

## AGONY & ECSTASY

**Timo Andres** – *Old Ground*, solo piano

**Billy Childs** – *Pursuit*, solo piano

**Maurice Ravel** – *Gaspard de la Nuit*, solo piano

Inna Faliks, piano

**Olivier Messiaen** – *Visions de l'Amen*, two pianos

Steven Vanhauwaert & Mark Robson, pianos

### Introduction

The history presented here reflects a continuum of human experience as seen through four musical works that are related in curious ways. The personal experiences of the composers, their casts of supporting characters – including me – are favored whenever possible to place the music in a vibrant context that does not gloss over uncomfortable truths. For “classical music” to engage listeners in the 21st century, it must lose the sense that it is decorative, safe, and inert. This particular journey may feel meandering at times as leads are followed, but by journey’s end the four composers will emerge as fully dimensional human beings engaged with the world that formed them, and the world they endeavor to form. Each is responsive to the extremities of life, to the vast range of nuances between its agonies and ecstasies.



Maurice Ravel in pajamas by Achille Ouvre, 1909

### Pride of Place

The story of Maurice Ravel, a shy, jockey-sized bachelor whose social life centered around the ballet and opera, was overshadowed for much of the 20th century by composers considered greater than he: Claude Debussy, whose controversial opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* shattered conventions, and Igor Stravinsky, whose controversial ballet *Sacre du Printemps* turned the world upside down.

Ravel composed his piano masterpiece, the suite *Gaspard de la Nuit*, between these radical landmarks, however Ravel’s *tour de force* was radical in less obvious ways. He was recognized decades later for his innovations once pianist/composer Olivier Messiaen (1908-92), his contemporaries, and his many students, took full measure of *Gaspard’s* polytonal and polyrhythmic design. Messiaen had a special affinity for the work. While living in the French countryside during WWI, the seven-year-old boy taught himself to play his uncle’s piano with gifts of sheet music that soon included Debussy’s popular *Estampes* and Ravel’s masterpiece.

The child then began study of the *Pelléas et Mélisande* score upon receiving it for his tenth birthday in 1918. This daring gift was the equivalent of offering a child Alban Berg’s opera *Wozzeck* at the end of WWII! The Debussy opera and Stravinsky ballet became the core works of Messiaen’s teaching at the Paris Conservatoire after returning to occupied Paris from a POW camp in Poland. Today, Stravinsky’s piano music hardly casts a shadow in the standard recital repertoire, while Debussy’s keyboard abstractions loom large. Nevertheless, Ravel’s *Gaspard de la Nuit* takes pride of place as a virtuoso pinnacle. His structural and technical mastery compels attention while being no less evocative as story telling.



Ricardo Viñes

Claude Debussy

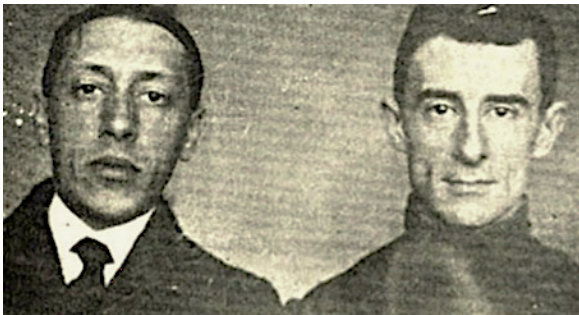
### Spices of all kinds

Ravel was born with a gypsy streak in 1875. Of Basque and Swiss heritage, he was quickly transplanted from very near Biarritz and the Spanish border to Paris. A decided sympathy for Spanish music, painting, and wine was deep in the *terroir* of his blood. But, Ravel also inhaled Javanese gamelan music and reveled in Rimsky Korsakov’s Orientalized orchestral palette at the 1889 Exhibition Universelle in Paris – a world’s fair that lasted six months

and left behind the Eiffel Tower among its many less evident but no less important legacies. The adjacent *Galerie des Machines* covered 83,930 square yards, with 37,823 meters of glass windows – the longest interior space in the world at the time, costing over seven times that of the Eiffel Tower. Its legacy will factor into our story later.

That year Ravel enrolled in the Paris Conservatoire where he would stay until 1895, and return again over a six-year period. He was expelled more than once during a span of fourteen years despite such early triumphs as the *Pavane pour une Infante Défunte* for solo piano published in 1900. Although, inspired by *Las Meninas*, the 1656 painting by Diego Velázquez, and commissioned by Winaretta Singer, the Princesse Edmond de Polignac, Ravel's choice of name for the work had little to do with the *Pavane's* gestation and more to do with how the words sounded together.

Formed around 1900, Ravel became closely associated with the Apaches, an all-male group of artists and intellectuals who saw themselves as hooligans and outcasts. The name was chosen by Ravel's best friend, the Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes, who noted, apropos of his friend's disposition, that Ravel craved pickles, mustards and spices of all kinds. The Apaches met on Saturday nights either in the studio of painter Paul Sordes, or poet Tristan Klingsor's home. Debussy was an Apache too, so the group rallied around his 1902 opera and helped usher in *Pelléas et Mélisande* as a *succès de scandale* that lasted until the First World War shut down all the opera houses across Europe.



Igor Stravinsky & Maurice Ravel

### Purported Liaisons

Sometimes the Apaches met in the apartment of Maurice Delage, who would later travel to India and experiment with preparing the piano decades before John Cage made it into an art. At the time Delage and Stravinsky lived together. They both shared a deep regard for Ravel's music. Speculation was fanned in Robert Craft's final book *Stravinsky: Discoveries and Memories* (Naxos Books, 2013) that Stravinsky and Delage had a love affair. However fleetingly, Viñes and Manuel De Falla have long been thought of as Ravel's intimate partners. Craft, who was Stravinsky's amanuensis, biographer and conductor, wagishly confirmed a persistent story about Ravel and Stravinsky sharing a bed in 1913. "People would laughingly ask: 'How was it?' to which his laughing answer was always, 'You will have to ask Ravel.'"

After successive failed attempts to win the coveted Prix de Rome, Ravel's 1903 graduation piece, his String Quartet, was so fully formed and technically advanced that it immediately drew excited comparisons with the Debussy Quartet, written ten years earlier. Its 1904 Paris debut led to incessant newspaper and café debates about the relative merits of the two quartets, false charges of plagiarism, and ultimately to the estrangement of the two composers.

Ravel described his tense friendship with Debussy as "on frigid terms for illogical reasons." Ravel brought a vital energy to the classic quartet form with its kaleidoscope of moods evoking sensations of light, color and space. The ambitious scale of it, and the exhilarating virtuosity demanded to play it, established Ravel's as the first great and truly popular string quartet of the 20th century.

By 1905, a very busy Ravel had perfected another solo piano work *Sonatine*, fashioned the ravishing orchestral songs for mezzo-soprano *Scheherazade*, and polished *Introduction & Allegro*, a radiant touchstone for harp, flute, clarinet, and string quartet. The Apaches were first to hear *Sonatine* complete. Its range of material was limited mostly to the middle of the keyboard in order to achieve unity, clarity of detail, and interdependence of the lines – like a cat's cradle infused with light.

Though *Sonatine* partakes of Japanese-sounding harmonies, the work's departure from the pictorialism of Ravel's previous piano music caused many to wonder what direction this new approach to the mostly-dismissed sonata form would take – given that the fashion of looking back was still decades in the future. With *Sonatine*, Editions Durand began a lifetime publishing partnership that assured the composer's financial security.



