

Reshaping the origin: An alternative use of Messiaen's *cahiers* of birdsong transcriptions performing *Catalogue d'oiseaux*

Carolina Santiago Martínez¹

INET-md (Instituto de Etnomusicologia - Centro de Estudos em Música e Dança)

Abstract: This article synthesises the use of Messiaen's manuscript notebooks of birdsong transcriptions as creative material. As a part of the research *Migrating to the origin*, it is presented as a space for establishing a flexible relationship between the final score and its sketches by incorporating them into a new narrative of the *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. Messiaen's birdsong sketches are analysed questioning them as transcriptions or compositions. A new perspective for the birdsong transcriptions sketchbooks brings a new relation between performer and score resulting in an unconventional interpretation, in the framework of an ecologically aware revision of the work.

Keywords: Cahiers; birdsong transcription; *Catalogue d'oiseaux*; artistic research; environmental awareness

The sources are as important as the perspective from which they are observed. For more than forty years, composer Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) wrote down transcriptions of birdsongs in more than two hundred notebooks, his *cahiers de notation de chants d'oiseaux*². Some examples from this archive were published by Messiaen himself in his *Traité de Rythme, de Couleur et d'Ornithologie* vol. V, devoted to birdsong in Europe (Tome I) and outside Europe (Tome II). However, these sketches have never before been thought of as a reconstruction material for a creative process other than Messiaen's. And these fascinating documents, by their very nature, are used in the research *Migrating to the origin: bird-becoming and musical performance through an interpretation of Messiaen's Catalogue d'oiseaux*³ as a source of rethinking a different creative process. These sketches, because of their richness and the numerous possibilities they offer, are ideal for artistic research, and this leads to a performance that is outside the interpretative tradition.

In the above-mentioned research, which is the subject of this article, these cahiers of birdsong transcriptions are used as material to modify this music. Through a flexible relationship with the score and its sources, the conception of a "finished" work of art becomes blurred and a feedback between the original sketches and the final score takes place. These sketches can serve not only to gain insight into the composer's transcription and compositional process, as has been the case up to now, but as an alternative way of interacting with the score, rewriting it. The creativity that Leech-Wilkinson notes in the figure of the performer is here confirmed by this "desacralisation" of the score:

What we do with music, and what music does with us, becomes central to all of us once we understand the freedom – historical, ethical, technical – that performers have to make music mean. (Leech-Wilkinson, 2016, p. 335)

With the aim of gaining a better grasp of these alternative paths, it is necessary to place this work in the framework of artistic research, where creative artistic practice and academic research go hand in hand. *Migrating to the origin* consists of an innovative performance of

¹ carollpiano@hotmail.com

² This collection of notebooks written between 1953 and 1991 is archived in the *Fonds Olivier Messiaen et Yvonne Loriod* at the Bibliothèque National de France (Paris).

³ This ongoing research is carried out by the author herself, and the text of this article refers to one of the parts of the research, so the title *Reshaping the origin: An alternative use of Messiaen's cahiers of birdsong transcriptions performing Catalogue d'oiseaux* is an implicit allusion to the title of the full research, *Migrating to the origin: bird-becoming and musical performance through an interpretation of Messiaen's Catalogue d'oiseaux*.

