

**Thursday,
September 13, 2012
3:15-5 p.m. in U73**

Guest lecture in the seminar series
**Topics in the Aesthetics of
Music and Sound**

- arranged by **The Aesthetics of Music and
Sound** – www.soundmusicresearch.org –
**Cross-Disciplinary Interplay between the
Humanities, Technology and Musical
Practice**, Institute for the Study of Culture,
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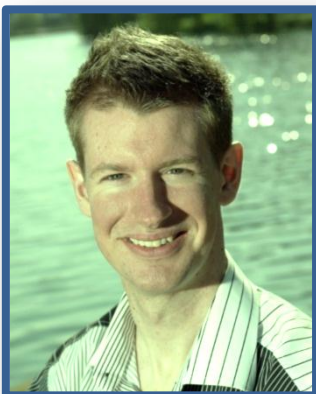
The Search for Musical Perfection When Preparing a Piece for Recording – Beyond the Musical Score

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(Expanded version of a talk originally given at NNIMIPA Network Meeting,
King's College, London, July 22, 2012)

After several years of performing Messiaen's music, I decided to record his vast piano cycle *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus/ Twenty Gazes upon the Infant Jesus*. 2010 was the year of preparation for this recording which I completed in the early summer of 2011. During the process of preparation, recording and finally the editing of many hours of recorded material, I found myself obliged to make many choices and to engage in much serious contemplation.

My goal with this short presentation is to shed some light on the process I (we) as (a) musician(s) go through when recording a piece of music - from the very first note played (when we perhaps hadn't even thought of recording the piece later on) until the final result. It's not so much the

final result that is important in this lecture, but the process, since it's a process of trying to *approach perfection*. And my idea of the "perfect" Messiaen recording surely differs from that of other musicians or musicologists.

As with most other composers there's not just one "true" way of playing Messiaen's music, but several ways. What then makes a recording "perfect" and might not this aim for perfection when recording Messiaen's music differ from when recording say music of Bach or Mozart? What is perfection in the context of recording? To what degree is one as a musician obliged to stay true to the musical score and to what extent is one allowed certain freedoms? Does performance practice (tradition) apply to contemporary music like that of Messiaen? When editing, what makes one "take" better than another if both contain all the right notes?

Those were but some of the many questions and considerations that consciously and unconsciously went through my mind during these three steps (preparing, recording and editing) of completing the recording. A lot of this is very difficult to put into words since, as always with music, it's to a great extent a matter of feelings, sense and emotions, of culture and traditions/schools, etc. In other words please don't expect this presentation to provide any final answers regarding the search for perfection in recording, but rather to work towards providing an articulation of some of the relevant questions which should be asked.

ALL ARE WELCOME! 