Maurice Delage

Aloysius Bertrand

### Notorious Orphan

Ravel's passing neo-classical proclivities were soon answered by three boldly contrasting movements for piano inspired by Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841), a French Romantic poet championed by the Apaches when his out-of-print masterpiece was reissued by the literary review *Le Mercure*. Some consider Bertrand the grandfather of the symbolist movement and great grandfather of the surrealists. Max Jacob, the Jewish poet, painter, writer and critic, who would perish in the holocaust, named



Bertrand the inventor of prose poetry. A collection of such poetry *Gaspard de la Nuit* was first published posthumously in 1842. Bertrand had died of complications from tuberculosis after three failed marriages and a fairly catastrophic career as a journalist. The edition of this book, his chef-d'oeuvre, was rife with manuscript errors. It sold only twenty copies, but emerged in 1908 as a notorious orphan. Though other editions and translations soon followed, *Gaspard de la Nuit* would finally be published in 1992 with eighteen of Bertrand's own illustrations, as he originally intended.

The name Gaspard is a cognate of Jasper or Caspar, a name strongly associated with the three starlit Magi of the Christian Nativity, sometimes depicted as turbaned and dark-skinned. The etymology of the name is Persian and renders as a treasurer. So Bertrand's opus is often translated "Treasurer of the Night – Fantasies in the manner of Rembrandt and Callot" the latter artist being a gritty printmaker and draftsman of a decidedly contrasting nature to the revered Dutch master.

Among the book's most famous poems, and the opening movement of Ravel's suite, "Ondine" depicts a seductive water sprite, splashing, spraying and diving into her underwater domain. Ashore, she begs the object of her desire to don a ring and be her king, but he is faithful to another, so she sings with wet shattered laughter and vanishes across his rainy windowpane.



Timo Andres

As commissioned by pianist Inna Faliks with support from UC LA Davise Fund and Yamaha Artist Services, the two movements of Ravel that inspired the California-born composers Timo Andres and Billy Childs come from the 13-piece supplement to Bertrand's fifty-two poems organized into six modest books bound together – each book with a preface, and each poem with a literary quote above it. In English

*Le Gibet* is the gibbet, an archaic word for a variety of related contraptions used to execute a miscreant for the purpose of making a public example – including suspended human-shaped cages made of chains and steel straps to prolong the exposed captive's agony beset by raptors like a large piece of suet. However, Bertrand's illustration is a simple crossbow in a wide-open landscape with a corpse hanging on a rope and nearby carrion birds in flight.

### Timo Andres

Born in 1985 in Palo Alto, Andres grew up in rural Connecticut and lives in Brooklyn, NY. He earned both degrees from Yale School of Music. About his 2010 Nonesuch Records debut album for two pianos *Shy and Mighty* (performed with duo partner David Kaplan), Alex Ross wrote in *The New Yorker*, "it achieves an unhurried grandeur that has rarely been felt in American music since John Adams came on the scene... more mighty than shy."

Notable compositions include *Everything Happens So Much* for Boston Symphony; *Strong Language* for Takács Quartet commissioned by Carnegie Hall; *Steady Hand*, a two-piano concerto commissioned by Britten Sinfonia and premiered at the Barbican with Andres and Kaplan; and the 2016 Pulitzer Prize-finalist *The Blind Banister*, a piano concerto for Jonathan Biss. The Calder Quartet premiered *Machine, Learning* at the LA Phil's Noon to Midnight in June 2019. As a pianist, Andres has appeared with the LA Phil, Albany Symphony, and New World Symphony. He has performed solo recitals at Lincoln Center, Wigmore Hall, San Francisco Performances, and Poisson Rouge. Andres has collaborated with Ted Hearne, Becca Stevens, Gabriel Kahane, Brad Mehldau, Nadia Sirota, Kronos Quartet, John Adams – and Philip Glass, with whom he has performed the complete Glass Etudes around the world. Glass selected Andres as recipient of the City of Toronto Glenn Gould Protégé Prize in 2016. He joined the composition faculty at Mannes School of Music two years later.

### Old Ground

About *Old Ground* Andres has provided a note: "Ravel's 'Le Gibet' fascinates and repulses me; it's a brilliantly succinct textbook of harmonic possibility, but I'm simultaneously uncomfortable with its extra-musical program, which depicts a hanged corpse at sunset. The music luridly romanticizes the already too-picturesque prefatory poem by Aloysius Bertrand, reducing the hanged victim to a scenic backdrop against which the poet projects his disturbed thoughts. Ravel represents the roles of observed and observer using an asymmetrical ostinato around which a palette of murky ambiguous chords slowly chums." Andres continues, "*Old Ground* reverses these roles. The opening ostinato is given agency and trajectory; the dark chords, which come in only at the end, accompany a silenced singer. The final chorale melody is derived from the Nina Simone recording of Abel Meeropol's song *Strange Fruit*"

The choice of such a textual reference is surely no less lurid in its word painting.



Nina Simone, Pittsburgh 1965, Photo by Teenie Harris

### Strange Fruit

*Southern trees bear a strange fruit,  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,  
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.*

*Pastoral scene of the gallant South,  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,  
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,  
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!*

*Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,  
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,  
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,  
Here is a strange and bitter crop.*

In 1999, *Time Magazine* recognized *Strange Fruit* the “Song of the Century” for its pivotal role in igniting the Civil Rights Movement and as an uncompromising blueprint for an effective protest song. Meeropol’s song joined the National Registry of the Library of Congress in 2002. He was born in the Bronx of Russian Jewish immigrants, graduated from DeWitt Clinton High School, where he taught for 17 years as a poet and songwriter. His students included James Baldwin, Paddy Chayefsky and Neil Simon. As an idealistic American communist during the depression, he would temper his politics circumstantially, but always moved in progressive and racially mixed circles.

Meeropol couldn’t shake his revulsion at seeing photo postcards of lynchings that were commonly sold at large community gatherings in the American South. Recent re-

search reported in the *Smithsonian* counts some 4,000 lynchings between 1877 and 1950, with 700 unreported lynchings counted in the 2015 Equal Justice Initiative report. “While Florida, Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana had the highest lynching rates,” the report states, “Georgia and Mississippi had the highest number of lynchings.” These previously concealed atrocities occurred mostly in Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina and Virginia. At the height of the lynching popularity, before WWI, picnic baskets and bleachers surrounded the trees and oil barrels for burning. Pistols were lined up for filling the bodies with lead. Souvenirs could be had. Children participated.

Meeropol’s resulting poem was originally published in 1937 as *Bitter Fruit* in the Left-leaning *Teachers Union* magazine under the name Lewis Allen. This pseudonym combined the names of two stillborn boys from early in Meeropol’s marriage to Anne. He set the poem to music and shared it with Billie Holiday who worked on it with the jazz pianist Sonny White. With a piano interlude by White, Holiday recorded it with orchestra in 1939. Meeropol also wrote the title song of Frank Sinatra’s 1945 hit film “The House I live in,” and a popular novelty song released by Peggy Lee in 1953. In June of that year Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were executed on the Jewish Sabbath in Sing Sing Prison. Months later Meeropol attended a Christmas party hosted by the historian, sociologist, writer and civil rights leader W.E.B. DuBois, who – two years before at age 83 – had married playwright, composer, activist Shirley Graham. At that time, DuBois also ran for Senate without success. As a socialist, he was often critical of religion, but often compared lynchings to the crucifixion of Christ.