the monumental piano work *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. This composition is modified through the search of an approach to the birdsongs cited in it, and also it contains electronic interludes made by the pianist which include birdsongs of the species presented and a voice-over making explicit the intrinsic narrative of the prefaces written by Messiaen in each movement. This performance features a message of environmental awareness – extrinsic to this musical work but justifying this change of the interpretative perspective – rooted in my worries about the disappearance of avian species and changes in their migration routes that are caused by the human overexploitation of natural resources. The pianist makes an approach to the birdsongs that originated this work by performing in the artistic practice the “bird-becoming”, and also using the cahiers of notations of birdsongs transcriptions by Olivier Messiaen. The idea that gave origin to this research came about through questioning how similar to birdsong were the citations described in the *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, and how it would be if the music was closer to this sound source with which Messiaen devised and originated it. The performer modifies an already finished work through an unconventional performance practice based on listening to and attempting to mimic birdsongs – devising a novel interpretative *style oiseau*⁴ –, fulfilling the distinctive aspect of an artistic research. Borgdorff's viewpoint that it “does not assume the separation of subject and object and does not contemplate any distance between the researcher and the artistic practice, since the latter is itself an essential component of both the research process and the research results” (2016, p.10), is elaborated in the author's case in the musical practice and resulting performance. The fact that the pianist experiences a process similar to the Deleuzian “animal-becoming”⁵ in this attempt at “bird-becoming” was especially interesting from my perspective as an artistic researcher. The “bird-becoming” is another one of the main pillars of my work – together with the already mentioned creative use of the cahiers –, consisting of a modification of Messiaen's bird quotations in different musical parameters as articulation, phrasing, agogic, pitches or silences, through a practice by listening to and mimicking recordings of the birdsongs mentioned. Both the method and the final sound result seek to get closer to the actual sound source that originated the piece and to move away from Messiaen's transcriptions, as they were imaginative reinterpretations. This search for a different path produces new results that are in turn contributions to the artistic and academic community:

Artistic research happens when there is this ‘double move’ of deconstructing an old mythopoetic configuration and of contributing to the construction of a new symbolic constellation. (Correia, Dalagna, Benetti & Monteiro, 2018, p. 25)

This new mythopoetic construction highlights the importance of new goals and methodologies. Our approach to the score as performers not only speaks about the way we have been educated to read the text in a certain way, but also makes explicit our own way of looking at music and understanding our role as performers. Classical music performers are usually trained to see the score as something sacred, a printed version of the composer's will that we have to manage to read between the lines. Artistic research, however, can be a means for performers to reshape our own relation with the text and to manage to reconstruct

⁴ The *style oiseau* (in English, “bird style”) is referred to Olivier Messiaen's compositional method based on the inclusion of birdsong transcriptions in his musical works, named in writings by Trevor Hold (1971), Robin Freeman (1995) or Robert Fallon (2007), among others.

⁵ Philosophical notion presented in *Mille Plateaux* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980), where the concept of animality is reformulated and seeks the human transformation towards this close relationship between the animal and its environment.

our role by assuming more creativity in our artistic process. Paulo de Assis, one of the referents in this field, already made a creative use of the sketches of Luigi Nono's ...*sofferte onde serene*... for his experimental reorchestration in 2012, considering them as a material to generate a more collaborative and multitemporal version of the work⁶. In my own case, I have been greatly influenced by the work that my advisor, pianist Luca Chiantore, has done in his *inVersions*, rethinking in a very original and creative way the manuscripts by Beethoven, among other composers, in order to reinterpret this music.

Several musicologists specialised in Messiaen's life and work, such as Peter Hill, Roderick Chadwick or Nigel Simeone, have studied the *Fonds Olivier Messiaen et Yvonne Loriod* archive where the cahiers can be found, which is key to understand his compositional process and the use of birds in his music. Chadwick and Hill in *Catalogue d'oiseaux: from conception to performance* (2017) provide an intensive survey of these documents in relation to Messiaen's compositional process:

For the *Catalogue* the cahiers show not only how he evolved the parallel language with which he translated birdsong into his music, but also the evolution of his thinking as he worked to solve the musical and structural problems in his path (Chadwick & Hill 2017, p. 19).

These “translations” of birds are, in Messiaen’s case, an attempt to bring together his musical writing and his anthropomorphic⁷ vision of birds with his scientific curiosity as an ornithologist, as Hill recalls, “claiming that he however minutely observed, the natural world as it appears in the cahiers is a musical or literary response, not the objective record of a scientist” (Hill, 2013, p. 144). Messiaen’s music is also marked by the multiple significations of his musical resources; in Shenton words “not only does a phrase signify a certain bird, but birds themselves have a particular place in Messiaen’s theology; he describes them in his *Technique de mon langage musical* as ‘servants of immaterial joy’ (Messiaen, 1944, p. 34), and, in a conversation with Samuel, as ‘the greatest musicians of our planet’” (Shenton, 2008, p. 61).

