A NEWLY DISCOVERED COMPOSITIONAL APPROACH TO BIRDSONG:
LA FAUVETTE PASSERINETTE OF OLIVIER MESSIAEN

A Thesis in
Music
by
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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

December 2017
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Abstract

While working with Messiaen’s birdsong notebooks in 2012, Peter Hill discovered a new birdsong composition for solo piano, spread out over three separate notebooks (Mss 23020, 23023, 23072). He then put the piece together based on the composer’s indications. Published by Faber Music in 2015 as *La Fauvette Passerinette* (Subalpine Warbler), this avian-inspired piece of Messiaen allows a new and enticing look into his musical world.

In this thesis, I examine *La Fauvette Passerinette*, uncovering its unique formal construction, as well as dense and colorful harmonic language. I also explore its programmatic nature and poetic symbolism, relating it to Messiaen’s birdsong music in general.
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Acknowledgements

I feel truly blessed to have had the opportunity to work with and learn from so many of the brilliant faculty in the School of Music at the Pennsylvania State University throughout my graduate studies. As this thesis project comes to a close, I find myself compelled to acknowledge and thank several professors specifically, beginning with my thesis advisor and musical mentor, Dr. Vincent Benitez, for his knowledge, wisdom, and abundant patience, and without whom this thesis would not have been possible. I must also thank Dr. Eric McKee and Dr. Maureen Carr for their continued encouragement, as well as for the diverse range of courses they taught, which have not only challenged me as a music theorist but also led me to new ways of thinking about music.

I am also blessed to have a gracious and caring support system that has always supported me through the trying times that come along with being in graduate school. First, I thank my parents, Randy and Susie Jones, for their constant love, encouragement, and support, which have all made it possible for me to pursue a career in music. Additionally, I must say thank you to my partner Andy Hunt, for supporting me through the hard times and keeping me at least relatively sane and calm throughout this entire thesis project. Finally, I wish to thank Éditions Alphonse Leduc for graciously allowing me to reproduce portions of Catalogue d’oiseaux, La Fauvette des jardins, and the Petites esquisses d’oiseaux, and Faber Music for allowing me to reproduce portions of La Fauvette Passerinette in this thesis.
In a conversation with French journalist Claude Samuel in 1986, Olivier Messiaen declared that “in the artistic hierarchy, birds are the greatest musicians on our planet.”\(^1\) This fascination with birdsong began when Messiaen was a child and continued throughout his life. He would often turn to birdsong for musical ideas, and his highly refined ear allowed him to dictate these avian melodies, a practice that he began at the age of fourteen. Inspired by birdsong, Messiaen incorporated this musical material into his compositions. Many of his works use birdsongs in some manner, including three large works for piano devoted solely to this material: *Catalogue d’oiseaux* (1956–58), *La Fauvette des jardins* (1970), and *Petites esquisses d’oiseaux* (1985).

Until recently, these three pieces were thought to be Messiaen’s only avian-inspired works for piano. That changed in 2015, however, with the publication of an unknown piece, *La Fauvette Passerinette* (subalpine warbler).\(^2\) Peter Hill, renowned pianist and Messiaen scholar, discovered this piece while working with Messiaen’s birdsong notebooks in 2012. Composed in 1961, *La Fauvette Passerinette* provides a new and informative look into how Messiaen approached birdsong in his compositions.

Many composers throughout history, such as Beethoven, Saint-Saëns, and Ravel, incorporated stylized birdsong into their music. Messiaen, however, was the first to make use of authentic birdsong as a source of fully-formed musical ideas in his compositions. When writing

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2. See the bibliography for publication information on all birdsong compositions cited in this thesis. Throughout my thesis, I refer to birds by their French names, providing the English translation in parentheses at the first mention of a bird.
birdsong-based works, Messiaen would adapt a bird’s microintervallic and fast twitterings to his musical language, which he notated while in different countrysides and parks. In addition, he employed other musical techniques that would sonically recreate a bird’s environment, and even its colorful plumage. This act of musical translation provides a challenge to scholars analyzing Messiaen’s music. Since all of these techniques are designed to emulate nature, and the formal organization of his avian-inspired works does not lend itself well to linear narratives, Messiaen’s birdsong works are fundamentally difficult to grasp. But it is this combination of abstract musical forms recreating nature and Messiaen’s compositional practice that make analyzing his birdsong pieces so appealing.

*Catalogue d’oiseaux* was Messiaen’s first birdsong work composed for piano. In this monumental opus comprised of 7 volumes and 13 movements, Messiaen blends the songs of over 80 birds with his pitch and rhythmic techniques in order to present poetic views of the birds as they exist in nature. The next birdsong work Messiaen composed for piano, or so we thought until the discovery of *La Fauvette Passerinette*, is *La Fauvette des Jardins* (1970). Although this work is similar to the *Catalogue* in its use of coloristic and poetic associations, it is presented as a single large movement—instead of multiple movements or volumes—in its detailing of a day in the life of a garden warbler. The last birdsong work for piano is the *Petites esquisses d’oiseaux* (1985), which consists of 6 short movements, 3 of which focus on the song of the *rouge-gorge* (robin). Due to the brief nature of this collection, Messiaen makes no attempt to depict the birds’ settings in nature; instead, he provides more succinct musical images, which supply yet another opportunity to examine his compositional practice as related to birdsong.

The turn to birdsong was important for Messiaen. In the first half of his career, he composed music with a decidedly theological focus, leading to compositions of monumental

2
proportions in the 1940s, such as *Vingt Regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus* (1944) and the *Turangalîla-Symphonie* (1946–48). Beginning in 1949, Messiaen shifted direction, writing music that was more abstract in orientation, as exemplified in the *Quatre Études de rythme* (1949–50), *Messe de la Pentecôte* (1950), and *Livre d’orgue* (1951–52). This was a difficult and exhausting time for Messiaen. He was physically drained after composing the colossal *Turangalîla-Symphonie*, as well as trying to maintain a full schedule of concerts and performances. Matters were complicated even further after his first wife, Claire Delbos (1906–59), underwent a botched hysterectomy in January 1949.³ This operation worsened her ongoing mental illness, and she was later placed in a psychiatric institution to receive care during the last years of her life. With all of this going on, Messiaen sought to refresh his compositional aesthetic—as well as his own peace of mind—in order to provide himself with new inspiration and creative impetus. Through the careful study of birds and their songs, and assisted by ornithologists Jacques Delamain and Jacques Penot, Messiaen embarked on a new creative path.⁴

The first piece to show Messiaen’s increased reliance on birdsong was *Le Merle noir* (1951–52) for flute and piano. In this composition, Messiaen imitates the song of the blackbird with much greater accuracy than the more stylized birdsongs found in his previous works. This piece was followed by two larger works for piano and orchestra, *Réveil des oiseaux* (1953) and *Oiseaux exotiques* (1955–56). *Réveil des oiseaux* outlines the daily cycle of numerous birds from midnight to dawn, and concludes with the silence of midday. *Réveil* is also notable for including Messiaen’s first experimentation with adding harmonic coloration to birdsong melodies. In


⁴. After learning of Messiaen’s use of birdsong in his music, Delamain invited Messiaen to his home to experience new birdsongs. Penot was the director of a bird sanctuary that Messiaen would visit. See Hill and Simeone, *Messiaen*, 200, 218.
*Oiseaux exotiques*, Messiaen combines Greek and Indian rhythms with the songs of birds from various parts of the globe. These works, along with the composition of the *Catalogue d’oiseaux* in 1956–58, show how he had succeeded in refreshing his creative aesthetic, and the newfound freedom that came from working with birdsong would greatly affect his creative outlook for the rest of his career.

Messiaen added prefaces to the scores of his birdsong works. In these instances, he not only included comments about his compositional techniques but also provided poetic visions for each piece. This is especially evident in the prefaces to each movement of the *Catalogue d’oiseaux*. These texts include descriptions of the birds and their natural habitat. Messiaen conveys the physical setting and landscape, the colors of the sun, lake, and even the bird’s plumage, as well as other creatures nearby, such as frogs and cicadas. The action of the birds during a given time frame is also described, and even a fight between numerous birds for a single prey is outlined in the preface to “La Buse variable” (The Buzzard). Messiaen was careful to present his poetic vision for these works so that the listener could be transported to these specific scenes in nature. Although he did not write a descriptive preface to *La Fauvette Passerinette*, the study of the other birdsong works allows one to construct his or her own artistic impression.

In this thesis, I analyze *La Fauvette Passerinette* with two goals in mind, one serving the other. I provide information regarding Messiaen’s compositional language, including his modes of limited transposition and invented chords, along with the important sonorities directly linked with birdsong. This information will be used to shed light on how Messiaen evokes the poetry of nature in this work. To analyze *La Fauvette Passerinette*, I will use post-tonal analytical techniques. This includes the use of pitch-class set theory to identify and assess important sonorities, such as the trichord 016 (sc 3-5), which is one of the generative sets used throughout
I shall also identify the piece’s larger harmonic fields by means of its referential collections to bring clarity to the structure of the work. These fields include those generated by diatonic, chromatic, and transpositionally symmetrical collections (which include all of Messiaen’s modes). In certain instances, I shall refer to modes 1 or 2 as whole-tone or octatonic collections, respectively.

Chapter 2 supplies an analytical context for my interpretations of Messiaen’s birdsong works. This involves examining how he uses his modes, invented chords, and other sonorities in his depictions of birds. Chapter 3 provides a more expansive examination of La Fauvette Passerinette’s place in Messiaen’s birdsong œuvre. In chapters 4 and 5, I present my analysis of the piece. In addition to considering its structural design and aspects of harmonic continuity, I explore the deeper aesthetic meaning of La Fauvette Passerinette. Chapter 6 will supply concluding remarks about the significance of this piece and birdsong in general in Messiaen’s compositional world, and propose directions for future study.