Abel & Ann Meeropol

Billie Holiday

At this holiday party Meeropol met the Rosenberg’s orphaned children Michael (age 10) and Robert (age 6). In the days that followed the Meeropols adopted the boys, who took their last name, cheering as the Big Apple dropped into Times Square. Five years later New York City Opera mounted the premiere of *Good Soldier Schweik* composer Robert Kurka’s setting of Meeropol’s libretto based on the darkly satiric anti-war novel by Jaroslav Hašek. In 1965 Nina Simone recorded her version of *Strange Fruit* on an album along with her incendiary protest song *Mississippi Goddam*. The Civil Rights movement was at full boil. On-air record smashing events by Southern radio stations catapulted Simone’s version of *Strange Fruit* to a broader, younger and more racially diverse public in the north and west with a galvanizing effect.





Meeropol with his sons Robert & Michael at their train set

### Pursuit

Billy Childs's take on "Scarbo" resonates historically with Andres's response to "Le Gibet." He wrote, "In the spirit of Scarbo, I sought to create a portentous atmosphere of impending malevolence, as though the main protagonist of a story line is being chased by unseen forces. To date, *Pursuit* is my most technically demanding piano piece and I am honored to have been commissioned to compose it for Inna Faliks." Understandably, she first viewed Ravel's Pre WWI imp as a freed slave, hiding in culverts and underbrush desperately looking for illusive signs, and safe haven – perhaps the pre-Civil War Underground Railroad that would guide him north past the Mason Dixon Line. But, as Childs explained, while he has thought long and hard about the facts and fables associated with this network for freeing slaves, his sense of menace is more urban in context, the all-to-common police pursuit of a black person today. As such, it is easy to hear reflected in the music that Childs credits to the influence of Herbie Hancock a stark street scene lit by moving vehicles and mercury vapor lamps high overhead.

### Billy Childs

A native of Los Angeles, Billy Childs was born in 1957 and grew up immersed in jazz, classical, and popular music. His prodigious talent earned him public performances at the piano by age six, and by age sixteen he was admitted to the USC Community School of the Performing Arts. At USC he earned a Bachelor of Music degree in Composition under the tutelage of Robert Linn and Morten Lauridsen. Childs orchestral commissions include *Tone Poem for Holly* (1993) and *Fanfare for the United Races of America* (1994), each premiered by Esa-Pekka Salonen and LA Phil. *A Day in the Forest of Dreams*, for woodwind quintet and piano, was commissioned by the Dorian Wind Quintet, premiered in September 1997 at Merkin Hall in NYC, and recorded the following spring. He performed the work in January 1999 with members of the LA Phil in its chamber series. His cantata, *The Voices of Angels*, commissioned by LA Master Chorale, was premiered in 2005. Detroit Symphony premiered his Concerto

for Violin and Orchestra under Leonard Slatkin's baton in 2009. With support from Madelyn and Jerald Jackrel, Lyris Quartet commissioned *Unrequited*, his String Quartet No. 3, premiered at Jacaranda in 2015 and featured on their album *Intimate Letters* (Ars Produktion, 2016).

Childs has garnered sixteen GRAMMY nominations and five awards: two for Best Instrumental Composition, and two for Best Arrangement Accompanying a Vocalist. His arrangement of Laura Nyro's "New York Tendaberry," featured Yo-Yo Ma and Renee Fleming. *Rebirth* was awarded Best Instrumental Jazz album in 2017. In 2006, Childs was awarded a Chamber Music America Composer's Grant, and in 2009 was the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship. He was also awarded the Doris Duke Performing Artist Award in 2013, and The American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Music in 2015. The following year Childs was appointed president of Chamber Music America.



Billy Childs

### An Unlikely Meeting

Denise Tual expected to meet someone young and trendy ("zazou"), or wild like Edgard Varèse in the roaring twenties when she was making the scene, but found instead a shy "ageless" man with glasses who lit up when she proposed a commission. The notorious Man Ray photo model (aka Denise Batcheff, née Piazza 1906-2000) had tamed her massive cloud of black hair, and matured into a film editor, sound technician and producer. After exchanging letters in the autumn of 1942, his on paper yellow with age, they met at the door to his organ loft in *Église de la Sainte Trinité* and sat together on the organ bench. "He seemed visibly frightened," she wrote. Messiaen's nervous fingers had healed from frostbite and his once gaunt appearance had improved somewhat since being liberated with ingenuity and lucky breaks from Stalag VIIIa, the prisoner of war camp in Silesia, now Poland. The organist Marcel Dupré had tirelessly advocated to the puppet government in Vichy for the talented prisoner when he saw Jewish professors dismissed in Paris and knew the vacancies would be filled with Catholics.

Forged papers in hand, through the ingenuity of an anti-Nazi bilingual Belgian guard Karl-Albert Brüll, Messiaen boarded a train to Southern France weeks after the mir-

aculous premiere in the camp of his famous *Quartet for the End of Time*. For forty-five minutes, unearthly chamber music held some 300 huddled prisoners and guards spellbound inside Barrack 27 January 15, 1941 in sub-zero snowfall. Meanwhile occupied Paris suffered a winter so cold it left children frozen in the street.



Denise Tual by Man Ray

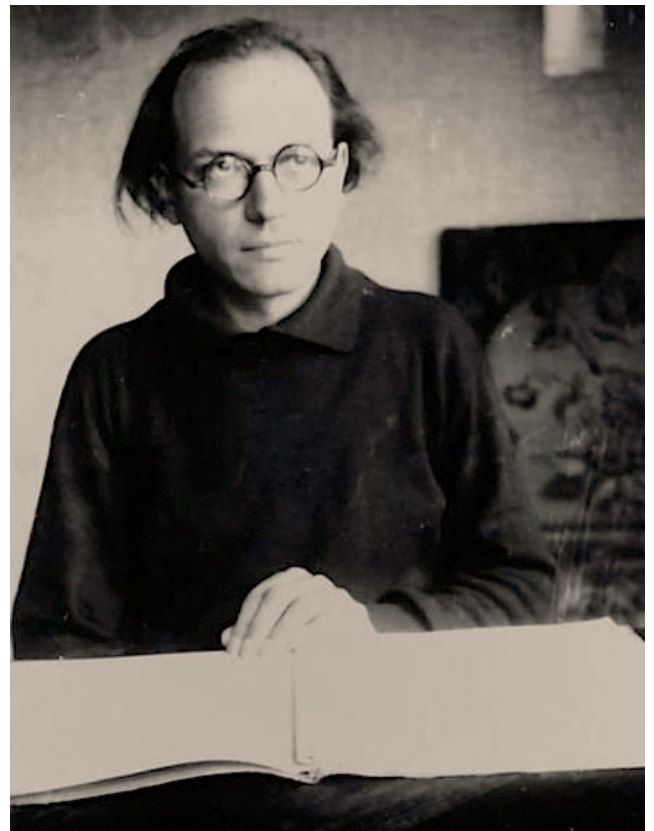
Messiaen's national army service began in 1933. He married the violinist and composer Claire Delbos in 1936. They spent the summer of 1939 with their young son Pascal and his grandparents making music in the Chateau St. Benoit (now a winery), two hours south of Vichy. His wife's family owned the nostalgic two-story stone estate braced by hulking turrets surrounded by countryside. Their vacation abruptly ended in September when Messiaen was drafted into active duty at the outset of the newly declared war. A suspended sense of unreality was shattered in May of 1940 with the German invasion of France and the Low Countries. Messiaen was captured June 15 on a march from Verdun to Nancy.

