaen himself:

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35 Ibid.
...they should retain the sentiment of the values, no more. They should not be afraid of the exaggerated nuances, the *accelerandos, rallentandos* all that makes an interpretation lively and sensitive.\textsuperscript{36}

However, there is a tendency for one to encounter some frustration with deciphering the tempo indications in the score. Hill also explains that Messiaen's rhythmic notations can be misleading:

In his later music, Messiaen systematizes his verbal indications ('vif', 'modérer', etc) so that they align with metronome marks (vif=138, 152, 160; très vif=168, etc.) Occasionally this gives a false impression of the musical character...My other point concerns Messiaen's practice of writing out very long values in a way that measures them exactly, even down to the briefest added demisemiquaver. Messiaen possessed a super-fine ability to perceive gradations between long durations...The other way in which Messiaen subverts our sense of time is through tempos of extraordinary slowness.\textsuperscript{37}

Therefore, a danger lies for performers to become too literal with the metronome markings and thus lose the true character of the music. It seems a more sound approach is to follow Messiaen's conception of rhythm as smaller gradations and have the musical events unfold in relation to these gradations to create a more natural pace and in the context of extremely slow tempi, the spaciousness of the moment. Ultimately, the tempo is relative and can vary according to different performers. Loriod summarizes this best by stating that:

Messiaen always marked the tempos in his scores only after the work had been performed. It may be that in the *Vingt regards* the first piece, 'Regard du Père', is marked too slow - it's quite possible. In fact, I am hoping to make new editions of certain of Messiaen's works in order to incorporate the tempos Messiaen wanted. One has to bear in mind that the technique of performers has advanced and now everyone plays the 'Regard de L'Esprit de joie' more quickly than it is marked. One should remember however, that different tempos suit different

\textsuperscript{36} Christopher Dingle, “Messiaen as a Pianist: A Romantic in a Modernist World,” in Perspectives on the Performance of French Piano Music, ed. Scott McCarrey and Lesley A. Wright (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 34.

performers. Some people are lively and energetic, others relaxed and calm - so it's partly a personal matter.\textsuperscript{38}

Therefore, a careful balance must be held in mind when approaching Messiaen's music. Although the score is a wealthy resource of information, one should not get too encumbered by taking everything too literally. Even when it comes to fingering, everything is highly subjective. According to Loriod:

Messiaen had a very good feeling for piano sound. He used to play to the class, he played everything that we discussed, even very difficult works, and as a result his sense of fingering was very, very good. But of course there are differences between one person's hand and another's, and between a man's hand and woman's. Some of his fingerings didn't suit me and so, before the work in question went to the printers, I would point these passages out to him and he would try over my fingering many many times, sometimes twenty times, and sometimes he would say, ‘Your fingering is better, let's put your fingering in the printed edition.’\textsuperscript{39}

The same principles to fingering would apply to Messiaen's music as with any other kinds of music; decisions regarding fingering are determined to allow the hand to best execute the musical ideas with the most ease and comfort.

As the subsequent chapters of this dissertation deal more specifically with analysis and performance, one should bear in mind that:

In general, however, his conception was 'classical', the expression powerful but simple and above all entirely devoid of vulgarity or false heroics. The virtuosity - awesome as it is - is

\textsuperscript{38} Peter Hill, “Messiaen on his own music,” in The Messiaen Companion, ed. Peter Hill (London: Faber and Faber, Faber, 1995), 287-88.
\textsuperscript{39} Peter Hill, “Interview with Yvonne Loriod,” in The Messiaen Companion, ed. Peter Hill (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 292-293.
integral to the music, part of a huge spectrum the opposite end of which is an extreme simplicity.⁴⁰

Further insight into how he still perceived conventional tonal areas within a larger structure is described by Hill in this example:

'La bouscarle' was an example of Messiaen's tonal thinking: in our discussion of the middle section he described the music as swinging to the 'dominant', then to the 'dominant of the dominant'.⁴¹

This duality between simplicity and complexity is a recurring theme performers face with Messiaen's music. From a detailed analysis, the writing and harmonies will appear to be very dense and difficult, yet from a more general perspective the form and thematic material links everything together to create a unified, comprehensible work. Perhaps this duality can be further traced to Messiaen as a person. His disposition is benign and unpretentious, yet his intellect is vibrantly active with rich harmonies and musical ingenuity. As Hill notes:

I was constantly struck by Messiaen's simplicity; he was entirely without affectation or desire to impress. His approach to our work was equally straightforward. Initially I found the directness with which he made criticisms disconcerting, but I came to value his frankness, and the high standards he expected were an inspiration.⁴²

What gives performers a further advantage in their interpretation of Messiaen’s music, are the rare recordings of the composer himself performing his works. Although it is reasonable to assume that composers may not necessarily possess the ideal means with which they can execute all the technical elements of their music, their recordings can nevertheless still provide a wealth of insights.

⁴¹Ibid., 277.
⁴²Ibid., 281.
of information regarding interpretation. For example, Messiaen's performance of his own music (particularly in *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités*) cannot necessarily be labelled as definitive due to technical limitations.\(^{43}\) Christopher Dingle elaborates on this subject:

The question arises, though, of whether Messiaen's performance would have differed markedly in spirit if he indisputably had had the requisite technique...we might wonder whether Messiaen would have liked to perform this piece more like those pianists who stay closer to the letter (and perceived abstract modernist spirit) of the score. As we shall see, his comments might appear to suggest so, but the evidence from his recordings of other pieces implies a personal performance aesthetic markedly different from his protégés...\(^{44}\)

Dingle then discusses the performance tendency of Messiaen’s time to have more focus on accurately following the score (labelled as the modernist-objective approach) instead of indulging too much in romanticism and sentimentality. He goes on to remark that "...evidence from his recordings of other pieces implies a personal performance aesthetic markedly different from his protégés among the post-war generation."\(^{45}\)

As Sholl observes:

Messiaen did not state that he was recording his music for posterity with the intention that they should be studied by others in association with the score. Neither did Messiaen ever claim that he was the best interpreter of his own works. It is far more likely that the original objective of these recordings was to present the pieces to a wider audience (they are in most cases the first recordings of each piece), with the additional cachet that Messiaen was himself the performer.\(^{46}\)

There is also another factor to consider, which is:

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\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.

A problem arises if a composer has recorded a piece more than once unless he or she advocates the supremacy of one version…what he is suggesting, perhaps, is that his recordings set parameters, or a spectrum of authenticity, which performers should be aware of as they determine their own interpretation of a work.47

Nevertheless, it is valuable to listen to the composer’s recordings and compare his execution of dynamics and tempi with his notated markings on the score in order to understand how he perceives their relativity as well as how closely he expects performers to adhere to his notation. Stravinsky best describes this process as stated below by Sholl:

By asserting his intentions ‘with real exactitude’, Stravinsky acknowledged that notation, however complex, is imprecise at accurately expressing every nuance intended by the composer, while a recording is, in many respects, capable of documenting more. He also recognized that a recording imposes certain restrictions on future performers, who consequently have some responsibility to the composer’s intentions as documented in that recording, but he strongly advocated the use of the recording as an additional and more detailed form of notation.48

Unfortunately, “there are a few recordings of Messiaen playing the piano; however, the most significant collection is those in which Messiaen plays the organ…. In June and July of 1956 Messiaen recorded all of his published organ works (written to that date)…”49 They include Verset pour la fête de la dédicace (1960) and Livre du Saint Sacrement (1984).50 Messiaen’s solo playing is of the Quatre études de rythme.51 His other recordings are chamber works, which include Visions de l’Amen (1949, 1956), Quatuor pour la fin du temps (1956), Poèmes pour Mi (1964).52 Other recordings of Messiaen’s playing were broadcasts, which include him

47 Ibid., 169.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
performing Harawi and Debussy's *Cinques Poèmes de Charles Baudelaire* (which is the only recording of him performing another composer’s work).  

In Sholl’s essay, he conducts a brief analysis/commentary based on Messiaen’s recording of *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité*. His study reveals several interesting findings regarding Messiaen’s treatment of registration, pitch, tempo and rhythm.

According Sholl’s observations of Messiaen’s recording, there is general lack of dynamic contrast, and this leads one to think that there may be a broad range of discretion given to performers in order for them to express what they feel is most relevant to the musical context. This gives way to the possibility for a more relative interpretation instead of a strictly literal one.

This is somewhat surprising because Messiaen has always been described as being meticulous with the different colors and nuances in his music, and it seems odd that he is not seemingly as meticulous as when he is performing them. Sholl goes on to say that:

…particularly in a case such as this passage from the seventh *Méditation*, where each of the three lines has a different registration, and Messiaen’s recording does not make the dynamic distinctions notated in the score (even taking into account the vagaries of recording technique in the 1970s).

There is also some unexpected discrepancies with pitch, as can be seen another observation made by Sholl:

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53 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
This study has uncovered some variations in pitch between the score and recording…There is a possibility that these ‘wrong’ notes represent changes that Messiaen made to the music at the time of the recording, reverting to his role as an improviser….It is more likely, however, that they are accidental. In general, Messiaen’s manuscript is neat and readable, and, since he was meticulous in proofreading his own printed scores, it is reasonable to assume that he was trying to represent the printed score accurately in his recorded performance.\(^{56}\)

This observation brings into light an interesting issue regarding the privileges that a composer may have when performing his own works versus that of a performer who doesn’t have the right to make changes that explicitly contradict the written score. Messiaen was certainly a prodigious improviser, and may have very well been drawing those skills into play when performing his works (since he did so regularly in his post as an organist). Therefore, it is difficult to deduce whether or not the mentioned discrepancies are capricious improvisations, a revision he saw as an improvement upon the original, or merely accidental.

This issue becomes further complicated when comparing the tempo between Messiaen’s recording and his score. Messiaen didn’t assign metronome markings to his compositions, which led to a lot of ambiguity regarding how one should perceive his various tempi markings (for example, \textit{modéré}, \textit{un peu vif}, etc.). This also creates some difficulty when attempting to gauge the relationship between different tempi markings among different movements as well as those within the same movement. The confusion is further increased when multiple tempi markings are used within the same piece. According to Sholl:

The first problem is sorting out a ranking for the written tempo designations in the work of French composers. Starting with the slowest, the generally accepted order is:

\begin{verbatim}
lent
très modéré
modéré
\end{verbatim}

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 179.
The second problem is deciding to which note value the tempo indication applies, and the third problem is assigning a metronome marking to each tempo indication. 57

Calculating these tempi is difficult because Messiaen does not keep a steady pulse. More problematic is the fact that Messiaen’s ranking of tempi is different from the accepted order.…

modéré
lent
un peu vif
très modéré
bien modéré 1
bien modéré 2

Unfortunately it seems that, even when we have Messiaen’s written metronome markings, we cannot take them as wholly accurate.…It could be, of course, that we should not be so pedantic about Messiaen’s recorded tempi. Surely what Messiaen really wants is for the performer to create his or her own melos and engagement with the piece. 58

Since there seem to be so many contradictions, it appears that Messiaen was more concerned about maintaining the spontaneous character of a plainsong/chant, as opposed to metronomically executing his tempi markings. This provides somewhat of a relief for performers, seeing that the composer himself prioritized the overall artistic delivery of his piece over the exact execution of his notation. It appears that there is a relative degree of flexibility available for the performer to move within a general dynamic/tempo marking within reason.

This topic leads to another similar area, which is rhythm, because similar deviations concerning the rhythm in Messiaen’s performance create a dilemma for performers in regards to the accuracy of its standard. One may recall Loriod’s earlier comment regarding rhythm, in that Messiaen had a specific structural purpose in the notation of the rhythm (to unify the material),

57 Ibid., 180.
58 Ibid., 181.
but also had a sense of freedom so the music would feel organic. As noted in the essay, Messiaen is not very accurate in terms of his rhythmic execution:

One would expect that using this distinctive rhythm would imply the need for strict accuracy in execution. As there are no further tempo indications, one would also expect that the rhythm would be free from distortion and played at a consistent speed throughout. This trend is confirmed based on the recordings made during Messiaen’s time, where interpretations were highly loyal to the score. However in Messiaen’s recorded performances, he is lax about the dotted semiquavers, and he inserts a huge rallentando during the last two bars. This therefore seems to make a mockery of his own notation of such a precise rhythm. Messiaen is consistent in the way he plays it each time, but it is another clear example of the dilemma between notation and intention, which would not have been apparent without the recording.  

To further compound the uncertainty, there is also a lack of resource in regards to recorded performances of Messiaen. This makes it rather difficult to gather a full sense of his style, even when he is playing music written by other composers (as observed by Sholl):

Perhaps we should be able to take the recording as an accurate representation of the composer’s intentions at the time of the recording. Unfortunately, as Griffiths also notes, we have only one recording of Messiaen playing the music of another composer (Debussy), so, with this one exception, we are unable to compare his performance of his own work against that of others in order to determine the extent to which his technique is responsible for the discrepancies between score and recording.

Nevertheless, we can gather that Messiaen experienced his music very spontaneously, and would prioritize its connection with his spiritual state over the accuracy of its execution in regards to the written score. Unfortunately, not as many recordings exist of him playing his piano music. However, we can glean a fair amount of performance practice indications from his organ works.

60 Paul Griffiths, *Olivier Messiaen and the Music of Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 221.
61 Ibid.
Performers can therefore take comfort in the fact that Messiaen was not opposed to certain liberties taken with his music if they somehow contributed to the overall success of conveying the character of the piece. As mentioned earlier, Messiaen was also an improviser, and he would occasionally employ these skills in order to make the music more organic and genuine. We can also draw parallels with Messiaen’s attitude towards his composition students; he encouraged them to find their own style and was appalled whenever any of them attempted to imitate his work. Sholl, drawing on insights from John Milson, reinforces this fact by pointing out that recordings by Messiaen's students:

... suggest that 'they do not replicate Messiaen's own solutions, but they do broadly adhere to what we might call his 'manner of realization'....in addition to markings in the score, 'Messiaen seems to have taken a certain style of performance practice and range of sonorities for granted, and when asked for advice by other organists would guide them towards those solutions.' This 'manner of realization' is a key concept for lovers of Messiaen's music.62

As mentioned earlier, despite Messiaen’s continual emphasis on precision in performing the text, he was not impartial to personal expression. The composer is also noted for saying:

But once one performs them very exactly, one is then in no way prevented from "interpretation" which embraces freedom, love, passion, emotion and all such things. No one should be allowed to make music as if he were made of wood. One must reproduce the musical text exactly, but not play like a stone.63

Further examples can be found in regards to the Quatuor pour la fin du temps:

Pierre-Laurent Aimard asserted that in rehearsal Messiaen encouraged this almost metronomic approach: “What personally I got from him for this piece was to try to keep the tempo [as if] for eternity and never, never to push it or to pull back.” [However] Messiaen's

recorded performance, on the other hand, presents a radically different approach. In the eighth movement, he rarely plays the rhythm the same way twice. He is constantly making shifts of nuance, allowing the accompaniment to ebb and flow. In particular, his extensive agogic accentuations underpin important shifts in harmony.“ 64

Christopher Dingle also describes Messiaen’s recording of Harawi as following the composer’s tendency of taking liberties with the score:

While the score seems to imply a change of tone, and maybe a little broadening in Messiaen’s hands these three chords create a sudden, complete change in the flow of the piano part, combining a ringing tone with the tempo being almost halved. 65

An interesting explanation for these discrepancies is made by Christopher Dingle:

Like Stravinsky, Messiaen would have witnessed performers making radical alterations to what was written in the score. Even re-writing the music was not uncommon, either in the guise of correcting perceived errors by composers, compensating for changes instruments (such as adding in lower or upper octaves) or simply out of a desire to improve the music or the spectacle. Understood in this context, Messiaen was not telling performers to reproduce the score as automatons. Rather, he was imploring them not to rewrite his music, but to take the score as the basis of interpretation. 66

If we are to concede that there exists a “school of playing” associated with Messiaen, it demands virtually the same elements which constitute a convincing performance of any other kind of piece: awareness of the composer’s markings in the score, attention to style, technical command as well as the musical intuition of the performer to bring a further emotional depth and insight to the work. We can safely conjecture that although Messaien’s pedagogical career was more centered upon composition rather than performance, we can still gather information in

64 Ibid., 36-37.
65 Ibid., 44.
66 Ibid., 46.
order to create a stronger concept on how his works ought to be performed. As summarized by Sholl:

It is apparent that with all the available source material for one of Messiaen's pieces - including the score, the composer's program notes and comments, the composer's own recordings and those of his pupils - there is a basis for a school of playing.\(^6\)

Issues regarding performance practice will be discussed in further detail towards the end of chapters 4, 5, and 6 in order to draw connections between the harmonic analysis and decisions made in performance practice.

