COHESION OF COMPOSER AND SINGER:
THE FEMALE SINGERS OF POULENC

DOCUMENT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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By

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ABSTRACT

Every artist’s works spring from an aspiring catalyst. One’s muses can range from a beloved city to a spectacular piece of music, or even a favorite time of year. Francis Poulenc’s inspiration for song-writing came from the high level of intimacy he had with his close friends. They provided the stimulation and encouragement needed for a lifetime of composition.

There is a substantial amount of information about Francis Poulenc’s life and works available. We are fortunate to have access to his own writings, including a diary of his songs, an in-depth interview with a close friend, and a large collection of his correspondence with friends, fellow composers, and his singers. It is through these documents that we not only glean knowledge of this great composer, but also catch a glimpse of the musical accuracy Poulenc so desired in the performance of his songs.

A certain amount of scandal surrounded Poulenc during his lifetime and even well after his passing. Many rumors existed involving his homosexuality and his relationships with other male musicians, as well as the possible fathering of a daughter. The primary goal of this document is not to unearth any hidden innuendos regarding his personal life, however, but to humanize the relationships that Poulenc had with so many of his singers. Scholars have collected and analyzed letters between Poulenc and Bernac as well as Poulenc and other composers, but few have delved into the relationships that he held so dear with his
female singers. His warm, inviting tone in these letters demonstrated the level of comfort shared by both parties. Often pertaining to the gossip of the day, the letters’ contents compared stories of well-known singers’ careers as well as their personal lives. Even the words of singers engaged in purely working relationships with Poulenc carry an affectionate timbre. Through these letters we are also able to recognize what aspects of his music were important to the composer, as he often wrote on this topic.

By examining Poulenc’s relationships with his singers, one can begin to understand the significant influence that these friendships had on his compositions. These personal relationships were the catalyst that inspired his passionate compositions. Included in this document are diary excerpts, letters from Poulenc written to his singers, and an annotated list of compositions and their dedicatees.
Dedicated to my husband, Andy
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my voice teacher and adviser, Dr. Robin Rice, for his support and often humorous words throughout this process. His humor and positive attitude were significant in helping me to survive the challenges of my degree.

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And finally, I must thank my husband. How fortunate I am to have found someone so dedicated to my well-being. His constant love and dedication prove that I will always be appreciated, and never be allowed to doubt myself.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Importance of the Study

Each composer, although often conforming to certain musical trends of his own era, casts his individual mark on the compositional world. Those fortunate enough to work with the composer are able to translate the composer’s ideas through documentation and performance. A study of these performers can help future generations obtain a level of musical production desired by the composer. It is the purpose of this document to examine the relationship between singer and composer through the study of Francis Poulenc and his female singers.

Poulenc left behind a great deal of documentation on his songs and his feelings on how they should be performed. Each of these songs was composed for or dedicated to a particular person in Poulenc’s life, and many of his songs were premiered or recorded by the individual for whom the song was composed. By listening to recordings of these performances, singers of today may be able to identify vocally with some of the singers with whom Poulenc worked. Discovering similarities in vocal timbres may assist a singer of today in choosing appropriate repertoire. In addition to this, the singer may be able to better understand the music by identifying with the original dedicatee.
Francis Poulenc left detailed accounts of both his personal and professional life. Through research of these documents, we are able to identify the important singers with whom Poulenc chose to work. Upon examination of these singers, the name of Pierre Bernac was continually referenced. The two worked together for almost a quarter of a century, and many books and articles exist on the pair. On the contrary, however, very little information is available on Poulenc and his female singers. It is apparent that Bernac’s relationship with Poulenc has been studied extensively, but these studies have not broadened their scope to cover other, lesser-known performers. This document encompasses this area that has been overlooked by previous scholars.

The absence of a study on Poulenc’s female singers would be evident to anyone searching for material on the subject. Little research on this particular topic has been done, and what has been studied is located either in short articles, Poulenc’s letters of correspondence¹, or in recordings. A need for a compilation of materials on this subject is obvious as Poulenc’s vocal music was often inspired by a particular voice. Through a thorough understanding of each singer’s life and musical strengths, present-day singers may better be able to select appropriate repertoire for their individual voice. For this reason, a collection of information on the lesser-known singers is important and necessary for anyone exploring the subject.