Joyful despite his extreme privation, the reunion in the same timeworn Chateau where the extended family had left off was bittersweet. Twenty months of war had taken an alarming emotional toll on Claire who had already suffered miscarriages before the difficult birth of Pascal. Her health was not robust, and her husband had just spent six months in a prison camp. The winter had been brutal. Claire's expressions of hope seemed childlike. Pascal's sense of belonging was confused. Memories of Messiaen's own wartime childhood haunted him as his health

slowly returned while watching his three-year-old son try to adapt to uncertainty and imminent separation.

Messiaen recovered from bronchitis and pleurisy before departing to perform expected administrative duties in Vichy, the Occupation capital, which began March 12. He worked for the *Association Jeune France*, under the aegis of the *General Secretariat for Youth* (AJF). Some 70 artists of all disciplines were working together, many living in the Hotel d'Angleterre. AJF was founded in the fall of 1940 but lasted only until the spring of 1942. Messiaen stepped into a whirlwind of concertizing and touring across the Free Zone; radio work also kept him busy. With his friend, the composer Jean-Yves Daniel-Lesur, and the musician/inventor Maurice Martenot they worked under the lively direction of Pierre Schaeffer (who would later pioneer electronic music).

Messiaen and another friend, composer Yves Baudrier, were given religious texts to set as incidental music to a hastily written play in honor of Joan of Arc's Feast Day – a national holiday declared by General Philippe Pétain, Chief of State of Vichy France for May 11, a day before the first anniversary of the German invasion.



Olivier Messiaen c. 1942

Joan of Arc was the patron Saint of the political right. After composing the traditional *Te Deum* text for large and small unaccompanied choruses, Messiaen's second text was to be a setting of the grim *Improperia*, known also as the "Reproaches," using the voice of God to link Jewish ingratitude for the Exodus to their complicity with the Crucifixion. The text originated around 850 AD in the writings



of Prudentius Bishop of Troyes, a major advocate of predestination. The *Improperia* began to take hold in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and by the fourteenth century was an official part of Good Friday liturgy. To Messiaen's frustration, this work, the administrative duties, and concert organizing interrupted his copying out the parts of his *Quartet for the End of Time*.

### Security or Destiny?

Despite the occupying government's interest in sustaining French culture and building a youth movement, such active public concerting, and this celebratory assignment could be seen as a way to coopt these promising talents as collaborators. Messiaen, Daniel-Lesur, Baudrier and Andre Jolivet were known since 1936 as *Jeune France* in reaction to the glibness of *Les Six*. Messiaen finished his composing tasks quickly. He had made a difficult choice between financial stability for his family living in Lyon, with acceptance by the prevailing authority, and a position as a low-paid professor with a modicum of prestige and the forfeiture of any fee for his work as organist in Paris. There would be another price: Claire and Pascal were not cleared to leave the free zone.



Claire and Olivier at St. Benoit

Messiaen's appointment to teach harmony at the Paris Conservatoire began May 7 with the third term. It required elaborate paperwork and a genealogical declaration in compliance with the *Statutes on Jews* to grant him access and employment in occupied Paris. He missed

the holiday festivities, the play, and the choral premieres in Lyon and Marseilles. Despite the large performing forces, and the fascist penchant for documentation, the two choruses were lost and have never turned up. A list of works appears at the end of Messiaen's 1944 textbook *The Technique of My Musical Language* in which the lost choruses are disassociated from Joan of Arc. He would never set traditional liturgical texts again.



Maurice Martenot inventor of the Ondes Martenot

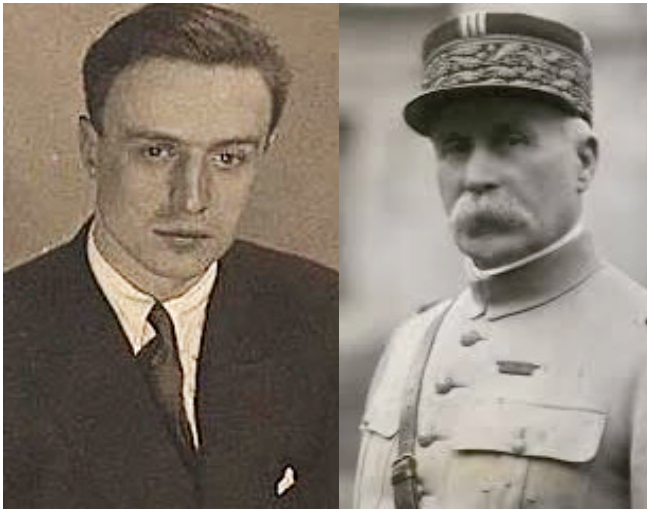
Messiaen returned to a radically different Paris under the control of the Nazis since July 1940. A week after the school term began, the so-called Green Ticket Roundup on May 14, netted 3,747 immigrant Jewish men who were put in trains that sped north to two large transit camps used for sorting. The deported Jews languished there for ten months before being sent to Auschwitz and almost certain death.

Messiaen's inaugural harmony class included two brilliant students Pierre Boulez and the 18-year old pianist Yvonne Loriod. She turned Messiaen's pages for the Paris premiere of the *Quartet for the end of Time* June 24 before the curfew. He was finally reunited with his wife and four-year old son in November. They lived in an apartment at the villa du Danube where, by 1943, Claire's increasing forgetfulness created an unstable environment. Pascal tried to lighten the situation with exaggerated jollity, as children do when a parent is slipping away.

### A Dynamic Duo — Horror

Denise Tual's first husband Pierre Batcheff was the lead male actor in Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali's history-making surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* (An Andalusian Dog). Roland Tual (1902-56) was an art collector, film director and producer with a financial interest in *Le Monde*, the daily newspaper founded at the request of General De Gaulle to replace the discredited *Le Temps* when liberation finally came in 1944.

The Tuals formed Synops Films in 1942 to produce *Le lit à colonnes* (The Four Poster Bed), based on a novel co-adapted by Jean Cocteau. The story by Louise de Vilmorin borrowed elements of Beethoven's opera *Fidelio*. Roland Tual directed, Christian Dior (not yet a fashion giant) designed the costumes, and Jean Francaix composed the score. The film was shot in March and released in July.



Roland Tual

General Petain

Synops soon produced *Les Anges du péché* (Angels of Sin, 1943), the first feature of the quintessential film genius Robert Bresson. Yet the Tuals would be remembered most for a private concert series named after the constellation Pleiades – in Greek mythology the seven daughters of Atlas and a sea nymph Pleione. A staff member of Synops was tasked with administering *Concerts de la Pléiade*.

The couple was dedicated to maintaining a wartime oasis of cultural sophistication in Paris. Café society nightlife had not disappeared – far from it – but the German occupiers, supported lavishly as they were by the Vichy government and the black market, dominated the milieu with a taste for brutish excess. The Messiaen commission would bring to it seriousness and intellectual probity.

