



# The Reinvention of Religious Music: Olivier Messiaen's Breakthrough Toward the Beyond

*Sander van Maas*

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Present-day music studies conspicuously evade the question of religion in contemporary music. Although many composers address the issue in their work, as yet there have been few attempts to think through the structure of religious music as we hear it. On the basis of a careful analysis of Olivier Messiaen's work, this book argues for a renewal of our thinking about religious music. Addressing his notion of a hyper-religious music of sounds and colors, it aims to show that Messiaen has broken new ground. His reinvention of religious music makes us again aware of the fact that religious music, if taken in its proper radical sense, belongs to the foremost of musical adventures. The work of Olivier Messiaen is well known for its inclusion of religious themes and gestures. These alone, however, do not seem enough to account for the religious status of the work. Arguing for a breakthrough toward the beyond on the basis of the synaesthetic experience of music, Messiaen invites a confrontation with contemporary theologians and post-secular thinkers. How to account for a religious breakthrough that is produced by a work of art? Starting from an analysis of his 1960s oratorio *La Transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur Jesus-Christ*, this book arranges a moderated dialogue between Messiaen and the music theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, the phenomenology of revelation of Jean-Luc Marion, the rethinking of religion and technics in Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, and the Augustinian ruminations of Sren Kierkegaard and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Ultimately, this confrontation underscores the challenging yet deeply affirmative nature of Messiaen's music.

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