

Music Extended Essay

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**The use of birdsong in the music of Olivier Messiaen and
Ross Edwards**

**How and for what purpose do Olivier Messiaen and Ross Edwards
make use of birdsong in their pieces ‘*Les Étoiles et la Gloire*’ from
‘*Éclairs Sur L’au-Delà...*’ and Movement 2 ‘*Lontano e misterioso*’
from ‘*Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*’?**

Word Count: 3986

Abstract

This essay considers both the musical and symbolic significance of birdsong in the music of Olivier Messiaen and Ross Edwards. After an exploration of the musical language of Messiaen and Edwards, the significance of birdsong is examined through the analysis of ‘*Les Étoiles et la Gloire*’ from ‘*Éclairs Sur L’au-Delà...*’ by Messiaen, and Movement 2 ‘*Lontano e misterioso*’ from ‘*Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*’ by Edwards. Through an analysis of how the musical concepts are used, the investigation makes particular note of how the musical gestures derived from birdsong are used within the larger context of these works. This analysis enables the symbolism of birdsong in both movements to be considered.

While birdsong is used for different musical purposes in the two movements, both composers make use of birdsong in order to convey aspects of their spirituality. Messiaen translates several birdsongs to his uniquely “coloured” harmonic language to represent his jubilation at the magnificence of creation. In contrast to this, Edwards makes use of a single birdsong in the form of stylized motifs, which are developed throughout the movement in order to convey the spirituality found within the balance of nature. Both composers make use of the juxtaposition of human and avian music to emphasize different ideas; Messiaen to emphasize that all of creation celebrates the wonder of God, and Edwards to convey the parallels between the physical and the spiritual worlds. Through the inclusion of birdsong in both of these movements, the two composers are able to successfully convey their spiritual beliefs to their audience.

Word Count: 256

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Introduction

Of all the forms of sound found in the natural world, one which has had a profound impact on the development of human music making is birdsong. The vocalizations of birds have been used as inspiration for musical composition since at least the 13th century, and this influence continues to this day. Birdsong has been used as not only the basis for musical and rhythmic material, but also has taken on different symbolism when utilized by different composers.¹

Two composers who have utilized birdsong in their compositions are Olivier Messiaen and Ross Edwards. Although two very different composers with very different musical outputs, both composers acted as musical revolutionaries of their times; Messiaen being a key figure in the development of European art music throughout the 20th century, and Edwards still playing a pivotal role in the development of Australian art music in the 21st century. Though both composers use different musical techniques in their treatment of birdsong, both use birdsong for a similar purpose; as an expression of spirituality. Olivier Messiaen considered birds as ‘master musicians who sang to the glory of God’² and used birdsong to express his devout Catholic faith, while Ross Edwards uses birdsong to convey the balance within nature and as a symbol of the ‘universal and eternal feminine spirit, the Earth Mother, source and nurturer of all things’³.

This essay will compare the musical treatment and significance of birdsong in the works of Olivier Messiaen and Ross Edwards through a close analysis of two pieces – ‘*Les Étoiles et la Gloire*’ from ‘*Éclairs Sur L’au-Delà...*’ by Olivier Messiaen, and the 2nd movement, ‘*Lontano e misterioso*’ of ‘*Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*’ by Ross Edwards. These two pieces also exemplify each composer’s musical aesthetic, and hence will allow for a good comparison of the treatment of birdsong in the music of both composers. This topic is worthy of consideration because it helps illustrate how spirituality can be represented in the art forms of different cultures.

¹ D Giddings, *Birdsong and Music*, 2003, viewed on 19 May 2010, <<http://www.colander.org/gallimaufry/Birdsong.html>>

² P. Hill et al., *The Messiaen Companion*, P. Hill (ed.), Faber and Faber, London, 1995, pg. 303

³ R. Edwards, *About The Music*, Sydney Symphony World Symphony Season, 2001

Olivier Messiaen (1906 – 1992)

Olivier Messiaen was one of the most influential French composers of the 20th century. Inspired by his composition tutor Paul Dukas,⁴ Messiaen first began notating birdsong in 1923 whilst on holiday in the Aube region of France⁵. However, it was not until 1941, with the composition of his '*Quatuor pour la fin du temps*', which featured the songs of the blackbird and the nightingale, that he began making use of birdsong in his music. Over the next few decades, Messiaen transcribed a large number of birdsongs from around the world.⁶ Messiaen saw himself as much of an ornithologist as a composer, and utilized birdsong in his compositions on a regular basis, as a fusion of these two passions.⁷

Messiaen made use of birdsong in his music as an expression of his devout Catholic faith. In many of his works, Messiaen makes use of birdsong as a symbol of his joy at the wonder of God's creation, and it is this meaning which permeates '*Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà...*'.⁸ Messiaen also aimed to convey not only the melodic contour of birdsong, but also the timbre and setting of the birdsong through the use of his distinctive, "coloured" harmonic language.⁹

⁴ C. Dingle, *The Life of Messiaen*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2007, pg. 15