It is important for performers to fully understand the history of any musical work on which they may be working. Possessing this knowledge can enhance their performance in many ways. When one understands the purpose of the work, the reason behind the composition and for whom it was composed, one can begin to fully appreciate the musical work and extend both their talent and knowledge to an audience. It is common practice for a singer to research a particular piece in terms of its poetry, especially if the language is foreign to the singer. It is important, however, to extend the study beyond the simple meaning of a particular work in order to fully comprehend the purpose of the song. If one understands the circumstances that were ongoing in the life of the composer, the singer may have the ability to better perform the piece by identifying with the composer’s emotion at the time of composition. The same idea applies to an understanding of the particular person for whom the song was written. If one can recognize the personal characteristics, as well as the voice type of the singer for whom the song was originally intended, an intimate understanding of the piece can ensue.

Scope of the Study

Since Poulenc’s compositional style and treatment of the voice were fairly consistent throughout his career, an analysis of each work is unnecessary and beyond the scope of this project. Rather, this study pertains mostly to the personal relationships that Poulenc had with his singers, as well as his preferences of musical skills for certain compositions. This study does not analyze each
singer’s vocal timbre, as this author did not want to impose her own opinions on each voice. The reader may wish to form his own ideas on each singer by listening to various available recordings.

Upon examination, it was discovered that Poulenc had a great deal of female friends, and that he composed and dedicated many songs to these women. Although each of the singers was different in their own right, many commonalities linked them to each other, as well as to Poulenc. Many of them attended the Paris Conservatory and performed on the stages of Parisian opera houses. Several of them came from musical families, had a passion for French poetry, a meticulous attention to detail, and impeccable diction. It is important to identify these strengths so that singers of today can strive to achieve what Poulenc valued so highly.

Every attempt was made to research each singer; however the amount of information about each performer varied significantly. In some cases, as with Jane Bathori, many sources were available due to her well-known status. In other cases, lesser-known singers left behind only selected correspondence with Poulenc, as well as a few recordings. In addition to correspondence between Poulenc and these women, biographical information has been included on each of them.
Procedure

This author first approached this topic through Poulenc’s writings on his own songs,\(^2\) since the composer kept meticulous records of his works and the singers who performed them. The inspiration for his diary was a less-than-pleasing singer that he had heard on the radio in November of 1939.\(^3\) His goal was to leave his own words behind as a guide to interpreters who found interest in his music. Not only was this accomplished, but Poulenc also left details on his favorite singers and their characteristics that attracted him as a composer.

In the beginning phases of this document, this author noted significant singers mentioned in Poulenc’s biographies, as well as in the endnotes of his diaries and letters of correspondence. Independent research on these singers was then done in the form of seeking out sources such as articles, books, and recordings. When this proved to be limiting for several of the performers, this author used Poulenc’s own letters\(^4\) to the singers. Through these letters of correspondence, one is able to delve into the deeply personal relationships of Poulenc and his friends. These writings allow us to realize the wavering emotional state in which Poulenc often composed. It is through this information that today’s singers may be able to understand his state of mind, allowing for enhancement of their performances. In addition to this, the letters offer

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\(^3\) Ibid., p. 19.

meaningful insight into his friendships with these women, as well as provide an
invaluable resource in the documentation of Poulenc’s personal relationships and
his music.
November 7, 1939

“If I were a singing teacher I would insist on my pupils reading the poems attentively before working at a song. Most of the time these ladies and gentlemen do not understand a word of what they are singing. I remember a singer who offered the fruit and flowers of ‘Green’ by Debussy as though from a stall in the market. In the last twenty bars, the aforesaid lady left the “fresh produce” for the “perfumery counter.”

Poulenc’s high standard of poetic interpretation is displayed in this passage from his diary. Comments of this nature demonstrate the importance of literature to the composer. His love of words united him with singers rather than instrumentalists, and he particularly thrived when he found a singer that shared his feelings on the matter.

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Sir Lennox Berkeley, author of the forward in Bernac’s text on Poulenc, described Poulenc’s analysis of poetry in the following passage.

“Poulenc himself approached his task as a song writer by a minute examination of each poem, subjectively by a re-creation of its atmosphere, and objectively by a careful study of its prosody and vowel sounds. Pierre Bernac takes the reader through a similar process, showing that the text of the poem must be interpreted as accurately as the music. Those of us who were lucky enough to hear him sing them will realize that this principle was the basis of his performance. Indeed, his amazingly clear diction, allied to his pure vocal technique, was something quite unforgettable.6

Although Poulenc’s basis for song composition was rooted in poetry, occurrences in the composer’s life often dictated the type of text used in his song writing. His varying religious phases produced significant sacred musical works such as the Gloria and Stabat Mater. To the contrary, the composer often endured faithless periods in his lifetime in which his focus was on secular poetry. These poems often varied greatly from his sacred works, often being seen as suggestive or even vulgar.

