

*I invite you to join me in a musical-spiritual journey, to meditate with Messiaen (and me) on the religious texts that he chose and which inspired him to compose each movement of this work. Although the inspiration for this music definitely comes from Catholic-Christian teachings, I also believe that through the universal language of music Messiaen's music transcends this and also speaks of a universal spiritual truth. As with any great work of art, it can be interpreted on many different levels: I hope that each of you will be able to find the proper way for it to speak to you.*

*It is interesting to remember these words of Messiaen himself regarding the religious aspect of his music: "I'm a Christian... and I think that in the present age of ecumenism — and, furthermore, in every era — we shouldn't attach too much importance to religious differences. Everyone — Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christians, Israelites, even Buddhists — is seeking God, finding God. My work is addressed to all who believe — and also to all others."*

- Jon Gillock

## Olivier Messiaen

# *Livre du Saint Sacrement*

Book of the Holy Sacrament, 1984

### A HISTORY OF THE WORK

Olivier Messiaen composed his *Livre du Saint Sacrement* in 1984, shortly after the premiere of his opera *Saint François d'Assise* in 1983. In an interview for *L'Avant-Scène Opera* before the production of his opera at the Salzburg Festival, Messiaen tells us this very interesting story about his inspiration for this organ work.

Messiaen: "I had, in fact, worked for eight years, night and day [on the opera]. Afterwards, I felt empty, I thought I had said everything, that I could stop composing...

*Interviewer: Nevertheless inspiration returned...*

Messiaen: Yes, and this is how: my post as a liturgical organist requires me to improvise. My wife records my playing, and I listen to these improvisations again with a very critical ear. Something happened: it was a Holy Thursday evening, when the Church commemorates the Institution of the Eucharist by Christ. I had three minutes to fill by playing, and it was here that I had a stroke of inspiration. I played a piece which, at first, seemed to be nothing: a very simple Bacchius rhythm (short-long), an ordinary first-inversion harmony...but suddenly I was aware, in relistening, that this music was not like the others. I believe that I was inspired by the moment, touched by this Office, which was very beautiful. I rewrote this piece, I named it *L'Institution de l'Eucharistie* [now movement VIII] and I began to write the *Livre du Saint Sacrement*: 18 pieces for organ, two hours and a half in length total! That was more than a year after *Saint François*.

*Interviewer: One finds in your Livre du Saint Sacrement an extraordinary summary of the great tradition of the French liturgical organ inaugurated by César Franck and continued by Dupré, Tournemire...All that allied to your own innovations in this domain...*

Messiaen: Don't forget my magnificent instrument, the Cavallé-Coll of the Church of the Trinity! In sixty years of good and loyal service, except for several years during renovation, it has allowed me every audacity. To the original stops, I myself have added a great number of reed and mixture stops...Here one can play absolutely all repertoire."

The *Livre du Saint Sacrement* is, I believe, Messiaen's most important work for organ: in its eighteen movements he explores a range of emotions, varieties of timbre, and a depth of expression that are unequalled in any of his other works. The order of the pieces is presented so perfectly — the way in which one piece follows the one before it in terms of mood, color, intensity, length, dynamics, etc. — that one is constantly led through the entire succession of the work as a whole with wonder, awe, amazement, and great expectation. Never is there a disappointment! The *Livre du Saint Sacrement*, more than any of Messiaen's earlier pieces is one huge piece, eighteen movements which form one large whole — not eighteen separate pieces played one after the other! Tonight, in the *Livre du Saint Sacrement*, we will experience the full powers of Messiaen's maturity in a great summation of his life's work.

## Acts of Adoration Before Christ

*Messiaen tells us that "the first [four] movements are acts of adoration before Christ, who, though unseen, is truly present in the Holy Sacrament."*

### I. Adoro te

#### I Adore Thee

"I adore Thee, O hidden Deity." St. Thomas Aquinas, *Adoro te*

The first movement gives the feeling of the profound nature of the whole piece that is about to unfold and of its epic proportions. It expresses great personal adoration from deep within the heart, an emotional, passionate love for God, and brings to my mind these words from the *Song of Songs* 1:1-2; 8:6 (New

English Bible): "I will sing the song of all songs to Solomon that he may smother me with kisses. For love is strong as death, passion cruel as the grave; it blazes up like blazing fire, fiercer than any flame. Many waters cannot quench love, no flood can sweep it away".

