OLIVIER MESSIAEN’S *COULEURS DE LA CITÉ CÉLESTE*: A CONDUCTOR’S GUIDE

ABSTRACT

Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) was one of the leading composers of the twentieth century. He was renowned for developing his own personal style of composition of which he outlined in his *Technique de mon Language Musical*. This style includes the use of color chords, birdsong, plainchant, and Hindu and Greek rhythms. His compositions were written for, and championed by conductors such as Pierre Boulez, Kent Nagano, Seiji Ozawa, and of course his primary artistic partner, pianist Yvonne Loriod.

Over the course of his compositional career, Messiaen wrote five works for winds and percussion. The first three works *Oiseaux exotiques*, *Couleurs de la Cité céleste*, and *Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum* were written over a span of eight years early in Messiaen’s career from 1956 to 1964. The last two works *Un Vitrail et des Oiseaux* and *La Ville d’En-Haut* were written over a span of two years late in Messiaen’s career from 1986 to 1987. Of all five works, *Oiseaux exotiques* has received the most attention from scholars and conductors thus far.

The second work, *Couleurs de la Cité céleste* is underperformed and will benefit from additional study. This study is intended to increase the number of informed performances of *Couleurs de la Cité céleste* in the United States by serving as a guide that will assist the conductor in gaining the understanding necessary to approach this monumental work.