In the spring of 1942, while the Tuals were in film production, the radios and telephones of thousands of Parisians were disabled, mail service was halted, and bicycles confiscated. Mothers went to markets to buy obligatory yellow stars with their food stamps. Libraries, museums and the cinema had become off limits to singles, lovers, parents and children wearing the stars.

The Messiaens celebrated Pascal's fifth birthday on July 13. A few days later, under the code name Operation Spring Breeze, on July 16 and 17, a roundup orchestrated by the French police force and over 3000 members of the fascist *Parti Populaire Français*, filled the Vélodrome d'Hiver. The cycling track and sports stadium was built on the huge footprint of the *Galerie des Machines* under the shadow of the Eiffel Tower. The glass roof, painted the color of the night sky hung over 13,152 Jews including more than 4,000 children.

These Parisians remained in Vel d'Hiv for five stifling hot days with only half of the restrooms operational and scarce food and water brought in by Quakers and the Red Cross. Cattle cars were used to transport them north. Many Catholic and Protestant leaders were outraged, as were much of the public, but their protests only reduced further depor-

tations to the remaining immigrant Jews – in the name of national pride! Instead Vel d'Hiv remains a source of eternal shame to France. Only recently was it acknowledged by President Emmanuel Macron's full apology on the 75th anniversary of Vel d'Hiv at the site in 2017.

Although his incidental music for an adaptation of *Oedipus Rex* that premiered weeks earlier has also not been found, Lioriod claims that some of its thematic material was originally composed for solo Ondes Martenot – an exotic electronic instrument and prototype to the synthesizer invented by Martenot – found ways into *Visions of Amen*. Surprisingly the theatre company *Le Rideau de Paris* had a capable player for this tiny keyboard and slider designed to be easier to play than the famously ethereal Theremin. On July 25, after securing permission to travel south, the Messiaens joined Claire's parents for a vacation during which he wrote most of *The Technique of my Musical Language*.



It may have been the loud and outrageously inventive organ music heard in the autumnal square in front of Sainte Trinité, that galvanized Denise Tual's interest in meeting its author, but given Messiaen's celebrity as a POW, Roland Tual's first film depicting a musical prisoner, and Bresson's return from a POW camp after sixteen months of incarceration for his part in the résistance, it would hardly seem happenstance that Messiaen and Denise Tual would meet just as all of France was finally occupied by Germany. The church administrator told her to write a letter to Messiaen for an appointment.



### Gestation: Visions de l'Amen

The day after Christmas 1942, Olivier Messiaen wrote the Tuals to confirm that a new work for two pianos was begun. His diary from that week also includes more strategies to get his older brother Alain released from a POW camp in Germany.

One of Messiaen's immediate musical challenges was to find a piano suitable for composing the complex and intricate Hindu rhythms he was imagining for himself and his student. Presumably the Tuals took the matter in hand.

During January and February Messiaen was given access to the apartment and piano of Andrè-Louis Dubois, the former Police Chief of Paris, who General Pétain had quickly replaced with someone more receptive to German requests. Dubois had helped anti-fascists escape Spain in 1936, and was a friend of Pablo Picasso, Cocteau, Francis Poulenc (all associated with *Les Six*) and the transgressive playwright Jean Genet. Dubois had begun surreptitiously working for the resistance, and later became France's ambassador to Morocco. His flair for journalism would eventually land him top positions with such august French press institutions as *Paris Match*, *Marie-Claire*, and *Le Figaro*.



Claire, Olivier and Pascal

A postcard to Denise Tual from Messiaen, dated March 17, 1943 declared *Visions of Amen* complete and listed the titles of the seven movements – an unusual mix of Christian religion, ornithology and astronomy. A month later rehearsals were conducted at the spacious apartment of Loriod's demanding Austrian-born piano teacher and godmother Melly Eminger-Sivade.

During that time Messiaen played organ for the wedding of Daniel-Lesur, prepared the second term harmony final exams, and copied out the two piano parts.

For years the young pianist gave regular monthly recitals in Madame Sivade's studio with each program including classical, romantic, and contemporary works performed from memory often for invited guests such as the comp-

osers Arthur Honegger and Poulenc. Loriod memorized Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, Beethoven's 32 Sonatas, Liszt, Chopin, Debussy, Ravel, and soon enough, Boulez.

Fourteen rehearsals preceded the premiere. Loriod was given the "primo" part consisting of glittering passage work of tremendous agility and complexity navigating rhythmic canons in three layers, as well as imitations of bird calls and bells with broken chords that ornament the sense of a huge cosmic dance. As Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone observed in their authoritative biography (Messiaen, 2005, Yale University Press), Loriod played the final movement "very quietly with no loss of incisiveness [then in] a sprint finish, spiraling through volleys of chords and the 'Creation' theme in rippling semiquavers, before erupting into carillons of glittering bells."



Yvonne Loriod

Messiaen's "secondo" part, on the other hand, is responsible for the melodic themes, stated sometimes with massive grandeur in stupendous solos, or embedded in ways that more subtly propel the discourse forward through the intricacy of Loriod's sonic landscape and recurring themes. One cannot help but experience some movements of *Visions of Amen* as eroticism writ large in the way that Indian religion shamelessly embraces the forces of creation and destruction as a coital metaphor. Leaning over the balcony at Beckman Auditorium for the LA premiere as part of the couple's US tour – keyboards below – I saw clearly such a metaphor in action. During *Amen du Désir* Loriod was on fire, her hands at either end of the keyboard, while Messiaen, hands together, drove the middle with an insistent jabbing rhythm. Of course, looking back, the chaste romantic love between Messiaen and his young muse – that would blossom only after the death of his wife – is inextricably fused with the DNA, if you will, of the work's creation.

### Cast of Characters

The May 10, 1943 premiere *Visions of Amen* was only the third of eleven Pleiades Concerts presented during the occupation. The late afternoon performance would leave very little time to get home before curfew. The composer's own guest list numbered fifty including two promising student composers as page-turners, his family, and important colleagues. What Messiaen described as the Tual's "draconian" invitation-only screening at the door of the Galerie Charpentier (since 1988, the Paris headquarters of Sotheby's auction house) was intended to keep out German occupiers and their collaborators. Three years into an occupation violently scourged by shocking deportations, the atmosphere of Paris was charged with distrust and deceit. A German-sponsored radio program invited citizens to publicly denounce others for money – be they business rivals, personal enemies, members of the resistance, or Jews. Extensive Vichy government regulations controlled gatherings of every sort. Galleries were considered safe.

A large platform for the pianos was built in the center of the gallery with surrounding stepped-up rows of chairs. Photos give the impression of a boxing match without the ropes - and in the center two pianos with their harps interlocked.

The gallery filled with an astonishing array of notables. What follows here is a panoramic group portrait that endeavors to trace the lives of this particular audience, with some important tangents, to reveal the complex relationships, faceted politics, individual struggles, and cultural identities that surrounded Messiaen and Loriod on this special afternoon.

Such an exclusive invitation was not to be squandered. Even Madam Colette, the 70-year old cultural icon, proto-feminist, author, and journalist made the bicycle trip from her apartment to the gallery wearing a sporty outfit with sandals and a boater hat. Considering her pain from botched x-ray therapies and the domestic use of a wheelchair that spring, this adventure was *a voir* – not to be missed! The short trip from her apartment in the Palais-Royal to 76 rue du Faubourg Saint Honore in Montmartre was flat, she confided to a society columnist in *Marie Claire*. She would know almost everyone there.