Chapter 4: A Study of Prélude 2 (Chant d'extase dans un paysage triste)

This more subdued and introverted selection of the Préludes exhibits the earlier typical aspects of the budding style of Messiaen’s music, such as formal symmetry, use of conventional musical structures, and triadic harmonies with subtle modal flavours, to name a few. There are strong elements of symmetry, especially within the formal structure. On the larger scale, the piece is written in an A-B-A form, yet within each of the larger sections, a miniature a-b-a can be found. Although these materials are clearly organized into their respective sections of the piece, Messiaen achieves cohesion between these various fragments through a variety of techniques that enable a comprehensive, unified presentation of the work. One of the ways in which he does so is to employ melodic writing more frequently than in his other pieces. These melodic themes are cast within a more linearly defined texture unlike the densely packed chordal passages in his other Préludes such as no. 6. However, it is similar to Prélude 6, in that recurrent motives create connections between the other sections (although there are slight variances with the motives when they return).

One of these recurrent motives is the augmented fourth frequently embedded into the melodic material. This can be seen in the descending F-sharp to B-sharp in measures 3 and 4, as well as in the motive in the section B in measure 25, also between B-sharp and F-sharp.
Example 4.1: Use of the augmented fourth in the melodic material

This use is different because Messiaen is often seen as using the augmented fourth as a cadential, closing gesture. Here, the augmented fourth present in the melodic material takes on a more active role in the momentum of the music. There is also a relationship of the augmented fourth with the rhythmic gestures used, which become part of the motivic material. In regards to harmony, modal flavors are certainly present, but are less unusual. The writing is largely tonal, occasionally containing the “chords with added notes.”
Messiaen ingeniously interlaces all of these various elements together here, in order to create a beautifully symmetrical, yet emotionally dense musical work. In order to provide a broader scope of the overall form and tonal plan before the detailed discussion to follow, the table below provides an overview:

Table 4.1: Form Diagram (for Prélude 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Large Sections</th>
<th>Measure numbers</th>
<th>Tonal Area</th>
<th>Further Details and/or Smaller Formal Breakdown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section A</td>
<td>1-24</td>
<td>Octatonic</td>
<td>Section a(^1) (mm. 1-11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f-sharp minor</td>
<td>• Phrase 1 = m. 1-4: melodic motive introduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Phrase 2 = m. 5-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cadential gesture in m. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Octatonic</td>
<td>Section b (mm. 12-16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d-sharp minor</td>
<td>• Largely octatonic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>melodic</td>
<td>• Motive in the right hand is introduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>which implies the tonalities of c minor (m. 12),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C major (m. 13) and e minor (m. 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Section a(^2) (mm. 17-24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The melodic material returns but is set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>now in octaves within a chordal texture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25-48</td>
<td>F-sharp major</td>
<td>Section c(^1) (mm. 25-32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Octatonic</td>
<td>• Fragment of the earlier melodic motive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d-sharp minor</td>
<td>heard against an arpeggiated accompaniment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>melodic</td>
<td>Section d (mm. 33-40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• A canon is introduced using material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>similar to the melodic motive in m. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Heard against an ostinato accompaniment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Octatonic</td>
<td>Section c(^2) (mm. 41-48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d-sharp minor</td>
<td>• Similar to the earlier Section C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49-74</td>
<td>Octatonic</td>
<td>Section a(^1) (mm. 49-59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d-sharp minor</td>
<td>• This is different because it actually opens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>with Section a(^2) from the original opening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Octatonic</td>
<td>Section b (mm. 60-64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d-sharp minor</td>
<td>Section a(^2) (mm. 65-end)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• This is also different in that the material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>from Section a(^1) is heard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Contains an extended cadence (mm. 73-74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section A:

This Prélude is largely set in f-sharp minor alongside strong modal flavours of the octatonic collection. Section A (mm. 1-24) is in f-sharp minor, section B (mm. 25-48) is based in F-sharp major (with a d-sharp minor melodic scale appearing in mm. 33-34) and the returning section A (mm.49-74) is transposed back to f-sharp minor. Although the tonalities change within the different sections of the piece, F-sharp is treated as a focal pitch in many instances, and is further emphasized with the ending chord being an f-sharp minor chord with an added sharp sixth.

mm. 1-4

Example 4.2: The opening phrase of section A

The opening phrase presents an octatonic melody, meandering within the augmented fourth interval, F-sharp to B-sharp. It is accompanied by the simple undulation from D-sharp to C-sharp. This melody is treated conventionally, being four bars in length and returning throughout the piece, unifying the various sections (mainly indicating the return of Section A or section a). The four-bar melody can be further divided in half, as the second phrase beginning at measure 5 shares the identical material as measures 1 to 2, but finished differently in order to lead into measure 9. The rhythmic figure (which is a sixteenth note and a dotted eighth) seen in measure 2 reappears in measure 9 as a cadential
gesture. This leads into the rolled soprano chords in measure 10, which recall the melodic motif in measure 3.

mm. 10-11

Example 4.3: Melodic motive seen in rolled chords

Messiaen already utilizes the melody (or fragments of it) to propel the movement of the piece. The rhythmic motive (sixteenth and dotted eighth) can be seen in measure 13, yet once more functioning as both cadential gesture to summarize the phrase as well as a suspension into the following chordal passage (similar to m. 3, where the nature of the suspended chord is followed by the octatonic motive). Furthermore, one may relate the cadential gesture in measure 13 to that previously seen in measures 2, 6, and 9. This pattern serves to blend together the otherwise clearly contrasting sections of the piece.

It is relevant to also make some observations in regards to measures 12-15 to appreciate how Messiaen juxtaposes diatonic and modal harmonies to achieve atmospheric effect.
Example 4.4: Juxtaposition of diatonic and modal harmonies

The highest-sounding chords in measures 12-13 create an upward inquisitive gesture, first in c minor, then in C major. This gesture reappears in e minor in measure 15 with more urgency by being transposed up a major third. These harmonies are supported by the same harmonies in the bass, creating a polytonal ‘sandwich’ for the middle voice containing D major in combination with neighbor tones. In measure 13, the last chord in the right hand is an example of a c-sharp minor with an added A-sharp, but when taken together with the left hand forms an E major chord with added sixth and sharp fourth, one of Messiaen’s favorite sonorities. In measure 16 we see a converging chordal passage similar to that also used in Prélude 6 (m. 20). The chords in each hand start at opposite registral extremes and move towards each other. The top line in the right hand moves to the G-natural and the bottom line in the left hand moves to the E-sharp; both are a semitone
away from the F-sharp, but Messiaen chooses to "converge" on the F-sharp one octave higher from the anticipated pitch. The chords in measure 14 are also all part of the octatonic collection (mode 2).

Section a returns in measure 17, set in octaves within a chordal texture. One can see that the undulating D-sharp to C-sharp movement can be found now in the upper voice of the left-hand chords. As Section A draws to a close, Messiaen transitions in measure 24 with alternations of f-sharp minor chords to a d-sharp minor chord, ‘finishing’ on f-sharp minor, yet carrying a sense of incompleteness by the fermata holding us in suspended anticipation.

Section B:

Section B commences immediately in F-sharp major in measure 26, with accompanying left-hand material centered around D-sharp, F-sharp, A-sharp, and C-sharp. Harmonically, the D-sharp is the added sixth to an F-sharp major triad; the music alludes to F-sharp major in the same way that it had alluded to f-sharp minor at the Prélude’s outset.
Example 4.5: First phrase of section B (also section c)

Thematically, a connection in these pitches can be associated with the previous accompanying D-sharp to C-sharp figure in the earlier A sections, demonstrating how Messiaen is also able to relate sections with non-melodic elements. A new melodic motive (let’s call this motive y), is introduced as the last three eighth-note beats of measure 25 and is very similar to the original melodic motive due especially to its common tritone between
F-sharp and B-sharp. There are now activities on all three levels: a chordal motive wavering between d-sharp minor and F-sharp major, the accompanying F-sharp major with added sixth, and the new melodic motive in the middle voice. This organization disperses in measure 28, where the top layer is elaborated and ‘takes over’ the activities accompanied with the left hand containing similar material moving in contrary motion and outlining an octatonic scale. Measures 29-31 repeat measures 25-27 leading into the transitional measure 32, which contain fragments of motive y in sequence in the right hand.

Section d appears in measure 33, now moving towards the tonal area of C-sharp major. At this point, it may be worthwhile to note that the emphasis placed on the pitches of D-sharp (a d-sharp minor melodic scale is outlined in the left hand in mm. 33-34) as well as C-sharp (being the dominant of F-sharp major and minor) echo the undulating accompaniment found at the opening of the piece. Therefore the accompanying material connects on a larger scale between highly contrasting sections. Section d (of Section B) contains a brief 2-part canon derived from a motive reminiscent of the one found at the beginning. The material from measures 33-36 is repeated from measures 37-40. The syncopated accompaniment in the middle voice is now much more dense, containing chords more similar to measures 33-36. However the material is transposed up by a major second, with the transposition interrupted in the middle of measure 39. More examples of chords with added notes can be found in the transitional passage in measure 40. Here, we can observe how Messiaen prepares for the return of section c. He has placed tenuto markings in measure 40 on D-sharp then goes to C-sharp. In other words, the end of measure 40 twice foreshadows the D-sharp to C-sharp motion by emphasizing the
following pitches to come, enabling the seamless transition into the next section. Section c then returns in measures 41-48 as a simple repetition of the earlier section c.

Section A’:

Section A returns in measure 49, but opens with the same material as a2 instead of a1. It begins to differ, however, in measures 56-57 (finishing more similarly to a1) with the rhythmic cadential gesture: sixteenth with a dotted eighth. Measures 58-64 are the exact repetition of measures 10-16. Interestingly, the use of repetition by Messiaen is yet another device employed by the composer for creating unity and symmetry. It can be further seen as having a meditative quality, enabling one to be suspended in time and atmosphere, giving significance to his prolonged endings immersed in resonances of sound. The a2 of A’ is now a combination of the texture from a1 and a2 of A. The ending quite fittingly reinstates the f-sharp minor juxtaposed with the octatonic qualities of the piece. If we look closely at the chords in measure 73, we see Messiaen uses an f-sharp minor chord with an added sixth (which is also octatonic), as well as a C major chord, an A major chord, and a D-sharp major chord (understanding the G natural enharmonically). These chords all occur within the octatonic collection emphasized throughout the piece, and linearly their uppermost pitches repeat the first four notes of the prelude. The material decomposes gradually into the extended cadence at measures 73-74 finishing on an f-sharp minor chord with an added D-sharp, suspended in an upwardly inquisitive gesture.
Performance Practice for *Prélude 2*:

As mentioned in chapter 1, I have selected recordings from five pianists, who are still currently active and come from contrasting backgrounds in hopes of providing a relevant portrayal of the different performance practices of Messiaen available today.

Pierre Laurent-Aimard (born in 1957) is a French pianist, committed mostly to performing contemporary music. He has studied with Yvonne Loriod and has won the Messiaen International Competition in 1973. I have selected him as well as Peter Hill and Håkon Austbø because all three of these pianists have worked closely with Messiaen, Loriod or both. Peter Hill (born 1948) is a British pianist who (as one can already see in many of the citations in this paper) is a prominent Messiaen scholar. Hill has worked closely with Messiaen himself and has recorded most of his piano works. Austbø (born 1948) has also worked closely with Messiaen and Loriod. He likewise has entered the International Messiaen Competition and has made many recordings of Messiaen’s music, one of which (*Catalogue d’Oiseaux*) Messiaen artistically supervised. Based on all three’s close collaboration with Messiaen and Loriod, their performances will offer very valuable insight regarding performance practice in Messiaen’s music.

Angela Hewitt is a Canadian pianist (born in 1958) who is best known for her interpretation of J.S. Bach. However she has also performed the works of other composers (notably French composers such as Rameau, Ravel, Chabrier and Messiaen). Apart from her recording of Messiaen’s *Préludes* she has also recorded his *Turangalîla* Symphony live with the Finnish radio orchestra. Kyoko Hashimoto is a Japanese pianist, who has recorded
music by a versatile range of composers. She was winner of the *Concours International de Musique Française* and has studied with György Sebök. She is currently professor of piano and chair of the piano area at McGill University in Canada. Neither Hashimoto nor Hewitt worked with Messiaen or Loriod.

**Performance Commentary for *Prélude 2***:

This deeply contemplative piece presents an interesting challenge for many performers, the main one being the successful execution of the various contrasting themes in order to reflect the formal symmetry as well as creating a unified, cohesive performance. One can already gather by the data in the table below that there are numerous ways of interpreting the different melodic and formal elements that are present. We will largely be examining the diverse tempi taken by each of the performers as well as determining whether or not it is convincing in conveying the composer’s intention, both in terms of his written indication, as well has how effectively it suits the context of the piece, in regards to the relationship it strikes between the other sections. We will also be discussing the different approaches as evidenced in the writing of the score with certain sections set in different staves (sometimes two, sometimes three), as well as the texture itself being different (sometimes chordal, sometimes more fragmented).
Table 4.2: Tempo choices made in the five recordings (*metronome markings are set to the eighth note)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pianists</th>
<th>Measure 1</th>
<th>Measure 12</th>
<th>Measure 17</th>
<th>Measure 25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>section a</td>
<td>section b</td>
<td>section a’</td>
<td>section c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Hewitt</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60 (approx.)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre Laurent-Aimard</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>66 (approx.)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Hill</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>64 (approx.)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyoko Hashimoto</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64 (approx.)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Håkon Austbø</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>80 (approx.)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Pianists         | Measure 33 | Measure 41 | Measure 49 | Measure 60 | Measure 65 |
|------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
|                  | section d  | section c  | section a  | section b  | section a’ |
| Hewitt           | 100        | 102        | 72         | 68         | 70         |
| Aimard           | 111        | 108        | 86         | 74         | 77         |
| Hill             | 108        | 89         | 71         | 60         | 69         |
| Hashimoto        | 112        | 108        | 69         | 58         | 72         |
| Hakon Austbø     | 119        | 120        | 74         | 68         | 65         |

The discussion will largely proceed chronologically through the piece, with these two main elements in mind as each of the performers’ approaches is considered. There will also be places where broader topics are introduced, in order to create a more holistic view amidst a detailed analysis. Throughout the discussion, Table 4.2 is available for reference, as it summarizes the tempi for all five recordings.
Before we begin looking at each performer’s approach in detail, it would be useful to first think of how the textural design of the piece offers a further invitation of interpretation. There are specific areas (particularly in mm. 12, 13, 25-31, 41-47, 60-63 and mm. 73-74) where the material is written in three staves and demands more differentiation in treatment. Such changes suggest an increase of musical activity as well as complexity and calls for performers to be more sensitive to choice of sounds and dynamics in the different layers. One of the greatest differentiations between the recordings was the quality of sound: some chose a more sustained, deeper pedaled sound to capture a lusher and dreamier quality while others used less pedal and had a more concise, drier tone (although variations in microphone placement and recording space, of course, impact these aspects of a recording).

In Angela Hewitt’s interpretation, the opening tempo is heavy and labored throughout all of the A section (i.e., both a and b components), evoking the image of someone trudging under a heavy burden. She clearly creates the contrast between the melody in the right hand and the monotony of the bleak landscape evoked by the left hand accompaniment. Hewitt’s treatment of the rhythmic figures in measure 2 and similar parts sound less like plaintive pleading, more like an agogic accent. There is definitely a sense of weariness combined with longing, which is ironic because this part can also be interpreted as a point of stillness deviating from the earlier movement of the eighth notes, yet Hewitt’s approach suggests more fatigue and resignation. There seems to be a dichotomy forming between the labored material in the agogic chords and lighter more colorful response in the melodic motive found in measure 10; this offers a glimmer of hope with the chords shimmering in
the upper register, which scatter into beautiful ripples of sound. Hewitt’s pacing here is also quite effective because the material in the middle staff begins to build into a longer statement in measure 16.