### II. La Source de Vie

#### The Source of Life

"May my heart ever thirst for Thee, O fountain of life, and source of eternal light!"

*Prayer of St. Bonaventure*

The second movement is striking in its contrast to the first. Its gentleness, its poetry, and its beauty are ravishing and intoxicating. Its refreshing quality is a relief to the great intensity and outpouring of the heart and soul of the first movement. Its delicate, intimate, quiet nature is another expression from within. The use of the *voix celeste* stop, by its gentle undulations, is a direct depiction of

water, which symbolizes "the fountain of life" or God. The two voices in dialogue above this background sound express the "longing" for the grace that is offered through becoming a believer; they symbolize a perpetual yearning for the "eternal light of the world", Jesus Christ. This registration reappears several times throughout the piece as a kind of refrain.

### III. Le Dieu caché

#### The Hidden God

“My eyes cannot bear the splendor of Thy glory. Allowing for my weakness, Thou hidest beneath the veils of the Sacrament.”

Anon., *Imitation of Jesus Christ, Book IV, Chapter XI*

“On the Cross, His divinity alone was hidden; now, moreover, His humanity is also invisible. Nevertheless, proclaiming and believing both, I make the same request as the repentant thief.”

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Adoro Te*

The mystery, delicateness, and intimacy of this piece are very touching and moving. Its colors are very subtle, one color gently blending into another, and they are somewhat faint. We cannot completely see them because of the “veils of the Sacrament”. This is the first movement in strophic form: it consists of two stanzas in which we hear several different elements stated and then repeated with amplification: a plainsong *Alleluia*; a haunting

flute solo; the startling song of a Tristram’s Grackle; and the distant, sweet Music of Adoration. The last is the most important: it is the mystery of receiving Christ’s *hidden* body and blood during the Eucharist, it is the mystery of the *hidden* God being sacrificed for us on the cross. The song of the Olivaceous Warbler brings us out of contemplation briefly. Then, a slow cascade of harmonies in complete repose ends the piece.

### IV. Acte de Foi

#### Act of Faith

“My God, this I firmly believe...” *Act of Faith*

After the subtle impressionism and delicate, hazy colors of the second and third movements, Messiaen gives us a very powerful piece. It is a strong, outward response to the very inwardly felt emotions of the preceding movements. It describes the word “firmly” from the *Act of Faith* over and over again. It is a very exciting, rhythmic piece, full of accents and rattling percussion effects. We have left

the inwardness of the first three movements and the celestial atmospheres of the second and third: we are present in this world, strongly and outwardly proclaiming our beliefs in an almost primitive, ritualistic fashion. The music is extremely emphatic in its insistence, repeating its ideas three times (another strophic movement), with more and more abandon and enthusiasm each time.

## The Mysteries of Christ

*Messiaen also tells us that “all of the graces which Christ won for us at various times in his earthly life keep their power forever, and this power is applied to us at each feast of the liturgy. This idea is developed at length in the beautiful book by Dom Columba Marmion, le Christ dans ses Mystères (Christ in His Mysteries). It is above all through the holy Eucharist that the graces of the Mysteries of Christ are given to us; therefore, the [seven] pieces that follow next describe each Mystery of Christ in chronological order.”*

## V. Puer natus est nobis

### For Unto Us a Child Is Born

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” *Isaiah 9:5 [6]*

It is almost impossible not to think of Handel’s setting of this text in his *Messiah* when reading the biblical subtitle that is the inspiration for this movement. The bright, ecstatic, contagious happiness that permeates his music is unforgettable, and it is difficult to imagine another interpretation of these words. Messiaen’s music, nevertheless, *is* quite different — it is much the opposite. While Handel captures a kind of childlike wonderment at the appearance of the Saviour in the form of a babe, Messiaen reflects very deeply on the great mystery of the miracle of virgin birth and that God could appear to man as his Saviour in the form of a baby. Perhaps this movement is Mary’s reflections on this

mystery. In any case, Messiaen uses subdued (but very colorful) sounds to draw us back into his inner, mystical world. The movement is built around the plainsong *Puer natus* (the Introit for Christmas Day), which is presented to us in the form of a kaleidoscope, a constant evolution of the plainsong theme in various colors, textures, and tempos. It is another strophic movement. At the end of the second stanza the vivacious Olive-Tree Warbler proclaims its innocent joy at this miraculous birth in a kind of inserted cadenza. The meditation ends on the “refrain registration” (see movement II) with a last interpretation of the plainsong theme, in deep reflection and wonder.