François Mauriac

Arpege

Jeanne Lanvin

The enormously influential Roman Catholic novelist and future Nobel Prize winner François Mauriac, who wrote meaningfully about reconciliation after the occupation,

had spent the months before visiting the bedside of Colette. He was the only member of the French Academy to publish on behalf of the Resistance. She was incurably crippled and wracked with anxiety about her husband's fate, but wrote constantly. A year earlier, Maurice Goudekot, her husband, was among the 1,000 highly visible Jewish intellectuals quickly rounded up in response to America's declaration of war.



Colette

She sprang into action. "There was no effort and no humiliation she wasn't willing to undertake," he said about her devotion to his freedom. Colette used every connection available and got him released after seven weeks, but now he couldn't leave the apartment without the yellow star. Two months later Vel d'Hiv would pin the fear needle.

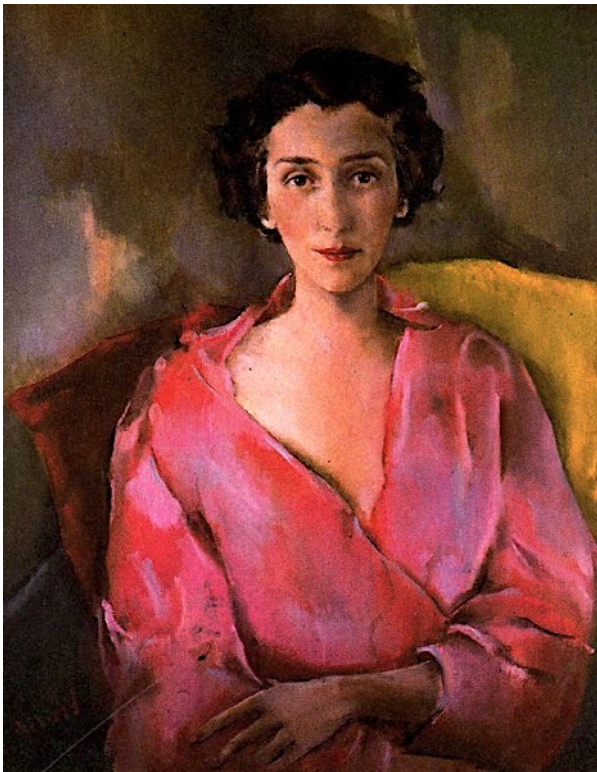
Another year of confined suspense would pass. She talked at length with Mauriac about the early Epistle of St. Paul. Her newfound interest in Christianity may only have been to ensure another card to play if she needed it. She even asked Mauriac to secure a priest who would counsel her husband in conversion, but it did not fly. Goudekot was honest to a fault.

Because of his falling out with Colette over a misunderstood slight, at the concert Mauriac sat alongside Dior and Countess Marie-Blanche de Polignac, the beloved daughter of the renowned 76-year old Jeanne Lanvin. Marie-Blanche would soon become director of the formidable fashion house bearing the name Lanvin. The black bottle emblazoned with a gold art deco image of mother and daughter designed by fashion illustrator Paul Iribe, Coco Chanel's lover at the time, contained *Arpege*, the



fragrance introduced in 1927 for Marie-Blanche's 30-birthday. As for the name, reportedly the scent of 60 flowers evoked in her an arpeggio. The flowers came from centuries-old farms in Grasse. She would accept her destiny with some resignation.

While Marie-Blanche was a talented designer, she possessed a ravishing voice and was a more-than-capable pianist greatly admired by many composers, especially Poulenc. She was quite close to Nadia Boulanger (her husband underwrote Boulanger's 1937 pioneering recording of Monteverdi madrigals) and was a member of Boulanger's Ensemble Vocal. While seated in her garden fanned by spring breezes, her dear friend Dali, in his memoir, recalls hearing from the open doors a string quartet surrounded by candelabra and Renoir paintings. Perhaps Ravel?



Countess Marie-Blanche de Polignac by Christian Berard

### Microcosm

The Parisian world of fashion serves up a remarkable microcosm within the city's charged politics, high/low culture, religion, and business during the occupation. His New Look was not yet dominant, but Dior worked alongside other future giants Pierre Balmain and Hubert Givenchy as a team of staff designers for the house of Lucien LeLong. Wives and mistresses of high-ranking Nazi officers flocked to LeLong including Frau Suzanne Abetz the French wife of the German Ambassador. It was with her that Colette's appeals to free her husband finally found a patronizing champion. Her chauffeur would bring armloads of books to be personally autographed by "my protégée." As Collette was reduced to writing about the season's fashion shows for a prominent German sanctioned glossy *L'Officiel de la Couture*, it is likely she met Abetz

at the house of LeLong.

Hitler was eager to relocate the entire French fashion industry to Berlin or Vienna and was dissuaded by design titan Christobal Balenciaga, a close friend of the dictator Federico Franco – the Third Reich's Spanish ally. "Hitler wanted to transfer the French couture to Berlin," wrote Balenciaga. "He sent six enormous Germans to see me... to talk about it. I said that he might just as well take all [of Spain's] bulls to Berlin and try and train the bullfighters there." Balenciaga was soon shut down on the grounds of a fabric quota violation. More than a dozen other attempts to shut down couture houses were thwarted.

This obsession with fashion made LeLong a busy hub of couriers and messengers, as well as women with their entourages going to and from fittings in 1943. It was here in this milieu that Jacqueline d'Alincourt, a beautiful young widow of aristocratic birth with Dior's public relations director, surreptitiously operated as agents of the resistance passing messages, false papers and ration cards, securing lodging and finding "mailboxes." Tragically, in September d'Alincourt was denounced by her landlady, brutally interrogated by the *gestapistes* (as the French counterpart to the Gestapo were known), arrested and put in a camp, where she became a heroin of the resistance.

Another victim of the *gestapistes*, Dior's sister Catherine, known as Caro, was one of the few women ever granted a government license to act as a cut-flowers broker because she operated a historic flower farm in Grasse. Secretly, Caro was an intelligence gatherer for the resistance. She was apprehended July 6, 1944, tortured for three days without breaking, and sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp until liberated April 19.

Bustling too was the purveyor of fine leather goods Louis Vuitton, the only brand permitted to operate a store on the street level of Hotel du Parc, the Parisian headquarters for France's puppet government. Another famous brand name today was, however, still finding her way around the political landmines of the occupation and flailing financially. She had lost control of her famous perfume to a large and prosperous Jewish family business. The new Aryanization laws gave her hope, but she had never settled for hope. In 2019, it was revealed that she was given a code name in 1941 – Westminster.

Coco Chanel was a spy protected by an enormous and powerful Nazi lover who bought her a yacht and paid for an apartment in the Hotel. She was willing to carry secrets to Spain, and meet with a British Diplomat in exchange for the freedom of her nephew. A past affair with the Duke of Westminster was the source of her code name as Agent F-7124. A plan to carry an SS proposal from behind Hitler's back to Winston Churchill came disastrously apart through a last minute betrayal. According to Tim Ott, writing for *Biography*, "with her reputation as a 'horizontal collaborator,' Chanel was taken in for questioning before the Free French Purge Committee, though

she was released in short order and promptly fled to Switzerland." After facing a tribunal in 1944, she used her nephew's release to cover the rest and bought the silence of anyone who knew of her duplicity.