Messiaen tells us stories through his birdsong works. He did not simply use birdsong to come up with abstract musical material, but sought to convey nature as closely as possible. Being an artist with such a vivid imagination, Messiaen created wonderfully detailed scenes, from the terror evoked in the cries of “La Chouette Hulotte” (The Tawny Owl), to the violent struggle in “La Buse variable,” and even the joyful depiction of a morning by the sea in “Le Traquet rieur” (The Black Wheateater). These enticing views into the lives of birds, as seen through Messiaen’s

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5. The use of pitch-class set theory allows one to label and compare pitch collections. Any musical idea can be reduced to its constituent pitch classes (numbered 0 to 11, with C=0, C#/Db=1, and so on, but with T and E representing Bb [10] and B [11], respectively). An unordered collection of pitch classes (pcs) is called a pitch-class set (pc set), and belongs to a family of sets—related by either transposition or inversion—known as a set class (sc). It is represented by a Forte set name or its prime form (beginning on 0, with the other pc numbers most packed to the left). In this thesis, pc sets are shown enclosed in square brackets, and prime forms in parentheses. I refer to scs by their name, prime form, or both, depending on the situation. See Joseph N. Straus, Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory, 4th edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 1–94, passim.
eyes, in combination with his complex musical language, invite the continued study of his birdsong music.
Chapter Two: Messiaen’s Birdsong Harmonies

This chapter considers Messiaen’s harmonic practice as related to birdsong in order to contextualize the examination of La Fauvette Passerinette. It surveys the composer’s modes of limited transposition and specialized chords (accords spéciaux), as well as the diatonic and chromatic collections he uses in his avian-inspired music. To formalize this discussion, I use concepts derived from post-tonal analytical techniques, such as pc set theory, interval cycles, and triadic post-tonality.¹ The chapter also provides selected examples of how Messiaen uses these sonorities in the Catalogue d’oiseaux, La Fauvette des jardins, and the Petites esquisses d’oiseaux.

The Modes of Limited Transposition

Messiaen developed the modes of limited transposition when he was a student at the Paris Conservatoire and used them throughout his compositional career. Since they are all examples of transpositionally symmetrical collections, they have a restricted number of transpositions (Example 2.1). Mode 1, sc 6-35 (02468T), the whole-tone collection (WT), has only two discrete versions. Although moments of whole-tone emphasis can be found in Messiaen’s music, he typically refrained from using the collection, probably because composers such as Debussy or Dukas used it so well in their music.

Example 2.1: Messiaen’s Modes of Limited Transpositions

Mode 1: 6-35; <02468T>; Whole-tone collection; 2 transpositions

Mode 2: 8-28; <0134679T>; Octatonic collection; 3 transpositions

Mode 3: 9-12; <0234678TE>; Enneatonic collection; 4 transpositions

Mode 4: 8-9; <0125678E>; 6 transpositions

Mode 5: 6-7; <01567E>; 6 transpositions

Mode 6: 8-25; <024568TE>; 6 transpositions

Mode 7: 10-6; <012356789E>; 6 transpositions

Mode 2, sc 8-28 (0134679T), the octatonic collection and a mode strongly preferred by Messiaen as reflected by its presence in his music, consists of four overlapping intervallic segments (marked with brackets in Example 2.1). The last note of one segment becomes the first note of the next, and so on, until the entire mode is produced. In fact, if one transposes the first segment by a series of m3s, the original collection of pcs is generated. These overlapping
segments create, moreover, four nodal points within the mode (0369), where one finds situated major and minor triads and various seventh chords (Example 2.2).

Example 2.2: The Distribution (0369) of Selected Tonal Harmonies in Mode 2

This disposition of sonorities familiar from tonal music allows the mode to be “in the atmosphere of several tonalities” at once. Finally, mode 2 can be generated by any two C3 cycles, strongly suggesting that the m3 plays a significant structural role in mode 2-generated harmonic fields.

Mode 3, sc 9-12 (01245689T), the enneatonic collection and another mode preferred by Messiaen, consists of 3 overlapping intervallic segments, resulting in 4 distinct transpositions. There are three nodal points in this mode (048)—as well as secondary ones lying a semitone below these primary ones—where one finds tonal harmonies related by M3s (Example 2.3). Mode 3 can be generated, furthermore, by any three C4-cycles, indicating that the M3 is an important structural element in mode-3 passages.

---

Example 2.3: The Distribution (048) of Selected Tonal Harmonies in Mode 3

Modes 4, 5, 6, and 7 contain two overlapping intervallic segments, forming two nodal points within each mode (06). Although modes 4, sc 8-9 (01236789), and 6, sc 8-25 (0124678'T), are also privileged collections (in terms of Messiaen’s usage of them in his music), they do not occur as frequently as modes 2 and 3. As a group, these 4 modes are distinguished from modes 1, 5, and 7 by the lack of inclusion relations between them, suggesting one possible reason why Messiaen might have favored them in his music. Conversely, the other modes definitely exhibit inclusion relations. Mode 5, sc 6-7 (012678), is a subset of modes 4 and 6, and mode 7, sc 10-6 (012346789T), lacking 2 pcs to complete the total chromatic, contains modes 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6. As a result, these structural relations might have prompted Messiaen not to use these modes as often as the other ones in his music.

The tonal harmonies contained in modes 4, 5, and 6 are fewer in number and distributed less uniformly than those found in modes 2 and 3. Mode 4 contains major and minor triads as well as dominant and half-diminished 7th chords, but none of them occur at the two nodal points (06), whereas mode 5 does not contain any complete triads or 7th chords. Mode 6 contains more tonal harmonies than modes 4 and 5, but these likewise occur at places in the mode other than the nodal points. Although mode 7 contains the most possible tonal harmonies, they are

distributed irregularly when compared to modes 2 and 3, and are at odds with Messiaen’s compositional aesthetic known as the “charm of impossibilities.”

As with modes 2 and 3, modes 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7 can be generated by interval cycles. In fact, mode 1 can be generated by different cyclic combinations: one C2-cycle (C2₀ or C2₁), two C4-cycles a whole step apart (C4ₙ, n+2), or three C6-cycles a whole step apart (C6ₙ, n+2, n+4). Modes 4 and 5 result from combinations of C6-cycles a half step apart, while any five C6-cycles can generate mode 7. Mode 6 involves the combination of four C6-cycles two half steps and one whole step apart (C6ₙ, n+1, n+2, n+4). Finally, and most importantly, interval cycles can bring about a sense of linear motion in static modal passages found in Messiaen’s music.

In Messiaen’s compositional aesthetics, the modes of limited transposition are first and foremost harmonic colors, not scales. Messiaen had a form of synesthesia that allowed him to experience colors internally when he heard complexes of sounds or read a score. But for some reason, he only identified modes 2, 3, 4, and 6—his preferred ones—as suggesting color associations in the *Traité de rythme*. In relation to Messiaen’s birdsong music, modes 2 and 3 are frequently employed—not surprisingly, since they are his favorite modes—for coloristic purposes of a programmatic nature (Figure 2.1 lists their color associations). In “La Rousserolle Effarvatte” (The Reed Warbler) from the *Catalogue d’oiseaux*, for instance, Messiaen paints the delicate image of an orange, pink, and mauve sunrise emerging from the violet-hued pink and

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4. The “charm of impossibilities” is a phenomenon that dominated Messiaen’s musical thought throughout his career, and is reflected by the static nature of the modes of limited transposition, nonretrogradable rhythms (rhythmic palindromes), and symmetrical permutations (durational schemes in which a permutation order is applied cyclically until the original scheme is reproduced again). Messiaen believed that one could exploit these limitations and impossibilities to create a greater musical and emotional impact. See Samuel, *Music and Color*, 47–48.


6. The sound-color associations listed in Figure 2.1 are derived from Messiaen, *Traité de rythme*, 7:110–34.
Figure 2.1: Mode-Color Associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode:</th>
<th>Color:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Blue-violet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Gold and brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Orange, specks of gold, milky white with opaline reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Gray and mauve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Blue and green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Orange striped with red and a bit of blue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mauve of the early morning. He accomplishes this by superimposing harmonic layers derived from modes 2.1 and 3.1 (Example 2.4). In the top layer (denoted by the upper-two circled pitch collections), mode 3.1 suggests—with its dominant color association of orange—the sunrise. In the bottom layer (lower-two circled pitch collections), mode 2.1—with its color association of blue-violet—connotes the pink and mauve of the early morning.7

Example 2.4: *La Rousserolle Effarvatte, Catalogue d’oiseaux*, IV, p. 11, mm. 10–12.

Messiaen, Catalogue d’oiseaux © 1964 by Leduc

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7. Mode 2.1 probably suggests pink and mauve (a move to the warmer side of the color spectrum) due to its combination with mode 3.1’s warm dominant color.
The Specialized Chords

Many of Messiaen’s specialized chords also find their way into his birdsong works.\textsuperscript{8} The *chords of transposed inversions on the same bass note* (CTI) consist of four sonorities derived from the modification of a $V^9$ chord (Example 2.5).\textsuperscript{9} Messiaen generates this chord type by replacing the third of the $V^9$ with the note lying a half step above. He then adds two appoggiatura notes (forming a perfect fourth) above this sonority, thus creating the root-position version of this chord type. Messiaen then inverts the altered $V^9$, using three out of its four inversions.\textsuperscript{10} As for the appoggiaturas, they remain registrally intact, except in the chord’s second inversion where they are sounded within the sonority. Finally, Messiaen transposes the inversions so that they all share the same bass note as the chord type’s root-position form. The resulting four chords are all members of sc 7-20 (0125679), which creates difficulties when trying to determine

Example 2.5: The Chords of Transposed Inversions on the Same Bass Note.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & CTI & CTI\textsubscript{1} & CTI\textsubscript{2} & CTI\textsubscript{3} \\
\hline
Modified Dominant-Ninth & & & & \\
Root Position & & & & \\
First Inversion & & & & \\
Second Inversion & & & & \\
Third Inversion & & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

8. The following discussion about Messiaen’s specialized chords is indebted to his *Traité de rythme*, 7:135–47, 149–60, 165–72, 181–90; and Benitez, “Chords and Colors: The Harmonic Vocabulary of *Saint François d’Assise*.”

9. Following Benitez (“The Harmonic Vocabulary of *Saint François d’Assise*”), I abbreviate Messiaen’s specialized chords in the following fashion: (1) *chords of transposed inversions* (CTI, CTI\textsubscript{1}, CTI\textsubscript{2}, CTI\textsubscript{3}), *first chords of contracted resonance* (1CCR\textsubscript{1}, 1CCR\textsubscript{2}), *turning chords* (TC\textsubscript{1}, TC\textsubscript{2}, TC\textsubscript{3}), and *chord of total chromaticism* (CTC).

