

# THE INFLUENCE OF YVONNE LORIOD ON THE PIANO WORKS OF OLIVIER MESSIAEN

AVZ

## BACKGROUND: WHO WAS YVONNE LORIOD?

- While there is a vast amount of research concerning Olivier Messiaen and his compositions, there is a dearth of information about the pianist Yvonne Loriod, who played a primary role in inspiring the development of Messiaen's compositional approach to the piano.
- Loriod was a French concert pianist, teacher, and composer.
- Born January 20, 1924 and died May 17, 2010
- Loriod would later become Olivier Messiaen's second wife

## WHY WAS YVONNE LORIOD IMPORTANT IN MESSIAEN'S DEVELOPMENT AS A COMPOSER?

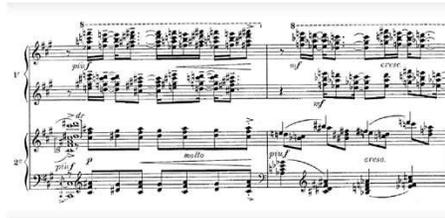
- Without the influence of Yvonne Loriod, Messiaen's compositional output would look completely different today.
- She inspired Messiaen to write new style of major piano works based on her pianistic strength, which included a strong sense of sonority, rhythmic vitality, and control of timbre.
- As their personal relationship changed from student and teacher, to musical partners, and finally to lifelong companions, so did their musical relationship.
- I will focus on three works to show how Loriod's and Messiaen's evolving relationship affected Messiaen's compositions.
  - *Visions of the Amen* (1943): Student and teacher
  - *20 Contemplations of the Infant Jesus* (1944): Musical partners
  - *Catalog of Birds* (1956-1958): Lifelong companions

## WHAT WAS HER MUSICAL CAREER?

- Age 6: Starts musical studies
- Age 14: Learns all Mozart piano concertos, Beethoven piano sonatas, and Bach Preludes and Fugues
- Enters Paris Conservatory and meets Messiaen in 1941
- As concert pianist, she recorded and premiered several major piano works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century including all of Messiaen's piano works and Bartok's 2<sup>nd</sup> Piano Concerto
- Taught piano at the Paris Conservatory and at Darmstadt

## LORIOD AND MESSIAEN: STUDENT AND TEACHER

- Loriod meets Messiaen as a student in his harmony class at the Paris Conservatory on May 7, 1941.
- Messiaen becomes familiar with Loriod's pianistic artistry by attending a concert in which she included Messiaen's *Preludes* (1929), a work she wanted to perform for the composer.
- Inspired by Loriod's prodigious talent, Messiaen writes *Visions of the Amen* (1943), a 40-minute work in seven movements for two pianos premiered by Loriod and himself.
- Messiaen writes the Piano I part for Loriod, which features virtuoso passagework, bell sounds, and birdsong. The Piano II part, played by Messiaen, is less but has all of the important thematic material for the work.



Excerpt from *Visions of the Amen*, VII. Consummation of the Amen. The Piano I part was composed for and played by Loriod. Messiaen played the Piano II part.

- Although this major work marks an important point in their musical collaboration, Messiaen and Loriod's relationship had yet to develop into true musical partners.

## LORIOD AND MESSIAEN: MUSICAL PARTNERS

- After a successful premiere of *Visions of the Amen*, Loriod becomes the primary motivator for all of Messiaen's new compositions for piano.
- Shortly afterward, Messiaen writes the monumental two-hour solo piano cycle: *20 Contemplations on the Infant Jesus* (1944) and dedicates the piece to Loriod.
- Like many of Messiaen's earlier works, the compositional techniques include:
  - Modes of limited transposition
  - Non retrogradable rhythms
- Compared with his last major work for solo piano, *Preludes* (1929), *20 Contemplations* has higher technical demands inspired by Loriod's pianistic skills:
  - Complex contrapuntal textures such as layered rhythmic canons
  - Use of extreme ranges of the piano
  - Brilliant passagework of runs, arpeggiations, and rapid chords played in succession
  - Wide ranges of contrast and differing timbres
- Equally significant to Loriod's compositions is her spirituality—a spirituality that is found in the two bottom staves



Excerpt from the *20 Contemplations on the Infant Jesus*, VIII. Contemplation of the Father. One of the most significant works in their collaboration is found in the two bottom staves

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## LORIOD AND MESSIAEN: LIFELONG COMPANIONS

- Messiaen continues to write pieces with piano parts written for Loriod and dedicates them to her including a major orchestral work, *Turangalila-Symphonie* (1946-1948).
- In the 1950s, Loriod helps Messiaen during a difficult period in his life. His first wife, violinist Claire Delbos, becomes mentally ill after surgery and is sent to a sanatorium and dies in 1959.
- Adding to the difficulties of his personal family life, Messiaen encounters difficulties with his own compositional process and critical reception of his works by the press and musicians.
- Loriod accompanies Messiaen on his ornithological research trips around Europe helping him record birdsong. The resulting piece represents another evolution in Messiaen's piano compositions, *Catalog of Birds* (1956-58), a 13-movement work of 2-1/2 hours.
- Messiaen dedicates yet another major work to Loriod. The work reflects his love for nature, another theme used in many of his compositions.
- Although Messiaen had used birdsong in his earlier pieces, *Catalog of Birds* features the most extensive use of his own "transcriptions" of birdsong.



Excerpt from the opening of *Catalog of Birds*, "VIII. The Lark Callendrelle."

- Solidifying their relationship as lifelong companions, Loriod and Messiaen marry July 1, 1961.
- Loriod continued to perform and record Messiaen's works. Their relationship continued even after his death, as she published his works.