The *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1956-58), the third work he composed devoted primarily to his winged artists – after *Le Réveil des Oiseaux* (1953) and *Oiseaux Exotiques* (1955-56) – is explicit both in its title and in its form and conception, being a total compendium of French birds. It includes at the beginning of its Leduc edition (1964) a list of the 77 scientific names of the birds that appear in the work in five languages. Together with the compendium of thirteen specific habitats from France, it shows his eagerness as a passionate ornithologist to offer this resulting artistic work from a certain scientific perspective.

Great as Messiaen’s contribution to the field of musical transcriptions of birdsongs was, this issue has interesting precedents that show how complex the task of transcribing bird sounds from a human perspective is. In the field of ornithology, it is most noteworthy the divergence of all kinds of aesthetic and philosophical approaches. Birdsongs have been transcribed by

⁶ Although Paulo de Assis treatment of Luigi Nono's compositional sketches differs from that of this research, it is worth noting that de Assis highlights the importance of the performer-composer collaboration between Pollini and Nono and how the pianist shares the creative process from different perspectives.

⁷ Olivier Messiaen attributed human qualities to birds, conceiving birds as true artists, “Anthropomorphisme? Voire. Déjà, nous l’avons vu, Jacques Delamain, le premier maître en ornithologie de Messiaen, appelait ‘les artistes’ ceux que le compositeur, quant à lui, qualifie de ‘petits serviteurs de l’immatérielle joie’” (Halbreich, 2008, p. 96).

humans in many ways: from onomatopoeias and vocalisations, through traditional western musical notation, to being transcribed directly into sonogram and spectrogram visualisations. The diversity of transcription methods throughout history is due to the way humans have perceived birdsong: as language, as music, as sound, and so on. The musicologist Lodewijk Muns, talking about historical musical transcriptions of birdsong, makes a good reflection on our conception of music:

[...] What these historical curiosities reveal is above all the strength of the human tendency to adjust perception to preconception, to subject what we hear to our preferences and categories. Without this, human music would not even be possible: all tuning systems involve impurities which we learn to ignore (Muns, 2018, p. 12).

For as long as we can trace back, birdsongs have been converted into music, but Messiaen sought to take the appearance of birds in his works to a more ornithological level, cataloguing them by species and performing the colossal task of transcribing them for more than forty years. Thus, Peter Hill points to this shift in the dichotomy between Messiaen's different perspectives:

At the heart of these was the tension between Messiaen the ornithologist – with his passionate admiration for birdsong – and Messiaen the composer. Messiaen's difficulty was that he regarded birdsong as music – and [...] God-given music at that – not simply as a source of sounds and patterns of which a composer might make use. As a result it was essential that the birdsong in his music, necessarily adapted to the limitations of human musical instruments, should be as authentic as possible (Chadwick & Hill 2017, p. 19).

Considering how problematic and inextricable the term “authenticity” is, especially in the field of artistic creation, the effort that Messiaen materialized in his more than two hundred notebooks of birdsongs by implementing his aesthetics and compositional technique into the field of transcriptions is reminiscent of the in-depth work that composers like Bartok did with Hungarian folklore⁸. But from my point of view, what was for them a lifelong work and an ongoing process can become an opportunity for later creators to continue this work from different perspectives.

As Messiaen's knowledge of birdsong deepened, however, his approach started to change, so that his birdsong became less a transcription and more an imaginative response (*ibid.*, *id.*).

Hill describes this development in the composer's cahiers but, looking carefully at the archive, we can indeed affirm that Messiaen's real development consisted in better recognizing the different species and detailing more the birdsongs, pointing out more articulations and different phrasings for the same kind of songs. From my viewpoint, it is more than questionable that initially they were more accurate and then became an imaginative response, rather than being so from the start.

