FRANCIS POULENC

THE COMPLETE

Songs

FELICITY LOTT  AILISH TYNAN
AGNIESZKA ADAMCZAK  NICOLE TIBBELS
SARAH FOX  SARAH-JANE BRANDON
GERALDINE McGREEVY  SUSAN BICKLEY
BEN JOHNSON  ROBIN TRITSCHLER
CHRISTOPHER MALTMAN  IVAN LUDLOW
BRANDON VELARDE  ASHLEY RICHES
NEAL DAVIES  PIERRE BERNAC

GRAHAM JOHNSON
FRANCIS POULENC
(1899–1963)

The Complete Songs

AGNIESZKA ADAMCZAK soprano
PIERRE BERNAC narrator
SUSAN BICKLEY mezzo-soprano
SARAH-JANE BRANDON soprano
   NEAL DAVIES bass
   SARAH FOX soprano
   BEN JOHNSON tenor
   FELICITY LOTT soprano
   IVAN LUDLOW baritone
   GERALDINE McGREEVY soprano
   CHRISTOPHER MALTMAN baritone
   ASHLEY RICHES bass-baritone
   NICOLE TIBBELS soprano
   ROBIN TRITSCHLER tenor
   AILISH TYNAN soprano
   BRANDON VELARDE baritone

GRAHAM JOHNSON piano
The Hyperion Poulenc Edition is arranged in four separate, self-sufficient programmes. These four discs can be listened to in any order. Track numbers in yellow refer to the continuously numbered download of the set.
MÉTAMORPHOSES

Trois poèmes de Louise Lalanne  FP57 (1931)  ......................... AILISH TYNAN soprano  [3'45]
1  Le présent  (LAURENCIN) .............................................................. [0'58]
2  Chanson  (APOLLINAIRE) ............................................................... [0'46]
3  Hier  (LAURENCIN) ..................................................................... [2'02]

Quatre chansons pour enfants  FP75 (1934)  (JABOUNE [NOHAIN])  ....... FELICITY LOTT soprano  [10'14]
4  Nous voulons une petite sœur ......................................................... [4'45]
5  La tragique histoire du petit René .................................................... [1'07]
6  Le petit garçon trop bien portant ................................................... [1'33]
7  Monsieur Sans-Souci .................................................................. [2'48]

Trois poèmes de Louise de Vilmorin  FP91 (1937)  (VILMORIN)  ........ AILISH TYNAN soprano  [6'23]
8  Le garçon de Liège ........................................................................ [1'33]
9  Au-delà ......................................................................................... [1'32]
10  Aux officiers de la Garde Blanche .................................................. [3'19]
11  Le portrait  FP92 (1938)  (COLETTE) ............................................ GERALDINE McGREEVY soprano  [1'52]

Fiançailles pour rire  FP101 (1939)  (VILMORIN)  ......................... AILISH TYNAN soprano  [12'21]
12  La dame d’André ........................................................................ [1'28]
13  Dans l’herbe ............................................................................... [2'07]
14  Il vole .......................................................................................... [1'48]
15  Mon cadavre est doux comme un gant .......................................... [2'47]
16  Violon .......................................................................................... [1'48]
17  Fleurs .......................................................................................... [2'23]
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<td>[Babar à la forêt <em>Dans la grande forêt …</em>]</td>
<td>5'11</td>
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<td>[Babar dans la ville <em>Au bout de quelques jours …</em>]</td>
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<td>Paganini</td>
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<td>Quelle aventure !</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Ba, be, bi, bo, bu</td>
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<td>Les anges musiciens</td>
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<td>Le carafon</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Lune d’avril</td>
<td>2'34</td>
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MAÎN DOMINÉE PAR LE CŒUR

Cinq poèmes de Paul Éluard  FP77 (1935)  (ÉLUARD) .................................................. BEN JOHNSON tenor  [6’50]

1  Peut-il se reposer ................................................................. [1’56]
2  Il la prend dans ses bras ..................................................... [0’49]
3  Plume d’eau claire ............................................................... [0’46]
4  Rôdeuse au front de verre .................................................... [1’53]
5  Amoureuses .................................................................... [1’26]

Tel jour telle nuit  FP86 (1936–7)  (ÉLUARD) .................................................. SARAH FOX soprano  [15’05]

6  Bonne journée .................................................................. [2’43]
7  Une ruine coquille vide ..................................................... [2’10]
8  Le front comme un drapeau perdu ..................................... [1’04]
9  Une roulotte couverte en tuiles ........................................... [0’59]
10  À toutes brides ................................................................ [0’42]
11  Une herbe pauvre ............................................................... [1’38]
12  Je n’ai envie que de t’aider ................................................. [0’51]
13  Figure de force brûlante et farouche ................................ [1’31]
14  Nous avons fait la nuit ....................................................... [3’28]

Miroirs brûlants  FP98 (1938–9)  (ÉLUARD) .................................................. CHRISTOPHER MALTMAN baritone  [5’46]

15  Tu vois le feu du soir .......................................................... [4’27]
16  Je nommerai ton front ....................................................... [1’19]

17  Ce doux petit visage  FP99 (1939)  (ÉLUARD) .................................................. AILISH TYNNAN soprano  [1’54]

18  Les chemins de l’amour  from Léocadia FP106 (1940)  (ANOUILI)  .................................................. SARAH FOX soprano  [3’28]

Deux poèmes de Louis Aragon  FP122 (1943)  (ARAGON) .................................................. BEN JOHNSON tenor  [4’22]

19  C .................................................................................. [3’17]
20  Fêtes galantes .................................................................. [1’04]

21  Le disparu  FP134 (1946)  (DESNOS) .................................................. CHRISTOPHER MALTMAN baritone  [1’31]

22  Main dominée par le cœur  FP135 (1946)  (ÉLUARD) .................................................. GERALDINE MCGREEVY soprano  [1’21]

23  ... mais mourir  FP137 (1947)  (ÉLUARD) .................................................. CHRISTOPHER MALTMAN baritone  [1’35]
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<td>CHRISTOPHER MALTMAN baritone</td>
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<td>L’espionne</td>
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<td>[1'51]</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Mutation</td>
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<td>[0'41]</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Vers le sud</td>
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<td>[1'36]</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Il pleut</td>
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<td>[1'12]</td>
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<td>La grâce exilée</td>
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<td>Aussi bien que les cigales</td>
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<td>Voyage</td>
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<td>[2'55]</td>
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<td>La fraîcheur et le feu FP147 (1950)</td>
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<td>CHRISTOPHER MALTMAN baritone</td>
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<td>Dans les ténèbres du jardin</td>
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<td>Unis la fraîcheur et le feu</td>
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<td>[1'15]</td>
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<td>Homme au sourire tendre</td>
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<td>La grande rivière qui va</td>
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<td>Le travail du peintre FP161 (1956)</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>Dernier poème FP163 (1956)</td>
<td>(DESNOS)</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td>Une chanson de porcelaine FP169 (1958)</td>
<td>(ÉLUARD)</td>
<td>GERALDINE McGREEVY soprano</td>
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# PARISIANA

**Tracks 78–119**

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<td>Le dromadaire</td>
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<td>La chèvre du Thibet</td>
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<td>La sauterelle</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Bonne d'enfant</td>
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<td>Vous n'écrivez plus?</td>
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<td>Rosemonde</td>
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<td>La souris</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>La puce</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>La dame de Monte-Carlo</td>
<td>Cocteau</td>
<td>1961</td>
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# FANCY

**Poèmes de Ronsard**  FP38 (1924–5)  (RONSARD)  

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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Le tombeau</td>
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<td>2'35</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ballet</td>
<td></td>
<td>2'08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Je n’ai plus que les os</td>
<td></td>
<td>3'51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>À son page</td>
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<td>1'35</td>
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*Chansons gaillardes*  FP42 (1925–6)  (17TH CENTURY)  

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<th>Duration</th>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>La maîtresse volage</td>
<td>ASHLEY RICHES bass-baritone</td>
<td>0'41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chanson à boire</td>
<td></td>
<td>2'15</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Madrigal</td>
<td></td>
<td>0'35</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Invocation aux Parques</td>
<td></td>
<td>1'26</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Couplets bachiques</td>
<td></td>
<td>1'26</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>L’offrande</td>
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<td>0'56</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>La belle jeunesse</td>
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<td>1'46</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sérénade</td>
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<td>2'15</td>
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**Vocalise**  FP44 (1927)  

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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Épitaphe</td>
<td>NEAL DAVIES bass</td>
<td>1'34</td>
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**Cinq poèmes de Max Jacob**  FP59 (1931)  (JACOB)  

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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Chanson bretonne</td>
<td>NICOLE TIBBELS soprano</td>
<td>0'50</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Cimetière</td>
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<td>2'39</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>La petite servante</td>
<td></td>
<td>2'14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Berceuse</td>
<td></td>
<td>1'09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Souric et Mouric</td>
<td></td>
<td>2'01</td>
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</table>
Huit chansons polonaises (Osiem piesni polskich) FP69 (1934) AGNIESZKA ADAMCZAK soprano [10'56]

21 Wianek (La couronne) (KOWALSKI) .......................................................... [1'49]
22 Odjazd (Le départ) (WITWICKI) ................................................................. [0'56]
23 Polska młodzież (Les gars polonais) (TRADITIONAL) ................................ [0'48]
24 Ostatni mazur (Le dernier mazour) (TRADITIONAL) ................................. [1'48]
25 Pożegnanie (L'adieu) (GOSLAWSKI) ........................................................... [1'29]
26 Biała choragiewka (Le drapeau blanc) (SUCHODOLSKI) ....................... [0'38]
27 Wisła (La vistule) (TRADITIONAL) ............................................................ [1'21]
28 Jezioro (Le lac) (TRADITIONAL) ............................................................... [2'07]

À sa guitare FP79 (1935) (RONSARD) ......................................................... GERALDINE McGREEVY soprano [2'34]

Priez pour paix FP95 (1938) (ORLÉANS) .................................................... SUSAN BICKLEY mezzo-soprano [2'42]

Chansons villageoises FP117 (1942) (FOMBEURE) .................. CHRISTOPHER MALTMAN baritone [11'39]

31 Chansons du clair-tamis .......................................................... [0'57]
32 Les gars qui vont à la fête ................................................................ [1'27]
33 C'est le joli printemps .................................................................... [3'07]
34 Le mendiant ........................................................................ [3'27]
35 Chanson de la fille frivole ................................................................. [0'59]
36 Le retour du sergent ............................................................. [1'42]

Trois chansons de F García Lorca FP136 (1947) (GARCÍA LORCA) SUSAN BICKLEY mezzo-soprano [4'18]

37 L'enfant muet ........................................................................ [1'35]
38 Adelina à la promenade ................................................................. [0'49]
39 Chanson de l'oranger sec ............................................................ [1'54]

Hymne FP144 (1948) (RACINE) .............................................................. NEAL DAVIES bass [3'40]

Mazurka FP145 (1949), for the collaborative Mouvements du cœur (VILMORIN) NEAL DAVIES bass [3'25]

Fancy FP174 (1959) (SHAKESPEARE) .................................................. GERALDINE McGREEVY soprano [1'48]
To the memory of Pierre Bernac (1899–1979)

Recorded in All Saints’ Church, East Finchley, London
on 14–16 July 2008 (Ailish Tynan)
31 May 2010 (Felicity Lott, Geraldine McGreevy, Neal Davies)
8, 10 & 11 March 2011 (Christopher Maltman)
11–12 May 2011 (Geraldine McGreevy, Nicole Tibbels, Ben Johnson)
18–20 September 2011 (Agnieszka Adamczak, Sarah Fox, Sarah-Jane Brandon, Ivan Ludlow)
and 2–5 January 2012 (Sarah-Jane Brandon, Geraldine McGreevy, Susan Bickley, Robin Tritschler,
Ivan Ludlow, Ashley Riches, Brandon Velarde)

L’histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant recorded at Studio 2, Maida Vale, in September 1977; issued by permission of BBC Worldwide
BBC Producer ELAINE PADMORE
Recording Engineer JULIAN MILLARD
Recording Producer MARK BROWN
Language Coaches MICHEL VALLAT, NICOLE TIBBELS
Piano STEINWAY & SONS
Booklet Editor TIM PARRY
Executive Producer SIMON PERRY
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Illustrations are from the private collections of Rosine and Benoît Seringe, with grateful thanks, and Graham Johnson

Unless otherwise stated the English translations of the song texts are by Winifred Radford,
from Francis Poulenc: The Man and his Songs by Pierre Bernac (1977, translations © Sidney Buckland),
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A NEW ‘INTÉGRALE’ OF POULENC’S SONGS

The mélodies of Poulenc have been recorded complete at least three times before, and they have been presented either in chronological order, or in separate programmes with one disc issued at a time. To mark the fiftieth anniversary of Poulenc’s death the Hyperion Poulenc Edition is issued as a complete set, but not in chronological order. Instead, each of the four discs presents a programme of songs in an order that is chronological for that disc alone—signifying four different journeys through the composer’s career. Of course the pros and cons of a straightforward chronology across the entire set were carefully considered. If the listener had the time to listen in a single sitting to four or five discs arranged in such an historically accurate way we could trace a mighty crescendo followed by a gentle diminuendo, the early songs from 1918 and the ’20s leading to the great masterpieces bunched together between the years 1936 and 1948, and then a gradual unwinding, full of distinguished music but a decrescendo nevertheless, through the ’50s to the early ’60s. There is a biographical poignancy in this messa di voce of mélodies, certainly, but the piling on of a dizzying juxtaposition of songs, particularly in that amazingly fecund middle period, is an embarras de richesses that does little to help the listener discern the separate paths that Poulenc, a mercurial and Protean artist, followed in his career. Like many great song composers he tended carefully to isolate different strands of his creative (as well as his private) personality as if he were one of those authors capable of working on four novels at once, advancing each of them in turn, a chapter at a time, rather than...
concentrating on one book and finishing it. How typical this is of a man of many parts: Poulenc the sybarite and epicurean in love with the austerity of Rocamadour and its Black Virgin; the homosexual man who fathered a daughter at the age of forty-seven; the life and soul of the party who was also a depressive; the rich boy from the Right Bank who chose to live on the Left and had tender affection for working-class Paris; the composer equally devoted to Guillaume Apollinaire and Paul Éluard, two different worlds of poetry, with a different way of setting each of them to music.

Accordingly, the Hyperion Edition is arranged in four separate, self-sufficient programmes. These four discs can be listened to in any order; the sequence proposed here is only a personal suggestion. Disc 1 features a substantial appearance, recorded in 1977, of Pierre Bernac—narrating rather than singing. It is to his memory that this \textit{Intégrale des mélodies} is affectionately and gratefully dedicated.

Throughout these notes the composer’s own opinions of his songs are quoted from a small notebook he kept as a kind of diary. This \textit{Journal de mes Mélodies} (abbreviated to here as JdmM) was posthumously published in 1964. A bilingual English edition translated by Winifred Radford appeared in 1985. The FP numbers are taken from \textit{The Music of Francis Poulenc: A Catalogue} (1995) by Carl B Schmidt.

\textbf{COMPACT DISC 1}

\textbf{MÉTAMORPHOSES} \textit{Songs 1931–1963}

Women and children first! This disc is an anthology of feminine verse and childlike wonder. Settings by female poets are heard alongside songs for and about children from the beginning and end of Poulenc’s career. Pierre Bernac, a tutelary spirit for all students of French song, narrates a performance of Poulenc’s \textit{L’histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant}, a story known to children throughout the world. In a BBC recording from 1977, Bernac, then aged seventy-eight, commands a range of colour and depth of nuance with his speaking voice that recall his own matchless singing of this repertoire.

The disc begins with a set of three songs to which the renowned painter Marie Laurencin contributes the first and last of the poems; she was the mistress of Guillaume Apollinaire, who wrote the middle poem himself. We also hear three sets of songs by Poulenc’s beloved Louise de Vilmorin, a single song to a poem by Colette, and one by the female poet Laurence de Beylié. Apart from the song \textit{Mazurka}, a Vilmorin setting for bass that is included on disc 4, this represents Poulenc’s entire output of settings by female poets. Children are represented in four songs from 1934 in the music-hall tradition, and by \textit{Babar} which the composer specifically dedicated to nine of his named younger relatives. The songs from Poulenc’s final cycle, \textit{La courte paille}, are addressed to children, although the poems themselves are by a male poet.

Poulenc was a homosexual man who adored women: Louise de Vilmorin and Marie-Blanche de Polignac, names that feature on this disc, both lifelong friends, were the kind of good-looking, glamorous women that Poulenc found irresistible. As a young man he had hoped to marry his childhood friend Raymonde Linossier, but she turned him
down and died soon afterwards, leaving him desperately unhappy. During his life he had important relationships with men (Richard Chanlaire, Raymond Destouches, Lucien Roubert, Louis Gautier) as well as other more fleeting attachments. He first met Pierre Bernac as a colleague in 1926 but the pair, very different personalities in fact, fell out over the scabrous texts of *Chansons gaillardes*. They met again in 1934 and became the most devoted of musical partners and confidants, but theirs was never a sexual friendship, and it was not a parallel relationship to that of Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, their celebrated English contemporaries. Poulenc and Bernac addressed each other as ‘vous’ (rather than ‘tu’) to the end of their lives. Until many years after his death it was not known that Poulenc was father of a daughter, Marie-Ange (born 1946), as a result of an unexpected affair with a woman named Freddy (Fréderique) Lebedeff whom he had known for a long time, a distant relative of his first great love, Richard Chanlaire (the song *Dans l’herbe* on this disc is dedicated to Freddy). The child was brought up believing that Poulenc was her godfather, a grievous mistake by today’s parenting standards, but in other respects the composer was a devoted father; the majority of his considerable posthumous royalties was left to Marie-Ange.

A study by Richard D E Burton (*Francis Poulenc*, 2002, a book that considers the composer’s sexuality in the light of his Catholicism) makes the fascinating suggestion that many of Poulenc’s emotional needs were addressed through his compositions for women’s voices—that he became, in his own mind, the brave and transfigured Blanche in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, just as he had identified with the hunting goddess Diana in his early chamber music piece *Aubade*. The composer admitted—in a letter of 20 April 1958—that he himself was the abandoned ‘Elle’ in *La voix humaine*, just as Flaubert had admitted to being Madame Bovary. Such a claim could never have been made, for example, about Benjamin Britten and the female characters in his operas. It seems likely that the songs that Poulenc wrote for women to sing, particularly those with texts by Louise de Vilmorin, had a measure of self-identification. Vilmorin was more of a novelist by inclination, but the composer had encouraged her into becoming a poet. Her work enabled him to explore the feminine side of his nature—as if he were suddenly slim and beautiful, dressed by Lanvin and able to receive the gallant homage of a line of suitors. Women singers have always found these songs supremely satisfying to sing, both emotionally and vocally (Poulenc had become a real expert in writing for the singing voice soon after the establishment of his duo with Bernac). There is never the slightest sense that the composer is patronizing his female singers or writing down to them—rather is he grateful to them for voicing aspects of his own personality. It is significant that shortly after Bernac retired from the concert platform in 1959 Poulenc established a duo with Denise Duval, a ravishingly pretty and extremely talented soprano for whom he wrote a number of works. Poulenc’s relatives and friends have assured me that he would have been equally stricken by *la grande Anglaise*, Felicity Lott. Dame Felicity is a star of a number of Poulenc records (including *Voyage à Paris*, Helios CDH55366, and an earlier intégrale on Decca); she makes a cameo appearance on this disc (tracks 4–7). Younger singers are indebted to her example in this repertoire, unmatched by any soprano of her generation.

**TROIS POÈMES DE LOUISE LALANNE** FP57 (February 1931)

The poems are not by Louise Lalanne, if such a person ever existed. They appear in Guillaume Apollinaire’s collection entitled *Il y a*, published posthumously in 1925. Marie Laurencin (1885–1956), the famous painter and designer of Poulenc’s ballet *Les biches*, confessed to the composer that she was the author of the first and third poems, whereas *Chanson* was by Apollinaire himself.
**1** i  **Le présent**  
Sung by Ailish Tynan;  *Presto possible*

Si tu veux je te donnerai
Mon matin, mon matin gai
Avec tous mes clairs cheveux
   Que tu aimes ;
   Mes yeux verts
   Et dorés
   Si tu veux.
Je te donnerai tout le bruit
   Qui se fait
Quand le matin s'éveille
   Au soleil
Et l'eau qui coule
Dans la fontaine
   Tout auprès ;
Et puis encor le soir qui viendra vite
Le soir de mon âme triste
   À pleurer
Et mes mains toutes petites
Avec mon cœur qu'il faudra près du tien
Garder.

MARIE LAURENCIN (1885–1956)

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**2** ii  **Chanson**  
Sung by Ailish Tynan;  *Follement vite*

Les myrtilles sont pour la dame
   Qui n'est pas là
La marjolaine est pour mon âme
   Tra-la-la !
Le chèvrefeuille est pour la belle
   Irrésolue.
Quand cueillerons-nous les arielles
   Lanturlu.
Mais laissons pousser sur la tombe,
   O folle ! O fou !
Le romarin en touffes sombres
   Laïtou !

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

---

The present

If you wish I will give you
my morning, my gay morning
with all my bright hair
   that you love;
   my eyes green
   and gold
if you wish.
I will give you all the sound
   which is heard
when morning awakens
   to the sun
and the water that flows
   in the fountain
   nearby;
   and then again the evening that will come quickly
   the evening of my soul sad enough
   to weep
   and my hands so small
   with my heart that will need to be close to your own
   to keep.

---

Song

Myrtle is for the lady
   who is absent
marjoram is for my soul
   tra-la-la!
Honeysuckle is for the fair
   irresolute.
When do we gather the bilberries
   lan-tur-lu.
But let us plant on the tomb,
   O crazed! O mazed!
Rosemary in dark tufts
   la-i-tou!
Hier
Sung by Ailish Tynan; Modéré mais surtout sans traîner
Hier, c’est ce chapeau fané
   Que j’ai longtemps traîné
Hier, c’est une pauvre robe
   Qui n’est plus à la mode.
Hier, c’était le beau couvent
   Si vide maintenant
Et la rose mélancolie
   Des cours de jeunes filles
Hier, c’est mon cœur mal donné
   Une autre, une autre année!
Hier n’est plus, ce soir,
   Qu’une ombre
Près de moi dans ma chambre.

Yesterday
Yesterday is this faded hat
   that I have trailed about so long
Yesterday is a shabby dress
   no longer in fashion.
Yesterday was the beautiful convent
   so empty now
and the rose-tinged melancholy
   of the young girls’ classes
yesterday, is my heart ill-bestowed
   in a past, a past year!
Yesterday is no more, this evening,
   than a shadow
close to me in my room.

Each of the songs introduces a type of mélodie that would later come to be considered generically typical of the composer; perhaps this is why Poulenc wrote in JdmM in connection with this work that with Apollinaire he had at last found his ‘true melodic style’. Le présent has an accompaniment that doubles the voice and hurtles through the staves like a miniature storm, the hands an octave apart throughout—inspired, surely, by the ‘wind across the graves’ of the last movement (also a Presto) of Chopin’s B flat minor Piano Sonata. This is one of Poulenc’s innumerable moments as a musical magpie. Chanson is also a moto perpetuo, more populist than the first song. This is a vintage piece of so-called ‘leg Poulenc’ with its echoes of the music-hall and the madcap gaiety of the 1920s. Poulenc wrote that he considered it a counting song in the manner of ‘Am–stram–gram–pic et pic et colégram’. Hier is eloquent and touching, prophesying the long sinuous vocal lines, accompanied by flowing quaver chords, for which this composer was to become justly famous. It is the first of his songs where Poulenc permits the shadow of a slow and nostalgic popular style to influence the mood of a deeply serious song. He manages to do this without cheapening his music; rather is it enriched with a nostalgia for ‘yesterday’ that seems especially French, in fact uniquely Parisian, especially for the British or American listener. While he composed the music Poulenc admitted to thinking of the operetta and musical star Yvonne Printemps, and of an interior painted by Vuillard. ‘If you think carefully of the words you are saying’, he advised in JdmM, ‘the colour will come of itself.’ The set as a whole is dedicated to the Comtesse Jean de Polignac, daughter of the great couturier Jeanne Lanvin, and better known as Marie-Blanche de Polignac, a fine soprano in her own right. Perhaps that is what made Poulenc think of Vuillard, who painted both Lanvin and her beautiful daughter.
MARIE-BLANCHE DE POLIGNAC (in white) as a soprano of the vocal ensemble founded by NADIA BOULANGER (at the piano).

At the right of the picture is the tenor Hugues Cuenod.
The other male member of the group is the bass Doda Conrad, dedicatee of *Hymne* and *Mazurka* (disc 4)
Nous voulons une petite sœur
We want a baby sister

Track 4

Madame Eustache a dix-sept filles,
Madame Eustache has seventeen daughters,
Ce n’est pas trop,
which is none too many
Mais c’est assez.
but quite enough.

La jolie petite famille
A fine little family—
Vous avez dû la voir passer.
you must have seen them passing by.

Le vingt Décembre on les appelle :
On December 20 they are summoned:
Que voulez-vous mesdemoiselles
What, girls, would you like
Pour votre Noël ?
for Christmas?
Voulez-vous une boîte à poudre ?
Would you like a powder box?
Voulez-vous des petits mouchoirs ?
Would you like some little handkerchiefs?
Un petit nécessaire à coudre ?
a little sewing set?
Un perroquet sur son perchoir ?
A parrot on his perch?
Voulez-vous un petit ménage ?
Would you like a little doll’s house?
Un stylo qui tache les doigts ?
a pen that inks fingers?
Un pompier qui plonge et qui nage ?
A fireman that can dive and swim?
Un vase à fleurs presque chinois
An almost Chinese flower vase?
Mais les dix-sept enfants en chœur
But the seventeen children replied
Ont répondu : Non, non, non, non, non.
in chorus: No, no, no, no, no.
Ce n’est pas ça que nous voulons
That’s not what we want,
Nous voulons une petite sœur
we want a baby sister,
Ronde et joufflue comme un ballon
round and chubby like a balloon,
Avec un petit nez farceur
with a funny little nose,
Avec les cheveux blonds
with blonde hair
Avec la bouche en cœur
and a heart-shaped mouth.

L’hiver suivant ; elles sont dix-huit,
Next winter—there are eighteen,
Ce n’est pas trop,
which is none too many
Mais c’est assez.
but quite enough.

Noël approche et les petites
Christmas draws near and the girls
Sont vraiment bien embarrassées.
are truly perplexed.

Madame Eustache les appelle :
Madame Eustache summons them:
Décidez-vous mesdemoiselles
Girls, you must decide
Pour votre Noël :
on your Christmas present—
Voulez-vous un mouton qui frise ?
Would you like a woolly sheep?
Voulez-vous un réveill’ matin ?
Would you like an alarm clock?
Un coffret d’alcool dentifrice ?
a bottle of mouth-wash?
Trois petits coussins de satin ?
Three little satin cushions?
Voulez-vous une panoplie
Would you like
De danseuse de l’Opéra ?
a ballerina’s costume?
Un petit fauteuil qui se plie
to be carried under the arm?
Et que l’on porte sous son bras ?
But the eighteen children replied
Ont répondu : Non, non, non, non, non.
Ce n’est pas ça que nous voulons
Nous voulons une petite sœur
Ronde et joufflue comme un ballon
Avec un petit nez farceur
Avec les cheveux blonds
Avec la bouche en cœur
Nous voulons une petite sœur.
Elles sont dix-neuf l’année suivante,
Ce n’est pas trop,
Mais c’est assez.
Quand revient l’époque émouvante
Noël va de nouveau passer.
Madame Eustache les appelle :
Décidez-vous mesdemoiselles
Pour votre Noël :
Voulez-vous des jeux excentriques
Avec des piles et des moteurs ?
Voulez-vous un ours électrique ?
Un hippopotame à vapeur ?
Pour coller des cartes postales
Voulez-vous un superbé album ?
Une automobile à pédales ?
Une bague en aluminium ?
Mais les dix-neuf enfants en chœur
Ont répondu : Non, non, non, non, non.
Ce n’est pas ça que nous voulons.
Nous voulons deux petites jumelles.
Deux sœurs exactement pareilles
Deux sœurs avec des cheveux blonds !
Leur mère a dit : C’est bien
Mais il n’y a pas moyen ;
Cette année, vous n’aurez rien, rien, rien.

J’ABOUNE’, JEAN NOHAIN,
Pseudonym for JEAN-MARIE LEGRAND (1900–1981)

La tragique histoire du petit René
Sung by Felicity Lott; Rondement

Avec mon face à main
Je vois ce qui se passe
Chez Madame Germain
Dans la maison d’en face.
Les deux filles cadettes
Préparent le repas
Reprisent les chaussett’s
Et font le lit de leur papa.

in chorus: No, no, no, no, no.
That’s not what we want,
we want a baby sister,
round and chubby like a balloon,
with a funny little nose,
with blonde hair
and a heart-shaped mouth.
We want a baby sister.

There are nineteen the following year,
which is none too many
but quite enough.
When the heart-warming season returns,
Christmas once more approaches.
Madame Eustache summons them.
Girls, you must decide
on your Christmas present:
Would you like some unusual toys
with batteries and engines?
Would you like an electric bear?
A steam hippopotamus?
Would you like a superb scrap-book
for pasting postcards in?
Would you like a pedal-car?
An aluminium ring?
But the nineteen children replied
in chorus: No, no, no, no, no.
That’s not what we want.
We want twin baby sisters,
identical twin sisters,
two sisters with blonde hair!
Their mother said: Very well,
but it cannot be done.
This year you’ll have nothing at all!

English translation by RICHARD STOKES

The tragic story of little René

With my lorgnette
I can see what’s going on
chez Madame Germain
in the bouse opposite.
The two younger girls
are preparing the meal,
mending socks
and making daddy’s bed.
Emma s’occupe du balai,
Paul va chercher le lait,
Mais le petit René
Quoique étant l’aîné
Fait rougir la maisonnée
D’un bout de l’année
À l’autre bout de l’année,
Il met les doigts dans son nez.

Les sermons, les discours
Dont ses parents le bourrent
Semblent tomber toujours
Dans l’oreille d’un sourd.
Sa mère consternée
A beau le sermonner,
Le priver de dîner,
Et lui donner le martinet,
Il se met les doigts dans les nez
D’un bout de l’année
À l’autre bout de l’année,
C’est sa triste destinée,
Pauvre petit René,
Pour en terminer,
On a dû lui couper
Le nez.

‘JABOUNE’, JEAN NOHAIN,
Pseudonym for JEAN-MARIE LEGRAND (1900–1981)

Le petit garçon trop bien portant
Sung by Felicity Lott; A perdre bileine
Ah ! Mon cher docteur, je vous écris,
Vous serez un peu surpris,
Je n’ai vraiment pas content
D’être toujours trop bien portant …
Je suis gras … Trois fois trop,
J’ai des bras … Beaucoup trop gros.
Et l’on dit, en me voyant:
« Regardez-le, c’est effrayant,
Quelle santé, quelle santé !
Approchez, on peut tâter ! »
Ah ! Mon cher docteur, c’est un enfer,
Vraiment je n’ai pas quoi faire,
Tous les gens disent à ma mère :
« Bravo, ma chère, il est en fer … »

English translation by RICHARD STOKES

The too-healthy little boy

Track 6

Ab! dear doctor, I am writing to you,
which might surprise you a little,
it really does not please me
always to be in such good health …
I am plump … far too much so …
my arms … are much too fat.
And when people see me, they say:
‘Look at him, it’s frightening:
He’s so healthy! So healthy!
Come closer and feel him!’
Ab! dear doctor, it’s hell,
I truly am at my wits’ end,
everyone says to Mother:
‘Bravo, my dear, he’s made of steel …’
J’ai René,
Mon aîné,
Quand il faut être enrhumé,
Ça lui tombe toujours sur le nez …
Les fluxions,
Attention !
C’est pour mon frère Adrien !
Mais moi, j’n’attrape jamais rien !
En pourtant j’ai beau, pendant l’hiver,
M’exposer aux courants d’air,
Manger à tort à travers
Tous les fruits verts — Y a rien à faire …
Hélas, je sais que lorsqu’on a la rougeole,
On reste au lit, mais on ne va plus à l’école …
Vos parents sont près de vous,
Ils vous cajolent,
Et l’on vous dit des tas de petits mots gentils …
Votre maman, constamment vous donne des médicaments.
Ah ! Mon cher docteur, si vous étiez gentil vous auriez pitié !
Je sais bien c’que vous feriez,
Les pilules que vous m’enverriez ! …
Être bien portant
Tout l’temps, c’est trop embêtant …
Je vous en supplie, docteur …
Docteur, un ‘seule fois,
Rendez-moi ill … ill … ill
Pendant une heure !

‘JABOUNE’, JEAN NOHAIN,
Pseudonyme de JEAN-MARIE LEGRAND (1900–1981)

Mr Carefree

When people have pots of money,
they are served,
so I’m told,
by flunkeys, nannies
and errand-boys.
That’s not the case chez Mr Carefree …
He does everything himself
in his little bome.
C'est le bon système : 
Il a bien raison !
Il frotte, il astiqu' :
Pas de domestiqu' .
Son plancher reluit ... 
Qu'on est bien chez lui !
Les petits plats qu'il aime,
Il se les fait lui-même
Et puis, il s'dit : « Merci »
Monsieur Sans-Souci.

Au printemps,
Il est bien content ...
Le jardinage
Prend tout son temps ...
Malgré son âge
C'est en chantant
Des airs d'antan
Qu'il se met à l'ouvrage ...
Il fait tout lui-même
Dans son p'tit jardin,
Et les fleurs qu'il aime
Il les a pour rien.
Il bêche, il arros',
Il taille ses ros's,
Et dans sa villa
C'est plein de lilas ...
Il a des chrysanthèmes
Qu'il cueille pour lui-même
Et pour les dam's aussi,
Monsieur Sans-Souci ...

Le bon vieux
N'est jamais envieux,
Il se contente
Toujours de peu ...
Rien ne le tente :
Il est heureux ...
Son seul désir,
C'est de vous faire' plaisir ...
Il fait tout lui-même
Pour qu'on soit content ...
Tout le monde l'aime
Il vivra longtemps ...
Il est centenair'
Et déjà Saint Pierr'
L'attend, m'a-t-on dit,
Dans son paradis ...

It's a fine system: 
be's absolutely right!
He dusts, he polishes: 
not a single servant in sight.
His floors glisten ... 
How cozy bis house is!
The little dishes be loves, 
be cooks them himself 
and then thanks himself; 
our Mr Carefree.

In spring
be's so happy ...
Gardening
takes up all bis time ...
Despite bis age
be sets to work
while singing songs
of yesteryear ...
He does everything himself
in bis little garden,
and the flowers be loves
be gets for nothing.
He digs, be waters,
be prunes bis roses,
and in bis cottage
there's bilac everywhere ...
The chrysanthemums be grows
be picks for himself
and also for the ladies,
our Mr Carefree ...

The dear old man
is never envious,
be's always content
with next to nothing ...
Nothing tempts him: 
be is happy ...
His only wish
is to please you ...
He does everything himself
to make people happy ...
Everybody loves him,
be will live a long time ...
He's a centenarian,
and Saint Peter already,
so I'm told,
awaits him in heaven ...
Poulenc’s flamboyant uncle ‘Papoum’ (Marcel Royer) was a lover of the music hall and he instilled a similar affection in his nephew from an early age. Poulenc came from an extremely well-to-do Parisian home (unlike Debussy, from the suburbs, or those southerners Fauré, Chabrier, Ravel and Milhaud). From the very beginning the refinements that money could buy were enjoyed side-by-side with the earthier manifestations of Parisian popular culture. These four songs were written to the texts of a popular poet Jean Nohain, otherwise known as Jaboune—both pseudonyms for Jean-Marie Legrand (1900–1981). He later became known as the writer of texts for the popular chansonnier Mireille. The musical language is simple, and the texts irreproachably suitable for young people either to sing or listen to. In the real music hall of the time songs of this kind, with their zany melodies and verbal patter, would have been far more suggestive than these innocent little sketches. On the concert platform today the first song, with its extended Christmas lists, is the most often performed. It is a reminder of the Third Republic’s obsession with encouraging its citizens to have more children, a theme that Poulenc revisited in far more extended fashion in the Apollinaire opéra bouffe Les mamelles de Tirésias.

TROIS POÈMES DE LOUISE DE VILMORIN  FP91 (DECEMBER 1937)

Louise de Vilmorin (1902–1969) was a member of the family whose celebrated firm still supplies the well-to-do French middle classes with flower and vegetable seeds. ‘Few people move me as much as Louise de Vilmorin’, wrote Poulenc in JdmM, ‘because she is beautiful, because she is lame, because she writes French of an innate purity, because her name evokes flowers and vegetables, because she loves her brothers like a lover and her lovers like a sister. Her beautiful face recalls the seventeenth century, as does the sound of her name.’ She was a friend of Marie-Blanche de Polignac, who was originally the recipient of the third poem in the set as a Christmas present in 1935. Poulenc read the poem and immediately encouraged Louise to write more. The composer was charming in his insistence, and the poet eventually complied; all three of the songs that were brought to birth as a result were dedicated to Marie-Blanche, who sang them exquisitely—although no recording survives.

Though less well known and far less performed than the cycle Fiançailles pour rire this is a masterful group of songs composed, significantly I think, after the composer’s reconversion to Catholicism.

LOUISE DE VILMORIN  a photograph by Horst P Horst
(at the shrine of the Black Virgin at Rocamadour in the Dordogne in 1936). It is the first set of songs to be composed after the great Éluard song cycle *Tel jour telle nuit*, and is the first specifically female cycle—bearing in mind that *Tel jour telle nuit* concludes with as wonderful a hymn to a woman’s deeper qualities, in fact Éluard’s hymn to his wife Nusch, that has ever been penned by a French composer.

8  

### i Le garçon de Liège

*Sung by Ailish Tynan; Vertigineusement vite*

Un garçon de conte de fée  
M’a fait un grand salut bourgeois,  
En plein vent, au bord d’une allée,  
Debout, sous l’arbre de la Loi.

Les oiseaux d’arrière saison  
Faisaient des leurs, malgré la pluie,  
Et, prise par ma déraison,  
J’osai lui dire : je m’ennuie.

Sans dire un doux mot de menteur,  
Le soir, dans ma chambre à tristesse,  
Il vint consoler ma pâleur ;  
Son ombre me fit des promesses.

Mais c’était un garçon de Liège  
Léger, léger comme le vent,  
Qui ne se prend à aucun piège  
Et court les plaines du beau temps.

Et dans ma chemise de nuit,  
Depuis lors, quand je voudrais rire,  
Ah ! beau jeune homme, je m’ennuie,  
Ah ! dans ma chemise, à mourir.

---

This song has much in common with the first song on this disc, *Le présent*. The breathless tempo and ever-restless semiquavers, an octave apart, denote a family similarity. But the musical lines of *Le garçon de Liège* are longer and infinitely more melodic. The song, a pun on the word ‘Liège/liège’ at its heart (both the Walloon town in Belgium, and the noun for ‘cork’), describes a whirlwind romance with a good-looking but not particularly profound young man, the kind of liaison to which both poet and composer could be partial. The excitement of the chase and the melancholy that goes with it (the closing bars of the song are extraordinary in this regard), the elegance of a self-aware promiscuity that entails the gracious renunciation of something that can only be loved as it flies by, and not possessed—these things are somehow captured in this music. Vilmorin was also capable of much longer attachments: she married a Hungarian count and at the end of her life was living with André Malraux. Shortly after the war she became the mistress of Duff Cooper when he was British ambassador to France. Cooper’s son, John Julius Norwich, remembers her living in the embassy at the time, and that she was wonderfully kind to him as a gawky teenager; she taught him any number of racy French songs with guitar accompaniment, Poulenc’s, of course, not among them.
ii   **Au-delà**
Sung by Ailish Tynan; *Très vite*

Eau-de-vie! Au-delà!
À l’heure du plaisir,
Choisir n’est pas trahir,
Je choisis celui-là.

Je choisis celui-là
Qui sait me faire rire,
D’un doigt de-ci, de-là,
Comme on fait pour écrire.

Comme on fait pour écrire,
Il va par-ci, par-là,
Sans que j’ose lui dire :
J’aime bien ce jeu-là.

J’aime bien ce jeu-là,
Qu’un souffle fait finir,
Jusqu’au dernier soupir
Je choisis ce jeu-là.

Eau-de-vie! Au-delà!
À l’heure du plaisir,
Choisir n’est pas trahir,
Je choisis ce jeu-là.

— Louise Lévéque de Vilmorin (1902–1969)

This is a breathless, triplet-accompanied song of erotic self-exploration. This at least is how Poulenc delightedly interpreted the poem’s first draft and Vilmorin was embarrassed enough by the seemingly inadvertent revelations occasioned by her stream-of-consciousness writing to change the poem for publication in her collection *Fiançailles pour rire* (1939). The title there is *Choisir n’est pas trahir*; the word ‘doigt’ (finger) is replaced by ‘mot’ (word) and the phrase ‘Jusqu’au dernier soupir’ disappears altogether. Poulenc was adamant in retaining Louise’s original words. The music is an impressive *moto perpetuo* for a delightedly bemused singer accompanied by roving fingers, including some untypically probing writing for the left hand in single quavers, not chords. It is remarkably successful in capturing a mood of quiet and private exultation (*cf* *L’offrande*, disc 4 track 11).

10   **Aux officiers de la Garde Blanche**
Sung by Ailish Tynan; *Assez modéré et mélanoliquement irréel*

Officiers de la Garde Blanche,
Gardez-moi de certaines pensées, la nuit,
Gardez-moi des corps à corps et de l’appui
D’une main sur ma hanche.

Gardez-moi surtout de lui
Qui par la manche m’entraîne
Vers le hasard des mains pleines
Et les ailleurs d’eau qui luit.

To the officers of the White Guard

— Louise Lévéque de Vilmorin (1902–1969)

This is a breathless, triplet-accompanied song of erotic self-exploration. This at least is how Poulenc delightedly interpreted the poem’s first draft and Vilmorin was embarrassed enough by the seemingly inadvertent revelations occasioned by her stream-of-consciousness writing to change the poem for publication in her collection *Fiançailles pour rire* (1939). The title there is *Choisir n’est pas trahir*; the word ‘doigt’ (finger) is replaced by ‘mot’ (word) and the phrase ‘Jusqu’au dernier soupir’ disappears altogether. Poulenc was adamant in retaining Louise’s original words. The music is an impressive *moto perpetuo* for a delightedly bemused singer accompanied by roving fingers, including some untypically probing writing for the left hand in single quavers, not chords. It is remarkably successful in capturing a mood of quiet and private exultation (*cf* *L’offrande*, disc 4 track 11).
This song, apart from the Charles d’Orléans prayer Priez pour paix, is uniquely religious among the Poulenc mélodies, a moment of metaphysical contemplation within the corpus of songs otherwise worldly and profane. He writes in JdmM of resisting any ‘false richness’ in the harmony. These ‘officiers’ are clearly meant to be angels, and Vilmorin the repentant sinner. This kind of avowal, a renunciation garlanded in sensuality, is completely in line with Poulenc’s recently reawakened Catholicism. His first response to these words suggests the humility and harmonic austerity of prayer. The throbbing semiquavers, repetitions on the same note, create an aureole of sound that propels the music forward. If the composer claimed that this kind of bare piano-writing was meant to evoke the guitar that Vilmorin used to accompany her singing at the home of friends, he cannot resist employing the fuller resources of the piano as the song progresses. As the ‘officers’ are addressed with quasi-liturgical repetition, the song gathers power and harmonic complexity and becomes fervently visionary; this reminds us of the life-changing experience Poulenc had recently undergone at Rocamadour. Such writing also prophesies the music of Dialogues des Carmélites composed some twenty years later. The song ends with a five-bar postlude as if the composer had envisaged a closing blessing or Amen.

**Le portrait** FP92 (March 1938)
Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Très violent et emporté

Belle, méchante, menteuse, injuste, plus changeante que le vent d’Avril, tu pleures de joie, tu ris de colère, tu m’aimes quand je te fais mal, tu te moques de moi quand je suis bon. Tu m’as à peine dit merci lorsque je t’ai donné le beau collier, mais tu as rougi de plaisir, comme une petite fille, le jour où je t’ai fait cadeau de ce mouchoir et tous disent de toi: « C’est à n’y rien comprendre! »

**The portrait**

Beautiful, wicked, lying, unjust, more changeable than the April wind, you weep for joy, you laugh in anger, you like me when I treat you badly, you mock me when I am kind. You scarcely thanked me when I gave you the beautiful necklace, but you blushed with pleasure, like a little girl, when I gave you this handkerchief as a present and everyone said of you: ‘It is beyond me!’
Mais je t’ai, un jour, volé ce mouchoir que tu venais de presser sur ta bouche fardée. Et, avant que tu ne me l’aies enlevé d’un coup de griffe, j’ai eu le temps de voir que ta bouche venait d’y peindre, rouge, naïf, dessiné à ravir, simple et pur, le portrait même de ton cœur.

SIDONIE-GABRIELLE COLETTE (1873–1954)

The famously bi-sexual novelist Colette (1873–1954) was known for most of her life simply by her surname—her full name was Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette. She also wrote the occasional poem-in-prose and it was one of these, printed on a handkerchief in facsimile, that she gave Poulenc when he visited her in hospital and asked her for something to set to music. Colette was bedridden and in great pain for the final years of her life, but she was a woman of enormous spirit, an undoubted national treasure, and Poulenc was an admirer without being a close friend.