On the other hand, Pierre Laurent-Aimard’s opening is one of the quicker interpretations compared to the other recordings. While it has a very clear sense of direction due to the flowing tempo, one can argue that a labored sense of loss and sorrow is not being conveyed. He also keeps a consistent tempo in measures 10-11 in contrast to Hewitt’s interpretation, again making it not so much like a dream-like impression, but more of an inevitable event. However he (like Hewitt as well as Austbø) also plays with a distinct difference in dynamic between the right and left hand, clearly observing the composer’s indications. Interestingly, Laurent-Aimard chooses to clear the pedal between the two-note rhythmic figures in measure 9, which make them more precise and not so dreamlike. This decision is questionable, as it disturbs the descending chromatic line in the top voice, and if one cannot physically stretch a ninth in the left hand, changing the pedal will lose the bass note (unless one takes the F# with the right hand). If we observe that he uses the una corda in measures 14 and 16, we can discern that he is striving for more of a muted quality versus the “dreamier” quality found in the other recordings.

Laurent-Aimard also gives prominence to the upper chords in the higher staff, creating a ringing echo in response to the chromatic motive (which is also very similar to Hashimoto’s playing in this section). Again, the two-note rhythmic gesture is played more in time and with less pedaling. What is most notable in his performance is that the
interpretation is very faithful to the indications in the score, but he doesn't choose to make an obvious decrescendo in measure 24 (only the fermata is observed) which makes the decay feel less natural.

In Hashimoto’s performance, the tempo in the opening is more in the medium range and overall it is steadier. She plays the motive in measures 10-11 more in time without doing too much of the presser rallentando marked at the end of measure 11. She also places the two-chord gestures in measure 13 with somewhat more intention and stretches out the time; not too much emphasis is placed on the two-chord gestures, but there is one slightly more so on the first than the second (since she takes m. 13 much slower than measure 12, it gives more prominence to the sense of decay). Her sound is most similar to Laurent-Aimard’s, because it is not too heavily obscured by the pedal. However, the middle voice is not so much emphasized as the top, which may work contrary to the unity of the line. Although Hashimoto plays the opening with two distinct dynamics in each of the hands, it feels a bit too strong for this point of the piece; the right hand is played with a very focused sound but the dynamic is almost at a mp/mf level. She also takes more time in the rests in measure 15, further contributing to the quality of suspension. However her transition in measure 16 feels a bit more assertive since she is using a stronger dynamic to lead into the return of section a’. Her section a’, is certainly more assertive than the other performances with the two-note rhythmic figure appearing more like a statement.

Austbø takes slightly more time before coming in with the second note in the opening, which is interesting because it can be heard as a struggle/hesitation to begin something very
emotionally painful. However, he does not give too much emphasis to the two-note rhythmic motives in measure 9, but like other pianists, he tends to stretch out the timing of the second two-note rhythmic figure slightly more than the first. In measure 10 with the melodic motive, he tends to slow down and take time before the sextuplet runs in measure 11, but he doesn't execute the presser rallentando, which seems to hinder the flow of the music into the next section. The transitional chordal material in measures 14 and 16 has more of a peaceful contemplative quality, since he doesn’t choose to pick up the tempo, and focuses more on the lushness of the harmonies. This quality is carried through into the return of section a, since the melody is still given the most prominence and the other voices are more subdued, which maintains a songful quality.

Peter Hill’s interpretation is quite unique for the opening, because he appears to be using the una corda. This creates an interestingly subdued sound, but detracts from the right-hand melody because it feels muffled. The way in which he executes the two-note gestures in measure 9 is more static, so unlike most of the other performers, not so much of an agogic accent is present. However, there is not a clear enough difference in sound between the chromatic material (in measures 12, 13 and 15) and the transitional chordal material (in measures 14 and 16). He doesn’t choose to do any presser rallentando in measure 11 either. This causes the flow of the music to feel more static leading into measure 12, where the chromatic movement in the middle staff is not very clearly brought out; there is no strong sense of leading into the next material or building up any tension. Furthermore, he gets even slower in measure 15, where he takes a significant amount of
time before commencing measure 16. Likewise, the return of the opening material also feels quite subdued and static.

Section B (also section c) is one area in which there were many variances between the performers. In Section B (m. 25), the “chant” appears and is striking in its simplicity being mainly a trill followed by a sixteenth-note figuration similar to the melodic motive from the opening of the piece. It is also appropriate at this point to discuss the formal symmetry, which is quite an intriguing aspect of this piece; despite the sorrowful poignancy being described, there is still an underlying, logical framework. This design therefore implies that this is a climactic point, or an area of turbulence towards the most dramatic section, which has to be approached methodically (planning an effective, but long build-up) and gradually departed from with an ending that nearly vanishes. This leads to various other concerns, such as how to deal with all the transitional passages, and how to perform repeated sections without sounding pedantic, but still be tastefully executed without sounding out of context.

Hakon Austbø’s interpretation of this section is starkly contrasting to the previous section, because in Section B, the tempo jumps to a significantly faster pace, and the energy grows more agitated. This is quite unusual in that there seems to be a constant alternation of tempi between the melodic tritone motive in the middle staff and the sixteenth-note figurations in the upper staff. Austbø seems to interpret the melodic motive lyrically, and attempts to do so by stretching out the motive in order to emphasize the phrasing, but this feels very unsettling when the sixteenth notes in the upper staff enter abruptly at a much
quicker tempo, not to mention the continuous presence of the left hand’s sixteenth-note accompaniment. Unfortunately, the context doesn't seem to accommodate this dichotomy and the section feels uncomfortable and rushed. This is not improved by the fact that he actually chooses to do a slight *accelerando* into measure 33 (section d). Despite his unusual treatment of tempo, he still creates beautiful distinction between the layers, with the outer harmonies shimmering as resonances and the chromatic motive in the middle staff very clearly voiced, enabling a continuity into the next section.

When Laurent-Aimard begins section B, there is no obvious increase in the tempo and no clear difference in dynamic level or sound between the chords in the upper staff and the melodic tritone motive in the middle, making this section seem less intriguing and missing the full advantage of all the activities occurring on the different levels.

In Hill’s performance, section B sounds quite static; the *un peu plus vif* is not clearly observed and the melodic motive is played very "matter of fact" (which is opposite to the interpretation of Austbø). The transition in measure 32 seems also to be very strictly in tempo and the sudden f in measure 33 feels rather jarring and abrupt.

In Hashimoto’s playing, the differences in layers (in Section B) are present, yet the chromatic motive in the middle staff is not brought out with as much clarity as some of the other performers. However, she eventually softens the tone in measure 24 to lead into section B. Interestingly, she treats the material here with more turbulence than would be normally expected (given the other interpretations). But the relative proportions in the
various dynamic levels are observed, despite the fact that they all seem to be one level louder than what is indicated.

Hashimoto also tends to rush towards the end of the melodic motive, pushing along all the other simultaneous activities in both hands, which gives more of a restless flavour to the piece. But there is not so much of a *rallentando* in measure 28. She builds even more in the material found in measures 29-31 and seems to aim towards the end of the melodic motive in measures 31 as the peak in the arc. She then lessens the pace in measure 32, but commences section d with a strong attack on the first notes, which make the entry more abrupt.

Section d (m. 33) seems to be the point of greatest tension, since it is literally the centre of the entire form and is interpreted in various ways. Austbø speeds up in section c (m. 25) before the trill melody comes in, then gets much faster in section d. His interpretation of section d is very exciting and passionate, but seems again to be out of context, because the tempo feels rushed and unsteady. This is further heightened by the sudden decline of speed in measures 36 and 40 where he faithfully executes the *rallentando*, but it feels unnatural because it is so different from what transpired previously. He also has a tendency to slightly accent the last note of the melodic motive, which detracts from the lyricism and *espressif* qualities. Also towards the end of the section c’ (particularly from measures 45-47) he doesn't seem to play it in any way differently from the earlier entrances, which differs from Hewitt who chooses to play it with more intimacy.
In section d (m. 33), Laurent-Aimard chooses more of a detached touch and sound in measure 36, perhaps to stay consistent with his interpretation of the two-note rhythmic gesture. He does not do an excessive *rallentando* into the following return of the earlier material. However, the lack of pedaling results in many of his attacks sounding rather vertical and abrupt; this section therefore doesn’t radiate too much on the *espressif* side, and the way he tends to accent the last note of the melodic motive also makes it less intimate and lyrical.

Likewise to Laurent-Aimard, Peter Hill chooses a drier sound in measure 40 and the momentum feels abruptly brought to a halt. With the return of the material in section c (in m. 41), Hill plays the sixteenth-note material in the upper staff slightly detached, which feels odd and makes the music feel very vertical (contradicting the flowing writing in the accompaniment). Section c is played with the same subdued quality as the earlier section c; although he is generally faithful to the indications, more contrasting quality in the dynamics is desired, as well as more obvious appropriate changes in tempo in order to highlight moments of excitement to better contrast moments of reflection.

One can hear Hashimoto trying to create more dramatic tension in this section (d), but because her previous section was already so strong (dynamically speaking) it is difficult to surpass that without sounding out of context and distasteful. Her approach for the repeated material is largely the same as her earlier interpretation; it seems more of a nineteenth-century romantic approach with a large projection of melodic material and sonority. She does soften the dynamics and momentum towards the end of measure 48, but the return of
the a2 material is at a roughly mp-mf dynamic so it doesn't exactly match up to the state of decline in measure 48.

In Hill’s performance, section d is not as unstable in tempo as the other performers, but nevertheless feels apathetic without any nuance in the execution of the melodic motive. In measure 36, Hill chooses to slightly detach the chords and use less pedal, which seems odd since the purpose of this section is to appreciate the fullness of the harmonies and create a transition into the next. This decision causes this section to feel very impersonal and out of context. In measures 37-39, the tempo does start to build up and things do gain more momentum.

Hewitt takes a rallentando before measure 33 and plays section d with a quicker tempo conveying greater urgency and passion. The ending chords outline the melody of the opening once again, but seems more halting (being interrupted by the chords in the bass) and eventually settles on the final chord, yet seems to hauntingly linger. She likewise creates a buildup with the return of the canonic material in measures 41-43, and faithfully executes the rallentando and tenuto indications within the last chords in measure 44. In measure 45 she plays this much more slowly than its previous rendition and stretches out the timing of the melodic motive, likening its expression to an intimate whisper.

Laurent-Aimard, however, does pick things up in section d, where each entry of the canon builds with more tension and excitement. This tension continues to build until measure 40, when he makes more of a rallentando into the return of section c (m. 41). The
rallentando in measure 48 comes across as being too calculated and out of place, because the return of section A (m. 49) doesn't feel much different than the middle section and the tempo doesn't seem to fit the description of Lent et triste.

Leading into the return of section A (m. 49), Laurent-Aimard actually makes more of a rallentando in measure 56 in order to stretch out the two-note slurred chords a bit longer. His execution of section b (m. 60) is very similar to its earlier counterpart. However, he does more of a rallentando in measure 64, but a1 feels a bit too quick, even though he gradually slows down, it doesn't feel like too much of a decay. In the extended cadence, he does get softer and softer, but because he keeps strictly in time, the fading quality doesn't seem to be present.

Hill’s return of section a (m. 49) is likewise subdued and played with a sense of suspension, causing it to feel very muted and distant sounding. Hill's interpretation strives more to depict the bleakness of the paysage and to create an overall veil of serenity and unity (without too much time taken in between sections).

The return of section A for Austbø, feels more assertive and majestic, perhaps because he contrasts this with his previous interpretation so much. Section b (m. 60) feels slower, with the two-note chords even more stretched out in their timing. The return of section a1 is slower still than a2, creating a very clear decay in the musical activity on all levels. He also chooses to do a rallentando in measure 64 and plays the chords in the extended
cadence with a growing space to heighten the contemplative qualities of the moment and create a greater sense of vanishing.

In Hashimoto’s interpretation, the atmosphere changes at measure 58, where she brings out more of the lyricism in the octaves. In the return of section b, she plays the upper chords in the staff with more sparkle, yet still appropriately voicing the middle chromatic motive. In measure 61, the two-note chordal motive is significantly stretched out in timing (in comparison to the first), which allows for more emotional impact. She continues to decrease the tempo in measures 63-64, then builds again in speed and dynamic to the f-sharp in measure 67, but overall, there is a sense of decomposition. The ending is quite effective, with each of the chords in the upper staves becoming decreasingly present after the chords in the bass. Judging by the tempo decisions made by Hashimoto, her concept of the piece is an emotional tumult, which is more tempestuous in nature building up to a dramatic climax, then dissolving into a memory. It is certainly one of the more exciting performances with very clear contrasts, but based on the earlier musical analysis, it may not coincide with Messiaen’s perception of this Prélude.

In Angela Hewitt’s performance, the timing grants this material to sound more languid and she seamlessly eases back into the return of the section a material. Although the material begins with the a2 instead of the a1, Hewitt plays this with more serenity (despite its octave setting, which seemed more assertive when it was initially introduced). As she moves into section b, section a, and lastly the coda, a disappearing effect can be felt as the layers seemingly come undone. She doesn't make too many obvious tempo changes, but
through her attention in timing she enables the material to grow incrementally fainter in dynamics in order to achieve this effect. This is particularly true in the extended cadence, as each chord seems like a residual resonance of the previous and finishes with a poignant added sixth chord.

**Conclusion**

As is the case with many musical works, the most elusive element for the performer to gather from the composer’s indication is tempo. The sense of pacing as well as the internal rhythmic drive is highly personal and strongly linked to the interpretative powers of the performer. In this particular Prelude, the only specified tempo markings are: *Lent et triste* (at the opening as well as at the return of section a) and *Un peu plus vif* (at the opening of section B), with the occasional *pressez* followed by *rallentando* in transitional measures (e.g. 11, 16, 28, 36, 40, 44, 48, 59, 64). These changes are definitely very subtle, and it appears that Messiaen felt that the nature of this piece (as suggested by its title) is permeated with melancholy and should intuitively ebb and flow in sync with emotional shifts as one would feel in a state of sorrow. This presents the challenge for performers to capture these shaded nuances without sounding overly mannered or falling into pedantry.

Based on our previous discussion, there were different strengths in each of the performances varying between the sections. Overall, I found Laurent-Aimard to be the most faithful to the score, and would only desire a bit more flexibility in places where *rallentando* markings were indicated, to provide more dramatic effect. I personally found Austbø and Hashimoto to have the strongest contrasts between the major sections, but at
times their choices can be a bit too extreme up to a point where newer sections seem out of context. However, their performances made the piece more exciting. Hill is a bit too bland, often taking a tempo that is slower than what is indicated, and not providing enough of a change, even when changes are clearly marked.

I found Hewitt to be a fine balance, as she was faithful to the score, but made distinctions that were tasteful and interesting. What ultimately constitutes a successful interpretation is an informed analysis of the piece, and understanding the scope of tempi that would be appropriate to the overall context. One can also relate tempo changes in relationship with the musical material as a reflection of an emotional journey in order to enable tempo choices that are more organic for the listener. This ties in nicely to the understanding of the piece’s texture and process involved with sound/dynamic choices.

In general, the decisions that were the most successful were the ones that had the most variety of sounds and different touches at the keyboard. Hewitt, Laurent-Aimard, and Austbø were most successful with this; despite having different interpretations of various sections as well as different choices in voicing, there was tasteful attention being given, where it was appropriate, to the context of the music.

Hashimoto and Hill interestingly seemed to represent two opposite extremes; Hashimoto would make too much of a dichotomy between the hands, whereas Hill would be very subdued and use the una corda often enough for the playing to sound muffled. I found these two interpretations to be the least convincing because neither seemed to be
aligned with the style of Messiaen, nor communicate the emotional tone of the piece. The detail and classical simplicity, so strongly inherent in the craftsmanship, seem lost if the attacks are too strong and vertical; likewise if everything is too understated, the subtle nuances cannot be heard. One requires a vast variety of sound gradations, carefully selected for each theme, motive, line, chord and note in order to grant full justice to the intricate components of the texture. It is through such attention to detail that the music of Messiaen can be fully appreciated by audiences.
Chapter 5: A Study of Prélude 6 (Cloches d’angoisse et larmes d’adieu)

As mentioned in chapter 1, this set of Préludes was composed soon after Messiaen experienced the devastating loss of his mother. His emotional turmoil can be felt in a large extent in this particular Prélude, bestowing a subtle programmatic element to the piece. The title itself (Cloches d’angoisse et larmes d’adieu) suggests the images and sounds of the solemn tolling of bells and falling tears.

