

Institution: University of Sheffield
Unit of Assessment: 35 - Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts
Title of case study: The cultural impact of interpreting and performing the music of Messiaen
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Peter Hill is an internationally-acclaimed scholar and pianist, and one of the leading authorities on the French 20th Century composer Messiaen. His research into the music of Messiaen made a significant contribution on an international and local level to cultural life and musical understanding, through written work for non-academic audiences, public lectures and master-classes, pre-concert and broadcast talks, and, most significantly, through the impact of that research on his and others' performances and recordings. The scale of his contribution is indicated by the number and range of public engagements, particularly during Messiaen's centenary year (2008), and critical acclaim and personal testimonies from professionals and the music-loving public. His work is a prime example of research informing performance, and enriching the cultural experience of the music-loving public beyond academia.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Professor Peter Hill's (University of Sheffield, since 1976; Emeritus Professor 2009-) research interests have included Stravinsky, the Second Viennese School, and the theory of musical performance, but a continuing thread (since 1985) has been the French composer Olivier Messiaen – one of the foremost twentieth century composers. Studies with Messiaen himself (1986–91), while recording the solo piano music, led to countless insights, but in particular a scepticism about the prevailing view of Messiaen as the composer of static or non-propulsive music (see, for example, the biography by Paul Griffiths). This alternative view was presented in three chapters in [R1] <i>The Messiaen Companion</i> (1995), later in [R2] <i>Olivier Messiaen: Oiseaux Exotiques</i> (with Nigel Simeone, 2007), and most recently in work for a forthcoming book on Messiaen's <i>Catalogue d'Oiseaux</i> [R4] and [R5]. This involves viewing Messiaen's music (especially post-1950) as a mosaic composed of structures that operate on different levels, and at the same time recognising the tonal centres established in the music that enable a sense of goal-direction. These ideas are key to Hill's own recordings [R6] and performances of Messiaen, and form the basis of his impact on other performers and the music-loving public.</p> <p>At the same time, Hill's views on the music were enhanced by unique access to the private Messiaen papers, beginning with four years researching in the composer's apartment in Paris (2001–4), followed by work on the manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF). The result was [R3] <i>Messiaen</i> (with Nigel Simeone, 2005), the first biography of the composer to relate in detail the circumstances of Messiaen's life to the evolution of his music. The holdings at the BnF include one of the birdsong notebooks, which contain his transcriptions, ideas, projects and sketches of all types. Hill is the first scholar to have subjected these manuscripts to detailed scrutiny, and an inventory of their contents is nearing completion. Hill's work on the birdsong notebooks was the principal source for the book on <i>Oiseaux Exotiques</i> (2007), which was the first study to trace in detail the genesis of a work by this notoriously secretive composer. In addition, Hill's research led to his discovery and reconstruction of a previously unknown work, <i>La Fauvette Passerinette</i> (Subalpine Warbler), which is a substantial 15-minute piece for piano in the composer's birdsong style, dating from 1961. The piece was discovered by Hill among Messiaen's sketches, the music clearly in an advanced state of completion, with several pages marked "page à copier". Passages that were still in the composer's shorthand were reconstructed by cross-referencing to the notations in Messiaen's birdsong notebooks. Hill's research shed light on the origins and context of this work and its relationship to Messiaen's other compositions at this time and provides a richer understanding of Messiaen's compositional development.</p> <p>Understanding the sources, inspirations and evolution of Messiaen's music has immeasurable significance for performers, and – like the ideas on 'time' discussed earlier – are central to Hill's performances and masterclasses. An illustrative example of this is the way understanding Messiaen's ornithological inspirations, including Hill's discovery of the recordings of birdsong used by Messiaen, and the evolution of birdsong into musical material in Messiaen's notebooks, made it possible to get closer to Messiaen's ideas of timbre, and to what Messiaen heard within the</p>

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birdsong. Ultimately these discoveries provided insights impossible to obtain from the score alone. These findings resonate with a wider public and have played a major part in Hill's public lectures and talks (together with broadcasts) on Messiaen.