10. In the *Traité de rythme* (7:139), Messiaen acknowledges another inversion that is present between the second and third inversions. He regards it as sounding less attractive and not connecting well with the others, hence he left it out.
the specific inversion of a CTI in a musical passage. To do so, one must rely on analyzing the
CTI’s intervallic spacing.

Like the chords of transposed inversions, the *first chords of contracted resonance* are also
derived from the modification of a $V^9$ chord (Example 2.6).\(^\text{11}\) Messiaen colors this chord with
inferior resonance elements (in this case, the D and E♭ at the bottom of the chords in Example
2.6) to create the seven-note sonority, sc 7-z12 (0123479).\(^\text{12}\) It is paired with its z-related set, sc
7-z36 (0123568), which precedes it. Five of the notes of the first sonority, excluding the
resonance notes, act as appoggiaturas to notes of the second.

Example 2.6: The First Chords of Contracted Resonance.

![Diagram of chords]

*Turning chords* consist of three eight-note chords, with the first two, scs 8-5 (01234678)
and 8-4 (01234578), functioning as appoggiatura chords to the modified tonal harmony
contained in the last one (Example 2.7).\(^\text{13}\) This harmony, sc 8-14 (01245679), consists of a major
triad with an added second, colored by the addition of a split or variable sixth and two notes
serving as superior resonance.

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12. Inferior and superior resonance involve adding notes below or above a sonority, respectively, in order to change
its harmonic color. See Messiaen, *Technique*, 71–73.

13. My interpretation of Messiaen’s turning chords is indebted to Benitez, “The Harmonic Vocabulary of *Saint
François d’Assise*."

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As its name suggests, the *chord of total chromaticism* is a sonority that contains all 12 pcs. This chord combines tonal harmonic elements, as well as superior and inferior resonance, to achieve its unique coloristic effects. In the birdsong works, this chord is often partitioned into a lower-register eight-note chord (sc 8-16 [01235789]), followed by a higher-register four-note chord (4-16 [0157]). Example 2.8, taken from the *Petites esquisses d’oiseaux*, clearly shows the CTC partitioned into its two parts. Set class 8-16 is sounded quietly in the middle range of the piano, which, with the help of the pedal, supports the remaining four pitches, sc 4-16, sounded above.

Like the modes of limited transposition, the specialized chords evoke color associations in Messiaen’s colored-hearing synesthesia. In an interview with Claude Samuel, Messiaen provides the colors associated with CTIs built on C#:

“With the fundamental on C-sharp, the upper range is the color of rock crystal and citrine; the lower range, of copper with gold highlights. In the first inversion on C-sharp: wide expanse of sapphire blue, rimmed with less intense blue (fluorine blue, light Chartres blue) and with outer rims of violet. The second inversion on
Example 2.8: “Le Rouge-gorge,” *Petites esquisses d’oiseaux* mvtx. I, p. 6, mm. 7–12

D-flat is orange, with stripes of pale yellow, red, and gold. The third inversion on D-flat, from high to low, moves through pale green, amethyst, and black.¹⁴

The inversions of a CTI can be interpreted as different arrangements of an added-sixth chord, with resonance elements sounding above. It is the major triad of this tonal harmony that governs the color association of a CTI, resonance elements enhancing its color (Figure 2.2 lists the colors major triads evoke in Messiaen’s synesthesia).¹⁵ Similarly, the color association of a CTC derives from its harmonic base.¹⁶ For example, a CTC with an A-major harmonic base will basically evoke blue in Messiaen’s synesthesia.

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¹⁴. Samuel, 64–65.


Figure 2.2: The Color Associations of Major Triads.\textsuperscript{17}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Triad:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Associated Color:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-flat</td>
<td>Copper (by itself)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-flat</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F#</td>
<td>Sparkling of all colors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-flat</td>
<td>Blue-violet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-flat</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Red, bordering on brown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chords of contracted resonance also have important coloristic associations. As mentioned above, five notes from a 1CCR\textsubscript{1} act as appoggiaturas to five in the ensuing 1CCR\textsubscript{2}. This second chord can be interpreted as containing a major harmony with added sixth and ninth, sounding above two inferior resonance notes (producing a gong-like effect), and it is this tonal harmony that dictates the fundamental color of the chord.\textsuperscript{18} For their part, turning chords are more coloristically complex. Again, their color is governed by the added-note sonority contained in a TC\textsubscript{3}. This is evident in the dominant colors Messiaen associates with most turning-chord groups: they correspond to the color association of the group’s last chord.\textsuperscript{19}

Messiaen incorporates these specialized chords throughout the birdsong works, and we can find general patterns regarding their use. The CTIs are typically found in descriptive, coloristic passages, such as the \textit{thème décor} used throughout the Rouge-gorge pieces of \textit{Petites esquisses} (Example 2.9). As a pair, 1CCRs are frequently employed as referential sonorities. As

\textsuperscript{17} Benitez, “The Harmonic Vocabulary of \textit{Saint François d’Assise}”; Rößler, 117–18; Samuel, 148.

\textsuperscript{18} Benitez, “The Harmonic Vocabulary of \textit{Saint François d’Assise}.”

\textsuperscript{19} See \textit{Traité de rythme}, 7:166–72.
shown in Example 2.9, they are used as a “motto chord” motive. Not being part of the birdsong material itself, these motto-chord ideas provide coloristic and harmonic references alongside avian-inspired music. Conversely, the CTC is used to introduce birdsong material, as a harmonic link between coloristic chords and birdsong melodies, and even as a cadential chord.

**Diatonic and Chromatic Collections**

Although Messiaen’s music is not diatonic in the common-practice period sense, he nonetheless employs the diatonic collection, sc 7-35 (013568T), and its constituent subsets in various ways, suggesting the presence of tonal passages in his music. For instance, Messiaen uses major and minor triads, $V^7$ and $V^9$ chords, and pentatonic sets to create contrast within a chromatic or modal harmonic field, emphasize important structural points, or to fulfill coloristic purposes.
Chromatic collections are made up exclusively—or almost exclusively—of semitones. Unlike the modes of limited transposition, they can be transposed to any pc level (excluding the trivial $T_0$) without duplicating its entire content. What is more, in Messiaen’s music, large chromatic collections are frequently realized as chromatic clusters, whereas smaller chromatic collections are realized as widely spaced sonorities.

Messiaen frequently employs chromatic collections throughout his birdsong works. Although his use of chromatic material in these pieces is apparent and at times pungent, there are a few patterns that can be observed. In “Le Chocard des Alpes” (The Alpine Chough) from the *Catalogue d’oiseaux*, the aggregate is used to represent both the cold, massive, and relentless alpine setting as well as the frantic flight of the music’s protagonist (Examples 2.10 and 2.11).


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Smaller chromatic collections, such as (012), (014), and (016), are also employed in these birdsong works, with leaps of minor ninths, major sevenths, and tritones predominating (Example 2.12).

Example 2.12: Smaller Chromatic Collections, *La Fauvette des jardins*, p. 25, m. 2

Messiaen, *La Fauvette des Jardins* © 1972 by Leduc
Conclusion

Familiarity with Messiaen’s harmonic techniques enhances our understanding of *La Fauvette Passerinette*. In examining his modes of limited transposition, specialized chords, and coloristic devices, we can begin to better understand how Messiaen structured his bird music, particularly from harmonic perspectives. Whereas the modes can lend themselves to some of the static moments in his works, the specialized chords can function as recurring motto ideas, familiar referential collections, or delineators of phrases or even formal sections. Most important, however, is Messiaen’s use of these techniques in relation to sound–color. Aside from simply employing coloristic effects in a programatic sense, such as in representing green foliage, blue water, or the oranges and reds of a sunset, there is also a symbolic aspect to his use of color. Educated in the arts, Messiaen was aware of the symbolic nature of color used in the visual arts, but his devout faith also allowed him to make use of Christian color symbolism. Once we have analyzed the music and uncovered these important techniques, then the underlying structure and poetic meaning become ever clearer.
Chapter Three: Symbolism and Development

This chapter focuses on the roles birdsong and nature play in Messiaen’s compositional aesthetic. It will discuss connections birdsongs have to Christian symbolism, including how birds are analogous to angels in terms of how they communicate, as well as the connection between birdsong and the language of the Holy Spirit (in that both forms of communication transcend words and human understanding). Birds and nature are also connected to God through creation. God gave birds a leading role in creation, allowing them to multiply on land before any other creatures.\(^1\) Since Messiaen viewed God as the alpha and the omega of creation,\(^2\) it is not surprising, then, that birds posses a significant position in his music.

Messiaen’s love of nature and birds was a direct reflection of his Catholic theology. He has even gone so far as to say that when he composed:

> The first idea I wanted to express, the most important, is the existence of the truths of the Catholic faith… The illumination of the theological truths of the Catholic faith is the first aspect of my work, the noblest, and no doubt the most useful and most valuable—perhaps the only one I won’t regret at the hour of my death.\(^3\)

Messiaen’s religious beliefs shaped his entire life, hence it is not unexpected for him to experience nature as interacting with God’s creation. Robert Sherlaw Johnson has even suggested that “the whole of Messiaen’s output is concerned either with the revelation of God

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through Christianity, the action of God in man in the form of love or, in the pieces in which birdsong predominates, the action of God in nature.

This chapter also surveys the development of Messiaen’s use of birdsong in his compositions, providing stylistic details of these works, focusing on those after 1950. In addition, this section considers Messiaen’s process of dictating and working with avian materials. The chapter’s ultimate goal is to provide a symbolic and stylistic context in which to place my analysis of *La Fauvette Passerinette*.

Speaking about his religious beliefs, Messiaen has said that, “I’ve always been a believer, pure and simple.” However, he did not have a sudden conversion at any point in his life, but instead devoted himself to the study of the Scriptures and theology as a whole. Messiaen also served as organist at the Église de la Sainte-Trinité (hereafter La Trinité) in Paris, a position he held from 1931 to 1992, where he performed and improvised music for the liturgical services. With Messiaen’s close connection to Catholicism, as well as being involved in the Church as an organist, focusing each week on the Eucharistic liturgy, it is quite predictable that his beliefs would affect every aspect of his life, including his compositions.