At first hearing, one can draw an allusion of the repeated dominant pedal (found at the opening) to the dominant pedal found in Le gibel (by Maurice Ravel). Messiaen learnt Le gibel when he was a child (as mentioned earlier in chapter 1), and some influence can be seen in this prelude. This second piece from Gaspard de la nuit, composed by Ravel based on three poems by Aloysius Bertrand, evokes the grotesque hanging corpse on a gibbet. Amidst the decaying image, the bells from the far-off city are heard as a repeated B-flat ostinato that eerily tolls during the entire piece. If one accepts this connection, the theme of death and transience is immediately evoked and pervades the work. Such a haunting motive creates a symbolic reminder throughout the piece that time is constantly present, and carrying us forward to face our mortality.

In Messiaen’s piece, the repeated-note figure undergoes more transformation, but is present during much of the Prélude (see Example 5.1). The performer must bear the character of this figure in mind even as it is found in another voice (see measures 65-68), transposed (for example at measures 21 and 28) or even suggested in a different melodic theme (see measure 14).
Example 5.1: Repeated-note figure in Prélude 6

Messiaen is clearly depicting the sonorous stroke of the bell in measure 5 (and also similar passages), where the upper cluster of chords can either be interpreted as the dwindling effects of the large stroke or possible emotional provocation (i.e. falling tears).
Example 5.2: Loud bell sounds with reverberations

The contrasting middle section (beginning in measure 39) is lighter in mood and now set in a major tonal area. The phrases end in upward gestures (for example in measure 43, shown in Example 5.3) suggesting hope and optimism, perhaps conveying Messiaen`s solace in the continuation of his mother`s soul (supported by his religious piety).

Example 5.3: A phrase ending in an upward gesture

Further possibilities of interpreting this piece can be conjectured through an in-depth analysis of his compositional approach.
This particular *Prélude* of Messiaen serves as a highly substantial piece wherein many notable characteristics of his later style can be found. Messiaen is known for his sense of balance and symmetry, evident in his strong use of form and clear boundaries between the sections. In this *Prélude*, the form is derived from conventional features, yet is unique in that the piece contains two forms within a larger form: A-B-A, C-D-C and then followed by a coda.

Below, I will further examine how the sections are differentiated in terms of thematic material as well as tonal areas. Aside from straightforward analytical observations that I will be pointing out (and which are summarized in the form diagram given as Table 5.1), there will also be an exploration of specific thematic topics that the performer may encounter in learning this piece. Among these topics are the sense of key in each section (i.e. harmony versus modality), repetition of material and continuity of form. In addition, the issue of intensification will be discussed, and in particular, how intensification roles are switched in the A-B-A, and C-D-C components of the pieces. Differences in energy levels and pacing are important aspects to consider in performance choices as well as understanding the sense of symmetry and balance that Messiaen brought to his compositions. This chapter will conclude with a commentary comparing several recordings of this *Prélude*, in order to offer a broad scope of various interpretations of Messiaen’s work. I will draw connections with observations made in my analysis with the aim to provide clearer insight into performance choices.
<table>
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<th>Tonal Area</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>c minor</td>
<td>Phrase 1 (measures 2-5)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Unit 1 = measures 2-4</td>
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<td>• Unit 2 = measure 5</td>
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<td>Return of Introductory material (measure 6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Section A</td>
<td>2-13</td>
<td>c minor</td>
<td>Phrase 2 (same as Phrase 1, measures 7-10)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Unit 1 = measures 7-9</td>
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<td>• Unit 2 = measure 10</td>
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<td>Extension of phrase 2 (measure 11-13)</td>
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<td>• Introduction of Motive X (found in the first beats of measures 11 and 12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Section B</td>
<td>14-20</td>
<td>D major</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(ambiguous)</td>
<td>• 4-bar, 2-part canon (measures 14-17)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Canon has an augmented 4th in its melodic material, or “as a melodic motive”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Measures 18-20: chordal material transitions into the next section (the return of Section A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section A`</td>
<td>21-38</td>
<td>e – flat minor</td>
<td>(similar material, but transposed)</td>
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<td>Introduction (measure 21)</td>
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<td>Phrase 1 (measure 22-25)</td>
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<td>• Unit 1 = measures 22-24</td>
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<td>• Unit 2 = measure 25</td>
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<td>Cadential bar = measure 26</td>
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<td>Introduction into the new tonal area of g-minor (measure 27)</td>
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<td>Phrase 2 (in g-minor, measures 28-36)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Unit 1 = measure 28-30</td>
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<td>• Unit 2 = measure 31</td>
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<td>Extended material based on Unit 2 (in the latter measure) = measures 21-36</td>
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<td>Motive X build-up = measures 37-38</td>
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<td>Section C</td>
<td>39-48</td>
<td>B major</td>
<td>Phrase 1 (comprised of 3 units) = measures 39-43</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Unit 1 = measures 39-40</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Unit 2 = measures 41-43 (measure 43 has symmetry with measure 39)</td>
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<td>Repeated material happening from measures</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Section D | 49-54 | Phrase 1 = measures 49-54  
| | | • Unit 1 = measures 49-50  
| | | (containing melody with a tritone)  
| | | • Unit 2 = measures 51-52  
| | | • Unit 3 = measures 53-54  
| Section C | 55-63 | Return of Phrase 1 from measures 55-59  
| | | Measure 60: brief introduction with reminiscent ostinato motif  
| | | Measures 61-62: return of Phrase 1 material, compressed  
| | | Ostinato introduction in measure 63  
| Coda | 64-74 | Based loosely on D material combined with ostinato  
| | | Prevailing melodic motive with tritone  
| | | Phrase 1:  
| | | • Measure 64-67 = 4-bar unit  
| | | Phrase 2:  
| | | • Measures 68-72 = 4-bar unit  
| | | Phrase 3:  
| | | • Measure 72-74 = ending  

**Introduction and Section A (measures 1-13):**

Before we get into the detailed analysis, I would like to mention again that although many scholars will argue that Messiaen’s music is largely modal, these *Préludes* are his earliest works and include strong tonal references. The details are unorthodox and there are certainly non-tonal elements, yet the setting is tonal. If Messiaen saw these pieces as purely modal, it would then appear coincidental to write a c-minor key signature, have an ostinato on a G (V pedal point), have in the first chord in the right hand be in c-minor, and then have a G-major (V) chord in measure 5. These relationships are seen again in measure 21 where the key signature refers to e-flat minor. So the B-flat is the V pedal point, and the right hand’s first chords are in e-flat minor.
Therefore, I will be referring to tonal areas in the analysis, since I do see it in the underlying frame of the music, despite the non-tonal elements.

Section A is very straightforward in its construction in that it consists of two phrases, where the second phrase is an extended version of the first. As mentioned earlier, Messiaen's music is neither completely tonal nor atonal, but rather consists of a harmonic fabric woven with both diatonic as well as modal flavors. In the introduction, the tonal area of c minor is established by a repetition of a dominant pedal as well as by the c minor chord in measure 2 (see Example 5.4). The iterations of the dominant pedal occurs at longer intervals suggesting an implied *decrescendo*, which can fit well with the falling melodic line. However, despite the clear references to c minor, there are contrasting chords in the texture which suggest the whole-tone scale and other modalities.

mm. 1-3:

![Example 5.4: The repeated dominant pedal](image)

At this point, it would be worthwhile to discuss Messiaen’s chordal repertoire. As described by Allen Forte, “One of the hallmarks of Olivier Messiaen’s remarkable music is its extensive repertoire of unusual chords…. [Messiaen] was unrelentingly dedicated to the construction of innovative sonorities. His music is full of new chords: small chords, medium-size chords,
gigantic chords; extraordinary in their diversity.”¹ As mentioned in the earlier chapters of this dissertation, Messiaen already began to use his modes of limited transposition very early in his career. Although many would view these additional scales as purely a new series of notes, “Messiaen regarded each mode as a large source of harmony rather than simply a scale that consists of contiguous pitches.”² Therefore, each mode (despite the limited transposition possibilities) can contain larger different arrangements of chords. Forte further describes this phenomenon as “many of the subsets of a Messiaen mode, conceived as an unordered pitch-class set, are not limited under the operation of transposition. Mode 2, which corresponds to pitch-class set 8-28 provides instances of this idea. While the scalar form of that mode is transpositionally redundant after three pitch-class distinct transpositions, many subsets of 8-28 are transpositionally non-redundant.”³

Such variety of chordal use is prominently seen throughout this Prélude, especially in measures 5, 25, 32 and other similar passages (see Example 5.5). In particular, the chords in this dialogue between modality and tonality reach a 'climactic' intermingling at measure 5, where the subito forte suggests a significant gesture and importance of the blending of sounds from different chords: G major and D-flat major.

² Ibid., 94.
³ Ibid., 94.
Example 5.5: Different examples of Messiaen’s modally derived chords

As discussed in chapter 1, this measure also serves as an example of polymodality, with the stream of descending chords in the right hand moving within mode 6 and those in the left hand expressing mode 2. Polymodality is similar to polytonality except that the former describes the simultaneous presence of two different modes instead of two different keys. Phrase 2 is an exact repetition of Phrase 1, both in terms of musical material as well as tempo and dynamic indications.

As mentioned earlier, this piece is very clearly structured into an A-B-A, C-D-C, Coda form. This writing reflects Messiaen’s attention to designing his works in distinct blocks, which contributes to the suspension of time or feeling of spaciousness in his music. This positive
aesthetic assessment of Messiaen’s approach to form is contrary to speculation made by others, especially from the mid-twentieth century, who see form as being somewhat of a stumbling block for Messiaen. André Hodeir, a French violinist, composer, and critic, writes that:

In his attempt to overhaul musical idiom, this eminent technician, this extraordinarily keen-eared harmonist, this erudite and discerning analyst was defeated by that obstacle which has been the stumbling block of every composer since Debussy: form. In this domain, Messiaen has proven completely – and, I fear, definitively – impotent. For it soon becomes apparent that the most anachronistic aspect of Messiaen’s music is its ultra-static character.\(^4\)

Despite his clear block approach, Messiaen includes transitional material along with thematic similarities to facilitate the progression into different sections. For example, in measure 11, he extends the unit 2 material and introduces motive X, which becomes a significant motive with shifting roles throughout the rest of the piece.

m. 11:

Example 5.6: Motive X introduced in the first three chords

This motive is here, and usually, comprised of the intervals of a perfect fifth ascending and a perfect fourth descending. The direction as well as the distance of these intervals vary at different sections of the piece, so the appearances will be identified with \(X^*\) and/or \(X^{``}\). After

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motive X is first introduced, Messiaen creates a mini build-up to measure 13. Further techniques used to facilitate transitions are common tones. An example of this can be found in later sections which we will discuss (such as measures 27 and onwards), where the D ostinato is introduced in the alto voice and carries into the subsequent section.

Section B (measures 14-20):

In section B, the piece moves to the new tonal area of D major; this can be seen in the notes of the D major chord in the left hand at the start of each two-bar unit. Again the harmonic fabric contains other chord types with modal flavors, such as mode 2 (in the upper voice of measure 14), mode 3 (in the upper and middle voices of measure 18), and mode 3 once again (in measures 19 and 20).

mm. 14-16:

Example 5.7: The opening of section B

Here at measure 14, we come upon a brief two-part canon, where the theme is based on the augmented fourth interval (which deceptively suggests b minor because the 'B' is treated as the central pitch). However upon closer examination, the melody is loosely based on e-sharp diminished seventh harmony. The phrase length now becomes 2 plus 2, shifting to a more
classical approach of phrase organization. Measure 18 is interesting because it contains a
downward chromatic movement seen in the quasi-polyphonic writing in the upper voice
(foreshadowed/mirrored by the downward ornamentation to the left hand chord). The canonic
figure returns but is altered to fit the G major harmony. The material in this measure overlaps
into the following measure, creating a displaced chordal sequence. The D also becomes an
important pitch as an indicator of an entry of the subject within this imitative material (3-part
imitation).

m. 14 upper voice: m. 18 upper and middle voice:

mm. 19-20:

Example 5.8: Opening melody and closing measures of section B

In measure 18, the D in the soprano leads to A on the second beat, presenting the tonic and
dominant pitches of the D major tonality. Yet, there is also a strong presence of mode 3 in
measures 18-20. These pitches differ from the previous pitches belonging to mode 2, in that
mode 2 excludes pitches which form a diminished seventh chord and the pitches of mode 3
exclude pitches which create an augmented triad. The fermata in measure 19 emphasizes the b-
minor triad, which is significant in that it indicates the relative minor of D major and shows that the tonal area of the piece has descended down a semitone from the original tonal area of C minor.

Section A’ (measures 21-38):

One element that contributes towards the transition into this section is the tempo marking: in measure 20, the performer is instructed to *rallentando poco* and then in measure 21, the tempo marking has changed to *Un peu plus vif qu’au début*. It is also interesting to note that the top and bottom lines in measure 20 are leading towards G (refer back to the end of Example 5.8), which was the pitch at the outset of the original A section. The sudden entry of the repeated-note figure on B-flat in measure 21 is therefore rather abrupt and out of context (see Example 5.9). This unexpected denial in both pitch and tempo expectation creates a bit of a jarring effect, perhaps symbolising the grief that one may feel when facing the death of a loved one. The performer can therefore really take advantage of the *diminuendo* and *rallentando* in the final measure of the B section in order to soften its end and create a greater sense of closure before resuming the return of the A section in a quicker tempo (possibly signifying a renewed vigilance or inevitability of reality).
Example 5.9: The entry of the repeated-note motive on an unexpected B-flat

Like the A section, the A’ section consists of two phrases (measures 22-27 and 28-38, counting measure 21 as introductory). However, compared to the initial section, both phrases are lengthened. Each phrase starts out as it did in A with a 3+1 construction, corresponding to the pedal point and the loud chords respectively. The lengthening of phrases is part of a strategy of intensification that pervades the A’ section.

Several factors make section A’ more intense than section A. The most obvious ones are the transposition of its opening phrase upwards by minor third and the faster tempo marking, noted previously. A less immediately apparent factor is the handling of motive X. In section A, motive X first appeared in measure 12, as the second phrase (measures 7-13) was heading to its close. In section A’, motive X already occurs in the first phrase (at measures 26-27). Like the opening of the phrase, it too is transposed upwards from its version in section A (the melody is a major second higher in measures 26-27 compared to measure 12).

The process of intensification is heightened in the second phrase of A’. The pitch material is transposed upwards yet again, this time by a perfect fifth (the pedal point is now on D). In the fourth measure of the phrase (measure 31), the loud chords are no longer marked forte but più
Moreover, the function of measure 31 is called into question because the material of measures 31-32 is subsequently repeated a major second higher in measures 33-34. In measure 35, the second half of the preceding two-measure unit is repeated, transposed higher again. There is thus a process of fragmentation, whereby a one-measure unit is generated from a two-measure unit, and a similar fragment is stated in measure 36. The succession of events beginning in measure 31 is analogous to a Beethovenian sentence: there is the presentation of a two-measure idea and its repetition (here sequential), followed by fragmentation.

mm. 33-34:

Example 5.10: The material from measures 31 and 32 are shown transposed a major second higher

During the extension of the second phrase of A’, motive X (or one of its variants) sounds at shorter and shorter time intervals: first once every two measures (measure 32 and 34), then once every measure (measures 35-36), and then in continuous succession (measures 37-38). This reflects a technique seen in Beethoven’s music as a sentence design builds towards a climax. At this point, the topic of repetition comes into view regarding its use by Messiaen to either create the sensation of being suspended in time (by repeating phrases) or heightening emotional tension (by repeating shorter motivic cells). At the end of the A’ section repetition serves to create tension. This effect is enhanced by Messiaen’s markings (rall. molto, crescendo molto and fff).
This striking contrast achieved by the motivic repetition and dramatic performance markings creates a very strong boundary at the end of section A’. Without doubt, it is the most strongly projected formal division thus far. It is worth noting that the bass line plays a significant role in connecting all of the different sections that have preceded this major formal boundary.

Therefore sections A, B and A’ are organized on a higher formal level since they are portrayed as one large unit. Furthermore, the harmonic content at the end of measure 38 is derived from the dominant 13\textsuperscript{th} of b minor, which can be seen here as serving a dominant function since the C section will begin above bass note B.