⁵ Hill et al., op. cit., pg. 249

⁶ R. Sherlaw Johnson, *Messiaen*, J M Dent & Sons Ltd., London, 1975, pg. 21

⁷ Hill et al., pg. 2

⁸ Ibid, pg. 523

⁹ J.W. Bernard, 'Messiaen's Synaesthesia: The Correspondence Between Colour and Sound Structure in his Music', *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, Autumn 1986, pg. 55

Ross Edwards (1943 – present)

Ross Edwards is one of Australia's most well-known modern composers.¹⁰ Like Messiaen, birdsong is an important feature of his music; however, unlike Messiaen's almost scientific cataloguing of different birdsongs, the music of Ross Edwards is inspired by birdsong rather than attempting to quote it directly: 'I've never gone out and collected environmental sounds the way [Messiaen] did.'¹¹ Edwards's music often features stylized birdsong motifs, however in their application Edwards is 'mainly concerned with trying to create intimate associations with specific areas,'¹² which 'helps to give his music an identifiable and distinctly Australian sound.'¹³

During the 1970's, the music of Ross Edwards developed into two distinct styles – the "sacred", introspective style, and the "maninya," a faster, repetitive, dance-like style.¹⁴ The contemplative "sacred" style bears the most similarity of intent to Messiaen's works, and the second movement '*Lontano e misterioso*' from '*Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*' is drawn from this compositional style.¹⁵

¹⁰ R. Edwards, *Ross Edwards – Home*, 2010, viewed on 24 June 2010, <<http://www.rossedwards.com/>>.

¹¹ R. Edwards, *Interlude*, Sydney Symphony Emirates Master Series Season, 2002.

¹² P.G. Cooney, *White Ghost Dancing Music Resource Kit*, Australian Music Centre, Sydney, 2006, pg.12

¹³ *Ibid*, pg.13

¹⁴ P.G. Cooney, 'Beyond Sacred and Maninya: Developments in the Music of Ross Edwards between 1991 – 2001', PhD thesis, University of Newcastle, 2003, Pg. iv

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 291

‘Les Étoiles et la Gloire’, ‘Éclairs Sur L’au-Delà...’ – Context

Composed in 1992, *‘Éclairs Sur L’au-Delà...’* was Messiaen’s final work - seemingly fitting as the work’s title literally translates as ‘Lightning-flashes of the Beyond.’¹⁶ The movement is captioned with several verses from the Bible and other apocryphal Christian texts. The various birdsongs used throughout the work, particularly birdsongs from the Southern Hemisphere notated by Messiaen on his eightieth-birthday tour, are used as ‘emblems of another world,’¹⁷ and are used to represent Messiaen’s joy at the vastness and complexity of God’s creation.

‘Les Étoiles et la Gloire’ is the eighth movement of *‘Éclairs Sur L’au-Delà...’*, with the title literally translating as ‘the stars and the glory’. The movement is ‘reminiscent... of a tone poem in its segmentation and description of a magical landscape and natural phenomena’¹⁸. According to Yvonne Loriod-Messiaen in her preface to *‘Éclairs Sur L’au-Delà...’*, the movement is ‘filled with the joy of the stars, of their radiance, of all that in the astral creation is movement, whirling and light,’¹⁹ and this sense of jubilation is conveyed through the use of a variety of birdsongs from Australia, Papua New Guinea, India and France.

¹⁶ Hill et al., pg. 510

¹⁷ Ibid, pg. 519

¹⁸ P.B. Gonzales, *Review | Messiaen: Éclairs Sur L’au-Delà... 2005*, viewed on 19 May 2010, <<http://www.bluecoupe.com/classical/messiaen.html>>.

¹⁹ O. Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L’au-Delà... Première Partie*. Alphonse Leduc & Co., Paris, 1998, pg. 11

'Les Étoiles et la Gloire', 'Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà...' – Musical Analysis

In order to understand the significance of birdsong in this movement, we must consider its interactions with Messiaen's constructed musical material. The movement opens with the principal theme, consisting of a pair of ascending tritones,²⁰ presented by the contrabass clarinet, contrabasses and tam-tam:

*Excerpt 1: Bars 1-4*²¹

Lent (♩ = 76)

CLARINETTE
CONTREBASSE

CONTREBASSES
(toutes)

X. TAM-TAMS

1

In bar 6, Messiaen introduces a series of pianissimo cluster chords, played trilled, in the violas, cellos and cymbal, which he uses to represent 'a nebula: a cloud of gas and dust'²². This highlights the purpose of the movement: a contemplation of the immensity of creation.

Messiaen first introduces birdsong into this movement by using the call of the Superb Lyrebird in bar 16.²³ This melody consists of a series of iambic, homophonic phrases, with an ascending melodic contour, presented by the woodwind and brass, as shown in Excerpt 2:

²⁰ Hill et al., pg. 523

²¹ O Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*. Alphonse Leduc & Co., Paris, 1998, pg. 11 Reproduced with permission

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, pg. 13

Excerpt 2: Bars 16-18²⁴

Très modéré (♩ = 88)
 (Oiseau Lyre d'Albert - Australie) *

Flûtes 1 2 3 4 5 6

Fl. en Sol

3 Hrb.

C.A.

2 P^{tes} Clar.

Clar.