**Birdsong and Christian Symbolism**

In Christian symbolism, birds can be likened to angels, in that both are often viewed as divine messengers, although neither communicate in ways humans can understand (a type of transcendent communication). In the preface to *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité*


5. Samuel, 16.

Messiaen discusses the mystery of angelic communication by stating, “Only angels have the privilege of communicating with each other without language, without convention, and, even more marvelously, without the considerations of time and space.” His views on how angels communicate echo the information presented by Saint Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*, the same theological work from which Messiaen spells out selected passages using the *langage communicable*. In question 107, “The Language of Angels,” Aquinas describes how angels communicate: “If an angel, by his will, directs his mental concept in order to manifest it to another, then the latter immediately becomes aware of it: in this way one angel speaks to another.” And later: “The angelic speech consists of an intellectual operation, but the angel’s intellectual operations disregard space and time.” Hence, angelic communication can take place regardless of local distance or even difference in time.

Issues of heavenly language are also linked to the Holy Spirit, which is often represented by a dove. As described in 1 Corinthians 2:12–13, when believers receive the Holy Spirit, they are exposed to a new, heavenly language: “Now, the Spirit we have received is not the spirit of the world but God's own Spirit, so that we may understand the lavish gifts God has given us. And these are what we speak of, not in the terms learnt from human philosophy, but in terms learnt from the Spirit, fitting spiritual language to spiritual things.”

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8. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 107. My translation of these selections is based on the source and Messiaen’s reproduction of the same selections in the preface to *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité*. Regarding the *langage communicable*, Messiaen lays out the information for this technique in the preface to the *Méditations*. In order to musically communicate spoken words, Messiaen developed a new musical alphabet by grouping letters by means of phonic production and assigning each letter a pitch, register, and duration.

Birds also represent the desire for freedom, flight, and the heavens in Christian symbolism, which is an image that attracted Messiaen. In particular, birds can evoke the freedom linked with the spirit of the divine, as suggested by 2 Corinthians 3:17: “Now this Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” This connection between birds and ideals of liberty and freedom is noted by Messiaen in the preface to “Le Prêche aux oiseaux” (The Sermon to the Birds) from scene 6 of his opera Saint François d’Assise, with an allusion to Keats’s Endymion: “Everything of beauty must come about from Liberty, the Liberty of glory. Our Brothers the birds await the day . . . that day when Christ will reunite all creatures: those of the earth, those of the sky!”

Birds were always “a subject of joy and astonishment” for Messiaen, and he enjoyed the moments away from the trials of everyday life to interact with them and learn from nature. In regard to the Messe de la Pentecôte (1949–50), Messiaen stated that the bird “is the symbol of the Alleluia, the joy of the Holy Spirit, it is also the symbol of the human soul which wants to lift itself above terrestrial concerns and rise towards God.” In fact, this yearning for peace and a heavenly dwelling away from the troubles of the physical world is described in multiple scriptural passages as groanings of the Holy Spirit within believers. In 2 Corinthians 5:1–5, the text communicates how God gave the Holy Spirit to believers as a pledge that their spiritual groaning for the heavenly realm will eventually be fulfilled. In Romans 8:22–26, the Spirit

11. NJB.
intervenes and provides a new language to believers in prayer: “And as well as this, the Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness, for, when we do not know how to pray properly, then the Spirit personally makes our petitions for us in groans that cannot be put into words.”

Birdsong can be linked with different divine emotions in Messiaen’s music. As early as the *Technique*, Messiaen referred to birds as “our little servants of immaterial joy.” In “Communion,” the fourth movement from the *Messe de la Pentecôte* subtitled “Les oiseaux et les sources” (The Birds and the Springs), there is an extended section of birdsongs accompanied only by staccato gouttes d’eau (drops of water). Together, the birds of the heavens and springs of water praise God and express the joy and mystery of a believer participating in communion. Another instance of birdsong expressing spiritual joy is found in Act I, scene 3 of *Saint François d’Assise*. In this instance, Messiaen uses the song of the merle bleu (blue rock thrush) from Delphi, Greece to express divine joy when the Leper is healed both physically and spiritually after being kissed by Saint Francis. In Act II, scene 6 of *Saint François*, Messiaen recreates the friar’s famed “sermon to the birds,” a pinnacle of the composer’s birdsong music. The song of the fauvette à tête noire (blackcap) punctuates the sermon, serving as a form of divine affirmation and commentary.

Instances of birdsong used to express human experience are not infrequent in Messiaen’s works. This is illustrated by his use of the Brazilian Uirapuru-verdadeiro (musician wren) as an omen of death in *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum* (1964). In the *Catalogue d’oiseaux* and *Saint Frainçois*, Messiaen employs the cries of various owls to communicate fear (fear in a

14. NJB.


human sense, not in regard to the emotional state of the birds themselves). The fifth movement of the *Catalogue*, “La Chouette Hulotte” (The Tawny Owl), emphasizes phrases from the chouette hulotte and chouette chevêche (little owl) to evoke the terror of the night, which itself is represented by quasi-serial techniques redolent of the composer’s *Mode de valeurs et d’intensités* (1949). Messiaen also uses these birds in a similar fashion in *Saint François*. In scene 1, these owls highlight the malevolent aspects of the night in Saint Francis’s narrative about the meaning of perfect joy. In scene 7, the chouette hulotte again appears, now evoking the dark and terrifying atmosphere surrounding Saint Francis as he receives the stigmata on Mount La Verna. Messiaen also uses birdsong to convey the sparse and lonely atmosphere of the desert in *Des canyons aux étoiles*... (1971–74). But birds, of course, are not restricted to suggesting dark and terrifying emotions. For example, in the *Turangalîla-Symphonie* (1946–48), stylized birdsong (based on songs from the rossignol, merle noir, and fauvette des jardins) accompanies the work’s “love theme” and is used to represent the serene joy of lovers at rest in movement 6, “Jardin du sommeil d’amour” (Garden of the Sleep of Love).17

Birdsong is likewise connected with Messiaen’s preoccupation with time and eternity and its depiction in his music. Since Messiaen viewed God as eternal, immutable, and simultaneous, as a composer he chose to focus on time and space, which exhibit qualities contrary to the nature of God. Given its status in his compositional thinking, Messiaen favors birdsong in his temporally constructed musical passages. This is evident when he is addressing the qualitative and quantitative aspects of time. According to Gilles Tremblay, Messiaen’s idea of qualitative time is associated with “the time of nature, of events, psychological and physiological time,”

17. Johnson, 90.
whereas quantitative time is geometric in nature.\textsuperscript{18} As typified by works such as \textit{Réveil des oiseaux}, \textit{Catalogue d’oiseaux}, and \textit{La Fauvette des jardins}, Messiaen represents lengthy time spans of a 24-hour day through much smaller segments within a piece. In \textit{Réveil des oiseaux}, for example, the piece is designed to follow the progression of time, from the early hours of the morning, through the chorus of birdsongs at dawn, to the silence of midday. Constituting the piece’s first 97 measures (rehearsal numbers 1–13), the opening piano solo spans the progression of time from midnight to 4:00 a.m.

Through its more measured attributes, Messiaen’s quantitative approach to time accentuates the free-flowing, qualitative nature of birdsong. To grasp this idea, let us first consider an example of how Messiaen structures quantitative time in his music. In the first movement of the \textit{Livre d’orgue} (1951–52), “Reprises par interversion” (there is no birdsong included), he makes use of \textit{personnages rythmiques} (rhythmic characters) applied to three Hindu rhythms, where one rhythm (\textit{pratāpacekhara}) increases by a 32nd-note, the second (\textit{gajajhampa}) decreases by a 32nd-note, and the third (\textit{sārasa}) stays the same. Through this technique of rhythmic characters, and its incremental increase and decrease of duration, Messiaen quantifies musical space in the piece. What is more, he uses open and closed fan permutational techniques, and retrograde motion, to construct a large rhythmic and melodic palindrome.\textsuperscript{19} In \textit{Chronochromie} (1959–60) Messiaen uses a more expansive version of these permutational techniques known as symmetrical permutations, which is applied to a chromatic series of 32


\textsuperscript{19} The term “open fan” characterizes pitch movement from the center to the extremes of a 12-note series. Specifically, notes of the second half of the series are alternated with notes of the first half in retrograde. Conversely, “closed fan” characterizes pitch movement from the extremes to the center of a 12-note series. In this instance notes of the second half of the series are alternated in retrograde with notes of the first half. See Benitez, \textit{Pitch Organization and Dramatic Design} in “\textit{Saint François d’Assise},” 421, 422.
durations, spanning one 32nd-note to thirty-two 32nd-notes. He sounds three of these permutations in the musical texture; they are colored by chords of transposed inversions, chords of contracted resonance (I), and turning chords, respectively. Above these colored durational series appears an unmeasured counterpoint of birdsongs, with eighteen separate birdsong melodies coming together in the closing Epôde of the work. Given these factors, Tremblay regards Chronochromie as synthesizing both Messiaen’s qualitative and quantitative approaches to time.

### Developments and Dictation

Although birdsong has shaped Messiaen’s musical thinking since his earliest works (the first of the eight Préludes for piano [1928–29] is entitled “La Colombe” [“The Dove”]), his use of avian materials developed throughout his career. Unspecified, stylized birdsong melodies appear in these early works. As per his practice at the time, Messiaen did not name specific birds in prefaces to works until the Quatuor pour la fin du Temps (1940–41). In the early 1950s, however, there was a noticeable change in his birdsong style, and he began to provide detailed information about the birds that he used in subsequent works.

No doubt partly attributed to receiving assistance and training from professional ornithologists Jacques Delamain and Jacques Penot, as well as his own detailed ornithological research, Messiaen began to shift from a stylized approach to writing birdsong to more authentic realizations. The first piece to utilize birdsong material exclusively was Réveil des oiseaux

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20. Samuel, 94. This approach is foreshadowed in “Liturgie de cristal” movement from the Quatuor pour la fin du Temps, where independent rhythmic and harmonic pedals create an abstract foundation over which birdsong freely flows.

Here one sees Messiaen’s first attempts in using harmony to reproduce the timbre of birdsong by placing the same harmonic coloration above each note in the melodies for the *grive musicienne* (song thrush) and *loriot* (golden oriole), respectively. With its prominent piano part, this piece also begins to show the development and increasingly significant role of that instrument in these works.

In *Oiseaux exotiques* (1956), Messiaen combines birdsongs from around the globe, coupled with Indian and Greek rhythms, to create a piece that is less realistic than *Réveil* (in that some of the birds present would never actually appear together in nature). Yet, due to the lack of a program, Messiaen achieves a more flexible musical result. A new sense of harmonic experimentation is also seen in *Oiseaux exotiques*, with avian melodies now harmonized unequally, instead of with the same harmony appearing with each note. Whereas the piano writing in *Réveil* was predominantly in octaves, except for when multiple birdsongs appear at once, in this piece, Messiaen uses incredibly varied harmonies at the piano to reproduce the more varied colors and timbres of birdcalls.