A wonderful example of this occurs in “Au-Dela,” from Trois Poèmes de Louise de Vilmorin.

Eau-de-vie! Au-delà!
A 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.

Eau-de-vie! Au-delà!
At the hour of pleasure
to choose is not to betray,
I choose that one.

I choose that one
who can make me laugh,
with a finger here, there,
as when one writes.

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 soufflé fait finir,
Jusqu’au dernier soupir
Je choisis ce jeu-là.

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

The text to this poem could be construed in a number of ways, as Louise de Vilmorin wrote in this letter to Poulenc.

“You ask me why the text of this poem, in the volume which I have called Fiançailles pour rire, is not the same as the original text which you received from me long before the publication of the volume. Here is the reason: this poem which I had written without any particular intent, without the least thought of anything improper, brought me such teasing from Marie-Blanche that I am still feeling astounded. She assured me that the poem was indecency itself and contained some ideas and admissions that would cause the most broad-minded Father-confessor to blush for shame. And when I told her that it was just her dirty mind she replied that my unawareness was not, in her eyes, a proof of innocence. She was laughing, as you can imagine, but as for me I swear that I had a face like an omelette – an omelette ‘aux fines herbes’ to boot. In short, I dare not let it appear as it was, I modified it for everybody, and if I have not changed it for you it is because I wrote it for you and I knew that your music would have the power to render it innocent in its original form.”

8 Ibid., p. 134.
Poulenc’s own words on the poem defend its original version.

“I regret that in her volume *Fiançailles pour rire* Louise has thought fit to tone down the veiled eroticism of *Éau-de-vie! Au-delà!* For nothing in the world would I make this alteration in my musical version, for that would create a positive misconception. The palpitation of the accompaniment would have no reason to exist...This song should be sung very lightly, very simply, without any underlining, but at the same time without dissimulation. The *staccato* triplets of the piano must remain in the background while still being precise.”

The palpitation of the accompaniment is one of many examples of hidden innuendos found in Poulenc’s music. His compositions not only exhibit characteristics of a sensual nature, they also carry traits of reverence and religion. These two opposing styles are a result of different phases in Poulenc’s personal life. The mood of his music often related directly to his state of mind during a composition. He lived much of his days in a state of melancholy, as his lifestyle required him to travel frequently. He was a man who required great social contact but often chose to use darker literary texts if he was left alone. Poulenc suffered the loss of several of his close friends during his lifetime. It was during these times when he turned to religion. He composed one of his great choral works, the *Stabat Mater* after the loss of his friend, Christian Bernard. His sarcastic and lighter repertoire was often composed during times of great social activity.

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Many may wonder how a man who possessed such devotion for Catholicism could compose music using text as sensual, and almost vulgar, as Poulenc has. This dichotomy can be traced back to his parents, as their personalities and upbringings diverged in many ways.

Born on January 7th of 1899, Francis Poulenc was brought into a family of distinction. His mother, Jenny Royer, descended from a long line of Parisian craftsmen, which included cabinet-makers, tapestry-weavers, and bronze-founders. Although none were professional musicians, they were known for their support of the arts. Jenny often entertained her family as an amateur pianist, playing works by Mozart, Chopin, Schubert, and Schumann. Her playing drew a young Francis to crawl under the piano to absorb its sounds. It was moments like this in which Francis’ mother realized his passion for the instrument. She began to teach him piano at the young age of four, until the niece of César Franck took over as his instructor. Poulenc spent countless hours at the piano, working to develop his own technique and has said, “When I recall my childhood I see myself always sitting at a piano.”

Jenny’s free-spirit reached also into areas of her life other than music, as Poulenc’s maternal side of the family gave little relevance to organized religion. There was no opposition to other’s beliefs; rather his mother’s family was indifferent. Poulenc recalled many weekends and holidays that were not spent in

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12 Ibid., p. 2.
14 Ibid., p. 22.
church, but rather at his grandmother Royer’s property at Nogent-sur-Marne.\textsuperscript{15}

Many of Poulenc’s musical preferences were developed on these weekends by listening to the accordion that accompanied dancing socialites in nearby \textit{bals-musettes}.\textsuperscript{16}

Poulenc’s relationship with his father was much different than the relationship he had with his mother. Emile Poulenc, Francis’ father, was the son of a devout Catholic family. Religion was a significant part of their lives, and Emile made every attempt to instill this in his son. The result of these conflicting convictions was a composer who would write something as sacred as the \textit{Stabat Mater} in one moment and the “Au-Dela” in another. Perhaps it is this dichotomy that has drawn so many to the music of Poulenc. His rather rash humor, yet reverent respect for his deity possesses the ability to humanize his music.