Bernac points out that this is ‘not one of Poulenc’s most beautiful works’, but he would also have to agree that it is a fine setting of the poem that is vicious and tender by turns, unsurprisingly feline in view of the writer’s celebrated passion for cats. As a complete one-off the composer felt free to make a musical portrait of Colette, someone both imperiously demanding and insecure, adorable, but dangerous when crossed. It was Bernac who gave the song’s first performance in 1939, but despite ‘quand je suis bon’ (signalling a male narrator) the poem seems written in Colette’s voice—a woman writing of another woman in a mood of passionate and love-stricken exasperation. The marking Très violent et emporté conveys the intensity of the song, which hurtles forward in a musical tidal-wave of passion and jealousy. The text describes the paradoxical behaviour of the beloved in a similar way to the (very different) hymn to Nusch Éluard, Nous avons fait la nuit from Tel jour telle nuit. One song is a mirror image of the other: the Éluard, with enormous lyrical calm, describes the love of soul mates, in this case heterosexual; Le portrait reflects the emotional turbulence and tension of a homosexual relationship teetering on the edge. The composer understood both states of mind as part of his own experience.

FIANÇAILLES POUR RIRE
Whimsical betrothal
Six mélodies sur des poèmes de Louise de Vilmorin
FP101 (September–October 1939)

This is Poulenc’s most famous cycle for the female voice. Having set three of Vilmorin’s poems at the end of 1937 he now returned to her work with renewed delight, all too aware that his beloved ‘Loulou’ had moved to Hungary to live with her husband Count Pálffy in his castle. The composer missed her, and during the war years he spoke of her as a
prisoner on her husband's estates (a true Parisian—like Poulenc—regarded any exile from Paris as something unimaginably tiresome). It was the composer's initial idea to write a cycle of male songs for Bernac, but the choice of texts proved difficult (there were other composers like Georges Auric who were equally keen to set Vilmorin's words). Instead he was drawn into the idea of making a short and concise cycle in the manner of Schumann's Elisabeth Kulmann songs Op 104. To imitate Schumann he had originally planned a seven-song set, but six songs proved sufficient in the end.

12 i  La dame d'André
Sung by Ailish Tynan; Modéré sans lenteur
André ne connaît pas la dame
Qu'il prend aujourd'hui par la main.
A-t-elle un cœur à lendemains,
Et pour le soir a-t-elle une âme?
Au retour d'un bal campagnard
S'en allait-elle en robe vague

André's woman friend

André does not know the woman
whom be took by the hand today.
Has she a heart for the tomorrows,
and for the evening has she a soul?
On returning from a country ball
did she go in her flowing dress

The monogram of Louise de Vilmorin, a flower with four petals, signifies her four brothers. André is the second from the left. Louise was the mother of three daughters.
Chercher dans les meules la bague
Des fiançailles du hasard?
A-t-elle eu peur, la nuit venue,
Guetée par les ombres d’hier,
Dans son jardin, lorsque l’hiver
Entrait par la grande avenue?
Il l’a aimée pour sa couleur,
Pour sa bonne humeur de Dimanche.
Pâlira-t-elle aux feuilles blanches
De son album des temps meilleurs?

LOUISE LÉVÈQUE DE VILMORIN (1902–1969)

This is an elegant sisterly meditation on the suitability of André de Vilmorin’s girlfriend. Louise muses as to whether the new lover will make her brother happy. Of course Poulenc also knew André well. The musical shape and mood depict concern at one remove, without passion but with affectionate concern. ‘The tonal ambiguity’, writes Poulenc in JdmM, referring to the final chord, ‘prevents the song from coming to a conclusion and so prepares the way for the following songs.’

13 ii Dans l’herbe
   Sung by Ailish Tynan; Très calme et très égal

Je ne peux plus rien dire
Ni rien faire pour lui.
Il est mort de sa belle
Il est mort de sa mort belle
Dehors
Sous l’arbre de la Loi
En plein silence
En plein paysage
Dans l’herbe.
Il est mort inaperçu
En criant son passage
En appelant, en m’appelant
Mais comme j’étais loin de lui
Et que sa voix ne portait plus
Il est mort seul dans les bois
Sous son arbre d’enfance
Et je ne peux plus rien dire
Ni rien faire pour lui.

LOUISE LÉVÈQUE DE VILMORIN (1902–1969)

Here is an altogether deeper song without rivalling the Éluard settings in a similar vein. It is not known whose death is referred to in the poem but, as in the first song, the feminine tone is conserved by a certain musical reserve. The song must be sung ‘with great intensity’ (JdmM) that avoids outright passion.

In the grass

I can say nothing more
nor do anything for him.
He died for his beautiful one
be died a beautiful death
outside
under the tree of the Law
in deep silence
in open countryside
in the grass.
He died unnoticed
Crying out in his passing
calling, calling me
but as I was far from him
and because his voice no longer carried
be died alone in the woods
beneath the tree of his childhood
and I can say nothing more
nor do anything for him.
iii Il vole
Sung by Ailish Tynan; Presto implacable

En allant se coucher le soleil
Se reflète au vernis de ma table:
C’est le fromage rond de la fable
Au bec de mes ciseaux de vermeil.

—Mais où est le corbeau?—Il vole.

Je voudrais coudre mais un aimant
Attire à lui toutes mes aiguilles.
Sur la place les joueurs de quilles
De belle en belle passent le temps.

—Mais où est mon amant?—Il vole.

C’est un voleur que j’ai pour amant,
Le corbeau vole et mon amant vole,
Voleur de cœur manque à sa parole
Et voleur de fromage est absent.

—Mais où est le bonheur?—Il vole.

Je pleure sous le saule pleureur
Je mêle mes larmes à ses feuilles
Je pleure car je veux qu’on me veuille
Et je ne plais pas à mon voleur.

—Mais où donc est l’amour?—Il vole.

Trouvez la rime à ma déraison
Et par les routes du paysage
Ramenez-moi mon amant volage
Qui prend les cœurs et perd ma raison.

Je veux que mon voleur me vole.

LOUISE LÉVÊQUE DE VILMORIN (1902–1969)

He flies

As the sun is setting
it is reflected in the polished surface of my table:
it is the round cheese of the fable
in the beak of my silver scissors.

But where is the crow? It flies.
_I should like to sew but a magnet
attracts all my needles._
On the square the skittle players
pass the time with game after game.

But where is my lover? He flies.
_I have a thief for a lover,
the crow flies and my lover steals,
the thief of my heart breaks his word
and the thief of the cheese is not here._

But where is happiness? It flies.
_I weep under the weeping willow
I mingle my tears with its leaves
I weep because I want to be desired
and I am not pleasing to my thief._

But where then is love? It flies.
_Find the rhyme for my lack of reason
and by the roads of the countryside
bring me back my flighty lover
who takes hearts and drives me mad._

_I wish that my thief would steal me._

With its famously tricky accompaniment, this song revisits the rueful sexual philosophy of _Le garçon de Liège_, a kind of rationalized dissatisfaction, a gracious and graceful acceptance of the realities of life, including unfaithfulness in love. This is a Parisian cynicism that poet and composer have in common. For Vilmorin love is something that flies past her; she speaks of inconstancy and betrayal, even of weeping, but this is all part of the charivari of life and the undependability of human emotion. Accordingly there is no complaint or bitterness in the music, only a kind of _joie de vivre_ (in this case simply the joy of being alive enough to experience and to suffer). The song’s subtext and undertone, a worldly sigh of disappointment, is scarcely to be discerned amidst the ebullience of the piano’s rushing semiquavers and cascading chords; the modulated twists and turns of the vocal line reveal greater vulnerability. The poem plays on the double meaning of ‘voleur’ (thief and flier); it ends with Vilmorin’s wish that her thief would steal her. But if this does not happen, _c’est la vie_ must be her response. It would be inestimably vulgar for the poet, already in her thirties, to wail her discontent to the heavens. So instead, with Poulenc’s help, she smiles ruefully.
and shrugs her shoulders as only the French can. How differently would this abandonment be expressed in a German lied.

iv  **Mon cadavre est doux comme un gant**  
Sung by Ailish Tynan; *Très calme, intense et très lié*

My corpse is as limp as a glove

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon cadavre est doux comme un gant</td>
<td>My corpse is as limp as a glove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doux comme un gant de peau glacée</td>
<td>limp as a glove of glace kid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et mes prunelles effacées</td>
<td>and my two hidden pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Font de mes yeux des cailloux blancs.</td>
<td>make two white glace kid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deux cailloux blancs dans mon visage</td>
<td>Two white pebbles in my face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dans le silence deux muets</td>
<td>two mutes in the silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ombrés encore d’un secret</td>
<td>still shadowed by a secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et lourds du poids mort des images.</td>
<td>and heavy with the burden of things seen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mes doigts tant de fois égarés</td>
<td>My fingers so often straying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sont joints en attitude sainte</td>
<td>are joined in a saintly pose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appuyés au creux de mes plaintes</td>
<td>resting on the hollow of my groans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Au nœud de mon cœur arrêté.</td>
<td>at the centre of my arrested heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et mes deux pieds sont les montagnes,</td>
<td>And my two feet are the mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les deux derniers monts que j’ai vus</td>
<td>the last two hills I saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>À la minute où j’ai perdu</td>
<td>at the moment when I lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La course que les années gagnent.</td>
<td>the race that the years win.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon souvenir est ressemblant,</td>
<td>I still resemble myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enfants emportez-le bien vite,</td>
<td>children bear away the memory quickly,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allez, allez, ma vie est dite.</td>
<td>go, go, my life is done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon cadavre est doux comme un gant.</td>
<td>My corpse is as limp as a glove.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LOUISE LÉVÈQUE DE VILMORIN (1902–1969)

This song was dedicated to the soprano Ninon Vallin, the greatest female recitalist of her generation; no doubt Poulenc hoped she would be tempted to perform a song as sumptuous as this, for it is the heavyweight number of the set in terms of its depth of emotion and sovereign legato line. According to Hugues Cuenod, Vallin (who in any case favoured Louis Beydts as a composer over Poulenc) was horrified with the opening line of the poem and refused to sing it. Richard D E Burton has pointed out that the death by decapitation of Poulenc’s fellow-composer Pierre-Octave Ferroud in 1936 had a profound effect on him; after that event he seems to have been drawn to the imagery of the broken corpse, in the manner of a Pietà, although Burton fails to take the dark Ronsard setting from 1925, *Je n’ai plus que les os*, into account. The Vilmorin text when read on its own seems scarcely to call for music as lyrical as this, but this was always Poulenc’s trick: he found music for texts that somehow humanized them and made them more accessible, and the obscurity of the texts themselves saved his music from seeming sentimental and over-flowery. This was a masterful exchange and a lesson in the checks and balances of successful song-writing. Ninon Vallin, who had been a Fauré protégée, clearly did not know what she was missing. Her disinclination to trust his modernity is a lesson to every famous singer who has failed to engage with younger living composers. As it was she remained satisfied with her duo with Reynaldo Hahn.
**Violon**

Sung by Ailish Tynan; *Modéré*

Couple amoureux aux accents méconnus  
Le violon et son joueur me plaisent.  
Ah! j’aime ces gémissements tendus  
Sur la corde des malaises.  
Aux accords sur les cordes des pendus  
À l’heure où les Lois se taisent  
Le cœur, en forme de fraise,  
S’offre à l’amour comme un fruit inconnu.

LOUISE LÉVÈQUE DE VILMORIN (1902–1969)

*Violon* is the song from the set that is most often heard on its own. It gives both singer and pianist the challenge of imitating the exaggerated legato of a restaurant violinist, here Hungarian in inspiration because it refers back in the composer’s mind to Vilmorin’s temporary homeland where she lived with her spouse, Count Pálffy. Poulenc insisted however (*JdmM*) that the song evoked Paris, and that the recipient of the serenade was wearing a hat by Caroline Reboux, the Chanel of milliners. The song suggests the slinky, smoky atmosphere of a nightclub, but this has tended to encourage many performers, less experienced in the composer’s style, to exaggerate the populist side of this music to the point of parody—which was never Poulenc’s intention. The stream-of-consciousness wordplay inspired by the curvaceous shape of the violin will be heard later on this disc in another Vilmorin setting, *Paganini*. Here the poet sees the player and his instrument entwined like a ‘couple amoureux’; Poulenc provides a song where, in matters of ensemble and musical complicity, the voice and piano are conjoined in similar manner. The passage where the violinist skates up the fingerboard (at ‘Le violon et son joueur’) and the *quasi parlando* at the end of the song (the voice murmuring ‘en forme de fraise’ in the background while the violin/piano plays an *obbligato*) are charmingly effective. Most of the accompaniment, effulently pedalled, is first and foremost pianistic, but the final bars of the song conjure violin harmonics and pizzicato; Benjamin Britten’s violin evocation in a Thomas Hardy setting, *At the Railway Station, Upway* from his *Winter Words* cycle (composed fourteen years later), employs similar imitative devices.

**Fleurs**

Sung by Ailish Tynan; *Très calme*

Fleurs promises, fleurs tenues dans tes bras,  
Fleurs sorties des parenthèses d’un pas,  
Qui t’apportait ces fleurs l’hiver  
Saupoudrées du sable des mers ?  
Sable de tes baisers, fleurs des amours fanées  
Les beaux yeux sont de cendre et dans la cheminée  
Un cœur enrubanné de plaintes  
Brûle avec ses images saintes.

LOUISE LÉVÈQUE DE VILMORIN (1902–1969)

*Fleurs* is one of the most static and most beautiful of all Poulenc’s songs. Once again it shows a certain passive resignation on the part of Vilmorin in matters of love and, through her, on the part of Poulenc himself. ‘Il faut la..."
chanter *humblement*, he writes in *JdmM*. The poet burns love letters from the past and muses on the melancholy of life where affection is turned to ashes. Mozart’s song about another Louise who burns her letters comes to mind: the Baumberg setting *Als Luise die Briefe* K520, a lied that bristles with fury and anguish, a short sharp shock. That Austrian Luise, choking back her emotion, confesses that she still burns with love, even if she destroys the letters. On the other hand, the rational Louise de Vilmorin and her alter-ego Francis Poulenc are superbly imperturbable in the slow lilting movement of crotchets in $\frac{3}{4}$; they humbly accept that everything in life is transient. A mood of deep, even inconsolable regret is expressed without undue emphasis or exaggeration. It is music like this that wins the heart of those who feel more temperamentally drawn to the mélodie than to the German lied. The older Gabriel Fauré was a special master in slow songs of this kind where implacable crotchets accompany a vocal line that remains relatively undemonstrative, but which nevertheless breaks the heart for all that it does not permit itself to say. Perhaps Poulenc, as Bernac’s accompanist in a wide range of French song, had learned something from Fauré, a composer he had earlier professed not to admire.

**L’HISTOIRE DE BABAR, LE PETIT ÉLÉPHANT**

*The history of Babar, the little elephant*

*pour récitant et piano* FP129 (1940–45)

*Narrated by Pierre Bernac*

This work with a spoken text by Jean de Brunhoff (1899–1937) is an inspired variation on the piano-accompanied melodrama experiments of such composers as Schumann, Liszt and Richard Strauss. It was sketched at the home of Poulenc’s friend Marthe Bosredon in Brive-la Gaillarde in the summer of 1940. According to Bernac, the children of the house, bored with Poulenc’s piano playing, placed a copy of their favourite book, *Babar*, on the piano stand, and said ‘Play this instead!’ The composer began to improvise on the story and the children were delighted. The work was composed more or less at the same time as Poulenc’s opéra bouffe on Apollinaire’s *Les mamelles de Tirésias*. The work, orchestrated in 1962 by Jean Françaix, much to Poulenc’s satisfaction, consists of twenty-two short piano pieces with spoken text in between. For the purposes of this recording it has been divided into three tracks.

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18 Dans la grande forêt un petit éléphant est né. Il s’appelle Babar. Sa maman l’aime beaucoup. Pour l’endormir, elle le berce avec sa trompe, en chantant tout doucement.

Babar a grandi. Il joue maintenant avec les autres enfants éléphants. C’est un des plus gentils. Il s’amuse à creuser le sable avec un coquillage.


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**Tracks 18–20**

32 In the great forest a little elephant was born. His name was Babar. His mother loved him dearly, and used to rock him to sleep with her trunk, singing to him softly the while.

Babar grew fast. Soon he was playing with the other baby elephants. He was one of the nicest of them. Look at him digging in the sand with a shell.

One day Babar was having a lovely ride on his mother’s back. Suddenly a cruel hunter, hiding behind a bush, shot at them. The hunter killed Babar’s mother. The monkey bid himself, the birds flew away. The hunter ran up to catch poor Babar. Babar was very frightened and ran away from the hunter.
Au bout de quelques jours, bien fatigue, Babar arrive pres d'une ville … Il est tres etonne, parce que c'est la premiere fois qu'il voit tant de maisons—que de choses nouvelles! Ces belles avenues! Ces autos! Ces autobus! Pourtant, ce qui interesse le plus Babar, ce sont deux messieurs qu'il rencontre dans la rue. Il pense: « Vraiment ils sont tres bien habilles. Je voudrais bien avoir aussi un beau costume. Mais comment faire? »

Heureusement, une vieille dame tres riche, qui aimait beaucoup les petits elephants, comprend en le regardant qu'il a envie d'un bel habit. Comme elle aime faire plaisir, elle lui donne son porte-monnaie. Babar lui dit: « Merci, Madame. » Maintenant Babar habite chez la vieille dame. Le matin, avec elle, il fait de la gymnastique, puis il prend son bain.

Tous les jours il se promene en auto. C'est la vieille dame qui lui a achetee. Elle lui donne tout ce qu'il veut.

Pourtant Babar n'est pas tout a fait heureux, car il ne peut plus jouer dans la grande foret avec ses petits cousins et ses amis les singes. Souvent, a la fenetre, il revoie en pensant a son enfance et pleure en se rappelant sa maman.

Deux annees ont passe. Un jour pendant sa promenade, il voit venir a sa rencontre deux petits elephants tout nus—« Mais c'est Arthur et Celeste, mon petit cousin et ma cousine », dit-il, stupere, a la vieille dame. Babar embrasse Arthur et Celeste, puis il va leur acheter de beaux costumes.

Ensuite il les emmene chez le patissier manger de bons gateaux.

Pendant ce temps, dans la grande foret, les elephants cherchent et appellent Arthur et Celeste, et leurs mamans sont bien inquietes.

Heureusement, en volant sur la ville, un vieux marabout les a vus. Vite il vient prévenir les elephants. Les mamans d'Arthur et de Celeste partent les chercher a la ville. Elles sont bien contentes de les retrouver, mais elles les grondent tout de meme parce qu'ils se sont sauves.

After some days, tired and footsore, Babar came to a town … He was amazed, for it was the first time he had ever seen so many houses. What strange things he saw! Beautiful avenues! Motor cars! Buses! But what interested Babar most of all were two gentlemen he met in the street. He thought to himself: ‘What lovely clothes they have got! I wish I could have some too! But how can I get them?’

Luckily, he was seen by a very rich old lady who understood little elephants, and knew at once that he was longing for a smart suit. She loved making others happy, so she gave him her purse. ‘Thank you, Madam’, said Babar.

Now Babar made his home in the old lady’s house. Every morning they did their exercise together, and then Babar had his bath. Every day he drove out in the car that the old lady had bought him. She gave him everything he wanted.

And yet Babar was not altogether happy; he could no longer play about in the great forest with his little cousins and his friends the monkeys. He often gazed out of the window, dreaming of his childhood, and when he thought of his dear mother he used to cry.

Two years passed by. One day he was out for a walk when he met two little elephants with no clothes on. ‘Why, here are Arthur and Céleste, my two little cousins!’ he cried in amazement to the old lady. Babar hugged Arthur and Céleste and took them to buy some lovely clothes.

Next he took them to a tea shop, where they had some delicious cakes.

Meanwhile, in the great forest all the elephants were searching for Arthur and Céleste and their mothers grew more and more anxious.

Luckily, an old bird flying over the town had spied them and hurried back to tell the elephants. The mothers went to the town to fetch Arthur and Céleste. They were very glad when they found them, but they scolded them all the same for having run away.
Babar se décide à partir avec Arthur, Céleste et leurs mamans et à revoir la grande forêt. Tout est prêt pour le départ. Babar embrasse sa vieille amie. Il lui promet de revenir—jamais il ne l’oubliera.

La vieille dame reste seule ; triste, elle pense :
« Quand reverrai-je mon petit Babar ? »

 Ils sont partis … Les mamans n’ont pas de place dans l’auto—elles courent derrière et lèvent leurs trompes pour ne pas respirer la poussière. Le même jour, hélas, le roi des éléphants, au cours d’une promenade, a mangé un mauvais champignon. Empoisonné, il a été bien malade. Si malade qu’il en est mort. C’est un grand malheur.


Tous les éléphants trouvent que Cornélius a très bien parlé. Impatients, ils attendent la réponse de Babar. « Je vous remercie tous, dit alors ce dernier, mais avant d’accepter, je dois vous dire que pendant notre voyage en auto, Céleste et moi, nous nous sommes fiancés. Si je suis votre roi, elle sera votre reine. »——« Vive la reine Céleste ! Vive le roi Babar ! » crient tous les éléphants sans hésiter. Et c’est ainsi que Babar devint roi.

Babar dit alors à Cornélius : « Tu as de bonnes idées, aussi je te nomme général et quand j’aurai la couronne, je te donnerai mon chapeau melon. Dans huit jours, j’épouserai Céleste, nous aurons alors une grande fête pour notre mariage et notre couronnement. » Ensuite Babar demande aux oiseaux d’aller inviter tous les animaux à ses noces. Les invités commencent à arriver. Le dromadaire, chargé d’acheter à la ville de beaux habits de noces, les rapporte juste à temps pour le mariage.

Babar made up his mind to return to the great forest with Arthur and Céleste and their mothers. When everything was ready for the journey Babar kissed his old friend goodbye. He promised to come back to her and never to forget her.

The old lady was left alone, sadly thinking: 'When shall I see my little Babar again?'

Off they went … There was no room for the mother elephants in the car—so they ran behind, lifting their trunks so as not to breathe in the dust. Alas, that very day the king of the elephants, during his walk, bad eaten a bad mushroom. It bad poisoned him. He had been very ill. So ill that he bad died. It was a terrible misfortune.

After his funeral the oldest elephants met together to choose a new king. Just at that moment, they heard a noise and turned round. What a wonderful sight they saw! It was Babar arriving in his car, with all the elephants running and shouting: 'Here they are! Here they are! They have come back! Hello Babar! Hello Arthur! Hello Céleste! What lovely clothes! What a beautiful car! Then Cornelius, the oldest elephant of all, said, in his quavering voice: 'My dear friends, we must have a new king. Why not choose Babar? He has come back from the town, where he has lived among men and learnt much. Let us offer him the crown.'

All the elephants thought that Cornelius had spoken wisely, and they listened eagerly to hear what Babar would say. 'I thank you all', said Babar, 'but before accepting the crown I must tell you that on our journey in the car Céleste and I got engaged to be married. If I become your king, she will be your Queen.' 'Long live Queen Céleste! Long live King Babar!' the elephants shouted with one voice. And that was how Babar became king.

'Cornelius', said Babar, 'you have such good ideas that I shall make you a general, and when I get my crown I will give you my hat. In a week’s time I am going to marry Céleste. We will give a grand party to celebrate our marriage and our coronation.’ And Babar asked the birds to take invitations to all the animals. The guests began to arrive. The dromadaire, who went to town to buy some fine wedding clothes, brought them just in time for the ceremony.
Mariage de Babar. Couronnement de Babar.

Après le mariage et le couronnement, tout le monde danse de bon cœur. Les oiseaux se mêlent à l'orchestre. La fête est finie. La nuit est venue. Les étoiles se sont levées. Le roi Babar et la reine Céleste heureux, rêvent à leur bonheur. Maintenant tout dort. Les invités sont rentrés chez eux, très contents, mais fatigués d'avoir trop dansé. Longtemps ils se rappelleront ce grand bal.

JEAN DE BRUNHOFF (1899–1937)
Here is an overview of the twenty-two piano pieces that make up this work:

I: ‘Dans la grande forêt un petit éléphant est né’ … Très modéré, a gentle berceuse in \( \frac{4}{4} \)

II: ‘Babar a grandi’ … Babar playing in the sand. Presto, \( \frac{2}{4} \)

IIIa: ‘Babar se promène’ … Babar on his mother’s back. Très calme, \( \frac{3}{4} \). The same music introduces the song Le mendiant in the Chansons villageoises

IIIb: A single bar, the sound of a rifle shot

IV: ‘Le chasseur a tué la maman’ … Babar’s mother is killed by a hunter and he flees. Molto agitato, \( \frac{3}{4} \)

V: ‘Au bout de quelques jours’ … Babar reaches the town and meets a kind old lady who gives him her purse. Babar says ‘Merci, Madame’. Très modéré, \( \frac{3}{4} \)

VI: ‘Maintenant Babar habite chez la vieille dame’ … Energetic gymnastics with the old lady. Modéré, \( \frac{4}{4} \)

VII: ‘Tous les jours il se promène en auto’ … Car music with a strident klaxon

VIII: ‘Souvent, à la fenêtre, il rêve en pensant à son enfance’ … Daydreams, and homesick music

IX: The meeting with Arthur and Céleste. The expedition to buy ‘beaux costumes’. Follement gai et tumultueux, \( \frac{4}{4} \) alla breve

X: ‘Chez le pâtissier’ … Eating cakes to an ingratiating waltz played by a palm-court orchestra. Très gai et animé, \( \frac{3}{4} \)

XI: ‘Pendant ce temps, dans la grande forêt’ … The elephants searching. Lent et pesant, \( \frac{4}{4} \)

XII: ‘Heureusement, en volant sur la ville, un vieux marabout’ … An old bird brings news to the elephants. Presto giocoso, \( \frac{4}{4} \)

XIII: ‘Les mamans d’Arthur et de Céleste’ … Parent elephants scolding their offspring. \( \frac{2}{4} \)

XIV: ‘La vieille dame reste seule’ … The old lady’s loneliness. Lent et mélancolique, \( \frac{4}{4} \)

XV: ‘Ils sont partis’ … The elephants’ car journey home. Presto, \( \frac{4}{4} \)

XVI: ‘Le même jour, hélas, le roi des éléphants’ … The king of the elephants out on a walk, and the eating of a poisoned mushroom. Gracieux et modéré, avec précautions, \( \frac{2}{4} \)

XVII: ‘Babar devint roi’ … Fanfares for a new king. Très animé, \( \frac{4}{4} \)

XVIII: ‘Babar demande aux oiseaux d’aller inviter tous les animaux à ses noces’ … The birds fly out with invitations to Babar’s wedding. Gai et très vif, \( \frac{2}{4} \)

XIX: ‘Les invités commencent à arriver’ … The wedding guests arrive … the dromedary arrives with the new wedding costumes bought for the occasion. Bien calme, \( \frac{4}{4} \)

XX: ‘Mariage de Babar’ … ‘Couronnement de Babar’. Très lent et pompeux, \( \frac{4}{4} \)

XXI: ‘Après le mariage … tout le monde danse’ … The birds mingle with the orchestra … the party ends. A toute allure, \( \frac{4}{4} \) alla breve, music in the manner of Chansons villageoises

XXII: ‘La nuit est venue’ … The stars come out … King Babar and Queen Céleste dream of their happiness … The End. Le chant très lié et très doux, \( \frac{4}{4} \) in the style of Sanglots
MÉTAMORPHOSESMétamorphoses
Poèmes de Louise de Vilmorin FP121 (1943)

The printed source of two of these poems (songs ii and iii) is Louise de Vilmorin’s collection Le sable du sablier, where their titles are Portrait and Métamorphoses. The latter title makes sense for this particular poem because it is the violin that is made to take on so many different imaginary shapes. Bernac’s copy of this collection is inscribed by the poet as follows: ‘À Pierre Bernac / Notre amitié est plus forte / que les mouettes et les / sables. Louise de Vilmorin, Noël 1945, Paris.’ The date of this suggests that Bernac must have received the handwritten texts of these poems (including the unprinted first poem, Reine des mouettes) at a much earlier date. A great admirer of Vilmorin, he had personally ensured that he could lay hands on poems by her that were suitable for a male singer, and then delivered them to Poulenc. The HMV recording the duo made of these three songs on a single side of a 12” 78 record was one of their most successful.

21 Reine des mouettes
Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Très vite et haletant
Reine des mouettes, mon orpheline,
Je t’ai vue rose, je m’en souviens,
Sous les brumes mousselines
De ton deuil ancien.
Rose d’aimer le baiser qui chagrine
Tu te laissais accorder à mes mains
Sous les brumes mousselines
Voiles de nos liens.
Rougis, rougis, mon baiser te devine
Mouette prise aux nœuds des grands chemins.
Reine des mouettes, mon orpheline,
Tu étais rose accordée à mes mains
Rose sous les mousselines
Et je m’en souviens.

This seems to be the most musically feminine of these three songs, although the poem is addressed to a beautiful young woman. Poulenc has evoked the sounds of the sea and the veiled sonorities of musical mists. It is an enchanting confection that only he could have composed, and it is over in a graceful trice, elegant and transparently gallant. In the best performances the accompaniment seems conjured under the pianist’s hands, sheer musical legerdemain.
ii C'est ainsi que tu es
Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Très calme, très à l’aise
Ta chair, d’âme mêlée,
Chevelure emmêlée,
Ton pied courant le temps,
Ton ombre qui s’étend
Et murmure à ta tempe.
Voilà, c’est ton portrait,
C’est ainsi que tu es,
Et je veux te l’écrire
Pour que la nuit venue,
Tu puisses croire et dire,
Que je t’ai bien connue.

LOUISE LÉVÈQUE DE VILMORIN (1902–1969)

Here is almost the quintessential Poulenc song, and much loved throughout the world. The opening prelude, simultaneously passionate and laid back, Chopinesque in its languid rubato (dangerously easy to exaggerate), is the very model of a pianist improvising nostalgically in the half-light. The vocal line, conceived to accommodate both the depths and *mezza-voce* heights of Bernac’s voice, is equally seductive, if only in looking back with appreciation at a passion that is now in the past. If this is a lover saying ‘farewell and thank you’ for ardour that has once burned bright, the marking ‘very much at ease’ indicates that passion that has died has not been wasted: to have been close to this person has been a cause for gratitude rather than bitterness. The wisdom garnered by the singer from his former lover seems encapsulated in the phrase ‘Que je t’ai bien connue’. The beautiful postlude contains the rise and fall of an inner sigh: former happiness now experienced in soft and distant focus, ‘tout lasse, tout passe, tout casse’—acceptance of mortality. The secret of a successful performance of this song is sincerity, to be sung, says Poulenc in *JdmM*, ‘without affectation’.

iii Paganini
Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Prestissimo
Violon hippocampe et sirène
Berceau des cœurs cœur et berceau
Larmes de Marie Madeleine
Soupir d’une Reine
Écho
Violon orgueil des mains légères
Départ à cheval sur les eaux
Amour chevauchant le mystère
Voleur en prière
Oiseau
Violon femme morganatique
Chat botté courant la forêt
Puit des vérités lunatiques
Confession publique
Corset

Paganini
Violin sea-horse and siren
cradle of hearts heart and cradle
tears of Mary Magdalen
sigh of a queen
echo
Violin pride of agile bands
departure on horseback on the water
love astride mystery
thief at prayer
bird
Violin morganatic woman
puss-in-boots ranging the forest
well of insane truths
public confession
corset
The madcap scherzo that is *Paganini* is a sheer piece of *trompe l’oreille* wizardry. Poulenc had long worked at songs of this kind where the words have to come almost automatically out of singers’ mouths before they have time to think of what they are. This is one of the finest examples of the genre, distantly derived from the music hall. The violin changes from one shape to the other (in modern phraseology it ‘morphs’) before our very ears, and the music is somehow the equivalent of modern film techniques where such changes are engineered, as if by magic, with computer technology. Poulenc dispatches this little firework with the greatest elegance and it makes a perfect ending to a miniature cycle that has had at its heart a serious song like *C’est ainsi que tu es*.

**Nuage**

No 2 of *Deux mélodies* FP162 (September 1956)

Sung by Geraldine McGevery; Allegretto

J’ai vu reluire en un coin de mes âges,
un souvenir qui n’était plus à moi.
Son père était le temps
sa mère une guitare
qui jouait sur des rêves errants.
Leur enfant tomba dans mes mains
et je le posai sur un chêne.
Un oiseau en prit soin,
maintenant il chante.
Comment retrouver son père,
voilé de vent,
et comment recueillir les larmes de sa mère
pour lui donner un nom.
Dans le passage d’un nuage
nous verrons poindre l’éternité
chassant le temps.
En ce point tout est écrit.

LAURENCE DE BEYLIÉ (1893–1968)
The poet of this slender song is Laurence de Beylié (1893–1968). It was sent to the composer in typescript by a friend. He did not know Beylié personally; she was hardly a well-known writer, and Poulenc corresponded with her without, it seems, meeting her. The song was dedicated to an American singer, Rose Dercourt-Plaut, whom Poulenc was fond of (as such she merited the dedication of course) but the LP he made with her, rather too late in her career, is not the composer’s most glorious legacy. The song has a pleasing gentleness in its unwinding harmonic meanderings, a feast of sequences which he claimed (in *JdmM*) were inspired by Liszt’s first *Valse oubliée*, as divinely played by Horowitz. The song is prophetic of the style of the three late sonatas for wind instruments (flute, clarinet, oboe) and piano.

**LA COURTE PAILLE**

FP178 (July—August 1960)

This is the last of Poulenc’s song cycles; it was composed for the soprano Denise Duval (b 1921) who, after the retirement of Bernac, had become the composer’s recital partner, his Blanche in the opera *Dialogues des Carmélites*, his Elle in *La voix humaine*, his beloved friend and confidante, and in many respects his muse. Duval, unlike Bernac, was not a lieder or mélodie singer *pur sang* (she was perhaps happier on the opera stage) and she gave recitals with Poulenc at the piano that included operatic extracts (he referred to her as ‘La Diva’). This cycle indicates a new direction, as if Poulenc was beginning to groom her more specifically for song, and that he was being careful not to compose anything too demandingly esoteric. It was dedicated to the singer and her six year-old son, Richard Schilling. The poems (halfway between Francis Jammes and Max Jacob, according to Poulenc in *JdmM*) are taken from two whimsical collections by the Belgian poet Maurice Carême (1899–1978): i, ii, iv and vi from *La cage aux grillons* and iii, v and vii from *Le voleur d’étincelles*.

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### i Le sommeil

*Sleep*

*Sung by Ailish Tynan; Très calme*

Le sommeil est en voyage,
Mon Dieu! où est-il parti?
J'ai beau bercer mon petit;
Il pleure dans son lit-cage,
Il pleure depuis midi.

Où le sommeil a-t-il mis
Son sable et ses rêves sages?
J'ai beau bercer mon petit;
Il se tourne tout en nage,
Il sanglote dans son lit.

Ah! reviens, reviens, sommeil,
Sur ton beau cheval de course!
Dans le ciel noir, la Grande Ours
A enterré le soleil
Et rallumé ses abeilles.

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**Track 25**

Sleep has gone off on a journey,
Gracious me! Where can it have got to?
I have rocked my little one in vain,
be is crying in his cot,
be has been crying ever since noon.

Where has sleep put
its sand and its gentle dreams?
I have rocked my little one in vain,
be tosses and turns perspiring,
be sobs in his bed.

Ah! Come back, come back, sleep,
on your fine race-horse!
In the dark sky, the Great Bear
has buried the sun
and rekindled his bees.
Si l’enfant ne dort pas bien,
Il ne dira pas bonjour,
Il ne dira rien demain
À ses doigts, au lait, au pain
Qui l’accueillent dans le jour.

Maurice Carême (1899–1978)

Quelle aventure!

Sung by Ailish Tynan; Très vite et rythmé

Une puce, dans sa voiture,
Tirait un petit éléphant
En regardant les devantures
Où scintillaient les diamants.

— Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! quelle aventure!
Qui va me croire, s’il m’entend?

L’éléphant eut, d’un air absent,
Suçait un pot de confiture.
Mais la puce n’en avait cure,
Elle tirait en souriant.

— Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! que cela dure
Et je vais me croire dément!

Soudain, le long d’une clôture,
La puce fondit dans le vent
Et je vis le jeune éléphant
Se sauver en fendant les murs.

— Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! la chose est sûre.
Mais comment le dire à maman?

Maurice Carême (1899–1978)

La reine de cœur

Sung by Ailish Tynan; Très calme et languide

Mollement accoudée
À ses vitres de lune,
La reine vous salue
D’une fleur d’amandier.

C’est la reine de cœur,
Elle peut, s’il lui plaît,
Vous mener en secret
Vers d’étranges demeures.

Où il n’est plus de portes,
De salles ni de tours
Et où les jeunes mortes
Violent parler d’amour.

Maurice Carême (1899–1978)
La reine vous salue :
Hâtez-vous de la suivre
Dans son château de givre
Aux doux vitraux de lune.

MAURICE CARÊME (1899–1978)

iv  Ba, be, bi, bo, bu
Sung by Ailish Tynan; Très gai, follement vite
Ba, be, bi, bo, bu, bé!
Le chat a mis ses bottes,
Il va de porte en porte
Jouer, danser, chanter.
Pou, chou, genou, hibou.
« Tu dois apprendre à lire,
À compter, à écrire »,
Lui crie-t-on de partout.
Mais rikketikketau,
Le chat de s’esclaffer,
En rentrant au château :
Il est le Chat botté ! .

MAURICE CARÊME (1899–1978)

v  Les anges musiciens
Sung by Ailish Tynan; Très lent et tendre
Sur les fils de la pluie,
Les anges du jeudi
Jouent longtemps de la harpe.
Et sous leurs doigts, Mozart
Tinte délicieux,
En gouttes de joie bleue.
Car c’est toujours Mozart
Que reprennent sans fin
Les anges musiciens,
Qui, au long du jeudi,
Font chanter sur la harpe
La douceur de la pluie.

MAURICE CARÊME (1899–1978)

Track 28

Track 29
30  Le carafon
The baby carafe
Sung by Ailish Tynan; Très vite
« Pourquoi, se plaignait la carafe,
N’aurais-je pas un carafon ?
Au zoo, madame la Girafe
N’a-t-elle pas un girafon ? »
Un sorcier qui passait par là,
À cheval sur un phonographe,
Enregistra la belle voix
De soprano de la carafe
Et la fit entendre à Merlin.
« Fort bien, dit celui-ci, fort bien ! »
Il frappa trois fois dans les mains
Et la dame de la maison
Se demande encore pourquoi
Elle trouva, ce matin-là,
Un joli petit carafon
Blotti tout contre la carafe
Ainsi qu’au zoo, le girafon
Pose son cou fragile et long
Sur le flanc clair de la girafe.
MAURICE CARÊME (1899–1978)

31  Lune d’avril
Sung by Ailish Tynan; Très lent et irréel
Lune, belle lune, lune d’Avril,
Faites-moi voir en mon dormant
Le pêcher au cœur de safran,
Le poisson qui rit du grésil,
L’oiseau qui, lointain comme un cor,
Douxement réveille les morts
Et surtout, surtout le pays
Où il fait joie, où il fait clair,
Où soleilleux de primevères,
On a brisé tous les fusils.
Belle lune, lune d’Avril.
MAURICE CARÊME (1899–1978)

Le sommeil is an exasperated text (a mother whose child will not go to sleep) set very gently to music. The late Poulenc song style is somewhat thinner than in the glorious ‘30s and ‘40s, fewer notes on the pages, less effulgent chords, but it is always elegant, and irreproachable in terms of prosody. Quelle aventure! and Ba, be, bi, bo, bu are both madcap, music-hall Poulenc, the reworking of an old, breathless style to charming effect. La reine de cœur is perhaps the jewel of the set, simple and unpretentious, heartfelt and with a pace and depth that only this composer could muster, a shadow of past splendours perhaps, but an authentic one. It is a song that Régine Crespin recorded
magically. *Les anges musiciens*, with its reference to the half-day holiday on Thursdays in French schools, is notable
for its mention of Mozart, and the way that Poulenc subtly suggests the melodic contours of the slow movement
(*Romanze*) in B flat major of the D minor Piano Concerto K466. *Le carafon* is a charming little ballad featuring the
magician Merlin, an old phonograph, a baby giraffe and finally a baby carafe. Poulenc handles this whimsy with
delicate mastery. The final song in the set, *Lune d’avril*, is very much a work from 1960 with its mention of nuclear
disarmament, a major theme of the time for parents of young children. The composer was father of a fourteen year-
old daughter, although very few people knew about her at the time. Poulenc’s farewell to song trails into the distance
with one of his longest, yet least eventful, postludes, its C major tonality and hypnotic pace finally melting into a
voluptuous dominant seventh. The addition of that crucial and luxuriously decadent B flat in the final chord adds a
haunting, questioning resonance. At that very moment Poulenc’s life’s work as a great song composer fades away
with the indication *pppp*. ‘The taste for this musical form is coming to an end, so I am told’, he wrote in *JdmM*. ‘So
much the worse. Long live Schubert, Schumann, Musorgsky, Chabrier, Debussy, etc, … etc …’
This disc collects together the settings of the surrealist poet Paul Éluard, whose writing most engaged the altruistic and humanistic side of Poulenc’s nature. Éluard wrote ceaselessly of love between man and woman, also a theme of fascination, somewhat paradoxically, for this composer; but Éluard was also poet of the Left and a voice of resistance and freedom during the Second World War. On this disc there are also war-related settings of Éluard’s friends and sometime colleagues Louis Aragon and Robert Desnos, as well as *Calligrammes*, a First World War cycle of poems by Guillaume Apollinaire. The more urbane aspect of this important poet dominates the third disc in this set.

It was a fortunate moment in Poulenc’s song-composing career when he began to set the texts of Éluard; his song-writing moved into a new sphere in 1935, one might almost say a coming of age, when he embarked on an intense engagement with the work of this poet, just over three years his senior. This more or less coincided with the composer’s reconversion to Catholicism as a result of a mystical re-awakening of faith at the shrine of the Black Virgin at Rocamadour, and the establishment of his recital partnership with the baritone Pierre Bernac. ‘People will never know how much I owe to Éluard, how much I owe to Bernac’, Poulenc wrote in *JdmM*. ‘It is due to them that lyricism has entered my vocal works.’

Paul Éluard was the pseudonym of Eugène Émile Paul Grindel (Éluard was in fact the name of his maternal grandmother). He was born into a comfortable middle-class household in Saint-Denis, just outside Paris, on 14 December 1895. Although Éluard was always associated with the Left and with working-class causes, his father was a chartered accountant who became a successful estate agent. Three things jolted the young man out of the comfort-zone of a bourgeois existence: illness, war and love. A sudden and severe pulmonary haemorrhage at the age of seventeen consigned him to months of enforced immobility at a sanatorium of Clavadel, near Davos, where he read deeply and widely; the crystalline Swiss mountain landscapes by which he was surrounded were later to influence his poems. A young Russian student by the name of Helena Dmitrovnie Diakonova was a fellow-patient at the same institution. Her nickname was ‘Gala’; after some years of separation Éluard was to marry her in 1917 when on military leave. Despite his ongoing infirmity he had volunteered for the front; his first published work, *Le devoir et l’inquiétude* (1917) describes the misery, comradeship and solidarity of the soldiers who suffered in the trenches. (The Poulenc cycle that encompasses this experience from another viewpoint—*Calligrammes* to the poetry of Apollinaire—is also to be heard on this disc.)

After his demobilization, already a young husband and father, Éluard was introduced to André Breton and Louis Aragon and soon assumed his place
as a member of the Parisian avant-garde, publishing several collections of poetry. In 1921 Éluard met the German painter and sculptor Max Ernst (1891–1976), the first of his many painter friends and one of the most influential on his development (there are thirty-two painters celebrated in Éluard’s 1948 anthology *Voir*, including Ernst). His seminal role in Éluard’s career has been compared to that of Virgil guiding Dante in the perilous regions of the dream-like inferno that was to become Surrealism. The poet chose six of Ernst’s collages to illustrate his collection *Récipients*. Éluard, Ernst and Gala settled into a *ménage à trois*, the German painter having left his wife and son. Their shared home at Eaubonne near Paris was decorated with Ernst’s murals. In 1924 there was a personal and conjugal crisis and Éluard suddenly left Paris for Saigon. Both Ernst and Gala followed him there at his behest; it was decided in Vietnam that Gala would stay with Éluard—although he was eventually to lose her to another painter, Salvador Dali, in 1929. The poet had a lifelong hatred for possessive jealousy, believing rather in the innocence of desire; sexual liberty was a reflection of fraternal sharing and openness of heart. Éluard took the subject of love extremely seriously: the erotic freedom he espoused was never simply an excuse for libertinage, and each of his partners was accorded the elevated role of Muse in a seamless tapestry of creativity. The work of the poet, like that of his close friend Picasso, has often been defined by the major female figures of his life—Gala, Nusch, Jacqueline and Dominique. It is the second of these, Nusch, who was often the inspiration of the poems that Poulenc chose for his settings.

Together with Breton, Philippe Soupault and Aragon, Éluard was the founder of Surrealism, a movement that grew out of Dadaism, although the term had been coined much earlier by Apollinaire. In October 1924, soon after Éluard and Gala returned to France from Saigon, Breton published his *Manifeste de Surréalisme*. This defines the movement as a ‘purely psychic automatism by which it is proposed to explain, be it verbally, be it in writing or by quite other means, the true functioning of thought. Dictated by thought in the absence of all control by reason, outside all aesthetic or moral occupations, Surrealism rests on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of associations, formerly neglected, and in the transcendent power of dreams released from any interference by thought. It tends to destroy all other psychic mechanisms and to take their place in the resolution of the principal problems of life.’ It follows that every reading of a surreal poem is wholly individual. When asked what Éluard’s poems actually meant Bernac always replied, ‘I have no idea’. But it was Poulenc’s readings and the musical meanings he assigned to the poetry that are both intuitive and revelatory—he seems to translate the poems into music rather than simply setting them.