Section C (measures 39-48):

mm. 39-41:

Example 5.11: Phrase 1 of section C

Section C can be seen as being divided into two, five-measure phrases which are each subdivided into 2 plus 3. Phrase 1 is comprised of two units going from measures 39-43 (see
Example 5.11). The first unit comprises measures 39-40, the second unit measures 41-43, and then the entirety is repeated in measures 44-48. As a result, there is an alternation of two-measure and three-measure units through measures 39-48. The projection of these two-and three-measure units is enhanced since the last measure in each unit is the same (measures 40, 43, 45 and 48). This section is highly contrasting because of its texture, writing and style. The lines become more horizontally directed, and the restrained pacing of the earlier parts softens into a more flowing reverie.

Section C introduces a lyrical theme similar in rhythm and contour to motive X. We can call this Theme X’, because motive X is usually a perfect fifth ascending followed by a perfect fourth descending. Theme X’ is varied to perhaps better fit the harmonic fabric. The phrases end with upward gestures on the keyboard creating an impression of trailing off, different from previous sections where there would be cadential figures and transitory measures (see Example 5.12).

The harmony within this section is less complex, providing a more stable backdrop for Theme X’ to sing out. In fact, it is stable enough so that everything can be seen as roughly within the B-major tonal area. This entire bar (measure 39) contains material in bmm⁷th with an added G-sharp. The resonance of sound occurring on both levels creates a glowing aura around Theme X’ in the middle voice.
m. 40:

Example 5.12: Phrase ending in an upward gesture

Perhaps Messiaen is less ‘block-like’ here in order to better create the dream-like state of this section. Further symmetry can be seen in the repetition of materials in measures 44-48 (yet the dynamic markings are different in this particular repetition, being pppp instead of ppp, implying a more subdued character) to further create cohesion in the overall structure.

Section D (measures 49-54):

The lyrical theme (Theme X’) moves into prominence with the texture changing into a scale-like accompaniment (see Example 5.13). Messiaen still holds onto the two-measure phrase length, although the rhythmic accents are no longer as obvious, and the material appears in more condensed intervals. The more pressing pace in section D nicely contrasts the timeless suspension in section C. Unlike the first part of the piece, where section B provided a lessening of intensity compared to surrounding A material, in the second part of the prelude section D brings greater tension than the surrounding C material. Mode 2 can be seen in the ascending run on measure 49, contrasting from the harmonic language of section C.
mm. 49-50:

Example 5.13: Theme X’ shown against a scale-like accompaniment

Measures 51 and 52 follow with the same material as measures 49-50, but are now transposed down a major second, resulting in a distinct mode 2 transposition (see Example 5.14). There is also a softening effect in measure 51, as the dynamics reach ppp.

m. 51:

Example 5.14: The material softens down to ppp

Measures 53-54 is quite unusual and unexpected, as the material is new, but contained within that specific section (see Example 5.15). The writing is unique of anything seen so far, and the marking, Très lent avec une grande émotion suggests that its function in the piece is more strongly dictated by expressive rather than intellectual motivations. In measure 54, there is tension being created which slows the momentum.
mm. 53-54:

Example 5.15: The momentum slows down

Section C’ (measures 55-62):

This return is not an exact nor a complete repetition of section C as it is more inclined towards the entry of the coda. Only measures 56-60 echo the previous material, but are interrupted in measure 60 with the ghostly ostinato motive transposed up a major third in the middle voice, compared to the G at the beginning of the piece.

m. 55:

Example 5.16: Start of section C’
This brief interruption precedes the return in measure 61 of material derived from measure 39 material, but now compressed and trailing off in measure 63. Measure 63 can possibly suggest that another softer statement of the C material will occur (see Example 5.17)

mm. 61-63:

Example 5.17: End of section C’

One can also observe that the progressive shortening of phrases at measure 61 with the softened dynamic markings creates the necessary contrast with the *mf* in measure 65 as well as the ostinato resumed in the middle voice mark the beginning of the coda. These can only be explained if the disintegrating nature of the end of C’ is made clear.
Coda (measures 64-74):

This coda is quite charged with activity on all levels: the repeated-pitch theme and the lyrical theme (Theme X’) from section D being heard against one another suggesting some sort of reconciliation (see Example 5.18). The materials are altered in that they harmonically suit the tonal area of b minor (indicated by the new key signature and ostinato in the middle voice on B).

mm. 64-66:

Example 5.18: Opening of the coda

The melodic motive from the D section is likewise seen here in the top line. There is diminution in measure 66 as the parts become more compressed and more urgency is apparent. The phrase length organization consists of four measures, followed by the repeated-pitch iterations (which thread the phrases by its almost chromatic descent). Specifically: measures 64-67 are one phrase, measures 68-72 are another phrase, and measures 72-74 serve as the ending, with measure 74emptily resonating the pitches B-E♯-B. A cadence can be seen in the bass in measure 68 (F-sharp) resolving to b (in measure 71), which confirms the key of b minor.
Example 5.19: Ending of the piece

The texture slowly thins out as the parts disappear, ending on the D lyrical theme alone, creating a lingering/haunting effect. It is an interesting choice for Messiaen to select to use the section D theme in this coda. Perhaps this choice was made to support the function of measures with the pitch iterations earlier which suggested another occurrence of the C section. So he is providing a “quasi D section” to follow. The theme of section D is also incredibly poignant in that it is harmonically hollow; containing an augmented fourth sandwiched between two iterations of the presumed tonal centre. Notably, the tonal centre has now shifted to b, which is the leading tone of c minor, the tonal centre at the beginning of the piece. Since it is now in the leading tone’s key, one can see it as a key in need of resolution and perpetually reaching towards it. Furthermore, this desire is heightened by the fermata on each of the pitches in ppp, with the adieu indicating that this farewell is not one said with finality, but will rather continue to linger on indefinitely.

This piece is intricately constructed and presents a poised balance where the sections are clearly defined, yet are thematically connected. This characteristic challenges the criticism made by Boulez that Messiaen tends to compose too much in “block-like” sections that disturbs the continuity of the musical development. Boulez criticized Messiaen’s music for being too
disjointed; the transitions are not seamless or convincing and sometimes even lacking, as well as the musical material within the contrasting sections being too far removed from one another to a point where it is difficult to identify them as being part of the same piece!\textsuperscript{5} Contrary to this observation, we have seen in various sections throughout the piece, Messiaen often threads thematic fragments in between the sections to connect the material. This is seen particularly clearly in the coda, where the ostinato is intermingled with fragments of the lyrical theme in section D. In addition, there is a strong underlying balance supporting the overall structure. Messiaen was very sensitive to symmetry but would also incorporate asymmetry to achieve a certain effect. His handling of form still shows his thorough background in common-practice tonal music. Studying how Messiaen incorporates his unique chords and harmonies within a larger formal context reveals the underlying traditional conception of his Préludes.

Performance Practice for Prélude 6:

Something clear to all musicians is that there is no absolute ‘correct’ manner of performing a piece. Despite how meticulous a composer’s markings might be, many performers do not follow the score to its uttermost detail, and all performers must add nuances not indicated in the score. The element of spontaneity and originality is what fuels an engaging performance for audiences, but analysis is certainly highly valuable in developing the musical understanding of a piece.

In the case of Messiaen’s Prélude No. 6, much can be said of how analysis of form, thematic material and tonal areas can supplement the musical execution of the piece. The form here is quite simple to understand, but there is a danger of one perceiving the piece in a fragmented manner according to the different “blocks” in the form. This is where recognizing small thematic connections are useful, since Theme X (for example) can be found consistently in all the different sections. The reiterated pitch motive also serves as a link announcing the coming of new material, or the return of a section.

In addition, Messiaen, rhythmically compresses motives in shorter recurring intervals to build up to a climax (measures 37-38). The manner in which he organizes the tonal areas can portray the character of that particular section. For example, the first A-B-A section is largely chordal with modes of limited transposition used in conjunction with triadic and extended tertian harmonies. The dense material creates a religious sort of grandeur in the opening, which works well if one thinks of all the sounds that tolling bells can produce.

Once sections C-D-C begin, the harmony is less complex and much more stable, and this contrasts the intensity of the opening. This shift to a more horizontally orientated texture possibly evokes memories from an earlier time that was more carefree of burdens.
Messiaen included numerous tempo markings which very clearly define the structure of the piece. It is fascinating that the ostinato pattern demands a rhythmically faithful execution in order to be effective, yet the steady repetition of the note creates an accumulation of tension. This repeated figure also returns often with a quicker tempo marking. This can be seen in measure 21 (Un peu plus vif qu’au début) as well as measure 28 (Encore plus vif). The increase of tempo thus adds more energy to the overall build-up of the piece, as well as heralding the entry of the new section.

The complexity of a section can be further enhanced through the recognition of the canonic treatment of material taking place. This creates awareness of the horizontal activity present in the piece in conjunction with the richness of the chords from a vertical perspective. The augmented fourth as a pleading gesture can also be utilized by the performer in order to create more emotional tension against the austere opening material. Such analysis will further assist the performer to effectively capture the details and possible intentions of the composer, as he or she makes the appropriate practical applications to the piece.

**Performance Commentary for Prélude No. 6:**

Much can be said regarding the various elements that contribute to a successful interpretation of a musical work apart from what is primarily discussed in this paper. Although every composer has a distinctive style, performances invariably involve basic elements such as tempo, articulation and other specific performance markings found in the score. In this section, I will focus on issues related to selection of tempo, tempo modification, and projection of thematic
material, and I will include brief comparisons of several pianists who have made recordings of the Messiaen *Préludes*.

In *Prélude* No. 6, the elements of rhythmic regularity and spaciousness are immediately conveyed through the reiterated pitch at the beginning. As the piece progresses, the tempo markings change in relation to the changes in sections as well as intensification of the musical material. Throughout the introduction up to the beginning of section C, there are already five tempi indications: *très lent*, *rall. poco*, *un peu plus vif qu’au début*, *encore plus vif* and *rall. molto*. The build-up of tempo can be seen as an emotional heightening, which is “choked” or subdued by moments of deep despair. Therefore, it is important to choose an appropriate starting tempo to enable a gradual build as well as accommodate the *rall. poco* without becoming too laborious.

Table 5.2: Tempo choices made in the five recordings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pianists</th>
<th>Measure 1</th>
<th>Measure 21</th>
<th>Measure 28</th>
<th>Measure 39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Très lent</td>
<td>Un peu plus vif</td>
<td>Encore plus vif</td>
<td>Toujours tout l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hewitt</td>
<td>64-65</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-Aimard</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>76-78</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill</td>
<td>62-63</td>
<td>70-71</td>
<td>73-74</td>
<td>60-61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hashimoto</td>
<td>64-65</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>74-75</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austbø</td>
<td>83-84</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>120-130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Angela Hewitt takes a slow, contemplative tempo that clearly establishes the *Très lent* indicated at the beginning of the piece (in terms of a sixteenth-note pulse, MM=64-65). In a way, this choice is effective in that it enables her to be most faithful to Messiaen’s tempo markings (especially in places like measure 28 where the shift is more evident). It further allows her to create a sense of spaciousness with the ringing sounds of the sonorities, which have the opportunity to linger longer in order to create the tolling bell image. Her return of the A section does not begin with a stronger sense of urgency until measure 28, the start of its second phrase. The entry of the repeated pitches is now at a *f* dynamic and her tempo reflects a clearly quickened pace. Her section C stands out particularly, as she takes a slower tempo than her opening tempo. This change is brought into sharper relief because the previous section had a very clear increase in the tempo. However, she manages to use her sound to create an atmosphere of suspension and lyricism without having too many fluctuations in her established tempo. She significantly reduces the tempo in this section further in measures 61-62, in order to convey a sense of closure and prepare the transition into the coda.

Peter Hill likewise takes an even slower tempo (in terms of a sixteenth-note pulse, MM= 62-63); actually he takes the slowest initial tempo out of all the recordings that I have reviewed. There is merit in his choice, as this allows him to follow the entire tempo, dynamic and performance indications in the score to the utmost detail. But it falls in danger of coming across as being very vertical and pedantic, something which may also contribute to Messiaen’s criticized block-like approach to form.

Pierre Laurent-Aimard does start slightly faster (in terms of a sixteenth-note pulse, MM= 68) which gives an overall stronger sense of line in his performance. He is likewise incredibly faithful to the tempo indications of the score and is able to maintain a balance between a
meditative pace, as well as convey the growing emotional tension. The return of the A section is played with slightly more presence (implied by the tempo marking) and the fact that the material has been transposed a minor third higher. By doing so, he perhaps better conveys that there is a C section to follow. There is a sense of space, which may seem static at times because of the steady pacing, but this is appropriate to the musical context.

Kyoko Hashimoto likewise takes the Prélude at a slower pace, similar to Angela Hewitt’s, but changes tempo drastically in the C section. Although she keeps a steady pulse when executing the reiterated pitch motive, the impetus in which her right hand enters with its syncopated chords allows the music to keep flowing whilst adhering to the Très lent indication. She is very sensitive to the climactic points and intensification processes occurring within the piece, but she does not necessarily follow all of Messiaen’s tempo indications. Such is the case in Section C, where instead of a tempo, she takes it faster than the beginning sections of the piece and also plays with fuller dynamics than indicated. Her performance then raises questions regarding the barrier between accuracy of the composer’s markings versus the amount of freedom that would be appropriate for a performer to bring to the piece without moving too far to an extreme.

The case is rather the contrary with Håkon Austbø. The tempo is significantly faster than that of the previous recordings (in terms of a sixteenth-note pulse, MM= 83-84). However this choice does not assist with the flow of the piece; rather, it’s fast up to a point where the piece is no longer Très lent. Overall, the pacing is also quite unsteady, particularly as Austbø tends to rush towards the endings of phrases. The reiterated “bell” figure becomes rushed and anxious (as at measure 28); the piece loses its broad sense of space and time, and it doesn’t feel deeply contemplative or introspective. There are also some “romantic” mannerisms on occasions
(sudden tempo fluctuations and dynamic choices that are not indicated within the score and seem to serve no clear purpose), which feel inappropriate to the style of the piece and disturb the build-up created by the relentless reiterated bell figure. The faster tempo also doesn’t offer the listener the opportunity to hear the mixtures of sound from the resonance. What is also startling is that at measure 39, he actually does the opposite of what is written in terms of the tempo and takes this even faster. This decision disturbs the overall build-up of the piece and creates more of a sense of agitation than solemnity.

Another prominent characteristic of this piece is the intensification of musical tension in response to the emotional tension that is present. These qualities are most strongly evident in the C section. The build-up is found in the tempo (as previously discussed) as well as the attention to thematic material. These themes become significant, as we saw earlier that they link sections together and change in their treatment in order to reflect the ongoing emotional ebb and flow. What came up most prominently in the previous formal analysis was Theme X and its variants. Not only was it present through much of the piece, but its use of the augmented fourth interval seems to convey a deep sense of longing. Although the theme isn’t obviously labeled, an insightful performer should notice its importance and strive to do justice towards its role throughout the performance. Such seems to be the case with pianists such as Angela Hewitt, who is bringing it out consistently throughout the piece. Theme X is first brought out with a lot of clarity, strongly voiced against the contrasting material. However there is also a strong sense of longing present, invoked by the augmented fourth interval (which Hewitt draws more attention to in the inflection of the interval). Overall, the layers building up to the climax are extremely well planned. She continually builds up all the tension of theme X at measure 37. At measure 39, one comes across very transparent playing, in which everything is very distant
sounding. Theme X is more wistfully represented in this section. Her tone grows even more subdued at measure 54, although perhaps with not enough *grande émotion*. The overall sense of the piece is extremely effective, particularly due to the very fine differentiation between *pp*, *ppp*, and *pppp*.

Pierre Laurent-Aimard brings out Theme X more prominently as it appears as a lyrical theme in section C. In measure 55, he draws out the tension by focusing on the theme represented by the longer note values. His dynamics are less subdued and on a more *f* level. Yet he is still able to maintain a clear distinction between all the layers occurring in the piece. The tritone in the canonic section as part of the melody is very clearly brought out, which reinforces the tone already set by the nature of Theme X. He also treats the piece a bit more percussively in order to reinforce the bell image and to depict the different qualities of the chords. His playing gives light to all the various elements of the piece’s construction and results in a highly convincing performance, which seems faithful to the composer’s intentions.

With Håkon Austbø’s playing there appears to be a lack of attention in regard to the different activities occurring within the texture. Such is often the case where the top layer is most prominent, and remains so for the entire passage (such as at measure 62 and other similar passages where Messiaen clearly marked the dynamic level higher in the middle voice). Again, there is a lack of attention to the composer’s notated dynamics, and the structural integrity as well as the atmosphere suffer; the relevance of different roles of the voices becomes obscured as a result of this.