It was during preparations for *Oiseaux exotiques* and *Catalogue d’oiseaux* that Messiaen first began to notate birdsong from recordings. Possibly coming into contact with the American

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22. Although *Le Merle Noir* (1951–52) for flute and piano is the first work to bear a bird title, *Réveil des oiseaux* is the first piece in which Messiaen used only birdsong material.


Bird Songs records as a gift from composer Darius Milhaud in January 1954, Messiaen studied and took repeated notations from these discs.\textsuperscript{25} As a result, the minute details and individual birdsong characteristics became ever clearer. Messiaen continued to notate birdsong from nature wherever his travels took him. His work with recorded birdsongs, however, led him to be more selective with the material he acquired, as contrasted with Réveil where he includes large, unedited portions of birdsong taken directly from his notations.\textsuperscript{26}

Now equipped with massive amounts of ornithological research and experience in dictating and working with birdsong, Messiaen composed Catalogue d’oiseaux rather quickly. Peter Hill observes that seven of the movements were completed in just over five months between September 1956 and February 1957, with the remaining movements added in short bursts of composition, either during the summer of 1957 or the following year.\textsuperscript{27} The notebooks in which Messiaen recorded the birdsongs for Catalogue are filled with details, as well as intensely poetic descriptions, of the various settings in which the songs were notated. Messiaen included these details not only in each movement’s descriptive program but also in the music itself. The result is more of a documentary rather than a catalogue. More than simply reproducing avian melodies, in Catalogue d’oiseaux Messiaen provided a glimpse into the everyday lives of the birds and created new musical forms based on the natural progression of life.

\textsuperscript{25} Hill, “From Réveil des oiseaux to Catalogue d’oiseaux,” 153.

\textsuperscript{26} Messiaen also worked with several other birdsong recordings made by Ludwig Koch, including Songs of British Birds (recorded in 1952 and 1953, and released by His Master’s Voice) and More Songs of Wild Birds (recorded in 1937 and released by Parlophone), the so-called “Disques Angletere” (English discs). Other birdsong recordings Messiaen studied include the “Disques suédois” (Swedish discs), Sture Palmér’s Radions fågelskivor (1938–56), and the “Disques suisses” (Swiss discs), Hans Traber’s So singen unsere Vogel (1955). See Hill, “From Réveil des oiseaux to Catalogue d’oiseaux,” 157.

\textsuperscript{27} Hill, “The Genesis of Messiaen’s Catalogue d’oiseaux,” 53.
In the compositions after the *Catalogue* and *Chronochromie*, birdsong continues to play a prominent role in his music. In works such as *Sept Haïkaï* (1962) and *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum*, birdsong is used not as primary musical materials but in a more symbolic or representative manner. We have already seen how Messiaen uses the song of the Uirapuru-verdadeiro as an omen of death in *Et exspecto*. In *Sept Haïkaï*, birds are not selected solely for their melodies, but also with respect to the color of their plumage. Messiaen returns to the poetic world of *Catalogue d’oiseaux* in *La Fauvette des jardins* (1970). As mentioned previously, the progression of an entire 24-hour day is compressed to fit within this large work for piano, lasting roughly 30 minutes in duration. This work shows Messiaen’s continued interest in evoking nature through birdsong.

Following the completion of *Saint François*, Messiaen fell into a deep depression.²⁸ He was physically and artistically spent and was unsure if he could continue to compose. Yvonne Loriod-Messiaen’s remedy to this crisis was to ask for a work starring her favorite bird, the Rouge-gorge. Messiaen responded by composing the *Petites esquisses d’oiseaux* (1985). In this comparatively short work (each of the six movements takes less than three minutes to perform), Messiaen presents birdsong without any program, poetic backdrop, or non-avian material (aside from a thème de décor that ties the movements together). Just as it had been a means to free Messiaen’s writing from the experimental aspects of his works from the early 1950s, now birdsong served as a lifeline back into the world of composition, allowing him to compose until the time of his death. Messiaen’s preoccupation with notating birdsong also continued until the end of his life.

end of his life, with the final entry in the birdsong notebooks written during the summer of 1991.²⁹

When notating birdsong, Messiaen preferred to work simply with pencil and paper.³⁰ Sometimes Yvonne Loriod-Messiaen would accompany him on these treks into nature with a tape recorder in hand. Messiaen would later notate these recorded versions, which allowed him to compare his rapidly notated version of a specific birdsong with a more detailed version taken from the recording. To facilitate his notations, Messiaen developed a musical shorthand where pitches are represented simply by dots spaced according to the given rhythm with a few indications for articulation.³¹ The version taken down during fieldwork would often be more artistic, and therefore preferred by Messiaen. To incorporate a specific birdsong into a composition, he would take numerous notations and synthesize them to recreate a characteristic version of the song.

The high tessitura, rapid speed, and unique timbral characteristics of birdsong pose problems for notating and performing these melodies. Messiaen would be true to the rhythms of birdsong, although frequently using only sixteenth and thirty-second notes. To overcome issues related to the high pitch registers of birdcalls, he would first lower the pitch material to more human levels. He would seek to maintain the ratio between pitches, preserving, as a result, a bird’s melodic contour. Although Messiaen was proud of the accuracy of his birdsong notations, he still added bits of his own compositional language. On this he says:

Personally, I’m very proud of the exactitude of my work; perhaps I’m wrong, because even people who really know the birds might not recognize them in my


music, yet I assure you that everything is real; but, obviously, I’m the one who hears, and involuntarily I inject my reproductions of the songs with something of my manner and method of listening.\(^{32}\)

Before one can analyze and comprehend the detailed musical language of Messiaen’s birdsong works, one must first understand what birdsong meant to him as a composer. Throughout his life, Messiaen was captivated by birds and their songs. For him, birds were symbols of “immaterial joy” and “a subject of joy and astonishment,” as is seen by the symbolic use of birdsong in many of his works. Messiaen even depicts divine joy through birdsong, one facet of the connection between his Catholic theology and birdsong. He composed works using birdsong material as malleable melodic ideas, symbolic of emotion or religious belief, and even poetic depictions of a bird as the primary soloist in its own natural environment.

As a rich tapestry of symbolism and poetic meaning in combination with its incredibly rich musical language, birdsong in Messiaen’s music is worthy of continued musicological research. It is understandably exciting then to receive new insights into this colorful world in the form of *La Fauvette Passerinette*. As I turn to my analysis of this newly published work in subsequent chapters, I will show how this piece fits alongside the other birdsong works in terms of scope, harmonic language, and symbolic importance.

\(^{32}\) Samuel, 94.
Chapter Four: Structural Design in Messiaen’s *LFP*

In chapters 4 and 5, I present my analysis of *La Fauvette Passerinette*. Chapter 4 will serve as a theoretical-analytical backdrop to the next chapter’s reading of the piece’s poetry and symbolism. In this chapter, I analyze *La Fauvette Passerinette* (hereafter *LFP*) from different theoretical vantage points, focusing primarily on form and pitch structure. I show how *LFP* is connected to other avian-inspired works by Messiaen, allowing it to take its place in the rich panoply of his birdsong compositions.

**Formal Considerations**

Traditional formal structures, such as sonata or rondo form, are usually not employed in Messiaen’s birdsong works. Instead, the formal designs Messiaen uses are frequently governed by specific passages of time, the birds’ interactions with each other, and even their interactions with their physical settings. Messiaen achieves formal clarity in these works through thematic recall (via repeated—and at times varied—occurrences of one song or nature theme), clear harmonic delineation between sections (such as juxtaposing modal passages with chromatic ones), and even through the use of silence at the conclusion of a formal section. *LFP* shows how Messiaen clearly had large-scale formal procedures in mind when working solely with birdsong material.

I analyze *LFP* as evincing a compound ternary design, with nested ternary forms (Figure 4.1).\(^1\) As a whole, the work is divided into three sections, mm. 1–122, 123–60, and 161–278, respectively. The first section features two extended duets by two fauvette passerinettes

\(^1\) In this section I approach form primarily from the standpoint of how the analysis of structural phenomena (other than pitch) shapes my reading of LFP. Later, I will show how pitch structure reinforces and enhances this analysis.
Table 4.1: The Compound Ternary Design of *La Fauvette Passerinette*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Overview</th>
<th>Birds</th>
<th>Duration$^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ternary 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Passerinette Duet</td>
<td>00:01–00:52 mm. 1–53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Medley</td>
<td>00:53–2:41 mm. 54–79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A$^1$</td>
<td>Passerinette Duet</td>
<td>2:42–3:25 mm. 80–122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ternary 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Fauvette mélanocéphale</td>
<td>3:26–4:16 mm. 123–29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Medley</td>
<td>4:17–5:22 mm. 130–51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C$^1$</td>
<td>Fauvette mélanocéphale</td>
<td>5:23–6:38 mm. 146–60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ternary 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Six Coucous geais</td>
<td>6:39–7:49 mm. 161–85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Fauvette orphée</td>
<td>7:50–9:07 mm. 186–90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G (based on A$^2$)</td>
<td>Passerinettes</td>
<td>9:08–10:56 mm. 191–278</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

separated by a medley of birds, whereas the second section features solos for the *fauvette mélanocéphale* (sardinian warbler), separated by a medley involving other birds. The final section of the piece contains three extended solos, ending with the passerinettes, but no medleys. Overall, this formal design lends itself to a sense of symmetry and recapitulation, since the work begins and ends with the solos of its main protagonist. This music’s flow of events evoke, moreover, the passing of time, a common thread in many of Messiaen’s birdsong works, since the piece physically centers around the song of the loriot, found within the second medley, who is seen “standing for the sun at midday.”$^3$

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The structural content of *LFP* distinguishes itself from other birdsong works in various ways. Unlike *Catalogue d’oiseaux* and *La Fauvette des jardins*, which include musical passages describing the birds’ physical setting, in *LFP* Messiaen is working only with birdsong materials. In this sense, *LFP* is closer to the earlier *Réveil des oiseaux* and the later *Petites esquisses d’oiseaux*, than these other two works. The only non-birdsong material that occurs in *LFP* are the coloristic chords that introduce and support the songs of the *alouette lulu* (woodlark) and the *rossignol* (nightingale). These chords foreshadow the more refined *thème de décor* used throughout the *Petites esquisses d’oiseaux*.