Several important poetry collections were published in this period—from *Capitale de la douleur* (1926, the year Éluard joined the Communist party) to *La vie immédiate* (1932). In 1930, the same year that Éluard published his collection *À toute épreuve*, he had met Maria Benz, a destitute music-hall and circus performer from Alsace, eleven years younger, who went by the name of Nusch. The poet’s discovery and rescue of this highly intuitive waif—Poulenc mistakenly always spelled her name ‘Nush’—brings to mind an older version of Mignon, the child-acrobat saved by Wilhelm Meister in Goethe’s novel. The couple married in 1934. Graceful, light-hearted and luminously beautiful (she was one of Picasso’s favourite models), Nusch was the poet’s ideal companion and inspiration. The collection *Les yeux fertiles* (1936) celebrates Éluard’s friendship with Pablo Picasso; the powerful affinity of poet and painter, both personal and political, was reinforced by the rise of Fascism and the outrage of Guernica. It is also the collection from which Poulenc took eight of the nine texts for his *Tel jour telle nuit*. The collection *Facile* (1935),
illustrated by Man Ray’s astonishing nude photographs of Nusch, is the source of the final poem in the cycle, *Nous avons fait la nuit*.

By 1938 Éluard had broken with Breton whose brand of ‘pure’ Surrealism became anathema to him; instead he preferred to develop his own kind of Promethean humanism, a joyful celebration of the fraternity of mankind where women are the spiritual mediators, a philosophy light years away from the dour and dogmatic Stalinism of some of his associates. *Le livre ouvert I*(1940)—later the source of Poulenc’s cycle *La fraîcheur et le feu*—was one of the first collections in which the poet, now taken up by Nusch and themes of love, more or less turned his back on the didactic preoccupations of his former colleagues. The occupation of France and the resistance, far from extinguishing these themes in the poet’s works, reinforced his visionary optimism and determination (*Poésie et vérité 1942*—a title that translated Goethe’s *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as a dig at the occupying forces—and *Rendez-vous allemand, 1944*). In these two collections the radiant poem *Liberté* (set as a huge choral piece by Poulenc in *Figure humaine*) proclaims the ‘power of a word’ by which the poet can begin his life afresh: ‘I was born to know you / To name you / Liberty.’

Éluard had always been fragile in terms of his health. He often left Paris for sojourns in the mountains and by the sea, holidays that were facilitated by the family money that enabled him to survive in relative comfort. Nevertheless it was Nusch who died first—of a totally unexpected cerebral haemorrhage in November 1946 while visiting the poet’s mother. This sudden loss rendered Éluard suicidal. He was consoled by the affections of Jacqueline Trutat who inspired a different kind of poetry in Éluard, as did Dominique Laure who became his tender and vigilant wife in 1951. The poet died of a sudden heart attack on 18 November 1952.

**CINQ POÈMES DE PAUL ÉLUARD** FP77 (March 1935)

This cycle was written in the south of France in March 1935. The first was written in Hyères, the home of the Noailles; the song is accordingly dedicated to the composer’s hostess, Marie-Laure Vicomtesse de Noailles; the second to the artist Valentine Hugo; the fourth to Bernac; and the last (composed in Cannes) to Nora Auric, wife of the composer Georges Auric who had always advised Poulenc to set Éluard’s poetry. They were given their first performance in Paris in the following month, the debut of the composer’s new duo with Bernac. Poulenc wrote: ‘Feeling my way in this work. Trying to give the piano the maximum with the minimum of means.’ In *JdmM* Poulenc compares this process to a series of drafts for an illustration by Matisse (an illustration for a Mallarmé poem) where the artist had slowly pared down the number of lines in the drawing of a swan to a single stroke of the pen. The source of the poems is *À toute épreuve*, which is more pamphlet than book, printed on a single sheet of paper (in different versions, pink or light green) that has been folded in half, and then in half again, and then yet again, to make sixteen small pages that are only readable when they are folded out again into a single sheet—a truly Surrealist production. Two sides were reserved for the front title and back-page list of works, and twenty-nine poems were printed on the remaining fourteen ‘pages’. Poulenc selected five of these poems. The text for his very last Éluard song, *Une chanson de porcelaine* (disc 2, track 46), is also from this collection.
i  Peut-il se reposer
Sung by Ben Johnson; Très calme

Peut-il se reposer celui qui dort
Il ne voit pas la nuit ne voit pas l’invisible
Il a de grandes couvertures
Et des coussins de sang sur des coussins de boue
Sa tête est sous les toits et ses mains sont fermées
Sur les outils de la fatigue
Il dort pour éprouver sa force
La honte d’être aveugle dans un si grand silence.

Aux rivages que la mer rejette
Il ne voit pas les poses silencieuses
Du vent qui fait entrer l’homme dans ses statues
Quand il s’apaise.

Bonne volonté du sommeil
D’un bout à l’autre de la mort.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

The key is a chromatically inflected C major with minor-key undertones. A new economy of means is evident in the trebling of melody in the voice and both piano staves, the hands an octave apart for five mysterious bars, and then diverging from the vocal line for three bars of strangely dotted rhythms. The almost brutal change to Subito allegro molto on the song’s second page has a jazzy heartlessness—the dark side of Éluard, abrupt and peremptory. This is the counterpart of the tenderness inspired by this poet and where melody is replaced by a chanting that is almost parlando. For the last four bars of the piece the music returns to C major—the ‘Bonne volonté’ here being perhaps prophetic of the ‘Bonne journée’ that opens Tel jour telle nuit, in the same sunny tonality.

ii  Il la prend dans ses bras
Sung by Ben Johnson; Presto

Il la prend dans ses bras
Lueurs brillantes un instant entrevues
Aux omoplates aux épaules aux seins
Puis cachées par un nuage.

Elle porte la main sur son cœur
Elle pâlit elle frissonne
Qui donc a crié?
Mais l’autre s’il est encore vivant
On le retrouvera
Dans une ville inconnue.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

This set is the most metropolitan of the Éluard cycles—perhaps Poulenc intended these songs to be companion pieces to the very Parisian Quatre poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire. The later Éluard cycles are not all specific about locale, but here we guess that something sinister is happening in Paris by night, a fragment of mysterious
and frightening *film noir*. There are three changes of tempo (described by Poulenc as ‘terribly difficult’) after the initial *Presto*: in bar 7 ‘Puis cachées par un nuage’ is marked *Céder avec liberté*—an effect difficult to arrange between voice and piano; nine bars marked *Sensiblement moins vite* give the impression of a cinema scene played in slow motion—the accompanying triplets are similar to the music for unwinding spools of film in *Avant le cinéma*; the sudden *Tempo presto* is violent and merciless as if the composer were describing a crime scene with grim and melodramatic relish. When ‘he’ takes ‘her’ in his arms it is uncertain whether love or terrible violence is in the offing—perhaps a bit of both.

### iii Plume d’eau claire

_Sung by Ben Johnson; Modéré_

Plume d’eau claire pluie fragile
Fraîcheur voilée de caresses
De regards et de paroles
Amour qui voile ce que j’aime.

**PAUL ÉLUARD** (1895–1952)

Here is a perfect miniature, nine bars typical of the future Poulenc, thus a powerfully prophetic fragment—the musical key to the poetry of Éluard grating in the lock, as the composer himself put it. The poem is lyrical word-music, indeterminately amorous, and the vocal line has the kind of sinuous shape so adored by singers who are drawn to this composer. The accompaniment glides in semiquavers and ranges over the keyboard without the slightest sense of being hectic. The postlude makes a point of juxtaposing E flat and E natural within C minor/C major arpeggios, something of a trademark of the Éluard settings.

### iv Rôdeuse au front de verre

_Sung by Ben Johnson; Sans lenteur_

Rôdeuse au front de verre
Son cœur s’inscrit dans une étoile noire
Ses yeux montrent sa tête
Ses yeux ont la fraîcheur de l’été
La chaleur de l’hiver
Ses yeux s’ajourent rient très fort
Ses yeux joueurs gagnent leur part de clarté.

**PAUL ÉLUARD** (1895–1952)

Again the mood is ominous, and we are never told who this prowler may be and why she loiters. She seems to be more sybil than Parisian prostitute, a female archetype of grand power and perspicacity—some of the language and imagery is reminiscent of the Rimbaud of the *Illuminations*. The music is serious, even imposing, and pulsates in majestic manner in the key of B flat minor—these throbbing chords are prophetic of *Joan Miró* in *Le travail du peintre*. For the last two lines of the poem Poulenc moves into the more lyrical and less forbidding realms of G flat major, but there is an unusual recapitulation of the poem’s first line and a prowling postlude with both hands in the bass clef—all in all, a strangely haunting song.
Amoureuses
Sung by Ben Johnson; Très vite—un peu haletant
Elles ont les épaules hautes
Et l’air malin
Ou bien des mines qui déroutent
La confiance est dans la poitrine
A la hauteur où l’aube de leurs seins se lève
Pour dévêtir la nuit.
Des yeux à casser des cailloux
Des sourires sans y penser
Pour chaque rêve
Des rafales de cris de neige
Et des ombres déracinées.
Il faut les croire sur baiser
Et sur parole et sur regard
Et ne baiser que leurs baisers
Je ne montre que ton visage
Les grands orages de ta gorge
Tout ce que je connais et tout ce que j’ignore
Mon amour ton amour ton amour ton amour.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

This song describes Parisian women with a flavour of street music, the tinge of louche chanson and boîte that characterize some of Poulenc’s settings of Apollinaire. This flavour of metropolitan sleaze, the composer’s distinctive nostalgie de la boue, is scarcely to be found in any of the later Éluard songs which are far more idealistic and high-minded. Amoureuses is by far the longest poem in À toute épreuve. The waltz rhythm (in fact the music is written in $\frac{5}{5}$), with its hint of a piano-accordion texture, seems appropriately hoity-toity for the girls of Paris, just as Granados’s Tonadillas accurately paint (through Goya’s eyes) the proud majas of Madrid. The flow of the music is rendered vertiginous by throbbing quavers as the piano strums a melodic descant to the vocal line—dotted crotchets in the tenor register, sometimes played by the right hand, sometimes taken over by the left. Singer and pianist are swept along by the throbbing music which manages to be nonchalant and threatening at the same time. The chilling climactic fortissimo of ‘Mon amour’ (bar 38 and the $\frac{5}{5}$ of bar 39) is backed up by a dizzying slew of chromatically ascending chords in octaves. The music’s charm and grace had been undermined from the beginning by an ominous undertone which now comes to the fore; breathless repetitions of ‘ton amour’ bring the song, and the cycle, to an eerie close.

TEL JOUR TELLE NUIT
As is the day, so is the night
Neuf mélodies sur des poèmes de Paul Éluard FP86 (1936–7)

This is by far the most famous of Poulenc’s song cycles—in the same way that Dichterliebe can be said to be the most famous of Schumann’s. Just as that composer’s musical relationship with the poet Heine is perfectly expressed within the sixteen songs of Dichterliebe, Poulenc’s affinity with Éluard is made crystal clear in the nine separate, but
musically interconnected mélodies of _Tel jour telle nuit_, a cycle in the same way that Fauré’s _La bonne chanson_ is a cycle, the last song a summing-up of what has gone before. The work was begun in December 1936 in Noizay and was completed by January 1937 with the first and last songs composed as a matching pair in Lyon. The distinction of the dedicatees show Poulenc’s confidence: Pablo Picasso, Freddy (Fréderique Lebedeff, later the mother of his daughter), Nush (sic) Eluard, Valentine Hugo, Marie-Blanche de Polignac (songs v and vi), Denise Bourdet, Pierre Bernac and Yvonne Gouverné (the choral conductor who introduced almost all of Poulenc’s choral music to the world). How it came to be that the _mauvais garçon_ of French music, the spoiled son of a rich family who had been famous for his insouciance and his _Leg Poulenc_ found it within himself to voice the quiet radiance, the humility and grandeur, the rapture, the profound humanity and compassion of this great poet is one of the mysteries of French music. Like _Die schöne Müllerin_ for Schubert, this was a watershed work.

In early January 1937 with the first performance only a month away, Poulenc asked the poet for a title for the work (each of the songs had individual titles which the composer declined to use). Éluard supplied a choice of four epithets for the cycle as a whole; his preferred choice was _Tout dire_, but Poulenc selected his second suggestion, _Tel jour telle nuit_, which encompasses the contrast between the opening and closing songs.

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**Bonne journée**
Song by Sarah Fox; Calme

Bonne journée j’ai revu qui je n’oublie pas
Qui je n’oublierai jamais
Et des femmes fugaces dont les yeux
Me faisaient une haie d’honneur
Elles s’enveloppèrent dans leurs sourires
Bonne journée j’ai vu mes amis sans soucis
Les hommes ne pesaient pas lourd
Un qui passait
Son ombre changée en souris
Fuyait dans le ruisseau
J’ai vu le ciel très grand
Le beau regard des gens privés de tout
Plage distante où personne n’aborde

**A good day**

A good day I have again seen whom I do not forget
whom I shall never forget
And women fleeting by whose eyes
formed for me a hedge of honour
they wrapped themselves in their smiles

A good day I have seen my friends carefree
the men were light in weight
one who passed by
his shadow changed into a mouse
fled into the gutter

I have seen the great wide sky
the beautiful eyes of those deprived of everything
distant shore where no one lands
Bonne journée qui commença mélancolique  
Noire sous les arbres verts  
Mais qui soudain trempée d’aurore  
M’entra dans le cœur par surprise.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

A good day which began mournfully  
dark under the green trees  
but which suddenly drenched with dawn  
invaded my heart unawares.

There is no introduction; voice and piano embark on this journey, and this ‘journée’, together. Both the poem and song are dedicated to Pablo Picasso; Éluard was probably referring to his visit to Spain in early 1936 to view the first Picasso retrospective exhibitions in Barcelona, Madrid and Bilbao. The piano-writing is ambulatory but calm and even, the piano’s bare oscillating Cs placed two octaves apart. Poulenc has described how the music came to him: walking happily towards the Bastille, he remembered the joyful departures of his childhood by a train ‘in the trees’ (the railway track elevated above street level) to his grandparents’ home at Nogent-sur-Marne. This explains the quintessential Poulenc travelling tempo of crotchet = 63. The vocal melody, ascending in optimism as if to greet the dawn of a wonderful new day, is in C major with a Lydian inflection of F sharp. The music for each of the three verses of the poem begins the same way and then branches off into different harmonic directions. This semi-strophic form lends the song a certain gravity—as if something important and radiant were being proclaimed. The marking Calme is of the utmost significance for there was never music more measured and genial than this, and Poulenc in JdmM specifies ‘peaceful joy’. The last six bars of the vocal line (from ‘Mais qui soudain trempée d’aurore’) blossom at the height of the stave and the high notes of ‘M’entra dans le cœur’ (forte with a diminuendo to piano) suggest, in Bernac’s words, ‘the invasion of the heart by the dawn’. The contained rapture of this extended and noble cadence (incorporating a stately return to the C major of the opening) is breathtaking. The postlude, a simple exploration of a C major triad denuded of its third (C up to G, then to the G below) will reappear at the end of the work. At the last moment the pianist adds the B flat below middle C to turn the final chord, left hanging in the air, into a seventh. This is a ravishing touch that prepares us for the dream-like world of the next song.

ii Une ruine coquille vide
Sung by Sarah Fox; Très calme et irréel

Une ruine coquille vide  
Pleure dans son tablier  
Les enfants qui jouent autour d’elle  
Font moins de bruit que des mouches  
La ruine s’en va à tâtons  
Chercher ses vaches dans un pré  
J’ai vu le jour je vois cela  
Sans en avoir honte  
Il est minuit comme une flèche  
Dans un cœur à la portée  
Des folâtres lueurs nocturnes  
Qui contredisent le sommeil.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)
Bernac makes a rare statement about the meaning of an Éluard poem: he imagines that the apron into which the ruin weeps is ‘heavy masses of ivy hanging down the old walls’. He is simply sharing with his students the kind of personalized imagery with which performers, when confronted with this poetry, have to experiment in order to make the texts (and thus the songs) come alive. In Bernac’s own performances there is never any doubt that he ‘understands’ everything of which he sings, or rather that the poetry has imprinted vivid images in his own mind; whatever these may be, they come across to the listener as authoritative. Poulenc creates a dream landscape suspended in time; the dynamics are muted throughout, even the *mezzo forte* passages are contained within the nocturnal atmosphere. In no song have the hushed mysteries of the midnight hour (‘Il est minuit comme une flèche’) been more eloquently expressed; the addition of the piano’s low C on the second syllable of ‘minuit’, as if a stroke of a tam-tam, provides one of the most spellbinding colours in the composer’s songs. From the beginning of this music the passing of time has been marked by bell-like left-hand crotchets, pricked out from the dreamlike texture; in the extraordinarily beautiful coda left hand crosses right and movement and stasis are inextricably entwined.

iii  *Le front comme un drapeau perdu*

*Le front comme un drapeau perdu*  
*Je te traîne quand je suis seul*  
*Dans des rues froides*  
*Des chambres noires*  
*En criant misère*  
*Je ne veux pas les lâcher*  
*Tes mains claires et compliquées*  
*Nées dans le miroir clos des miennes*  
*Tout le reste est parfait*  
*Tout le reste est encore plus inutile*  
*Que la vie*  
*Creuse la terre sous ton ombre*  
*Une nappe d’eau près des seins*  
*Où se noyer*  
*Comme une pierre.*

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

A sudden shock, and planned as such, this is one of those songs that Poulenc placed strategically between slower and more profound ones to create a sense of contrast and excitement. There is a harsh and militant side to Éluard, a violence that Poulenc does not try to avoid—this is poetry with a definite angry edge that is expressed in four of the cycle’s songs. This strange and stormy outburst, a love song of sorts, has an inexplicably charming middle section (‘Tout le reste est parfait’) and a peroration (beginning ‘Une nappe d’eau’) which begins ominously and winds down to a graceful resolution in the major key. If performers follow all the directions and perform the song implacably it successfully sets up the drama of the next song.
iv Une roulotte couverte en tuiles
Sung by Sarah Fox; Très lent et sinistre
Une roulotte couverte en tuiles
Le cheval mort un enfant maître
Pensant le front bleu de haine
A deux seins s’abattant sur lui
Comme deux poings
Ce mélodrame nous arrache
La raison du cœur.
PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

This poem is slightly easier to understand. Éluard is a poet whose Communism promises and supports Revolution, but whose own tendency is to sympathize with individual cases rather than promulgate theory. The poet understands the power of rage among the have-nots with whom he strongly identifies without being one of them. In the 1930s starvation and untreated illness left many a child orphaned and facing the brutal responsibilities of adulthood alone on the streets; it was to be worse during the war. In this taut melodrama, a single page of music, even the carthorse drawing the wagon is dead. Poulenc’s own image was of a gypsy child on a wagon he saw one late November day in Ménilmontant. The scene is still but ominous, a bleak moonscape where there is nothing to hope for. Both poet and composer also register a brooding sense of danger from the ‘child master’ whose brow is ‘blue with hatred’. The future of a society that permits such a heartless scenario can only be violent. The music ends with a shudder, not of revulsion but self-accusatory.

10 v À toutes brides
Sung by Sarah Fox; Prestissimo
À toutes brides toi dont le fantôme
Piaffe la nuit sur un violon
Viens régnier dans les bois
Les verges de l’ouragan
Cherchez leur chemin par chez toi
Tu n’es pas de celles
Dont on invente les désirs
Viens boire un baiser par ici
Cède au feu qui te désespère.
PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

The outbreak of this mad music (the words suggest an irresistible impetus) is carefully arranged to spring from what has gone before—but it is in itself one of the composer’s ‘trampoline’ songs, meant to clear the air for the calm repose that is needed for Une berbe pauvre, one of the focal points of the cycle. The violin imagery of the poem produces open fifths in a wild danse macabre, and there are two extraordinary jazzy piano interludes that are strangely mirthless—despair is the order of the day, not pleasure. The bars of ‘Les verges de l’ouragan’ have a suitably stormy quality. The B flat minor tonality at this point suggests a link in Poulenc’s mind with the windswept
last movement of the Chopin second piano sonata, Op 35, in the same key. In the song’s wild closing moments the piano seems to pursue the vocal line; the two bars of postlude (très violent) are like a trap snapping shut.

This little masterpiece in E minor has a simplicity worthy of the Fauré of Le jardin clos, a composer who announces some of his greatest song masterpieces with opening bars of seemingly innocuous crotchets, the beginning of a magical journey where one harmony yields to the next in a way that is both inevitable and surprising. So it is here. ‘This poem of Éluard has for me a divine savour’, writes Poulenc in JdmM. ‘It recalls for me that invigorating bitterness of a flower I once plucked and tasted in the surroundings of the Grande Chartreuse.’ Lieder enthusiasts will recognize a similar emotion expressed by the poet Kerner in Schumann’s Erstes Grün Op 35 No 4. The melancholy inherent in the poem’s final line (‘Elle était fanée’) colours the sense of resignation in the music—the blade of mountain grass, brave enough to stick its head above the snow, has been withered by cold. Most unusually, the composer repeats the first three lines of Éluard’s poem to round off this haunting elegy in the form of a pavane, as perfect and as simple a song as Poulenc ever wrote.

Poulenc writes in JdmM that this song is ‘to be sung in a single curve, one single impulse’. This seems to have been a corrective to hearing performances that were laboured and which failed to convey the breathless well-being of the words—a mood which must be careful, on the other hand, not to create a sense of agitation (as Bernac warns). Éluard has written, by his standards, an uncomplicated love poem to Nusch and the lyrical élan of the music is a
perfect match. There is just a tinge of cabaret in the music, a charming lightness of heart reflected in the acciacatura ornamenting ‘la taille de ma solitude’. In the opening bars the pianist has the sensation of dancing on the black keys in the key of G flat major before sliding down to the white notes for a graceful cadence into F major in the third bar. Poulenc then takes us on a tour of sequences in flat, and then sharp, keys—no doubt carefully and even laboriously composed, harmony by harmony, but somehow adding up to something effortlessly elegant, as if conceived in a single, inspired arch—indeed, the whole song gives that pleasing impression. The last phrase of the song (beginning ‘Et des jours et des nuits) throbs with a mysterious alternation of B flat minor and major; the two-bar postlude has the delicacy of a caress.

13  Figure de force brûlante et farouche
Song by Sarah Fox; Presto—très violent
Figure de force brûlante et farouche
Cheveux noirs où l’or coule vers le sud
Aux nuits corrompues
Or englouti étoile impure
Dans un lit jamais partagé

Aux veines des tempes
Comme au bout des seins
La vie se refuse
Les yeux nul ne peut les crever
Boire leur éclat ni leurs larmes
Le sang au-dessus d’eux triomphe pour lui seul

Intraitable démesurée
Inutile
Cette santé bâtit une prison.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

This poem has a fierce Rimbaud-like intensity, a frightening vision of considerable grandeur. In JdmM Poulenc wrote that the reason he created a song as loud and active as this was to make the silence of the following song, Nous avons fait la nuit, more effective. This may be, but the gestural power of Figure de force brûlante et farouche has something mystical and powerful in its own right that adds considerable weight to the power of the cycle as a whole—it is as if the spirit of Stravinsky at his most elemental has suddenly appeared as a kind of avenging angel, although whenever Poulenc imitates another composer the music is always refracted through a prism of his own individuality. We hear the ‘Russian’ Stravinsky in the repetitive punched rhythms of the opening and the savagery of ‘Dans un lit jamais partagé’, and the Stravinsky of the Symphony of Psalms in the hieratic slowness of ‘Aux veines des tempes’. In truth, the song is a bit of a ragbag of different effects, but intensity of utterance binds it together. Amidst the lyricism of much of the cycle this is a reminder that Éluard is no miniaturist and mere love poet—his words sometimes require a Picasso-like boldness in setting them to music. The dedication of the song to Pierre Bernac, who was not only Poulenc’s favourite singer but also a kind of moral counsellor, gives pause for thought. Bernac was in many ways a hard-working ascetic with none of the composer’s sybaritic laissez-faire. Is this song perhaps the composer’s subtle critique of Bernac’s formidable and sometimes intractable self-control?
Nous avons fait la nuit  
Nous avons fait la nuit je tiens ta main je veille  
Je te soutiens de toutes mes forces  
Sillons profonds où la bonté de ton corps germera  
Je m’émerveille de l’inconnue que tu deviens  
Qui est toujours nouveau.

Paul Éluard (1895–1952)

The song begins in C minor with the piano doubling the voice, a tonal analogue, surely, for a couple holding hands in the dark and feeling their way to intimacy; the tempo is as constant as a heartbeat. Gradually the harmonies fill out and become more luminous; at bar 15 the three flats of the key-signature are cancelled into naturals for six bars, essentially a shift into A minor. At bar 22 there is a change from a chord in that key to a second inversion of D flat major, the bass falling a semitone to A flat (on ‘Et dans ma tête’). After this descent into darker harmonic profundity the vocal line, inflected by a bel canto intensity that any Italian composer might admire, moves into another sphere...
and takes flight. The piano-writing also becomes increasingly demonstrative; the phrase ‘avec la nuit’ occasions a piano chord ornamented with grace notes, a stretch of a tenth on the keyboard which seems a metaphor for one soul reaching, straining to become part of another. For the next eight bars piano and voice are anchored on what is almost a non-stop G pedal. This underscores imagery of anchored devotion, the person singing to Nusch (in other words Éluard himself) transfixed by fascinated admiration for an unknown woman (‘Une inconnue’) who is also the woman he already knows and loves. This pedal-point also sets up a longing for a cadence. On the final syllable of the phrase ‘Qui est toujours nouveau’ the listener is granted this resolution in sumptuous fashion, one of the most satisfying dominant-to-tonic progressions in all song. The thirteen-bar postlude, entirely on the piano’s white keys (a lack of accidentals denoting, perhaps, purity and altruism) is radiantly calm, aglow with a vision of twinned souls that has moved and inspired the composer, but seems sadly out of his own reach. We hear once again those notes from a C major triad that have ended *Bonne journée*. The cycle has come full circle, and in only twenty-three pages of music Poulenc has joined the ranks of the song-composing immortals.

**MIROIRS BRÛLANTS**

*Paroles de Paul Éluard*  FP98 (1938—9)

Poulenc found the texts for both these songs in *Mesures*, a review published in a yellow paperback, and dated 15 July 1938. The composer picked it up from the bookshop below his apartment in the Rue de Médicis before embarking on a train journey to Nevers. From there Bernac met him in a car and they drove together to Anost, a town to the west of the Côte d’Or in Burgundy, nestling in the mountains of the Morvan, where Poulenc found he could work with ‘lightness and oxygen’ in the summer break. Four new Éluard poems were printed in *Mesures* (pp 89—92), the first and the last of which (entitled *Nous sommes* and *Vertueux solitaire*) became the *Miroirs brûlants*—a title later supplied by Éluard. Poulenc was astounded that the sunset described in the poem was exactly that to be seen from his room in Anost.
Tu vois le feu du soir

Tu vois le feu du soir qui sort de sa coquille
Et tu vois la forêt enfouie dans sa fraîcheur
Tu vois la plaine nue aux flancs du ciel traînard
La neige haute comme la mer
Et la mer haute dans l’azur
Pierres parfaites et bois doux secours voilés
Tu vois des villes teintes de mélancolie
Dorée des trottoirs pleins d’excuses
Une place où la solitude a sa statue
Souriant et l’amour une seule maison
Tu vois les animaux
Sosies malins sacrifiés l’un à l’autre
Frères immaculés aux ombres confondues
Dans un désert de sang
Tu vois un bel enfant quand il joue quand il rit
Il est bien plus petit
Que le petit oiseau du bout des branches
Tu vois un paysage aux saveurs d’huile et d’eau
D’où la roche est exclue où la terre abandonne
Sa verdure à l’été qui la couvre de fruits
Des femmes descendant de leur miroir ancien
T’apportent leur jeunesse et leur foi en la tienne
Et l’une sa clarté la voile qui t’entraîne
Te fait secrètement voir le monde sans toi.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

This is another of Éluard’s ‘litany’ poems (‘Tu vois’ five times in all) in praise of Nusch, as if a priestess here addressed by her awestruck husband and votary. As in Nous avons fait la nuit, Poulenc found the perfect mood of radiant calm to frame a complicated and difficult poem. The tempo of this song (crotchet = 60) is typical of the composer—by no means fast, by no means slow, a gentle rhythm that glides through seemingly every tonality possible while avoiding all gratuitous rubato and sentimentality. In the entire song there is only one bar of piano interlude (in \(\text{\textfraction}6\)) where the singer is mute. The effect of the words that follow (‘Pierres parfaites’) is heightened by the preceding vocal silence. It is a miracle that the song hangs together as seamlessly as it does—Poulenc was not a composer to whom a long span of musical thought came naturally and, unlike Fauré, he was not a master of organic development. Instead he composes a patchwork of juxtaposing ideas (modified according to the imagery of the words—thus the special tenderness on ‘Tu vois un bel enfant quand il joue quand il rit’) which he carefully connects via a sequence of interconnecting harmonic doors separated by ‘terraced’ dynamics. A good performance, poised and necessarily hypnotic, depends on the singer having a masterful control of mezza voce at the top of the stave (as did Pierre Bernac, the song’s dedicatee) and a feeling for the mystery of the text. The sumptuous piano-
writing, almost always cushioned quavers and crotchets (not a semiquaver in sight) makes the composer’s achievement in avoiding dullness all the more remarkable.

16 ii Je nommerai ton front
Sung by Christopher Maltman; Molto agitato

I will name your brow

I will make of it a stake at the summit of your sobs

I will name reflection the sorrow which rends you like a sword in a silken curtain

I will destroy your secret garden

full of poppies and precious water

I will bind you with my whip

In your heart you had nothing but subterranean gleams you will have nothing in the pupils of your eyes but blood

you will name your mouth and your hands the last

your mouth destroyed echo your hands leaden coins

I shall break the rusted keys that they command

If the day comes when I am completely calmed

if I must forget that I have not known victory

at least let it be that you have known the extent of my hate.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

Even Poulenc realized that this song, very difficult to play and sing, with its subject of towering anger and revenge, was not a success. The composer claims that he abandoned the song in Anost sooner than intended and then found it impossible to pick up the thread. It was always meant as a song to follow Tu vois le feu du soir which would in turn be followed by another of Poulenc’s great songs in moderate tempo—like a bracing lemon sorbet served between courses in a meal, Je nommerai ton front was meant to clean the palate in preparation for the next significant course. As Bernac comments: ‘Both Éluard and Poulenc were more successful in singing of love than of hate.’ This said, the song is an effective piece of huffing and puffing, glittering with pianistic challenges and vocal energy; in fact it is difficult to conceive words like these, so untypical of the poet, receiving more effective treatment than they do here.

17 Ce doux petit visage FP99 (April 1939)
Sung by Ailish Tynan; Très modéré

This sweet little face

Nothing but this sweet little face

nothing but this sweet little bird

on the distant jetty where the children wane
À la sortie de l’hiver
Quand les nuages commencent à brûler
Comme toujours
Quand l’air frais se colore
Rien que cette jeunesse qui fuit devant la vie.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

This is a remarkably tender poem of Éluard set to remarkably moving music. The poem is taken from the collection *Cours naturel* (1938), the volume as a whole dedicated to Nusch. The poem *Passionnement* (pp 18 –24) is divided into seven parts of which this is the last. Poulenc dedicates the song to the memory of Raymonde Linossier, the marvellous but complicated girl he had wanted to marry in his youth, and who turned his proposal of marriage down. According to Poulenc (JdmM) she had been one of his best musical advisers. The other song on this disc dedicated to Raymonde is *Voyage* at the end of *Calligrammes*; that Poulenc’s memory of her should have been linked to two such wonderful songs is an indication of her importance in his life. Accordingly this is one of the few Éluard settings which suits a female voice better than a male (on the whole the songs are remarkably asexual, despite their erotic power). It is the inscrutability of Éluard’s words, their mystery, that gives this music the dignity to refute all sentimentality. The first eight bars of the song float like a bird in the ether of the treble clef, unanchored by the bass; thereafter the music has a sumptuous warmth, and a remarkably lyrical vocal line: haunting melancholy, precious memories turned into sound, perfection of a kind, and vintage Poulenc.

Les chemins de l’amour
from *Léocadia* FP106 (October 1940)
Sung by Sarah Fox, *Modéré mais sans lenteur*

Les chemins qui vont à la mer
Ont gardé de notre passage,
Des fleurs effeuillées
Et l’écho sous leurs arbres,
De nos deux rires clairs.
Hélas ! des jours de bonheur,
Radiéuses joies envolées,
Je vais sans retrouver traces
Dans mon cœur.

Les chemins de mon amour,
Je vous cherche toujours,
Chemins perdus, vous n’êtes plus
Et vos échos sont sourds.
Chemins du désespoir,
Chemins du souvenir,
Chemins du premier jour,
Divins chemins d’amour.

Les chemins de l’amour
from *Léocadia* FP106 (October 1940)
Sung by Sarah Fox, *Modéré mais sans lenteur*

Les chemins qui vont à la mer
Ont gardé de notre passage,
Des fleurs effeuillées
Et l’écho sous leurs arbres,
De nos deux rires clairs.
Hélas ! des jours de bonheur,
Radiéuses joies envolées,
Je vais sans retrouver traces
Dans mon cœur.

Chemins de mon amour,
Je vous cherche toujours,
Chemins perdus, vous n’êtes plus
Et vos échos sont sourds.
Chemins du désespoir,
Chemins du souvenir,
Chemins du premier jour,
Divins chemins d’amour.

The paths of love

The paths that lead to the sea
have kept from our passing,
flowers with fallen petals
and the echo beneath their trees
of our clear laughter.
Alas! of our days of happiness,
radiant joys now flown,
no trace can be found again
in my heart.

Paths of my love,
I seek you for ever,
lost paths, you are there no more
and your echoes are mute.
Paths of despair,
paths of memory,
paths of the first day,
divine paths of love.
Si je dois l’oublier un jour,
La vie effaçant toute chose,
Je veux, dans mon cœur, qu’un souvenir repose,
Plus fort que l’autre amour.
Le souvenir du chemin,
Où tremblante et toute éperdue,
Un jour j’ai senti sur moi
Brûler tes mains.

JEAN ANOUILH (1910–1987)

The first seventeen tracks on this disc have been songs to Éluard texts; the eighteenth, perhaps the Poulenc song most often heard in concert halls these days, has a lyric by Jean Anouilh (1910–1987) of a kind that the composer could have set again and again if he had wished—something instantaneously understandable and banal, all-purpose emotion for a soprano singing a song on stage. When writing incidental music for Jean Anouilh’s play Léocadia, he wrote to Nora Auric (1 January 1941) that the composition of this work lifted his spirits from the ‘menace of the occupation which weighs on my house—what a sad epoch is ours, and when and how will it all finish up’. The song thus fits a sub-theme of this disc which is ‘France at war’. There could be no greater contrast than between Éluard and Anouilh, the first an idealist, politicized poet, the other a bourgeois playwright, a superb man of the theatre interested in winning audiences, unpolitical, although his famous Antigone can be read as a criticism of Marshal Pétain and Vichy France. Léocadia (its English title was Time Remembered) was one of Anouilh’s lighter plays written as a vehicle for the divinely talented singing actress Yvonne Printemps and her second husband, the classical actor Pierre Fresnay—this is no doubt what interested Poulenc (star-struck when it came to the likes of Printemps) about contributing to Léocadia. He provided about twenty minutes of music, most of it orchestral overtures to five different ‘tableaux’, but in Les chemins de l’amour he was effortlessly able to write a perfect pastiche of the kind of music, in this case a valse chantée, which had captivated him since his youth in shows and reviews by composers like Messager, Hahn, Christiné, Yvain. It is a genre piece with a memorable tune composed affectionately and with taste, but it is a pity that it is chosen by many young singers as an easy option—Poulenc-lite, in lieu of their taking the trouble to learn some of the genuine mélodies. Those sopranos who have not been schooled in mainstream Poulenc invariably turn a delicious French waltz into a Viennese, with a soggy tempo and style as cloying as whipped-cream. Printemps recorded this song in an orchestration since lost; a delicious feature of that recording was the molto più mosso of the postlude, all in the fashion of the time. Though not written in the piano score, the speed of that evanescent ending is adopted here.
The songs were composed at the end of the summer of 1943. Someone brought the composer the first edition of 
*Les yeux d’Elsa* (published wisely in Switzerland) by Louis Aragon (with his wife Elsa cast in a Nusch-like role of 
*inspiratrice*). Poulenc would have skipped the pontifications of the thirty-one page preface and noted a sequence 
of night-poems, including *La nuit de Dunkerque* where the uncompromising and self-regarding guardian of 
Communist party purity turns *chansonnier* in time of war. *Fêtes galantes* follows on page 49 and *C* on page 55. 
The composer had known Aragon (1897–1982), uncomfortable surrealist colleague of Éluard, since his teens, but 
his poetry is not Poulenc’s normal stamping ground. As in *Miroirs brûlants* he conceived a twin-set where a deeply 
serious song is followed by a helter-skelter scherzo.

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**Track 50**

Sung by Ben Johnson; *Très calme*

J’ai traversé les ponts de Cé
C’est là que tout a commencé
Une chanson des temps passés
Parle d’un chevalier blessé
D’une rose sur la chaussée
Et d’un corsage délacé
Du château d’un duc insensé
Et des cygnes dans les fossés
De la prairie où vient danser
Une éternelle fiancée
Et j’ai bu comme un lait glacé
Le long lai des gloires faussées
La Loire emporte mes pensées
Avec les voitures versées
Et les armes désamorcées
Et les larmes mal effacées
Ô ma France ô ma délaissée
J’ai traversé les ponts de Cé

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I have crossed the bridges of Cé
it is there that it all began
A song of bygone days
tells of a wounded knight
Of a rose on the carriage-way
and an unlaced bodice
Of the castle of a mad duke
and swans on the moats
Of the meadow where comes dancing
an eternal betrothed
And I drank like iced milk
the long lay of false glories
The Loire carries my thoughts away
with the overturned cars
And the unprimed weapons
and the ill-dried tears
O my France O my forsaken France
I have crossed the bridges of Cé

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Les Ponts-de-Cé is a commune near Angers, the site of a battle in the Hundred Years War. With some historical 
license with regard to the town and its bridges, *C* is Aragon’s Marxist take on the history of France whereby there 
is a trajectory to be traced between the abusive sixteenth-century aristocracy in their Loire chateaux and the 
country’s inevitable fall to the Nazis (it is also something of a virtuoso exercise in end rhymes). The poet’s lyrics were 
admired by a number of left-wing popular singers (Léo Ferré comes to mind in a later generation) but Poulenc is not 
at all interested in agitprop, only the sadness and pathos of France’s demise. Aragon’s lament has an angry agenda 
(German occupation is the crowning disaster of many ‘false glories’ in French history) which Poulenc simply ignores. 
He composes the song in his own small chateau near the Loire, and he has no right to castigate the upper classes.
(to which he more or less belongs) for their decadent errors; instead he embraces France tenderly (infiniment doux is the marking at bar 21) as if it were a wounded lover who will one day recover. His music adopts a shadow of popular culture, a hint of nightclub and boulevard (the song is dedicated to Marcel Royer—‘Papoum’—who first introduced his composer-nephew, when still a boy, to this musical world) without trivializing the mood of a dignified patriotic song about the life and death of a nation. Not even two floated high A flats, openly sensual, can undermine the song’s seriousness of purpose, unless uninformed singers are determined to smooch and swoon their way through music that is gorgeous, certainly, but chiefly heart-breaking. The four-bar introduction, a long arc of rising and falling quavers, is a miracle of harmonic eloquence, although unharmonized, and the unusual key of A flat minor occasions some of the composer’s most exquisite excursions and sequences. This is a masterpiece known the world over; it is the most unusual, and perhaps the most moving, song about the ravages of war ever composed.

### Fêtes galantes

Sung by Ben Johnson; Incroyablement vite, dans le style des chansons-scies de café-concert

On voit des marquis sur des bicyclettes
On voit des marlous en cheval-jupon
On voit des morveux avec des voilettes
On voit des pompiers brûler les pompons
On voit des mots jetés à la voirie
On voit des mots élevés au pavois
On voit les pieds des enfants de Marie
On voit le dos des diseuses à voix
On voit des voitures à gazogène
On voit aussi des voitures à bras
On voit des lascars que les longs nez gênent
On voit des coïns de dix-huit carats
On voit ici ce que l’on voit ailleurs
On voit des demoiselles dévoyées
On voit des voyous On voit des voyeurs
On voit sous les ponts passer les noyés
On voit chômer les marchands de chaussures
On voit mourir d’ennui les mireurs d’œufs
On voit périscliter les valeurs sûres
Et fuir la vie à la six-quat-dieux.

LOUIS ARAGON (1897–1982)
In June 1940 the entire Parisian population seems to have been convinced (inaccurately as it turned out) that the arrival of the ‘Bosch’ would lead to bombardment and large-scale destruction and terror. This resulted in an exodus en masse of Parisians which Aragon describes with the relish of Schadenfreude. His poem has funny lines but it is without humour; there is a grim calling to account here: descendants of ‘aristos’ whose japes on the lawns of Versailles had been depicted in the Fêtes galantes of Watteau and Verlaine are now forced into a game where their power and privilege count for nothing and where they must compete for survival, hugger-mugger, with the working classes. It is perhaps equally insensitive of Poulenc to have made light of an event which caused so much anguish, but his decision to cast this song in the implacable rhythm of a chanson-scie (a music-hall genre featuring obsessive repetition—in this case the ‘On voit’ beginning of each line) softens Aragon’s contempt and finds an excuse for hoopla of the ‘we are all in this together’ variety. For Aragon the phrase ‘true values in jeopardy’ presages the coming of Bolshevik revolution, whereas for Poulenc it is a blip in the ‘comédie humaine’. Nevertheless, an intelligent performance makes of this something more ominous than a good-natured romp, and the pressure put on singer and pianist to master all the words and notes at breakneck speed generates a certain appropriate tension. The listener is redirected to Tempête en juin from Irène Némirovsky’s Suite française for a thrilling and moving evocation of the flight from Paris in those bizarre days of temporary madness.

Le disparu FP134 (1946) The one who disappeared

Like Poulenc, Robert Desnos (1900–1945) was a born Parisian. He played an important role in the early days of Surrealism when he was able to dictate a stream of words in any conditions—he had only to close his eyes and poetry erupted from him, also when he was more or less asleep. Always left-wing, but too individualistic to become identified with dogmatic Communism, Desnos was eventually spurned by his more hard-line Surrealist colleagues and moved into a period of radiophonic experimentation, broadcasts with the collaboration of other artists (Kurt Weill for example) that were valued at the time for their imaginative and avant-garde use of the medium. During the war he was a member of the resistance while editing the newspaper Aujourd’hui, remaining outspoken and courageous in his artistic and personal beliefs. He was arrested on 22 February 1944, sent to Germany and died on 16 June 1945 at Terezín.

Je n’aime plus la rue Saint-Martin
Depuis qu’André Platard l’a quittée.
Je n’aime plus la rue Saint-Martin,
Je n’aime rien pas même le vin.
Je n’aime plus la rue Saint-Martin
Depuis qu’André Platard l’a quittée.
C’est mon ami, c’est mon copain.
Nous partagions la chambre et le pain.
Je n’aime plus la rue Saint-Martin.

I no longer like the Rue Saint-Martin
since André Platard left it.
I no longer like the Rue Saint-Martin,
I like nothing not even wine.
I no longer like the Rue Saint-Martin
since André Platard left it.
He is my friend, he is my pal.
We shared a room and bread.
I no longer like the Rue Saint-Martin.
Desnos’s title is *Couplets de la rue Saint-Martin*, a poem from 1942 which anticipates, in eerie prophecy, his own arrest (a fact not lost on the composer of course) and which bemoans the disappearance of the fictional ‘André Platard’, as the Gestapo close in on a cell of the resistance. Poulenc casts the whole song as a *valse-musette* (the marking is *Tempo de Valse à 1 temps, très allant*), and calls it ‘a Lied-chanson in the style of Môme Piaf’. He uses changes of key in a progression of thirds (A major—D flat major—F major, and so on) to ratchet up the tension while the texture changes from effulgent to bare-as-bones over the song’s four pages. In *JdmM* the composer notes three moods: ‘the dance with accordion band, the peal of bells, the funeral march’. The music for the poem’s third verse gets faster as if in panic, the final page seems lost and hopeless while never really relaxing the pulse. This is a tense yet poetic song in memory of a harrowing epoch.

**Main dominée par le cœur**

*Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Très allant*

- Hand ruled by the heart
- Heart ruled by the lion
- Lion ruled by the bird
- The bird that a cloud effaces
- The lion intoxicated by the desert
- The heart where death abides
- The hand closed in vain
- No help all escapes me
- I see that which disappears
- I realize that I have nothing
- An absence between the walls
- Then the exile into the darkness
- The eyes pure the head inert.

We return to Paul Éluard for the song that lends this disc its title, although the poet’s own heading for this closing poem of *Poésie et vérité 1942* was *La main le cœur le lion l’oiseau*. The marking is *Très allant* and the
accompaniment is in non-stop semiquavers, hectic on paper perhaps, but sharing with a number of the other masterpieces inspired by the same poet a kind of genial calm, an unfolding of music that is ardent at the same time as being above the fray—a gnomic pronouncement. Poulenc, in a letter to Bernac, admitted that the tempo was modelled on Fauré’s _Le don silencieux_, one of that composer’s most inscrutably beautiful songs. Poulenc has carefully worked out a chain of harmonic progressions that mirrors the word-journey (‘main’ back to ‘main’) traced in the poem’s first seven lines. This is one of the most graceful and sinuous of the Éluard songs, nine bars in three flats, in the minor key, the remainder basking in the sunlight of naturals. The closing section (to the words ‘Les yeux purs la tête inerte’) is swathed in graceful arpeggio arabesques, the piano imitating the melody of the vocal line after a gap of two bars; this leads to one of the most satisfying codas of any of the Poulenc songs where gentle cascades of pianism lead to an immensely satisfying, and sumptuously extended, C major cadence.