In this respect, the precedents of Messiaen's *style oiseau* can be considered not only in the

⁸ “Personnellement, j'avais la passion de l'ornithologie. Comme Bartok a parcouru la Hongrie pour y recueillir des chants folkloriques, je me suis promené longuement dans les différentes provinces de France pour y noter des chants d'oiseaux. C'est un travail immense et sans fin. Mais qui m'a redonné le droit d'être musicien! Et quelle joie de découvrir un Nouveau chant, un Nouveau style, un Nouveau paysage!” (Messiaen, 1960, p. 5).

field of music – such as the birds in compositions by Janequin, Rameau, Vivaldi, Beethoven or Ravel –, but also in the evolution of birdsong musical transcription in the field of ornithology⁹. In the 1940s, while Messiaen was starting to notate birdsongs, the tape recorder and the sound spectrograph or sonograph revolutionised, among many other scientific and artistic fields, bird studies. The possibility of reproducing bird frequencies several times and viewing them graphically confirmed the complexity of the field. These developments gave rise to one of the most interesting fusions: ornithomusicology. Hungarian scientist and musicologist Péter Szöke was the first to name this field and to merge these new technologies with music notation in his article *The Study of Intonation Structure of Bird Vocalizations: an Inadequate Application of Sound Spectrography* (1977), which resulted from the collaboration with scientists Gunn (biologist, field recordings) and Filip (analysis of sound microscopy, audio-physics), in which he transcribed spectrograms to music notation¹⁰. The unprecedented detail of his resulting transcriptions is evident, although it is not known whether Messiaen was aware of his work.

It should not be forgotten that these incursions of musical notation into the ornithological developments of the time were contemporary with the appearance of Messiaen's *style oiseau*, who, although influenced by the developments of his time, sought his own artistic style and a unique and personal development of transcribing – or rather, composing – birdsongs. It is of crucial importance to know how birdsong transcriptions were developed in the scientific field in order to understand that Messiaen's case was different despite his passion for ornithology. Indeed, the 50s were the years when Messiaen spent a lot of time with some ornithologists that taught him – Jacques Delamain, Jacques Penot, Robert-Daniel Etchecopar, François Hüe, Henri Lomont¹¹ – from whom he achieved a considerable knowledge. In those times, when integral serialism was fashion in Europe and specially in France, the fact that a renowned composer such as him devoted an enormous part of his work to birdsongs was something that could seem not “serious” to some. Indeed, the premiere of *Le Réveil des oiseaux* was a failure, maybe because not surprisingly birdsong was considered an eccentricity with respect to the predominant contemporary aesthetics. Perhaps the predilection he claimed to have for the sounds of nature rather than “noise”, as he reveals in his film *Olivier Messiaen et les Oiseaux* (1971), was also the reason that made him reject technology and rely on his own methods and his exceptional ear, instead of using

⁹ The first attempts to transcribe birdsongs in Europe, called as such – in an encyclopaedic way, seeking to capture ornithological knowledge –, date back to the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher in his treatise *Musurgia universalis* (1650), as well as to scholars who, during the Enlightenment, also strove to combine scientific vision and musical notation as a tool to concretely capture their theories. Sir John Hawkins (1776) and Louis Barrington (1773) sought to give musical expression to the different types of birdsong – chirps, calls, recordings, songs. The latter reflected on their learning qualities, anthropocentrically attributing to certain birds in urban areas better singing qualities due to their exposure in cities like London to the orchestral music of the time. In the 19th century, Simeon Pease Cheney's *Wood Notes Wild: Notations of Bird Music* (1892) includes transcriptions of both avian and nature sounds present in such habitats. Subsequently, F. Schuyler Mathews in his *Field book of wild birds and their music* (1921) shows in an encyclopaedic way a huge amount of transcribed bird melodies catalogued by avian species, some with piano accompaniment, including also charts with the birds' registers reflected in the piano keyboard register and even the transcription of a song with graphic notation reflecting the complexity of its transcription in conventional musical writing.

¹⁰ Szöke also experimented with the speed of bird vocalisations in a LP made by tape recordings in lower speed called *The Unknown Music of Birds* (1987). The essence and the theoretical significance of the discovery of true avian music have been explained in detail and illustrated with numerous slowed down bird vocalizations in Szöke's book *The origin and the three realms of music – on the levels of pre-life, animal, and human existence*, published in Hungarian in 1982. In making the choice of sound material for the record, maybe the author was guided not so much by the beauty of the vocalizations but by the beauty and the importance of the recognition of the unknown. These low-speed recordings also facilitated the process of transcribing songs.