An open homophobe, scorning her rivals, Chanel may have ingeniously passed without requiring public rehabilitation, but Cocteau was not so shrewd – or nearly as guilty of collaboration. In the Galerie Charpentier, Cocteau (despite Messiaen's antipathy toward his manifesto for neo-classicism) sat with poet/philosopher and twelve-time Nobel Prize nominee Paul Valéry, who had just been stripped by the Vichy government of his memberships in the French Academy and the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon, as well as his position as Chair of Poetics at the College of France in retaliation for his adamant non-collaboration. Cocteau was probably good company.

Cocteau and Colette became very close as neighbors during the war. Despite his vulnerable status as a "degenerate" homosexual, he was not prevented from publishing poetry or essays (*El Greco*, 1943), or plays (*Renaud et Armide* premiered in April) and films (the screenplay for *L'Eternel Retour* starring his lover Jean Marais, also 1943), however the critics viciously and unanimously denounced his work despite his right-leaning politics. It didn't matter that he cultivated German friends, and wrote some German poetry. Another blow would strike the following year. Cocteau's friend, secretary and former lover from 1926 to 1933, Jean Desbordes was picked up July 5, 1944 as the resistance director of the F2 Marine Network, code name Duroc. He withstood four days of beastly torture before the gestapistes tore his eyes out, beat him to death, and dumped the body in a graveyard outside of Paris.



Jean Cocteau

Claude Arnaud (*Jean Cocteau: A Life*, Yale University Press, 2016) wrote that after the purge tribunals officially clear-

ed Cocteau's name, "he displayed his usual ambivalences in heightened form, his usual affinity for paradox, his usual insecurity concerning his 'position'...he emerged from the Occupation more seared by inward guilt than ever before [...it was his] writing at the far end of an established intellectual tradition that made his own peculiar mix of pathos and sincerity possible at all."



Coco Chanel

On an upper row in the galley was a pack of French composers: Poulenc and Honegger as well as Alexis Roland-Manuel the critic, film composer and close friend of Erik Satie; also the young Henri Dutilleux. Eight years Messiaen's junior and a friend of Denise Tual, Dutilleux had just completed service as a stretcher-bearer before becoming director of the Paris Opera chorus. His popular pre-Opus 1 *Sonatine for Flute and Piano* was published that year, while Poulenc was about midway into composing his choral masterpiece *Figure Humaine*, a setting of Paul Éluard's most famous poems including *Liberté*.

Commissioned in March and completed in August – six months in the occupation pressure cooker – the poems express the "suffering of the people of France" and the "final triumph of freedom over tyranny." The score was smuggled into Britain where it was published and premiered in 1945.

Honegger exemplified Swiss-born political neutrality. Since the premiere May 12, 1938 in Basel, with Paul Sacher conducting, Honegger's 70-minute hybrid oratorio/opera *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher* (Joan of Arc at the Stake) was an impressive success, The score called for five vocal soloists, five actors, chorus, boys choir, and Martenot playing his invention in the large orchestra, The charismatic actor/dancer Ida Rubenstein commissioned the work for



herself as Joan depicted in flash backs during her immolation. Rubenstein had converted to Catholicism in 1936, and France awarded her the Grand Cross of the *Légion d'honneur* – its highest honor, three years later.

Her performances occurred in Zurich and twice in Paris – just before and after the war initially erupted. Her last enactment, until 1947, was in Brussels February 29, 1941. It would seem that the spectacle of a Jewish/Catholic convert being burned alive was no longer tenable. She retreated to Britain where she adopted a squadron of Free French Airmen who paid for her tombstone in 1960. However the Vichy Ministry of Unemployment financed a tour to 27 cities in Southern France in 1942 with a non-Jewish actor.



Arthur Honegger during WWII

Honegger had access as a music critic to German music festivals, and he wrote reviews of living German composers. A prominent French musicologist commenting on the composer's differences with the resistance [who threw him out], and his professional access to power said, "Honegger's wartime conduct... was ambiguous at best and justly controversial." His lost 1942 *Song of Liberation* was found in a Paris library ten years ago. It would seem he actually wrote it in 1944 to appear on the right side of history.

Messiaen's most important review of the premiere came from the German controlled newspaper *Comoedia*. It accurately described the performance, and anticipated difficulties Messiaen would face from his use of highly colored and surreal language to present theological ideas – specifically Christian ideas. The byline was Arthur Honegger:

The charming ear-ticklers of previous programs were unexpectedly replaced by a work which is long, highly individual, and densely written, eschewing a variety of orchestral timbres by restraining itself to the black and white of two pianos. And what a serious subject, *Visions de l'Amen*, seven large frescos with a duration of nearly an hour. Nevertheless the experience was nothing less than a perfect success. I must say straight away that this work by Olivier Messiaen seems to me a remarkable one, of great musical richness and of true grandeur in its conception.

Honegger devotes two full paragraphs of artful and not-too-technical descriptions along with a glowing appreciation of the performance by Loriod and Messiaen, before these parting thoughts (my emphasis):

One personal wish. I would like this work to be heard, preceded by its commentaries [not in between movements is unsaid] at the Jeunesses musicales... In this work there are things for the young to discuss and to admire. **Some will be passionate about it, while others will repudiate it**, but that would give life to the world of music. Finally, we should thank the organizers of the Pléiade for having put on a work of this quality in the best possible conditions.

The late afternoon audience was certainly distinguished and wildly appreciative, but Messiaen's childlike passion for extra-musical sources of inspiration, and the elaborate commentaries he insisted upon attaching to ambitious new works premiered one after another in the years ahead, seeded fertile ground for strong criticism.

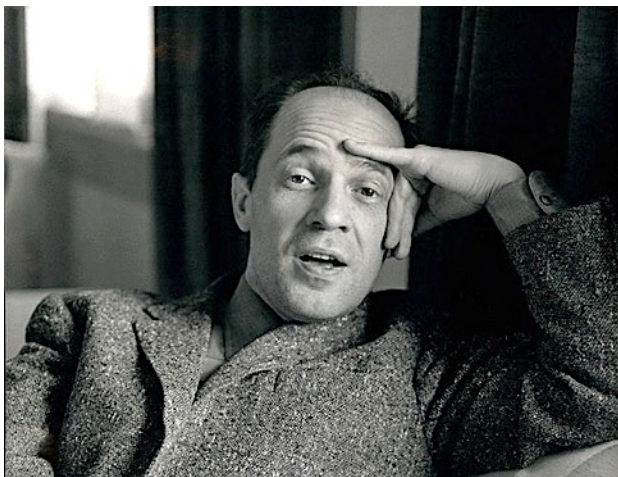


Francis Poulenc

Messiaen's stated interest was to create sacred music for the concert hall with his next commissioned premiere by the Tuils for the Pleiades Concerts. Despite precedents

such as Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* (1931), the *Three Little Liturgies for the Divine Presence*, with a major part for the piano, a wild and vivid Ondes Martenot part, women's chorus and orchestra, provided the tinder for a critical firestorm called the *Messiaen Case* that lasted for decades and still resonates.