Many artists remember the piece of music, the painting, or the exact moment when they realized they had found their calling. For Poulenc, this occurred while listening to Franz Schubert, one of his mother’s favorite composers. “One day I discovered \textit{Die Winterreise} of Schubert and suddenly something very profound in my life was changed. Particularly the astonishing \textit{Die Nebensonnen} which always keeps for me the same emotive power.”\textsuperscript{17} It was after this realization that he discovered his deep love for the music of Debussy, and later on, Stravinsky.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 22.
\textsuperscript{16} Ballrooms or dancing halls.
Poulenc actually had a childhood encounter with Debussy, of which the latter had no idea. The young Francis and his mother were in a shop in the rue Tronchet, at the corner of the Place de la Madeleine, when Debussy and his wife entered. Francis immediately recognized his idol, having seen him from a distance at rehearsals of the Concerts Colonne. Debussy took a moment to set down his hat so that he could browse around in the shop. Francis took the opportunity to touch the hat of the man he had so admired. “If I had dared I would have kissed it,” recalled Poulenc. It was encounters of this sort that inspired Poulenc to continue working toward his passion of composition.

Poulenc’s compositional style was unlike most of his peers, as he lacked the formal education that they had received. His mother’s wish was for him to attend the Paris Conservatory, but fate intervened in the form of war. The First World War broke out just as Francis’ first examinations were being held, and instead of continuing his studies, he regrettably found himself in uniform. When peace finally resumed years later, Francis concluded that it was too late for him to return to the Conservatory. At the time, this lack of formal education was considered to be a handicap by the young composer. It was this trait, however, that later set him apart from many of his peers.

It was through his teacher, Ricardo Viñes, that Poulenc met Georges Auric and Erik Satie, two men after whom he would pattern his own compositions. During the time when the young Francis and Satie began their friendship, Jane

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18 Ibid., p. 22.
19 Ibid., p. 23.
Bathori entered Poulenc’s life. She was asked to manage a concert in the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, where Poulenc’s first work was premiered. A strong case of nerves left the baritone unable to perform, so Poulenc stepped in to fill the part. His amateur voice and humorous disposition pleased the crowd, and the work was deemed a success. It was during this point in his life in which he became associated with the group Les Six. Poulenc spoke on the series of concerts, “This, although it wasn’t done deliberately – and I’d like to emphasize the point that it wasn’t deliberate – marked the beginning of the group that became known as Les Six. What we didn’t owe to Bathori!”

In the year of 1920, Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honegger, Georges Auric, Louis Durey, and Germaine Tailleferre became known by this name after a critic, Henri Collet, saw a correlation between them and the Russian group, The Mighty Five. The six composers did not view themselves as members of any type of movement or school, although there were some similarities in their compositional styles. What drew them together was not only their friendships with each other, but their adverse reaction to exaggerated impressionism and romanticism. Instead, they found inspiration in Erik Satie’s compositions and Jean Cocteau’s literary works. The composers furthered their association through joint performances of their works.

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20 *Rapsodie nègre*
22 Ibid., p. 41.
It was because of *Les Six* that Poulenc came to know Jane Bathori. The singer was well-known throughout the region, and subsequently, her fame brought attention to the group as she often performed their works in concert. Her poignant interpretation of songs by Debussy, Ravel, and Roussel lead to Poulenc’s interest in the French mélodie, which became a significant part of his repertoire later in his career.

Because of his excellence as a pianist, keyboard compositions dominated Poulenc’s early works. His *Suite in C and Impromptus for Piano* was highly publicized by *Les Six*’s spokesman, Jean Cocteau, which heightened Poulenc’s level of fame. Soon after this success, the composer sought the wisdom of Charles Koechlin who, from 1921 to 1924, was able to teach valuable technical skills. Enriched with this knowledge, Poulenc began serious work on several of his chamber pieces, resulting in the completion of his *Trio for piano, oboe, and bassoon* in 1926.

Although inspired in song composition since 1918 with his song cycle *Le Bestiaire*, Poulenc’s incentive for mélodie was not fully realized until his friendship with Bernac had developed. In 1927, Bernac gave the first performance of *Chansons gaillardes*. Poulenc and Bernac then lost contact with one another for seven years until, in 1934, their paths crossed once-again during a private Debussy concert in Salzburg. Upon a very well-received performance, the two realized that a collaboration between them could benefit them both.