¹¹ Gareth Healey (2016) points out the main ornithologists that helped Messiaen to compose some movements of the *Catalogue d'oiseaux*.

a sound spectrograph for his transcriptions. About Messiaen's lack of information about his methodology for transcribing birdsongs, Healey draws important conclusions:

Comments regarding the transcription process itself are completely absent, and it seems to have been a conscious decision on Messiaen's part to avoid elaborating on such technicalities. This may be partly due to the difficulty of establishing definitive rules for the notation of birdsong; also its religious connotations (in Messiaen's mind) dictated the retention of an element of the unknowable (Healey, 2013, p. 29).

Due to the taste for mystery linked to his religious faith, maybe he acted on purpose and wanted that some part of the process remained unknown, but the only time he went to it he affirmed something not totally true: that he transcribed all birds by hand in real time, in a natural setting and by ear¹². Indeed, Messiaen used to go to the forest with Yvonne Loriod, who carried a recorder with her, and they wrote down some birdsongs to work on them back at home. He also received many records from ornithologists or friends from outside Europe, so he had recordings that far outnumbered those presented in his cahiers. Therefore, he could work on transcriptions and he was able to repeat the sounds as many times as he wished, to increase the accuracy of the transcriptions.

The documented form of these studies tells us a lot about how musical tradition views the sketches and manuscripts of compositional processes of classical works. However, there are many ways of realising a creative process depending on how these documents are viewed. The innovative approach to of Messiaen's sketchbooks also means an important contribution not only because of the scarce study and use that has been made of them so far, but also in terms of the originality with which a performer can approach such sketchbooks to make a recreation. In this way, the musician can escape the traditional concept of "work of art" and the treatment it has been given in the history of musical performance and, when conceiving a score, act with the same flexibility applicable to any other music of which sketches or different versions exist.

In the case of my research, the narrative of the work is reconstructed from a contemporary perspective and through an environmentalist vision, highlighting how climate change and human overexploitation of natural resources have modified the environmental realities that Messiaen made explicit in his *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. But perhaps most interesting of all is the "how", more even than the "what". Messiaen's cahiers offer to me a very interesting tool to modify the score of the *Catalogue* and to musically make explicit the ecological message of each piece. Their format in sketches, short motifs, and great variety of developed phrases allow them to be used as real elements that can be "copied and pasted", modifying Messiaen's discourse with his own ink.

In a first step, I select all the notebooks of birdsong notations from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's archive prior to 1958 – the year in which Messiaen finished the composition of the *Catalogue d'oiseaux* – and I take and notate those that include some of the 77 birds present in the work. Then I make a list with bird species, numbers of archives and pages where they are found.

Secondly, I research about the species present in each movement of the *Catalogue* and the ecological problems that most affect them and their habitats. Once I decide on the theme that

¹² In his conversation with Claude Samuel, Messiaen affirms that as composer and ornithologist "you must have an extremely experienced ear and be capable of very quickly writing down something retained while listening to something else that will also be retained" (Samuel, 1994, p. 93).

I will use to modify the narrative of the movement, I reflect upon the possibilities of modifying Messiaen's structure and score so as to include them in a different way in each piece. Then, consulting the previous list made from the archive selection, I analyse the transcriptions of these birds, play them on the piano and decide which motifs to use for the modification of the score. Finally, I design the new piece by including or modifying these motifs from the notebooks.

Through this new ecological perspective, I intend to contribute to increase the political and social awareness, in line with the ethical dimension that Performance Studies¹³ have had from the very beginning and, in this specific case, with environmental activism.

