

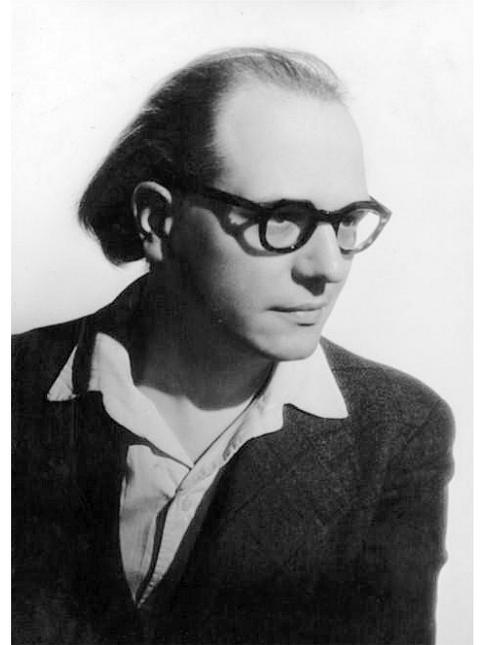
OLIVIER MESSIAEN

as explained by David Drew

The brilliant musicologist David Drew was the expert on French Music and some of what he said and wrote is set out below.

He said that Jolivet was a greater composer than Messiaen which view is still widely held in France. To some extent this is clearly true. Jolivet wrote more structured music having traditional forms such as his concertos and symphonies and had an excellent use of the orchestra. His music has a greater variety. The conventional style is easier to appreciate.

But although Messiaen is a crucial figure, Drew points out some of his music is abysmal as also is some of the music of Berlioz. But Messiaen is also vilified as was Schoenberg and Webern and by people who are prejudiced and limited in their appreciation of music. Drew also states that only a rash person would claim that Messiaen had the gift of the master composers and, among other things, his music lacks the essential requirement of communication. His preoccupation with bird song misleads him and listeners are at a great disadvantage in trying to identify the birds' songs as set in Messiaen's music.



The UK premiere of the Turangalia Symphony was received unfavourably. It was hailed as an indescribable din and a medley of grunts, whistles and pops and compared to the poor compositions of Franck. It was also likened to unclaimed lost property. Others compared it to the nonsense composed by Scriabin. Every informed musician and music lover accepts that Scriabin is a very bad composer and both of them wrote in a mystical style although Messiaen's music has a sincerity and religiosity. That Scriabin is blindly revered by some in Russia, and one wonders why, this adulation does not account for the many problems always present in his music, including mysticism which is undoubtedly suspect. The search for new harmonies is inartistic and Messiaen is like Scriabin consigned to music in limbo. It has been said that the success of composers like Satie, Faure and Ravel succeed because of their traditional values. The quest for new harmonies has failed and embarrassed some composers who have tried new harmonies such as Chopin, Debussy and Ravel, who certainly did not advance new harmonies in any way whatsoever, and, to add to this list, we include Scriabin and Messiaen. Liszt was the composer who advanced harmony as did Wagner and then the Second Viennese School still maligned by the ignorant and stupid.

He went through a period of adulation of Wagner particularly Tristan. He also tried to write serialism but was unequal to it.

Messiaen's first established work was *Le Banquet Celeste* for organ of 1928 which says nothing new although it is sincere. It does not stand close to Tournemire's *L'Orgue Mystique*. Messiaen used repetition techniques and so his music appears to be nonsensical. The most extreme of this is found in the central movement of his *Trois Petites Liturgies*.

The *Quartet for the End of Time* recounts Messiaen's time in a concentration camp and all the horrors he saw. However distressing this is, this work is truly abysmal and lasts about 50 minutes. To be sympathetic to his ordeal is one thing but to have to endure 50 minutes of this music is far too much. The massive piano work *Vingt Regards sur l'enfant Jesus* create similar problems and the music is often tedious since the writing for the piano is puzzling and exasperating, albeit challenging.

People will dispute this to bolster their opinions not wishing to be considered to be wrong, but what is written here is true. It is amazing that the majority agree with all this.

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