In Peter Hill’s approach, there is a highly meticulous attention given to clarity (in his choice of touch) particularly found in his very clear pedalling. For example, his recording is the only
one where there is a distinct change in parts like measure 4, where the sixteenth rest is given full attention. His fermatas are likewise very obvious and well calculated (see the end of measure 38) where their lengths are differentiated very clearly. One can observe the two different types of fermata signs that Messiaen uses (the longer one and the shorter one). This creates the differentiation in the layers and gives full range to the various modes and chords that Messiaen has designated. Hill’s approach does border on the line of leaving the listener in want of slightly more resonance; nevertheless there is a benefit in that this clarity enables Messiaen’s markings to be heard to their utmost precision.

In the case of Kyoko Hashimoto, her pedalling has more resonance than Hill’s but doesn’t move to a point where the texture is being obscured. Overall, she is not as vertical as Hill because she brings more of an agogic execution to two-note slurred figures such as the ones found in places like measure 3. Her lusher sound also brings out more of the longing quality in Theme X. As previously mentioned, she creates effective build-up to climaxes, especially in places such as measures 31-39 with a tasteful increase in tempo and dynamic range. Again, these decisions reflect whether the performers wish to promote the lyrical sense of longing reflected by the pleading quality of Theme X or more of a solemn, halting sorrow as implied by the reiterated pitch motive at the beginning.

**Conclusion**

Based on all of these recordings the biggest issue of differentiation is tempo choice and consistency. All of these pianists have their unique approach to the music, but choice of tempo affects the overall presentation of the piece. Hashimoto and Austbø are more dramatic, in that they choose quicker tempi than what seems to be suggested, and fluctuate a lot more in between
the different sections. Laurent-Aimard and Hewitt are more faithful to the score, and begin with a slower tempo, which enables them to make the indicated changes as the piece progresses, without sounding too abrupt. Peter Hill likewise follows the score, but as mentioned earlier, he is too literal, and plays slowly up to a point where the flow of the piece feels laboured. Our previous analysis of the piece suggested that the texture has many layers of thematic fragments that make the piece more vivid and exciting when they are brought out according to the harmonic context. Therefore Laurent-Aimard and Hewitt’s performances are most successful in that they are loyal to the text, but are able to add their personal interpretation because their tempo choice enables them to bring out fragments such as Theme X and the syncopated motive in the left hand. This observation reinforces the importance of making formal and harmonic analyses. These analyses will raise awareness of the piece’s structure and thematic elements, enabling one to make appropriate performance choices.

Messiaen is quite traditional in a sense that he was meticulous with what he wanted. Therefore performers can already expect to find a wealth of performance indications specified in his music. Nevertheless, structure plays an enormous role in his works, and the performer must be aware of a piece’s construction as well as be sensitive to the intensification and releases which draw more life into its presentation.
Chapter 6: An In-Depth Study of Prélude 8 (“Un reflet dans le vent…”)

This Prélude is perhaps the most popular of the set, being frequently performed by pianists to pianists to showcase the virtuosic elements of piano playing. These include rapid alternating octaves, sweeping arpeggios, and intricate runs, to name a few. It bears strong similarities to Debussy’s “…Ce qu’a vu le vent d’Ouest”, such as the introduction consisting of a repeated arpeggiated figure (evoking a swirling gust of wind), active accompaniment figures as well as the use of broken-octave accompaniments. The virtuosic elements and the similarities to Debussy’s prelude help to make this piece more accessible than others in Messiaen’s collection--for performers and audiences alike. It also sets a nice contrast compared to the others found in this set. For example, Prélude 2, discussed in chapter 4, evoked a very calm and contemplative atmosphere. Prélude 6, discussed in chapter 5, offers a more haunting picture, exploring emotions of great sorrow later infused with hope, yet still remaining largely introverted in nature. Prélude 8 has much to offer in terms of drama and excitement, featuring a wide scope in dynamic and registral range. There are multiple points of ebb and flow in the musical tension, which comes to full fruition in the middle (highly developmental) section where the opening ascending octave motive is stated in full chords against an arpeggiated octave accompaniment. Despite the more extroverted nature of the piece and its emphasis upon pianistic effects, study of its formal design, motivic elements and harmonic construction provides further insight into its musical interpretation.

The overall form is A – B – A` plus a Coda. This piece is similar to Prélude 2, in that its larger sections contain smaller ternary designs as well as different phrases (found especially in section B). Messiaen’s most noticeable characteristic in his formal design lies in his sense of symmetry and balance. As we delve deeper into the examination of this piece, we will also
surprisingly discover subtle hints of sonata-form practice. Such references to the conventional formal types reveal the residual student qualities of Messiaen as he draws upon these traditional compositional frameworks. Elements of unity, especially in the thematic material between the contrasting sections of this piece will receive considerable attention in the discussion below (as in the treatment of Prélude 6 in chapter 5). Instead of having a specific recurrent motive, thematic material from the opening section A reappears in section B (reminiscent of a development section). The tonal areas of the piece are also significant, in the way they relate to the different sections of the form as well as provide a constant harmonic fabric which can be seen as both tonal and modal (in terms of Messiaen’s modes of limited transposition).

Messiaen’s clear-cut formal organization consists largely of micro-structures found within a larger framework, fully documented in the form diagram below:

**Table 6.1: Form Diagram (for Prélude 8)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Large Sections</th>
<th>Measure numbers</th>
<th>Tonal Area</th>
<th>Smaller Formal Breakdown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section A</td>
<td>1-74</td>
<td>Nonatonic as expanded D major (expanded A major)</td>
<td>Section X (mm. 1-32): a (mm. 1-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b (mm. 9-14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a¹ (mm. 15-24): The opening material is repeated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b¹ (mm. 25-32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Section Y (mm. 33-74)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a (mm. 33-38, 39-44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b (mm. 45-51, 52-60): lyrical theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a' (mm. 61-66, 67-74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section B</td>
<td>75-108</td>
<td>b-flat minor b minor</td>
<td>Phrase 1 (mm. 75-79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-sharp major E major</td>
<td>Phrase 2 (mm. 80-83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transition (mm. 84-90): modulatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phrase 3 (mm. 91-96)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phrase 4 (mm. 97-108)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>109-190</td>
<td>Nonatonic as</td>
<td>Introduction: mm. 109-115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>A’</td>
<td>expanded D major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(transposed down a fifth from before)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section X</td>
<td>(mm. 116-148): Same as opening A section, except the material is being transposed beginning on different pitches at measures 140 and onwards.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a (mm. 116-124)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b (mm. 125-130)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a¹ (mm. 131-139)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b¹ (mm. 140-148)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Section Y</td>
<td>(mm. 149-188)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a (mm. 149-154, 155-160)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b (mm. 161-167, 168-176): lyrical theme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a’ (mm. 177-182, 183-190): There is also transitory material going into the coda at mm. 188-190</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>191-end</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Section A (measures 1-74):**

In comparison with all the other *Préludes* found within this collection, *Un reflet dans le vent*, is much more directly representational in its writing. The repeated thirty-second-note figure, which is circular in contour, is constantly repeated in order to evoke the image of a swirling gust building into a larger force. The capricious nature of the wind and the uncertainty of its origin are immediately portrayed in the ambiguous tonal area: at first glance, the piece appears to be set in the key of D major, as suggested by the key signature. However, upon closer examination, the collection of notes used can be seen as drawn from the nonatonic scale: C-sharp, D, E-flat, F, F-sharp, G, A, B-flat and B. In Messiaen’s musical terminology, this nonatonic scale is referred to as mode 3. Nevertheless, one cannot deny some gravitation towards the pitch D as a resolution in measure 4 (albeit altered as a D major chord with an added sixth).¹

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¹ The use of a major/minor triad with an added 6th is a practice favoured by Messiaen. Another instance can be found in measure 31, where there is C major chord with an added sixth. This usage is discussed in Chapter 13 of Messiaen’s first treatise, *Technique de mon langage musical*. In this *Prélude*, he later incorporates augmented fourths and major ninths as added notes in addition to added sixths.
This opening section can be seen as divided into two sections (we will refer to them as sections X and Y), which can be further broken down into small forms with two components (a and b). The first smaller section within the larger section A (called section X), goes from measures 1 to 24, which further contains a smaller a (from measures 1-8), followed by b (from measures 9-14) and ending with a^1 (measures 15-24) and b^1 (measures 25-32). Section X is strongly contrasting in character to section Y; it presents the growing force of the wind as it becomes more active and builds up to a climactic fff at measure 8.

The piece opens with three measures of an arpeggiated harmony (Example 6.1). The first two measures present A, C-sharp, E-flat and B-flat which are taken from the octatonic or nonatonic scale. In measure 3, the chord is transposed up a minor sixth and then up a major third growing in intensity along with a crescendo to lead into measure 4. This chordal transposition further reinforces the nonatonic scale by including most of its pitches: A, C, B-flat, E-flat, F, F-sharp, B. At measure 4, we come across a D major chord with an added flat sixth, which can be seen in contrast to the D major with an added sixth on the second beat of the same measure. Another interesting connection can be drawn between the chords on the downbeat of measure 4, the second beat of measure 4, the downbeat of measure 10 and the second beat of measure 10. The chords on the second beat of measure 4 and downbeat of measure 10 are identical. Therefore, measure 10 can be seen as a sort of continuation from the chordal gesture in measure 4. Also in measures 11-13, the chords occurring on the three beats of each measure are identical to the chords seen earlier in measure 4 and measure 10 which can be seen as the culmination of the earlier chords. These subtle connections used at these strategic junctures provide a sense of unity as well as forward motion.
Throughout the opening section, there is an opposition between B-natural and B-flat. The B-flat is shown to be of significance in the A-Bb-D motive in measures 5-6, which can be seen in later sections of the piece. As noted above, both B-natural and B-flat occur as added sixths with D major triads.

mm. 1-4

Example 6.1: Opening four measures of Prélude 8

This motive is expanded upon in the subsequent bars, growing into alternating octaves between the hands. This sort of writing is much more direct than any of the previous Préludes, in that the texture is not too dense and there are not too many instances of polymodality and/or polytonality. This texture changes in measure 9 (section b), with the wavering chords changing from a D major chord with an added sixth oscillating with neighbor tones, creates a circular
effect, and grows into an expanded three-measure passage evoking the sweeping of a powerful
gust of wind (Example 6.2).

mm. 9-10

Example 6.2: D major chord with an added sixth

As mentioned earlier, what is most fascinating apart from the imagery of this passage is the
fact that the chords formed on beats one and three in measures 11-13 are a concatenation of the
chords seen earlier in measure 4 and measure 10. Therefore Messiaen subtly uses this opening
theme to link the various different materials together despite the obvious variances in character
and texture. At measure 14, the abrupt grace-note jump ending on a low octave signals the end
of the phrase. Again, the pitches from the nonatonic scale are used in the chords, and the ending
on the low A octave simultaneously hints at the presence of the D major tonality.

The opening material is then repeated in a\textsuperscript{1}, being nearly identical to the earlier segment
except for measures 21-23 which are an expansion of measures 7-8. This difference creates a
more dramatic gesture, covering a broader range and ends on a D instead of a B-flat, offering the
performer an opportunity for more flare and effect. Section b\textsuperscript{1} is similar in writing to the earlier
section b. The material from measures 9-14 is seen again, but begins fragmenting from measures
29-32 instead of growing into a three-measure unit as before. This fragmentation effectively
implies the decaying force of the wind which comes to a pause contrary to the exciting build-up from the previous measures. Interestingly, fragmentation when found in the works of Beethoven, for example, is often a vehicle whereby tension is built. Yet here in Messiaen’s use, it reduces the momentum and is employed to taper the ending of a section.

Section Y (measures 33-74) introduces a lyrical theme tapering off with alternating tritones, which is a common gesture throughout all of Messiaen’s Préludes. The registral contour of the lyrical theme aspires upwards and usually finishes in a descending gesture illustrative of the capricious upward swirls of wind followed by a calming descent as the gust has run its course. In this section, Messiaen’s phrase structure becomes more stable being divided into six-bar units. This slightly recalls the writing found within the C section of Prélude 6, where he would write exact repetitions of certain phrases. In this Prélude, measures 33-38 are repeated almost exactly in measures 39-44. The key signature changes to the dominant key (A major), which recollects the modulation characteristic of sonata form. The pitches E, G-sharp and D become prominent, which further reinforce A major, since they are central to the dominant seventh in that key. Yet by looking at the larger collection of notes being used, we can see that mode 3 is still present, but has also been transposed up a perfect fifth. Measure 34 contains another example of a chord with an added note; in this case A major with an added sixth (Example 6.3; note both hands are in treble clef and the key signature of A major is in effect).

m. 34
Example 6.3: A major chord with an added sixth

A lyrical theme now unfolds in measures 45-46 in section b (of section Y) which is comprised of the tritone interval. The melody is played against an accompanying figure which is somewhat similar to the thirty-second notes of the opening, in the way it is distributed between the hands as well as containing the perfect fourth interval. In contrast, a seven-bar unit ensues from measures 45-51 (commencing section b of section Y), with the melodic material occurring on different pitches but following the same rhythmic pattern as at the start of section Y (compare measures 45-46 with measures 33-34). In measures 49-50, the same melodic motive (B, D, A and F-sharp) can be heard in the upper voice (skipping over the A# on the second beat of measure 49; Example 6.4). Things become highly dense and ambiguous at measure 51, where the right hand contains clusters derived from the left-hand accompaniment. This seven-bar phrase unit is repeated once again in measures 52-58, followed by a similar cluster chord passage expanded into three bars in measures 58-60. This leads into the return of the opening section Y material (labelled here as a¹) from measures 61-74 (compare measures 33-44). Measures 73 and 74 are additions to this section, and continue the thirty-second-note figures which evoke the introduction of the piece. The chord in measure 73 is a transposition down a major third of the chord in measure 72, and it is transposed down a further minor third in measure 74, which is the D major chord with the added flat sixth first introduced in measure 4. This harmony offers
another form of relating different sections together in the piece, as well as reprising its role as a transitioning link used with more substance to mark the ending of a major section.

There is also some significance found in ambiguity between a duple meter versus a triple meter. For example, the beginning of section Y is clearly set in 2/4 time with the theme written accordingly to suit the distribution of beats within a measure. The uncertainty is created by the syncopation in measure 35, which creates a resistance that foreshadows the change to 3/8 meter in measure 37. This is seen with more clarity in measures 47-48 in the syncopation followed by measures 49-50 where a four-beat measure is suggested by the groupings of the theme. But in measure 51 there is further ambiguity as a grouping of five eighths by the slur (divided as three and two by the beaming). This teetering between meters is highly evocative of the unpredictable nature of the wind.

mm. 49-50

Example 6.4: Melodic motive (B, D, A and F-sharp) heard against unusual chords

Section B (measures 75-108):
As mentioned earlier, this piece contains subtle elements characteristic of the sonata form, which can be seen yet again in this middle section. There are clear thematic similarities with the previous section, making it similar in function to a development. Furthermore the section features several changes in key signatures: measure 75 in b-flat minor, measure 80 in b minor, measure 91 in F-sharp major and measure 97 in E major, which reinforces the modulatory characteristics of the development section. It seems best to view this section as containing four large phrases, with the pairs related to one another divided by a brief transition. In other words, Phrase 1 (measures 75-79) and Phrase 2 (measures 80-83) are related in that Phrase 2 begins like Phrase 1, but in the key of b minor. A transition then follows from measures 84-90, containing the three-chord gesture as first seen in measure 4, but now expanded and repeated within shorter rhythmic intervals to create tension. Likewise, Phrase 3 (measures 91-96) and Phrase 4 (measures 97-104) are related to one another.

mm. 75-78
Example 6.5: Phrase 1 of Section B

Phrase 1 opens in the tonal area of b-flat minor, with a staccato figure in the right hand suggesting a dominant ninth harmony (Example 6.5). This repetitive pattern stirs up the momentum of the piece once again, with the occurrence of the melodic motive from measures 5-6 found in the left hand in measures 77-78.

mm. 84-90
Example 6.6: Transition following phrase 2 of section B

This is followed by Phrase 2, which leads the listener to expect an exact repetition, but instead leads into a transition from measures 84-90 creating agitation with the accompanying trills and the repeated three-note chordal motive (Example 6.6).\(^2\) Repetition in this particular instance is utilized by Messiaen to create excitement and drive. Further restlessness emerges in the meter changes and rhythmic ambiguity (as discussed earlier regarding a similar instance in Section Y). Although Messiaen notates the section in 3/8 time, there are instances in measures 75, 76, 80, 85, and 87-89 where the groupings of the notes can be seen in 6/16. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that measure 90 is notated as 9/16, which again contributes to the building momentum. It also fits the descriptive nature of the wind that is being portrayed. Phrases 3 and 4 achieve a similar effect, seemingly appearing to be moments of victory and ecstasy with the right-hand accompaniment recalling the octaves of the beginning of the piece and the rhythmic motive in the left hand recalling the motive introduced in measures 5-6 (octave motive appears as full chords), although using a major sixth (D-sharp) above the local tonic in contrast to the use of a minor sixth (B-flat) before (Example 6.7). The effect is very grandiose and glorious. In measure 94 we can see a more chromatic version of the beginning Phrase 3 material as well as rhythmic acceleration in measure 96 into the next phrase.

mm. 91-96

\(^2\) As mentioned earlier, this chordal motive is first introduced in measure 4. Here in measure 84, the contour closely mimics the half-step followed by a leap, but moves in the opposite direction and reverse order.
Example 6.7: Phrase 3 of Section B

Phrase 4 takes place in E major but is transposed down a major second from the material in Phrase 3. The repetitive accompaniment in the left hand in measure 102 and the rolled chords create the brisk movement which climaxes into the chordal cascade at measure 105. They sweep downwards to the low A at measure 109. The introduction in measure 109 on the A emphasizes the dominant as a pedal point. However, unlike the sonata-form model which has the dominant pedal occur towards the development section, this dominant pedal seems to function separately as a one-bar introduction. Therefore, despite the strong references to sonata form made at various points throughout the piece, differences do exist that argue against the possibility that
this piece is written in sonata form. This ostinato followed by sixteenth notes slowly builds (as it’s treated in diminution), transforming back into the opening thirty-second notes of the piece at measure 116.