Bassons 1 2 3

P^{te} Trp. 1

Trp. 1

Cors 1 3 5

VIII. Cymb. susp.

5

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²⁴ Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, op. cit., pg. 13

To Messiaen, ‘the lyrebird represented a source of “pure” music, undefiled by the modern world’²⁵ which ‘sang to the glory of God.’²⁶ Hence, by choosing to introduce its song in this movement, Messiaen emphasizes the grandeur of God’s creation. Several versions of this lyrebird motif appear throughout the movement, with the length of the melodic phrase gradually increasing. The motif is alternated with block chords, alluding to the original theme presented at bar 1.

Although this birdsong is presented as transcribed by Messiaen, birdsong by its very nature is largely monophonic. Thus, Messiaen has adapted the birdsong for use within his own musical language, by retaining the melodic contour, but using dense, chromatic harmonies to convey the timbre of the lyrebird’s song. Hill notes that ‘you can usually see what Messiaen meant by his notation [of birdsong], but it is very much a translation... into Messiaen’s musical language.’²⁷

At bar 54, Messiaen reintroduces the cluster chords from bar 6 in the upper strings, while the brass and percussion play a canon featuring melodic fragments based on the tritone motif. The song of the Garden Warbler is presented as a flute solo above the stable harmonic base provided by the strings at bar 57²⁸ (see Appendix 1). This melodic line is unmetred, mirroring the manner in which birdsong occurs in nature. Messiaen was very familiar with the call of the Garden Warbler, having previously composed several pieces based on its song, such as ‘La Fauvette des Jardins’ (1956-58).²⁹ Hence, by using the song of the Garden Warbler, Messiaen stresses the personal nature of spirituality.

The call of the Garden Warbler is used again in bar 147, though here it is presented by two flutes, playing melodically and rhythmically similar phrases in free time.

²⁵ S. Ingham, *Messiaen: Sound to Image*, 2001, viewed on 19 May 2010, <<http://www.kurtbrereton.com/messiaen.html>>.

²⁶ Hill et al., pg. 303

²⁷ P. Hill, *Birdsong in Messiaen*, 2010, viewed on 19 May 2010, <<http://www.philharmonia.co.uk/messiaen/about/birdsong.html>>.

²⁸ Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L’au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, pg. 23

²⁹ Hill et al., pg. 346

At bar 71, Messiaen utilizes the song of the Mallee Ringneck,³⁰ a melodic pattern consisting of repeated demisemiquavers, as shown in Excerpt 3. In his treatment of this melodic line, Messiaen uses accents and loud dynamics, giving it a very energetic feel. This birdsong is presented by the upper strings in a dense, homophonic texture, conveying the rich timbre of the vocalizations of the Mallee Ringneck. By making use of such an animated birdcall Messiaen again conveys the joy of creation.

Excerpt 3: Bars 71-73³¹

Presque vif (♩ = 152)
(Mallee Ringneck - Australie)

1^{re} VI.
(div.)

2^{de} VI.
(div.)

Altos
(div.)

VI. 6 Tpt.-bl.

14

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³⁰ Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, pg. 30

³¹ *Ibid*, pg. 33

This birdcall is contrasted with the more restrained tones of the Eastern Whipbird and the Blackcap in bars 74 and 79 respectively³² (see Appendix 2). The call of the Eastern Whipbird is presented by the woodwinds, and serves to decrease the momentum of the previous musical material, leading into the more subdued call of the Blackcap. This is played legato by the solo flute at a slower tempo. This birdsong is presented with minimal harmonic support, being accompanied by the horns and trombones playing a sustained note, pianissimo. This alternation between thick, harmonically dense textures and relatively thin textures emphasizes the all-encompassing nature of God's creation, ranging from the humble to the magnificent. This pattern of birdcalls is repeated twice, with the second version featuring greater ornamentation. The melodic material of this section is repeated again in bar 177, with elongated melodic phrases.

Between bars 96 and 144, Messiaen makes use of the calls of four different birds - the Mallee Ringneck, the Hooded Butcherbird, the Shama, a North Indian magpie-robin, and the Pied Butcherbird³³. Each of these birdsongs is presented by a different instrumental combination; the Mallee Ringneck's call is presented by the strings, the call of the Hooded Butcherbird is presented by the woodwinds, the call of the Shama is presented by the vibrant tones of tuned percussion, and the call of the Pied Butcherbird is presented by the woodwind and brass. This varied instrumentation may again allude to the universality and omnipotence of God, whilst the jubilatory nature of these birdsong again alludes to the quote from the book of Baruch placed as part of the preface to the movement³⁴: 'the stars shine joyfully at their posts; when He calls them, they answer, "Here we are!" They shine to delight their creator.'³⁵

These melodic motifs reappear from bars 207 to 263, in the same order, with the exception of the final birdsong, where the Pied Butcherbird is replaced with the Grey Butcherbird at bar 239.³⁶ The musical material based on the song of the Grey

³² Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, pg. 31

³³ *Ibid*, pgs. 36-44

³⁴ Hill et al., pg. 523

³⁵ Author unknown, *Baruch - Chapter 3 – Catholic Online*, 2010, viewed on 19 May 2010, <<http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=32>>.

