

Siglind Bruhn

Messiaen's Interpretations of Holiness and Trinity

Echoes of Medieval Theology in the
Oratorio, Organ Meditations, and Opera

Table of Contents

Preface	7
Introduction	9
Messiaen's Reception of Thomas Aquinas	13
Thomas Aquinas and Music	14
Thomistic References in Works Composed before 1965	19
Excerpts from the <i>Summa</i> in Messiaen's <i>Transfiguration</i>	22
Thomistic Definitions in Messiaen's Meditations on the Trinity	25
Joy, Music, and Truth in <i>Saint François d'Assise</i>	30
Patterns in Messiaen's Thomistic Adaptations	35
Messiaen's Avian, Numerical, and Rhythmic Signifiers	37
The Significance of Collective and Individual Birdsong	37
Mythical and Emblematic Numbers	42
The Magic of Selective Permutation	48
<i>La Transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ</i>	57
The Overall Design	58
The Music for the Gospel Verses	60
The Chorales Concluding the Two Septenaries	63
Diversity and Common Themes in the Meditation Movements	65
<i>Configuratum corpori claritatis suae</i> : Light as an Indicator of Hope for Human Resurrection	66
<i>Christus Jesus, splendor Patris</i> : The Transfigured Jesus' Radiance	70
<i>Quam dilecta tabernacula tua</i> : Pure Effulgence in God's Tent	73
<i>Candor est lucis aeternae</i> : The Dimensions of Glistening	76
<i>Perfecte conscius illius perfectae generationis</i> : Jesus' Divine Filiation	79
<i>Adoptionem filiorum perfectam</i> : Humankind's Divine Filiation	84
<i>Terribilis est locus iste</i> : The Witnesses' Shudder of Awe	86
<i>Tota Trinitas apparuit</i> : Jesus as a Person of the Trinity	88
Metastructures in the Fourteen Movements	91
Messiaen's Musical Subtext in <i>La Transfiguration</i>	94
<i>Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité</i>	97
Messiaen's <i>langage communicable</i>	98
The Musical Alphabet	99
Themes: Melodic Emblems for the Persons of the Trinity	105
<i>Formules musicales</i> for Declensions and Essential Verbs	115
Musical Signifiers of Divine Attributes	117
Contemplative Texts and Their Musical Rendering	123
Hindu Rhythms and the Christian Trinity	127
Birdsong Contributing to the Meditations on the Trinity	129

Colors as Qualities of the Divine	130
Seven Observations on Texture and Form	131
1 – <i>A Layout in Alternations</i>	131
2 – <i>Correspondences</i>	132
3 – “ <i>Seven Mysterious Chords</i> ”	133
4 – <i>Four Three-part Superimpositions</i>	135
5 – <i>The Transcendent Dimension</i>	138
6 – <i>Inverted Counterpoint</i>	139
7 – <i>Four Aspects of a Large-scale Symmetry</i>	140
Messiaen’s Musical Subtext in the <i>Méditations</i>	144
<i>Saint François d’Assise</i>	149
Biography, Influence, and Reception	151
The Companions	155
The Canticle	158
Plot and Recurring Components	162
An Unusual Opera with an Atypical Protagonist	165
Staples and Surprises in Messiaen’s Musical Language	167
Heaven and Earth Meeting “in Mid-air”	174
The Divine and the Human Realms	179
Reaching out to Humans: The Formidable Angel	187
Reaching out to Christ: The Humble Friar Francis	193
Messiaen’s Musical Subtext in <i>Saint François d’Assise</i>	199
Appendix I: Birds in the Oratorio, Organ Cycle, and Opera	203
Appendix II: <i>Saint François d’Assise</i> , Libretto (translation)	207
Bibliography	219
List of Illustrations	225
Index	227
About the Author	229