3. References to the research

- R1. Peter Hill (editor). *The Messiaen Companion*. Faber and Faber, 1995.
- R2. Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone. *Olivier Messiaen: Oiseaux exotiques*, Ashgate 'Landmarks since 1950', 2007.
- R3. Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone. *Messiaen*, Yale University Press, 2005. (Later revised and enlarged in a French edition, including a new chapter: 'Epilogue: la pensée musicale', pp. 481–510: *Messiaen*, Fayard).
- R4. Peter Hill 'The genesis of Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux*' in *Perspectives on the Performance of French Piano Music*, ed. Scott McCarrey and Lesley A. Wright (Ashgate, 2013)
- R5. Peter Hill 'From *Réveil des oiseaux* to *Catalogue d'oiseaux*: Messiaen's *Cahiers de notations des chants d'oiseaux*', 1952–59 in *Messiaen Perspectives 1: Sources and Influences*, Christopher Dingle and Robert Fallon (eds) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).
- R6. Peter Hill *Messiaen: the complete solo piano music* (CD recordings), reissued as part of *The Messiaen Edition* by Brilliant Classics, 2008

The research was supported by two AHRC funding awards (2002-4 and 2006-9 with Nigel Simeone), and Peter Hill was awarded the Dumesnil Prize for musical scholarship by the Académie des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 2008. His books have received excellent reviews in the scholarly and musical press: *Messiaen* (Hill & Simeone, 2005) was described as "...exemplary...an authoritative biography, one not likely to be surpassed for years to come." (*Times Higher Education Supplement*, 2006) and was a book of the year in the *Daily Mail* and *Independent* (2005).

4. Details of the impact

Peter Hill's research has had three main types of impact: first, the research informed Hill's creation of cultural artefacts (his performances, recordings, writings and broadcasts) and helped preserve - and in one case discover - musical heritage, all of which enriched the cultural life of the general music-loving public; second, shaping musical education and performance interpretation of Messiaen's music beyond the University of Sheffield, through piano masterclasses, lectures, writings and recordings; and, third, economic impact from performances and recordings.

As described above, Hill's research into Messiaen's music led to new ways of interpreting the composer's work in relation to intra-musical processes (goal direction versus stasis) and their relationship with extramusical ideas and inspirations (the relationship between the natural world and its portraiture in Messiaen's music). These new ways of thinking impacted on Hill's creative practice as a performer, both in terms of creating cultural capital – specifically the performances and reissued recordings that resulted from the research – and in terms of the particular musical expression that those performances take. The manifestation of this research in the form of Hill's recordings and performances is particularly significant because neither Messiaen nor his wife, and primary interpreter, Yvonne Loriod, are alive anymore. While there is a 'school' of followers influenced by studying with Loriod, Hill was influenced by studying with Messiaen rather than his interpreter. Hill's exhaustive studies with, and subsequent to, Messiaen now means he has a different but equally respected and highly acclaimed interpretation. Hence, Hill's distinctive contribution to cultural life comes from the way his research enabled him to create distinctive interpretations of Messiaen's music that are received as culture- and life-enhancing.

Hill's performances and recordings are widely regarded as authoritative interpretations and the touchstone for future performers, as noted by reviewers: '*Few pianists have more authority in [Messiaen's] music than Hill, who studied the Catalogue with the composer ... He plays it with a fluency that extends far beyond mere technical accuracy and rhythmic precision. The pieces are thus immediately far more than abstract technical exercises, but become the richly coloured portraits from nature that Messiaen intended ...*' (*Guardian*, 2011). In further evidence of this cultural impact, his Messiaen recordings were first re-issued by Regis Records as a 7CD set in