³⁶ Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, pg. 69

Butcherbird utilizes a single rhythmic motif, which is alternated between the strings and the woodwinds, creating harmonically dense chords within a homophonic texture:

Excerpt 4: Bars 239 – 243³⁷

Rhythmic motif played by woodwinds

Modéré (♩ = 138)
(Grey Butcher Bird - Australie)

Rhythmic motif played by strings

32

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³⁷ Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, pg. 69

The use of the calls of the Helmeted Friarbird, the Brown Shrike-Thrush, Brown Oriole, Lewin's Honeyeater, Laughing Kookaburra and Noisy Pitta from bars 264 to 352³⁸ also emphasizes the jubilatory nature of the movement. In the presentation of these birdsongs, Messiaen makes use of extended techniques to imitate the actual sounds of these birdcalls. In bars 296-297, the call of the Brown Oriole is presented by the flutes, clarinets and oboes, beneath which the upper strings play descending glissandi.³⁹ In bars 299-303 and 321-323, Messiaen makes use of the 'nebulous' string trills from the beginning of movement, along with an eoliphone,⁴⁰ to accompany the xylophone, xylorimba and marimba presenting the call of the Lewin's Honeyeater (see Appendix 3). This return to the musical material from the beginning of the movement after such extended use of birdsong focuses the listener's attention back to the idea of the vastness of creation. Here Messiaen again contrasts thick textures with thinner textures to again convey the variety of God's creation.

From bar 305 onwards, different birdsongs are presented followed by a statement of this original tritone motif by the bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet, bassoons, cellos, and contrabasses. This juxtaposition of natural birdsong and Messiaen's tritone motif emphasizes how 'stars, birds and man are all singing to the same purpose'⁴¹; to the glory of God.

At bar 323, the woodwinds, cellos, contrabasses, bells and large gongs play various versions of the original tritone motif, making use of rhythmic augmentation. In this section, the harmonic tension is amplified through the layering of this motif in tritones and perfect fourths. Messiaen describes this section as 'a heap of stars in a constellation,'⁴² and hence the complex polyphonic texture created by the different parts highlights the complexity of God's creation.

³⁸ Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, pgs. 75 - 89

³⁹ Ibid, pg. 80

⁴⁰ A wind machine

⁴¹ Hill et al., pg. 519

⁴² Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, pg. 90

*Excerpt 5: Bar 323*⁴³

Modéré (♩ = 126)
 (taches lumineuses: un amas d'étoiles dans une constellation)

The image shows a musical score for three flutes. On the left, a vertical staff labeled 'Flûtes' has six positions numbered 1 to 6. A large number '28' is written vertically next to it. The main score consists of three staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff is marked with a dynamic of *ff*. The second and third staves are also marked with *ff*. The music features a tritone interval (F#4 and C#5) and a perfect fourth interval (F#4 and B4). The intervals are labeled 'Tritone' and 'Perfect fourth' respectively. A large number '316' is written vertically between the staves.

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At bar 349, Messiaen concludes the movement with the powerful statement of an extended passage based on the tritone motif, presented by the entire orchestra in melodic and rhythmic unison. This section of the work is captioned 'Glory to God in the Highest!'⁴⁴, a reference to the words sang by the angels to the newly-born Christ in the biblical book of Luke.⁴⁵ By layering this melodic line in different registers on different instruments, Messiaen conveys a sense of majesty and grandeur, befitting this glorious image of God.

⁴³ Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, pg. 90

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 96

⁴⁵ Hill et al., pg. 523

Excerpt 6: Bars 349 – 354⁴⁶

96 **Altered tritone motif within the larger melodic structure**
(Gloire à Dieu dans les Hauteurs!)

Un peu lent (♩ = 66)

6 Flûtes
Fl. en Sol
1^{re} Hh.
2^e Hh.
C. A.
2^{1^{re}} Clar.
1^{re} Clar.
2^e Clar.
Clar. basse
Bassons
2^{1^{re}} Trp.
Trp.
Cora
Tvb.
2 Tubas
1^{re} Vl.
2^e Vl. (div.)
Altos
Vcl. (div.)
C. B.
I. Cloches I
II. Cloches 2
III. Cloches 3
VIII. Cymb.
X. T. -tarn

48

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⁴⁶ Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, pg. 96

Thus, throughout this movement, Messiaen makes use of birdsong to illustrate his devout Catholic faith. Birdsong is used to illustrate the eternal love of God and the immensity of his creation. Messiaen also makes use of a variety of birdsongs from around the world to highlight the universality of God.⁴⁷ By juxtaposing the composed tritone motif with various birdsongs, and presenting the two simultaneously, Messiaen emphasizes how all of creation praises the glory of God.

⁴⁷ S. Bruhn et al., *Messiaen's Language of Mystical Love*, Garland Publishing, Inc., USA, 1998, pg. 211.