## VI. La Manne et le Pain de Vie

### Manna and the Bread of Life

“You have given your people the food of angels, from heaven untiringly sending them bread already prepared, containing every delight, satisfying every taste. And the substance you gave demonstrated your sweetness toward your children, for, conforming to the taste of whoever ate it, it transformed itself into what each eater wished.”

*Wisdom 16:20, 21*

“The life that Christ gives us through the Communion is His whole life, with the special graces that He earned for each of us in living His mysteries.”

Dom Columba Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries, Chapter 18*

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

*St. John 6:51*

In this movement Messiaen puts us in the middle of the desert, using both the peaceful and howling desert wind, a plaintive “song” of a desert tribe, and desert birds. The Morning Chat reappears often throughout the piece and the Desert Lark has two extended solos. All this produces an extremely lonely and solitary atmosphere. It is a picture of a

meandering life searching for direction and meaning. Near the end of the piece, where there is a very subtle orchestral crescendo and diminuendo, this lonely searching transforms itself into a passionate plea. Then, in the last phrase of the piece, we receive a divine response, a perfect peacefulness. It is “manna falling from heaven”.

## VII. Les Ressuscités et la Lumière de Vie

### The Resurrected and the Light of Life

“He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

*St. John 8:12*

“Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

*St. John 6:54*

After the subtle qualities of the two preceding movements (subdued colors, understated shadings of tempos, sublime and intimate subjects) the seventh movement is stunning and dramatic. It is like a trumpet call of the last judgment. The resurrection — everlasting life, the “light” of life — was promised to us by Jesus. Here, Messiaen gives us a very powerful commentary on what that life will be like. This movement, strong and full of energy,

is rather short. Its impact, however, is major. It is composed of three stanzas, with an introduction and conclusion that spell out the word “r-e-s-u-r-r-e-c-t-i-o-n” (twelve notes in octaves) in Messiaen’s musical alphabet. Each stanza is composed of the same material in the same order, but each becomes successively longer and more intense. This is the first movement that calls for the tutti of the organ.

## VIII. Institution de l’Eucharistie

### Institution of the Eucharist

“This is my body. This is my blood.” *St. Matthew 26:26, 28*

The previous movement left us with the feeling of the great power of the promise of the resurrection. This movement brings us to a very real place here on earth, the Upper Room (the Cenacle), the place where the Last Supper, the Institution of the Eucharist, took place. Here, Messiaen gives us a piece in which we feel as if this act has been suspended in time: we enter a completely other world, one in which we glimpse this serene, sublime moment with the Saviour. We must imagine Jesus and his disciples gathered together in this room, and we must imagine the profound, tender voice of Jesus speaking to them, pro-

nouncing the words (for the very first time) that have linked Christians together through the ages in the act of the Eucharist: “*This is my body. This is my blood.*” While Jesus is talking, we hear the world outside going on just as usual: there is an open window in this room, and through it floats the song of the Nightingale. The repetition and sustaining of the A-flat major chord gives us the warm glow of the holiness which surrounds Jesus in this holiest of moments. In two stanzas and a conclusion, the movement is calm and serene. At the end we are left with the feeling of perfect tranquility and profundity.

## IX. Les Ténèbres

### Darkness

“Then Jesus said to them, This is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

*St. Luke 22:53*

“And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him.”

*St. Luke 23:33*

“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.”

