

Project 4: Isorhythmic Trio or Quartet after Messiaen

What's due when:

1. **Online discussion comments posted** by Tuesday October 1 at noon.
2. **Preliminary analysis worksheet completed** by Wednesday, October 2.
3. **Rough draft completed** by Wednesday, October 9. We will read them through (on piano, MIDI playback, and/or in ensemble) and discuss them in class.
4. **Score and parts completed** in neat copy (by hand or computer) by noon on Monday, October 14, to me by email (Sibelius or PDF; scans of neatly handwritten music are fine).

Model: Messiaen "Liturgie de cristal" from *Quartet for the End of Time*.

Instrumentation: 3-4 instruments. One and only one must be a "chord" instrument (piano, marimba, vibraphone, or guitar). The other 2-3 can be any available single-line instrument: voice, flute(s), clarinet, t. sax, bass.

Duration: circa 2-5 minutes, circa 4-16 pages of score

Formal procedure: Your piece will be based on one or more isorhythmic structures. Each isorhythm should employ a talea (rhythmic cycle) and color (pitch cycle) of different lengths. At least one of the isorhythmic patterns should run through the entire movement. You may choose what elements are governed by isorhythmic cycles: it could be certain instruments (like the piano and cello in the Messiaen), or it could be certain dimensions (for example, a harmonic progression, or the notes of a certain register) that are not necessarily localized to one particular instrument.

Structure: Think about the relationship between isorhythmically determined and free writing in your piece. Remember that the isorhythmic elements are not "beyond your control" just because you follow a strict procedure, as **you** are determining the content of the talea and color. However, once you have set these elements, follow them strictly. (This doesn't mean you can't revise the talea and color as you sketch your piece, just that the final talea and color you end up with must be strictly respected.) If you make occasional exceptions (i.e. break the "rules" of the isorhythm) do it in such a way that the overall isorhythmic patterning predominates and is clearly discernible in the score.

In addition to the Messiaen, listen to and study the scores of Arvo Pärt's *Fratres*, Steve Reich's *Piano Phase*, and Ligeti's Piano Étude No. 1 ("Désordre") for some ideas on the use and effects of strict **constructionist** processes. We will study these pieces in class in the coming weeks.

Texture: Think about all the instrumental combinations possible, including subsets (solos, duos), and think of the different individual textures each instrument can contribute.

Expressive indications: Give **clear, detailed** information on tempo, articulation, and dynamics.

Style: The above instructions will direct your approach to pitch, rhythm, and structure. You should **not** feel obligated to make your piece "sound like Messiaen".

Analysis: You should include a clear and complete explanation of the role of isorhythm, including writing out your talea and color. Explain how you chose the parameters, and point out any places where you veer from the strict implementation of the isorhythmic process. If you wish to say anything else about the piece, you may.

Readings: We will read the pieces in class on Wednesday October 16. Have a full set of parts and one copy of the score.