Movement 2, ‘Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna’ – Context

Composed for Australia’s Centenary of Federation in 2001, ‘*Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*’ is scored in three movements for full orchestra with extended wind, brass and percussion. Ross Edwards composed ‘*Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*’ whilst staying at Leura in the NSW Blue Mountains.⁴⁸ Consequently, Ross Edwards incorporated into this symphony many natural musical patterns such as ‘birdsong, frog and insect rhythms and the pulsating summer drones of cicadas’⁴⁹ from this environment, with birdsong motifs appearing in all three movements. Edwards states that the symphony ‘is also permeated by fragments and transformations of the plainsong *Ave Maria Gratia Plena* (Hail Mary, full of Grace): the Christian Mary, synonymous, for [him], with the universal and eternal feminine spirit, the Earth Mother, source and nurturer of all living things.’⁵⁰ In this movement, Edwards highlights the co-existence of natural opposites in order to emphasize the imbalances he perceives in our everyday existence, thereby creating ‘a chameleon-like surface where everything is constantly changing and interacting, bits of plainsong, Aboriginal chant and all these different elements.’⁵¹

⁴⁸ Cooney, ‘Beyond Sacred and Maninya: Developments in the Music of Ross Edwards between 1991 – 2001’, op. cit., pg. 270

⁴⁹ R. Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*, Ricordi, Sydney, 2001, pg. 1

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ R. Edwards, *About The Music*, Sydney Symphony World Symphony Season, 2001

Movement 2, 'Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna' - Musical Analysis

The first section of this movement⁵² uses layering to represent different aspects of the natural landscape. This layering, along with Edwards's use of birdsong patterns, helps to illustrate his vision of wholeness and harmony within nature. A firm harmonic base is provided by block chords from the brass section, based around the four notes B, C, D and F sharp, with a horn melodic line above this base featuring stable, conjunct motion. The piccolo clarinet plays the main melodic line in its upper register, with other woodwind instruments providing smaller, less frequently repeated motifs. In this section the stability of the block brass chords is used to represent the ground, above which the woodwind motifs are used to represent the sky.⁵³ The interaction of these two layers suggests the balance and harmony found in nature.

Unlike Messiaen, Edwards makes use of only one true birdsong motif in '*Lontano e misterioso*', which is altered and used as the inspiration for other musical material throughout the movement. Although Ross Edwards has stated that he does not strive to directly emulate birdsongs in his compositions, Cooney states that the melodic motif used in the piccolo clarinet shown in Excerpt 7 is 'one of the rare times that Edwards has used actual birdsong, being based on the sound of the Currawongs in the valley that the composer heard from the lookout'⁵⁴.

⁵² From bars 1-31

⁵³ Cooney, 'Beyond Sacred and Maninya: Developments in the Music of Ross Edwards between 1991 – 2001', pg. 295

⁵⁴ Ibid, pg. 292

Excerpt 7: Bars 13-19⁵⁵

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The woodwind section includes Flutes 1-4, Oboes 1-3, Clarinet in A, Clarinets 1-2, Piccolo Clarinet, and Clarinet 4. The brass section includes Horn 1, Trumpets 1-2, and Trombones 1-2. A specific 'Birdsong motif' is highlighted in a box on the Piccolo Clarinet staff, marked '(Solo)'. Performance instructions include 'Piccato (1)', '(1) Independent of conductor's beat', and dynamic markings like 'mf' and 'mp'.

Ross Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*. Reproduced with permission.
 Works available from the Australian Music Centre www.australianmusiccentre.com.au

⁵⁵ Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*, op. cit., pg. 21

This melodic motif utilizes both the melodic and rhythmic patterns of birdsong, as can be seen by comparing the melodic contour of this melodic line to a sonogram image of a fragment of Currawong call.

Figure 1: Melodic Contour of Piccolo Clarinet (bars 14-15)

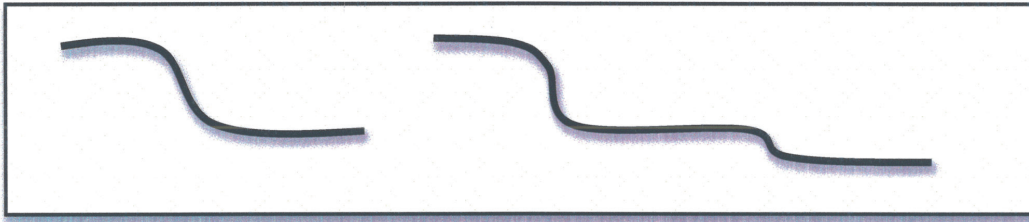
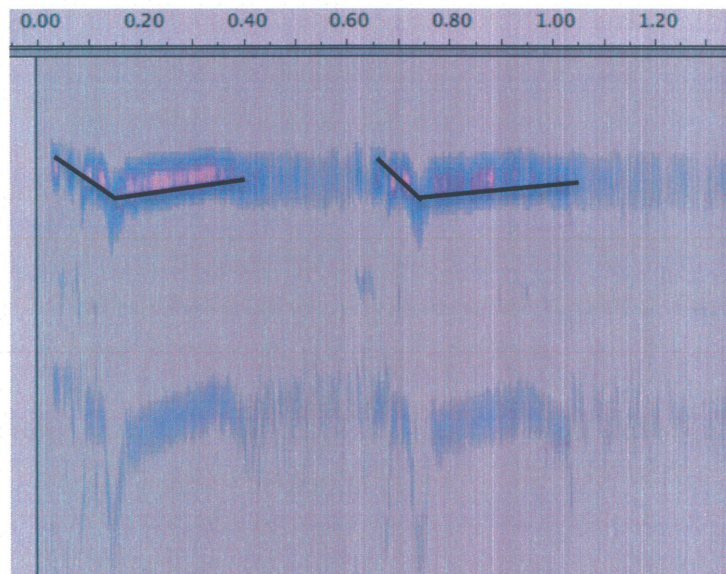


Figure 2: Sonogram Image of Pied Currawong call⁵⁶



⁵⁶ Created using Audacity 1.3.3 from a recording taken from <http://birdsinbackyards.net/feature/top-40-bird-songs.cfm>

Two different versions of this motif are used, with the second, shorter version alternating with the longer, original version. By varying where in the bar this birdsong motif occurs, Edwards creates an unmetered feel, similar to the free rhythmic manner in which birdsong appears in nature.

Although the piccolo clarinet melodic line consists entirely of this repeated motif, Edwards creates variety through the use of dynamics. The motif is originally played *mezzo forte* in bar 14, with the dynamic gradually decreasing up to bar 31, when it is marked *p* (*echo*). By using dynamics in such a way, Edwards creates an echo-like effect, mirroring the natural setting in which the piece was conceived.

Other melodic material which incorporates birdsong includes the *accelerando* motif first presented at bar 17 by the piccolo, and the rapid flourishes presented by the flutes and 4th clarinet, shown in Excerpt 8. The flute and clarinet passages are almost melodic inversions of each other; the 1st flute passages feature a descending melodic contour, the 4th flute and clarinet passages an ascending melodic contour. Although not directly quoting birdsong, these passages can be seen to certainly be in a similar style to the rapidly descending piccolo clarinet melody. The soft dynamic chosen certainly helps to illustrate the ‘distant birdsong’⁵⁷ Edwards attempts to convey in this movement.

⁵⁷ Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*, pg. 1

Excerpt 8: Bars 20-26⁵⁸

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Fl. 3

Fl. 4

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Ob. 3

C. A.

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

Picc. Cl.

Cl. 4

2

Descending melodic contour

Piccolo 'accelerando' motif

take flute

Ascending melodic contour

Ascending melodic contour

mp

p

(2) Re-enter at conductor's cue

(3) Re-synchronise

Ross Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*. Reproduced with permission.
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The layering of these birdsong-inspired motifs from bars 1 to 31 helps to not only create a musically interesting texture, but also to further suggest the setting in which the piece was conceived.⁵⁹

From bars 32 to 69, the bassoon and cor anglais take the main melodic interest. These new melodic lines employ many of the same rhythmic devices of the birdsong patterns in the previous section, such as grace notes, pentuplets, and demisemiquavers, as shown in Excerpt 9.

⁵⁸ Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*, pg. 22

⁵⁹ Cooney, 'Beyond Sacred and Maninya: Developments in the Music of Ross Edwards between 1991 – 2001', pg. 295

Excerpt 9: Bars 36-43⁶⁰

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After bar 31, the birdsong flourishes provided by the flutes and clarinet continue, and are elaborated upon by the woodwinds and 1st violins. The increasing harmonic complexity in this section of the piece is reflected through the increasing melodic complexity of the birdsong motifs presented. In contrast to the sparse presence of birdsong in the previous section, the birdsong motifs played by the woodwinds alternate between polyphonic and homophonic textures. At bar 47, the flutes and oboes play homorhythmically beginning on different notes to create a thicker, more chromatic sound.

⁶⁰ Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*, pg. 24

Excerpt 10: Bars 47-50⁶¹

Elongated birdsong motif **Homorhythmic treatment of elongated birdsong motif**

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At bar 70 the character of the movement changes dramatically. In contrast to the fast birdsong motifs presented by the woodwinds and 1st violin in the previous sections, this section is marked 'Like A Chorale', and features only the string parts (marked *con sordino/sul tasto, poco vibrato*⁶²). Unlike the constantly changing textures of the previous sections, this section is homophonic, featuring rhythmic and harmonic imitation. The modal tonality also contrasts the chromaticism of the previous sections, as the music moves into Phrygian mode beginning on D. These musical features help to create a quasi-religious feel to the passage. Cooney also notes that the string parts in this section are based on Edwards's arrangement of the plainsong 'Ave Maria

⁶¹ Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*, pg. 25

⁶² With mutes/near the fingerboard, a little vibrato

Gratia Plena'⁶³ (see Appendix 4), further emphasizing the similarity of this section to the plainchant melodies of the Christian church. By juxtaposing birdsong and the plainchant 'Ave Maria Gratia Plena' in this way, Edwards conveys the parallels between the spirituality of nature and Christian ideology, emphasizing the connection he draws between the "external" and "internal" worlds through his music.⁶⁴ This parallel itself is found more in Aboriginal spirituality rather than Christianity, where 'the numinous shines through the forms of the world.'⁶⁵ This symbolic use of birdsong bears many similarities to the manner in which Messiaen juxtaposes human and avian music to convey his Catholic faith.

Excerpt 11: Bars 70-77⁶⁶

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⁶³ Cooney, 'Beyond Sacred and Maninya: Developments in the Music of Ross Edwards between 1991 – 2001', pg. 296

⁶⁴ Edwards, *About The Music*, Sydney Symphony World Symphony Season, op. cit.

⁶⁵ D. Tacey, 'Towards a Creation Spirituality in Australia', *Earthsong Journal*, Issue 12, Autumn 2010, pg. 5

⁶⁶ Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*, pg. 27

From Figure 9 onwards, the melodic lines played by the flutes are also based on the plainchant 'Ave Gratia Maria Plena'⁶⁷, and retain the modal tonality used in the previous section.

From Figure 11, the original woodwind birdsong motifs are developed further, featuring more ornamentation. The piccolo clarinet motif is only stated once, in bars 123-124, while 'the lights begin to fade over about 25 seconds until the concert platform is in darkness'⁶⁸. This visual feature along with the cessation of the explicit birdsong motifs suggests the darkness of night, furthering the natural imagery in the movement.

At bar 125, the extended harp solo features many of the same rhythmic patterns that are used in the birdsong motifs throughout the movement (see Appendix 5). The fact that some phrases in the harp part are marked "like an echo" further highlights the connections Edwards draws to the original musical material from bars 11-31. The bass marimba also plays a version of the *accelerando* birdsong motif presented by the piccolo from bars 17-18.

This musical material leads into a section in free time at Figure 14, where hand-bells played at different times generate a chord based on the pentatonic Hirajoshi scale (see Appendix 6). According to Cooney, this creates the effect of 'bellbirds'⁶⁹. The lack of a fixed meter and the tonality used create an introspective, spiritual feel, while the characterization of this section as "bellbirds" furthers the parallels Edwards draws between human and natural spirituality. The use of lighting in this section also furthers the natural imagery of the movement; the "bellbird" chorus simulates the vocalization of birds prior to dawn. The section concludes when 'the conductor signals the end of the "contemplative" section by turning on a light, visible to the orchestra', and 'the movement concludes in a mysterious half-light.'⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Cooney, 'Beyond Sacred and Maninya: Developments in the Music of Ross Edwards between 1991 – 2001', pg. 296

⁶⁸ Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*, pg. 31

⁶⁹ Cooney, 'Beyond Sacred and Maninya: Developments in the Music of Ross Edwards between 1991 – 2001', pg. 298

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 298

At bar 138, the movement returns to the chorale-like style found at bar 70. However, unlike this previous section, here the strings play homophonically and homorhythmically, creating a texture similar to that of plainchant:

Excerpt 12: Bars 138-149⁷¹

16 Grave, ♩ = ca. 46, Like a Chorale

Violin 1 div.
Violin 2 div.
Vc. div.
Vc. div.

ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp

non vibr. (con sord.)
non vibr. (con sord.)
non vibr. (con sord.)
non vibr. (con sord.)
non vibr. (con sord.)
non vibr. (con sord.)

ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp

ppp

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By juxtaposing the “bellbirds” of the previous section with a passage similar to Western plainchant, Edwards emphasizes the connection he draws between ‘matter and spirit, masculine and feminine, mind and body’⁷²; he focuses the listener’s attention on the balance of nature.

Thus, in the 2nd movement of ‘*Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*’, Edwards uses birdsong to draw parallels between human spirituality and the spirituality of nature. Although not directly quoting birdsong in the same manner as Messiaen, Edwards uses birdsong as the main inspiration for much of melodic material in the movement. Through variations in harmonic language and texture, Edwards emphasizes the interaction between the spiritual and the natural worlds. Edwards also juxtaposes his stylised birdsong motifs with the plainchant melody ‘Ave Maria Gratia Plena’ in much the same manner as Messiaen juxtaposes his birdsongs and the self-constructed tritone motif.

⁷¹ Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*, pg. 34

⁷² Edwards, *About The Music*, Sydney Symphony World Symphony Season

Conclusion

Although both Olivier Messiaen and Ross Edwards utilize a variety of musical techniques in their treatment of birdsong, both employ birdsong for the purpose of conveying their spiritual beliefs. Messiaen utilizes birdsong with great accuracy in '*Les Étoiles et la Gloire*' as an expression of his devout Catholic faith. In this movement, birdsong is used to symbolically convey the joy of the stars, emphasizing Messiaen's own delight in the vastness and complexity of God's creation. Likewise, Ross Edwards makes use of stylized birdsong motifs in '*Lontano e misterioso*' from '*Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*' to both convey a sense of place and to emphasize the spirituality found in the balance of nature. Both composers juxtapose the "natural" music of birdsong with self-constructed musical motifs; in Messiaen's case, to emphasize how creation is a testament to the glory of God, and in Edwards's case, to highlight the interactions between the natural and the spiritual in our everyday existence.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Bars 57-64, 'Les Étoiles et la Gloire', where Messiaen utilizes the call of the Garden Warbler⁷³

Garden Warbler melodic line

The score features the following parts and markings:

- Flûte 1 solo:** Solo part for the first flute, marked *Fauvette des jardins* (Garden Warbler). It includes a melodic line with a *(Vif) stacc.* marking and a *ff* dynamic. A note indicates *(hors tempo - au signe du chef)*.
- Glock.:** Glockenspiel part, marked *p*.
- Xylozm.:** Xylophone part, marked *pp*.
- P^{re} Trp. 1:** First Trumpet part.
- Trp. 1 & 2:** Trumpet parts 1 and 2.
- Cors 1 & 2:** Horn parts 1 and 2, marked *mf*.
- 1^{re} VL (1 à 6):** First Violin part, marked *pp*.
- 2^{de} VL (1 à 6):** Second Violin part, marked *pp*.
- Altus:** Alto part, marked *pp*.
- Vcl. 1:** Viola part, marked *pp*.
- I. Cloches 1:** First Bells part, marked *p*.
- II. Cloches 2:** Second Bells part, marked *p*.
- III. Cloches 3:** Third Bells part, marked *p*.
- IV. Trgl.:** Triangle part, marked *p*.
- VI. 6 Tpl.-bl.:** Six Tom-toms part, marked *p*.
- VIII. Cymb. susp.:** Suspended Cymbal part, marked *pp*.
- X. T.-tans:** Tenor Tom-toms part, marked *pp*.

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⁷³ Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, pgs. 23-26

Appendix 2: Bars 74-80, 'Les Étoiles et la Gloire'⁷⁴

Modéré (♩ = 132)
(Eastern Whip Bird - Australie)

Un peu lent (♩ = 63)

Vif (♩ = 200)

3 Picc. 3/16 2/16 3/8

Flûtes 1 2 3 4 5 6

3 Hb. mf pp cresc. molto ff

C. A. mf pp cresc. molto ff

2 P¹^{es} Clar. 2 P¹^{es} Clar. pp cresc. molto ff

Clar. 3 4 5 6 pp cresc. molto ff

3 Bassons mf pp cresc. molto ff

Xylo. 3/16 2/16 3/8

Xylorim. 3/16 2/16 3/8

P¹^{er} Trp. I P¹^{er} Trp. I pp cresc. molto ff

3 Trp. 3 Trp. pp cresc. molto ff

Cors 1 2 4 6 pp cresc. molto ff

VIII. Cymb. susp. pp cresc. molto ff

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⁷⁴ Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, pgs. 31-32

Appendix 3: Bars 299-300, 'Les Étoiles et la Gloire'⁷⁵

Vif (♩ = 176)
(Lewin's Honeyeater - Australie)

41

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⁷⁵ Messiaen, *Éclairs Sur L'au-Delà... Deuxième Partie*, pg. 85

Appendix 4: Transcription of 'Ave Maria Gratia Plena' from 'Five Carols' by Ross Edwards, transcribed by P.G. Cooney⁷⁶

Quasi non misura, $\text{♩} = \text{c.}96$
pp *espress.*

Soprano solo

A - ve Ma - ri - a, gra - ti - a pic - na,
 Do - mi - nus te - cum: be - ne - dic - ta to in - nu - li - e - ti - bus.

Ave Maria Gratia Plena from Five Carols by Ross Edwards, works available from the Australian Music Centre www.australianmusiccentre.com.au; transcribed by P G Cooney, 2003, Beyond Sacred and Maninya: Developments in the music of Ross Edwards between 1991-2001, University of Newcastle, Australia

⁷⁶ Cooney, 'Beyond Sacred and Maninya: Developments in the Music of Ross Edwards between 1991 – 2001', pg. 286

Appendix 5: Bars 125-135, 'Lontano e misterioso'⁷⁷

At Figure 13 the conductor stops beating. The overhead lights are fading towards total darkness. Each individual performer, having memorized the patterns, keeps repeating them according to his or her perception of $\text{♩} = 60$.

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⁷⁷ Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*, pg. 32

Appendix 6: Bars 136-137, 'Lontano e misterioso'⁷⁸

The image shows a musical score for 11 staves, labeled H A N D B E L L S at the top. The staves are numbered 1 through 11 from top to bottom. The score consists of vertical lines representing notes and rests, with various durations and dynamics indicated. A large bracket on the right side of the score spans from measure 14 to measure 15, labeled 'THE DURATION OF SECTION 14 IS 3 MINUTES'. The dynamics 'pp' (pianissimo) are marked at the beginning of several staves. The durations are as follows:

- Staff 1: 18"
- Staff 2: 7", 10", 6"
- Staff 3: 10", 9", 5"
- Staff 4: 13", 9"
- Staff 5: 15", 8"
- Staff 6: 5", 9", 7", 8"
- Staff 7: 12", 7", 8"
- Staff 8: 20", 7", 8"
- Staff 9: 21", 9"
- Staff 10: 19", 5", 9"
- Staff 11: 17", 8"

Measure 14 is marked at the top right, and measure 15 is marked at the bottom right. The duration of section 14 is indicated as 3 minutes.

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⁷⁸ Edwards, *Symphony No. 3 Mater Magna*, pg. 33