Various contrasting textures help to define the formal boundaries of *LFP*. Structural phenomena, such as pitch register, tempo indications, dynamics, different types of melodic and/or harmonic figurations, and fermatas also contribute to the piece’s formal design. Analyzing the structure of the piece from these perspectives supplies a foundation for the discussion of pitch structure that follows.

The manner in which structural phenomena clarify the piece’s formal design is exemplified in the first nested ternary (mm. 1–122). Here, Messiaen supplies each bird with a distinct set of musical characteristics that provides the piece with either a sense of formal continuity or static, block-like contrast. These various characteristics and textures are distinguished in part by their tempo, dynamics, pitch content and pitch register. Section A (mm. 1–53)—the opening duet of passerinettes—is sounded at a fairly quick *Un peu vif* tempo, and its nearly constant and fluid 32nd or 16th-note motion does not subside until the fermata that ends the section in m. 53. The register is consistent within this section, generally encompassing C#4–B6, only venturing outside this range as the duet approaches its conclusion.

This texture is in stark contrast with Section B (mm. 54–79). Beginning in m. 54,
Messiaen introduces the slow, thick, chordal thème de décor that introduces the first bird to appear in the medley, the alouette lulu. Appearing with the inscription “haut dans le ciel” (high in the sky), the extremely high range from D6–Bb7 and delicate nature of the alouette lulu is juxtaposed with the more violent, fortissimo outburst from the pie-grièche écorcheur (red-backed shrike) at the opposite end of the keyboard, straddling Eb1–C#4. The fauvette orphée (orphean warbler) immediately follows, unafraid of the pie-grièche’s alarm call, and fills the empty pitch space left between the previous birds, with its range of A2–A5. After these three birds complete their interactions, the rossignol then enters the scene in m. 73, preceded by one of its two associated chordal themes. The varied material within this bird’s song, with its unique inscription of “comme un clavecin mêlé de gong” (like a harpsichord mixed with a gong), results in an extended pitch range encompassing D2–C8.\textsuperscript{5} The song ends with a dramatic exclamation at the uppermost extreme of the keyboard; however, reminiscent of the beginning of the medley, this exclamation provides an exciting conclusion to Section B. The medley ends with a fermata over a blank measure (no specified duration or rests), clear evidence that the formal section has come to a close.

The return of the two passerinettes’ music is evident by the reappearance of the more continuous, fluid motion (at essentially the same register) characteristic of the piece’s beginning. Although the material of this second duet is more varied than the first, now containing trills and thicker harmonies, the melodic figurations, tempo, register, and even dynamic level still produce a sense of musical return. It is at this point that one can feel, at least in hindsight, the sense of continuity or discontinuity provided by these formal sections. Sections A and A\textsuperscript{1}, a combined 87

\textsuperscript{5} The inclusion of the expressive marking “comme un clavecin mêlé de gong” was added by Hill, based on the appearance of nearly identical figurations with the same inscription found in the “L’Alouette Lulu” of the Catalogue d’oiseaux.
measures, contain only one tempo indication (Un peu vif) at the beginning of each section, very few rests that result in a continuous sound, and fermatas only at their conclusions. Section B, however, contains 28 tempo indications, significantly more varied melodic figurations, frequent yet brief periods of silence between birds in the medley, and a total of 5 fermatas in its 25 measures. This sense of textural contrast between formal sections is continued in the second nested ternary.

Section C, the opening of the second large ternary, begins with an extended solo for the fauvette mélanocéphale. This bird’s song is texturally dense, replete with registral, dynamic, and melodic contrasts, providing a sense of clear juxtaposition from the more consistent duet of the passerinettes. The fauvette mélanocéphale’s wide registral range (G1–B7), in addition to the presence of rests and silence within its song, might initially blur the aural boundaries between solo and medley sections. This is due to the fact that, up until this point in the piece, pitch register was generally more restricted, and silences only occurred within medleys or at the conclusion of a formal section.

The ensuing medley comprising Section D contains multiple birdsongs heard previously (fauvette passerinette, rossignol, pie-grièche écorcheur, fauvette orphée), as well as birdsongs that appear for the first and only time within the piece, such as those of the rollier (roller), choeur des guêpiers (choir of bee-eaters), and the loriot. As in the previous medley, Messiaen alternates between songs with contrasting registers to enhance the avian interactions. The comparatively stable harmonies of the loriot (more than hinting at E major) are followed by an empty measure with a fermata, concluding the section. Returning for its second solo, the fauvette mélanocéphale’s song is interrupted for two measures by the rossignol, who apparently still had more to say even after the end of the medley.
The final section of the work is unique in that it is made up of three extended solos without the presence of a medley. Section E is reserved for six *coucous geais* (six great spotted cuckoos) working as one. The relatively low register (D2–B5), extremely thick chords, *Vif* or *Un peu vif* tempo markings, and a total of 7 fortississimo dynamic markings all contribute to this section as being one of the most intense in the entire work. The six coucous’ obsessive repeating of chordal and melodic figurations, frequently emphasizing the birds’ highest note, a B5, eventually give way to the more relaxed solo of the fauvette orphée. Although the range of the coucous is similar to that of the fauvette orphée (Ab2–B5), this bird’s melodic style, quieter dynamic markings, and more subdued tempo markings (*Très modéré* or *modéré*) create tangible contrasts between these sections. The juxtaposition of these extended solos, without the buffer of a medley section, creates the sense of the passing of a longer span of time, and increases one’s expectation for the final extended solo of the fauvette passerinettes.

Entering for a final time, the concluding solo for the passerinettes shows these birds in their most witty and joyous state. With a pitch range focused on the middle of the piano (the total range for the section is C2–G6), the birds predominantly sing as two voices following the same contour with less frequent instances of denser harmonies. Messiaen achieves an intensified variety and contrast in these final minutes, especially in comparison to the passerinettes’ first appearances, by employing various harmonic fields (diatonic, modal, and chromatic) and a wealth of musical details (frequent expressive and articulation markings, as well as more than 80 dynamic markings are found in these 89 measures, 13 of which contain only rests), all under the *Un peu vif* tempo indication.
Pitch Structure

Pitch structures in *LFP* are as varied as the birds within the work. The avian material passes through modal, tonal, and chromatic harmonic fields. Such fields are established through repetition, subset/superset relationships, as well as transposition or inversion operations. Messiaen creates continuity or contrast through these harmonic fields to enhance and clarify the formal procedures at play.

At the beginning of *LFP*, sc (016) generates much of the modal material. As illustrated in Example 4.1, entering with overlapping and successive iterations of (016) shaped by I\(_{10}\) followed by T\(_9\) operations, the first passerinette presents seven of the eight notes of mode 2:2 [235689E0]. Later on in mm. 23–31, the iterations of (016) combine to form (0125689), sc 7-22, a subset of mode 3. These operations point to an important aspect of the generative qualities of (016) in relation to the modes of limited transposition. As shown in Figure 4.1, if (016) is taken through a C3 path, then mode 2 will be generated (0134679T); if C4, then mode 3 will be generated (01245689T). This connection allows Messiaen to use this trichord to create a wealth of birdsong material.

Example 4.1: Sc (016) as a Generative Trichord, *La Fauvette Passerinette*, p. 1, mm. 1–2

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6. This is reminiscent of Messiaen taking a more tonal sonority through a series of major or minor thirds to establish a modal area. Of course, these operations relate back to the harmonic nodes within the given mode discussed in chapter 2.
This exacting development of a single trichord as a means to generate the material for a piece is reminiscent of the musical style of Anton Webern. Observing the connection between the opening measures of LFP and Webern’s style, Peter Hill remarks that, “It almost sounds to me as if… Webern had decided to write birdsong music… It’s lyrical, but also detailed as well.”

A noteworthy comparison of Messiaen’s use of (016) in LFP is Webern’s constant working out of (014) throughout the Concerto for Nine Instruments, op. 24.

Messiaen also uses modal material harmonically throughout the piece. In m. 68, for example, the final descending M7 of the fauvette orphée’s melody is supported by a sonority containing the notes of mode 4:1 (Example 4.2). Another instance is found in m. 77, where the octatonic septachord is used to support the rossignol’s song.

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Example 4.2: Mode 4 in the Song of the Fauvette Orphée, *La Fauvette Passerinette*, p. 4, m. 68

Messiaen also structures the music of *LFP* by establishing various tonal centers. In the song of the loriot (mm. 143–44), E major serves as a referential sonority (Example 4.3). Despite all the pitches in these measures forming the chromatic set 10-1, E major still governs these measures through the presence of an E\(^{add6}\) chord and a melodic line ending with Messiaen’s descending tritone cadential figure, A# to E. In the final song of the passerinettes (mm. 191–277), A major is established not only through the use of A-major triads throughout the section, but also by this sonority being included in melodic figurations. If one takes into consideration the most prominent pitches in the passerinettes’ song, usually the topmost and concluding pitches of a melody, then A major continues to be reinforced.
Chromatic material characterizes the pitch content of some birdsongs in *LFP*. For instance, a descending chromatic line distinguishes the alouette lulu’s song, the first bird to participate in the first medley. Even in the presence of B-major sonorities and possible modal hearings, the chromatic nature of the song still prevails. Similarly, in the abrasive song of the rollier, found in the second medley (m. 141), an (015) trichord ascends chromatically, exhausting all 12 pitches. Some of the dense, chromatic harmonies found throughout *LFP* make it difficult for any specific harmonic field to be established for a significant duration, but it is in these sections that Messiaen is seen focusing on other ideas, such as color associations evoked by invented chords.

Messiaen’s invented chords not only provide clear harmonic arrival points but also accentuate the music’s structural design through their color associations. Messiaen embeds these sonorities within a bird’s song, or uses them to support avian melodic material, or even as melodic ideas. Throughout *LFP*, the first chords of contracted resonance (1CCRs) and turning
chords (TCs) are quite prominent, while other sonorities, such as the chord of total chromaticism (CTC), are paired with specific birds, as in the case of the rossignol.