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2002 (original recordings 1985-1994, Unicorn-Kanchana) and then in 2008 reissued again by Brilliant Classics who chose Hill's version of the piano music for their complete edition of Messiaen's music. Moreover, Hill has the distinction of three listings in *1001 Classical Recordings You Must Hear Before You Die* (Universe Publishing, 2008), including one for Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (original recording, 1988-90; reissued 2002 and 2008). In addition his recording of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* was named in *The Times*' "The Classical Collection" (2008) as the best recording of this work. Hill's recordings and performances are also a means by which this musical heritage is preserved. An extreme example of this is Hill's discovery and interpretation of Messiaen's previously unknown piano piece, *La Fauvette Passerinette* (Subalpine Warbler), which emerged during Hill's work in the Messiaen archive 2002-4 (reported in *Gramophone*, 31 July 2013), and was premiered by Hill in Sheffield, on 2 November 2013, with a broadcast by BBC Radio 3.

The impact of Hill's work on the wider public also comes through his huge number and range of public engagement activities which include masterclasses, lectures, broadcast talks, discussions and documentaries, journalism, and pre-concert talks. The range and number of events is illustrated by Hill's schedule in Messiaen's centenary year (2008), which included 12 broadcasts (including a recital at the Messiaen Festival at La Grave, broadcast by Radio France), 23 public lectures (including Carnegie Hall, the Library of Congress, the British Library and the Proms), broadcast interviews and documentaries (including, 'Debussy's year in 1912', 'Messiaen as teacher', and 'The Golden Oriole' for BBC Radio 3, and others for CBC, Radio France and Radio New Zealand), 12 masterclasses, in addition to 10 solo and 4 duo recitals in Europe, North America and Australia. Solo recitals to non-academic audiences include: in 2008 - Boston University, Buxton Festival, Cardiff University Messiaen Day, La Grave Messiaen Festival, Leeds University Messiaen Day, Norwich Messiaen Weekend, Queen's Hall Edinburgh, RNCM Messiaen Weekend, MITO Festival Milan and Turin; in 2011 - Boston Conservatory; Le Poisson Rouge, New York; Bristol Earth Music Festival (Radio 3); in 2012 - Festival Louise Besette, Montreal, for which he received the award for Best Contemporary Recital and Best Overall Recital, Synaesthesia Festival at MONA, Hobart; in 2013 - Norwegian Academy of Music, Brisbane Conservatorium. In addition, since 2008 he has given 15 performances as piano duo (with Benjamin Frith) and as pianist with numerous ensembles in performances of Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*.

Unsolicited individual testimonies and reviews attest to the highly prized experiences that these performances arouse in audiences [S3]. For example, the reviewer of a performance in Glasgow described the performance as "*lyrical and poetic..., intimate..., meticulously expressive in its dynamic layering and achingly tender in the ecstatic calm of the love music*" (*The Herald*, 2008). The Director of the SoundsNew Contemporary Music Festival remarked "*...your recordings of Messiaen literally changed my life - and I sincerely mean that. The recording of Books 1, 2 and 3 of Catalogue...inspired me more than words can say. No one else plays Messiaen like you*" (email to Hill, 2008). As another reviewer put it: '*Peter Hill does not just give concerts, he also enriches one's life with perceptive introductions that illuminate the music, however well you may think you know it ...*' (Yorkshire Post).

Hill's many public lectures include those for general audiences and trainee music educators, totalling approximately 1800 people (2008-13). In 2008 alone his public lectures included: 'Messiaen's use of birdsong recordings', British Library Saul lecture; 'Messiaen', Carnegie Hall (to an audience of 300 people and where his co-lecturer was Pierre Boulez); 'Messiaen's Blackbird', Chicago Humanities Festival; 'Messiaen in War and Peace', Library of Congress; 'Introducing Messiaen', MITO Festival Milan; 'The composer in an age of change', 'Messiaen and birdsong' and 'Why music education matters', New Zealand Music Teacher's Conference; 'Messiaen, Birdsong and *Oiseaux Exotiques*', Philharmonia Orchestra, Royal Festival Hall; 'Messiaen's *Saint François d'Assise*' (broadcast discussion), BBC Promenade Concerts, Radio 3; 'The Crystal Liturgy', BBC Promenade Concerts; 'Messiaen's Quartet', Queen's Hall Edinburgh. In illustration of the value placed on these activities by audience members, the organiser of the New Zealand Music Teacher's Conference remarked afterwards: "*Everyone is unanimous in their praise for you and the time you spent with us. With your 'wonderful communication skills with voice and piano' you convinced, converted, and indeed 'motivated, encouraged and inspired' people to explore new horizons.*" (email to Hill, 2008).

