

# The Influence of Yvonne Loriod

## On the Piano Works Of Olivier Messiaen

By Tiantian Liang, NCTM

French pianist, teacher and composer Yvonne Loriod (1924–2010) played a significant role in inspiring the development of Olivier Messiaen’s compositional approach to the piano. She would later become Messiaen’s second wife. Without her influence, Messiaen’s compositional output would look completely different today.

Loriod inspired Messiaen to write a new style of major piano works based on her pianistic strengths, which included a strong sense of sonority, rhythmic vitality and control of

timbre. As their relationship changed—from student and teacher to musical partners, and finally to lifelong companions—so did their musical relationship.

Three works show how their evolving relationship affected Messiaen’s compositions. Messiaen’s first work for Loriod, a two-piano piece entitled *Visions of the Amen* (1943), demonstrates his recognition of her virtuosic technique. Although he gives Loriod the virtuosic part, his part contains the important thematic material. Their student and teacher relationship evolved later in his largest work to the date, *20 Contemplations of the Infant Jesus* (1944)—a two-hour piano cycle that capitalized on Loriod’s skills including complex contrapuntal textures, brilliant passagework, and a wide range of contrasting timbres. Another monumental piano cycle, *Catalog of Birds* (1956–1958), represents the pair’s relationship as lifelong companions. ◀◀

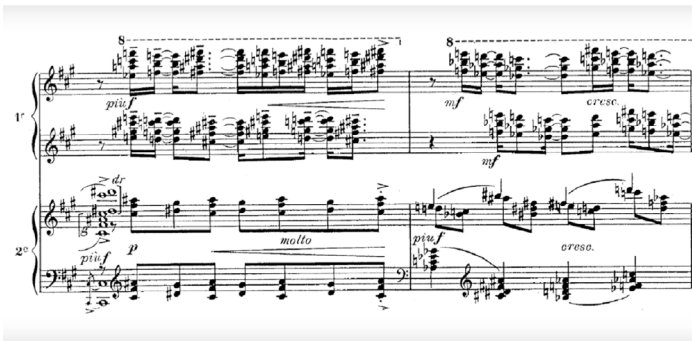
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**STUDENT AND TEACHER**

- Loriod meets Messiaen as a student in his harmony class at the Paris Conservatory on May 7, 1941 and becomes familiar with Loriod’s pianistic artistry.
- 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 the important thematic material for the work.



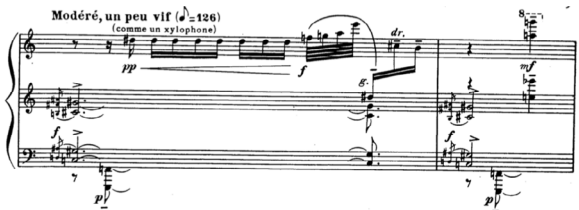
Excerpt from *Visions of the Amen*, VII. Consummation of the Amen.

**MUSICAL PARTNERS in 20**

**Contemplations on the Infant Jesus (1944)**



Bell tones are in the top staff, while the bottom staff bass notes imitates a tam-tam. This requires the pianist to perform these lines with different techniques using arm weight and finger speed to create contrasting colors. Control of timbre was one of Loriod’s strengths.



Excerpt from the second theme of “Bells.” Messiaen’s demand for imitation of orchestral colors is evident with the indication “like a xylophone” in the right hand.

**LORIOD AND MESSIAEN: LIFELONG COMPANIONS in *Catalog of Birds* (1956–1958)**



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