

Messiaen, *Quartet for the End of Time* I. “Crystal Liturgy” Preliminary Analysis

Analysis typically has one of two goals. One is to discover something about how a piece “works” for a listener, why it has the effect it does, how it “makes sense” perceptively. The other is to figure out something about how the composer put it together. These are often taken to be the same thing, and people are often unclear as to which one they are addressing in an analysis. Though they overlap much of the time, they are distinct: the first is about perception, that is, the experience of the listener or performer; the second is about construction, the composer’s procedure.

Part I:

Before you do any focused analysis, first listen to the entire movement at least **twice** with your full attention: at least once without the score, and at least once following the score closely. If using the Burkhardt anthology, **resist** any urge to read the analytic intro.

Then, write considered answers to the following on our online forum. Please do **not** get into detailed analysis online; these questions are about your initial and general reactions.

1. What do you like about the piece?
2. What intrigues you about it?
3. If you have trouble making sense of it, if it doesn’t speak to you, why do you think that is? Try to articulate what makes it confusing or unappealing.
4. Based on the answers to the preceding questions, what would you like to discover about the piece? What would be your goal in analyzing it, and how might you go about it? In other words, what questions do you want to ask of the piece?

Part II:

Only **after** writing your answers to these questions, particularly the last one, turn this sheet over and answer the analytic questions you find there (on your paper, not online).

1) Study the cello part. Write out the pitches until you see a repeating pattern, then write that pattern here. (Note the tenor clef!) As we discussed in class, the notation of harmonics is a kind of tablature. Only one note is sounded at a time here, not double-stop fourths.

2) What scale or mode is employed in the cello line?

3) There is also a repeating rhythmic pattern, but it is a little harder to discover, because it is considerably longer and the use of tied notes obscures the actual values. Write out the cello rhythm, without barlines, re-notating to eliminate all ties (so, for example, the first value is a half-note). When you detect the repeating pattern, write one full statement of that pattern here.

4) How long is the melodic pattern? _____ pitches

How many total duration events are in the rhythmic pattern? _____ events

An “event” is one onset or attack, regardless of how it is notated (simple value, dotted value, or multiple tied notes)

Therefore, the same pitch/rhythm lineup will occur only every _____ notes.

This type of pitch/rhythm organization is called **isorhythm**, a technique that goes back to the middle ages. The repeating rhythm is called the **talea** (Messiaen calls it a “rhythmic pedal”) and the repeating melody the **color**. Go look and listen to the Machaut motet on p. 11 of Burkhardt, and then come back here.

5) Draw a line after the first 3 values, separating the talea into two unequal segments. Each segment, considered separately, is an example of what Messiaen called “**non-retrogradable rhythm**.” Can you figure out what the term means?

The piano part is also organized this way, but both talea and color are longer than the cello’s.

6) How long is the piano’s **color** (i.e. how many different chords are there before they start repeating)? (Remember to count tied notes as a single event.)

7) Write out the piano’s **talea** below (again, re-notate to eliminate all ties). How long is it? (i.e. how many events or attacks, not the total duration in beats)

8) How long would it take (number of events or attacks, not # of measures) for the piano’s melody and rhythm patterns to line up again as they do in the beginning?

(answer questions 9 and 10 on a separate sheet, printed)

9) Unlike the piano and cello parts, the clarinet and violin in this movement are “free” (although highly repetitive); the score indicates they represent bird-calls. What is the effect of this movement on you? Do you think the “mechanical” or automatic nature of the isorhythm has an effect on the feel of the piece?

10) Is the use of mechanistic isorhythmic procedure an “unartistic” surrender of compositional control? Why or why not?

Messiaen Assignment, continued

Extra Credit
VI. "Dance of Fury"

11) What mode or scale is used in mm.1-4? Which note(s) don't belong to the prevailing mode?

12) What mode or scale is used in mm.5-6?

Learn to speak the rhythm of the first few bars. Is there an underlying "normal" metrical feel suggested but somehow distorted? If so, what is it, and how is it distorted?

The following questions refer to the passage from reh. F to one bar before reh. H:

13) What pattern governs the succession of pitches in this section?

14) Each individual measure in this section (except the final measure before H) is an example of what Messiaen called "non-retrogradable rhythms." Can you figure out from the music what the term means? (What do all of these rhythms have in common?)