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He has also made a conscious effort to communicate his research findings in an accessible way through written material for general audiences, such as programme notes and essays for the South Bank Messiaen Festival, February–December 2008, and booklet notes for a Messiaen chamber music CD by the Gould Trio (Hyperion), 2008. The way in which Hill's research influences the general public's understanding [S4] is illustrated by the example of the Saul Lecture at the British Library (2008), which examined Messiaen's transcriptions from birdsong recordings, copies of which are held in the British Library's sound archive, and their subsequent use in his music. As well as making connections between ornithology and music this work resulted in interdisciplinary connections between the curators of the ornithology and music recordings.

Hill's research has also influenced later performers and interpreters of Messiaen's music through the numerous public lectures and masterclasses [S1, S2] to audiences of up to a hundred people each time at universities and conservatoires throughout Europe, North America and Australia. Some of these comprised week-long residencies in which Hill worked intensively with up to 20 students at a time as well as giving public lectures and recitals. For instance, at the Australian National Academy of Music (in 2012) he coached advanced pianists in Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen* (taking the second piano part himself) before giving performances at the Hobart Synaesthesia Festival, Tasmania. Participants attest to the value and influence of his educational work, one host remarking: *'thank you for all your many contributions to the Conservatorium last week. For Colin the experience was priceless but for many others [pianists named] and all those who witnessed your infectious enthusiasm and boundless expertise in your lectures/classes/concerts, we shall remember your visit for a long time.'* (Queensland Conservatorium, email to Hill, 2013) [S1].

Hill's numerous recordings and performances also create economic benefits. Sales of recordings and tickets directly benefit record companies, and the regions and organisations hosting the many festivals at which he performs. For example, Hill provided four events to an audience of 400 within the Synaesthesia weekend festival at the Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania - Tasmania's primary tourist attraction and part of its emerging 'neo-economy'. More locally, Hill has contributed to the University of Sheffield's identity as a 'Civic University' through his contribution to the success of the Sheffield Chamber Festival 'Music in the Round', resulting in expansion of the Crucible Theatre studio *"to accommodate a much larger audience due to the following built up by the Lindsays [String Quartet] ...placing Sheffield squarely on the musical map... He has truly enriched all who have heard him and thereby the reputation of Sheffield as a cultural centre."* (Master Cutler, Sheffield)[S5].

The constant stream of invitations to perform, coach and speak all over the world attest to the value placed on Hill's work and his reputation as someone who can communicate with the general public. Moreover it underlines Hill's commitment to communicate ideas, insights and knowledge about music to the widest audience and indicates the enrichment to quality of life this brings.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. Hill's influence on other performers and on performance practice more generally, could be verified by Senior Lecturer in Music Studies and Composition, Queensland Conservatorium, who hosted Peter Hill's masterclasses and performances there in March 2013.
- S2. Hill's influence on other performers and on performance practice more generally, could be verified by the Artistic Director, Australian National Academy of Music, who hosted Peter Hill's masterclasses and performances there in March 2013.
- S3. Hill's influence on audiences is exemplified by testimonials by long-time followers of his performances.
- S4. The influence of Peter Hill's research and performances on understanding of Messiaen could be verified by the Head of music research at McGill University.
- S5. The influence of Peter Hill's research, performances and talks on the City of Sheffield's economy and vibrancy could be verified by the Master Cutler (ambassador of industry in Sheffield 2006)