In medley 1, the first entrance of the fauvette orphée concludes with a repeated, descending major 7th supported by a 1CCR₁ (7-z36). This sonority is heard again in the song of the rossignol. After a CTC (8-16 and 4-16) is used to bridge the gap between introductory (non-avian) and avian material, a 1CCR₁ is used to bring the rossignol’s first phrase to a close. Turning chords also make their first appearance in the rossignol’s song. The repeated chord with the added inscription of “comme un clavecín mêlé de gong” is drawn from a TC₃ (8-14). Preceding this sonority is another turning chord, TC₁ (8-5), which is found in the rossignol’s second introduction. This sonority occurs twice in this passage and leads to the mode 2:3 sonority [35689E0] (7-31) that supports the final phrase of the birdsong. Here, the two examples of TC₁ are related by T₉, the generative interval associated with mode 2 that perhaps facilitates its presence in this final phrase.

In the second medley, the songs of the passerinette and the fauvette orphée are made up almost exclusively of invented chords. Both of these short phrases contain all three turning chords in sequential order (that is, TC₁, TC₂ [8-4], and TC₃), while the passerinette also emphasizes both chords of contracted resonance (1CCR₁ and 1CCR₂ [7-z12]).

Although Section A¹, the first return of the music linked with the passerinettes, contains invented chords (1CCR₂ occurs four times within the section), these sonorities are generally saved for the medley sections. This contrasts with the final ternary section, however, where each individual section includes significantly more melodic figures harmonized with invented chords.
Centricity, Colors and Contrasts

In addition to harmonic fields and textural considerations, the form of LFP is shaped by recurring pc centers and sound-color relationships. Messiaen creates aural continuity throughout the piece with the use of B as a centric pc. As I shall explain, this recurrent pc serves not only as a registral ceiling for most of the birdsong material within the work, but also as an important presence in the harmonic support of avian melodies. Sound-color relationships play a unique role in guiding the form of LFP. The modal opening of LFP sets the tone for the work and presents a visual, coloristic image of the passerinettes. Messiaen also employs complementary colors at critical formal junctures in the work, clarifying both the boundaries of the medley sections as well as the arrival of the final solo. This section is characterized by the consistent presence of the warm colors red, orange, gold, and brown, which contrasts with the clear presence of the cool color blue in the final solo.

The importance of pc B throughout LFP is clear from the first phrase, which ends on B5 in m. 2 (see Example 4.1). One notable characteristic of the passerinette’s song is the trend to reach up to and continuously revisit one single, uppermost pitch. It takes the passerinettes 29 measures to finally settle on one note. After this point, however, the two birds return to this ceiling pitch at an increasing rate, with B5 occurring in this manner six times, and B6 eight times, in the remaining 25 measures. This is comparable to Messiaen’s melodic treatment of the song of the skylark in Saint François, which returns to a high B as if “trying to poke a hole in the sky.” After the passerinettes conclude their first duet, the influence of B5 continues through the first medley.

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8. Messiaen uses the terms “ceiling” (plafond) and “floor” (plancher) pitches to label repeated uppermost or lowermost notes in birdsongs. See Traité 5/1: 252–53.

The introduction to the song of the alouette lulu ends on a tertian-based sonority, a $B^9$ chord with added resonance notes in the right hand, and a B1, the lowest pitch in the medley, serving as its root. In the second entrances of their songs, the fauvette orphée and alouette lulu both reach up to their highest pitches, B5 and B7, respectively (see Example 4.2). The medley comes to a conclusion with the rossignol breaking through this ceiling, reaching up twice to C8.

The second ternary section exhibits a continued emphasis on pc B. In the fauvette mélanocéphale’s song (sections C and C¹), melodic figurations regularly return to B5, and B7 is the uppermost pitch. In the second medley, B2 and B6 serve as the anchors for the E-major sonorities of the loriot (see Example 4.3). For the final ternary section, B5 serves as the ceiling pitch for the six coucous geais as well as the fauvette orphée, but B as a centric pc is conspicuously absent in the final solo from the passerinettes. Partly due to the shift from emphasizing warm colors early in the work to an emphasis on the cool color blue in the concluding section, this turn away from pc B is one important factor in the sense of contrast and arrival of the final solo.

As discussed in chapter 2, sound-color relationships are determined by their evocation via specific keys, modes, or invented chords. The modal opening of $LFP$ allows a clear view into the colors Messiaen is envisioning for the piece, establishing its coloristic framework. He uses mode 2:2 at the opening to suggest gold and brown—dominant colors in the fauvette passerinette’s plumage. Messiaen then switches to mode 3:1 to define the largest modal area in this section (mm. 20–31), suggesting orange, specks of gold, and milky white with opaline reflections. In this opening, Messiaen is not only painting a visual, coloristic image of the main bird, but is also grounding the harmonic color of the entire work in the warm side of the color spectrum.¹⁰

¹⁰ There are possible symbolic interpretations based on the colors found within $LFP$, to be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.
Throughout *LFP* Messiaen juxtaposes complementary colors in order to create clear delineations between formal sections. One such example is in the song of the rossignol, which signals the end of both medley sections. In m. 73, the rossignol’s first chordal introduction ends on a CTC (8-16 [234579TE]/4-16 [6801]) evoking red in Messiaen’s synesthesia, which supports the first phrase of the bird’s song. In m. 77, the rossignol’s second chordal introduction ends on a mode 2:3 septachord (7-31 [35689E0]), which evokes the color green and signals the end of the first medley. This instance vividly illustrates how Messiaen juxtaposes complementary colors to define as well as intensify the boundaries between formal sections.

Messiaen’s use of complementary colors also clarifies arrival points within the work, as exemplified in the final solo for the passerinettes. Most of the piece is centered around the warm side of the color spectrum (orange, red, brown, gold, etc.), but this is opposed dramatically with the arrival of the passerinettes’ final extended solo that emphasizes the cool side through the color blue. This coloristic contrast is achieved through the presence of A-major sonorities and modes 2:1 and 3:3 in the song of the passerinettes, which is preceded by blue’s complementary color of orange in the previous sections.\(^\text{11}\) Coloristic contrast also signals the arrival of the end of *LFP*. After a final presentation of A-major, the work is brought to its ecstatic conclusion with a measure densely colored with invented chords. This final burst of color comes immediately after significantly less-colored chromatic and WT material (Example 4.4), the juxtaposition of which produces the intensified musical and coloristic contrast that brings the work to a close.

\(^{11}\) In Messiaen’s colored-hearing synesthesia, an A-major chord evokes blue, mode 2:1 blue-violet, and mode 3:3 blue-green. See chapter 2, 12 and 17.
Conclusion

In La Fauvette Passerinette, Messiaen presents an avian-inspired work full of rich counterpoint, colorful harmonies, and inventive formal designs. He creates overlapping textural, harmonic, and coloristic connections within LFP, which allow not only the structural design of the piece to become evident but also the avian material to successfully stand on its own without the aid of environmental material for structural support. Through my analysis, I have uncovered key compositional elements of LFP, which, coupled with more detailed coloristic readings, provide the theoretical backdrop for the more detailed and poetic interpretations of the work presented in chapter 5.
Chapter Five: The Aesthetics of *La Fauvette Passerinette*

**Introduction**

In this chapter, I examine *La Fauvette Passerinette* for its poetry and symbolism. After contextualizing *LFP* among Messiaen’s birdsong compositions, I explore relationships between the piece’s birds and their environments, within the time span of a 24-hour day.\(^1\) Since sound-color relationships are an important part of Messiaen’s compositional aesthetic, I interpret the piece according to how colors inform the piece’s narrative.

*La Fauvette Passerinette* and Messiaen’s Birdsong Works

*La Fauvette Passerinette* is unique among Messiaen’s birdsong works for piano for a variety of reasons. Unlike the *Catalogue d’oiseaux* and *La Fauvette des jardins*, Messiaen makes no direct references to the environment in *LFP*. The only non-avian music comes from the introductory chords associated with the alouette lulu and the rossignol, which anticipate the chordal successions that unify the rouge-gorge movements of the *Petite esquisses d’oiseaux* of 1985. *LFP* does not include, moreover, different kinds of birds participating in a dense polyphonic web of sound, as exemplified in the *Catalogue* or *La Fauvette des jardins*; instead, it presents avian materials as independent of each other. Being a posthumous publication, *LFP* also lacks the commentaries that Messiaen typically associates with his music. Given this lack of information about composerly intent, the analyst has to present his/her own reading of the piece’s poetry and drama.

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1. My examination is in keeping with Messiaen’s formal approach that focuses on the dynamic events of nature occurring during a single day.
Continuing the rich harmonic language of the *Catalogue*, Messiaen provides elaborate harmonizations to avian melodies in *LFP*. These harmonizations are more detailed in comparison to his attempts to harmonize birdsong in the *Reveil des oiseaux* of 1953. *LFP* is similar to *Reveil*, however, in that the form of both works is governed primarily by the relationships between the birds themselves. The form of *Reveil* is dictated by a series of solos, interspersed with birdsong choruses. Similarly, *LFP* emphasizes a sequence of solos, but interspersed with birdsong medleys featuring a more rapid succession of avian phrases. Conversely, in *Oiseaux exotiques*, Messiaen uses Greek and Hindu rhythmic patterns to structure the piece’s birdsongs.

*LFP* is also connected to *Reveil* and *La Fauvette des jardins* in depictions of the passing of time. Whereas *Reveil* depicts the passage of time from midnight to midday, and *La Fauvette des jardins* depicts time passing from midnight through the course of a 24-hour day, I interpret *LFP* as suggesting the passing of time from about 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., as I will explain below. The *Petites Esquisses d’oiseaux* is distinguished from these works in that the its movements are too short to depict any large span of time. This work is related to *LFP*, however, in that both pieces lack environmental details, and in that Messiaen utilizes chordal themes to unify various sections.

In spite of its close ties to these aforementioned avian works, *LFP* is intriguing in its originality. Messiaen seems to be experimenting with new means of creating coherence by relying solely on avian melodies, as if he were ready to compose a newly re-imagined *Catalogue d’oiseaux*. If *LFP* suggests the beginning of a second *Catalogue* (as proposed by Peter Hill), then what might this work have looked like?² It is doubtful that Messiaen would have revisited the idea of a more serially conceived catalogue, as were his initial thoughts for the existing

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² In his preface to *LFP*, Peter Hill hypothesizes that the piece may have suggested a second “catalogue of birds.” See *La Fauvette Passerinette*, iii.
It is also possible that he would not have underscored the descriptive, poetic, environmentally related materials as much as in that piece. Although this hypothetical second catalogue might have been less descriptive, it might have also opened new compositional vistas where new formal designs, harmonic techniques, and symbolic perspectives could be found. It is curious that Messiaen never developed this hypothetical project. What with the composition and publication of *Chronochromie* and *Sept Haïkai* in the early 1960s, as well as the death of his first wife Claire Delbos in 1959, and the related legal and financial complications that ensued, Messiaen opted perhaps to proceed with different projects. In any event, birdsong remained an integral part of his compositional style for the rest of his life.