*St. Matthew 27:45*

The aura of holiness that surrounded the eighth movement is suddenly shattered in the ninth. Messiaen has plunged us directly into the events of Jesus' betrayal and crucifixion on Good Friday. We feel and hear the power that the concealment of darkness provides to betray Jesus; the darkness and calamity of nailing Jesus to the cross and his death; the darkness of desertion that covers the earth in the middle of the afternoon. Messiaen's musical description of these events is awesome and overwhelming. In a very short space of time,

he is able to make us feel anguish, hopelessness, and despair, where we are left with a terrible, sick feeling in the pits of our stomachs and an acrid taste in our mouths, as if we are watching the actual event. Messiaen leaves us with the point of view of one who was experiencing the crucifixion, of one who did not yet know of the events that were to follow three days later. We are left with the feeling that the life of Jesus is over. He is dead. We expect nothing more.

## X. La Résurrection du Christ

### The Resurrection of Christ

“Why seek ye the living among the dead?” *St. Luke 24:5*

As promised in the seventh movement, the resurrection is now fulfilled. Here, in this movement, the resurrection is not presented as the quiet, serene, secretive moment (only symbolized by silence) that Messiaen used to portray this mystery in his *Les Corps glorieux*. On the contrary, it is presented on the tutti of the organ as a huge struggle: in great churning

movements and phrases, the struggle that Jesus faces to regain “life” is monumental. At first, the struggle is from deep, deep within. As the movement progresses, the struggle gains and gains in strength, moving from the most intense dissonances to consonance, until it arrives in the glorious, luminous, light of life and love of F-sharp major.

## XI. L'Apparition du Christ ressuscité à Marie-Madeleine

### The Appearance of the Risen Christ to Mary Magdalene

“But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping. And she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.”  
*St. John 20:11-17*

With “The Resurrection”, the previous movement, we reached a tremendous climactic point in the cycle. It was triumphant and glorious. The eleventh movement is just as powerful, but in a very touching and personal way. The main part of this movement is a description of Mary Magdalene’s feelings, which are expressed in a very grand manner. The music comes in very large sections and it is through-composed; there are no repeated stanzas. The only theme that keeps reappearing is the luminous “Voice of Jesus”. This is, by far, the longest movement in the cycle, and it is presented like a dramatic scene of an opera.

As the curtain rises, we see Mary Magdalene just arriving in the garden near the tomb of Jesus. It is still night, but just before daybreak. It is Easter morn. The strings of the orchestra begin to play very faintly in the distance, symbolizing Mary as she weeps very quietly. This is interrupted by a rising figure played by the clarinet, perhaps symbolizing the very first, faint rays of the rising sun. The two ideas now continue to alternate, becoming longer and crescendoing. During this time Mary’s weeping has intensified and the sky has become slightly lighter — for me, shades of rose, mauve, gray, hints of yellow, the night is slowly fading away. The sobbing suddenly stops — Mary is aware that she is no longer alone, that someone is in the garden with her.

After this tremendous outpouring of Mary’s soul, we hear the quiet, luminous voice of Jesus for the first time, calm and reassuring, comforting, seeming to come from afar. He gently says (in French), “Ma-rie, Ma-rie, Ma-ri-e, Ma-rie”! Mary does not recognize the voice.

The next section contains one of the most emotionally devastating moments in all of Messiaen’s organ music. Here, he gives us an incredible musical description of Mary’s disbelief, her tremendous mourning, gradually turning into belief and complete realization that Jesus is everything that he had promised her. Little by little, Mary begins to understand that it is the resurrected Jesus who is in the garden with her. Her heart begins to throb, beating faster and faster, it pounds and pounds until, finally, she screams “Rab-bo-ni”. The music continues and continues to intensify, the accumulation of emotion is almost too much to bear. Completely overwhelmed by the comprehension that Jesus has indeed risen from the dead, the music reaches a crushing climax as Mary’s heart begins to melt. As she begins to accept what she has just witnessed, an incredible calmness begins to overtake her, and she listens to the serene voice of Jesus a second time, again saying, “Ma-rie”.

This time the phrases of Jesus’ voice are extended, becoming a commission to Mary Magdalene: “Go find my brothers and tell them my words: I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Thus, a section follows in Messiaen’s Communicable Language that translates those thoughts into music, ending in a tremendous climax with the proclamation of the word “a-p-o-c-a-l-y-p-s-e” (the revelation of the Resurrection and Ascension) spelled out in Messiaen’s musical alphabet, ten fortissimo notes in octaves.

As night subsides, the music from the beginning now returns in downward motion diminuendoing. We hear the voice of Jesus for the third time, again saying, “Ma-rie”, but this time more faintly. In the pale dawn, this vision of Jesus fades away. The curtain falls.

## INTERMISSION

### Prayers to Christ Through the Holy Sacrament

*Messiaen further tells us that “from the twelfth piece onward, we leave the chronological order of events in the life of Christ, and we are in his Church today, making supplication to Him through the Holy Sacrament.”*

The next seven movements correspond to actual parts of the Mass (Eucharistic service): the Prayer of Consecration, the Fraction, the Prayer of Humble Access, the Communion, the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the Dismissal, and Final Alleluia.

### XII. La Transsubstantiation

#### The Transsubstantiation

**“Sight, touch, and taste cannot convince us; hearing alone ensures my faith. I believe every word that the Son of God has said: nothing is truer than Truth’s own word.”**

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Adoro te*

**“Beneath the two species [the bread and wine], which are no longer substances but only signs, are hidden their sublime realities.”**

Sequence, *Lauda Sion*

The belief that the bread and wine of the Eucharist actually become the flesh and blood of Jesus is a difficult concept for anyone. Therefore, Messiaen has chosen a complex musical device to express this mystery: that of completely serializing the 12 pitches of the chromatic scale, assigning to each of them an octave (an exact pitch), a color, and a duration: a mystery of unusual juxtaposed colors and a kind of timeless rhythm. This music occurs two times, after which follows each time (in the pedal) the plainsong theme, the *Communion of the Feast of Corpus Christi* (the feast of the Eucharist). In addition to its beauty, Messiaen uses this melody to conjure up certain feelings among those who recognize it. Above this theme are two birdsongs, the

Common Garden Bulbul and the Laughing Dove: Messiaen often relies on birds (one of God’s own creations and his most natural musicians) to convey a message that is particularly difficult to comprehend or explain, such as the Transsubstantiation. That is the first half of the piece. The second half is an inward, passionate reflection on the same plainsong theme, now on the foundations stops of the organ with the Swell trumpet. The piece ends in a mood of tenderness, elevated sweetness, and trust as the plainsong theme appears in its third transformation using the “refrain registration” (see movement II). This movement corresponds to the “Prayer of Consecration” of the Mass.



### XIII. Les deux Murailles d'Eau

#### The Two Walls of Water

“The waters were divided. And the Children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.”

*Exodus 14:21, 22*

“If the Host is broken in two, do not despair at all, but know that there is as much beneath each fragment as there is beneath the complete Host. By no means does one divide the substance, one only breaks the sign, which modifies neither the state nor the splendor of Him who is beneath the sign.”

Sequence, *Lauda Sion*

The previous piece was a quiet, far away meditation. This piece is a robust toccata, depicting the furious waters of the Red Sea. After the powerful introduction, we begin to hear the tremendous, rocking waves, underneath which is an intense theme in the pedal. This must be a picture of the Red Sea as the Israelites, led by Moses, saw it as they approached, looking for an escape from the pursuing Egyptians. We hear this toccata two times. Each time it is followed by the song of the Melodious Warbler, perhaps urging the Israelites on toward the perilous waters. As they arrive, the waters part and open up. The calmness of the waves lapping against the sides

of the riverbed is amazing after the previous ferociousness. Then, suddenly, the toccata returns (the waters have closed) in even greater force. The Israelites have been saved, the Egyptians swallowed up. Next we hear the call of the Great Egyptian Reed Warbler, trumping the triumph. The piece concludes as it began, but with even more power. Just as God was present in these waters as they parted in twain, he is also present in the Eucharist as the bread is broken. The power of this piece communicates the renewed energy that believers feel as they experience the spiritual. This movement corresponds to the “Fraction” of the Mass.

### XIV. Prière avant la Communion

#### Prayer Before Communion

“Lord, I am not worthy...but speak the word only...”