Section A`: (measures 109-end)

This section is largely a repetition of the earlier section A (once we have moved past measure 4 at the corresponding measure 120), except for the fact that most of the phrases later in this section are transposed into a different key. In measures 140-190 the material is transposed up a perfect fourth (or down a perfect fifth). One may feel that the phrase b of section A is heard here with more warmth in the lower key, suggesting the dying momentum of the wind. Again, this practice recalls the traditional sonata-form writing where the material in the recapitulation is written in the tonic key. This greatly impacts all of section Y – the second large theme within the initial A section – since it is brought back a fifth lower than its initial presentation. There results a subtle sense of returning to the tonic key (or in this case, what is seen as the tonic pitch), which recalls the traditional practice of sonata form.

Coda (measures 191-end):

This Coda is highly exciting in that it gathers together most of the motoric elements from the previous sections and “spins” them together (both figuratively and literally) into a dramatic finish. The right-hand accompaniment recalls the material at the outset of the B section (measures 75-78) with the left hand bearing the octave motive once more. The combination of these two ideas is very interesting because it crosses the distinctive boundaries which were so clearly defined earlier within the piece. Such meticulous attention to fine detail sheds light on
the extent of Messiaen’s craftsmanship: the capricious nature of the wind becomes convincing since it knows no boundaries and the whirling excitement gains power because everything is being “swept” together. Moreover, the transposition of the motive from the B section includes the pitch E-flat. As a result, the B-flat and E-flat from the first measure of the prélude are incorporated in the initial measure of the coda. These themes are perpetually repeated and condensed in measures 195-201, escalating in an upward octave sweep. This is followed by a grace-note gesture similar to the one first seen in measure 14 but it is longer and covers a broader registral range and ends on sfff. This contrasts the earlier gesture ending with a pp. It also reinforces the groups of three as the rising octave material repeats motorically driving into the ending. The ascending octave is frequently used to build up to a dramatic silence followed by contrasting material. However, here it leads to an abrupt grace-note gesture finishing in the low register therefore completing the piece with an assertive closing.

**Performance Practices of Prélude 8:**

*Prélude 8*, as mentioned earlier, is one of the more representational pieces of this set and much of the writing shows a remarkable depiction of an elemental force as a pianistic work. The challenge faced by performers is deciding on an appropriate balance between the degree of liberty to be taken with the tempo according to personal preference and the obligation to respect Messiaen’s score. Messiaen doesn't include too many performance indications, yet there is a general question of the degree of liberties suggested by the writing of the actual musical material (e.g. the purpose of the rests, contrasting accompanying figures, the interpretation of the character of the different themes, to name a few). The very nature of the wind’s spontaneity may
develop into a dangerous invitation for performers to become too erratic with the tempo. Yet *Prélude* 8 is a highly sophisticated piece with very clear structural components, containing many elements from the conventional sonata form. This formal clarity suggests a degree of classicism and balance that needs to be present and is essential (as implied by the composer’s efforts to establish such a strong premise). Further difficulty lies in the fact that Messiaen didn’t mark too many tempo changes, making it even more challenging for performers to determine an appropriate approach. In performing this prelude, one must have beforehand established a clear idea as to where the various climaxes are and how to most effectively achieve the different points of excitement and rest, without sacrificing the rhythmic integrity of the entire piece.

As we examine the various performances of this piece, we will see how all the performers deal with the different challenges that arise, mainly concerning tempo markings, range of dynamic contrast, and the larger issue of the degree of artistic liberty permissible within this context. We will focus particularly on the treatment of the opening, section Y (which introduces a new theme), section B, the beginning of section A’ and the coda. Smaller areas such as the b phrase (measures 9-13) and the measures 25-32 before section Y will be discussed, since these are areas where discrepancies were most obvious between the performers. The transitions between the major sections are also particular points of interest because the performers all have a slightly different approach. Generally, some choose to have a bit more freedom and try to exaggerate differences in tempo and dynamics, whereas others make a more subtle change (or sometimes none at all). This leads to the broader issue of how successfully one can strike a balance between having enough of an effect to have more drama at specific moments without becoming too overdone and mannered.
In the table below, each performer’s tempo choice at a significant juncture of the piece is listed for a convenient comparison. Following this table is a description as well as a discussion of specific choices that the performers make, including any additional significant characteristics that are unique. We will then discuss which choices best capture the likely purposes of the composer, without being eccentric or contrary to the score.

Table 6.2: Tempo choices made in the five recordings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pianists</th>
<th>Measure 1</th>
<th>Measure 33</th>
<th>Measure 75</th>
<th>Measure 116</th>
<th>Measure 191</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modéré</td>
<td>au mvt</td>
<td>(section B)</td>
<td>au mvt</td>
<td>(coda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Hewitt</td>
<td>197 (approx.)</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>156 (approx.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Laurent-Aimard</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>169</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Hill</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>154</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyoko Hashimoto</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakon Austbø</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>180</td>
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</table>

The opening is marked *Modéré*, which suggests a tempo sufficiently controlled as to permit later changes and climactic build-ups (see Example 6.1). Some of the most striking differences between the various performers are their tempo choices and their way of building up tension and momentum; some choose to adhere to a consistent tempo while others take more freedom according to the contrasting characters in the different sections and/or choose to exaggerate existing indications in the score (e.g. pausing longer on fermatas, rests, doing bigger *crescendi* and faster *accelerandi*). Pierre Laurent-Aimard executes the piece pretty strictly in time, as does Austbø, who gives a solid interpretation, but one occasionally lacking in dynamic contrasts and
subtle flexibility in the tempo (especially in between sections). Likewise, Hill is also quite consistent with his tempo choice, but takes a relatively slow tempo. However it is slow up to a point where there isn’t much differentiation between the various sections and the ascending octave motive becomes a bit lethargic. This seems contrary to the nature of this motive because it is marked $ff$, is syncopated and drives upwards, suggesting more energy and excitement.

On the other hand, Hewitt and Hashimoto make more of an effort to evoke the imagery of a gust of wind, which results in more contrast and flexibility with the tempo. The circular contour of the thirty-second-note figure, as well as the gravitation towards the pitch D, lends itself well to this treatment. In Hewitt’s case, she begins slightly under her chosen tempo at the opening four thirty-second notes to ease into the driving momentum of the introduction. Her phrasing tendency is to begin and finish at two dynamic extremes (in agreement with the dynamic indications) with slight pushing and/or pulling of the tempo according to the context. For example, she adds a slight accelerando to the final octave in the instance of the ascending octaves (first seen in measures 7-8). Hashimoto makes similar choices in her treatment of the opening. In the b phrase which ensues (measures 9-13 and where it appears again within the piece) Hewitt treats it very effectively, in that she breathes a bit in between measures 10 and 11 then shapes the chromatic thirds according to the way they rise and fall which depicts the swirling effects of the wind (see Example 6.2). Hashimoto likewise has more pushing and pulling in the rhythmic flow in the same sections. There are also many instances in the score where there is a dramatic change of dynamics from $pp$ to $f$ or $ff$. These extreme contrasts correspond further to the opposing characters between sections X and Y. As mentioned earlier in the analysis, section X presents the growing force of wind as it becomes more active and builds up at measure 8. This build-up is further reinforced by the chordal relations mentioned earlier in
measures 4 and 10, eventually accumulating in measures 11-13. However, it was surprisingly lacking in Laurent-Aimard’s performance, where he does not show enough of a contrast between \( pp \) and \( f \) (e.g. measures 15-18) and the chromatic motion in b feels a bit too strict and dryly played. In measures 25-32 a decaying process is taking place (as discussed earlier) which provides performers with an opportunity to slow the momentum and perhaps exercise a dramatic effect opposite to the energizing one prevalent at the beginning and thereby set the mood for the next section. At measures 25-32, Austbø does a longer \textit{diminuendo} and provides a longer line of decay. He also treats the \textit{tenuto} chords at measure 32 as prolonged moments instead of a literal articulation.

In Hewitt’s interpretation, the decaying material is felt as she plays the first figure like its earlier counterpart in measure 9, and then increases the dynamics up to measure 29 (to reflect the transposition of measures 25-27 up a major second), but gradually lessens the dynamics along with the pedal in order to further reinforce the effect of the dying gust. Likewise, Hashimoto’s treatment of the material in measures 25-32 is similar to Hewitt’s as she builds to measure 29 and then decays. With Laurent-Aimard, the "decay" effect desired here is likewise very faithful to the score markings, yet the feeling of resistance or of dying away feels unnatural; rather it feels too calculated perhaps because the execution feels more like a literal translation of the score without any additional personal input from the performer. As mentioned earlier, the use of fragmentation here is different from its frequent use in Beethoven’s music, where it serves as a vehicle of building tension. It is therefore significant for the performer to highlight this difference by emphasizing its purpose to reduce the momentum and tapering the end of a section.

A highly contrasting lyrical melody is introduced in Section Y, which offers performers the opportunity to bestow a different quality upon the “wind”. Although the phrase structure in this
section is clearly divided into six-bar units, the registral contour of the lyrical theme implies the capricious nature of the wind. It is also important to be aware of the duality in this material: there is a lyrical melody comprised of the tritone interval (commonly used as a plaintive gesture by Messiaen) played against an accompanying figure similar to the thirty-second notes of the opening. Hewitt gives more prominence to the melody with a murmuring accompaniment. The lyrical melody is first heard in a fairly faithful rhythmic manner, but Hewitt takes more liberties as it is repeated. For example in measures 67-71 she drops the dynamic level of the melody possibly to suggest that the section is coming to a close. Hashimoto takes this faster than the other pianists and makes the accompaniment more present. She also uses less pedal so the accompaniment sparkles but does not overshadow the main melody. As the melody is repeated, she does include some differences, such as playing at a softer dynamic and playing the melody slightly detached on the last three eighth notes. These decisions are not marked in the score, but they effectively bring out different parts of the material, which again add to the spontaneous nature of the wind.

Laurent-Aimard does show slightly more freedom in the rhythmic consistency of the Y section, where he allows himself to breathe in significant junctions between phrases at measures 38, 44, 51, and 66, although more "expressif" quality could have been desired, as there does not seem to be a clear enough distinction between the colors of the two hands. Despite the fact that I do not believe that singing the right hand would be the only element essential to achieving a lyrical quality, each hand should have a different timbre in accordance with its function within the context. Therefore the finishing flourishes of the left hand (for example in measures 64, 66, 68 and 70) desire either some more brightness or subtlety depending on the nature of the phrase.
A clearer *diminuendo* is also lacking in measures 73-74 because the beginning of section B is not a large enough contrast.

In Hill’s performance, section Y does not seem to be too great of a contrast because his tempo is already quite slow and his dynamic range is not too varied. Although he plays what is written in the score, the interpretation is somewhat plain and seems unconvincing. Austbø tends to be different in that he really does bring out the melody as well as the sweeping accompaniment with tempo changes reflected in the movement of the lines. He also makes some interesting choices in measure 38 and measure 154 where he lifts the pedal and plays the thirty-second notes slightly detached. Hashimoto also uses a slightly detached touch with the chords that finish off the lyrical theme of section Y. Although there is no clear reason for this decision, the lessening of sound may evoke the final remnants left behind by the gusts of wind as it quiets. She also chooses to play different dynamics for phrases that are identical repeats of previous phrases. It is refreshing to hear these nuanced differences because they make the repeats more meaningful with more contribution to the piece from an interpretational perspective as well as from a structural perspective.

The degree of differentiation in section Y is significant because it would undoubtedly impact the developmental nature of section B. Although it contains thematic similarities with the previous section, it is developmental in character, containing more frequent changes of key. Hewitt provides a clear contrast here with the accompaniment becoming more prominent because of its staccato and "secco" nature (see Example 6.5). The transition in measures 84-90 achieves a sinister character as Hewitt takes a slightly slower tempo and really emphasizes the three-sixteenth-note cell through the accented articulation and initially taking more time in between the rests at measures 84-86. She also does a very dramatic *crescendo* and broadens at
measure 90, stretching out the tension which is created and then releasing it in measure 91. Hewitt gives this section the full benefit of her energy and dynamic output and makes full use of the dynamic and tempo marking at measures 103-105.

In phrases 3 and 4 of this section, Hill actually doesn't treat the material too climactically. This seems contrary to the nature of these phrases, which appear to be moments of victory and ecstasy with the right-hand accompaniment recalling the octaves of the beginning of the piece and the rhythmic motive in the left hand recalling the motive (now in full chords) introduced in measures 5-6 (see Example 6.7). The octaves in Hill’s performance are a bit more subdued and the right hand is underplayed, leaving one to feel that the lack of dynamic contrast between the sections and the lack of drama in the rests make this climactic section unsatisfying. Likewise, Laurent-Aimard faithfully executes the performance markings in the score, but in general, he stays strictly in time and doesn't take any extra liberties when transitioning between sections. Therefore, one does not feel a true sense of arrival at the peak points in the music.

Hashimoto’s approach to section B leans more towards the direction of adding dramatic flair in appropriate proportion to a respectfully contextual interpretation. She observes the rallentando and really makes it feel like a tremendous broadening of momentum at the transition before plunging into the exciting entry of phrase 3 (see Example 6.6). She also adds small details leading up to Pressez, where she detaches the rolled chords. This attempt to make them more pronounced is a refreshing change of texture since it offers clarity amid all the thickness. She is also very clear with building up the various sequences, rendering them much more effective.
Hewitt also makes a dramatic contrast at measure 109. She makes a very interesting choice to gradually lift the pedal on the last chord at measure 108. The sound can be heard dying away - this can be Hewitt's choice of adding a fermata to the last chord as well as the fermata over the breath mark. She also takes a significant pause before playing the low A. The large build-up of sound from Pressez vanishes as a low A (barely audible) begins Section A’. She initially takes a slower tempo but then increases it accordingly as the material intensifies. The return of the b in measures 123-127 is played slightly slower than the opening, perhaps to show that the piece is still in the process of regaining its original momentum. She also does more of a rallentando in measures 140 and 142 and then plays the following material in a manner very close to her original choice in the earlier section. There is again a sharp contrast drawn in the coda as Hewitt begins at a soft dynamic and slower tempo, increasing it up until approximately measure 192 where she broadens and suspends the tension (as seen earlier in measure 90) before increasing it dramatically in measure 195.