In his prefaces, Messiaen typically provides details about the symbolic, poetic, or descriptive aspects of his birdsong works. Perhaps he included poetic or environmental descriptions of the birds included in *LFP* somewhere in his compositional notebooks, but without these descriptions present in the score, one is left to develop original interpretations of the work. I interpret *LFP* based upon my analysis of the interactions of its different birds and their songs. This view of the piece, as I shall explain, is supported not only by its compositional details but also via its color symbolism.

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3. Based on his work with Messiaen’s birdsong notebooks, Hill suggests that the *Catalogue d’oiseaux* may have originated from a serial plan, “with one piece having a series of rhythms, another a series of pitches.” See Hill, “From *Réveil des oiseaux* to *Catalogue d’oiseaux,***” 166.
A Hypothetical Programmatic Narrative of La Fauvette Passerinette

Following Messiaen’s practice in the Catalogue and La Fauvette des jardins, I offer a hypothetical programmatic narrative of LFP. This narrative encapsulates a global perspective of how the music develops through avian interactions. Peter Hill provided his own programmatic description of LFP in the preface to the score, mimicking Messiaen’s own prefaces. Whereas Hill’s description is more matter of fact, I provide more scenic detail accompanied by musical readings.

My hypothetical programmatic narrative for LFP is set early in the autumn season in southern France. The trees are bright with a kaleidoscopic blend of green, yellow, orange, and red leaves, evoking one of the last clear, warm days of the year. One follows a pair of fauvette passerinettes from mid-morning through late afternoon. Within the course of a single afternoon, these birds interact with a large number of other birds, prompting transformations of their songs, moving from individual twitterings to more unified musical utterances.

After their morning activity, the fauvette passerinettes settle into a tall tree overlooking a valley. These two birds are heard singing over each other, each one stating its own opinion in an overlapping counterpoint. Their heated discussion wanders, with melodies passing through various modal colorings, until the passerinettes come to a reasonable agreement—they have finally decided upon a note to share. Tired after expending energy in their debate, the passerinettes fall quiet as they take a moment to rest.

Singing from high above the red canopy of the trees, the graceful, chromatically falling song of an alouette lulu descends upon the valley below, where a fauvette orphée passes time by


5. This narrative takes its inspiration from the descriptive programs Messiaen wrote for the birds and their natural habitats in the prefaces to the Catalogue d’oiseaux.
taunting a territorial pie-grièche écorcheur. The alouette observes this alternation between the pie-grièche’s dark, grumbling exclamations, represented by fortissimo chords at the lower extreme of the piano, and the orphée’s hops and twirls, before soaring off again with its languid melody wafting gently onto the red canopy beneath it. Nearby, a rossignol is serenely perched on an exposed branch. Supported by the soft breeze moving through autumn-colored leaves, its song seems to reenergizes the passerinettes. Accordingly, the two passerinettes strike up a new discussion. After hearing the melodies from the rossignol, they now work more closely together to come to a conclusion, with their melodies more in sync with each other than before.

At the edge of the valley, a fauvette mélanocéphale jumps into the air and begins its acrobatic routine of dives and turns, landing on a nearby branch only for brief moments of repose. Singing all the while, its melodies contain all the excitement and acrobatics of his flight. The athletic nature of this song is reproduced aurally and physically, requiring the pianist to leap daringly from one end of the keyboard to the other without hesitation.

New and familiar voices then resonate throughout the valley, including the song of a young passerinette, colored with invented chords, singing from within the safety of nearby bushes, as the mélanocéphale continues to practice its routine. The rossignol tries to sing again, only to be interrupted by the pie-grièche écorcheur. The pie-grièche challenges the orphée’s desire to sing all of the time, even convincing the rollier to respond to the orphée’s behavior. A choir of guêpiers stutters quietly in the bushes near the young passerinette. Seemingly unbothered by the activity below, a loriot sings from the top of a tree, its E-major song reverberating throughout the valley and declaring the arrival of midday. Now singing and rustling about in the bushes, the mélanocéphale moves around quickly, dodging leaves and branches as if he were a daredevil. Insistent on its voice being heard, the rossignol finally
interrupts the mélanocéphale, completing its message before finally departing the scene.

By mid-day, the valley is relatively still. A group of coucous geais, singing almost purposefully out of tune, creates an unnecessary ruckus out of place with the calm, subdued energy shared by most of the birds. The fauvette orphée sings underneath the orange glow of the afternoon sun. Previously heard in a heated discussion, the passerinettes take flight, singing a new song against the backdrop of the bright blue autumn sky.

**La Fauvette Passerinette and Color Symbolism**

Color symbolism reinforces my reading of *LFP*. Emphasizing trichord (016), the opening duet between the passerinettes (mm. 1–53) passes through several modally colored sections. Mode 2:2 depicts the brown and gold of the passerinettes’ plumage; mode 2:3, green oak trees; and mode 3:1, the orange glow of the sun. The two-part counterpoint of this section is juxtaposed with the chordal themes and single harmonized lines found in the ensuing medley (mm. 54–79). Warm colors predominate, however, as the alouette lulu (mm. 54–55, 70–71) flies high above the red of the autumn-colored foliage, represented by the B⁹ sonority supporting the song. Red is dominant in the harmonic support of the rossignol’s song as well, evoked by an Eb-major triad found in the lower register of the CTC (m. 73). There is shift to green in order to support the rossignol’s final phrase (m. 77–78). This shift is important, moreover, for two reasons. First, the intensity created by the juxtaposition of the complementary colors red and green signals the end of this formal section. Second, these colors foreshadow the final movement from warm to cool ones that brings *LFP* to a close (mm. 191–279).
Conclusion

*La Fauvette Passerinette* is a fascinating piece, not only for its uniqueness in relation to Messiaen’s other avian-inspired works, but also for its ingenious formal construction, colorful harmonies, and evocative symbolic narratives. It should take its place among Messiaen’s other birdsong pieces, as it can supply additional insights into his compositional aesthetic related to birds. In other words, analyzing its structural and symbolic components can lead to conclusions that can help us better understand how Messiaen composed.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined the newly published work *La Fauvette Passerinette*, not only analyzing its structure but also proposing a programmatic narrative. In this conclusion, I will summarize my findings, as well as explore suggestions for future research, particularly as to how this thesis can be situated in relation to existing scholarly work on Messiaen’s avian-inspired music.

Through my analysis of *LFP*, I have not only shown how the form of the work is shaped by blocks of material (avian solos and medleys), typical of much of Messiaen’s music, but also how Messiaen effectively used complementary colors to clarify the formal boundaries within the work. He accomplishes this on a small scale, as in the song of the rossignol, and on a larger scale, as seen in the arrival of the final solo of the passerinettes. The presence of pc B as a recurring ceiling or floor pitch suggests that this is a compositional staple of Messiaen’s birdsong music, as this pc is used in a similar manner in other like-minded works. I have also suggested the connection to, but not necessarily the influence of, composers such as Webern in Messiaen’s use of sc (016) to generate modally colored avian material.

Messiaen’s birdsong works are obviously worthy of further detailed study. Birdsong was influential from his very first compositions, and increasingly so from the 1950s to the end of his life. Although drastic stylistic changes occur, some birds remain clearly identifiable. These changes should be traced, and their influences on Messiaen’s musical style explored to obtain a better sense of his work a composer.

Much of the extant research on Messiaen’s birdsong works generally falls into one of two catagories: on the one hand, there are theoretical-analytical examinations of various pieces or even specific characteristics of birdsong; and on the other, explorations of the aesthetic and
symbolic nature of birdsong itself. While working on this thesis, I wanted to find a source that synthesized both approaches, especially one that dealt with the theological symbolism and meaning of birdsong, and even its relationship to ecomusicology, in addition to explanations of the inner workings of the notes themselves and the musical-theoretical possibilities involved. Such a source does not exist. Theorists and musicologists alike owe it to Messiaen and this imaginative music to take a more complete, well-rounded approach to researching, analyzing, and discussing his use of birdsong. There is far too much valuable information hidden in this multifaceted material, and the current state of research on this topic is only just beginning to scratch the surface.

My research synthesizes contemporary analytical approaches and theoretical vantage points with an interpretation based on my knowledge of Messiaen’s life and beliefs. Accordingly, I explored the role of birds and birdsong in relation to his Catholic theology and sought to incorporate his love of art and color (and its symbolic meaning) into my readings of his work. Applying a similar approach to the analysis of Messiaen’s other birdsong works will surely yield new insights into his avian-inspired compositional techniques, as well as a better appreciation of his musical output as a whole.

The publication of LFP in 2015 was an important event with respect to Messiaen scholarship. I have discovered, however, that this piece could benefit from a second edition to correct, or at least clarify, some editorial details. Two measures in particular, 171 and 182, require immediate attention. These measures are both missing precautionary accidentals. Without them, one could easily play or analyze incorrect pitches in these chords. In m. 171, not only are precautionary accidentals missing, but the A♮ in the sixth chord of the measure is incorrect, and
should be read as an Ab instead.\footnote{This conclusion is based not only on the presence of Ab in the fourth chord of the measure but also by the clear voicing of Ab in Peter Hill’s recording of \textit{LFP}.} Measures 141 and 277 both contain noticeable inconsistencies with respect to Peter Hill’s recording of the work. In m. 141, there appears to be a chord missing, and in m. 277, the rhythms are noticeably different. I accept the possibility that these inconsistencies may arise from Hill’s interpretation of the work, and I would never wish to downplay either the performance or the editing of \textit{LFP}. Rather, I am simply pointing out observations that may improve the notation of the piece.

The future of \textit{La Fauvette Passerinette} may be uncertain, seeing as some may question the legitimacy of the posthumous nature of its publication. I believe, however, that this intriguing piece holds the possibility of revealing more insights into Messiaen’s compositional practice. I hope to see future research into his birdsong works, research that illuminates the creativity contained within this avian language.
Bibliography:


