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Messiaen: Chronometric or Chrono-ametric

In thinking about the first two movements of *Quatuor pour la fins du Temps*, it seems to me that both movements, in 3/4 time throughout, could be called *chronometric*, in the same sense that e.g. the music of Mozart and Haydn can be called chronometric. In fact, it is easy to conduct the first movement of *Quatuor* in 3/4 without having to change the quarter-note beat.

The second movement, also in 3/4, while it remains in 3/4 to the end, gives the impression of being freed from the beat because of the contrast in tempi (*Modere/Presque vif/Presque lent*) between the sections and also because of the transcribed songs of the blackbird and the nightingale in the first and third sections which are fantasy-like). Also contributing to the concept of freedom is the two-octave doubling of the birdsong by the cello and violin that is often accompanied simply by the resonance of the piano. The example is in the tied notes, as in m. A:2 - 4, (piano tied notes). In H: 3 - 5, the cello, clarinet, and violin parts have tied notes while the piano plays the inverted figure from A:1. The cello, clarinet, and violin parts are played **fff** as opposed to the simple resonance of the piano tied notes in A: 2 - 4, but in each case there is an absence of the passage of time, or meter against which to measure the free figures played against them. In the middle section, beginning at D, the cello and violin double each other at two octaves in a song-like, even plainsong-like, passage which supercedes the very regular sixteenth-note figures of the piano accompaniment, which is marked **ppp**. Again, the effect is ethereal and un-measured, seeming to justify the nomenclature of *chrono-ametric* quality.

In summary, I think that Messiaen uses both chronometrics and chrono-ametrics in order to accomplish his goals. They here appear not so much in all parts at once, as in one or two parts at a time while the other(s) recedes into the background.