Music can work as far more than a soundtrack or as dread-inducing ambience in climate-crisis storytelling; it can actively expose its audience to critical insight as well as to visceral concern. Music can serve as a narrative engine, energizing critical thinking, political action, and even violence. In its absence, it can make listeners miss its presence as a human artifact. (Hart, 2018, p. 10)

Actively influencing the public, raising awareness, and making viewers think about environmental pollution and human's negative influence on nature through an artistic experience: this can contribute to the construction of a stronger collective conscience on the need of an environmentally sustainable reality.

Depending on how I modify the narrative of each of the movements, with specific environmental issues for certain birds and/or habitats, the cahiers become a material to modify the structure of the piece, make the dialogues between different birds more chaotic and realistic, diminish and mute an avian species, add tension, or increase the number of birds singing.

The start of the reconstruction process consists of determining the ecological issues to be highlighted in each piece. Although climate change has many effects on virtually all avian species, each is affected to a greater extent by different factors depending on habitat type, feeding, nesting or whether they are migratory or sedentary birds. For example, *Lullula arborea* (woodlark, *L'Alouette Lulu*), is a migratory bird that mainly inhabits forests and whose numbers have been declining markedly in recent years. The causes are diverse, but we can guess that, in addition to the modification of their natural habitats, global warming means that their migratory routes have to be longer and therefore more risky and deadly. Through the form of this piece by Messiaen, A-B-A', A being the section where the song of the woodlark appears and develops and B the dialogue between this bird and the nightingale, I make evident the decrease in the number of specimens of the *Lulu* by using shorter and shorter motifs from the cahiers and decreasing their interventions in A', and to stress the evidence of this decrease I add material from the cahiers to the first section A. Furthermore, in section B I intend to find a way for the two birds to dialogue in a less calculated and structured way than in Messiaen's score, in a way that simulates a real dialogue of two birds in the middle of the forest, with its potential and characteristic chaos and improvisatory nature; so I use various motifs from the cahiers and accumulate and disarrange them in this middle section.

¹³ The Performance Studies are an academic discipline and branch of knowledge that emerged in the USA in the second half of the 20th century led by thinkers such as Schechner and Conquergood, and consists of studying all actions as performances, encompassing in such study not only ethical questions and social awareness through actions, but also artistic practice.

[Here](#) you can listen to an excerpt of *L'Alouette Lulu's* ending including cahiers' sketches that are decreasing in duration until the birdcall totally disappears:



Video Example 1. Carolina Santiago: *L'Alouette Lulu / Migrating to the origin*. Excerpt from <https://youtu.be/glrhkiurR9U>

Some cahiers have harmonised sketches and others are written in a single voice, which is the case with the woodlark. In the *Catalogue*, Messiaen uses a very specific harmonisation of this bird by colouring it with a second voice which is usually at an intervallic distance of major or minor ninth, minor sixth, diminished tenth or diminished octave. At the extracts from the cahiers that I use to densify part A, by increasing the duration of the woodlark songs, I reharmonise them using the same logic as in Messiaen's own writing to achieve a sense of unity and belonging to the text. However, in this last exemplified part A', when this bird begins to disappear, I keep the sketches written in a single voice, creating a diminution of the voices present. Specifically, on pages 8 and 9 of the Leduc edition of *L'Alouette Lulu*, I replace bars 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60 and 62 by motifs present in the digitalized files of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS-23028, MS-23015 and MS-23059(1). The selection of the motifs to be used was made by trying out several of those that are written and making a logic of decreasing the length of these extracts in these seven bars. The last excerpt in measure 62 was consciously selected with a wide interval and a short length to imply a character of drowning or final agony of the woodlark, accompanied by a brief and concise gesture with the performer's left hand covering the mouth, embodying with this intervention the modifications that are sounding.

In *La Chouette Hulotte*, however, I highlight a problem that is not linked to global warming but to human overexploitation and bad practices. The *Strix aluco*, like the other two species featured in this movement (*Asio otus* and *Athene noctua*) are all part of the owl family and are nocturnal birds of prey that suffer from indiscriminate poaching at the hands of man. Those who carry out these illegal practices often sell them in the illegal bird trade or display their stuffed bodies as trophies. Messiaen, inspired by the haunting beauty of these nocturnal birds, includes "fear" as an ever-present leitmotif before the owls' interventions. In my interpretation, this fear is personified by the birds themselves sensing that they are going to fall victims of poaching. After modifying the subject of this emotion and including an abrupt tapping of the piano lid as a gunshot effect, I implement short motifs from the cahiers to replace those of the score and make the birdsongs more tense, abrupt, brief and disordered.

Messiaen himself ends the piece with a solo of the *Strix aluco* screaming and growing weaker and weaker, and he describes the terror of this scene as *comme un cri d'enfant assassiné* (like the scream of a murdered child). Contextualizing these birds as victims of this indiscriminate hunting, the latter alone takes on an even more desolate meaning.

[Here](#) you can listen to an excerpt of *La Chouette Hulotte*'s ending including cahiers' sketches for disarraying birdcalls after the gunshot effect:



Video Example 2. Carolina Santiago: *La Chouette Hulotte / Migrating to the origin*. Excerpt from <https://youtu.be/PpNUZ9PxM9s>

From bar 125 to 132 of the Leduc edition, I replace the three interventions of the *Hibou moyen-Duc* and the *Chouette Chevêche* by short and abrupt sketches of these two birds together with some of the *Chouette Hulotte*, all already harmonised by Messiaen. By trying out different motifs, I sought to compose a chaotic, dissonant and more improvisatory dialogue with pieces from the digitised files MS-23016, MS-23001, MS-23009, MS-23008, MS-23059(1), MS-23013, MS-23066¹⁴.

In *Le Chocard des Alpes*, the most characteristic feature of the piece is that it is mostly based on the description of three mountain massifs of the *Dauphiné* Alps, with a writing with serial harmonies where the rhythm of the chords plays a very important role. In it, I modify the piece to raise awareness of the effects of global warming in the high mountains: melting of ice, landslides, loss of glaciers and of mountain volume and therefore of the habitat of birds. In this piece, the passage of time is not an explicit guiding thread in its structure – as in *Le Lorient*, which occupies the whole morning of a day, or *La Rousserolle Effarvatte*, which is developed during 24 hours. However, my modification highlights in the piece this temporal dimension, reflecting in this landscape a development over the course of time that includes years, decades or even centuries.

The introduction and first description of the Alps remain unchanged, as "ideal" as Messiaen perceived it, and unchanged remain the birds that intervene later. In the second part (*Clavier Saint Christophe*) I want to evoke the current thaw with a clear modification of the texture. The solid chords gradually become two continuous, undulating legato lines – as in the sole moment in which Messiaen describes water in the *Catalogue*, in *Le Courlis Cendré*. In the

¹⁴ Here is an explanatory list of file numbers from the *Fonds Olivier Messiaen et Yvonne Loriod* archive of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France consulted by the researcher and available on the Gallica virtual portal of digitized archives.

last bars of this part, I create a "detachment" with the chord texture as written but in crescendo and accelerando to the bass. The birds that appear later (*Couplet 2*) are replaced by shorter cahier motifs, disappearing accordingly with the changes in their habitat. Finally, the third mountainous part (*Cirque de Bonne Pierre*) bears witness to that hypothetical future where the glaciers of the French Alps will have almost disappeared. I transpose all the chords into the two lowest octaves of the piano and the absence of birds after this mountainous part in Messiaen's own structure takes on an explicit metaphorical meaning in this new narrative.

These cases are examples of each of the specific modifications developed in *Migrating to the origin*. In this way, the *Catalogue d'oiseaux* becomes a starting point to develop my personal search of what, from my point of view, is the most interesting and valuable side of artistic research: the capacity to analyse our way of understanding music and our current reality, the space to rethink our own artistic activity, and a definite opportunity to spread our wings opening new horizons of knowledge.