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**… mais mourir** FP137 (October 1947) **… but to die**

Sung by Christopher Maltman; _Modéré, sans lenteur_

- Mains agités aux grimaces nouées
- Une grimace en fait une autre
- L’autre est nocturne le temps passe
- Ouvrir des boîtes casser des verres creuser des trous
- Et vérifier les formes inutiles du vide
- Mains lasses retournant leurs gants
- Paupières des couleurs parfaites
- Coucher n’importe où
- Et garder en lieu sûr
- Le poison qui se compose alors
- Dans le calme mais mourir.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

Éluard’s title for this poem in _La vie immédiate_ (1932) was _Peu de vertu_, which was discarded by Poulenc who clearly searched Éluard’s work for a poem that he could set in memory of Nusch Éluard (he always misspells her name ‘Nush’) who had died suddenly in 1946. Poulenc was no doubt acutely aware of the fact that his old friend Paul Éluard was in a dire emotional state on account of this loss; indeed the composer may have seen the composition of _… mais mourir_ as expressing his condolences to the poet whose work had done so much to shape his own. Poulenc remembered that Nusch had beautiful hands and alighted on this poem—although whether or not she herself inspired it fifteen years earlier is not clear. The song begins in E minor and ends in E major; the vocal line ranges unusually far and wide for an Éluard setting at this speed. There is a real independence between voice and piano; melodic shapes traced in the accompaniment have a life and eloquence of their own, as if the composer were thinking of hand movements at the piano as he wrote the music. In the last five bars (for the phrase ‘mais mourir’) it is the pianist who plays the final melody against a held vocal note, an effect that is suffused with tender melancholy.

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There is only one poet in Poulenc’s song output who can match the importance of Paul Éluard and that was Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918). In _JdmM_ Poulenc states: ‘If on my tomb could be inscribed: Here lies Francis
Poulenc, the musician of Apollinaire and Éluard, I would consider this to be my finest title to fame.’ It was Apollinaire’s *Bestiaire* poems which launched Poulenc’s song-writing career in 1918 (see disc 3) and the composer remained for ever the poet’s entranced admirer. Poulenc heard Apollinaire reading aloud at Adrienne Monnier’s bookshop in the Rue de l’Odéon shortly before the poet died and he never forgot the sound of his voice—Marie Laurencin, formerly Apollinaire’s lover, claimed to be able to hear these vocal inflections somehow incorporated in Poulenc’s music.

Both Apollinaire and Poulenc were deeply in love with Paris. The composer was born with a silver spoon in his mouth on the right bank while the impoverished Apollinaire, Parisian only by adoption, was a left-bank garret-dweller (Poulenc himself later chose to live a somewhat bohemian life *à la rive gauche*). They were also both enthusiasts of modernity and its everyday blessings and conveniences: both were able to find many things poetic that had formerly not been recognized as such. Anything could be the subject of poetry—trains and trams, planes, posters, modern architecture, electricity, machines, cannon and shrapnel, any picturesque curiosity, any unexpected or outlandish juxtaposition. This earthy eclecticism suited Poulenc, the musical magpie, the master of patchwork quilts, to a T; he gobbled up composers, Monteverdi to Malipiero, just as Apollinaire revered Villon to Verlaine, recycling them to his purpose. Both artists were masters, in their own fields, of the audaciously allusive. Add to this that Apollinaire was the most lubricious and anti-puritan of poets (relishing his ‘bad boy’ status) and also the most intrinsically musical (a lover of popular song as much as of medieval virelais) and the creative link (albeit posthumous) between composer and poet seems almost inevitable. In Apollinaire’s poetry there is a simplicity of emotion beneath the outré sophistication, an unashamed elegiac lyricism, that inspired some of Poulenc’s greatest music, similarly avant-garde on the outside, and utterly accessible on the inside—or the other way around. Side by side with his passion for the here and now, Apollinaire sang of lost paradise, the tragedy of ‘never again’, the intimate and melancholy music of the unlucky in love, the unlikely hero with his face turned expectantly towards the future. In many ways he was Poulenc’s literary alter-ego.

Guillaume Apollinaire was the pseudonym of Wilhelm Apollinaris de Kostrowitsky, born in Rome on 26 August 1880, the first of two illegitimate sons of Angelica de Kostrowitsky, a down-at-heel noblewoman of Polish-Russian stock, and Francesco Flugi d’Aspermont, a feckless Italian playboy-aristocrat. In 1885, the abandoned Angelica moved to France with her children; until the age of seven the young Wilhelm spoke only Polish and Italian. Guillaume (as he became) went to school in Cannes and subsequently in Nice where he did not bother to finish his *baccalauréat*. The upheavals Apollinaire later effected in French literature, and the insouciance and charm with which these were accomplished, were no doubt symptoms of his disrupted childhood and polyglot background (because Apollinaire was naturalized only in 1916, the greatest French poet of the early twentieth century was a citizen of France for only the last thirty-two months of his life). In 1897, at the age of seventeen, he was already as interested in anarchism as in the prevailing orthodoxy of symbolism—indeed he was destined to become the liquidator of symbolism (a Debussy song to an Apollinaire text thus seems an impossible thought, although the two men died in the same year).

After a year of Bohemian-living in Monaco, Guillaume moved to Paris with his family in 1899—a city of which he had long dreamed and which he idealized (see Poulenc’s *Montparnasse*). Excluded from the literary establishment, the daily challenge of the young poet (‘un peu bête et trop blond’) was to escape poverty by whatever means necessary—he became an odd-jobs man of the printed word, putting together hasty anthologies, writing articles
GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE
in Picasso's studio
for other writers (a practice known as ‘faire le nègre’), and proving himself a master-pornographer, admired not only for his salacious imagination, but for his style and wit. Apollinaire’s beloved Paris now became a base for travel on a shoestring. In 1899 he and his brother Albert (passing themselves off as Russian nobility) lived for a while near Liège, where they learned the local dialect, explored the Walloon countryside (see Banalités/iii) and engaged in amatory adventures. More in earnest was Guillaume’s futile courtship of Linda Molina in 1901 (Quatre poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire/ii). Striking it lucky in the same year with Vicomtesse Milhau who needed a tutor for her daughter, Apollinaire was whisked off to Germany and discovered the Rhineland at the same time as initiating an affair with Annie Playden, English governess of the Milhau children, a relationship that was to drag on for three years. In February 1902 the poet visited Cologne during the Carnival (an episode recalled in Quatre poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire/iv) and went on to visit Berlin and Dresden. In March he took in Prague, Vienna and Munich.

Apollinaire’s fortunes improved somewhat in 1903 when a job was found for him in Paris working in a bank. He visited London (see Hyde Park) in the vain hope of persuading Annie to elope with him. At this time he began to meet more important people in artistic circles: the writers Max Jacob, André Salmon and Alfred Jarry, and the painters Picasso and Derain (the latter illustrated Apollinaire’s first book, L’enchanteur pourrissant, in 1909). In 1905 he visited Holland (see Rosemonde); by 1907 he left his mother’s apartment and moved into his own lodgings in Montmartre where he frequented the louche bars and the famous Bateau-Lavoir, the nickname for the insalubrious building in Montmartre where avant-garde artists, mainly painters (including Picasso), had taken up residence. Apollinaire’s profound knowledge of modern painting and his famous book Les peintres cubistes (1913) have their origin in this period. In 1908 Picasso introduced the poet to the painter Marie Laurencin with whom Apollinaire had a passionate and stormy affair (Trois poèmes de Louise Lalanne, disc 1). Marie terminated the liaison in 1912 on account of the poet’s jealousy and his incorrigible infidelities; there remained, nevertheless, an emotional link between them (reflected in Calligrammes/v). Apollinaire’s poetry implies, disingenuously, that women habitually mistreated him, but his perpetually roving eye was largely to blame for the failure of his relationships.

During these years poems by Apollinaire appeared in various reviews and newspapers. In 1911 he published Le bestiaire où le cortège d’Orphée, poems set by Poulenc seven years later. The woodcuts were by Raoul Dufy, although the poet would have preferred Picasso. He spent some days in prison, bizarrely suspected of being mixed up in the famous theft of Leonardo’s Mona Lisa from the Louvre; as a Russian national he risked deportation from France. (He was an associate of someone who had regularly stolen other artefacts from the museum.) This low point was followed by increasing literary success, although it was lost on nobody that the poet kept questionable company and was a ‘wide boy’ ready to sweep aside with audacity the accepted way of doing things—serving the pizza with a florid gesture, as someone put it, while fixing the lady with a long and languorous look—hardly in the tradition of the impeccably disinterested French waiter. At the same time he sincerely professed himself a dyed-in-the-wool Parisian and patriotic Frenchman precisely because he was neither Parisian nor French; like an Indian-born writer bemoaning the end of the British aristocracy, he revelled in a nostalgia for a vieille France that another side of his nature sought to modernize by any and every means, even if his rampages might result in its destruction.

1913 saw the publication of Apollinaire’s most famous collection of poetry, Alcools. On the outbreak of war in 1914 he volunteered immediately but, as a Russian citizen, encountered a barrier of red tape. In September of that year in
Nice he met Louise de Coligny-Chatillon (‘Lou’) who temporarily resisted his advances. He then successfully enlisted in the 38th infantry regiment at Nîmes (see *Calligrammes* /vi for a song about these ‘Gens du midi’). In December 1914 ‘Lou’ capitulated to the poet in uniform and the couple spent an idyllic week together (reflected in *Calligrammes* /iii). On a train journey to Nice-Nîmes in January 1915 Apollinaire met the young Madeleine Pagès to whom he became engaged later in that year. Being unable to spend more time in Madeleine’s company because of his war duties inspired *L’espionne* (*Calligrammes* /i). The following Easter he was sent to the front at Champagne; by November 1915 he had been promoted to sub-lieutenant in the 96th regiment and had experienced the horror of the trenches. On 17 March 1916 he suffered a head-wound from shrapnel at Berry-au-Bac and underwent a lengthy convalescence and sub-cranial surgery. The relationship with Madeleine Pagès had petered out. In September his collection of stories, *Le poète assassiné* was published. Although only thirty-six himself, he had already become the idol of a group of younger men who espoused the literary avant-garde—Breton, Tzara, Reverdy and Cocteau. He wrote the programme note for the Cocteau-Satie ballet *Parade* in 1917; shortly afterwards his play *Les mamelles de Tirésias* was performed, the work for which he first formulated the label ‘surrealist’; in 1946 Poulenc was to turn it into an opera, his greatest homage to the poet. During his recuperation from a lung infection the poet met Jacqueline Kolb who became his wife shortly afterwards—Poulenc later became her friend and dedicated *Calligrammes* /iii to her. (Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes*, discussed in detail below, was a collection of poem-drawings with a war-and-peace theme that had been published in April 1918.) The poet, weakened by his illnesses, died of Spanish flu on 9 November 1918. An actual friendship between Apollinaire and Poulenc might have brought forth even greater things but, as in the case of Schubert and Goethe, we must be grateful for an inspired synthesis of words and music that personal contact could not possibly have improved.

**CALLIGRAMMES**

*Sept mélodies sur des poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire*  
FP140  
(May–August 1948)

Because *Calligrammes* is work inspired by war we hear it here, in the context of disc 2. The other Poulenc settings of this poet are all to be heard on disc 3. This was Poulenc’s last Apollinaire cycle, written in 1948, although the composer had known these poems since they had first appeared in 1918—he bought his copy of the sumptuous large-format first edition (published by Mercure de France, with a drawing by Picasso of the poet, a war-hero with a bandaged head) in Adrienne Monnier’s bookshop. How extraordinary and exciting these ‘calligrammes’ (drawn poems, poems-in-pictures, bold experiments in typography) must have seemed in 1918! The poet had written (and designed) this collection between 1913 and 1916; they recount one man’s reactions, a poet in his mid-thirties and in love (when was Apollinaire not in love?) as he survived from day to day through emotional vicissitudes and a cruel and senseless war. The collection’s subtitle (‘Poèmes de la Paix et de la Guerre’) emphasizes that before, and even during, Apollinaire’s time at the front he experienced—and remembered—times of...
repose and delight. These poems germinated in Poulenc’s brain for thirty years during which time he burnished his skills with regard to composing Apollinairian music, eventually ready to tackle, as he put it, ‘the culmination of a whole range of experiments in setting Apollinaire’. The composition of Calligrammes was also a massive exercise in nostalgia for the composer as he returned to a time in his youth, the spring of 1918, when he bought a copy of these poems in Paris as he himself prepared to leave for the front. Nineteen years younger than Apollinaire, Poulenc could at least claim to have participated, even if only at the margins, in the same war as his beloved poet.

24  i  L’espionne
Sung by Christopher Maltman; Très modéré
Pâle espionne de l’Amour
Ma mémoire à peine fidèle
N’eut pour observer cette belle
Forteresse qu’une heure un jour
Tu te déguises
À ta guise
Mémoire espionne du cœur
Tu ne retrouvès plus l’exquise
Ruse et le cœur seul est vainqueur
Mais la vois-tu cette mémoire
Les yeux bandés prête à mourir
Elle affirme qu’on peut l’en croire
Mon cœur vaincra sans coup férir
GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

The spy

Pale spy of love
my memory scarcely to be trusted
having watched this beautiful
fortress for but one hour one day

Disguise yourself
as you will
memory spy of the heart
you find no longer the exquisite
trickery and the heart alone is victorious

But do you see this memory
eyes blindfolded at the point of death
it affirms that it can be believed
my heart will conquer without a shot

This poem is printed simply, three strophes without a calligramme design; in fact of the songs in this cycle only three are real calligrammes. L’espionne was sent in a love letter to the poet’s fiancée Madeleine Pagès whose unassailable virtue is described as a ‘forteresse’ in the poem (he has been unable to be alone with her for an hour, much less a day) and whose imaginary Mata Hari-type execution as a spy, eyes blindfolded, is employed in playful, if slightly sinister, badinage. The tempo is one favoured in the Éluard settings (crotchet = 60) and if we listen to the first two bars we might imagine ourselves to be in the sound-world of Tu vois le feu du soir (from Miroirs brûlants). Not for long however: there is a sensuality, a suave eroticism in this poet, and in this music, which is not appropriate to Éluard’s more rigorous humanistic vision. In a performance of this song (‘poetic, but very virile’, says Bernac) the weaving and teasing of the vocal line, always persuasive, always charming, is a portrait of Apollinaire at the front, the would-be seducer dreaming of love, the soldier beset by sexual longing, caught up in every detail of the photographs of his beloved he carries in his pocket.

25  ii  Mutation
Sung by Christopher Maltman; Presto, très rythmé
Une femme qui pleurait
Eh ! Oh ! Ha !
Des soldats qui passaient
Eh ! Oh ! Ha !

Mutation

A woman who wept
Eb! Ob! Ha!
Soldiers who passed
Eb! Ob! Ha!
Un éclusier qui pêchait
   Eh! Oh! Ha!
Les tranchées qui blanchissaient
   Eh! Oh! Ha!
Des obus qui pétaient
   Eh! Oh! Ha!
Des allumettes qui ne prenaient pas
   A tant changé
     En moi
Tout
   Sauf mon amour
     Eh! Oh! Ha!

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

This is another poem without a printed design. The mutation described in this song is the metamorphosis of Apollinaire from a civilian into a soldier; there is a certain brutality to the process as the rough-edged ‘Eh! Oh! Ha!’ refrain makes clear. Poulenc had already entered this world of gruff soldierly camaraderie in Chanson d’Orkenise (Banalités/i) on disc 3. The poet, perched on a wagon and in charge of a machine gun, passes through three tableaux in which he views scenes of grief, war and peace. The trenches have been dug in the white chalk of the Champagne region and the shells explode (literally ‘fart’) all around. Experiences of war have changed him certainly, but he tells us he is still as much in love as ever. The pulse is that of a foot-stomping folksong—lusty and bawled to the rooftops by a group of soldiers. The bravado has a hollow ring to it but the insouciance of the music emphasizes that there is nothing for it but to go forward. This is surely one of Poulenc’s most implacable songs. Paradoxically it was Éluard who was the Communist and ‘man of the people’, but it is Apollinaire, connoisseur of rough-living and impoverishment, who mucks in with the proletariat in a way that Poulenc finds irresistible.

25 Vers le sud

Sung by Christopher Maltman; Calme mais allant

Zénith
Tous ces regrets
   Ces jardins sans limite
Où le crapaud module un tendre cri d’azur
La biche du silence éperdu passe vite
Un rossignol meurtri par l’amour chante sur
Le rosier de ton corps dont j’ai cueilli les roses
Nos cœurs pendent ensemble au même grenadier
Et les fleurs de grenade en nos regards écloses
En tombant tour à tour ont jonché le sentier

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

Once again this is a Calligramme poem without a drawing. It looks back with hugely affectionate nostalgia on the week spent in the south of France with ‘Lou’ in December 1914. In Frühlingstraum from Winterreise Schubert uses the musical language of Mozart to describe a dream of a romantic idyll from happier times. The five-bar introduction to Vers
le sud similarly invokes old music (baroque neoclassicism, somewhat Stravinskian) to suggest a liaison from the past. The gently melancholic E minor of this expressive preamble warms into sunnier E major with the entry of the voice on ‘Zénith’, as if struck by a sunbeam. ‘Ces jardins sans limite’ describes a memory of the fecund flora of the south of France as well as the present reality of gardens dug by the soldiers near the trenches in Champagne; the song of the southern toad (‘crapaud’) is also the sound of a whizzing German shell (‘crapaud’ or ‘crapoussin’); towards the end of the song the vocal climax on ‘Et les fleurs de grenade’ denotes a profusion of pomegranate flowers as well as the exploding hand grenade that takes its death-bringing name from the shape of the fruit. The nightingale illustrated at ‘Un rossignol meurtri par l’amour’ with delicate piano ornamentation is a distant relative of Debussy’s songster, courtesy of his Fêtes galantes and Verlaine. Rubato is the order of the day here (unlike in the Éluard settings); the composer marks eight changes of tempo to denote the subtle pull-and-push of a style—passionate, gallant, quixotic, ever inventive—that is in fact a portrait of Apollinaire himself. It is little wonder that Poulenc dedicated this song to the poet’s widow, Jacqueline Apollinaire.

iv  Il pleut
It is raining
It is raining women’s voices as though they were dead even in memory

Il plieut des voix de femmes comme si elles étaient mortes même dans le souvenir
It is you also that it is raining marvellous encounters of my life O droplets
Il pleut des voix de femmes comme si elles étaient mortes même dans le souvenir
Il pleut des voix de femmes comme si elles étaient mortes même dans le souvenir

C’est vous aussi qu’il pleut merveilleuses rencontres de ma vie ô gouttelettes
And these rearing clouds begin to neigh a whole universe of auricular cities
Et ces nuages cabrés se prennent à hennir tout un univers de villes auriculaires

Écoute s’il pleut tandis que le regret et le dédain pleurent une ancienne musique
Listen if it is raining while regret and disdain are weeping an ancient music
Écoute s’il pleut tandis que le regret et le dédain pleurent une ancienne musique

Écoute tomber les liens qui te retiennent en haut et en bas
Bears the bonds falling that bold you high and low
Écoute tomber les liens qui te retiennent en haut et en bas

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

This is one of the most famous of Apollinaire’s calligramme drawings; it dates from 29 July 1914, a few days before the declaration of war that took the poet by surprise when working in Deauville. The design depicts rain falling at something of an angle: the poem is printed in five lines that are neither exactly vertical nor parallel. Poulenc seems to have taken this as a clue that the rain is windswept, something of a summer storm in fact, and very unlike the drizzle depicted in, say, Debussy’s Il pleure dans mon cœur / Comme il pleut sur la ville. Poulenc invents an ingenious (and fiendish) piano étude with sextuplet semiquavers alternating between the hands with pernickety exactitude (although pedalled) and moving at considerable speed up and down the keyboard. Anyone finding himself in the path of these gusts of pianistic downpour would be soaked to the skin, as well as elbowed. The vocal line, propelled forward by the energy of the accompaniment, soars over the stave in arcs of sound while ducking and weaving with insouciance. In this heady flight of memories Apollinaire recalls the ‘marvellous encounters of my life’—the rain like women’s voices, women whose names he had long forgotten now flooding his mind with erotic memories.

v  La grâce exilée
Exiled grace
Away, go away my rainbow

Va-t’en va-t’en mon arc-en-ciel
Allez-vous-en couleurs charmantes

Track 59
Cet exil t’est essentiel
Infante aux écharpes changeantes
Et l’arc-en-ciel est exilé
Puisqu’on exile qui l’irise
Mais un drapeau s’est envolé
Prendre ta place au vent de bise

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

Poulenc has understood that this poem of love is not exactly a full-blown love poem. This lyric addressed to Marie Laurencin, a former lover, glows at a different temperature and with a different intensity from the rampantly erotic communications with Madeleine Pagès. Apollinaire had had a tempestuous affair with Laurencin between 1908 and 1912; by the time this poem was written the pain of their parting had been assuaged by new relationships on both sides. In 1914 Laurencin had married a German artist, Otto von Wätgen, and the couple was forced into exile in Spain at the beginning of hostilities—thus the reference to Laurencin being an ‘Infanta’. The ‘charming colours’ and ‘changing scarves’ are an evocation of her delicate style as a painter. The poet makes the point that the French flag has taken the place of painting as a matter of priority in times of war, or perhaps that he was now enrolled under the new colours of Madeleine, to whom he had recently proposed marriage. This poem and others were sent to Laurencin from the front via a female intermediary. The music is simple, valedictory, affectionate, the final cadences charming; all in all, a perfect foil for the musical explosion that is now to follow.

vi Aussi bien que les cigales
Sung by Christopher Maltman; Aussi vite que possible; dans un tourbillon de joie

Gens du midi gens du midi
vous n’avez donc pas regardé les cigales
que vous ne savez pas creuser
que vous ne savez pas vous éclairer ni voir
Que vous manquez vous donc pour voir aussi bien que les cigales
Mais vous savez encore boire comme les cigales
ô gens du midi gens du soleil
gens qui devriez savoir creuser et voir aussi bien
pour le moins aussi bien que les cigales
Eh quoi ! vous savez boire et ne savez plus pisser utilement comme les cigales
le jour de gloire sera celui où vous saurez creuser pour bien sortir au soleil
creuzez voyez buvez pissez comme les cigales
gens du midi il faut creuser voir boire pisser aussi bien que les cigales

LA JOIE ADORABLE DE LA PAIX SOLAIRE

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)
Of all the songs in *Calligrammes* this is the one that is most directly connected with war—indeed it could not be more imbued with the mud and sweat of male activity. The poem was sent to Madeleine Pagès, the final seven words of the poem in large bold capital letters to emphasize Apollinaire’s joy in contemplating their marriage, once hostilities had ceased. The words are lined up and printed so that the gap between the trenches of the two opposing sides is a diagonal ribbon of white across the page, each side of the diagram having about half the poem’s verbal participants, some in the direct line of fire on each side of the divide, others ranged in clumps as if back-up forces. Apollinaire’s regiment (the 96th, from the south of France where the composer had gone to school) was dug in at Champagne. These ‘Gens du midi’ in the trenches are likened to tenacious and courageous cicadas (the Apollinaire of *Le bestiaire* was knowledgeable about insects) who burrow and tunnel in the earth and who, when coming to the surface, squirt urine at their enemies. There are other allusions as well: ‘cigales’ was slang for shrapnel, the burrowing of cicadas a metaphor for the laborious marching of soldiers.

After a fanfare of frantic semiquaver activity, Poulenc assigns to the piano music to be found nowhere else in his songs, staccato quavers that suggest burrowing or digging. These heavy chords in thirds and seconds, spaced an octave apart, alternate with the confident masculine swagger of marcato semiquavers. On the third page the music really takes off. There is scarcely a song in all Poulenc that works itself up into such a state of excitement, the singer almost gibbering commands to his comrades. The music is borne along by wave after wave of bravado and gung-ho optimism, getting faster and wilder. The poet exhorts the soldier-insects to imitate the industry of the cicadas to dig . . . to see . . . to drink . . . to piss, in order to be able to sing, *like them*. And where will all this hard work lead? A *Subito largo maestoso*, with mighty chords underpinning a vocal paean (high Gs), provides the answer while each massive chord under the pianist’s hands lunges to establish a different bass note: THE ADORABLE JOY OF THE SUN-FILLED PEACE, that glorious day when Guillaume Apollinaire will be able to marry. (*Pace* Proust, dipping his Madeleine in a cup of tea would simply not be good enough.) This moment of triumph and freedom earned by the burrowing soldiers, and their emergence at last into the open-air, has the elemental majesty of a sunburst, the unified emotion of many men fighting for the same cause shouldered here by a single heroic baritone.
Voyage is one of the greatest of Poulenc’s songs and the composer thought so too. It is also by far the most complicated calligramme that Poulenc had to decipher. The poem is spread extravagantly over two whole pages and there is a wide variety of typefaces in terms of size and emphasis with seemingly quixotic, and sometimes perplexing, patterns of words. There is also a drawing of insulators and electric wires—seemingly to illustrate ‘Télégraphe’ placed some distance away on the page. Poulenc produces, however, an exceptionally lucid song that has an unmistakable rhythm of travel, the slow rhythm of a ghost train departing on an other-worldly journey. This is undoubtedly music for a final farewell—a song of infinitely dignified melancholy dedicated to the memory of the composer’s beloved friend Raymonde Linossier whom he once asked to marry him (she refused). The final page is a feast of Poulencian sevenths. The nocturnal beauty of ‘La douce nuit lunaire et pleine des étoiles’ (C sharp7 to E7) is succeeded by the heartbreaking ‘C’est ton [G7] visage [D flat7] que je ne vois plus’, which is as if ‘the clouds had all at once unveiled a ray of moonlight’ (Poulenc’s own words from *JdmM*). The strange postlude (anchored in F sharp minor, as is the beginning of the song) evoked for Poulenc the distant chugging of trains that he could hear from the terrace of his grandparents’ home in Nogent on July evenings. He thought then that they were ‘leaving on holiday’ but the adult composer knew only too well that ‘the journey of Dante’ knows of no return.

LA FRAÎCHEUR ET LE FEU
The coolness and the fire
Sept mélodies sur des poèmes de Paul Éluard FP147 (April–July 1950)

The poems for this cycle were taken from Paul Éluard’s *Le livre ouvert I* (1940). Very unusually for Poulenc he decided to set a complete Éluard poem exactly as printed, in seven numbered sections (its original title was *Vue donne Vie*, ‘Sight gives life’), only later asking the poet for an alternative title. (It is strange that Poulenc adored Éluard’s poems—he would never have changed their poetic content—but he very seldom found the original titles suitable for his musical purposes.) Poulenc wrote the songs in Noizay and Brive between April and July 1950—a full decade after the poems were written in the first year of the Nazi occupation. Thirteen years had elapsed since the composition of *Tel jour telle nuit*. The cycle is dedicated to Igor Stravinsky, whose music Poulenc had admired since
his teens and who was now resident in America. Poulenc once said that he regarded himself as the spiritual son of Stravinsky, but he wrote to Milhaud that he was pleased to be able to dedicate something to ‘père Igor’ in a form for which Stravinsky did not possess the secret (i.e. the writing of songs).

### i Rayons des yeux

**Beams of eyes**

Sung by Christopher Maltman; Allegro molto, emporté

Rayons des yeux et des soleils
Des rameaux et des fontaines
Lumière du sol et du ciel
De l’homme et de l’oubli de l’homme
Un nuage couvre le sol
Un nuage couvre le ciel
Soudain la lumière m’oublie
La mort seule demeure entière
Je suis une ombre je ne vois plus
Le soleil jaune le soleil rouge
Le soleil blanc le ciel changeant
Je ne sais plus
La place du bonheur vivant
Au bord de l’ombre sans ciel ni terre.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

The cycle opens with a virtuosic passage of piano-writing in **concertante** style that momentarily suggests Rachmaninov more than Stravinsky—three bars that are not exactly typical Poulenc in terms of their defiant romantic bravura. The composer has clearly wished to thrust forward something grandly rhetorical to fit the broad-brushed humanistic notions of this first text. When writing this large poem Éluard was already very much under the influence of Nusch and disengaged with Surrealism and Communism. However, he was horrified by the political developments of Europe (‘a cloud covers the earth’) and he was soon to join the Résistance. This first song is a state-of-the-nations address, a lament for the dislocated universe. The vocal line is rather more turbulent than is normally associated with an Éluard lyric, the piano chasing the voice up and down the stave with an implacable pattern of two semiquavers in the right hand, two in the left. On ‘le ciel changeant’ (bar 20) the motif of the introduction returns in transposed form, but only for a bar. There is no key signature but the song begins in F minor and ends in the same key with another atypical flourish crashing between the hands (**très brusque**).

### ii Le matin les branches attisent

**In the morning the branches stir up**

Sung by Christopher Maltman; Presto, très gai

Le matin les branches attisent
Le bouillonnement desoiseaux
Le soir les arbres sont tranquilles
Le jour frémissant se repose.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

This is a piquant and devilishly difficult little scherzo with the twittering of birdsong the inspiration. There is a marked contrast between the first page, which is very fleet, and the second (**à peine plus lent et très lié**), suddenly
smoother and more suave. Once again the music ends in F minor, although this time there is the equivocation of an A natural that undermines the minor-key colouring and turns it into a battle of tonalities, a familiar thumbprint of the Éluard style.

### iii Tout disparut
Sung by Christopher Maltman; *Très calme*

Tout disparut même les toits même le ciel  
Même l’ombre tombée des branches  
Sur les cimes des mousses tendres  
Même les mots et les regards bien accordés  
Sœurs miroitières de mes larmes  
Les étoiles brillaient autour de ma fenêtre  
Et mes yeux refermant leurs ailes pour la nuit  
Vivaient d’un univers sans bornes.

All disappeared

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PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

In honour of the cycle’s dedicatee, Igor Stravinsky, Poulenc does something here that we find nowhere else in his songs: an actual quote from another composer (three bars) and acknowledged as such in a footnote in the score. The work is the Russian composer’s Serenade in A (1925) and it appears here of course in its original A major tonality. The *Hymne* from Poulenc’s *Trois pièces pour piano* FP48 (1928) had already been inspired by the *Hymne* from this same work. In this song the music sounds entirely Poulencian, perhaps because Poulenc has appropriated a great deal of Stravinsky elsewhere while making it his own. The poet falls asleep and the vocal line, almost a recitative, remains dreamlike as it pivots around the A major tonality of the song’s first nine bars. At ‘Sur les cîmes des mousses tendres’ the music falls into flat-key tonality, as if entering deeper into the realm of the unconscious. The other-worldly quality of the ‘Sœurs miroitières’ phrase and the gentle twinkling of the stars outside the poet’s window are vintage Poulenc, as is the *subito pianissimo* phrase, infinitely lyrical, of ‘Vivaient d’un univers sans bornes’. (No one knew as well as this composer how to use harmonic up-lighters to cast a glow on an entire phrase—in this case an octave on C sharp, reverberating gently in the bass.) The song ends with a restatement of the song’s first bar (Stravinsky), with three further bars and a cadence of suspended animation tacked on (very much Poulenc).

### iv Dans les ténèbres du jardin
Sung by Christopher Maltman; *Molto vivace*

Dans les ténèbres du jardin  
Viennent des filles invisibles  
Plus fines qu’à midi l’ondée  
Mon sommeil les a pour amies  
Elles m’enivrent en secret  
De leurs complaisances aveugles.

In the darkness of the garden

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PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

The poet here recounts an erotic dream and the composer provides as phantasmagorical a page as he ever wrote, a single page that shows, surely, his knowledge of the miniature lieder of Berg and Webern; while declining to enter
their harmonic world he understands their aesthetic brevity. There are many dream songs in the repertoire, but few as fast and breathless as this. The fugitive nature of ‘Plus fines qu’à midi l’ondée’ is musical dew evaporating on a blade of grass. The imagery of the invisible girls, and their blind deference, inspires a cadence engineered (over three bars of piano-writing, from forte to pianissimo) to depict a playful and erotic yielding.

35 v Unis la fraîcheur et le feu
Sung by Christopher Maltman; Très calme
Unis la fraîcheur et le feu
Unis tes lèvres et tes yeux
De ta folie attends sagesse
Fais image de femme et d’homme.

Paul Éluard (1895–1952)

At the centre of the cycle stands another single-page song of the kind that seems engraved in stone, a gnomic utterance. The introductory music is marked fortissimo, and it has grandeur and depth while remaining utterly calm. The composer momentarily evokes the grandeur of baroque ornamentation in the third bar, but when the vocal line begins he uses minimalist atonality to underline the gravity and austerity of the implied ceremonal. He then goes on to write a phrase (‘De ta folie attends sagesse’) which is exaggeratedly tonal on the white keys. The cadence at the end of the song veers, typically, between C minor and C major by alternating E flat with E natural. This is a ragbag of effects, a conjurer’s bag of tricks in slow motion, but it serves its purposes to announce and herald the grand and universal theme, Man and Woman, of the following song.

36 vi Homme au sourire tendre
Sung by Christopher Maltman; Très lent
Homme au sourire tendre
Femme aux tendres paupières
Homme aux joues rafraîchies
Femme aux bras doux et frais
Homme aux prunelles calmes
Femme aux lèvres ardent
Homme aux paroles pleines
Femme aux yeux partagés
Homme aux deux mains utiles
Femme aux mains de raison
Homme aux astres constants
Femme aux seins de durée
Il n’est rien qui vous retient
Mes maîtres de m’éprouver.

Paul Éluard (1895–1952)

Éluard returns here to one of his favourite themes—male and female as eternal opposites. The cycle’s title indicates this—‘La’ and ‘le’, coolness and fire. As a man the poet is completed, instructed, inspired, transformed by the power of the eternal feminine (in Faust Goethe calls it the Ewig-weibliche). It is not often that Poulenc as a
composer of religious music is evident in his secular mélodies, but this is the exception. In hieratic two-bar phrases counterpointing male and female, the litany of repetitions, the solemnity of ceremony, the composer expresses Éluard’s radiant, almost religious confidence that the future of mankind is assured—despite all the evidence of the horrors of 1940 and beyond—by the impermeable power of humanity as exemplified by male and female archetypes.

This is one of the composer’s most haunting songs; in other hands the music would be stuck in phrases that fail to cohere into a believable whole, but Poulenc is the great life-giver to material that would be stillborn in another midwife’s hands. The poetry conjoining, and contrasting, man and woman is sung softly and gently at first, growing in power and majesty as the song progresses, the accompanying chords gradually becoming richer and more sumptuous, culminating in the fortissimo of ‘Homme aux astres constants’. The final phrase addressed to ‘Mes maîtres’ has the serenity of someone about to be submitted to a gruelling test (torture by the Gestapo perhaps) but quietly aware that, despite all evidence to the contrary, he has eternity on his side, the winning hand. It is perhaps here that we realize that the cycle as a whole has been composed only five years after the downfall of Nazism. From the vantage point of 1950 it seems as if Poulenc has intended to declaim with wonder and with gratitude the words of a poet whose confidence in the endurance of humanity had been entirely vindicated.

The intensity of this song is a bookend match for the first in the cycle, although it is slightly more deliberate in terms of tempo. The earth and sky imagery of the first poem is here replaced by the idea of a river that flows in all directions at once—reflected perhaps by the way the pianist has to dart all around the keyboard in search of the right notes, borne this way and that by the music’s current. There is the same implacable accompanying pattern of two semiquavers in the right hand, two in the left; as in the first song, the notes of the left hand sometimes flow in the same direction as the descending semiquavers of the right, sometimes they move upwards, in the opposite direction. This gives the piano-writing an unusual feeling of swimming upstream—something more effortful for these words than swathes of graceful arpeggios. The ending is a recapitulation of the two bars of the cycle’s introduction plus a rather hackneyed descending scale and two further bars of chords, minor then major, in quick juxtaposition as a thundered conclusion. It was Marie-Blanche de Polignac’s idea, believing the cycle to have originally ended lamely, to return to the work’s dramatic beginning, in the interests of cyclic unity. I for one believe that what is provided here sounds somewhat randomly attached and fails to avoid a certain bombastic banality. I would be delighted to see Poulenc’s first ideas; sadly the autograph of La fraîcheur et le feu has inexplicably vanished.

[37] vii  La grande rivière qui va

Sung by Christopher Maltman; Allegro moderato

La grande rivière qui va
Grande au soleil et petite à la lune
Par tous chemins à l’aventure
Ne m’aura pas pour la montrer du doigt
Je sais le sort de la lumière
J’en ai assez pour jouer son éclat
Pour me parfaire au dos de mes paupières
Pour que rien ne vive sans moi.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)
Poulenc had an impeccable eye for art and could write about pictures with great perspicacity. Extracts from a journal that he kept on a visit to America describe graphically (in every sense) his museum visits and his enchanted reactions to paintings by Zurbarán, Ingres, David, Daubigny, Chardin. But it was of course the paintings of his contemporaries that interested him most—and particularly the painters that were dear to his two great poets Éluard and Apollinaire. ‘I thought it would stimulate my work to paint musically’, wrote Poulenc in JdmM. When the composer told Éluard about his plan to write a cycle about painters, the poet ‘half-promised’ to write a poem about Henri Matisse, the painter from whom Poulenc had apparently learned a great deal about economy of style, the paring down to essentials of his piano-writing texture. (Apollinaire writes movingly about Matisse in Il y a.) Éluard was so close to Picasso (someone remarked that the love between them was the love of equals) that he was only lukewarm in his appreciation of Matisse. In any case, why should Éluard publish a poem in praise of a painter who had been so closely associated with the dreaded Louis Aragon and whose genius, moreover, rivalled that of the easily offended Catalan colossus? The cycle was commissioned by the American soprano Alice Esty, who gave the first performances in both Paris (1957, with the composer) and New York (1958); needless to say, there was no Matisse to end the cycle in the ‘joy and sunlight’ Poulenc had envisaged. The texts are taken from Voir (1948), an anthology of Éluard poems, mostly old, some new, about the artists the poet had most admired, who had been an integral part of his life and work. The large-format publication permits illustrations, some in colour, taken in part from the poet’s own dazzling collection. Works by all the painters in Poulenc’s cycle were owned by Éluard at different times in his life, paintings and drawings by Picasso (including numerous depictions of Nusch) outnumbering the others.

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**Pablo Picasso**

Sung by Geraldine McGreevy, *Modéré*

Entoure ce citron de blanc d’œuf informe
Enrobe ce blanc d’œuf d’un azur souple et fin
La ligne droite et noire a beau venir de toi
L’aube est derrière ton tableau
Et des murs innombrables croulent
Derrrière ton tableau et toi l’œil fixe
Comme un aveugle comme un fou
Tu dresses une haute épée dans le vide

**Surround this lemon with formless white of egg**

**coat this egg white with a malleable delicate blue**

**although the straight black line surely comes from you**

**the dawn lies behind your picture**

**And innumerable walls crumble**

**behind your picture and you your eyes fixed**

**like a blind man like a madman**

**you put a tall sword in the empty space**
Une main pourquoi pas une seconde main
Et pourquoi pas la bouche nue comme une plume
Pourquoi pas un sourire et pourquoi pas des larmes
Tout au bord de la toile où jouent les petits clous
Voici le jour d’autrui laisse aux ombres leur chance
Et d’un seul mouvement des paupières renonce.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): born in Malaga, he was one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century—his name a byword for modern art; whether paintings of his Blue, Rose, Cubist or neoclassical periods, whether in sculpture, theatre décor, lithography or pottery, Picasso led, more or less, in every field. His fame far outweighs that of the other painters in this cycle, if not necessarily in the eyes of specialists, then certainly with the general public. Poulenc’s personal link with this artist, enhanced by their mutual friendship with Éluard (who was Picasso’s brother-in-art, his ‘ami sublime’), was stronger than with other painters. Picasso, no doubt in the twinkling of an eye, executed the cover for the cycle, clearly with a paint brush, although this was simply his writing of the title plus the names of composer and poet.

Francis Poulenc in Journal de mes Mélodies: ‘Picasso opens the collection: Honour to whom honour is due. Its initial theme, likewise found a long time ago, served as rootstock for the theme of Mother Marie in Dialogues des Carmélites . . . The song, in C major, very distantly recalls the beginning of Tel jour telle nuit, but many years have passed since then, and for the musician, C major no longer means peaceful happiness . . . It is the progress of the prosody with its long run-on lines, that gives a lofty tone to this song. Note, before the end, the vocal minim rest preceding the word ‘renonce’ which to my mind underlines the imperious side of Picasso’s painting.’

A majestic song, the dotted-rhythm opening has an air of almost baroque Spanish grandeur; it is sung forte almost throughout (the two piano passages are awestruck by the painter’s creativity). It is as if we are seeing a painting brought to life before our eyes by an artist who knows no fear and admits no boundaries, whose brushstrokes continue until the moment he decides it is finished (the song’s final line).

ii Marc Chagall
Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Molto prestissimo
Âne ou vache coq ou cheval
Jusqu’à la peau d’un violon
Homme chanteur un seul oiseau
Danseur agile avec sa femme
Couple trempé dans son printemps

Marc Chagall
Ass or cow cock or horse
even the skin of a violin
a singing man a single bird
agile dancer with his wife
Couple steeped in their springtime

Track 70
L’or de l’herbe le plomb du ciel
Séparés par les flammes bleues
De la santé de la rosée
Le sang s’irise le cœur tinte
Un couple le premier reflet
Et dans un souterrain de neige
La vigne opulente dessine
Un visage aux lèvres de lune
Qui n’a jamais dormi la nuit.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

The gold of the grass the lead of the sky
divided by the blue flames
of health and of dew
the blood grows iridescent the heart rings
A couple the first reflection
And in an underground cavern of snow
the opulent vine delineates
a face with moon-like lips
which has never slept at night.

Marc Chagall (1887–1985): born in Vitebsk, Russia (now Belarus), and studied with Léon Bakst in St Petersburg; in Paris in 1910 he met, among others, Max Jacob and Guillaume Apollinaire; his whimsical and dreamlike art, often like a film montage, is influenced by his Jewish and Russian roots with images such as clowns, flying lovers, fantastic animals and biblical figures; he became a famous printmaker and designer of stage sets; an honoured refugee in the USA in the war years, he moved back to France in 1948; he painted the ceiling of the Paris Opéra (1964) and made large murals for the Metropolitan Opera in New York (1966).

Poulenc in JdmM: ‘Chagall is a kind of rambling scherzo. Strange objects pass in the sky. A poetic somersault brings us back to the human being.’

The entire song is derived from the opening bars of the introduction, in musical terms a triumph of motivic variation (not so rambling!) in which various aspects of Chagall’s phantasmagorical imagination are tied together into a creative unity. The impish wit of the postlude is like a signature affixed to a mischievous canvas.

iii Georges Braque
Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Surtout pas lent (sans traîner)
Un oiseau s’envole,
Il rejette les nues comme un voile inutile,
Il n’a jamais craint la lumière,
Enfermé dans son vol,
Il n’a jamais eu d’ombre.
Coquilles des moissons brisées par le soleil.
Toutes les feuilles dans les bois disent oui,
Elles ne savent dire que oui,
Toute question, toute réponse
Et la rosée coule au fond de ce oui.

Un homme aux yeux légers décrit le ciel d’amour.
Il en rassemble les merveilles
Comme des feuilles dans un bois,
Comme des oiseaux dans leurs ailes
Et des hommes dans le sommeil.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

Georges Braque
A bird flies away
it throws off the clouds like a useless veil,
it has never feared the light,
enclosed in its flight,
it has never had a shadow.
Husks of harvest grains split by the sun.
All the leaves of the wood say yes,
they can say nothing but yes,
every question, every answer
and the dew flows in the depth of this yes.

A man with carefree eyes describes the heaven of love.
He gathers its wonders
like leaves in a wood,
like birds in their wings
and men in sleep.
Georges Braque (1882–1963): born near Paris of a prosperous family; a sportsman as fit as an athlete; initially influenced by Cézanne and ‘Les Fauves’; introduced by Apollinaire to Picasso with whom he developed Cubism—the two of them described as ‘roped together like Alpine climbers’; he initiated the concept of ‘papier collé’ and the idea that a picture is an autonomous object; wounded in the head during World War One, like Apollinaire, but unlike the poet he recovered; from 1917–18 influenced by his friend Juan Gris; designed stage sets for Diaghilev; a long and distinguished career crowned, in 1961, by being the first living artist to be exhibited in the Louvre.

Poulenc in JdmM: ‘Braque is the most subtle of the songs, the most detailed in the collection. It is perhaps too mannered, but that is how I feel about Braque. It must be accompanied with precision, and above all, from the beginning a tempo must be taken that is not too slow, suitable for the conclusion “Un homme aux yeux légers”.’

In the Braque illustrations in Voir there are no birds—although birds frequently feature in the poet’s work. The song is divided into two distinct sections: in the first, birdsong is heard in the pianistic decorations of the second bar and the flight of birds—wafting rather than darting—is enchantingly depicted. With the human tenderness of ‘Un homme aux yeux légers’ the song changes and deepens; images of birds’ wings and men asleep are united at the end.

**iv Juan Gris**

Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Très calme

De jour merci de nuit prends garde

De douceur la moitié du monde

L’autre montrait rigueur aveugle

Aux veines se lisait un présent sans merci

Aux beautés des contors l’espace limité

Gimentait tous les joints des objets familiers

Table guitare et verre vide

Sur un arpent de terre pleine

De toile blanche d’air nocturne

Table devait se soutenir

Lampe rester pépin de l’ombre

Journal délaissait sa moitié

Deux fois le jour deux fois la nuit

De deux objets un double objet

Un seul ensemble à tout jamais.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

Juan Gris (1887–1927), the pseudonym of Victoriano Gozález: born in Madrid and studied as an engineer; began making drawings in art nouveau style; moved to Paris in 1906 and lived in the Bateau-Lavoir where he was influenced by Picasso and Braque in their Cubist phase; his first significant paintings date from 1910—he mastered the style known as Synthetic Cubism to increasingly lyrical effect; his lucidly composed still lifes are masterpieces of stringent purity and economy combined with dead-pan humour, Castillian control as opposed to the Catalan improvisation of Picasso.
Poulenc in JdmM: ‘Gris is the song that I had first sketched out several years ago. I have always greatly admired this painter, and very much liked him as a man, this poor worthy and unfortunate Juan who is only beginning to take the place he deserves … the whole song is poignantly melancholy.’

This is certainly the most spare of the songs in pianistic terms—Poulenc would say the most Matisse-like—the first two bars accompanied by left hand alone. It is also the most tenderly affectionate of the songs (to be ‘fond’ of Picasso was impossible, rather like being ‘fond’ of Beethoven).

Paul Klee

Paul Klee (1879–1940) was born near Bern, Switzerland; an accomplished violinist, poet and writer; his art studies with Stück in Munich and then in Italy led to caricatures that expressed his own sardonic nature; on a visit to Paris in 1905 he admired Van Gogh and Cézanne; from 1911 Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc of Der blaue Reiter movement in Munich further formed his tastes. His lectures on art for the Bauhaus in Weimar initiated the geometric phase of his output and the pointillist paintings, with their mosaic-like surfaces of coloured dots. His work was known to Poulenc as a result of Klee’s first one-man show in Paris in 1925 for which Éluard wrote a poem.

Poulenc in JdmM: ‘Klee. I needed a presto here. It is a dry song that must go with a bang.’

The song is the most brusque, the most cut-and-dried, of all Poulenc’s songs (‘not among the best’, says Bernac of both song and poem). Perhaps Poulenc was aiming for music of a Swiss precision to reflect the geometric patterns of the painter’s work. The cramped time signature is very rare in Poulenc songs—Klee is certainly the least ‘French’, the most vertical, the least lyrical of them all.

Joan Miró

Joan Miró (1893–1983) was born in Barcelona, Spain; an accomplished painter, poet and writer; his art studies with Deliège in Barcelona and then in Paris led to scenes that expressed his own surreal nature; on a visit to New York in 1928 he admired Picasso and Gris; from 1930 he was associated with the Surrealists, and from 1937 with Hans Arp and Jean Hans Arp. His lectures on art for the Bauhaus in Weimar initiated the geometric phase of his output and the pointillist paintings, with their mosaic-like surfaces of coloured dots. His work was known to Poulenc as a result of Miró’s first one-man show in Paris in 1924 for which Éluard wrote a poem.

Poulenc in JdmM: ‘Miro. I needed a presto here. It is a dry song that must go with a bang.’

The song is the most brusque, the most cut-and-dried, of all Poulenc’s songs (‘not among the best’, says Bernac of both song and poem). Perhaps Poulenc was aiming for music of a Swiss precision to reflect the geometric patterns of the painter’s work. The cramped time signature is very rare in Poulenc songs—Miró is certainly the least ‘French’, the most vertical, the least lyrical of them all.
Nuages du premier jour,
Clouds of primeval day,
Nuages insensibles et que rien n’autorise,
insensitive clouds sanctioned by nothing,
Leurs graines brûlent
their seeds burn
Dans les feux de paille de mes regards.
in the straw fires of my glances.
À la fin, pour se couvrir d’une aube
À la fin, to cloak itself with dawn
Il faudra que le ciel soit aussi pur que la nuit.
the sky must be as pure as the night.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

Joan Miró (1893–1983) was born in Barcelona, son of a watchmaker and goldsmith, introverted, taciturn and short of stature; he was a late-starter as a draughtsman—he wanted to depict nature as might a primitive man (or child) equipped with twentieth-century intelligence; he divided his time between Spain and Paris; influenced by Klee and by a study of the Dutch realists he developed a taste for monumental murals and stage décor; he achieved world fame with many public commissions and exhibitions; his work (over which he was almost notoriously painstaking) is characterized by strength and wisdom permeated with playful irony. Miró illustrated an edition of Éluard’s À toute épreuve that appeared only after the poet’s death.

Poulenc in JdmM: ‘Miró. The most difficult to interpret with its sudden passing from strident outburst to softness and lyricism on the words “Les libellules des raisins”. The céder beaucoup on “Que je dissipe d’un geste” and the [gradual] return to the tempo cannot be explained—it must be felt.’

On its first page this song about a southern master conveys ‘éclat’—a sunlit joy in colour and a celebration of the visual sensuality of painting. The remainder of the song is more delicate and subtle. The final phrase ‘aussi pur que la nuit’ takes flight into an aerial sphere, ornamented by pianistic birdsong. The postlude retraces the melody of the opening paean, now reduced to its essentials—as if tamed by Miró’s legendary discipline.

Jacques Villon

Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Modéré

Irremédiable vie
Irremediable life
Vie à toujours chérir
life ever to be cherished
En dépit des fléaux
Despite scourges
Et des morales basses
and base morals
En dépit des étoiles fausses
despite false stars
Et des cendres envahissantes
and encroaching ashes
En dépit des fièvres grinçantes
Despite grinding fevers
Des crimes à hauteur du ventre
crimes belly-high
Des seins taris des fronts idiots
dried up breasts foolish faces
En dépit des soleils mortels
despite the mortal suns
En dépit des dieux morts
Despite the dead gods
En dépit des mensonges
despite the lies
L’aube l’horizon l’eau
dawn horizon water
L’oiseau l’homme l’amour
bird man love

Track 75
L’homme léger et bon
Adoucissant la terre
Éclaircissant les bois
Illuminant la pierre
Et la rose nocturne
Et le sang de la foule.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

Jacques Villon (1875–1963) was the pseudonym of Gaston Émile Duchamp, born in Normandy; brother of the more famous Marcel Duchamp (his siblings Suzanne and Raymond were also painters); he moved to Paris in 1894 where he made his living as an illustrator and cartoonist; he was a Cubist painter with an Impressionist’s command of colour and also a prolific printmaker, specializing in the illustration of famous literary works; in the year Poulenc composed this cycle, Villon was awarded the Grand Prix at the Venice Biennale.

Poulenc in JdmM: ‘Villon is, with Gris, the song I like best. It is known how much I like the litanist side of Éluard’s poetry. The prosody of “L’aube, l’horizon, l’eau, l’oiseau, l’homme, l’amour” brings human relief to this severe and violent poem.’

A poem about the least famous painter of the set provides one of the most significant songs. In the absence of a Matisse this music brings the cycle to a noble close with a poem which transcends its subject and signifies the beauty and power of mankind ‘clearing the woods’, and ‘illuminating the stone’, forever driven to create the art that mirrors the joys and struggle of life itself.

48 Dernier poème
FP163 (December 1956)
Sung by Christopher Maltman; Assez lent et mélancolique

J’ai rêvé tellement fort de toi,
J’ai tellement marché, tellement parlé,
Tellement aimé ton ombre,
Qu’il ne me reste plus rien de toi.
Il me reste d’être l’ombre parmi les ombres
D’être cent fois plus ombre que l’ombre
D’être l’ombre qui viendra et reviendra
dans ta vie ensoleillée.

Robert Desnos (1900–1945)

We have already met the poet Robert Desnos who ended his life tragically in the concentration camp of Terezín. This is his last poem, said to have been written on a cigarette paper shortly before his death and smuggled to his wife Youki—to whom Poulenc dedicates the song. The pathos of this story, whether true or not, threatens to overbalance music which is utterly sincere, delicately melancholic rather than tragic, not perhaps equal to the story and the circumstances of the poet’s demise. The setting has the advantage, even if it is not the greatest Poulenc, of the restraint and dignity typical of Desnos. The gentle sequences of the composer’s late style, contemporary with the Sonata for flute and piano, are attractive and touching, but when a Swiss critic said that it was the best thing that the
composer had ever done, Poulenc’s response was ‘poor him, poor me’. It is left to the pianist and the four-bar postlude to leave ‘a truly tragic impression’ (Bernac), a dark intimation of violence or catastrophe.

46 Une chanson de porcelaine
A song of porcelain

FP169 (March 1958)
Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Andante semplice

Cette chanson de porcelaine bat des mains
Then in pieces begs and dies
Tu te souviendras d’elle pauvre et nue
then in pieces begs and dies
Matin des loups et leur morsure est un tunnel
morn of the wolves and their bite is a tunnel
D’où tu sors en robe de sang
out of which you come robed in blood
À rougir de la nuit
to blush for the night
Que de vivants à retrouver
so many living beings to find again
Que de lumières à éteindre
so many lights to extinguish
Je t’appellerai Visuelle
I will call you Visual
Et multiplierai ton image.
and will replicate your face.

PAUL ÉLUARD (1895–1952)

This is Poulenc’s last setting of the poetry of Paul Éluard, a song composed as a tribute to that great champion of French modern music, the singer Jane Bathori, on her eightieth birthday. In terms of its tonality (it begins in A minor) and style it recalls Juan Gris from Le travail du peintre, without attempting to match that song’s visionary level. It displays an ease in setting Éluard’s words that could only have been achieved after nearly a quarter of a century’s practice. The poem was chosen from À toute épreuve, the collection of poetry with which Poulenc had begun his musical association with the poet in 1935, a full circle that might have been the result of deliberate choice. As Poulenc wrote in JdM: ‘I have taken all that I could from Éluard, Apollinaire, Max Jacob etc …’.
PARISIANA  Songs 1918–1961

This disc, with the city of Paris at its centre, encompasses seven cycles and sets of songs, as well as five single songs (twenty-eight songs in all), to words by Poulenc’s beloved Guillaume Apollinaire, adopted Parisian, but poet of Paris sans pareil. Of the forty-two tracks on this disc all but fourteen are devoted to the poetry of Guillaume Apollinaire, a poet we have already encountered in Calligrammes on disc 2. The first of Poulenc’s cycles, *Le bestiaire*, appears alongside assorted pieces of the composer’s Apollinaire juvenilia, the early Cocteau chanson *Toréador*—as well as the Cocteau cycle *Cocardes*—and Poulenc’s *Airs chantés*, songs to texts of Jean Moréas—the dislike of whose poetry among the younger literary set seems a typically Parisian contempt for la littérature démodée on the part of the jeunesse dorée of the 1920s. Poulenc’s music for these poems is deliberately meant to render the words ridiculous, and the music more or less impossible to perform. However, these settings were so well liked by sopranos that they immediately entered the repertoire. There are tiny cameo appearances by Théodore de Banville and Raymond Radiguet. The disc closes with another Cocteau work written forty-two years after *Cocardes*: *La dame de Monte-Carlo*, a scène rather than a song of course, but written by Poulenc as a recital piece for Denise Duval. We may be sure that this inveterate and suicidal gambler is a displaced Parisienne.

Poulenc’s first songs were almost Apollinaire settings—almost because there is a single madcap chanson, *Toréador*, that is officially the composer’s first work for voice and piano. *Toréador* has a text by Jean Cocteau (1889–1963), whom someone named ‘the spoiled child of the century’. Ten years older than Poulenc, he was very much part of the composer’s youth, an iconoclastic poet who was soon to become an icon and cultural animateur in general. It was the musicians around Cocteau—Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc and Germaine Tailleferre—who were collectively dubbed ‘Les Six’ by the critic Henri Collet. It was entirely natural that Poulenc should have wanted to collaborate with this quicksilver spirit who was ruthlessly ambitious and whose talents seemed limitless. Cocteau was everything and anything he needed to be: playwright, critic, novelist, draughtsman, stage decorator, film director, choreographer. Considering the consanguinity of their sexual tastes and the multiplicity of Cocteau’s talents (the validity and depth of which have always been hotly contested, particularly by the serious Surrealists) it is surprising that Poulenc, a social gadfly in at least part of his being, did not become much more of a Cocteau composer. Even in the early
days we sense that what Cocteau had to offer the composer in terms of verbal inspiration was not enough. Theirs was a friendship of youth, a *tutoyer* relationship that time could not wither, but after *Toréador*, apart from the tiny cycle *Cocardes* composed in 1919, there was no collaboration until two Cocteau works written for the soprano Denise Duval at the end of Poulenc’s career: the one-act ‘tragédie lyrique’ *La voix humaine* (1958) and *La dame de Monte-Carlo* (1961), the ‘monologue pour soprano’ that closes this disc.

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**Toréador**

*Chanson hispano-italienne* FP11 (Autumn 1918, revised 1932)

Sung by Ivan Ludlow: *Allant*

Pépita reine de Venise

Quand tu vas sous ton mirador

Tous les gondoliers se disent :

Prends garde—Toréador !

Sur ton cœur personne ne règne

Dans le grand palais où tu dors

Et près de toi la vieille duègne

Guette le Toréador.

Toréador brave des braves

Lorsque sur la place Saint-Marc

Le taureau en fureur qui bave

Tombe tué par ton poignard,

Ce n’est pas l’orgueil qui caresse

Ton cœur sous la baouta d’or

Car pour une jeune déesse

Tu brûles Toréador.

*Belle Espagnole*

*Dans la gondole*

*Tu caracoles*

*Carmencita !*

*Sous ta mantille*

*Œil qui pétille*

*Bouche qui brille*

*C’est Pépita.*

C’est demain jour de Saint Éscure

Qu’aura lieu le combat à mort

Le canal est plein de voitures

Fêtant le Toréador !

De Venise plus d’une belle

Palpite pour savoir ton sort

Mais tu méprises leurs dentelles

Tu souffres Toréador.

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**Toreador**

*Pépita, queen of Venice,*

*when you appear at your mirador,*

*all the gondoliers say:*

*Look out—Toreador!*

*Nobody rules over your heart*

*in the great palace where you sleep,*

*and near you the old duenna*

*looks out for the Toreador:*

*Toreador, bravest of the brave,*

*when, on Saint Mark’s square*

*the furious bull, foaming at the mouth,*

*falls to the ground, killed by your dagger,*

*It is not pride which swells*

*your heart beneath your cape of gold—*

*it is for a young goddess*

*that you burn, Toreador.*

*Spanish beauty,*

*in your gondola*

*you preen yourself,*

*Carmencita!*

*Beneath your mantilla,*

*your eyes sparkle*

*your lips shimmer,*

*it’s Pépita!*

*Tomorrow, on Saint Escure’s day,*

*a fight to the death will take place,*

*the canal is full of vessels*

*cheering on the Toreador!*

*More than one fair Venetian lass*

*trembles to know your fate,*

*but you scorn their finery,*

*you suffer, Toreador.*
Car ne voyant pas apparaître,
Caché derrière un oranger,
Pépita seule à sa fenêtre,
Tu médites de te venger.

Sous ton caftan passe ta dague
La jalouseie au cœur te mord
Et seul avec le bruit des vagues
Tu pleures Toréador.

Que de cavaliers ! que de monde !
Remplit l'arène jusqu'au bord
On vient de cent lieues à la ronde
T'acclamer Toréador !

C'est fait il entre dans l'arène
Avec plus de flegme qu'un lord.
Mais il peut avancer à peine
Le pauvre Toréador.

Il ne reste à son rêve morne
Que de mourir sous tous les yeux
En sentant pénétrer des cornes
Dans son triste front soucieux.

Car Pépita se montre assise
Offrant son regard et son corps
Au plus vieux doge de Venise
Et rit du Toréador.

Jean Cocteau (1889–1963)

Poulenc makes his song-composing debut under Jean Cocteau’s wing—the chanson was more or less commissioned (without fee of course!) for a Cocteau-inspired ‘Séance’ à the Vieux-Colombier Music-Hall, crossover 1918-style, where it was almost certainly sung with instrumental accompaniment by its dedicatee, the singing actor Pierre Bertin (1891–1984), the husband of the famous pianist Marcelle Meyer. It so happens that he was the exact namesake of another Pierre Bertin (1899–1979) who was later forced to change his stage name (being the younger member of the actors’ union) to Pierre Bernac. Poulenc used to sing this silly song himself, to the delight of his friends, and was eventually persuaded to publish it, doing so only in 1932. It is a strictly strophic creation, in the manner of a popular hit, the refrain sung slower the third time around. The words are sheer whimsy: the story concerns Pépita, so-called queen of Venice for whom the toreador conceives an unrequited passion. In the manner of a Peter Blake montage the bullring is transported to Venice’s Piazza San Marco, gondoliers become Spanish galleons and the oldest doge in the city enjoys Pépita’s favours, all sheer insouciant nonsense, quasi-surrealist.
Apollinaire, a great bibliophile, knew all about the exquisitely illustrated medieval bestiaries; in 1906 his friend Picasso had made some experimental woodcuts of animals. He published eighteen of the eventual thirty poems in 1908 in a review, La phalange, and promised his readers an illustrated edition. Picasso, ever elusive, was otherwise engaged; the poet persuaded Raoul Dufy (whom he had met through Derain, illustrator of Apollinaire’s first work) to provide the artwork, the first of that artist’s many illustrations. Apollinaire casts himself as Orpheus in this work in poems 1, 13, 18 and 24 (all of which are ignored by Poulenc). The work was an artistic triumph and commercial disaster for its authors.

As he was leaving for war service in 1918 Adrienne Monnier handed Poulenc a packet of books which included a later edition of Apollinaire’s work. The composer had already heard the poet read his lyrics, and he fell in love with them, selecting twelve to set to music in Pont-sur-Seine where he found himself stationed.

Having set these twelve poems to music, Poulenc reduced the number to six on the advice of Georges Auric. On learning that Louis Durey, fellow-member of Les Six, was working at the same time on setting the entire collection, Poulenc rather gallantly dedicated his own set to Durey.

2 i Le dromadaire  
Sung by Brandon Velarde; Très rythmé, Pesant
Avec ses quatre dromadaires
Don Pedro d’Alfaroubeira
Courut le monde et l’admira.
Il fit ce que je voudrais faire
Si j’avais quatre dromadaires.

ii La chèvre du Thibet
Sung by Brandon Velarde; Très modéré
Les poils de cette chèvre et même
Ceux d’or pour qui prit tant de peine
Jason, ne valent rien au prix
Des cheveux dont je suis épris.

iii La sauterelle
Sung by Brandon Velarde; Lent
Voici la fine sauterelle,
La nourriture de Saint Jean.
Puissent mes vers être comme elle,
Le régal des meilleures gens.

The dromedary

Track 79
With his four dromedaries
Don Pedro d’Alfaroubeira
roamed the world over and admired it.
He did what I would like to do
if I had four dromedaries.

The Tibetan goat

Track 80
The hair of this goat and even
that hair of gold for which so much trouble was taken
by Jason are worth nothing to the value
of the hair of her I love.

The grasshopper

Track 81
Here is the delicate grasshopper
the nourishment of St John.
May my verses be likewise
the feast of superior people.
Le dauphin

Sung by Brandon Velarde; *Animé*

Dolphins, you sport in the sea,
Yet the waters are always briny.
At times my joy bursts forth
But life is still cruel.

Dauphins, vous jouez dans la mer,
Mais le flot est toujours amer.
Parfois, ma joie éclate-t-elle?
La vie est encore cruelle.

L'écrevisse

Sung by Brandon Velarde; *Assez vif*

Uncertainty, O my delights
You and I we progress
Just like the crayfish,
Backwards, backwards.

Incertitude, ô mes délices
Vous et moi nous nous en allons
Comme s'en vont les écrevisses,
À reculons, à reculons.

La carpe

Sung by Brandon Velarde; *Très triste—Très lent*

In your fish-ponds, in your pools,
Carp, how long you live!
Is it that death has forgotten you
Fish of melancholy?

Dans vos viviers, dans vos étangs,
Carpes, que vous vivez longtemps!
Est-ce que la mort vous oublie,
Poissons de la mélancolie?

The poems Poulenc chose for his published *Le bestiaire* were numbers 10, 4, 17, 19, 22 and 23 of Apollinaire’s collection. *Le dromadaire*, with its marvellous left hand, a less than nimble quintuplet falling to the bass, brilliantly suggests a dour fleet of haunch-rolling dromedaries galumphing through the sands of the world. According to the source of Apollinaire’s story, Gomez de Santistevan, the journey took three years and four months (via Norway and Babylon) but Poulenc keeps the song mercifully short and to the point. The song is a minor relation of Schubert’s *Die Forelle* where a simple piano figuration drawn from nature becomes a memorable motif. The melody of the interlude is a slow-motion variation of the beginning of the *Farandole* of Bizet’s *L’Arlésienne*. The tiny perky postlude, whoopla in deadpan manner, betrays Poulenc’s own delight in the solemn scenario.

La chèvre du Thibet is a love song in disguise with Jason’s Golden Fleece failing to match the infinite value of the beloved’s hair. The piano interlude in bars 4–5 of the song skips rather heavily, goat-like, across the bar lines. The closing cadence shows that Poulenc already knows how to write music of genuine tenderness.
In *La sauterelle* the grasshopper of the wilderness, ennobled by its culinary link with John the Baptist, is the perfect match for the mock-snobbism of Apollinaire, whose self-parodying fastidiousness regarding the social *niveau* of his readers is perfectly captured by the heady, oscillating tones at the end of the song. Poulenc seldom set a baritone more of a challenge in head-voice than in these two bars, right on the ‘break’.

*Le dauphin* gambols joyfully in the sea, a creature clever and good-natured enough to be a stand-in for Poulenc himself who made something of a splash with this cycle. The composer may not yet be *roi de la mélodie française* (Fauré and Ravel are still alive) but with this music he unexpectedly proves himself heir-presumptive—the dauphin in fact.

*L’écrevisse* paints to perfection the forward-sideways-and-backwards movement of a crayfish, now a rising motif in the treble clef, now a descending one in the bass. The use of *portato* in the voice for ‘À reculons’ is an early sign of this composer’s feeling for vocal sensuousness (as is also the setting of ‘mélancolie’ at the close of the next song).

*La carpe* is, in some ways, the masterpiece of the set although so little happens. The sadness of these large fish, moving sluggishly in the pond’s depths, their movement giving rise only to tiny ripples on the surface, is caught in a single page of such atmosphere that, once heard, it is never forgotten. The set is so successful because the voice of Apollinaire, commenting in this allusive charivari of animals with tender seriousness and sincerity (in the manner of the makers of the first medieval bestiaries), is in tune with Poulenc’s. This member of the *jeunesse doré* is amusing, chic, naughty, self-consciously modern, an artistic snob, but this young man undeniably has a heart.

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**DEUX MÉLODIES INÉDITES DU BESTIAIRE**

**FP15b (1918)**

**8 i Le serpent**

*Sung by Brandon Velarde; Très vite*

Tu t’acharnes sur la beauté.
Et quelles femmes ont été
Victimes de ta cruauté !
Eve, Eurydice, Cléopâtre;
J’en connais encore trois ou quatre.

---

**Track 85**

The serpent

*You set yourself against beauty.*
*And what women have been*
*victims of your cruelty!*
*Eve, Eurydice, Cleopatra;*
*I myself know three or four others.*
La colombe

Sung by Brandon Velarde; Très lent

Colombe, l’amour et l’esprit
Qui engendrâtes Jésus-Christ,
Comme vous j’aime une Marie,
Qu’avec elle je me marie.

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

As noted above, Poulenc set six further Bestiaire poems in 1918: of these Le bœuf, La mouche and La tortue have disappeared. La puce was reworked in 1960 as a tribute to Raoul Dufy, and La souris was newly composed in 1956 (see tracks 41 and 40). Le serpent and La colombe reappeared in 1944, not as published works, but as miniatures copied out for a friend. In the absence of an extant autograph of the twelve songs from 1918, it is not clear whether Poulenc changed or revised them as he did so. Le serpent is cast as a mock-seductive cancan in Satie’s cabaret style; the chromatic vocal line of La colombe is woven around a static and strangely hypnotic accompaniment that evokes the cooing of doves. ‘Marie’ refers to the poet’s beloved, the painter Marie Laurencin. The composer was probably wise to cut from his printed cycle a song where requiring singers to intone ‘Jésus-Christ’ in this somewhat facetious context would have lessened the work’s popular appeal.

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COCARDES

Chansons populaires sur des poèmes de Jean Cocteau FP16 (1919)

Miel de Narbonne

Sung by Robin Tritschler; Très vite – Subito très lent

Use ton cœur. Les clowns fleurissent du crottin d’or.
Dormir ! Un coup d’orteil : on vole.
Vôlez-vous jouer avec moâ ? *
Moabite, dame de la croix bleue. Caravane.
Marin, cou, le pompon, moustaches, mandoline.
Cinéma, nouvelle muse.

* Cocteau’s attempt to transcribe a child’s way of saying ‘Voulez-vous jouer avec moi?’

Bonne d’enfant

Sung by Robin Tritschler; Andante

Técla: notre âge d’or. Pipe, Carnot, Joffre.
J’offre à toute personne ayant des névralgies …
Ave Maria de Gounod, Rosière,
Air de Mayol, Touring-Club, Phonographe.
Affiche, crime en couleurs. Piano mécanique,
Nick Carter ; c’est du joli !
Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité.

Nanny

Tecla: our golden age. Pipe, Carnot, Joffre.
I offer to everybody who has neuralgia …
Giraffe. Wedding. A good day from Gustave.
Ave Maria by Gounod, Queen of the village,
Air by Mayol, Touring-Club, Phonograph.
Poster, crime in colours. Mechanical piano,
Nick Carter; that’s a nice thing!
Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.
This set of three songs, originally accompanied by small instrumental ensemble, is an evocative time capsule of popular culture during a certain period in post-war French life—the city’s music halls, the Medrano circus, Marseilles (according to Poulenc), the contemporary preoccupations of the media, somersaults of memory.

Influenced by Erik Satie and his ballet *Parade*, Henri Hell explained that ‘the source of inspiration is the same—the circus, the travelling fairs, with their poetry, tender, mechanical and droll’. Poulenc says that the essential thing is to believe in the words (printed in Cocteau’s *Poésies 1917–1920*, where the three poems are grouped together under the title *Cocardes*), ‘which fly like a bird from one branch to another’. The end of one word is often the beginning of the next—‘Carnot, Joffre’ leading to ‘J’offre’, ‘Un bonjour de Gustave’ juxtaposed to ‘Ave Maria’, ‘piano mécanique’ morphing to ‘Nick Carter’ (a popular American detective serial), and so on; indeed this technique also applies to the titles where *Miel de Narbonne* is followed by *Bonne d’enfant* and so on.

*Miel de Narbonne* is extremely fragmentary with many changes of tempo, a veritable patchwork quilt of experiences and the allusive phrases of yesterday’s century. The child’s invitation to play (‘Voulez-vous jouer avec moi?’) is charmingly rendered by Cocteau into child’s dialect, and this is the key of the cycle—it is a revisiting of childhood memories by a Parisian ‘enfant gâté’. The musical phrases that connect the seemingly arbitrary images of caravan, vanilla, pepper, tamarind jam are the first genuine expression of human (rather than bestial) nostalgia in Poulenc’s songs—moments of luxurious repose that alternate with mock fanfares and winsome coquetry.

*Bonne d’enfant* is a disingenuous Mozartian pastiche (via neoclassical Stravinsky), with many contemporary allusions—it is only when reading Apollinaire side by side with Cocteau that one realizes how superior, and how much more subtle, was Apollinaire’s ability was to synthesize past and present.

*Enfant de troupe* is an enchanting rendition of a circus scene, replete with popular cultural references, Andy Warhol *avant la lettre*. Ushers with trays of sweets and refreshments shout out their list of comestibles during the interval. The most powerful moment in the song is at the end where a trapeze artist crosses from one side to the other of the high-wire in the midst of enormous suspense. The orchestra raucously strikes up at the successful conclusion of the stunt.
AIRS CHANTÉS
pour soprano d’après des poèmes de Jean Moréas FP46 (1927–8)

What could be more chic, more Parisian, more Cocteau-like, than to mock literary icons of the past, and trample on the reputation of a deceased poet, once famous, and now very much out of fashion? This was entirely Poulenc’s aim with Airs chantés, a cycle, or perhaps anti-cycle of songs, during the composition of which he promised himself, as he put it, ‘every possible sacrilege’. It was also partly a game to tease a friend, François Hepp, who genuinely admired the poet. Jean Moréas was the pseudonym of the Greek-born poet Ioannis Papadiamantopoulos (1856–1910). Having already published a collection of Greek poetry in Athens, Moréas came to Paris and made the acquaintance of Verlaine and Mallarmé. He was a man of formidable culture and technical gifts, but the neoclassical purity of his style (he belonged to the so-called ‘École romane’) laid him open to charges of being a latter-day Leconte de Lisle and an emotionless pasticheur. He also took himself very seriously indeed. Poulenc certainly felt that Moréas’s verse was ‘suitable for mutilation’; for the only time in his songs he writes that the work is ‘after’ (‘d’après’) the poems—as if to distance himself from the writer, and from the responsibility of deliberately misrepresenting him. The composer then proceeded to write a set of songs ‘against’ the texts that was an unexpected ‘hit’ with singers and the public. What the poet might have thought of it is another matter.

The poems are taken from different books of Moréas’s Stances (1899–1901). The fact that Poulenc’s four songs were chosen from Stances Books 3–7 suggests that the composer used a collection, published in 1901 (belonging to his parents perhaps), that prints only the last five of those once-celebrated seven books. Air romantique is Book 7 No 4; Air champêtre is Book 6 No 1; Air grave is Book 3 No 8; Air vif is Book 5 No 1. Poulenc clearly hunted assiduously for his prey.

13 i Air romantique
Sung by Ailish Tynan; Extrêmement animé

J’allais dans la campagne avec le vent d’orage,
Sous le pâle matin, sous les nuages bas,
Un corbeau ténébreux escortait mon voyage
Et dans les flaques d’eau retentissaient mes pas.

La foudre à l’horizon faisait courir sa flamme
Et l’Aquila doublait ses longs gémissements ;
Mais la tempête était trop faible pour mon âme,
Qui courrait le tonnerre avec ses battements.

De la dépouille d’or du frêne et de l’érable
L’Automne composait son éclatant butin,
Et le corbeau toujours, d’un vol inexorable,
M’accompagnait sans rien changer à mon destin.

14 ii Air champêtre
Sung by Ailish Tynan; Vite

Belle source, je veux me rappeler sans cesse,
Qu’un jour guidé par l’amitié
Ravi, j’ai contemplé ton visage, ô déesse,
Perdu sous la mousse à moitié.

I walked in the countryside with the storm wind,
beneath the pallid morning, under the low clouds,
a sinister raven followed me on my way
and my steps splashed in the puddles.

The lightning on the horizon forked its flame
and the North Wind redoubled its long wailing;
but the tempest was too weak for my soul,
which drowned the thunder with its throbbing.

From the golden spoils of the ash and the maple
autumn amassed her brilliant booty,
and the raven still, with inexorable flight,
 bore me company changing nothing towards my fate.

Pastoral air

Lovely spring, I will never cease to remember,
that on a day, guided by friendship
entranced, I gazed upon your face, O goddess,
half hidden beneath the moss.
Que n’est-il demeuré, cet ami que je pleure,
Ô nympe, à ton culte attaché,
Pour se mêler encore au souffle qui t’effleure
Et répondre à ton flot caché.

iii Air grave
Sung by Ailish Tynan; Andante con moto
Ah ! fuyez à présent,
malheureuses pensées !
Ô ! colère, ô remords !
Souvenirs qui m’avez
les deux tempes pressées,
de l’étreinte des morts.
Sentiers de mousse pleins,
vaporeuses fontaines,
grottes profondes, voix
des oiseaux et du vent
lumières incertaines
des sauvages sous-bois.
Insectes, animaux,
Beauté future,
Ne me repousse pas
Oh divine nature,
Je suis ton suppliant
Ah ! fuyez à présent,
colère, remords !

iv Air vif
Sung by Ailish Tynan; Presto—très gai
Le trésor du verger et le jardin en fête,
Les fleurs des champs, des bois éclatent de plaisir
Hélas ! et sur leur tête le vent enflé sa voix.
Mais toi, noble océan que l’assaut des tourmentes
Ne saurait ravager,
Certes plus dignement lorsque tu te lamentes
Tu te prends à songer.

JEAN MORÉAS (1856–1910)

Air romantique is a strange and unlikely companion piece to Schubert’s Die Krähe from Winterreise, but a good deal more jolly. The latter fact is entirely to do with Poulenc, writing against the meaning and the sentiment of the words. The song ‘must be sung very fast with the wind in one’s face’, writes the composer. The melancholic flight of the crow is rendered as musically peremptory, and busy, as a humming-bird—a fine little display piece for soprano and pianist alike.
Air champêtre is entirely pleasant as a song, and in some ways its lovely melody and genial piano texture are not at all inimical to the seraphic mood of the text—like a ‘modern dress’ production of a classic perhaps. The delight of looking in the face of the goddess is happily, if not too respectfully, expressed. And then, with the phrase ‘sous la mousse à moitié’ Poulenc, very pleased with himself, plays what he believes to be his most deadly card: in his music, and against all rules of prosody, the line becomes ‘sous la mou, sou la mousse à moitié’ as if the cancan were suddenly being danced on Olympus. Offenbach had done it before, of course, but not quite as malignly as this. To the composer’s astonishment no one was particularly shocked with this sacrilege, and certainly not singers who took it in their stride, delighting in the song nevertheless. On the closing phrase ‘j’ai contemplé ton visage, ô déesse’ Poulenc momentarily, and cheekily, taps into Richard Strauss’s Zerbinetta style.

Air grave is certainly the least loved song in the set, and also the least effective as parody. Certainly Poulenc had aimed to write a setting that was clumsily ‘over the top’ in terms of its histrionics and with its melodramatic appeals to ‘Insectes, animaux’ and so on. A singer determined to make the song ridiculous might be able to do so with a lot of mummery, but in performance the neoclassical grandeur of the music is not nearly as funny, nor as impossible to take seriously, as Poulenc had intended. For the rest of his life he had to sit through any number of perfectly serious performances of this less-than-inspired song.

Air vif ends the set with an explosion of joy, a real success despite its initial intention to shock and irritate. The words do not read particularly well—‘Mais toi, noble océan’ and so on—but Poulenc actually does what he can to mirror the severity of these words and the only real challenge is for the wind-borne voice where the necessary, and tricky, coloratura is easier for some singers than others. The same applies to the piano-writing and pianists with its deliciously deft, quasi-coloratura coda.

QUATRE POÈMES DE GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE FP58 (February–March 1931)
Almost all the remaining Apollinaire settings on this disc were found by Poulenc in the volume Il y a (1925), a collection of Apollinaire’s youthful and unpublished verse, as well as a reprinting of poems that had been written for reviews and ephemeral publications. This kind of Apollinaire—youthful, casual, transparent—was a treasure trove for Poulenc, who found in Il y a the Trois poèmes de Louise Lalanne (disc 1, two poems of which are by Marie Laurencin) at the same time as working on these four songs (the first of which is dedicated to Laurencin).
i  **L'anguille**
Sung by Ivan Ludlow; *Mouv't de Valse à 1 temps*

Jeanne Houhou la très gentille
Est morte entre des draps très blancs
Pas seule Bébert dit l'Anguille
Narcisse et Hubert le merlan
Près d'elle faisaient leur manille
Et la crâneuse de Clichy
Aux rouges yeux de dégueulade
Rényte Mon eau de Vichy
Va dans le panier à salade
Haha sans faire de chichi
Les yeux dansant comme des anges
Elle riait elle riait
Les yeux très bleus les dents très blanches
Si vous saviez si vous saviez
Tout ce que nous ferons dimanche

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ii  **Carte postale**
Sung by Ivan Ludlow; *Modéré sans traîner*

L'ombre de la très douce est évoquée ici,
Indolente, et jouant un air dolent aussi :
Nocturne ou lied mineur qui fait pâmir son âme
Dans l'ombre où ses longs doigts font mourir une gamme
Au piano qui geint comme une pauvre femme.

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iii  **Avant le cinéma**
Sung by Ivan Ludlow; *Très animé*

Et puis ce soir on s'en ira
Au cinéma

Les Artistes que sont-ce donc
Ce ne sont plus ceux qui cultivent les Beaux-Arts
Ce ne sont pas ceux qui s'occupent de l'Art
Art poétique ou bien musique
Les Artistes ce sont les acteurs et les actrices
Si nous étions des Artistes
Nous ne dirions pas le cinéma
Nous dirions le ciné
Mais si nous étions de vieux professeurs de province
Nous ne dirions ni ciné ni cinéma
Mais cinématographe
Aussi mon Dieu faut-il avoir du goût

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Track 94

**The eel**

Jeanne Houhou the nice creature
is dead between very white sheets
not only Bébert known as the Eel
Narcisse and Hubert the whiting
close to her played their card game
And the swanker of Clichy
with the red eyes of the spewer
repeats My Vichy water
go in the prison van
without making a fuss
Eyes dancing like angels
she laughed she laughed
her eyes very blue her teeth very white
if you knew if you knew
all that we shall do on Sunday

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Track 95

**Postcard**

The ghost of one who is very sweet is evoked here
indolent, and playing an air that is doleful too
nocturne or lied in a minor key that makes her soul swoon
in the shadow where under her long fingers a scale is dying
on the piano that laments like a poor woman.

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Track 96

**Before the cinema**

And then this evening we will go
to the cinema

What kind of Artists are they
they are no longer those who cultivate the Fine Arts
not those who go in for Art
poetic art or even music
the Artists are the actors and actresses
If we were the Artists
we would not say the cinema
we would say the ciné
But if we were old professors from the provinces
we would say neither ciné nor cinema
but cinematograph
Dear me we must have good taste
Sung by Ivan Ludlow, *Très animé*

À Strasbourg en 1904
J’arrivai pour le lundi gras
À l’hôtel m’assis devant l’âtre
Près d’un chanteur de l’Opéra
Qui ne parlait que de théâtre

La Kellnerine rousse avait
Mis sur sa tête un chapeau rose
Comme Hébé qui les dieux servait
N’en eut jamais ô belles choses
Carnaval chapeau rose Ave !

À Rome à Nice et à Cologne
Dans les fleurs et les confetti
Carnaval j’ai revu ta trogne
O roi plus riche et plus gentil
Que Crésus Rothschild et Torlogne
Je soupai d’un peu de foie gras
De chevreuil tendre à la compote
De tartes flans etc.
Un peu de kirsch me ravigote
Que ne t’avais-je entre mes bras

**GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)**

*L’anguille* is an implacable *valse-musette* that ‘evokes the atmosphere of a shady hotel’ (*JdmM*). Apollinaire’s ‘Parigot’ (Parisian slang) includes animal nicknames for well-known members of the underworld (*cf* the New Yorker Damon Runyon) and where a Black Maria is a ‘salad basket’ (police van). Bernac counsels singers to avoid vulgarity in performing songs where Poulenc ‘adopts a plebeian accent’, but he affirms that the composer understood, better than most, ‘the dark poetry of a certain sordid Parisian atmosphere’.

*Carte postale* is an acrostic (the first letter of each line spelling the beloved’s name—LINDA) that appears in *Il y a* without a heading; Poulenc gives it the title *Carte postale* because the young Apollinaire had communicated his affection for the sister of his friend, Fernand Molina da Silva, in a series of postcards. This song with its gentle but imperturbable pianism, indolent but not slow, put the composer in mind of the painting of Misia Sert at the piano by Pierre Bonnard. Poulenc dedicated the music to another more modern Linda, Mrs Cole Porter.

The poem for *Avant le cinéma* dates from 1917. The poet was a greedy enthusiast for the new ‘ciné’. Apollinaire ruthlessly parodies the need of ‘old professors from the provinces’ to use fancy terminology to define (and thus make more intellectually acceptable) their fascinating new hobby. (Poulenc’s teacher, Charles Koechlin, was an unashamed cinema addict.) The triplets of much of the song’s accompaniment unwind like a spool in an old cinema projector. Composing the music fourteen years after the poem was written, Poulenc allows himself a postlude that evokes the closing theme of Laurel and Hardy, an ironic after-comment on ‘good taste’.
The original title for the poem Poulenc set as 1904 was *Carnaval*. Writing in 1914, Apollinaire evokes a sojourn—a decade earlier—in Strasbourg where he had been sent on a journalistic mission just before Lent. The speed of the song, one of Poulenc’s whirlwinds, testifies to the poet’s riotous time in Alsace where he enjoyed carnival-time better than in Rome, Nice or Cologne. The name Torlogne (Torlonia) is that of a Rumanian family known at the time for their fabulous wealth. Apollinaire has his fill of the food and alcohol, the famous delicacies of Strasbourg, but the music stops suddenly, and very lyrically, in its tracks (*Très lent, amoroso*) when he realizes that the girl of 1914 who is missing in this historic scenario would have made that delightful experience of 1904 complete. The closing bars of four staccato quavers capture the Gallic sigh, or shrug, to perfection.

**Pierrot**

*Sung by Brandon Velarde; Très vite*

Le bon Pierrot, que la foule contemple,
Ayant fini les noces d’Arlequin,
Suit en songeant le boulevard du Temple.
Une fillette au souple casaquin
En vain l’agace de son œil coquin ;
Et cependant mystérieuse et lisse
Faisant de lui sa plus chère délice,
La blanche Lune aux cornes de taureau
Jette un regard de son œil en coulisse
À son ami Jean Gaspard Deburaux.

THÉODORE DE BANVILLE (1823–1891)

The autograph of this song was recovered from the files of the publisher Salabert and it is highly unlikely that Poulenc intended to publish it. The poet Théodore de Banville (1823–1891), the highly skilled precursor of the Parnassians, was completely outside Poulenc’s area of literary interest. Banville had been set some dozen times by the young Claude Debussy; it was almost certainly Debussy’s skittish setting of this *Pierrot* (composed in 1882 but posthumously published only in 1926 as one of *Quatre chansons de jeunesse*) that drew Poulenc’s attention to the poem—written as one of twenty-four *Caprices* in the manner of the sixteenth-century poet Clément Marot. Jean Gaspard Deburaux was a famous Czech-born mime of the 1830s who created the character of Pierrot as his
trademark. Poulenc’s madcap and unsubstantial song, perhaps written for some party event involving the work’s socialite dedicatee, Marie Laure de Noailles, takes its cue from the Debussy using an updated and more jazzy harmonic idiom.

**DEUX POÈMES DE GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE**  FP94 (May—August 1938)

22  i  Dans le jardin d’Anna
Sung by Ivan Ludlow; Très animé

Certes si nous avions vécu en l’an dix-sept cent soixante
Est-ce bien la date que vous déchiffrez Anna sur ce
banc de pierre

Et que par malheur j’eusse été allemand
Mais que par bonheur j’eusse été près de vous
Nous aurions parlé d’amour de façon imprécise
Presque toujours en français
Et pendue éperdument à mon bras
Vous m’auriez écouté vous parler de Pythagoras
En pensant aussi au café qu’on prendrait
Dans une demi-heure

Et l’automne eût été pareil à cet automne
Que l’épine-vinette et les pampres couronnent
Et brusquement parfois j’eusse salué très bas
De nobles dames grasses et langoureuses
J’aurais dégusté lètentement et tout seul
Pendant de longues soirées
Le tokay épais ou la malvoisie
J’aurais mis mon habit espagnol
Pour aller sur la route par laquelle
Arrive dans son vieux carrosse
Ma grand-mère qui se refuse à comprendre l’allemand
J’aurais écrit des vers pleins de mythologie
Sur vos seins la vie champêtre et sur les dames
Des alentours

J’aurais souvent cassé ma canne
Sur le dos d’un paysan
J’aurais aimé entendre de la musique en mangeant
Du jambon
J’aurais juré en allemand je vous le jure
Lorsque vous m’auriez surpris embrassant à
pleine bouche
Cette servante rousse
Vous m’auriez pardonné dans le bois aux myrtilles

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To be sure had we lived in the year seventeen hundred and sixty
Is it not the date which you decipher, Anna, on this
stone bench

And if by mischance I had been German
but if by good fortune I had been close to you
we would have spoken of love in a vague way
almost always in French
and hanging passionately on my arm
you would have listened to me speaking to you of Pythagoras
while also thinking of the coffee we would take
in half an hour

And the autumn would have been like this autumn
crowned with berberis and vine branches
And I would at times have abruptly made a deep bow
To stout languorous ladies of the nobility
I would have sipped slowly all by myself
during long evenings
beautv tokay or malmsey wine
I would have donned my Spanish coat
to go out on the road along which
will arrive in her old-fashioned carriage
my grandmother who refuses to understand German
I would have written lines full of mythology
on your breasts on the pastoral life and on the ladies
of the neighbourhood

I should have often broken my walking stick
on a peasant’s back
I should have liked to bear music while eating
ham
I should have sworn in German I assure you
when you caught me kissing full on
the mouth
This red-haired serving-wench
You would have forgiven me in the myrtle wood
J’aurais fredonné un moment
Puis nous aurions écouté longtemps les bruits
du crépuscule

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

In setting this exceptionally complex poem (again from *Il y a*) Poulenc came of age, in a way, as a composer of long mélodies. He confessed to having attempted to set the poem in 1931, not having understood, at this early stage, that despite all the different images, the secret of a song like this is that there should be a single and strict unifying tempo. The poem was written in the autumn of 1901 when Apollinaire met the governess Annie Playden in Germany (see the poet’s biography above). It is a kind of fantasy riff (prompted by the couple happening to find themselves sitting on park bench from 1760) of what it might have been like for the young Polish-Russian-Italian Guillaume from Paris and young Annie (Anna) from London, desperately in love, but with no hope of staying together, to have lived together as man and wife as members of the eighteenth-century German nobility. Apollinaire imagines them speaking French in the courtly manner of the time, with him penning verses in the manner of the Anacreontic poets and playing the cruel lord of the manor with the serfs, enjoying a serving girl (or trying to) in the manner of Figaro’s count. He then asks Anna’s forgiveness (like singing ‘Contessa, perdono!’) for his infidelities; a rapprochement is effected in the enchanted twilight of an earlier, less complex age. The dizzying profusion of events conjured by Apollinaire’s astonishingly fertile and quirky imagination inspires a highly episodic song that somehow manages to hang together to enchanting effect. The conversational tone adopted by the narrator is effortlessly grand seigneur, Anna cast as an admiring ‘milady’ who is too pretty to appreciate the significance of Pythagoras. (To be fair to the poet, this is part of his portrait of the *Zeitgeist*.) Poulenc’s response to these discursive verbal acrobatics makes the poet’s castles in the air sound casually, and conversationally, erected on the spot. The narrator’s solitary and pensive drinking is marvellously captured, as is his meeting with his querulous old grandmother, his imagined thrashing of an unfortunate peasant retainer, and his embarrassing indiscretion with the red-haired serving girl. All this activity is planned to lead up to the quietus of a marvellous peroration. All the spikiness and verve of the self-regarding narrative is now smoothed into a nocturnal postlude (‘Puis nous aurions écouté longtemps les bruits du crépuscule’) — music of ravishing tenderness and assuagement. There is nothing like this masterpiece in all Poulenc’s songs, or anywhere else in the French song repertoire.

Allons plus vite

Come along make haste

Track 100

Sung by Ivan Ludlow; Très calme

Et le soir vient et les lys meurent
Regarde ma douleur beau ciel qui me l’envoies
Une nuit de mélancolie
Enfant souris ô sœur écoute
Pauvres marchez sur la grand-route
Ô menteuse forêt qui surgis à ma voix
Les flammes qui brûlent les âmes

And the evening comes and the lilies die
beautiful sky see my suffering which you send to me
a night of melancholy

Smile child O sister listen
poor folk walk on the high road
O deceptive forest risen at my voice
the flames which burn souls
Sur le boulevard de Grenelle
Les ouvriers et les patrons
Arbres de mai cette dentelle
Ne fais donc pas le fanfaron
Allons plus vite nom de Dieu
Allons plus vite
Tous les poteaux télégraphiques
Viennent là-bas le long du quai
Sur son sein notre République
A mis ce bouquet de muguet
Qui poussait dru le long du quai
Allons plus vite nom de Dieu
Allons plus vite
La bouche en cœur Pauline honteuse
Les ouvriers et les patrons
Oui-dà oui-dà belle endormeuse
Ton frère
Allons plus vite nom de Dieu
Allons plus vite

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

It is entirely typical of Poulenc that in Dans le jardin d’Anna he should have composed a song about the companionship of love and marriage, a companionship he was only to know fitfully in his own life. Allons plus vite, on the other hand, betokens something more ephemeral, that search for instant gratification which the composer delicately describes as ‘the rhythm of a felt slipper sliding along the pavement on a May evening’ (JdmM)—and who, he says, knows that better than him? Of course the interests of the sexually greedy Apollinaire are more or less mainstream (with certain arcane tributaries) but sexual addiction admits no boundaries of gender or proclivity, and Poulenc knows at first hand exactly what the poet is talking about—‘Une nuit de mélancolie’, the sense of incompleteness, the futile hopes that yet another exciting chance encounter will lift depression and heal age-old wounds—‘the flames which burn souls’ framed by the most beautiful of all locations, Paris in early summer. ‘There are few poems I “hankered after” more intensely and for longer’, says Poulenc; a true composer longs to write of what he knows, and what he has felt. He made a sketch in 1935 and then burnt it. In 1938 Poulenc discovered the Parisian, Maurice Chevalier-like A major music for ‘Sur le boulevard de Grenelle’ (the cruising-ground of his own youth had been the boulevard de la Chapelle), and then carefully centred the song’s opening pages in A minor (where Apollinaire’s words take on the gravity of Baudelaire) so that the change from the lofty opening to the pavement of Paris comes as a musical surprise. Despite the slow and calm tempo, the music’s solitary quest is driven ineluctably forward by a ceaseless movement of quavers. At the end of the song the poet becomes more specific—he is about to pay a girl for sex, and it is here that comparisons with the composer’s own scenario end. Poulenc writes: ‘I pictured Pauline at the door of the Hôtel Molière . . . Czechoslovakian prostitutes are found there in shiny rubber boots, for a hundred sous.’ What is happening at the end is not clear. A search for a poetic assignation has ended with an impatient transaction; the couple hurry off, but not quickly enough for the client’s liking (perhaps he does not like to be seen in these circumstances). Or perhaps ‘Pauline’ has lingered a moment too long to talk
with her pimp (whom she passes off as her brother, to the incredulity of her client). Come on, the poet says, *come on!* The poetry of erotic expectation is rendered prosaic by the imperatives of desire and the commercial cruelty of the street. So much for your romantic dreams splutters the final left-hand quaver deep in the bass clef—a peremptory and brutal staccato.

La Grenouillère
Poème de Guillaume Apollinaire FP96 (October 1938)
Sung by Sarah-Jane Brandon;

By the shore of the isle one sees
the empty boats that bump against each other
and now

neither on Sunday nor on weekdays

neither the painters nor Maupassant set out

with bare arms in their boats with their women friends
full-bosomed

and stupid as a cabbage

little boats you make me very sad
by the shore of the isle

both Renoir and Monet painted the Grenouillère—a resort on the Seine in the western suburbs of Paris, popular in the late 1860s, where working-class Parisians (the women ‘à grosses poitrines / Et bêtes comme chou’) could swim in a spa, boat on the river, and eat and drink in a floating café—‘Sundays of ease and contentment’ as Poulenc put it in *JdmM*. In 1904 Apollinaire visited the painters Derain and Vlaminck who lived in the area; he passed by the Grenouillère, and saluted, in passing, a once-celebrated watering-hole frequented by the Impressionists and literati more than thirty years earlier. More than thirty years after the poem was written, Poulenc, now at his height as a song composer, captures the poem’s atmosphere with relaxed insouciance—four imperturbable crotchets per bar somehow convey movement within stasis: the gentle undulations of the Seine cradle the bumping and bobbing of empty boats (as depicted—shaded by trees—in the foreground of Monet’s *Les baigneurs de la Grenouillère* in London’s National Gallery). The vocal line unfurls, *molto legato*, gently resigned to the transitory nature of life, a sadness momentarily enlivened by musings about the Renoiresque clientele (bare arms, *décolleté plongeant*, Maupassant) in the late heyday of the second Empire. This is all quintessential Parisian nostalgia. Poulenc admitted borrowing the musical language of Musorgsky (the ‘Nursery’ cycle) for the bars beginning ‘Petits bateaux vous me faites bien de la peine’ but this detracts not in the least from two pages of perfection, an out-and-out masterpiece, and a supremely simple one.

Bleuet FP102 (October 1939)
Sung by Robin Tritschler;

Young man
of twenty years
you who have seen such terrible things
what do you think of the men of your childhood
Tu connais la bravoure et la ruse
Tu as vu la mort en face plus de cent fois
Tu ne sais pas ce que c’est que la vie
Transmets ton intrépidité
À ceux qui viendront
Après toi
Jeune homme
Tu es joyeux ta mémoire est ensanglantée
Ton âme est rouge aussi
De joie
Tu as absorbé la vie de ceux qui sont morts près de toi
Tu as de la décision
Il est 17 heures et tu saurais
Mourir
Sinon mieux que tes aînés
Du moins plus pieusement
Çar tu connais mieux la mort que la vie
Ô douceur d’autrefois
Lenteur immémoriale

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

In Il y a the poem is printed as something of a calligramme—reminiscent of Aussi bien que les cigales in the Poulenc cycle of 1948 (see disc 2). The verse beginning ‘Tu as vu la mort’ is printed diagonally across the page and the rest of the poem is ranged on either side, like opposing sides facing each other in battle. Apollinaire was witness to the war of attrition which sent young men over the top at a certain time of day, in this case five o’clock in the afternoon, to face almost certain death as they struggled to storm the enemy position and take a few yards of muddy terrain. When composing this song Poulenc heard that André Bonnélie, a young soldier from Amboise (whom the composer had known since André was a child) had been killed in action; after he had finished the song Poulenc discovered this was not the case, but he dedicated the song to Bonnélie nevertheless.

As a gay man Poulenc had two ‘types’: masculine and stocky (like his long-time companion Raymond Destouches, a professional chauffeur), and the other, younger and more dependent, like Lucien Roubert with whom the composer was in love during the composition of Dialogues des Carmélites and who died as Poulenc kept vigil by his bedside while completing the moving final scene of this opera. The unknown soldier of this song clearly falls into this second category, a hero who might also have been one of the composer’s fallen angels. Like some of the greatest war poems of Wilfred Owen, Bleuet is a subtly homoerotic work—it achieves its lyricism via the composer’s tender engagement, only at a distance of course, with the young soldier—‘bleuet’ being a diminutive of ‘bleu’, the nickname of an enlisted man due to the blue-grey colour of his uniform. Poulenc wrote a number of Éluard settings that pay tribute to the strength and poetry of heterosexual relationships; it would have been extraordinary if his output had not included at least one song addressed to a ‘Jeune homme’—and this is the only one. Of course it is possible for a heterosexual man to write tenderly of the pity of war and the senseless loss of young men (Apollinaire’s poem is proof enough of this) but Poulenc’s music, uniquely conceived for tenor (all the others for male voice are written for
high baritone) employs an ethereal, youthful tessitura which seems to come from another world where the lover’s caress and the comrade’s salute are interchangeable. In this miniature war-requiem there are moments of determination and manliness (although the composer never forgets the soldier is seventeen and not thirty), but it is the sweetness, the humble readiness to die, the yielding to fate, all conveyed in the music, that break the heart. The final section, a kind of hushed starlit epilogue, is one of the miracles of French song. Poulenc writes movingly of ‘the mysterious moment when leaving the mortal remains in the vestiary the soul flies away after a long, last look at the “douceur d’autrefois”’. It is of course Poulenc himself who glances back at this young man, a hero of ‘la patrie’, a martyr for his loved ones, and the ghost of all the young men the composer has loved and lost—some, like this, in an imagined time and place, and others in real life.

**BANALITÉS  FP107 (October—November 1940) Banalities**
Poulenc was very clear that he thought of this work as a set of songs, rather than a cycle; in this recording the songs are accordingly divided between two singers. The composer put the words together for the set from two sources: poems (iii) and (v), long-time favourites, were taken from the main part of *Il y a*, that important posthumous
collection (1925) of the poet’s works. Poulenc chanced on the texts for songs (ii) and (iv) in October 1940 as he nostalgically leafed through the literary reviews that he had collected in his adolescence: he alighted on *Littérature* for 8 October 1919 where five Apollinaire poems, (ii) and (iv) among them, were published under the title *Banalités*—so violà, now he had four poems to make a set and also a title. He now needed one more song with which to begin the cycle (see below).

### i Chanson d’Orkenise

Sung by Ivan Ludlow; *Rondement, dans le style d’une chanson populaire*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Par les portes d’Orkenise</td>
<td>Through the gates of Orkenise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veut entrer un charretier.</td>
<td>a carter wants to enter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Par les portes d’Orkenise</td>
<td>Through the gates of Orkenise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veut sortir un va-nu-pieds.</td>
<td>a tramp wants to leave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et les gardes de la ville</td>
<td>And the town guards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courant sus au va-nu-pieds:</td>
<td>basten up to the tramp:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>« Qu’emportes-tu de la ville? »</td>
<td>‘What are you taking away from the town?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>« J’y laisse mon cœur entier. »</td>
<td>‘I leave my whole heart there.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et les gardes de la ville</td>
<td>And the town guards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courant sus au charretier:</td>
<td>basten up to the carter:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>« Qu’apportes-tu dans la ville? »</td>
<td>‘What are you bringing to the town?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>« Mon cœur pour me marier. »</td>
<td>‘My heart to be married.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que de cœurs dans Orkenise!</td>
<td>What a lot of hearts in Orkenise!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les gardes riaient, riaient,</td>
<td>The guards laughed, laughed,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Va-nu-pieds, la route est grise,</td>
<td>tramp, the road is hazy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’amour grise, ô charretier.</td>
<td>love makes the head hazy, O carter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les beaux gardes de la ville</td>
<td>The fine-looking town guards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tricotaient superbement;</td>
<td>knitted superbly;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puis les portes de la ville</td>
<td><em>then the gates of the town</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se fermèrent lentement.</td>
<td>slowly closed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)**

Poulenc wanted to open this set of songs with something upbeat and rhythmical as he had already envisaged the contrasting and more serious mood of the closing *Sanglots*. He suddenly remembered, as he relates in *JdmM*, a poem which was ‘a little Maeterlinck in style, that Apollinaire had inserted in a strange and beautiful prose piece entitled *Onirocritique*. In June 1940, marching as a soldier on the road to Cahors [called-up for brief spell before the fall of France] I began to whistle, I do not know why, “Par les portes d’Orkenise”.’ (In the same *Journal* he informs us that Orkenise is a road in Autun leading to the Roman gate.) One imagines, with some amusement, Poulenc—hardly a born soldier—singing and marching in \( \frac{2}{3} \) rhythm. The song has a great vigour and determination—a real folksong flavour from a fairy-tale land with a fortified castle and city gates—which is why the composer referred to Maeterlinck, although this robust music is light years away from Debussy’s *Pelléas* style. The song is at the same time heartless and heartfelt, earthy and other-worldly, typical Apollinaire and typical Poulenc, the composer here at his most confident in guessing how to mirror that poet in musical terms. The slow closing of the city gates is described by the longer note-values of ‘Se fermèrent lentement’ underneath which a grinding bar of
piano music is mechanically repeated three times, plus two further bars leading back to the tonic—as if a key inserted in a gigantic lock were slowly turning, and then clicking shut with a change of tonality. These splendid musical machinations are followed by the spirited coda drawn from the introduction.

ii **Hôtel**

Sung by Sarah-Jane Brandon; *Très calme et paresseux*

Ma chambre a la forme d’une cage  
Le soleil passe son bras par la fenêtre  
Mais moi qui veux fumer pour faire des mirages  
J’allume au feu du jour ma cigarette  
Je ne veux pas travailler je veux fumer  

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

At the time Apollinaire wrote this he was living on the top floor of 202 Boulevard St Germain. Poulenc, in *JdmM*, places the poem, and his musical response to it, unequivocally in Montparnasse. The music is once again in 3⁄8 but the absolute antithesis to the stomping ‘Ronde’ with which *Banalités* has begun, a description of a rare oasis of early-morning indolence in Apollinaire’s hectic life. The tempo is one of infinitely leisurely inhalation and exhalation—music for castles in the air, or rather spiralling smoke pictures. It is these ‘mirages’ that waft in the rhythm of a very slow waltz; the music thus avoids the complete stasis that is not to be found in French music before Messiaen. One can almost hear the self-satisfied stretching of lazy limbs in the piano’s wide-spaced chords, activity within inactivity. The warmth of the early-morning sun, its light somewhat muted and diffused by the window panes and (perhaps) curtains, sets the song’s texture gently aglow in a sumptuous harmonic haze. The sinuous vocal line decadently catches fire in the head-voice on the *subito piano* of ‘J’allume’ as we are spirited back to a time when smoking indoors, anywhere and at any time, was every citizen’s right (in the next song of the set the poet smokes a pipe in the wild outdoors but fails to make smoke rings in the wide-open spaces). The brazenly emphatic ‘fumer’, quite unashamed, comes at the end of the sentence; the postlude in *mezzo forte* chords sets its seal on an act of gently imperturbable defiance.

iii **Fagnes de Wallonie**

Sung by Ivan Ludlow; *Très vite, d’un seul élan*

Tant de tristesses plénières  
Prirent mon cœur aux fagnes désolées  
Quand las j’ai reposé dans les sapinières  
Le poids des kilomètres pendant que râlait  
Le vent d’ouest  
J’avais quitté le joli bois  
Les écureuils y sont restés  
Ma pipe essayait de faire des nuages  
  Au ciel  
Qui restait pur obstinément  
Je n’ai confié aucun secret sinon une chanson énigmatique  
  Aux tourbières humides  

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

**Track 104**

**Hotel**

*My room is shaped like a cage*

the sun puts its arm through the window  
but I would like to smoke to make smoky pictures  
I light at the fire of day my cigarette  
I do not want to work I want to smoke

**Track 105**

**Walloon uplands**

*Overwhelming sorrow*

seized my heart in the desolate uplands  
when tired I rested in the fir plantation  
the weight of the kilometres while blustered  
the west wind  
I had left the pretty wood  
the squirrels stayed there  
my pipe tried to make clouds  
in the sky  
which remained obstinately clear  
I did not confide any secret except an enigmatic song  
to the damp peat bog
Les bruyères fleurant le miel
Attiraient les abeilles
Et mes pieds endoloris
Foulaient les myrtilles et les airelles
Tendrement mariée
Nord
Nord
La vie s’y tord
En arbres forts
Et tors
La vie y mord
La mort
À belles dents
Quand bruit le vent

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

This is a rare description of nature in Apollinaire—and far from Paris. The vitality of the poem makes us realize why Poulenc found the ‘Moss-grown paths’ and ‘vaporous fountains’ of Moréas in the *Airs chantés* so ridiculously pompous and unreal by comparison. The *Fagnes de Wallonie* are a high plateau in the Ardennes, the moors and forests of Wallonia—French-speaking Belgium—visited by the poet in 1899; at the time this was the farthest north he had ever ventured. Part of this region is bleak and dramatic—filled with peat-bogs and gnarled trees. Poulenc fails to mention the song individually in *JdmM*, but he had reason to be proud: these five pages of music are a truly cogent musical achievement, unfolding inevitably, all of a piece, with a clever deployment of motifs. Instead of vertical harmonic sensuality (as in *Hôtel*) the music moves horizontally, like wind sweeping across bare plains; the piano accompaniment, like the vegetation, is denuded of effulgent foliage. Bernac refers to the song as a single ‘great gust of wind’, an impression enhanced by the hocketing nature of the vocal line. Poulenc’s music seldom achieves such organic momentum as this—a roller-coaster ride for the pianist, particularly in the postlude where the accompaniment branches out into three staves. This part of the Ardennes was an important theatre of war in conflicts between France and Germany, but the setting’s mood is neither tragic nor ominous; the young Apollinaire is excited and invigorated by his contact with the great outdoors, so different from the south of France where he had grown up, and the composer enters into the spirit of his delighted explorations.

iv **Voyage à Paris**

*Song by Sarah-Jane Brandon; Très allant, valse à 1 temps*

Ah ! la charmante chose
Quitter un pays morose
Pour Paris
Paris joli
Qu’un jour
Dut créer l’Amour
Ah ! la charmante chose
Quitter un pays morose
Pour Paris

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)
‘To anyone who knows me at all’, wrote Poulenc in *JdM*, ‘it will seem quite natural that I should open my mouth like a carp to snap up the deliciously stupid lines of “Voyage—à Paris”. Anything that concerns Paris I approach with tears in my eyes and a head full of music.’ The composer opts here for a madcap *valse-musette* and the exuberance of the music-hall *chanson*. The style of Maurice Chevalier—with its touches of devil-may-care falsetto—is evoked, as is ‘une gouaille parisienne’, the cheeky humour of Parisians who pity anyone not lucky enough to live in their beautiful city. The most deprived of non-Parisians (when viewed through the prism of big-city chauvinism) live in the ‘paysage morose’ of the French provinces. When Bernac and Poulenc—both inveterate Parisians—were on tour, a train or car ride away from the capital, they made a point of performing this song, deliciously malign, as their final encore.

### v Sanglots

Sung by Ivan Ludlow; *Très calme*

Notre amour est réglé par les calmes étoiles
Or nous savons qu’en nous beaucoup d’hommes respirent
Qui vinrent de très loin et sont un sous nos fronts
C’est la chanson des rêveurs
Qui s’étaient arraché le cœur
Et le portaient dans la main droite
Souviens-t’en cher orgueil de tous ces souvenirs
Des marins qui chantaient comme des conquérants
Des gouffres de Thulé des tendres cieux d’Ophir
Des malades maudits de cieux qui fuient leur ombre
Et du retour joyeux des heureux émigrants
De ce cœur il coulait du sang
Et le rêveur allait pensant
À sa blessure délicate
Tu ne briseras pas la chaîne de ces causes
Et douloureuse et nous disait
Qui sont les effets d’autres causes
Mon pauvre cœur mon cœur brisé
Pareil au cœur de tous les hommes
Voici voici nos mains que la vie fit esclaves
Est mort d’amour ou c’est tout comme
Est mort d’amour et le voici
Ainsi vont toutes choses
Arrachez donc le vôtre aussi
Et rien ne sera libre jusqu’à la fin des temps
Laissons tout aux morts
Et cachons nos sanglots

**GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE** (1880–1918)

The poem was written in 1917 and appeared in *Il y a*. Poulenc composed *Sanglots* in 1940. It is the most Éluard-like of Poulenc’s Apollinaire settings (although it was the populist *Voyage à Paris* that was actually dedicated to Éluard). Two poems are here woven together, or superimposed one on the other—the first written in expansive alexandrines,
the second, more personal, less metaphorical, in octosyllables. To make this internal dialogue clearer for the listener (one may imagine a colloquy between two different personalities, a prophet and a romantic) the versification, as printed above, indents the less expansive of the two metrical strands. It was with the poem’s dual shape in mind that Pierre Bernac used to teach this song, encouraging singers carefully to differentiate two kinds of declamation by obeying the subtle tempo markings and observing the terraced dynamics.

This is one of Poulenc’s longest and most complex songs, with an uncharacteristically extended seven-bar prelude which perfectly depicts the image of ‘calmes étoiles’ and a pedal F sharp that continues for sixteen bars and returns in the song’s closing section. With ‘C’est la chanson des rêveurs’ the music quickens and moves into E flat minor for six bars while becoming less austere and more lyrical (the second of the two internal poems). At ‘Souviens-t’en cher orgueil’ (and for the next sixteen bars) the visionary style of the opening returns with its fantastic imagery of conquering sailors and of Thule and Ophir. The song then returns to more personal and intimate realms, and the somewhat slower tempo, of ‘De ce cœur il coulait du sang’ with occasional vehement interpolations of shards from the first lyric—all this makes the poem something of a seesaw or a jigsaw puzzle (the order of the poem’s lines as set by Poulenc is not definitive—another persuasive solution was offered by the literary scholar J W Chambers in 1953). The song ends movingly in the intimate and heartfelt sphere where Apollinaire’s ability to inspire this composer is unexcelled. It may be agreed that Éluard’s lofty poems (like Tu vois le feu du soir) are better suited to Poulenc’s pronouncements as sage or seer, but Sanglots, in daring to sing of the emotional fragility of the entire human race, is a masterpiece by any reckoning.

### Colloque FP108 (December 1940)

*Pour deux flûtes*

Sung by Robin Tritschler & Geraldine McGreevy; *Modéré sans traîner*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D’une rose mourante</td>
<td>The ennui of a dying rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’ennui penche vers nous ;</td>
<td>leans towards us;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu n’es pas différente</td>
<td>you are no different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dans ton silence doux</td>
<td>in your gentle silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De cette fleur mourante ;</td>
<td>from this dying flower;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle se meurt pour nous …</td>
<td>it dies for us …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu me sembles pareille</td>
<td>You seem the same to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>À celle dont l’oreille</td>
<td>as the woman whose ear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Était sur mes genoux,</td>
<td>rested on my lap,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>À celle dont l’oreille</td>
<td>as the woman whose ear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ne m’écoutait jamais ;</td>
<td>never listened to me;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu me sembles pareille</td>
<td>you seem the same to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>À l’autre que j’aimais :</td>
<td>as the other woman I loved;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mais de celle ancienne,</td>
<td>but that woman of yesteryear—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sa bouche était la mienne.</td>
<td>her mouth was mine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Colloquy (for two flutes)

Track 108
Why do you compare me
to some withered flower?
Love has no virtue
unless it be fresh, spontaneous …
My gaze in yours
finds all that’s good for it:
I see myself quite naked there!
My eyes will erase
your tears which have sprung
from this memory! …
If your desire was born,
let it die on my bed
and on my lips which
will bear your mouth away …

PAUL VALÉRY (1871–1945)                                                                         English translation by RICHARD STOKES
À Francis Poulenc, qui a fait chanter ce colloque

The poet Paul Valéry (1871–1945) was unquestionably one of France’s
greatest poets and men of letters—much admired by both Poulenc
and Bernac. Older than Apollinaire (although published as a young
man in the same literary reviews), Surrealism passed him by—his
great maître was Mallarmé and, building on symbolism, he created his
own modernism. It was a style little suited to Poulenc’s music, but the
composer wrote a single Valéry setting, just as he composed single
settings of Charles d’Orléans, Malherbe, Racine, Anouilh, Colette,
Radiguet and Beylié. Each of these is a fine song, a memorable
dalliance but, for one reason or another, hardly an enduring liaison.

Colloque is also Poulenc’s only duet—although he prefers, in the
manner of many of Schubert’s so-called duets, one voice to follow the
other (in this case tenor followed by soprano) rather than have them
sing together. The poet’s subtitle is ‘pour deux flûtes’ and in the 1942
edition of Valéry’s Poésies the poem is dedicated to Poulenc. The
piano’s quavers in the introduction, an octave apart, are strangely
reminiscent of the opening of the Cinq poèmes de Paul Éluard where
the composer was also feeling his way with a new poet. The poem is
less obscure than much of Valéry’s verse, more of an obvious love
poem than anything Éluard ever wrote, and Poulenc clearly finds this
a disadvantage. He instinctively shies away from anything as hackneyed
as stagey, or staged, romantic lyricism. Accordingly, he keeps the male part of the colloquy lean and serious,
permitting a flowering of romantic emotion only with the entrance of the female voice in the song’s twenty-fourth
bar. It is here that we perceive what Poulenc’s love songs may have been without the strength of Éluard’s poetry—
nearer the immediate sentiment of Les chemins de l’amour than the sublimity of Tel jour telle nuit. There are some lovely, and characteristic, harmonic progressions and an eloquent vocal line, but such approachable music lavished à deux on love’s faded roses, and despite the innate elegance of Valéry, teeters precariously on the borders of operetta; it is surely for that reason that the composer chose not to publish it in his lifetime—the reappearance at the end of the austere opening does nothing to remove the awkward impression of having glimpsed Poulenc denuded of the armoury of literary mystery that rendered his music revelatory rather than sentimental.

**DEUX MÉLODIES DE GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE**

FP127 (September 1941–January 1945)

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**i Montparnasse**

Sung by Sarah-Jane Brandon; Très calme

Ô porte de l’hôtel avec deux plantes vertes
Vertes qui jamais
Ne porteront de fleurs
Où sont mes fruits ? Où me planté-je ?
Ô porte de l’hôtel un ange est devant toi
Distribuant des prospectus
On n’a jamais si bien défendu la vertu
Donnez-moi pour toujours une chambre à la semaine
Ange barbu vous êtes en réalité
Un poète lyrique d’Allemagne
Qui voulez connaître Paris
Vous connaisssez de son pavé
Ces raies sur lesquelles il ne faut pas que l’on marche
Et vous rêvez
D’aller passer votre Dimanche à Garches
Il fait un peu lourd et vos cheveux sont longs
Ô bon petit poète un peu bête et trop blond
Vos yeux ressemblent tant à ces deux grands ballons
Qui s’en vont dans l’air pur
À l’aventure

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

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Montparnasse

O door of the hotel with two green plants
green which never
will bear any flowers
where are my fruits? where do I plant myself?
O door of the hotel an angel stands in front of you
distributing prospectuses
virtue has never been so well defended
give me for ever a room by the week
bearded angel you are really
a lyric poet from Germany
who wants to know Paris
you know on its pavement
these lines on which one must not step
and you dream
of going to pass your Sunday at Garches
It is rather sultry and your hair is long
O good little poet a bit stupid and too blonde
your eyes so much resemble these two big balloons
that float away in the pure air
at random

Poulenc clearly has it mind to write a pair of songs that correspond to ‘A Tale of Two Cities’, Paris and London, in Apollinaire’s own story. The nostalgic poem for Montparnasse was published in 1913. Apollinaire looks back on his youthful days as a penniless jobbing journalist and wannabe poet in bemused reminiscence, greeting and evoking his former self, inexperienced and naive, with an almost romantic tenderness. In music lyrical and wistful Poulenc similarly enfolds in posthumous embrace the blonde and bearded young man whose poetry has long bewitched him and who had turned him into a song composer. Long before Apollinaire’s arrival in Paris from the south of France at the turn of the century, the capital city and its hordes of writers and artists had encapsulated his dreams; even the rather ordinary suburb of Garches seemed suffused with glamour (although he may be referring here to his Sunday
jaunts there in 1912 to visit Gabrielle Picabia—daughter of the painter, and later Résistance leader). Although Apollinaire was by no means ‘a lyric poet from Germany’, he had spent an extended period in that country in 1901; this may be a deliberate (and typical) mystification regarding his origins. For Poulenc the poem is very much Apollinaire-among-the-painters—in *JdM* the composer cites Picasso, Braque and Modigliani as the artists he associates with the Montparnasse of this period. The song is a superb example of the composer’s patchwork-quilt method of composing: he found the music for the phrase ‘Un poète lyrique d’Allemagne’ at Noizay in 1941; the final section of the song was composed in 1943, the first two lines in 1944 and so on. ‘After this’, writes Poulenc, ‘I let these fragments macerate and perfected the whole in three days in Paris in February 1945.’ Poulenc never transposed these passages once he had found the music for them, rising here to the challenge of combining the disparate sections (and tonalities) into a seamless and deeply satisfying whole. This is a song-evocation of a city awaiting its liberation, its great days untouchably golden in the mind’s eye of its two creators; few would disagree with Poulenc’s own verdict: ‘one of my best songs’.

**ii Hyde Park**

Sung by Ivan Ludlow; *Follement vite et furtif*

Les faiseurs de religions  
Prêchaient dans le brouillard  
Les ombres près de qui nous passions  
Jouaient à collin-maillard  
À soixante-dix ans  
Joues fraîches de petits enfants  
Venez venez Éléonore  
Et que sais-je encore  
Regardez venir les cyclopes  
Les pipes s’envolaient  
Mais envolez-vous-en  
Regards impénitents  
Et l’Europe l’Europe  
Regards sacrés  
Mains énamourées  
Et les amants s’aimèrent  
Tant que prêcheurs prêchèrent

**Hyde Park**

The promoters of religions  
were preaching in the fog  
the shadowy figures near us as we passed  
played blind man’s buff  
At seventy years old  
fresh cheeks of small children  
come along come along Éléonore  
and what more besides  
Look at the Cyclops coming  
the pipes were flying past  
but be off  
obdurate staring  
and Europe Europe  
Worshipping looks  
hands in love  
and the lovers made love  
as long as the preachers preached

‘It is a bridging song, nothing more’, wrote Poulenc of this song in his madcap fast style. Apollinaire had visited London in 1903 in futile pursuit of his paramour, the governess Annie Playden. His poem evokes Speakers’ Corner—the north-east corner of Hyde Park near Marble Arch—where freedom of speech encouraged eccentricity and bigotry in an era of hypocrisy. Little girls—one of them called Éléonore—are hurried along by their governesses; young couples make love on the grass as the preachers promise eternal condemnation; in the pea-souper the pipes of the men appear to be the glowing eye of Cyclopes. Apollinaire seems to have diagnosed the Empire’s capital as beset by a fog of insular, and rather wacky, national blindness. In the song’s precipitous speed Poulenc transports Apollinaire’s Edwardian lines into a jazz age suggestive of the frenetic 1920s or ’30s; London’s
popular music is quite different from that of Paris—above all influenced by American jazz. When he wrote this song,
London was full of American servicemen, most of them soon bound for war in France and beyond.

DEUX MÉLODIES SUR DES POÈMES DE GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE  FP131 (1946)

34 i  Le pont
Sung by Robin Tritschler; Très vite, d’un seul élan

Deux dames le long du fleuve
Elles se parlent par-dessus l’eau
Et sur le pont de leurs paroles
La foule passe et repasse en dansant

un dieu c’est pour toi seule que le sang coule
tu reviendras

Hi ! oh ! là-bas

Tous les enfants savent pourquoi
Passe mais passe donc
Ne te retourne pas

Hi ! oh ! là-bas

Les jeunes filles qui passent sur le pont léger
portent dans leurs mains
le bouquet de demain

Et leurs regards s’écoulent
Dans ce fleuve à tous étranger
Qui vient de loin qui va si loin
Et passe sous le pont léger de vos paroles

Ô bavardes le long du fleuve
Ô bavardes ô folles le long du fleuve

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

This is another poem from Il y a which was originally printed as something of a calligramme. Like Montparnasse
the song was subject to ‘long polishing’, as Poulenc puts it in JdmM: ‘I found in 1944, at Noizay the music for the
line “Qui vient de loin qui va si loin”, in 1945, at Larche (Corrèze) “Et passe sous le pont léger de vos paroles” …
I worked again at the whole song in May 1946 and finished it at one go in Normandy in July, during a spell of
rehearsing with Bernac … The day, and that day only, when I solved the problem of expressing intelligibly the
formidably difficult “c’est pour toi seule que le sang coule” (bars 18–21) I ventured to write this song.’ In fact this
delightful piece of gently running water-music is one of Poulenc’s most skilful (and lesser-known) songs. The piano-
writing in this marvellously stitched-together patchwork of happily conjoined phrases is limpidly economic, the
tempo an even and commodious one-in-a-bar, the conversation on opposite sides of the river bank without stress or
undue haste. The composer dedicated the song to the memory of the writer Raymond Radiguet (see below), whom
Poulenc associates with the Cocteau set and golden days in his teens spent at his grandparents’ home on the banks
of the Marne; valses-musettes something like this could be heard in the working-class dance halls and funfairs along
the river bank and instantly became part of the composer’s musical vocabulary.
ii Un poème
Sung by Ivan Ludlow; Excessivement lent
Il est entré
Il s’est assis
Il ne regarde pas le pyrogène à cheveux rouges
L’allumette flambe
Il est parti

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

Un poème appears in H y a opposite Le pont. The brevity of the poem as well as its mystery encouraged the composer to write a single-page musical exercise in avant-garde atonal style—dedicated, appropriately, to the composer Luigi Dallapiccola. The poet that comes to mind here is surely James Joyce, whose Solitary Hotel from Ulysses (much later set to music by Samuel Barber) paints a similarly mysterious scenario. If Poulenc was discreetly making fun of atonality (the final voluptuous C major chord seems positively provocative in that regard) he said nothing that might imply that this song, the size of a postage stamp as he put it, should be sung with anything other than great seriousness. He wrote that he sought to evoke in this music ‘a great silence and a great emptiness’. Apart, that is, from the moment when the match memorably sparks into flame.

* * *

The young novelist Raymond Radiguet (1903–1923) was a post-war literary phenomenon, in terms of his literary precocity a 1920s equivalent (although far nicer) of Verlaine’s lover-nemesis Arthur Rimbaud. His two novels Le diable au corps (1923) and the posthumously published Le bal du comte d’Orgel are stylistic marvels for a writer only just out of his teens. Someone remarked, maliciously, that the bisexual Radiguet knew not only how to use his pen, but his pencil as well. There is no doubt that his liaison with Jean Cocteau advanced his career and his literary position to that of a cult.

Paul et Virginie FP132 (August 1946)
Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Très calme
Ciel ! les colonies.
Dénicheur de nids,
Un oiseau sans ailes,
Que fait Paul sans elle ?
Où est Virginie ?
Elle rajeunit.

Paul and Virginia

Heavens! The colonies.
Bird-nester,
a bird without wings,
what is Paul doing without her?
Where is Virginia?
She grows younger.

Track 112
Track 113
Ciel des colonies,
Paul et Virginie :
Pour lui et pour elle
C'était une ombrelle.

RAYMOND RADIGUET (1903–1923)

The poem is from Radiguet’s only collection of poetry, *Les joues en feu* (1920), and is his commentary on a famous story, *Paul et Virginie*, a Rousseau-influenced novel by Bernadin de Saint-Pierre (1737–1814). The eponymous boy and girl, both fatherless and in love with each other from an early age, are brought up in Mauritius (thus the poem’s references to ‘des colonies’). The author’s *pastorale* is a tragic love story as well as a charming evocation of innocence and purity of heart in a tropical environment, far from the corruption of society.

It is clear that Poulenc’s youthful friendship with Radiguet, and the poet’s unexpected and early demise, had left the composer with a sense of responsibility regarding this lyric. His commentary in *JdmM*—unusually detailed for so slight a song—may be quoted at length: ‘These few lines of Radiguet have always had a magical savour for me. In 1920 I set them to music … at that period, lacking technical control, I ran into difficulties, whereas today I believe I have found the means to progress without any real modulation as far as that sudden pause, that silence which makes the ultimate unprepared modulation into C sharp [in the last four bars] unexpected and as though perched right on the top of a tree … One rainy day a feeling of great melancholy helped me to find the tone that I believed to be right. I think it useful to bear in mind how modern poems are placed on the page. It was this that gave me the idea of respecting the blank space in the printing of the poem before “Elle rajeunit” [bars 11–12] … If the tempo is not maintained strictly throughout, this small song, made of a little music, of much tenderness and of one silence, is ruined.’

PARISIANA

*Deux mélodies sur des poèmes de Max Jacob*  FP157 (April 1954)

The poet Max Jacob (1876–1944), the son of a Jewish tailor, was born in Quimper in Brittany—a very Catholic and almost mystically superstitious area of France, at least in those days. Right from the start he felt both deracinated by, and attracted to, the mysticism and folklore of his natal region. In his twenties he came to Paris and became close friends with Picasso and Apollinaire, who were fascinated by his endless verbal dexterity and sense of fantasy; Jacob, also an able painter, became very much part of the *Bateau-Lavoir* community. In 1909 he claimed that Christ appeared to him in a vision and he converted to Christianity. Jacob’s *Le laboratoire central* (1921) was the source of Poulenc’s cantata for voice and orchestra, *Le bal masqué* (FP60), probably the composer’s most phantasmagorical work. Poulenc was often deemed a combination of *moine* and *voyou* (monk and ragamuffin); Max Jacob was much more so, and to a degree that was almost dazzlingly bizarre. Poet and composer got on exceedingly well. Jacob retreated to a life in contemplation outside Paris in Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire (1921–7), returning to Paris for ten years (during which
period Poulenc's first Jacob settings, Breton in inspiration, were composed, see disc 4), before returning in 1937 to his retreat, where he is buried. Convinced he would die a martyr, Jacob was arrested by the Gestapo at the end of February 1944 and died nine days later, of bronchial pneumonia, at the notorious holding camp of Drancy. The songs on this disc were clearly written by Poulenc partly in affectionate memory of this dear friend who had died in such terrible circumstances ten years earlier.

37 i Jouer du bugle
Sung by Brandon Velarde; Sans ironie, très poétique
Les trois dames qui jouaient du bugle
Tard dans leur salle de bains,
Ont pour maître un certain mufle
Qui n’est là que le matin.
L’enfant blond qui prend des crabes
Des crabes avec la main
Ne dit pas une syllabe
C’est un fils adultérin.
Trois mères pour cet enfant chauve
Une seule suffisait bien.
Le père est nabab, mais pauvre
Il le traite comme un chien.

[SIGNATURE]

Cœur des muses, tu m’aveugles,
C’est moi qu’on voit jouer du bugle,
Au pont d’Iéna, le dimanche,
Un écrivain sur la manche.

MAX JACOB (1876–1944)

Poulenc takes this strange poem, bizarre without boasting the word-music of Apollinaire, from Le laboratoire central (see above); indeed he had originally intended to set it as part of Le bal masqué in 1931. The final verse of the poem—an envoi preceded by the rubric SIGNATURE—casts Jacob himself as the cornet player; mention of the Pont d’Iéna adds an indefinably Parisian glow to the music. The rest of the scenario has to be recounted in matter-of-fact style as if this level of Bohemian madness and dysfunction were an everyday aspect of life in the city. The child suffering from crabs is a relative of the disadvantaged baby described in the earlier Jacob setting Berceuse (see disc 4).

38 ii Vous n’écrivez plus ?
Sung by Brandon Velarde; À fond de train
M’as-tu connu marchand d’journaux
À Barbès et sous l’metro
Pour insister vers l’Institut
Il me faudrait de la vertu,
Mes romans n’ont ni rangs ni ronds
Et je n’ai pas de caractère.

Don’t you write any longer?

Track 114

Playing the cornet

The three ladies who played the cornet
late in their bathroom,
have for master a certain scoundrel
who is there only in the morning.
The blonde child who takes some crabs
some crabs with his hand
does not speak a syllable
he is a bastard son.
Three mothers for this bald child
one alone would be quite enough.
The father is nabob but poor
be treats him like a dog.

Heart of the muses, you blind me,
it is I myself who am seen playing the cornet,
by the Pont d’Iéna, of a Sunday,
a placard on my sleeve.

Track 115

You don’t write any longer?

Did you know me newspaper-seller
at Barbès and under the metro
to persist concerning the Institute
I would have needed courage,
my novels have neither top nor tale
and I have no character.
M’as-tu connu marchand d’marrons
Au coin de la rue Coquillière,
Tablier rendu, l’autre est vert.

M’as-tu connu marchand d’tickets,
Balayeur de double V.C.
Je le dis sans fiel ni malice
Aide à la foire au pain d’épice,
Défenseur au Juge de paix,
Officier, comme on dit office
Au Richelieu et à la Paix.

Did you know me chestnut-seller
at the corner of the rue Coquillière,
I gave my apron back, the other is green.

Did you know me ticket-seller,
latrine-cleaner.
I say it without bitterness or spite
assistant at the gingerbread fair,
defender at the police court,
officer, as it is called office
at le Richelieu and la Paix.

MAX JACOB (1876–1944)

Poulenc went through various crises in his career where he believed himself written-out with no more music in him. For Parisiana he selects two poems that revel in the predicament of the artist who is past his best, almost down-and-out; and the fellow-feeling between Jacob (in this case the opening poem of the collection Rivages, 1931) and the perpetually insecure Poulenc is palpable. The failed writer in this song responds to the question ‘Don’t you write any longer?’ with a list of his various employments—seller of newspapers and chestnuts on the streets, lavatory cleaner and finally washer-up of dishes in the scullery—the ‘office’—attached to the famous restaurant, the Café de la Paix. The bravado with which this recital of failure is recounted is in the great tradition of working-class defiance central to the tradition of popular French chanson. Maurice Chevalier would have been at home here.

ROSEMONDE FP158 (May 1954)

Sung by Brandon Velarde; Calmement

Longtemps au pied du perron de
La maison où entra la dame
Que j’avais suivie pendant deux
Bonnes heures à Amsterdam
Mes doigts jetèrent des baisers
Mais le canal était désert
Le quiav aussi et nul ne vit
Comment mes baisers retrouvèrent
Celle à qui j’ai donné ma vie
Un jour pendant plus de deux heures
Je la surnommai Rosemonde
Voulant pouvoir me rappeler
Sa bouche fleurie en Hollande
Puis lentement je m’allai
Pour quêter la Rose du Monde

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (1880–1918)

This is the only one of Poulenc’s Apollinaire settings to be taken from the collection Alcools (1913). Apart from a tiny fragment from Le bestiaire (see below)—a pièce d’occasion—this is Poulenc’s farewell to the poet who had played such a crucial part in his life as a song composer. The setting unfolds gently and persuasively—at this stage

Rosemonde

Track 116

Long I stood at the foot of the steps
of the house where the lady entered
whom I had followed for two
good hours in Amsterdam
my fingers threw kisses
But the canal was deserted
the quay also and no one saw
bow my kisses found her again
to whom I had given my life
one day for more than two hours

I named her Rosemonde
wishing to be able to recall
her flowery mouth in Holland
then slowly I went away
to seek the Rose of the World

This is the only one of Poulenc’s Apollinaire settings to be taken from the collection Alcools (1913). Apart from a tiny fragment from Le bestiaire (see below)—a pièce d’occasion—this is Poulenc’s farewell to the poet who had played such a crucial part in his life as a song composer. The setting unfolds gently and persuasively—at this stage
of his career Poulenc was an absolute master of unforced wistfulness. As the song was given its first performance in Amsterdam in October 1954, the composer may well have chosen to set this poem with that occasion in mind. The title is perhaps related to the mistress of the English Plantagenet King, Henry II, the same Rosemonde who inspired the similarly mysterious Duparc setting *Le manoir de Rosemonde*; Apollinaire was so well-read in medieval history that it may refer to another famous Rosemonde—this time from Lombardy. There could of course have been a real Rosemonde at some point in the poet’s life (not one of the famously documented lovers), or the name could even refer to Schubert’s *Rosamunde* D797—bearing in mind that this composer was Apollinaire’s favourite above all others.

### La souris  
**The mouse**  
**Track 117**

No 1 of *Deux mélodies* FP162 (September 1956)  
Sung by Brandon Velarde; *Assez lent et doucement mélancolique*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belles journées, souris du temps,</td>
<td><strong>Lovely days, mouse of time,</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vous rongez peu à peu ma vie.</td>
<td><strong>little by little you gnaw at my life.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dieu! Je vais avoir vingt-huit ans,</td>
<td><strong>God! I’ll soon be twenty-eight,</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et mal vécus, à mon envie.</td>
<td><strong>years that are wasted, I fear.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918)**  
English translation by Richard Stokes

This is the first of two small songs written in September 1956—the second of these, *Nuages*, a setting of Laurence de Beylié, is on disc 1, devoted to women poets. In honour of the eightieth birthday of the soprano Marya Freund, a close colleague of his youthful years, Poulenc returned to the Apollinaire collection that had begun his song-writing career. He chose a deliciously apposite verse for someone (himself surely) who could scarcely believe how the years of his life (1918–1956) had slipped away—slowly nibbled by the mouse of time. In my own experience, having first performed this song long before the age of twenty-eight, there was a distinctly Poulencian melancholy in returning to it for this recording, well over three decades later.

### La puce  
**The flea**  
**Track 118**

**without FP number** (9 November 1960)  
Sung by Brandon Velarde; *Lent et mélancolique*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puces, amis, amantes même,</td>
<td><strong>Fleas, friends, even lovers—</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qu’ils sont cruels ceux qui nous aiment !</td>
<td><strong>bow cruel are those who love us!</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tout notre sang coule pour eux.</td>
<td><strong>All our blood is spilled for them.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les bien-aimés sont malheureux.</td>
<td><strong>It’s the beloved who are wretched.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918)**  
English translation by Lauren Shakely

This is perhaps the least known and least substantial of Poulenc’s songs, as well as his last setting from *Le bestiaire* and his last Apollinaire setting of all—forty-two years after the first. It was written in homage to the memory of the painter Raoul Dufy (1877–1953) who had made the woodcuts that had illustrated Apollinaire’s first published book in 1918, the selfsame *Le bestiaire*. The song was published posthumously in 1965 in Marcelle Oury’s anthology in tribute to Dufy, *Lettres à mon peintre*.  

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*La souris* and *La puce* are performed by Brandon Velarde. The recordings are issued under the supervision of Françoise Poulenc and the assistance of the BPIE (Bureau de la Protection des Intérêts Economiques) and the Theodore Presser Company.
La dame de Monte-Carlo
FP180 (April 1961)
Sung by Nicole Tibbels; Lent et triste
Quand on est morte entre les mortes,
Qu’on se traîne chez les vivants—
Lorsque tout vous flanque à la porte
Et la ferme d’un coup de vent,
Ne plus être jeune et aimée . . .
Derrière une porte fermée,
Il reste de se fiche à l’eau
Ou d’acheter un rigolo.
Oui, messieurs, voilà ce qui reste
Pour les lâches et les salauds.
Mais si la frousse de ce geste
S’attache à vous comme un grelot,
Si l’on craint de s’ouvrir les veines,
On peut toujours risquer la veine
D’un voyage à Monte-Carlo.
Monte-Carlo! Monte-Carlo!
J’ai fini ma journée.
Je veux dormir au fond de l’eau
De la Méditerranée.
Monte-Carlo! Monte-Carlo!
Après avoir vendu à votre âme
Et mis en gage des bijoux
Que jamais plus on ne réclame,
La roulette est un beau joujou.
C’est joli de dire : « Je joue »,
Cela vous met le feu aux joues
Et cela vous allume l’œil.
Sous les jolis voiles de deuil
On porte un joli nom de veuve.
Un titre donne de l’orgueil !
Et folle, et prête, et toute neuve,
On prend sa carte au casino.
Voyez mes plumes et mes voiles,
Contemplez le strass de l’étoile
Qui me mène à Monte-Carlo.
La chance est femme. Elle est jalouse
De ces veuvages solennels.
Sans doute elle m’a cru l’épouse
D’un véritable colonel.
J’ai gagné, gagné sur le douze.
Et puis les robes se décousent,

The lady of Monte Carlo

When you’re dead amongst the dead,
when you’re withering in the land of the living,
when everything kicks you out
and the wind slams the door shut,
when you’re no longer young and loved . . .
when behind a closed door
there’s nothing left but to drown
or buy a pistol—
Yes, gentlemen, that’s what’s left
for cowards and bastards.
But if the thought of suicide
makes you tremble like a leaf,
if you baulk at slashing your veins,
you can always take the gamble
of a trip to Monte Carlo.
Monte Carlo! Monte Carlo!
I’ve done with life.
I want to sleep on the bed
of the Med.
Monte Carlo! Monte Carlo!

Having sold your soul,
and pawned your jewellery
once and for all,
roulette is a pretty plaything.
It’s fun to say: ‘I gamble’.
It makes your cheeks flush
and lights up your eyes.
Beneath your fine widow’s veil,
you’ve a fine widow’s name.
Such a title gives you pride!
Crazy, prepared, and wholly restored,
you take out your card at the casino.
Just look at my feathers and my veils,
behold the bejewelled star,
leading to Monte Carlo.

Luck is a woman. She’s jealous
of these solemn widows.
She no doubt took me for the wife
of a real colonel.
I won, won on the twelve.
Dresses then become unstitched,
La fourrure perd des cheveux.
On a beau répéter : « Je veux »,
Dès que la chance vous déteste,
Dès que votre cœur est nerveux,
Vous ne pouvez plus faire un geste,
Pousser un sou sur le tableau,
Sans que la chance qui s'écarte
Change les chiffres et les cartes
Des tables de Monte-Carlo.

Les voyous ! les buses ! les gales !
Ils m'ont mise dehors … dehors …
Et ils m'accusent d'être sale
De porter malheur dans leurs salles,
Dans leurs sales salles en stuc.
Moi qui aurais donné mon truc
À l'œil, au prince, à la princesse,
Au duc de Westminster, au duc,
Parfaitement. Faut que ça cesse,
Qu'ils me criaient,
Votre boulot!

Ma découverte.
J'en priverai les tables vertes.
C'est bien fait pour Monte-Carlo, Monte-Carlo.
Et maintenant, moi qui vous parle,
Je n'avouerai pas les kilos que j'ai perdu
À Monte-Carle, Monte-Carle, ou Monte-Carlo.
Je suis une ombre de moi-même …
Les martingales, les systèmes
Et les croupiers qui ont le droit
De taper de loin sur vos doigts
Quand on peut faucher une mise.
Et la pension où l'on doit
Et toujours la même chemise
Que l'angoisse trempe dans l'eau.
Ils peuvent courir. Pas si bête.
Cette nuit je pique une tête
Dans la mer de Monte-Carlo, Monte-Carlo.

JEAN COCTEAU (1889–1963)

Pierre Bernac retired from the concert platform in 1959. Soon afterwards Poulenc created a duo with the soprano Denise Duval (born 1921) who was to be his recital partner until his death. Apart from Duval singing the leading roles in the composer's two operas Les mamelles de Tirésias and Dialogues des Carmélites, Poulenc was to write three works for her: the role of ‘Elle’ in his one-woman ‘tragédie lyrique’, La voix humaine (Cocteau, 1958), the song cycle La courte paille (1960) which concluded disc 1, and La dame de Monte-Carlo, dedicated to Duval, a ‘monologue for soprano and orchestra’, often performed with piano, and with which Poulenc significantly concludes
his *Journal de mes Mélodies*. The poem is taken from Jean Cocteau’s *Théâtre de poche*, a collection of fourteen small dramas; *La dame de Monte-Carlo* had been written for the singer-actress Marianne Oswald (1901–1985) and recorded by her in 1936, a mannered recitation where only the ‘Monte-Carlo, Monte-Carlo’ refrain (appearing three times) is sung and accompanied by piano.

In *JdmM* Poulenc wrote: ‘This monologue delighted me because it brought back to me the years 1923–1925 when I lived, together with Auric, in Monte Carlo, in the imperial shadow of Diaghilev [the composer was there preparing the première of his ballet *Les biches*]. I have often enough seen at close quarters those old wrecks of women, light-fingered ladies of the gaming tables. In all honesty I must admit that Auric and I even came across them at the pawnshop where our imprudent youth led us once or twice.’ For this portrait of a woman d’un âge avancé, addicted to gambling, down at heel and also fatally down on her luck, Poulenc creates a scène in various sections with a main tempo of Lent et triste—faster, edgier and more nervous at times, but basically sad and pathetic amidst her displays of outrage. The woman is almost stoically set on suicide when there seems to be no other financial option. Poulenc abbreviates Cocteau’s second and third refrains by ignoring the ‘etc.’ written after the words ‘Monte-Carlo, Monte-Carlo’. We might imagine the woman jumping into the sea as she cries out that name, sacred to all gamblers, one last time—the final staccato in the piano signifying a small inconsequential splash. One can certainly see in the background to this choice of scenario signs of the composer’s own depression, his fear that he had written himself out, and that he too was scarcely able to contemplate a future when he was less in command of his powers than he always had been.
FANCY  Songs 1924–1959

This is a disc for a finale, a dazzling gallimaufry of a programme with Poulenc as time-traveller and stylistic magician. Benjamin Britten is often praised for his stylizations, but Poulenc is his match, although in terms of languages foreign to him he can only boast Polish, English (Shakespeare), and translations of Spanish (Lorca), against Britten’s French, German, Russian and lānd Scots. Like Britten in Gloriana Poulenc excels in time-travel with musical inflections that cleverly suggest antiquity while retaining their contemporary focus: settings of Ronsard, Charles d’Orléans, seventeenth-century Chansons gaillardes as well as Racine and Malherbe. As Ravel said, Poulenc invents his own folksongs—specifically Breton in the Cinq poèmes de Max Jacob and more generalized in Chansons villageoises, music that shows just how glamorous the composer found working-class life, an enchantingly idiosyncratic nostalgie de la boue. The Chansons polonaises are evocations of Poulenc’s beloved Chopin, as is the Mazurka for bass, written on the hundredth anniversary of the Polish composer’s death. The disc ends with the composer’s only song in English.

POÈMES DE RONSARD  FP38 (December 1924—January 1925)

France’s greatest Renaissance poet was Pierre de Ronsard (1524–1585), a scholar and reformer of French verse techniques (a member of the famous brigade of poets known as La Pléiade) as well as an astonishingly original artist. Ronsard’s profound studies of Homer, Pindar, Horace and Petrarch were the foundation stones of a new French literature that abandoned medieval literary precepts in favour of the Greek and Roman classics. The poet’s fame was such that he traversed national and political boundaries, writing poems in honour of Charles IX of Spain, Catherine de Medici, Mary Queen of Scots (who sent him a gift from her captivity) as well as Mary’s enemy, Elizabeth I of England. Poulenc set these poems during the four-hundredth anniversary of Ronsard’s birth, but not early enough in 1924 to feature in the special Ronsard number of La revue musicale featuring newly commissioned settings of the poet by Dukas, Roussel, Caplet, Honegger, Delage and Ravel. The dying Fauré had also intended to contribute a song to that collection.

After the success of the ballet Les biches in Monte Carlo in 1924 Poulenc was already a celebrity, and the fame of each of these songs’ dedicateesingers demonstrates that the composer already stood at the centre of Parisian music-making. It was also not every twenty-five-year-old who could persuade Picasso to design a cover, a Klee-like design with lines and dots in the shape of a viol or lute. So why are these Ronsard songs so seldom sung? Perhaps because the composer himself consistently gave them a bad press, and more or less renounced them. He felt in retrospect that the influence of Charles Koechlin, his teacher at the time, was not beneficial. In fact, as Robert Orledge
has shown, Koechlin taught Poulenc a great deal, but the younger composer preferred his earlier *Le bestiaire* style, and saw his Koechlin period, perhaps unfairly, as a deviation from his ‘natural’ self.

i **Attributs**

Sung by Susan Bickley; *Allegro giocoso*

Les épis sont à Cérès,
Aux dieux bouquins les forêts,
À Chlore l’herbe nouvelle,
À Phoebus le vert laurier,
À Minerva l’olivier,
Et le beau pin à Cybèle ;
Au Zéphires le doux bruit,
A Pomone le doux fruit,
L’onde aux Nymphes est sacrée,
À Flore les belles fleurs ;
Mais les soucis et les pleurs
Sont sacrés à Cythère.

PIERRE DE RONSARD (1524–1585)

The poem is from *Les Odes de P Ronsard, Gentilhomme vendomois* (1550). The song’s dedicatee is the soprano Suzanne Peignot, a close friend and creator of the *Airs chantés*. Poulenc acknowledged the influence here of Stravinsky’s *Mavra* but his own insouciance, his ability to create something part serious and part knees-up—a cancan of the gods, Orpheus with an Undertone (of cabaret)—is everything that one might expect of the composer’s ‘naughty boy’ reputation of the time. The implacable, madcap tempo with its B flat minor ritornello and leaping bass notes binds the song together; it was the composer’s own favourite of the set.

ii **Le tombeau**

Sung by Susan Bickley; *Modéré, sans lenteur*

Quand le ciel et mon heure
Jugeront que je meure,
Ravi du beau séjour
Du commun jour,
Je défends qu’on ne rompe
Le marbre pour la pompe
De vouloir mon tombeau
Bâtir plus beau :
Mais bien je veux qu’un arbre
M’ombrage en lieu d’un marbre,
Arbre qui soit couvert
Toujours de vert.
De moi puisse la terre
Engendrer un lierre,
M’embrassant en maint tour
Tout à l’entour :

Pierrot Léger

Pierrot Léger (1881–1955) French artist of the Fauvist movement. His work is characterized by bold, simplified forms and contrasting planes of bright color, often depicting scenes from popular culture, such as music halls, circuses, and café tables. Léger's works often express a sense of dynamism and movement, which is evident in his depiction of Pierrot here.
And may the twisted chain of the vine
embellish my sepulchre,
spreading on all sides
a scattered shade.

PIERRE DE RONSARD (1524–1585)

Poulenc extracted this text from another 1550 poem—verses 3 to 7 of *De l’élection de son sepulcre*, an Ode in twenty-six strophes—and the song’s title is his own. Bernac labels the music ‘laboriously and artificially elaborate’ and it does aspire to the grandeur of the neoclassical style espoused by Stravinsky and others. (And why not? Ronsard is neither a Romantic nor a Modern poet.) As an older composer Poulenc would have better understood the poem’s tranquillity and humility; the music becomes vehement and overheated as if Ronsard had the energy here to throw a tantrum. However, the genuine voice of Poulenc shines through the artifice: when the piano gambols in roulades on the last page that illustrate the verb ‘embellisse’ (pre-echoes of Louise de Vilmorin’s *Violon*) we realize the composer is unable to remain po-faced for long. There are glints of musical inspiration here that amply prophesy the composer’s future in poetry of a different kind. The dedicatee is Marya Freund, the singer associated with early performances of Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire* and whose eightieth birthday Poulenc would honour, forty years later, with *La souris*.

3 iii Ballet
Sung by Susan Bickley; *Très animé*

Le soir qu’Amour vous fit en la salle descendre
Pour danser d’artifice un beau ballet d’Amour,
Vos yeux, bien qu’il fût nuit, ramenèrent le jour,
Tant ils surent d’éclairs par la place répandre.

Le ballet fut divin, qui se souloit reprendre,
Se rompre, se refaire et, tour dessus retour,
Se mêler, s’écarter, se tourner à l’entour,
Contre-imitant le cours du fleuve de Méandre :
Ores il était rond, ores long, or’ étroit,
Or’ en pointe, en triangle, en la façon qu’on voit
L’escadron de la grue évitant la froidure.

Je faux, tu ne dansais, mais ton pied voletait
Sur le haut de la terre : aussi ton corps s’était
Transformé pour ce soir en divine nature.

PIERRE DE RONSARD (1524–1585)

The poem dates from 1555. The ballet danced here is rather more *The Rite of Spring* than a stately occasion at the court of the Valois kings. Poulenc certainly never wrote anything that was more difficult to count, a song full of stuttering rhythmic energy where ‘the river Meander’ menaces rather than charms. With the second verse (‘Le ballet fut divin’) there is a complete change of register where Poulenc’s instinct for whoopla populism asserts itself in a way that seems almost shocking (it is as if Richard Rodgers’s *March of the Siamese children* from *The King and I* were suddenly to appear in the middle of *Les noces*). As if ashamed of these cheery melodic sequences that border on
vulgarity, the composer switches into totally unmelodic modernistic posture for the third verse before providing a new section (Plus lent) of slinky, jazz-like music for the poem’s final three lines with splashy harmonies (laissez vibrer avec les pédales) that add to the impression of an improvised mishmash. The song was dedicated to the Greek soprano Vera Janapoulos with whom Pierre Bernac (a singer as yet unknown to Poulenc) was taking singing lessons.

4 iv Je n’ai plus que les os
Sung by Susan Bickley; Adagio

Je n’ai plus que les os, un squelette je semble,
Décarné, dénervé, démusclé, dépoulé,
Que le trait de la mort sans pardon a frappé.
Je n’ose voir mes bras que de peur je ne tremble.

Apollo and his son, two great masters ensemble,
Ne me sauraient guérir, leur métier m’a trompé.
Adieu plaisant soleil, mon œil est étoupé,
Mon corps s’en va descendre où tout se désassemble.

Quel ami me voyant en ce point dépouillé
Ne remporte au logis un œil triste et mouillé,
Me consolant au lit et me baisant la face,
En essuyant mes yeux par la mort endormis?

Adieu chers compagnons, adieu, mes chers amis,
Je m’en vais le premier vous préparer la place.

PIERRE DE RONSARD (1524–1585)

This is Ronsard at the end of his life, the Derniers vers published posthumously in 1586, and Poulenc rises to the occasion magnificently—it is surely this that is the dark and unacknowledged jewel of the set; that Poulenc dedicates it to ‘Madame [Claire] Croiza’, the most famous mélodie singer of the time, shows that the composer estimated it too, at least at the time of its composition. At quaver = 88 (or crotchet = 44) he never wrote a slower song, and he never chose a darker text—Mon cadavre est doux comme un gant from Fiançailles pour rire seems upbeat by comparison. In this set Poulenc was not yet pasticheur-master of sixteenth-century style (as he was later to become for À sa guitare) but he has caught the bleak and implacable grandeur of Ronsard’s century, an era when a man of sixty could expect to die grateful for a long life. Ronsard, in the grip of terminal illness, describes the physical deterioration that will lead to his death—and we hear death’s stalking tread throughout this music as well as pulse-racing panic (towards the end of the song) that is the response of the hypochondriac composer rather than that of the composed, and dying, poet. The fact that Poulenc completely passes over this setting in his Journal de mes Mélodies seems less a result of musical disdain than of fear, as if the music were somehow jinxed: he had once created
a song that looked into a frightening abyss that he did not care to revisit, particularly when he himself was in his sixties, and felt strange, inexplicable—and accurate, as it turned out—intimations of his own mortality.

To his page

Sung by Susan Bickley; Allegro molto

Fais rafraîchir mon vin de sorte;
Qu’il passe en froideur un glaçon;
Fais venir Jeanne, qu’elle apporte
Son luth pour dire une chanson;
Nous ballerons tous trois au son,
Et dis à Barbe qu’elle vienne
Les cheveux tors à la façon
D’une folâtre italienne.

Ne vois-tu que le jour se passe?
Je ne vis point au lendemain;
Page, reverse dans ma tasse,
Que ce grand verre soit tout plein.
Maudit soit qui languit en vain!
Ces vieux médecins je n’approuve;
Mon cerveau n’est jamais bien sain
Si beaucoup de vin ne l’abreuve.

PIERRE DE RONSARD (1524–1585)

The poem is one of the Odes of 1550; on the opposite page of the Ronsard edition used by Poulenc in 1924 there is the poem for À sa guitare (see below). The lyric is a drinking song of great elegance but the song is extraordinarily bitty, even by Poulenc’s patchwork-quilt standards. Speed and verve, rather than any attempt at organic musical cohesion, are what make the song stick together. The stomp of Russian peasant music ($\frac{2}{4}$ + $\frac{3}{4}$ + $\frac{2}{4}$ + $\frac{3}{4}$ + $\frac{2}{4}$, all within seven bars) is annealed to the romp and insouciant scuttle of the Folies bergères. In this melange the great French poet (albeit posthumously) is made to drink the uncertain health of the devil-may-care 1920s. At one point the accompaniment goes into three staves as if to prove the composer’s avant-garde credentials; the peroration works up a head of steam where ebullience combines with ‘melancholy lyricism’ (Bernac), a rather effective depiction of intoxication. The postlude sounds as if the accompanist, in the grip of delirium tremens, is chasing a chord that continues to elude his grasp. All this is perverse enough to have made Stravinsky proud of his star-struck imitator—in fact the Russian composer could not have cared less. The song is dedicated to the soprano Jane Bathori who was musician enough to have made light of the score’s complexities. As time went on Poulenc came to see this pursuit of chic modernism as injurious to his music but, even if a folie de jeunesse, the work as whole has its saving graces.
Pierre Bernac (who must have taught these songs a thousand times, so popular are they with baritones) made a point of turning his back on the audience and engaging the student-singer in a mock-discreet man-to-man chat, purportedly to reveal the already obvious double entendres of the texts. In this way he conveyed to the public that, yes, the songs were really as rude as suggested by the printed translations, and he was spared any further public explication. The early association between the composer and this singer came to grief as a result of the disinclination of Bernac—a young man much more bourgeois in upbringing than the composer, and initially more innately religious—to extol the virtues of masturbation, both female and male (songs vi and viii), on the concert platform (the composer was later to depict the former with much greater subtlety in the Vilmorin setting Au-delà, disc 1); nearly a decade was to elapse before Poulenc and Bernac re-established professional contact. By this time Bernac was more relaxed and Poulenc was far less of a tearaway.

Why the Ronsard cycle should be so seldom performed, and this collection of scabrous seventeenth-century poems should have remained ceaselessly popular is scarcely a mystery. The poetry is far less good than Ronsard, but this is precisely what appeals to Poulenc—and the result is a much more characteristic piece of music. The texts have a chic literary pedigree of course—they appear in the third and supplementary fourth volume (‘Choix de chansons joyeuses’) of Chevalier Monet’s *Anthologie française* [sic], 1765 (the first volume of which is the source for Mozart’s two songs in French, *Oiseaux, si tous les ans* and *Dans un bois solitaire*). The tradition of *Chansons gaillardes* of this outrageous kind is a time-honoured one in French literature. Singing them on the recital platform is another matter. What seemed deliciously ‘osé’ when I first performed these songs in 1975 is now far less hilarious; ‘épater la bourgeoisie’ was much more fun for Poulenc in 1926 than if he had lived, as we do, in an age of pornographic surfeit. The songs are good despite, rather than on account of, their obscenities. The composer counsels against the smuttiness of ‘knowing winks’ in performance, but those songs in implacable tempi are impossible to distort in such a manner, and it would take an exceptionally bold and vulgar singer to act out the slow ones. What makes this cycle effective in performance is the rhythmic drive of the music, the virtuosic pianism and the welcome fact that the web of motifs of the Ronsard has been replaced by a stream of vocal melody. Poulenc is now writing his own folksongs, as Ravel remarked. The poems, incidentally, are all parodies of contemporary seventeenth-century airs where well-known words were ousted by these suggestive replacements. Although Poulenc pays no attention to the original tunes given in the anthology, his musical means throughout are simple and direct while remaining challenging, especially so far as the accompaniments are concerned.
**6 i La maîtresse volage**  
Sung by Ashley Riches; *Rondement*

Ma maîtresse est volage,
Mon rival est heureux;
S’il a son pucelage,
C’est qu’elle en avait deux.

Et vogue la galère,
Tant qu’elle pourra voguer.

*ANONYMOUS (17TH CENTURY)*

The fickle mistress

My mistress is fickle,  
my rival is fortunate;  
if he has her virginity  
she must have had two.

Let’s chance our luck  
as long as it will last.

This is in the manner of a folksong ‘with a beat’—the prototype of *Chanson d’Orkenise* from *Banalités*. The title of the poem is *Les deux pucelages* but Poulenc preferred to reveal the joke in the song itself. The music veritably crows with the glee of someone who has trounced a rival. Of all the songs in this set it is this one which best suggests a seventeenth-century musical style; the composer takes his cue from Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella* (1920) where the musical past is reinvented in modern terms—in this case like a château on the Loire stuffed with ultra-modern furniture.

**7 ii Chanson à boire**  
Sung by Ashley Riches; *Adagio*

Les rois d’Égypte et de Syrie,
Voulaient qu’on embaumât leurs corps,
Pour durer plus longtemps morts.

Quelle folie!

Buvons donc selon notre envie,
Il faut boire et reboire encore.
Buvons donc toute notre vie,
Embaumons-nous avant la mort.

*Embaumons-nous;  
Que ce baume est doux.*

*ANONYMOUS (17TH CENTURY)*

Drinking song

The kings of Egypt and Syria  
wished to have their bodies embalmed,  
to last for a longer time dead.  
What folly!

Let us drink then as we will,  
we must drink and drink again.  
Let us drink our whole life long,  
embalm ourselves before death.  
Embalm ourselves;  
since this balm is sweet.

The first of two songs in the set about drinking rather than sex—the poems come from Volume III of the same anthology where this one is cast as a duet. Poulenc had already written a part-song of this title for the Harvard Glee Club (FP31). This solo setting, bass-clef weighted and thick of texture, almost too picked to move, suggests a thick head and furry tongue. Ancient Egypt provides a time-honoured justification for inebriation, and the lugubrious blocks of chords suggest a Karnak-like grandeur.
**iii Madrigal**  
Sung by Ashley Riches; *Très décidé*

Vous êtes belle comme un ange,  
Douce comme un petit mouton ;  
Il n’est point de cœur, Jeanneton,  
Qui sous votre loi ne se range.  
Mais une fille sans têtons  
Est une perdrix sans orange.

*Anonymous (17th Century)*

The poem of *Madrigal* has the title of *La fille sans têtons* and again Poulenc invents a new title in order to avoid giving the game away early. The song, a miniature of considerable musical skill with a remarkably agile piano part, is both gleefully cruel and smugly arrogant. One of the least shocking songs in the flat-chested 1920s, it is now this loutish insult which seems more objectionable than the songs with obscene texts. Fortunately Poulenc, the least misogynistic of men, was later to expiate this *folie de jeunesse* with some of the most marvellous music about, and for, women that has ever been written.

**iv Invocation aux Parques**  
Sung by Ashley Riches; *Grave*

Je jure, tant que je vivrai,  
De vous aimer, Sylvie.  
Parques, qui dans vos mains tenez  
Le fil de notre vie,  
Allongez, tant que vous pourrez,  
Le mien, je vous en prie.

*Anonymous (17th Century)*

A mock-serious prayer to the Fates, this song has an in-joke explained to me many years ago by the late Hugues Cuenod (who also invented and sang an obscene parody-text of Poulenc’s *C* to the composer’s delighted amusement). The size of a man’s penis (and this song is his prayer to the Fates to make his as big as possible) is said to have some link with the stretch and span of his hand. Accordingly Poulenc provided an accompaniment built on right-hand tenths—as if the ever-dutiful pianist were demonstrating, or measuring-out, the optimum endowment requested in the text. (It might also encompass a boast on the composer’s own part—he was, after all, the work’s first proud accompanist.) The two-bar postlude in particular is taxing for pianists disappointed by smaller hands—the whole side of the thumb is required to play two notes—A sharp and C sharp—while bridging the gap of white notes between.
**Couplets bachiques**

Sung by Ashley Riches; *Très animé*

Je suis tant que dure le jour
Et grave et badin tour à tour.
Quand je vois un flacon sans vin,
Je suis grave, je suis grave,
Est-il tout plein, je suis badin.
Je suis tant que dure le jour
Et grave et badin tour à tour.
Quand ma femme me tient au lit,
Je suis sage, je suis sage.
Quand ma femme me tient au lit
Je suis sage toute la nuit.
Si catin au lit me tient
Alors je suis badin.
Ah ! belle hôtesses, versez-moi du vin.
Je suis badin, badin, badin.

**ANONYMOUS (17TH CENTURY)**

Another song from Volume III of the anthology, arranged there as a vocal duet. This is certainly the hardest in the set to play, bristling with runs in double thirds and chords that dart all over the keyboard. It is a remarkably exuberant, and even genial, song—mainly about drinking, but including adultery in its boastful list of misdemeanours. Poulenc's madcap energy makes us believe, if only for a moment, that seventeenth-century Paris danced its own frenetic cancan, and that the dancers of the *Moulin rouge* and the *Folies bergères* had entertained Cardinal Richelieu. The composer bridges the divide between the centuries, and between serious and popular music; if we were to hear this song as part of a film about the three musketeers we would not be at all surprised (apart from the sound of a modern piano). For all the musicological impossibilities, it is the reckless spirit of the age that is marvellously evoked.

**L'offrande**

Sung by Ashley Riches; *Modéré*

Au dieu d'Amour une pucelle
Offrit un jour une chandelle,
Pour en obtenir un amant.
Le dieu sourit de sa demande
Et lui dit : Belle en attendant,
Servez-vous toujours de l'offrande. Ha!

**ANONYMOUS (17TH CENTURY)**

A straightforward piece of music this, apart from the high tessitura for baritone and the imagining of the scenarios that might have led to the extended piano postlude and the final surprised 'Ha!'. One can have all sorts of accidents with a candle, especially if already lit; Jeremy Sams memorably suggested, many years ago, that the anonymous recipient of the god's prurient advice might have been the novelist Fanny Burney.
La belle jeunesse
The beauty of youth

Sung by Ashley Riches; Très animé

You should love always
and seldom marry.
You should make love
without priest or notary.

Il faut s’aimer toujours
Et ne s’épouser guère.
Il faut faire l’amour
Sans curé ni notaire.

Cessez, messieurs, d’être épouseurs,
Ne visez qu’aux tirelires,
Cessez, messieurs, d’être épouseurs,
Ne visez qu’aux coeurs.

Cessez, messieurs, d’être épouseurs,
Holà, messieurs, ne visez plus qu’aux coeurs.

Pourquoi se marier,
Quand les femmes des autres
Ne se font pas prier
Pour devenir les nôtres.

Quand leurs ardeurs,
Quand leurs faveurs,
Cherchent nos tirelires,
Cherchent nos touloueurs,
Cherchent nos cœurs.

ANONYMOUS (17TH CENTURY)

Another exciting song, very fast and helter-skelter, where the tradition of the modern French music hall fits perfectly with these texts—racy poems and racing pianism. This is music for a knees-up as well as a leg-over. As in Couplets bâboucques there is a contempt for the institution of marriage, and the title of the published poem, Avis à la belle jeunesse, makes clear that the song is list of dos and don’ts for a younger generation of seventeenth-century rakes. Singers and pianists have enormous fun with this side of Poulenc; before he has become a serious composer with a feeling of responsibility to set his beloved Apollinaire and Éluard, here he is, youthful and unbuttoned, working up an enviable head of steam in favour of the life of the unbridled libertine. For the singer, and certainly the pianist, this is hard work.

Sérénade
Serenade

Sung by Ashley Riches; Modéré

With so fair a hand,
possessed of so many charms,
that you must indeed
handle Cupid’s darts!

Avec une si belle main,
Que servent tant de charmes,
Que vous devez du dieu malin
Bien manier les armes !

Et quand cet Enfant est chagrin
Bien essuyer ses larmes.

ANONYMOUS (17TH CENTURY)
The poem is entitled *La main* (‘The hand’) which was too blatant, even for Poulenc in this mood of defiant obscenity. The song’s title of *Sérénade* (and famous transcriptions for cello and piano) brings its elegance as a piece of music to the fore (a lilting *sicilienne*) rather than the meaning of its text. It makes a rather strange ending to the set, a solitary song for a solitary vice. The double entendre of the poem is obscure enough for the singer to be able to present this song more or less without embarrassment, apart from the self-indulgent (and self-pleasuring) sliding in the closing bars of the vocal line. One cannot help thinking that the previous song would have made a better ender to the set, certainly more upbeat. Perhaps Poulenc intended to imply that when all was said and done, a life of orgiastic abandon was lonely. The melancholy feeling left hanging in the air at the end of the work seems an intentional reflection of his own circumstances—always a naughty boy, but seemingly too often left to his own devices.

**Vocalise** FP44 (February 1927)  
Sung by Geraldine McGreedy; *Andante con moto*

This ‘Air sans paroles’ (as it was known in the Poulenc circle at the time) was one of a huge series of such pieces commissioned, ostensibly for teaching purposes, by Amédée Hettich, singing professor of the Conservatoire, and published by Leduc. In a list of the fifty-nine vocalises for high voice Poulenc takes his place besides such composers as Fauré, Messiaen, Milhaud, Ravel (the most famous of them all—the *Pièce en forme de habanera*) and even the young Aaron Copland. He writes a dramatic and angular piece of high seriousness in B minor which makes considerable technical demands. If it is true that in 1927 he has not yet found his ‘voice’, the singer has to find hers from the very first bar. The music in his occasional *marche funèbre* style—albeit in triple time—reminds us of the earlier *Chanson à boire*. It has a severity and a bleakness that is not at all characteristic of Poulenc’s later vocal works, although the mood of this music makes a rare reappearance in *Le mendiant* from *Chansons villageoises*. This is a far cry from the transparent femininity of the Vilmorin settings; if those later delights might be characterized as Poulenc’s *Così fan tutte* songs, this *Vocalise* (performed several times by Jane Bathori and the composer) brings to mind Gluck’s uncompromising Iphigénie.

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François de Malherbe (1555–1628), born in Caen in Normandy, belonged to the generation of French poets after Ronsard. He was the official court poet of both Henri IV and Louis XIII, remaining also in favour with Cardinal Richelieu. Poulenc’s *Épitaphe* thus explores the deeply serious side of the epoch of the *Chansons gaillardes* and Dumas’ *Three Musketeers*. Malherbe was famous for this literary severity and set himself against the frivolity and freedom of the poets of the *Pléiade*. He was something of a killjoy in fact—although the noble austerity and economy of the lines that Poulenc chose were ideal for the purpose of honouring the memory of his beloved Raymonde Linossier.
Épitaphe  
sur un texte de Malherbe  FP55 (July 1930)  
Sung by Neal Davies; Calmement

Belle âme qui fus mon flambeau,  
Reçois l’honneur qu’en ce tombeau  
Le devoir m’oblige à te rendre ;  
Ce que je fais te sera de peu,  
Mais au moins tu vois en la cendre  
Que j’en aime encore le feu.  

FRANÇOIS DE MALHERBE (1555–1628)

Poulenc never wrote a more austere song than this, and none that looked more like Stravinsky on the printed page; from the eighth bar the accompaniment is laid out in an unnecessarily complex arrangement in three staves with a pile-up of bass-clef chords that adds to a feeling of doleful lugubriousness. The vocal line is also untypical with a succession of difficult intervals; it is as if singer and pianist have been invited to take part in a ritual of grave importance, but first have to decipher the secret of the message to be relayed. Fortunately the poem is a very fine one, short and succinct, and there is no doubt of the depth of Poulenc’s feeling. The result is a profound song in every sense; true to its title this is an epitaph short enough to be engraved on a headstone with every word chiselled in musical marble. In JdmM Poulenc compares the song to a piece of the architecture of Louis XIII and directs that it should be sung without bombast (his italics).

CINQ POÈMES DE MAX JACOB  FP59 (July–December 1931)
Poulenc knew Max Jacob from 1920, as he was very much part of the Parisian avant-garde scene at that time. (See the commentary on Parisiana, disc 3, for a biography of the poet.) The composer found these poems in No 22 of the review Commerce (Winter 1929) where twenty lyrics are printed under the Breton pseudonym of ‘Morven Le Gaëlique’. Poulenc selected five, sometimes changing their titles: Chanson bretonne was simply published as Chanson, as was Souric et Mouric. Berceuse was in fact originally Berceuse de la petite servante, linking songs iii and iv to the same character. In his JdmM Poulenc’s special fondness for these songs, and for Jacob, is clearly expressed.

15 i Chanson bretonne  
Sung by Nicole Tibbels; Rondement

J’ai perdu ma poulette  
Et j’ai perdu mon chat  
Je cours à la poudrette  
Si Dieu me les rendra.  
Je vais chez Jean le Coz  
Et chez Marie Maria.  
Va-t’en voir chez Hérode  
Peut-être il le saura.

Song from Brittany  
I have lost my little chicken  
and I have lost my cat  
I run to the dust bole  
if God will give them back to me.  
I’ll go and see Jean le Coz  
and Marie Maria.  
Go and see Herode  
perhaps he will know.
Passant devant la salle
Toute la ville était là
À voir danser ma poule
Avec mon petit chat.
Tous les oiseaux champêtres
Sur les murs et sur les toits
Jouaient de la trompette
Pour le banquet du roi.

MAX JACOB (1876–1944)

Chanson bretonne is best described by the composer himself: ‘The scene is the market place of Guidel in Brittany one summer morning. A peasant girl recounts, very simply, her misfortunes.’ The middle of the song offers Poulenc’s most extended passage of bird music in his mélodies, a succession of trills and grace notes. Mention of a chicken dancing with a little cat adds an air of unreality to a scenario that in other ways seems convincingly, even aggressively, down to earth—but that is Max Jacob for you. In some ways this is a scene that might have been painted by a Breton incarnation of the Russian Marc Chagall.

Cimetière

Sung by Nicole Tibbels; Sans lenteur
Si mon marin vous le chassez
Au cimetière vous me mettriez,
Rose blanche, rose blanche et rose rouge,
Ma tombe, elle est comme un jardin,
Comme un jardin, rouge et blanche,
Le dimanche vous irez, rose blanche,
Vous irez vous promener,
Rose blanche et blanc muguet,
Tante Yvonne à la Toussaint
Une couronne en fer peint
Elle apportera de son jardin
En fer peint avec des perles de satin,
Rose rouge et blanc muguet.
Si Dieu veut me ressusciter
Au Paradis je monterai, rose blanche,
Avec un nimbe doré,
Rose blanche et blanc muguet.
Si mon marin revenait,
Rose rouge et rose blanche,
Sur ma tombe il vient auprès,
Rose blanche et blanc muguet.

Cemetery

If you drive my sailor away
you will put me in the cemetery,
white rose, white rose and red rose,
My tomb, it is like a garden,
like a garden red and white,
On Sundays you will go, white rose,
you will go to take a walk,
white rose and white lily,
Aunt Yvonne and All Saints’ Day
a wreath of painted iron
she will bring from her garden
of painted iron with satin pearls,
red rose and white lily.
If God raises me up
I will go to Paradise, white rose,
with a golden halo,
white rose and white lily.
If my sailor should return,
red rose and white rose,
be will come near to my tomb,
white rose and white lily.
Souviens-toi de notre enfance, rose blanche,
Quand nous jouions sur le quai,
Rose blanche et blanc muguet.

MAX JACOB (1876–1944)

This is an enchanting waltz of great tenderness, a French Allerseelen (lighter-hearted of course) where the singer envisages herself buried in a country cemetery and visited by her relatives and her sailor lover. Grocery shops near to the cemetery used to sell ready-made wreaths for visits such as these, ‘painted iron and decorated with satin and pearls’ as Bernac describes the commercialism of religious kitsch. This is the kind of bad taste which Poulenc loved to subject, affectionately of course, to the refining fire of his own musical inspiration.

La petite servante

Sung by Nicole Tibbets; Très agité, presto

Préservez-nous du feu et du tonnerre,
Le tonnerre court comme un oiseau,
Si c’est le Seigneur qui le conduit
Bénis soient les dégâts.
Si c’est le diable qui le conduit
Faites-le partir au trot d’ici.

Préservez-nous des dartres et des boutons,
De la peste et de la lèpre.
Si c’est pour ma pénitence que vous l’envoyez,
Seigneur, laissez-la moi, merci.
Si c’est le diable qui le conduit
Faites-le partir au trot d’ici.

Goître, goître, sors de ton sac,
Sors de mon cou et de ma tête !
Feu Saint Elme, danse de Saint Guy,
Si c’est le diable qui vous conduit,
Mon Dieu, faites-le sortir d’ici.

Faites que je grandisse vite
Et donnez-moi un bon mari,
Qui ne soit pas trop ivrogne
Et qui ne me batte pas tous les soirs.

MAX JACOB (1876–1944)

La petite servante is influenced, says the composer, by Musorgsky, but also clearly by the Stravinsky of Mavra and Les noces. Russia here meets Brittany in the almost medieval depth of its faith and superstition. The kind of incantation hurled out at the beginning of the song would not be out of place during an era of witch burnings and ducking-stools. The existence of the devil as a real person with a pitchfork is not in doubt. On the last page, where the girl at last allows herself to dream of something nice—a husband who is not too drunk or abusive—the composer allows himself at last a truly Poulencian turn of legato phrasing and harmony, having become bored with playing at being Russian.
iv  Berceuse
Sung by Nicole Tibbels; Mouvement de valse

Ton père est à la messe,
Ta mère au cabaret,
Tu auras sur les fesses
Si tu vas encore crier.

Ma mère était pauvresse
Sur la lande à Auray
Et moi je fais des crêpes
En te berçant du pied.

Si tu mourais du croup
Coliques ou diarrhées,
Si tu mourrais des croûtes
Que tu as sur le nez.

Je pêcherais des crevettes
À l’heure de la marée,
Pour faire la soupe aux têtes
Y a pas besoin de crochets.

MAX JACOB (1876–1944)

In Berceuse, says Poulenc, ‘everything is topsy-turvy: the father is at mass, the mother at a tavern. A waltz rhythm takes the place of a cradle song. It is redolent of cider and the acrid smell of the thatched cottages.’ This is a companion piece to A Charm (Quiet, sleep!) from Britten’s A Charm of Lullabies: both songs feature the baby-sitter from hell, here a beggar woman’s daughter, not at all enamoured of children. The song’s closing verse has a charming insouciance: she would rather be shrimping, or cooking a bisque, than remain indoors with a disobligingly sick brat.

v  Souric et Mouric
Sung by Nicole Tibbels; Extrêmement vite

Souric et Mouric
Rat blanc, souris noire,
Venus dans l’armoire
Pour apprendre à l’araignée
À tisser sur le métier
Un beau drap de toile.
Expédiez-le à Paris, à Quimper, à Nantes,
C’est de bonne vente !
Mettez les sous de côté,
Vous achèterez un pré,
Des pommiers pour la saison
Et trois belles vaches,
Un bœuf pour faire étalon.
Chantez, les rainettes,
Car voici la nuit qui vient,
La nuit on les entend bien,
Here is another song where, despite the Breton provenance of the poetry, Stravinsky’s Russia and Poulenc’s Paris meet in the middle. The angularity of the opening vocal line suggests mechanical music, the sinister spinning of a spider, and Poulenc admits as much in JdmM—he sees this music as a ‘counting song’ to be delivered as fast as possible. The second half of the song (from ‘Chantez, les rainettes’) is an early example, to an even more pronounced degree than the end of La petite servante, of what might be termed ‘real Poulenc’—one of the composer’s seductive nocturnes where the tempo retreats from the furore of the vertiginous opening, and sensuously chimes with the movements of the stars and the call of the frogs. This is genuinely touching and almost completely original music, with only the ghost of Stravinsky’s Oedipus Rex haunting the music’s calm and radiant gravity.

HUIT CHANSONS POLONAISES (Osiem piesńi polskich)  FP69 (January—April 1934)

These songs, harmonizations and arrangements of Polish melodies, were made by Poulenc at the request of the Polish soprano Maria Modrakowska (1896–1965) with whom the composer-pianist toured Morocco in 1935. It was Modrakowska who chose the songs and provided the notes on their historical background. Poulenc thought her ‘incomparably gifted’ and that she ‘sang divinely’. To his consternation and disappointment, the singer disappeared inexplicably from his musical horizons after this collaboration. Poulenc compared this work with Ravel’s arrangement of Greek folksongs (Cinq mélodies populaires grecques). When writing those arrangements Ravel had a free hand, largely because, as Poulenc put it, he had no ‘ghost of an Athenian Chopin’ to haunt him. The work as a whole is, almost inevitably, a homage to the Polish composer whose music Poulenc so loved. The poems come from the period when Poland was occupied by Russia, Germany and Austria, a baleful state of affairs that gave rise to the Polish insurrection that began on 29 November 1830 (known as the November Uprising) and continued into the autumn of 1831. This was a valiant revolution of patriotic combat and fervour, but it was eventually crushed by Russia because none of the big powers came to the aid of the Poles. It made a difference of course to both Modrakowska and Poulenc that the outcome of this struggle was of crucial importance to the expatriate Chopin; he had left Poland to begin his European career shortly before the November Uprising, and his heart was entirely with his countrymen. His angry disappointment and fury at the eventual victory of the Russians knew no bounds. Poulenc dedicated each song in the set to an important female member of the expatriate Polish community in Paris—including Ida Godebska, Misia Sert, Marya Freund and Wanda Landowska.
Bo w Lublinie są Krakusy,
 Żywże chłopcy i wiarusy,
 ’Nie idź, nie idź Janku,
 śmierć tam groź tobie,
 Czyż ja bez ustanu,
 Płakać mam w żałobie?’
 ’Uśmierz dziewczew we katusze,
 Ja Ojczyźnie służyć muszę.’
 ’Więc ty z sobą razem,
 Zabierz swą dziewczęnę,
 Jak zginiesz żelazem,
 I ja z tobą zginę.’
 FRANCISZEK KOWALSKI (1799–1862)

The poem is by Franciszek Kowalski. It tells the story of the young girl weeping as her betrothed goes to war, joining the army reunited at Lublin. The melody is entitled ‘The young girl and the Krakouss—the soldier from Krakow’. Poulenc’s arrangement is in the two contrasted speeds of the mazurka form. His opening ritornello is one of the most successful Chopin evocations of the set.

ii Odjazd (Le départ)
Sung by Agnieszka Adamczak; Mouvement de Mazurka
Rży koniczek mój bułany,
 Puście, czas już czas!
 Matko, ojcze mój kochny,
 Żegnam, żegnam was.
 Cóż by życie warte było,
 Gdybym gnuśnie zgasił?
 Dosyść, dosyć się marzyło,
 Teraz nie ten czas.
 Zdala słyszę trąb hałasy,
 Dobosz w beben grzmi,
 Rzucam, rzucam słodkie czasy,
 Błogosławcie mi!
 STEFAN WITWICKI (1801–1847)

The poem is by the famous popular poet of the period Stefan Witwicki, friend of Chopin and dedicatee of the Op 41 Mazurkas. The melody used here is a popular song, another mazurka with faster and slower sections. Chopin’s song Wojaka is a setting of the same poem with original music.
23 Polska młodzieź (Les gars polonais)
Sung by Agnieszka Adamczak; Gaiement
Polska młodziez niech nam żyje,  
Nikt jej nie przesadzi,  
Bo jej ręka dobrze bije,  
Głowa dobrze radzi,  
Pogrzebien, zapomnieni,  
Od całego świata,  
Własnych baliśmy się cieni,  
Brat unikał brata.
Niezakub rąk będziemy,  
Piekne tam skonanie,  
Za jednego, który legnie,  
Sto mścił i wstanie.
Zawsze Polak miał nadzieje  
W mocy Niebios Pana,  
On w nas jedność, zgode wleje,  
A przy nas wygrana.
TRADITIONAL

This song, cheekily harmonized by Poulenc, and alternating between fast and slower tempos, was originally sung by enthusiastic crowds at Warsaw’s National Theatre, on 8 February 1831, in honour of General Józef Chłopicki. The first battle in the Russo-Polish war took place six days later.

24 Ostatni mazur (Le dernier mazour)
Sung by Agnieszka Adamczak; Modérément lent
Jeszcze jeden mazur dzisiaj, nam poranek świat,  
‘Czy pozwoli Pan Krak”, młody uhlan pyta.  
I tak długo błaga, prosi, bo to w polskiej ziemi:  
W pierwszą parę ją ponosi, a sto par za niemi.
On coś pannie szepce w uszko, i ostroga dzwoni,  
Pannie tłucze się serdzusko, i liczko się płoni.  
Cyt, serdzusko, nie płoń liczka, bo uhlan niestały:  
O poł mili wres potyczka, słychać pierwsze strzały.
Słychać strzały, głos pobudki, dalej na koń, hurra!  
Lube dziewczę porzuć smutki, dokończym mazura.  
Jeszcze jeden krąg dokoya, jeden uścisk bratni,  
Trabka budzi, na koń woła, mazur to ostatni.
TRADITIONAL

The last mazurka

This song, cheekily harmonized by Poulenc, and alternating between fast and slower tempos, was originally sung by enthusiastic crowds at Warsaw’s National Theatre, on 8 February 1831, in honour of General Józef Chłopicki. The first battle in the Russo-Polish war took place six days later.
Poulenc harmonizes a melody here that was created in the period of the November Uprising, and sung in honour of Chłopicki’s troops as they departed for the front. It remained famous until the First World War where the uhlans, troops of General Józef Piłsudski, adopted it as their theme tune. Piłsudski was the aged, and increasingly despotic, leader of Poland at the time that Poulenc and Modrakowska first performed these songs. The mournful mazurka is marvellous grist to Poulenc’s mill; a number of his songs from here on are tinged with exactly this kind of Chopin-influenced tristesse. The final line, suddenly marked Très vite, comes as something of a surprise.

**Pożegnanie (L'adieu)**

Sung by Agnieszka Adamczak; Mélancolique

Widzisz dziewczę chorągiewkę,
Co przy mojej lancy drży?
Zaśpiewam ci o niej śpiewek,
Ona piekna tak jak ty.
Nie płacz luba, bywaj zdrowa,
Łzy na cięższe zostaw dnie:
Co Bóg sądzi, bywaj zdrowa,
Może wrócę, może nie.

MAURYCY GOSŁAWSKI (1802–1834)

The farewell

Girl, see the pennant
fluttering by my lance?
I’ll sing you its song—
its beautiful, like you.
Don’t cry, darling,
save your tears for harder days,
If God wills, stay well—
perhaps I’ll return, perhaps not.

English translation by OWEN BADZIAK
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This text of fateful leave-taking is by Maurycy Gosławski (1802–1834), famous for his Poems of a Polish Outlaw. At the time of the Insurrection of 1830–31 he had been a member of the Russian army, but deserted in order to become an ‘uhlans’ and join the revolutionary cause. He died in prison in Stanisławów. The poem has twenty strophes of which four are set here. This is one of the two songs in the set (the other is the first) where Poulenc allows himself a postlude; this one is particularly haunting.

**Biała chorągiewka (Le drapeau blanc)**

Sung by Agnieszka Adamczak; Modéré

Warszawianka dla kochanka szyła białą chorągiewkę,
To plaiała, to wdychała, śłą modły do Boga.
Warszawiaczek zrzucił fraczek
Przeciw cara jest czamara,
Kulka w rurke, proch w panewkę,
I dalej na wroga.

RAJNOLD SUCHODOLSKI (1804–1831)

The white pennant

The Warsaw girl sewed a pennant for her love,
crying, sighing, praying to God.
The Warsaw boy threw off his frock-coat
and donned a greatcoat to fight the czar;
A ball in the musket, powder in the pan,
and off to fight the foe!

English translation by OWEN BADZIAK
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Rajnold Suchodolski (1804–1831), the poet of this text, was the younger brother of January Suchodolski (1797–1875), who was a famous painter of military pictures. Rajnold was one of the many talented and idealistic young Poles who lost their lives in the November Uprising.
After six songs connected with the November Uprising, Modrakowska appends two folksongs to this set of arrangements and harmonizations. This is a song in honour of the Vistula, the longest and most important of Poland’s rivers, passing through many towns on its way to the Baltic, including both Krakow and Warsaw. The song from Krakow was popular with all Polish schoolchildren of the time, and the singer on this disc remembered it from her own childhood.

This is perhaps the most original arrangement of the set—for the first page the vocal line is harmonized by a single line of piano-writing. The melody is a peasant song from Polish Silesia and Poulenc brings to it a haunting modernity that is lacking from the other songs that are, after all, character pieces from a definite historical epoch. Chopin and his style simply had to be present in music from a period where he was almost an active participant in the political events of the time. But here, Chopin plays no role. This is the song that brings to mind the folksong-arranger Ravel with whom Poulenc compared himself in JdmM.
À sa guitare  FP79 (September 1935)

Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Calme et mélancolique

Ma guitare, je te chante
Par qui seule je déçois,
Je déçois, je romps, j’enchante
Les amours que je reçois.

Au son de ton harmonie
Je rafraîchis ma chaleur,
Ma chaleur flamme infinie
Naissante d’un beau malheur.

PIERRE DE RONSARD (1524–1585)

To her guitar

My guitar, I sing to you
through whom alone I deceive,
I deceive, I break off, I enchant
the loves that I receive.

At the sound of your harmony
I refresh my ardour,
the infinite flame of my ardour
born of a beautiful sorrow.

We have already encountered the famous singing actress Yvonne Printemps in Les chemins de l’amour (disc 2) from Jean Anouilh’s Léocadia. Her first collaboration with Poulenc was in a play entitled Margot (see left for work’s cover) by Édouard Bourdet (1887–1945). Both Poulenc and Georges Auric provided music for this production which was about the remarkable Queen Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549), sister of the first Valois king, François 1er. She was a key cultural figure in the French Renaissance and considered to be one of the first modern women. Each composer wrote a song for Printemps, and both set words of Ronsard. In addition Poulenc wrote seven short pieces of incidental music, inspired by the Livre de danseries of Claude Gervais (circa 1550), which were published as Suite française FP80, either for piano or small orchestra.

In the ten years since composing his Poèmes de Ronsard Poulenc has changed as a song composer, and no longer feels the need to prove his credentials as an important modernist. For the final scene of Bourdet’s play he is content to write a song of mournful ennui, a sixteenth-century pastiche certainly (the composer confessed that he had thought of the fifteenth-century Château of Plessis-les-tours when writing it), but with a memorable melody and full of personal feeling. (Eighteen years later Benjamin Britten was to write a similarly haunting evocation—the second lute song of the Earl of Essex from Gloriana.) Ronsard’s wonderful poem with this title is in thirteen strophes; sadly, but understandably, Poulenc selects only the first and third, the first verse appearing twice in an ABA structure, framed by a prelude and postlude suggesting the twanging of lute strings.

* * *
Charles d’Orléans (1394–1465) was nephew of the French King Charles VI, a prince of the blood, and perhaps the best of the fifteenth-century *poètes courtois*. This scholar and gentleman had the great misfortune to be captured by the English at Agincourt in 1415 and spent twenty-five years in England as a prisoner of war (in various castles, including the Tower of London). He began writing verse in captivity (*Livre de la prison*) and continued to do so after his return to France where he made his residence at Blois a centre of literary activity. Three of his rondels were set by Debussy in 1904.

Poulenc found this poem reprinted in *Le Figaro* of 29 September 1938, thus exactly at the time of the Munich crisis when the whole world was on tenterhooks, fearing imminent war with Germany. In fact, the poem as quoted in the newspaper was only the first ten lines of a fifty-line *Ballade* with a five-line envoi, but it was sufficient for the composer’s purposes. Poulenc wrote a song, fervent and grave, inspired by his own *Litanies à la vierge noire*. It was a prayer that worked at the time, but sadly only temporarily. In *JdmM* Poulenc confessed that it was the faith on his father’s side of the family that had inspired him: ‘All my religious music sits back on the style that is inspired in me by Paris and its outskirts. When I pray it is the native of Aveyron who reawakens in me. This is evidence of heredity. Faith is strong in all the Poulencs … it is a prayer to be spoken in a country church.’ The hieratic song in 5 has an introduction in stately crotchets, a pulse continued throughout the song which seems much slower than the metronome marking. The music transcends pastiche, although the musical rigours of the poet’s own epoch are not lost on the composer. There was a perfect reason for writing this song, and this was a perfect poem by a medieval prisoner of war that utterly reflected the concerns of the contemporary world in 1938. Perhaps it is no surprise therefore that this is a work that achieves a perfection of its own. Composer and poet make time stand still in every way; one cannot imagine a single note different.

* * *
The aim of Maurice Fombeure (1906–1981) was to ‘refresh’ poetry and give it a ‘new virginity’. He wanted to ‘wash it, brush it up, take it for a walk in the grass, in the wind and the woods. Let’s listen to our hearts— the head has played its part and failed—we now need a little freshness on earth, poetry made of drops of water.’ In order to achieve this Fombeure invested his work with the wit and energy of popular music and old folksongs. In his nautically titled *Chansons de la grande bune* (‘Songs of the maintop’, 1942) Poulenc found poems ideal for his purposes. The poems are divided into two sections: the first, *Chansons de la grande mer*, is concerned with sailors and life on the ocean wave; the second is *Chansons de la petite terre*, eleven poems in the style of country folksongs on dry land, six of which Poulenc set to music. In *JdmM* he writes: ‘The texts by Fombeure evoke the Morvan where I have spent such wonderful summers! It is through nostalgia for the surroundings of Autun that I have composed this collection.’ This music comes across as a defiant celebration of the French way of life impervious to the German occupation.

Poulenc conceived *Chansons villageoises* as an orchestral cycle with quite a large percussion section, and it was first sung by Roger Bourdin in 1943 rather than by Pierre Bernac. The composer had envisaged a ‘heavy Verdi baritone (Iago)’ but later admitted that this momentary ‘infidelity’ to his favourite singer had been a mistake. Bernac recorded the piano-accompanied version of the cycle with the composer, perhaps because the vocal requirements of the set—subtlety of colour and diction, the ability to negotiate piano singing in the heights of the *passaggio*—are hardly associated with a heavy operatic voice. These mélodies, clever stylizations of *chansons*, are among Poulenc’s most diverting pieces of musical conjuring.

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31 Chansons du clair-tamis
Sung by Christopher Maltman; *Très gai et très vite*

Où le bedeau a passé
Dans les papavéracées
Où le bedeau a passé
Passera le marquillier
Notre vidame est mort
Les jolis yeux l’ont tué
Pleurons son heureux sort
En terre et enterré
Et la croix de Lorraine
Sur son pourpoint doré

---

Songs of the clear sieve

Track 150

Where the beadle has gone by
among the poppies
our lord and master is dead
pretty eyes have killed him
let us weep for his happy lot
in earth and buried
and the cross of Lorraine
on his gilded doublet
Henri Hell wrote that in these songs ‘the shrewdness of the peasant emerges’, the same shrewdness in relation to the German enemy during the war as to his survival in a feudal society since time immemorial. In both cases peasants pay minimum lip-service to those who wield power, and then disregard and covertly undermine them. In this poem the village’s bigwig, lord of the manor, has died (perhaps as a result of sexual excess); it doesn’t seem as if he was liked, much less loved. His death and ceremonial funeral (Saturday) will be followed by joyous dancing at the village fête (Sunday). Life goes on. The imagery here is almost surreal, and certainly Fombeure flirted with the surrealists, but the incongruous juxtapositions here are the result of the ‘little people’ determined to live their lives to the full. The music is an irrepressible onslaught of quixotic individualism. Vive la France!

**32**  
**ii Les gars qui vont à la fête**  
Sung by Christopher Maltman; *Follement animé et gai*  
Les gars qui vont à la fête  
Ont mis la fleur au chapeau  
Pour y boire chopinette  
Y goûter le vin nouveau  
Y tirer la carabine  
Y sucer le berlingot  
Les gars qui vont à la fête  
Ont mis la fleur au chapeau  
Sont rasés à la cuiller  
Sont racés dessous la peau  

They have laid him in the grass  
his great sword under him  
a bird in the branches  
cried: ‘Cuckoo’  
It is Sunday tomorrow  
it is the day of our fair  
To the sound of the clarinet  
the cornet in the lower part  
the local wine, the accordion  
the old folk are the most tipsy  
Grandma with her spectacles askew  
on her twenty-year-old legs  
let the springtime come my sweet  
let springtime come  
Where the frog has gone by  
down among the buttercups  
where the frog has gone by  
the beetle will go.
Ont passé la blouse neuve
Le faux-col en cellulo
Les gars qui vont à la fête
Ont mis la fleur au chapeau
Y faire danser les filles
Chez Julien le violoneur
Des polkas et des quadrilles
Et le pas des patineurs
Le piston la clarinette
Attendrissent les costauds
Les gars qui vont à la fête
Ont mis la fleur au chapeau
Quand ils ont bu, se disputent
Et se cognent sur la peau
Puis vont culbuter les filles
Au fossé sous les ormeaux
Les gars qui vont à la fête
Ont mis la fleur au chapeau
Reboivent puis se rebattent
Jusqu’au chant du premier jô
Le lendemain on en trouve
Sont couchés dans le ruisseau
Les gars qui vont à la fête
Ont mis la fleur au chapeau.

MAURICE FOMBEURE (1906–1981)

The young working-class men, ‘strapping fellows’ with flowers stuck in their hats, have come to dance at the village fair having scrupulously prepared themselves for their weekly outing. In JdnM Poulenc (who clearly finds them both attractive and touching) imagines them ‘rasés à la cuiller’—shaved to the underskin, and doused with ‘the common odour of Sunday aftershave’ as they dance at Julien the fiddler’s. The dance takes place in a marquee that mirrors bourgeois opulence: ‘In the Morvan it is possible to buy portable ballrooms with polished floors, crochet curtains, plush seats, copper candelabras.’ Poulenc provides music that Bernac describes as having a certain ‘truculence’ and ‘a certain peasant coarseness (quite different from Parisian slang)’. How different this is musically from the Butterworth-Housman Gloucestershire gathering, The lads in their hundreds, but something of a similar occasion is described. The French knees-up sounds far more fun, although there is a sexual undertone in both poems. Poulenc relishes occasions such as these where drink unbuttons inhibitions in unexpected ways. The music manages to sound both deft and clumsy—meticulous, and at the same time casual. Once again, vive la France!
C'est le joli printemps
It is pretty springtime

Qui fait sortir les filles
bringing the maidens out of doors
Qui fait briller le temps
making the weather sunshiny

J'y vais à la fontaine
I am going to the fountain
C'est le joli printemps
it is pretty springtime
Trouver celle qui m'aime
the one who loves me
Celle que j'aime tant
the one I love so much
C'est dans le mois d'avril
It is in the month of April
Qu'on promet pour longtemps
that a lasting promise is given
C'est le joli printemps
it is pretty springtime
Qui fait sortir les filles
that brings the maidens out of doors

La fille et le galant
The lass and her swain
Pour danser la quadrille
to dance the quadrille
C'est le joli printemps
it is pretty springtime
Qui fait briller le temps
making the weather sunshiny

Aussi profitez-en
So enjoy it while you may
Jeunes gens, jeunes filles
young folk, young maidens
C'est le joli printemps
it is pretty springtime
Qui fait briller le temps
making the weather sunshiny
Car le joli printemps
For pretty springtime
C'est le temps d'une aiguille
is but a point in time
Car le joli printemps
for pretty springtime
Ne dure pas longtemps.
lasts so short a time.

At the heart of this cycle is a real jewel, one of Poulenc's most beautiful creations. ‘The singing of this song’, writes Poulenc in JdmM, ‘must be as clean and sad as an April day.’ The accompaniment is remarkably spare (particularly at the beginning) and the vocal line wafts and weaves with the greatest sweetness, spring sunshine streaked with the melancholy of Poulenc's trademark harmonies. Here is a French equivalent of Shakespeare's ‘Youth's a stuff will not endure’; the composer responds to the ache in the imagery and seems to hold the beauty of spring within his own tender embrace. ‘Then come kiss me, sweet-and-twenty …’ At the age of forty-three he already feels himself past his prime.
S’en fut au moutier mendier
Vive le passant qui passe
Va-t’en dit le père moine
N’aimons pas les va-nu-pieds
S’en fut en ville mendier
Vive le passant qui passe
Épiciers et taverniers
Qui mangent la soupe grasse
Et qui vous chauffez les pieds
[Long live the passer-by]
Puis couchez près de vos femmes
Au clair feu de la veillée
Jean Martin l’avez chassé
Vive le passant qui passe
On l’a trouvé sur la glace
Jean Martin a trépassé
Tremblez les gros et les moines
Vive le passant qui passe
Tremblez, ah! maudite race
Qui n’avez point de pitié
Un jour prenez garde ô race
[Long live the passer-by]
Les Jean Martin seront en masse
Aux bâtons de cornouiller
Ils vous crèv’ront la paillasse
[Long live the passer-by]
Puis ils violeront vos garces
Et chaussureront vos souliers
Jean Martin, prends ta besace
Ton bâton de cornouiller.

MAURICE FOMBEURE (1906–1981)

The poem’s title is *Complainte de Jean Martin*. Fombeure was not a political activist, but there is nothing as angry as this in all the settings of Éluard (who was a Communist), and it is all the more effective for its sudden appearance in the middle of this rural idyll. The juxtaposition of light and shade is a Poulenc speciality, and sudden violence in the countryside immeasurably strengthens a cycle that might otherwise have appeared lightweight. Poulenc admitted to the influence of Musorgsky, especially his *Songs and dances of death*, and there is indeed something very Russian about the contrast of the beggar’s plight with the comforts of the rich bourgeoisie. Fombeure’s fury is directed at the fat cats of monastery and manor who were more than happy to benefit from Jean Martin’s bravery at the time of the 1914 war, but decline to help an aged veteran down on his luck. The introduction has echoes of the *Chanson à boire* from the *Chansons gaillardes* as well as the lumbering elephants in *Babar*—music for the power (and menace) of sleeping giants. Here, Poulenc imagines the giant waking up: the gathering of momentum is splendidly managed,
as if the tumbrils of the revolution were rolling to the scaffold. This is Poulenc’s *mélodie fantastique*, unlike any other he wrote, music ominous and angry that covertly imagines the underdog turning its fury against the alien aggressor … Vive la Résistance!

**Chanson de la fille frivole**

Sung by Christopher Maltman; *Prestissimo possible*

Ah dit la fille frivole
Que le vent y vire y vole
Mes canards vont sur l’étang
Belle lune de printemps

Ah dit la fille frivole
Que le vent y vire y vole
Sous les vergers éclatants
Belle lune de printemps

Ah dit la fille frivole
Que le vent y vire y vole
Et dans les buissons chantants
Belle lune de printemps

Ah dit la fille frivole
Que le vent y vire y vole
Je vais trouver mes amants
Sous la lune de printemps

Ah dit la fille frivole
Que le vent y vire y vole
L’âge vient trop vitément
Sous la lune de printemps

Ah dit la fille frivole
Que le vent y vire y vole
Plus tard soucis et tourments
Sous la lune de printemps

Ah dit la fille frivole
Que le vent y vire y vole
Aujourd’hui guérissez-m’en
Belle lune de printemps

Ah dit la fille frivole
Que le vent y vire y vole
Baisez-moi bien tendrement
Sous la lune de printemps.

**MAURICE FOMBEURE (1906–1981)**

As if embarrassed by the intensity and seriousness of the preceding song, Poulenc now goes to another, dizzy extreme of frivolity. The poem closes Fombeure’s *Chansons de la grande hune*. Although breathless vocal *scherzi* had been a Poulenc speciality ever since the *Trois poèmes de Louise Lalanne* (disc 1), the composer here excels himself in that
genre where semiquavers, an octave apart between the hands, rove the keyboard with windswept insouciance. The composer provides fast and naughty music for a girl who is also both those things, albeit in an adorably rural way, and without a touch of metropolitan sophistication.

36 vi Le retour du sergent

Sung by Christopher Maltman, Mouvement de marche enlevée

Le sergent s'en revient de guerre
Les pieds gonflés sifflant du nez
Le sergent s'en revient de guerre
Entre les buissons étonnés
A gagné la croix de Saint-Georges
Les pieds gonflés sifflant du nez
A gagné la croix de Saint-Georges
Son pécule a sous son bonnet
Bourre sa pipe en terre rouge
Les pieds gonflés sifflant du nez
Bourre sa pipe en terre rouge
Puis soudain se met à pleurer
Il revoit tous ses copains morts
Les pieds gonflés sifflant du nez
Il revoit tous ses copains morts
Qui sont pourris dans les guérets
Ils ne verront plus leur village
Les pieds gonflés sifflant du nez
Ils ne verront plus leur village
Ni le calme bleu des fumées
Les fiancées va marche ou crève
Les pieds gonflés sifflant du nez
Envolées comme dans un rêve
Les copains s'les sont envoyées
Et le sergent verse une larme
Les pieds gonflés sifflant du nez
Et le sergent verse une larme
Le long des buissons étonnés.

MAURICE FOMBEURE (1906–1981)

Fombeure's poetry had long been associated with the military as is shown by his collection Soldat (1935), and particularly the humorous side of being a soldier. This poem however is not at all funny. Its appearance in a book of poems hot off the press in 1942, when Poulenc composed his settings, might just as well refer to the Second World War as the First. Shortly before Poulenc wrote these songs, French soldiers had been demobbed in the wake of great losses incurred during a futile struggle against the Germans. The humiliation of the situation, as well as patriotic anger, were felt as keenly by simple working folk as by the intellectuals (such as Aragon who wrote the poem C, disc 2). In tramping back to his village the sergeant remembers his dead chums and while retaining his disciplined
bearing (the music is an implacable march) he sheds a tear for them. We also learn that he himself is far from well: he has been spared death but he is suffering, probably without realizing it, from what is now termed trauma and shellshock. A cycle that has begun in such a merry way, the French countryside impermeable to change, has gradually found its way back to the present, 1942, and the harsh realities of war. It is this pertinent mixture of moods and styles that makes this cycle one of Poulenc’s finest.

**TROIS CHANSONS DE F GARCÍA LORCA** FP136 (1947)

Federico García Lorca (1898–1936) was one of the greatest of Spanish poets and playwrights, renowned for his lyrical vision and power. He was born near Granada, and his Andalusian roots (including his friendship with Manuel de Falla and his discovery of the cante jondo) are to be traced in much of his work. He was also a gifted pianist and painter, admired as much for his personality as for his prodigious literary talents. He was murdered by the Nationalists at the outset of the Spanish Civil War, whether on account of his political leanings or homosexuality, or both, is not certain. Without ever having met Lorca personally, Poulenc felt a profound affinity with the Spanish poet and dedicated his Violin Sonata (FP119, 1942) ‘à la mémoire de Federico García Lorca’.

All three of these are early poems by Lorca (in a translation by Félix Gattegno) and were included in *Canciones 1921–1924*, published in 1927. The section subheadings for each of the poems are: (i) ‘Au delà du monde’, (ii) ‘Andalouse’, and (iii) ‘Chansons pour finir’—indeed, the Chanson de l’oranger sec is the last poem in the collection. ‘What difficulty I have in proving musically my passion for Lorca!’, wrote Poulenc in *JdmM*. ‘My sonata for violin and piano … is, alas, very mediocre Poulenc, and these three songs are of little importance in my vocal work.’

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**i L’enfant muet**

Sung by Susan Bickley; *Modéré mais sans traîner*

L’enfant cherche sa voix.
(C’est le roi des grillons qui l’a.)
Dans une goutte d’eau
l’enfant cherchait sa voix.

Je ne la veux pas pour parler;
j’en ferais une bague
que mon silence portera
à son plus petit doigt.

Dans une goutte d’eau
l’enfant cherchait sa voix.

(La voix captive, loin de là,
met un costume de grillon.)

The dumb child

The child searches for his voice.

(It is the king of the crickets who has it.)

In a drop of water
the child looked for his voice.

I do not want it to speak with;
I should make a ring of it
that my silence will carry
to his smallest finger.

In a drop of water
the child looked for his voice.

(The captive voice, far from there,
put on a cricket’s costume.)

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Adelina à la promenade
Sung by Susan Bickley; Follement vite—dans un tourbillon

La mer n’a pas d’oranges
et Séville n’a pas d’amour.
Brunette, quelle lumière brûlante!
Prête-moi ton parasol.
Il rendra vert mon visage
—jus de citron et de limon—
et tes mots—petits poissons—
nageront tout à l’entour.
La mer n’a pas d’oranges.
Ay amour.
Et Séville n’a pas d’amour.

Chanson de l’oranger sec
Sung by Susan Bickley; Tempo de Sarabande

Bûcheron.
Abat mon ombre.
Délivre-moi du supplice
de me voir sans oranges.
Pourquoi suis-je né entre des miroirs?
Le jour me fait tourner
et la nuit me copie
dans toutes ses étoiles.
Je veux vivre sans me voir.
Les fourmis et les liserons,
j’entends que ce sont
mes feuilles et mes oiseaux.
Bûcheron.
Abat mon ombre.
Délivre-moi du supplice
de me voir sans oranges.

Pouicisco García Lorca (1898–1936)
French translation by Félix Gattegno

Pouicisco was unnecessarily harsh on these songs. They are certainly no match for his Apollinaire or Éluard settings,
and they do not reveal the greatness of the poet; but as songs with a Spanish flavour and evocations of Lorca’s
personality, profound and gently playful by turns, they have considerable charm. L’enfant muet, in one of Poulenc’s
favourite tonalities, F sharp minor, is limpid and spare in texture, an early example of Poulenc’s ‘songs-for-children’
style that would eventually lead to the transparent settings of La courte paille. The gentle acciacaturas that depict,
at the same time, the sound of crickets and gentle drops of water containing traces of the child’s lost voice are a
unique touch. The modulations leading back to F sharp minor at the end are unusually convoluted and whimsical.
Just as someone said that the wrought-iron balconies of Chabrier’s España came from a French department store, Adelina à la promenade is an evocation of a Spanish dance (so fast that the pianist’s fingers almost clack like castanets as they dash around the keyboard) that is more Parisian than genuinely Iberian. In a letter to Bernac the composer described it as ‘a jota a little “Plaza Clichy” as Satie used to say’. It is rather more skilful and effective than he was prepared to admit, albeit over in a flash.

Chanson de l’oranger sec is a sarabande, the time-honoured musical means (used by Hugo Wolf among others) of evoking Spanish seriousness, the depth of the country’s religious belief, and its imposing ceremonial. Here even a barren orange tree begs for death in this stately rhythm. This is an imposing and stylish song but Poulenc confessed that it was ‘nobly French’ rather than ‘gravely Spanish’. The E flat minor phrase ‘Je veux vivre sans me voir’ is eerily similar to the ‘Télégraphe … Oiseau’ phrase in Voyage from the contemporary Calligrammes (disc 2). The song was dedicated to a young baritone, Gérard Souzay, the most talented of Bernac’s pupils from the younger generation.

* * *

Jean Racine (1639–1699) had a knowledge of Greek and Latin from childhood—a fact that is pertinent to a text not actually by Racine, but translated from the Latin by him. The poet was brought up in the doctrine of Jansenism, a controversial offshoot of conventional Roman Catholicism that was sometimes persecuted, sometimes tolerated by the Vatican during the poet’s lifetime. Racine’s attraction to the world of the theatre was counterpointed by his desire to withdraw and pursue a more spiritual life. He was a protégé of Molière for a time and then a deadly rival of the older Pierre Corneille, gaining ascendancy by 1670 and specializing in female characters such as Andromaque, Phèdre and Athalie, the latter for a religious drama written after he had retired from the theatre. La Bruyère quipped that Corneille portrayed men as they should be, and Racine as they actually are. Neither poet was of course part of Poulenc’s pantheon of beloved writers (certainly not for musical purposes) but the composer, a practising Catholic, found himself attracted to a fragment of the Breviary translated by Racine.

40 Hymne FP144 (November 1948)
Sung by Neal Davies; Largo
Sombre nuit, aveugles ténèbres,
Fuyez, le jour s’approche et l’Olympe blanchit ;
Et vous, démons, rentrez dans vos prisons funèbres ;
De votre empire affreux, un Dieu nous affranchit.
Le soleil perce l’ombre obscure,
Et les traits éclatants qu’il lance dans les airs,
Rompant le voile épais qui couvrait la nature,
Redonnent la couleur et l’âme à l’univers.

Hymn
Dark night, blind shadow,
fly away, day approaches and Olympus pales;
and you, demons, go back to your gloomy prisons;
a God releases us from your dreadful power.

The sun penetrates the obscure shadow,
and the glittering arrows that it shoots into the air,
breaking through the thick veil that covered nature,
give colour once again to the soul and the universe.
The bass Doda Conrad (1905–1997) was the son of Marya Freund (1876–1966), the Polish soprano resident in France who had played an important part in early Poulenc performances, and he was the dedicatee of three of Poulenc’s songs. Conrad was a member of Nadia Boulanger’s ensemble (performing and recording Monteverdi, Rameau and Brahms) and an aspiring recitalist. He was able to approach Poulenc as an old family friend and ask him to compose a piece to be premiered in a New York recital in December 1948 (he had already premiered the Vilmorin Mazurka—see below—in November, also in New York).

The marking of this curious but eloquent song is Largo. It is an incantation, as might be sung by a French Sarastro. The vocal line is notated in the bass clef, and for the first ten bars the pianist’s hands also remain there, effecting an initially dark and murky texture. The high priest begins by invoking Olympus in classical manner but redeems himself with an address to Christ, ‘notre unique lumière’. The composer manages the alexandrines (which he admitted to finding difficult to handle) by alternating freely between $3/4$ and $2/4$. The harmonization of this imposing hymn underlines the majesty one associates with le grand siècle and its ceremonial musical flourishes. Throughout this song there is a dotted-rhythm motif that evokes the sound of muffled drum (both hands darting down to the bass clef).
Font ainsi, font, font,
D’un regard qui s’appuie,
D’une ride à leur front,
Le beau temps ou la pluie.
Et d’un soupir larron,
Font ainsi, font, font, font,
Du bal une tourmente
Où sage et vagabond,
D’entendre l’inconstante,
Dire oui, dire non,
Font ainsi, font, font, font,
Danser l’incertitude
Dont les pas compteront.
Oh ! le doux pas des prudes,
Leurs silences profonds,
Font ainsi, font, font, font,
Du bal une contrée
Où les feux s’uniront.
Des amours rencontrées
Ainsi la neige fond.
La neige fond, fond, fond.

MAZURKA

LOUISE LÉVÊQUE DE VILMORIN (1902–1969)

This is the last of Poulenc’s Vilmorin settings, and the only one not on disc 1. It finds a place here as a kind of coda to the composer’s Chopin characterizations of 1934—and also because of the link with the bass Doda Conrad (see above), who commissioned Vilmorin to write seven poems in honour of the centenary of Chopin’s death in 1949. He then set about asking six composers to set these words to music: Henri Sauguet (Prélude and Postlude; Polonaise) Francis Poulenc (Mazurka), Georges Auric (Valse), Jean Françaix (Scherzo impromptu), Léo Preger (Étude), Darius Milhaud (Ballade nocturne). Sauguet also came up with the title of the ‘Suite’ as a whole—Mouvements du cœur. The Poulenc song has a sombre majesty about it (Très lent et mélancolique). It is reminiscent of another Chopin-inspired work that Poulenc composed in 1933—the second Nocturne for piano, which moves at the same dreamlike pace in $\frac{3}{4}$. In connection with both pieces Poulenc mentioned the dreamlike ball-scene from Alain-Fournier’s famous novel Le grand Meaulnes. Poulenc described the music as ‘quite piano, melancholy and sensuous’. He made a point of telling Vilmorin how difficult it was to sent the word ‘font’ (and then ‘fond’) again and again.
Fancy FP174 (August 1959)
Sung by Geraldine McGreevy; Calme et mélancolique
Tell me where is Fancy bred,
Or in the heart, or in the head?
How begot, how nourished?
Reply, reply.
It is engender’d in the eyes,
With gazing fed; and Fancy dies
In the cradle where it lies.
Let us all ring Fancy’s knell:
I’ll begin it,—Ding, dong, bell.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616)

The plays of Shakespeare (and this poem comes from the casket scene in The Merchant of Venice) were out of the range of Poulenc’s usual literary interests. Marion, Countess of Harewood, invited Poulenc to contribute a setting to Classical Songs for Children, an anthology she had put together with Ronald Duncan, published in 1964. She asked Britten and Kodály to set the same poem and all three composers obliged; it was the Countess’s close link with Britten that worked wonders, though the other composers took longer than Poulenc to answer the request. Poulenc disliked visiting seaside towns, and was intensely uncomfortable in Aldeburgh for his one and only visit there in 1956, but he was fond of Britten and Pears (and they of him) and he was a deep admirer of Britten’s genius. This little setting was dedicated ‘To Miles and Flora’, the child characters in Britten’s opera The Turn of the Screw. Poulenc consulted Bernac regarding the English prosody, and still failed to get it absolutely right … ‘Or in the heart, or in the head?’). The song makes a charming epilogue to a disc that shows his ability to encompass different national styles and evoke the music of earlier epochs. It is, of course, Poulenc’s only song in English and part of its enduring charm is that it is utterly un-English in style.
I experienced the coup de foudre of discovering Poulenc the song composer late in 1971. An LP by Régine Crespin, accompanied by John Wustman, contained delectable performances of Hôtel and C, and the indomitable Mrs Knight of The Chimes music shop in Marylebone High Street in London sold me the scores—the Apollinaire cycle Banalités and the Deux poèmes de Louis Aragon. Felicity Lott and myself, fellow-students at the Royal Academy of Music, were simultaneously hooked and enraptured. For a concert in June 1972 in honour of the seventieth birthday of my piano teacher Harry Isaacs, we performed Hôtel; during the postlude, after ‘je veux fumer’, Flott lit a cigarette on stage (it seemed a good idea at the time) turning the Duke’s Hall into a Parisian boîte—quite an achievement this—without any regard to health and safety. Autres temps, autres mœurs. In the same year we took part in masterclasses given by Pierre Bernac at the British Institute of Recorded Sound; these were organized by the enchanting Winifred Radford, the soprano daughter of the great British bass Robert Radford. After her retirement she taught the French song class at the Guildhall School. Winifred was a lifelong friend of the great baritone, and assisted him in the translation into English of his two books. At these classes Flott and I encountered an impressive array of young singers, mostly Guildhall students, who were already devoted to French mélodie—Richard Jackson (later a founder member of The Songmakers’ Almanac), Stephen Varcoe, Jennifer Smith, as well as such accomplished pianists as Jonathan Alder and Richard True. It was at one of these classes that the late Anthony Rolfe Johnson sang Poulenc’s Bleuet (later recorded on the Hyperion Poulenc Songmakers’ Almanac anthology Voyage à Paris) leaving the usually hyper-critical Bernac almost speechless with admiration (‘My God, what a singer you are!’).

Working with this exacting teacher awakened my curiosity about Bernac’s singing voice (he had retired from the concert platform in 1959). I found an LP published by French EMI which remastered some of his 78-rpm recordings with Poulenc accompanying. The first track was Gounod’s Sérénade: I was initially taken aback by the unusual sound of the voice—neither sumptuous nor particularly beautiful—but by the end of that track I was fascinated by the flexibility of the arpeggios and the colour changes in that song’s magical final verse (‘Quand tu dors’). By the end of the LP’s second side I had become an ardent fan of Bernac’s mastery of musical and verbal nuance, as well as the inimitable sound and touch, generously pedalled, of Poulenc as an accompanist. Since then I have never wavered in my admiration for this great duo, who stand next to Pears and Britten in the performance of twentieth-century song. In the few remaining shops in London where 78 records were still for sale I bought Bernac-Poulenc performances on shellac, recorded in the ’30s and ’40s; in Holland I found their final recordings: two 10” LPs on the Vega label from the early ’50s with a wonderful selection of Poulenc songs. On a trip to Paris I stumbled across a music shop, long-since vanished, in the Rue Lamartine where I purchased second-hand scores of almost all the song collections at ten francs each, copies that serve me still. The easy availability at that time of those partitions struck me as evidence that this composer was not yet as well known a master of twentieth-century song as he should have been: I wrote an appreciation of Poulenc’s songs for the RAM magazine in the summer of 1973, the year I left to begin my career. Many years later I was moved to discover that Sir Lennox Berkeley, a personal friend of Poulenc, had written approvingly about this article in his diary.

At about the same time as I was planning the first series of concerts for The Songmakers’ Almanac in 1976, I approached Elaine Padmore, at that time head of opera at the BBC, and a singer herself, about the possibility
of doing a radio series about Poulenc’s songs. I visited her office in Yalding House, spread all the scores on the table, and asked her how many she knew. Today most of these titles would probably be familiar to music-lovers, but then it was not the case. Elaine was intrigued and what followed is scarcely believable by today’s standards: I was commissioned by Radio 3 to write no fewer than thirteen programmes, each 90 minutes long. These were arranged in biographical sequence and narrated by Elaine and myself; they were broadcast on Sunday afternoons between October 1977 and the end of January 1978. The series’ title was *Journal de mes Mélodies*, taken from the small song-diary kept by the composer and published after his death. Gramophone records were used only in part: twelve British singers and eight accompanists, as well as a number of instrumentalists and The Nash Ensemble, were invited to contribute new performances of the songs. The series enjoyed considerable critical success at the time and many appreciative letters from listeners. Sidney Buckland, an Éluard expert, was astounded to hear for the first time over the radio settings of texts where Poulenc’s music brought words she already knew by heart into sharper and more meaningful focus. This first acquaintance with the composer’s songs led to her becoming one of our foremost Poulenc authorities; her English edition of a selection of the composer’s letters is a masterpiece. It is to Sidney that I owe a copy of Éluard’s *Chanson complète* inscribed by the poet in 1939 to Pierre Bernac—‘to whom these poems owe being heard’. It had been a gift to her from the composer’s niece in recognition of her wonderful translations of Poulenc’s letters, entitled *Echo and Source*.

Thirty-eight years after that inscription was written, Bernac, already frail with a heart condition, was invited by the BBC to come to London to record *L’histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant* as part of the *Journal de mes Mélodies* series. He had given the first performance of the work on French radio in June 1946. I remember his huge emotion (and his nervousness) in returning to Studio 2 in Maida Vale where he had worked so often with Poulenc himself. It is our performance from 1977 which reappears on the first of these four discs. The broadcast also included a long interview where the singer’s loyal discretion concerning Poulenc’s private life remained unshakeable: at that time it was not even generally known that the composer had fathered a daughter, nor that the composition of his opera *Dialogues des Carmélites* had been overshadowed by a painful love affair—these and many other biographical details have emerged only in the last twenty years or so, and not a word about them from Bernac himself.

Bernac was naturally interested in the progress of the radio series and requested tapes for *Les Amis de Francis Poulenc*, a lively group of the composer’s friends and admirers administered at that time by the composer’s niece, Rosine Seringe (and now, with continuing success, by her grandson, Benoît Seringe). In 1977 my first visit to the composer’s home, his beautiful house at Noizay near Tours, was the beginning of my lifelong friendship with Rosine (daughter of Poulenc’s older sister Jeanne Manceaux) and her remarkable husband Jean. My friendship with Bernac also grew and we corresponded regularly: he despaired of finding a publisher for his recently completed book on Poulenc’s songs. Cassell, who had earlier issued his celebrated *The Interpretation of French Song*, were not prepared to take on so specialized a study. It so happened that I had worked as a student répétiteur at the City Literary Institute in Stukeley Street and had overseen a concert performance with mature student singers of Poulenc’s *Dialogues*. I had assigned one of the roles to Livia Gollancz, who had years before played the horn in the Hallé orchestra. She had fallen in love with singing Poulenc’s music, and when I told her of Bernac’s dilemma she immediately agreed to publish his book, *Francis Poulenc, the Man and his Songs*, overriding the objections of others in her family firm.
In March 1979 Bernac himself arranged a concert of Poulenc songs at the Théâtre du Ranelagh in Paris for Jennifer Smith, Richard Jackson and myself; Jennifer fell ill and Felicity Lott took her place. After the concert we were all invited to the Paris apartment of Rosine and Jean Seringe in Rue d’Aumale in the ninth arrondissement, almost next door to the Trinité. This was one of the last gatherings of the old Poulenc côterie still more or less intact, and my copy of the newly published Bernac book was signed by those present: Winifred Radford; the song composer Henri Sauguet; Henri Hell, Poulenc’s first biographer; Yvonne Gouverné, who had conducted the first performances of many of Poulenc’s choral works; the astonishingly youthful Suzanne Peignot, who had sung the first performance of the Trois poèmes de Louise Lalanne and recorded Poulenc’s Airs chantés with the composer more than forty years earlier; the glamorous Geneviève Touraine, Gérard Souzay’s sister, who had sung the first performance of Fiançailles pour rire; and Madeleine Milhaud, Darius’s brilliantly lively widow. After Bernac died in October 1979, Patrick Saul of the British Institute of Recorded Sound, together with Winifred Radford, established ‘The Friends of Pierre Bernac’ which arranged the reissue of the singer’s recordings first on LP and later on CD. That great patron of the arts Alice Tully of New York, an enormous Bernac admirer, contributed the funds to make this possible. Winifred Radford also published a version of Journal de mes Mélodies with the French texts with her English translations printed on facing pages.

Since that time my visits to Paris to play in recitals have almost always been combined with the joy of staying with Rosine in that same family apartment in the Rue d’Aumale. Rosine has long referred to herself as my ‘Mère d’Outre Manche’—my mother across the channel. Jean Seringe, most generous of hosts, died some years ago; he was enormously charming, the incarnation of ‘vieille France’ (a member of the Jockey Club) and at the same time an earthy Parisian. Rosine, now over ninety, still seems as energetic and engaged as ever in the lively life into which her uncle’s work has drawn her. (It was her older sister Brigitte who had been particularly close to Poulenc, and who had been expected to take up the responsibilities of managing the composer’s affairs after his death, but she died, most unexpectedly, shortly after Poulenc.) A highpoint of my Parisian career in tandem with my beloved Flott was an invitation from Les Amis for us to perform an entire recital of Poulenc songs at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1993, thirty years after the composer’s death. Afterwards we were royally entertained at an elegant brasserie in the Avenue Montaigne, the Eiffel tower glistening in the background. The name of the establishment, most appropriately, was Chez Francis.

Although I never met the composer personally I have always felt ‘chez Francis’. I have encountered so many people whose faces light up in remembering him and his circle (Peter Pears, Hugues Cuenod, Dalton Baldwin, Ned Rorem, Felix Aprahamian, John Amis, John Julius Norwich with his tender adolescent memories of Louise de Vilmorin, among many others) that I feel Poulenc to have become what the Germans call a ‘Schutzgeist’, a spiritual mentor. Rosine even allowed me to sleep in his bedroom in Noizay; this was intended to be, and was taken as, an enormous honour. As if I were listening to a selection of different Poulenc songs playing in my mind I was acutely aware of the nights of loneliness, anguish and melancholy passed in this room with a crucifix over the bed, and then suddenly ascetic thoughts as these would vanish in favour of the joyous rough and tumble of another kind of music. The critic who described Poulenc as both ‘moine et voyou’, monk and ragamuffin, understood the dichotomy that runs through the composer’s life and work. Rosine also gave me a copy of Ceremony of Carols inscribed to Poulenc by Benjamin Britten, his ‘English friend’, in 1945 when the two composers played Poulenc’s Concerto for two pianos.
at the Albert Hall—two worlds of song, two such different men, united in cross-channel friendship. When Felicity and I recorded a BBC television programme at Noizay together, I played Poulenc’s songs on the very piano on which they had been composed. In Paris I continue to sleep in the childhood bedroom of Poulenc’s great-nephews and sleep in sheets embroidered with his initials; for breakfast there is a charming teapot with a lid engraved with an Art Deco ‘FP’. Many items from his library surround me in the ceiling-high bookshelves in the dining room at Rue d’Aumale, including the manuscripts of Louise de Vilmorin’s poems. It is things such as these that seep into the blood and somehow or other guide the fingers via the heart. Much more is now known about Poulenc the man since nearly forty years ago, when I first realized that the composer of the lightweight *Mouvements perpetuels* was also a great composer of songs, some of them as deeply moving and profound as any composed in the twentieth century.

In the days of the BBC programmes I rushed in where only angels would have dared to tread. But now in presenting an intégrale of the Poulenc mélodies I feel myself both on familiar territory and very mindful of a lifelong debt to be repaid. The songs of Poulenc have brought untold joy and friendship into my life, beginning with my collaboration with Felicity Lott (it was our shared love for the composer that perhaps sealed our partnership). And now everything has come full circle with a musical scene peopled by younger singers, not yet born when we were at the beginning of our careers, and who are all in love with this music in the same way. To paraphrase, and slightly alter, W H Auden on Edward Lear, singers have flocked to Poulenc like settlers, he has become a land. At the same time it is inevitable that the performing traditions that go back to Bernac should have become ever more distant. For those of us who have been privileged to know something of this unique territory, if not quite at first hand then something near it, it is both a duty and a joy to follow Hector’s instructions in *The History Boys* by Alan Bennett: ‘Pass the parcel . . . Take it, feel it, and pass it on.’ To me the Poulenc parcel has felt heavy and light; it has seemed dark and joyous, accessible and remote, imperishable yet infinitely fragile, and now it is in the hands of a younger generation.
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