

Isorhythm Listening Examples

1. Guillaume Dufay: "Apostolo Glorioso" c. 1440

[Youtube Link](#)

This is a choral piece by a French composer named Dufay. It was written right at the time that what we call the Middle Ages were changing over into what is called the Renaissance in Western Europe. Dufay is one of the all-time masters of Isorhythmic technique, and he wrote a whole set of these short choral works called Motets using isorhythm. The basic rule is that at least the tenor part has to use isorhythm, but in many of his pieces there's also some isorhythm in other voices as well. Can you spot any rhythmic or melodic patterns that repeat in this piece?

2. Olivier Messiaen: "Liturgie de Cristal" (Crystal Liturgy) c. 1941

[Youtube Link](#)

This piece is actually the first movement of a longer work called the "Quartet for the End of Time". It was composed by another French composer, Olivier Messiaen, only about 500 years after Dufay wrote his motets. When Messiaen wrote this piece, he was not in the happiest place--he was actually a prisoner of war. Nevertheless, I think you'll be surprised at the music--it's not too dark and gloomy! I don't want to give too much away, but I will tell you that Messiaen was *obsessed* with birds. He knew almost everything about them, and memorized lots of their songs. I'll also tell you that the isorhythm is in the piano and cello parts, and the *talea* and *colore* patterns are so long and complicated that they never get a chance to line up together before the piece ends!

3. Bill Brovold's Larval: "The Entity" c. 2000

[Listening Link](#)

This is a totally different kind of piece. Not only are the instruments and style different (what instruments can you hear?), but the way the isorhythm works is different too. Instead of one or two parts with different *talea* and *colore* in them, Bill Brovold has written this piece so that every part repeats a simple pattern, but all the patterns are different lengths, so the whole band makes an isorhythmic texture! (One part is in 4, one in 5, and another in 6). Because there are many different patterns happening at once, it takes a while for them all to line up again, but something special happens when they do. Can you tell where the parts realign? What happens to the music?