References:

- Assis, P. (2013). *Exploring multi-temporalities: An orchestration of Luigi Nono'ssofferte onde serene...* AEC.
- Assis P. (2006). *Luigi Nono's ende. Zwischen "Como una ola de fuerza y luz" und "...sofferte onde serene..."* Hofheim: Wolke Verlag.
- Barrington, L. (1773). Experiments and observations on the singing of birds, in a Letter to Mathew Maty. *Philosophical Transactions (1683-1775)*, 63, 249-291. Retrieved March 14, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/106159>.
- Bevis, J. (2019). *A Complete history of collecting and imitating birdsong*. Retrieved from <https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/a-complete-history-of-collecting-and-imitating-birdsong/>
- Borgdorff, H. 2016. *The debate on Research in the Arts*. Retrieved May, 2019 from <https://es.scribd.com/document/202198978/El-Debate-Sobre-La-Investigacion-en-Las-Artes>
- Chadwick, R., & Hill, P. (2017). *Olivier Messiaen's catalogue d'oiseaux: from conception to performance*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cheney, S. P. (2012). *Wood notes wild, notations of bird music*. HardPress Publishing.
- Chiantore, L. (2021). *inVersions'*. Retrieved from <https://chiantore.bandcamp.com/album/inversions>
- Correia, J., Dalagna, G., Benetti, A. and Monteiro, F. (2018). *Cahiers of artistic research 1: When is research artistic research?* UA Editora.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1980). *Mil Mesetas (Vol. 2 of Capitalism and Schizophrenia)*. Pre-Textos.
- Fallon, R. (2007). The record of realism in Messiaen's bird style. In C. Dingle & Simeone, N. *Messiaen: Music, Art and Literature* (pp.115-136). Ashgate.

- Freeman, R. (1995). *Courtesy towards the thing of nature: Interpretations of Messiaen's catalogue d'oiseaux*. *Tempo*, 192, 9-14. Retrieved April 2019 from https://www.jstor.org/stable/946000?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
- Halbreich, H. (2008). *L'œuvre d'Olivier Messiaen*. Fayard.
- Hart, H. (2018). *Music and environment in dystopian narrative. Sounding the disaster*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hawkins, J. (1776). *General history of the science and practice of music*. T. Payne.
- Healey, G. (2013). *Messiaen's musical techniques: The composer's view and beyond*. Ashgate.
- Hill, P. (2013). From Réveil des oiseaux to Catalogue d'oiseaux: Messiaen's Cahiers de notations des chants d'oiseaux, 1952–59. In C. Dingle & R. Fallon (eds). *Messiaen Perspectives 1: Sources and influences* (pp. 143-174). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Kircher, A. (1650). *Musurgia universalis*. Francesco Corbelletti.
- Leech-Wilkinson, D. (2016). Classical music as enforced Utopia. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 15(3-4), 143-174. Retrieved in November 2018 from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1474022216647706>
- Mathews, F. S. (1921). *Field book of wild birds and their music, a description of the character and music of birds, intended to assist in the identification of species common in the United States east of the Rocky Mountains*. G.P. Putnam's Sons. Retrieved in January 2021 from <https://archive.org/details/fieldbookofwildb00math/mode/2up>
- Messiaen, O. 1994. *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie: Tome V*. Paris: Alphonse Leduc.
- Messiaen, O. (1964). *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. Alphonse Leduc.
- Messiaen, O. (1960). *Conférence de Bruxelles, prononcée à l'Exposition Internationale de Bruxelles en 1958*. Alphonse Leduc.
- Messiaen, O. (1953-1991). *Travaux préparatoires: Cahiers de notation de chants d'oiseaux (Fonds Olivier Messiaen et Yvonne Loriod)*. Bibliothèque National de France.
- Muns, L. (2018). *The Ancient Song of Reptiles (2)*. Retrieved in January 2020 from <https://lodewijkmuns.nl/2018/08/01/kircher/>
- Samuel, C., & Messiaen, O. (1994). *Olivier Messiaen: Music and color: Conversations with Claude Samuel*. Amadeus Press.
- Shenton, A. (2008). *Olivier Messiaen's System of Signs: Notes Towards Understanding His Music*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Szöke, P. (1987). *The Unknown Music of Birds*. Hungaroton.
- Szöke, P. & Filip M. (1977). *The Study of Intonation Structure of Bird Vocalizations: an Inadequate Application of Sound Spectrography*. Opuscula Zoologica