In the case of Laurent-Aimard, he chooses not to begin section B at a slower tempo nor do a ritardando in measure 74; the contrast is found more in the change of his articulation between the two sections. This is an example of an instance where natural musical instinct guides many pianists to slow down at the end of a section and then to gradually increase up to a tempo as the new section progresses. Austbø is also similar to Laurent-Aimard in this respect, because he also doesn't execute the rallentando markings (in measures 32, 90, and 193) as well as the fermata over the breath mark at measure 108, which detracts from the overall effective playing in this section. Messiaen makes no indication of this, so one can argue, on the contrary, that this was not the composer’s intention. However, something can be said of having a larger scope of the music and incorporating finer details (permitted within that scope) to effectively give a
convincing performance. A similar instance is also found from measures 84-90, where Laurent-
Aimard adheres to a strict tempo even at a transitional passage with a sequential build-up. Many
pianists would tend to start slower and gradually accelerate with each sequential repetition. The
*rallentando* at measure 90 is executed, but not drawn out enough to achieve a broadening effect;
rather it only allows the last few chords to be more clearly pronounced. Likewise, the return of
section A begins *a tempo* without too much time taken in between the two sections. He,
however, chooses to play the melody in measure 159 with a softer dynamic in this section than
its earlier counterpart.

Austbø is more similar to Laurent-Aimard’s approach at the start of section B in that he
begins without slowing down from the previous section. But it doesn’t feel as abrupt as Laurent-
Aimard because the *secco* is not too sharp and he doesn’t begin quite as loud as a *mf*. He also
shares a similar treatment in the return of section, A’, but he chooses to vary the dynamics as the
phrases are being repeated in section Y of A’. There is also more of the *rallentando* at measures
172-174 that captures gradual calming.

Hashimoto keeps a consistent tempo leading up to section B, but the manner in which she
plays the right hand in section B creates a stronger sense of the 6/16 meter because she gives
slight impulses on every dotted eighth note. This is very exciting because the dynamic increases
with each phrase. The transition from measures 84-90 is also quite impressive in that she begins
*f*, but is still able to show increasing intensity with clearly articulating the entry of each
sequential repetition and doing a much earlier *rallentando* (beginning approximately around
measure 85) so as to fully broaden at measure 90. Interestingly, she adds her own *rallentando*
from measures 100-102 and starts the *Pressez* at measure 103 at slower speed so as to show a
more drastic increase in speed. She doesn’t pause too much before section A’ but starts at slower tempo and builds up to the opening tempo with the return of the original material.

Laurent-Aimard begins the coda in a very similar fashion as Section B, and builds each sequence up more with an increase in dynamic intensity instead of speed. This is certainly consistent with what is marked in the score, but it does present a situation where the theme appears too vertical and the forward push of the wind isn’t conveyed. This approach may seem to be contrary to the intention of Messiaen because the passage combines the right-hand material from measures 75-78 with the octave motive in the left hand, which are perpetually repeated and condensed in measures 195-201. Austbø begins the coda similarly to how he begins section B, but unlike Laurent-Aimard, he builds with both dynamics as well as tempo. However, he drives so much that the rallentando marked at measure 198 is not executed. Hill’s coda seems a bit underplayed, in that the range of dynamic intensity is not broad enough. As seen in Laurent-Aimard’s playing, it is not necessary to increase the tempo, but Hill’s tempo is so slow throughout that when the material grows exciting it becomes inadequate. Hashimoto likewise begins the coda without any ritardando or pause beforehand and plays the coda at the previous tempo. She also doesn’t do too much of a rallentando at measure 196 but builds up the speed increasingly and drives towards the end.

All five performances are credible interpretations of this piece, largely faithful to all of the indications found in the score. The main points of differentiation seem to be: changes in tempo between section X and section Y, the tempo at the beginning of section B as well as the tempo at section A’ (a gradual build-up or a resumption of the original tempo). Further discrepancies are found in the degree of rallentando executed (or disregarded) in measures 32, 90, 175 and 198 (as well as the fermata found in measure 108). Pianists such as Hill and Laurent-Aimard favour a
more literal interpretation; there is nothing offensive with the choices they make, but having one consistent tempo throughout the entire piece seems contradictory to the programmatic reference being made. The sheer fact that Messiaen included *rallentando* indications and fermata was to imply that the piece was not to be conceived with a too consistent approach to timing. Rather there are build-ups of tension as well as spaces for breathing and broadening, which in their contrasts enable more momentum to be built and to make the piece more exciting and evocative of the wind. Hewitt and Hashimoto seem to approach the piece more with an overall sense in mind. In other words, they begin with the big picture and shape all the minute details within the music to best serve that end. In their performances, before section Y and section B listeners have time to clear their ears of what was heard before and be ready to anticipate something completely new. These sections are so entirely different from one another (as seen in the earlier analysis) that to pause or to take time in between seems natural and appropriate.

Another issue faced by the performer in this piece is how to deal with all the repetitions of phrases. There are no performance markings that indicate any sort of differentiation. Yet they should still feel meaningful apart from the mere fact that they serve formal symmetry. The programmatic reference to the wind would seem to imply that the performer can afford the liberty to have some free artistic input in order to vary these repetitions. I found that Austbø and Hashimoto’s choices to experiment with a more detached articulation in section Y was interesting since the clarity of notes evoked smaller particles being swept up in the wind’s path. It also made the piece more realistic, since the wind is an unpredictable force of nature. One may even go so far as to say that the sharp contrasting dynamics can be illustrations of the different moods of the wind: mysterious, menacing, aggressive, soothing, light, circular, and graceful, to name a few. Some of these descriptions are almost completely opposite to one
another, and this reflects the opposite dynamic and articulation markings all found within this same piece. Therefore, I find Hewitt, Hashimoto and Austbo’s performances more satisfying in this respect; they offer a larger range of contrast which makes the piece more convincing.

Although the composer can never write enough performance indications to make a fixed prescription for performing his music, his primary aim and ideas can still be found in the examination of his score and compositional writing. The highly contrasting thematic material, registral range, contours of the motives, dynamic markings, tempo markings and articulation markings all seem to convey Messiaen’s efforts of creating a depiction of *Un reflet dans le vent*. Therefore, I feel that it is well within the rights of the performer to strive towards the same goal, combining a thorough study of the score with analysis and personal interpretation (given that it does not contradict the composer’s markings) in order to deliver a convincing performance.
Chapter 7: Summary and Directions for Further Research

In the balance that they strike between conventional form and his unique harmonic language, Messiaen’s Préludes create a beautiful introduction into his rich repertory. The entire collection presents opportunities for performers to exhibit a wide range of their pianistic capabilities: subtlety in voicing, a rich palette of color, control of tempo and virtuosic fluency at the keyboard.

These different performance qualities (as well as the decisions involved behind making them) are facilitated by a thorough structural and harmonic analysis. A trait that these Préludes share is that they all contain a unifying element (i.e. the tritone motive in Prélude 2, the rhythmic motive in Prélude 6 and The A-B♭-B natural- D motive in Prélude 8). This characteristic creates cohesion in each of these pieces despite the common notion that Messiaen's music is highly sectionalized (written as a series of several "blocks"). His unique harmonic language also beckons a stronger awareness of different sound qualities, in order to convey modal versus diatonic harmonies in correspondence with the atmospheric context of the piece. In Prélude 2, the entire piece is a combination of f-sharp minor and the octatonic mode. F-sharp is commonly treated as the focal pitch, and this remains consistent throughout the piece. In Prélude 6, there are instances of polymodality, as in measure 5, where a different sound is required for the descending cascade of chords. And in Prélude 8, the opening is suggested to be in D major (as implied by the key signature), but upon closer examination, it contains collection of pitches from the nonatonic scale (mode 3).
We have also observed certain preferences of Messiaen in regards to the performance of his piano music. As explored in detail in chapter 3, these characteristics include: beautiful tone with fine attention to color, attention to balance, careful pedaling to avoid blurred harmonies, effortlessness in technically demanding passages and an organic emotional reaction to the music. It is helpful to bear in mind that there exists a strong connection between the physical approach with the spiritual; the ethereal quality is best reflected by an effortless technical execution (regardless of the level of pianistic difficulty) in order for the introspective and weightless quality of his pieces to be fully realized. The focus should be mostly centered upon the listening aspect; Messiaen himself had a keenly discerning ear, and each subtle presence or change in pitches and chords is relevant.

A richly informative source regarding performance practice in Messiaen's music (aside from interviews with Loriod and his other former students) are recordings made by well-recognized interpreters of his music. The aforementioned interviews make clear that despite Messiaen's meticulous attention to notational detail in his compositions, he was open to different interpretations of his music (all of course, within reason of the style and context of the piece). Such differences are abundantly present in all of the recordings which were examined in this dissertation.

In Prélude 2, Laurent-Aimard was the most faithful performer to the score. Austbø and Hashimoto had the strongest degree of contrasts, but these were so extreme that the
overall effect became jarring. Hewitt struck a lovely balance between having an original approach, yet remaining faithful to the score. Hill's performance was quite bland, and he took a noticeably slower tempo than the rest of the other pianists, which made his performance seem somewhat monotonous. In Prélude 6 a larger range of interpretation was observed, perhaps since the emotional backdrop of the piece gives way for further variances. The largest issue of debate was tempo, since the piece contains several different sections of different tempi, and the relation of these tempi in comparison with the opening tempi greatly varied in each performance. Hewitt felt the piece more like a sombre funeral march, whereas Austbø represented the opposite extreme where the piece felt more tempestuous and unpredictable. In Prélude 8, Hewitt and Hashimoto delivered the most vivid performances, which successfully created the wind imagery within appropriate choices of contrast as well as flexibility in the tempo. Hill's tempo is relatively slower and he doesn't do too much differentiation between the various sections. Both Laurent-Aimard as well as Austbø deliver performances that respect the composer's markings but lack dynamic contrasts and flexibility in the tempo.

Of course, one cannot give an absolute positive or negative label to any of these performances, but they exist to show what is available, and it is the prospective performer's responsibility to decide how to approach the work(s) grounded in a well-informed background.

What we may conclude, is that we can metaphorically liken Messiaen's music to one of his childhood fascinations: stained-glass windows. His music contains various key
components, which possess their own color or play a certain role within a larger picture. These components ultimately contribute to a stunning masterpiece. Each part deserves to be meticulously crafted without losing perspective of the overall image.

**Directions for Further Research:**

Elements of Messiaen’s techniques discussed in his *Préludes*, can be seen yet again in his later work, also titled *Prélude*. Composed in 1964, *Prélude* features, among other things, the juxtaposition between triadic harmony and modality. This sense of juxtaposition can even be further expanded in order to encompass registral contrasts as well as thematic/motivic contrasts in character. I will now briefly analyze this later *Prélude* in order to demonstrate the previously discussed characteristics, and the continuity in important elements of Messiaen’s musical language.

As some may recall from the earlier discussion of *Prélude* 6 in measures 10-13 (Example 7.1), the sonorous chords were first struck on the downbeat then followed by a cascade of descending chords in the upper register set in a different mode.
Example 7.1: Alternating chords and upper-register material from *Prélude* 6

In the 1964 *Prélude*, the context and character are strongly unlike that of the aforementioned work. In measures 10, 12 and 14, we not only see a registral contrast, but also a contrast of character in the material and triads followed by a bird-like theme (Example 7.2). However, the musical gestures exhibit some similarity to those in the earlier work.

m. 10
Example 7.2: Excerpt from 1964 Prélude

This moment is quite fascinating in that it recalls what Messiaen did in his earliest works, plus it also incorporates his later interest in bird-song, which fully manifested in Catalogues d’oiseaux of the 1950’s.

To further highlight these contrasts, consider the converging/diverging motion of notes found in the transitional passages. This style of writing was also quite commonly used in the Préludes discussed in earlier chapters. We can see these motions in measure 20 of Prélude 6 (Example 7.3), and measure 16 of Prélude 2 (Example 7.4). In locations
such as these, there seems to be a tendency to favor a “wedge” motion (either converging or diverging), which is effective in giving more direction to the piece as well as building intensity.

mm. 19-20

Example 7.3: Converging chords from Prélude 6

m. 16

Example 7.4: Converging chords from Prélude 2
We can further relate this technique to how Messiaen builds tension and increases intensity throughout his pieces. One instance occurs in *Prélude* 2 at m. 36 (Example 7.5), and a similar build-up occurs leading to m. 37, where the canonic material is repeated with more urgency.

Likewise in the 1964 *Prélude*, we can see the manner in which he builds up to measures 32-33 (Example 7.5). The chords move in similar motion to a climactic ff, then the left hand diverges as—like in the earlier examples—the tempo slows in advance of the new section and the return of thematic material.

mm. 32-33

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Example 7.5: Transitional chords from 1964 *Prélude*
The contrast provided by the directional writing also sets apart these transitional passages from the thematic material of the major sections. This technique can almost be seen as an idiosyncrasy of Messiaen’s, one adopted perhaps to offer more clarity to the form.

This leads us to the formal analysis of Messiaen’s 1964 Prélude. Although the piece is quite short, one can still discern elements of a rough A-B-A-B form:

Section A: mm. 1-8
Section B: mm. 9-20
Section A: mm. 21-28
Section B: mm. 29-39
Closing: mm. 40-41

As one can observe, he still composes with a clear formal structure. Although it may not be identical to any of the earlier Préludes, it certainly recalls the method he employs to set the canvas for his writing.

This Prélude also encapsulates characteristics from Messiaen’s earlier style of writing (as we have previously examined) with his later compositional techniques: in particular, his rhythms (associated with a motive) and his fascination with birdsong. The most memorable theme of the 1964 Prélude is its anapestic rhythmic figure (see m. 4 and similar measures). We can also liken this common rhythmic thread to that of the ostinato
figure found in *Prélude* 6. Here, Messiaen uses it as a unifying element to create cohesiveness throughout the piece.

It is through such similarities that we can witness the evolution of Messiaen’s style as he begins to assume a larger interest in rhythmic complexities as well as bird-song. His earlier techniques regarding polymodality, contrasts in sonorities, dramatic build-ups as well as structural clarity continue to resonate throughout his body of works, which sets him apart as a reconciliatory figure between conventional techniques and innovative approaches.

As we have witnessed with the earlier *Préludes*, Messiaen’s music presents performers with particular challenges. Fortunately, this later piece is not extremely taxing in terms of pianistic difficulty. However its main challenges lie in maintaining continuity throughout the different thematic lines, or motivic sequences without having them disrupt one another. The primary example would be the opening majestic theme. The character in this theme is very declamatory and is also regularly punctuated with gong-like strokes in the bass. The difficulty lies in maintaining the ringing prolongation of the endings of each statement, while simultaneously commencing a new statement of another theme. This occurs in mm. 1-8 as well as mm. 21-26. The performer is challenged to employ a large range of dynamic variety in order to add more shape to the transitional passages (such as mm. 9-20 and 31-36), which can easily come across as too vertical without the proper awareness.
Since this piece is formally not too complex, there are not too many areas of startling contrasting material where the tempo choices can be easily disputed. With the exception of m. 33, where Messiaen indicates *Lent*, one can easily maintain a consistent pulse throughout the entire piece. What is interesting is that Messiaen has created his own tempo fluctuations; they are implied within his rhythmic notation. For example, he creates an innate sense of broadening in mm. 9, 11, 13, 16-18, 29, and 34-36, with the triplet quarter-note rhythms. He further builds a sense of *accelerando* through his use of diminution found in mm. 16-18 as well as mm. 31-33.

This clarity enables the performer to have the luxury of playing the piece as written, with the confidence of knowing that the piece will carry its own meaning as it naturally unfolds. This is not to say that there is no room for personal interpretation. Rather, the piece itself is able to draw a more introspective response from the performer, therefore making way for a simultaneous process of shaping phrases as well as experimenting with the different sonorities and resonances as they blossom during the piece. Such an approach reinforces the spiritual dimension present in so much of Messiaen’s music, which takes both the performer as well as the audience on a profound journey.

The study of Messiaen’s *Préludes* lays a foundation for performers and scholars alike to build a deeper understanding of the composer’s style in order to bring more informed interpretations to these pieces. Although they may not be as iconic as works composed in his mature years, they nevertheless bridge the aesthetic between Messiaen’s early influences (such as Debussy) and his later fully realized unique style. These pieces are an
excellent introduction for anybody who would like to begin exploring Messiaen’s music or for seasoned performers of his works who would like to gain a richer background of how his style developed. Regardless of different pursuits, an extensive study of these early works can immensely enrich and inspire the performance, preservation and appreciation of Messiaen’s contribution to the classical music repertory.
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(Assessed 5 December 2010)


Discography