Words of the Centurion, *St. Matthew 8:8*

This piece returns us to the quiet, elevated, celestial, and sweet. It contains some of the most beautiful and simple music of the whole work. It is the prayer of the believer, preparing to commune with the spiritual, humble and devout. It simply alternates several beautiful plainsong melodies (the *Alleluia of the Feast of*

*Dedication*, the Hymn *Lauda Sion*, and the *Gradual of Epiphany*) with very slow-moving, peaceful, voluptuous harmonies on the faraway voix celeste stop. It transports us to another world. This movement corresponds to the “Prayer of Humble Access” of the Mass.

## XV. La Joie de la Grâce

### The Joy of Grace

**“I come to Thee, O Lord, to taste the joy of the sacred banquet that Thou hast prepared for the poor.”**

Anon., *Imitation of Jesus Christ, Book IV, Chapter III*

**“He who loves, runs, flies! It is in this joy that he is free and nothing can stop him.”**

Anon., *Imitation of Jesus Christ, Book III, Chapter V*

This movement is probably the most difficult to comprehend on first hearing. It is composed entirely of birds singing abundantly with incessant joy. It features three birds: the proclaiming trumpet-call of the Common Garden Bulbul, the delicate response of Tristram's Grackle, and the more urgent call of the White-throated Robin with its three different dynamics. There are six stanzas in all, the birds always singing in the same order. To enjoy this piece I think one must imagine oneself in a garden, a meadow, a forest, (or even in one's bed early in the morning) simply

listening to the birds singing, answering, interrupting one another. One must not be impatient for the time to pass: we have entered the birds' world, into their sense of time. As the stanzas progress the songs of these birds become more extended and virtuoso in proclaiming their uninhibited joy. Thus, Messiaen has totally relied on birds to communicate another difficult concept that is impossible to explain: that which actually occurs during the communion. This movement corresponds to the partaking of the “Communion” of the Mass.

## XVI. Prière après la Communion

### Prayer After Communion

**“My fragrance and my gentleness, my peace and my sweetness...”** St. Bonaventure

This is another simple and sweet movement. It may be surprising to find so many major and minor chords here. The entire movement is in the “refrain registration” (see movement II): the dialogue of the melody features a triplet rhythm (rarely found in Messiaen's music). It is the calm and peacefulness of universal

harmony, a delicate fragrance wafting through the celestial atmospheres. It is giving thanks to God for all that he has given us, especially for the peace and beauty of spiritual life. This movement corresponds to the “Prayer of Thanksgiving” of the Mass.

## XVII. La Présence multipliée

### The Presence Multiplied

**“One alone receives Him — a thousand receive Him, the one receives as much as all those: all receive Him without consuming Him.”**

Sequence, *Lauda Sion*

There are two complementary textures (themes) in this movement, both representing the growing presence of the faithful. The first is a series of rising or falling tritones in three-part canon. The second, a reaction and response to the first, is composed of phrases of full, majestic chords. The idea here is simple

and direct: it is the irrepressible power of the presence of God in his faithful people. All ends on mighty C-sharp octaves. This movement corresponds to the “Dismissal” of the Mass by the priest: “Let us go forth in world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit”.

## XVIII. Offrande et Alléluia final

### Offering and Final Alleluia

“I offer Thee, O Lord, all the outbursts of love and joy, the ecstasies, raptures, revelations, and the heavenly visions of all the saintly souls...”

Anon., *Imitation of Jesus Christ, Book IV, Chapter XVIII*

We have arrived at the end of our journey. The final movement is glorious. It begins humbly, with a plainsong-like prayer, the *Offering*. What follows is a jubilant, brilliant toccata, the *Alleluia* — in which one can envision all the joy, glory, majesty, and awe of the Almighty. Near the end, in powerful octaves, the words “L-a J-o-i-e” (joy) are spelled out in Messiaen’s musical alphabet, six notes, proclaiming emphatically the theme of this movement. The conclusion that follows is a wild exclamation of joy: the fanfares

continue, brilliant whole-tone scales dissolve into a frenzy under which a plunging pedal melody proclaims its exultation, a harmonized “rocket” brings us to a devastatingly passionate, overpowering chord, repeated seven times — one feels as if the gates of heaven are opening — and, the piece concludes with a final plummet to the sustained low C of the pedal. This movement corresponds to the “Final Alleluia” of the Mass: “Thanks be to God, Alleluia, Alleluia”.

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Olivier Messiaen at Petichet, his summer retreat near Grenoble