Despite consistently tremendous audience response, critics and journalists became entangled in an all-out war of words. Some Parisians even called Messiaen the atom bomb of contemporary music! Given Messiaen's role in gestating serialism in 1949-50 – in cahoots with his students Pierre Boulez, Iannis Xenakis and Karlheinz Stockhausen – such an extreme view might seem understandable. But as Esa-Pekka Salonen recently observed in a discussion at the remodeled Thomas Mann House, the so-called crisis of serialism must be credited to Boulez. Schoenberg died in 1951, before he could come to terms with Anton Webern's expansion of the twelve-tone system. Boulez took the ball and ran with it. Messiaen turned instead to birdsong – his escape from the tonal conventions of Western music so many composers yearned for. Personal meaning saturated his musical ornithology and gave him refuge. As Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, "A birdsong can even, for a moment, make the whole world into a sky within us."



Pierre Boulez

#### Afterword

Messiaen composed ceaselessly, depositing drafts in his bank's safety deposit box for fear of Claire's destructive impulses. After the liberation, Messiaen would take greater responsibility for raising his son in Paris, as his "smiling star" had begun her long mental descent in 1943.

Immediately after the Liberation, state-supported Radio France (RDF) sprang into being and commissioned Messiaen to compose a large-scale work to be performed live in studio for the nation. He hastily composed the "Song of the Deported" to celebrate the liberation of the camps. The forces included a mixed chorus and orchestra, altogether about 200. The work was thought lost,

but turned up decades later in the Radio archive. The London premiere was given in 1991 led by Sir Andrew Davis, and the U.S. premiere was given in 2009 by Jacaranda led by Mark Alan Hilt.

Messiaen's home life grew more challenging when Claire's doctors determined that she needed a hysterectomy. Using just an epidural for fear a general anesthetic would further damage her brain, Claire underwent the procedure in 1949. Nonetheless, her memory was drastically affected and would eventually require that she be moved to a sanatorium in 1953 – her diagnosis: "cerebral atrophy, incurable."

Messiaen set aside Christian themes for almost twenty years. Instead, the legends of Tristan, Isolde, Bluebeard and related non-western myths preoccupied his creativity until 1949. His deep and sustained dive into ornithology and birdsong during the 1950s would remain a passion for the rest of his life.

For over twenty years, Messiaen and Loriod traveled and toured extensively, gave broadcasts, continued to teach privately and in the conservatory; they attracted students from across the globe. As Jed Distler wrote in Loriod's 2010 obituary, "In 1964 she played 22 Mozart Concertos over a five-week period with the Lamoreux Orchestra, and gave the French premiere of Bartók's Second Piano Concerto, learning the piece with only eight days' notice."



Torii Gate, Miyajima Japan

Claire ultimately died in 1959. The devout Catholic couple waited two more years out of respect before Boulez witnessed their wedding in Japan, where Messiaen composed *Sept Haïkai* (Seven Haikus). After his death Loriod completed his massive seven-volume *Treatise On Rhythm, Color & Ornithology*, finished, and published some posthumous works, and authored with translation by Paul Griffiths, *Ravel: An Analysis of the Piano Works of Maurice Ravel* (University of California/Durand, 2005). If pressed, I would find it difficult to deny that destiny danced here in that vast territory between agony and ecstasy.



## Messiaen Commentaries

Amen has four different meanings:

Amen, so be it! The creative act. Amen, I submit, I accept. Thy will be done! Amen, the wish, the desire, that this may be, that you would give to me and I to you. Amen, that is, all is fixed forever, consummated in paradise.

Adding to these the life of creatures that say Amen by the very fact that they exist, I have tried to express the varied richness of the Amen in seven musical visions. *Visions of Amen* was conceived and written for two pianos, demanding from these instruments their maximum force and diversity of sounds. I have entrusted the rhythmic difficulties, clusters of chords, all that is velocity, charm and tone quality to the first piano. I have entrusted the principal melody, thematic elements and all that expresses emotion and power to the second piano.

### I. Amen of the Creation [\(audio link\)](#)

Amen, so be it! "God said, 'Let there be light!' And there was light!" (Genesis)

The first piano has a double rhythmic pedal point in bell sounds and non-invertible rhythms, which are augmented or diminished with each repetition. The second piano expresses the theme of Creation, the main theme of the work: grand and solemn chords. The whole piece is a crescendo. It begins absolutely pianissimo in the mystery of that primeval nebula that already contains the potential of light. All the bells quiver in this light – light and therefore life.

### II. Amen of the Stars, of the Ringed Planet

"God called them, and they said, "Amen here we are!" (Baruch).

A savage and brutal dance. The stars, suns, and Saturn, the planet with its multicolored ring, rotate violently. The second piano exposes the theme of the planets' dance. This theme begins with five notes, which are the substance of the piece. First development: below the polymodal swirling of the first piano, the second alters the rhythm and changes in sudden leaps the compass of the first five notes of the theme. Second development: the opening fragment by elimination, in retrograde and forward movement. A third development is superimposed: the first piano has the fragment as rhythmic pedal point: the second piano has the fragment with changes of register. A varied recapitulation of the planets' dance follows. All these mixed movements evoke the colors of the ring around Saturn.

### III. Amen of the Agony of Jesus

"My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." (St. Matthew)

Jesus suffers and weeps. He accepts. Thy will be done. Amen. Jesus is alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, face to face with his agony. Three musical motifs: 1.) the curse of the father on the sins of the world that Jesus represents at this moment: 2.) a cry! A rhythmic and expressive grouping: anacrusis-accent-termination; 3.) a heart rending lament on four notes variously rhythmized. Recall of the theme of Creation. A long silence, broken by some pulsations, evokes the suffering of this hour: an unspeakable suffering only slightly expressed by the sweating of blood.

### IV. Amen of Desire [\(audio link\)](#)

There are two themes of desire. The first, slow ecstatic and yearning with deep tenderness: already the peaceful perfume of Paradise. The second is extremely passionate; here the soul is torn by terrible love that appears carnal (see "the Song of Songs"), but there is nothing carnal about it, only a paroxysm of the thirst of Love. The first theme, very serene, as an ending. The two principal voices seem to merge into each other, and nothing remains but the harmonious silence of heaven...

### V. Amen of the Angels, Saints and Birdsong

"The angels fall prostrate before thy throne: Amen." (Revelation)

Song of the purity of the saints: Amen. The exultant calling of the birds: Amen. First the song of the angels and saints stripped of inessentials and very pure. Then a middle section based on birdsong, giving rise to more brilliant keyboard writing. These are true songs of nightingales, blackbirds, finches and black-caps mingled in a turbulent yet smiling mixture. Varied recapitulation of the song of saints, with a non-reversible rhythmic canon arranged on three planes. A short coda based on birdsong.

### VI. Amen of the Judgment

"Accused get thee hence!" (St. Matthew)

The damned are eternally damned. An intentionally short and harsh piece. [Given what Messiaen had witnessed in the camp and in occupied Paris, its easy to imagine that he had vivid inspiration here.]

### VII. Amen of the Consummation [\(audio link\)](#)

"The shining light that shineth more and more." (Prophets)

Consummation, Paradise. The life of the bodies in glory, in a carillon of light. Amen - the second piano takes up the theme of Creation and makes of it a long chorale of glory. The first piano surrounds the second (in the very low and high registers together) with a ceaseless carillon of chords and brilliant, scintillating rhythms, in ever closer rhythmic canons: precious stones of the Apocalypse ring, collide with, dance, color and perfume the light of life.