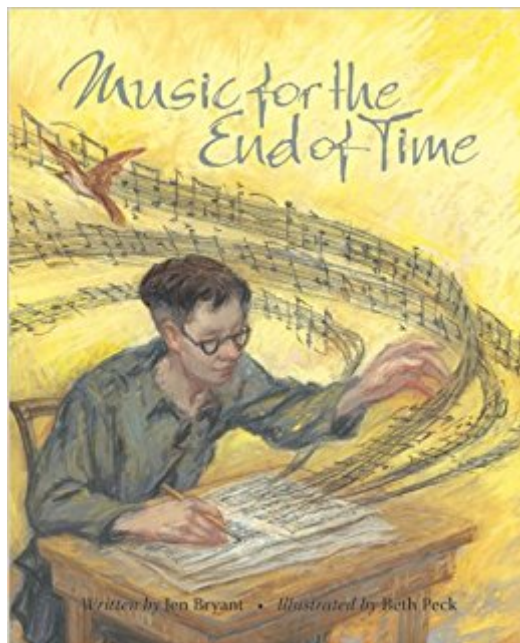


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# Music For The End Of Time



## Synopsis

This work is Jen Bryant's poetic biography of French composer Olivier Messiaen, coupled with Beth Peck's evocative pastel illustrations, captures both the desolation of a World War II prison camp and the transforming power of music. This book will stir readers of all ages to seek hope in the things that inspire them.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Grade 3-5 "A poignant story of humanity, creativity, and survival. Olivier Messiaen, a well-known French composer, was captured by the Germans during World War II and taken to a prison camp. In her softly flowing watercolor paintings, Peck portrays him as a pale, bespectacled man clutching a pack of sheet music. For an unexplained reason, a German officer allowed the musician to use a small room to continue to write. Although he wondered if anyone would ever hear his work, he pressed on, finally finding inspiration in the song of a nightingale. The illustration shows the notes rising from his pen in a triumphant arch intertwined with songbirds. With the arrival of two new prisoners carrying instrument cases, Messiaen gained hope. Finally, the composition was performed by a quartet in front of 5000 prisoners. Again, this moment is reinforced with a scene that shows the darkness of the winter day and camp enlightened by the music as the notes "presented in bands of yellow and entwined with nightingales" flow above the audience. Use this book with other stories of triumph over suffering, such as Ken Mochizuki's *Baseball Saved Us* (Lee & Low, 1993) or Louise Borden's *The Greatest Skating Race* (S & S, 2004). Better yet, play Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* as you read it." Jane Marino, Bronxville Public Library, NY Copyright

Gr. 4-7. Based on a true World War II incident that took place in 1941, this handsome picture book tells a story of kindness from the enemy and of the power of music. In the German camp Stalag 8A, a young officer allowed a captured French soldier, Olivier Messiaen, to compose music in a small room in the toilets, and then to play what he wrote (the now-famous composition "Quartet for the End of Time") with three other prisoners in a concert attended by 5,000 prisoners in the camp. The Germans found a run-down piano for Messiaen; they found a cello for another prisoner musician; two others were allowed to keep the instruments they brought with them. Bryant tells the fictionalized biography in clear poetic prose, and Peck's beautiful charcoal-and-pastel double-page spreads never downplay the harshness of the crowded barracks and the desolate lines of sad, sometimes wounded prisoners, even as they show the composer close up and the nightingales whose calls inspire the wild and beautiful music. Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Music for the End of Time would be perfect as PART of a unit on the Holocaust. Messiaen brought hope to all in Stalag 8A and that is amazing. My suggestion is that before you read the book, start off by letting students listen to the "Quartet for the End of Time" by Olivier Messiaen (I use a video of a violinist from YouTube). Ask students what they hear, the feeling conveyed by the composer, etc. Then, play it in the background as you read this book. At the end of the story, ask them the same questions. It makes the hope, music, and Messiaen come alive to students. If you are looking for a book to introduce the Holocaust, then I highly recommend Terrible Things by Eve Bunting.

"Quartet for the End of Time" is a 20th century classic, but hardly an item that most children would relate to. The music demands sophisticated listening for most adults, though like any music a listener may choose just to daydream with or without Messiaen's own descriptive commentary. The children's storybook format is charming on its own, though the depiction of a POW camp is heavily sugar-coated. "Schindler's List" this is not! "Music for the end of time" hardly evokes the brutal harmonies or mystic vision of the actual music, but might just get someone started down the path to exploring a composer well worth discovering, especially in this [2008] his centennial year.

Music for the End of Time is a children's picturebook based on the true story of French composer Olivier Messiaen, who was captured by the Germans during World War II and sent to a prison camp

in Gorlitz (now part of Poland). Despite the bleak living conditions, he received the gift of a small miracle - the opportunity to write music again. With the aid of three fellow musicians also taken prisoner, the song of a beautiful nightingale, and the permission of a German officer, he was able to compose and play the now-famous "Quartet for the End of Time", in a performance appreciated like no other by his fellow prisoners. The emotionally touching pastel illustrations add the perfect quality to this simple story about keeping hope alive in the darkness.

This story is based on the experience of Olivier Messiaen, a Christian French composer. In 1941, he is detained in a German prison camp, but he is granted permission to play a piano and compose his music. A German officer leads him to the piano and he eventually becomes inspired by the song of a nightingale, which he translates into a sonata. Two new prisoners arrive carrying their instruments in cases and before long, voila!-- chamber music for a camp concert in front of 5,000 prisoners. The camp is described as desolate, and the first illustration does show a dejected line of khaki-clad prisoners being guarded through the gates by German guards and a dog. The prisoners are sent to their barracks where they receive non-striped khaki uniforms and mattresses made of straw, but the lovely pastel illustrations down play the harshness of the surroundings. There is no Jewish content.. The now-famous piece Messiaen composed there, is: Quartet for the End of Time. For ages 8 and up. Reviewed by Marcia Posner

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