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Combined with Poulenc’s love of the written word, Bernac’s impeccable, clear diction inspired Poulenc to compose a significant number of mélodies. The two continued to perform and record together for the next quarter of a century. It was during this period in Poulenc’s life that he formed many friendships and working relationships with other singers. His correspondence\textsuperscript{25} with these singers mainly took place from the 1930’s through the 1950’s. The value of this correspondence lies in the historical content and engaging nature of these letters, which provides us with a significant look into Poulenc’s relationships with his singers.

Partly due to his concert schedule, Poulenc spent a large amount of his life traveling. Fortunate enough to have been born into a wealthy family, he was never burdened with the task of working. He enjoyed this freedom but kept himself occupied by composing and performing as though his livelihood was dependent upon it. He led a bit of a vagabond lifestyle as he often visited with friends for days at a time or stayed in hotels for extended periods. He was content, for the most part, as long as he had a piano in his room. It is due, in part, to this lifestyle that so many of his letters exist. He would often grow homesick and feel the need to reach out to a friend, which often turned out to be one of his female singers. In this letter to Marie-Blanche de Polignac, the composer discusses his loneliness:

Chère Marie-Blanche,
Would you believe that your Poupoule’s heart is full of moss and melancholy? I have just spent ten days here all alone in a big house, not my own, in the pouring rain – and what rain! – thumping away on a piano that has more fungus than flats. Constantly have I thought of the times when I was the happy, spoiled darling at Kerbastic. Unfortunately this year 1936, which I am hating, is now depriving me of what were once my only real holidays: I leave tomorrow for Uzerche where, between dear Yvonne Gouvernante and gentle Pierre Gouverné, I shall have to toe the line for a good two weeks.  

In an earlier letter he writes, “I feel rather like the friend from the country who only appears in the summer. But that is more or less how it is. I have been in Paris so little this winter.” His self-induced seclusion may have provided him with countless opportunities to compose, but the nomadic, solitary lifestyle was not his preferred state of being. In 1947, he took up residence in an apartment at 5 rue de Médicis, oddly enough in the same building which had previously been his residence. It was this apartment that he called home for the remainder of his life.

It was in the 1940’s and 50’s that he composed his three most notable operas. The humorous Les mamelles de Tirésias was written in 1944, while his unique, one-woman, one-act opera La Voix humaine was composed in 1958, just a few years before his death. His most widely-performed and well-known opera,
Les dialogues des Carmélites was composed between 1953 and 1956. It was this work that pleased Poulenc the most as he felt it was some of his best writing. His other compositions include several ballets, a handful of orchestral works, numerous choral works, a large quantity of solo piano pieces, and 152 songs.

What pleased him most was uniting literary works with music. He had no formal training in the area, but he felt as though it came naturally to him. In his own words, “‘My rules’ are instinctive, I am not concerned with principles and I am proud of that; I have no system of writing (for me, ‘system’ means ‘tricks’); and as for inspiration, it is so mysterious that it is wiser not to try to explain it.”

Poulenc’s treatment of the voice followed this idea as well. Rather than accommodate text to a melody, he allowed the inflection of the words, as well as their colors, accents, and the rhythm of a phrase to create a line that seemed to fuse music and text. Most singers found this to be desirable, however Claire Croiza believed that Poulenc’s songs ‘had unusual tessitura, and were hard for the voice.’ This was clearly not the case for the majority of his singers, as many of them spent a good portion of their careers performing and recording his works.

31 Ibid., p. 38.
33 Ibid., p. 179.
Poulenc dedicated his life to the betterment of French mélodie, as it was here that he found his niche. His close friend, Pierre Bernac, was an invaluable asset as he was highly knowledgeable in the field. It was Bernac who knew the composer so intimately, and it is his words which can portray him so well.

“In my opinion there are few composers whose music so faithfully reflects their personality. His music is the true expression of his being. The reason is that Poulenc never forced himself away from his natural bent, and this applies as much to his life as to his work. He always had the good fortune to be able to do what he wished, and only what he wished, in his existence as in his compositions. He followed the impulse of his sensibility and his heart, and gave himself up entirely to it. But this is not to say that he ever lost his lucidity. He was far too French for that. He was very typically French, in the kind of man he was, in his way of living, in his tastes, his reactions, and also in his musical style. Debussy speaks of ‘the clarity of expression, the precision, the concentration in the French musical form’ which can be contrasted with the Germanic genius which excels in long sentimental outpourings. Lyricism and even passion are not absent in French music, but reason and mind are always in control of the emotions. As Henri Hell put it, grief and sentiment are there, but under the veil of grace, clarity and proportion. When Debussy wrote, ‘Music must humbly seek to give pleasure,’ our thoughts turn to the music of Poulenc with its sonorous sensuousness, its subtle harmonies, the flexibility of its modulations and the play of the resulting colors, to the beauty and charm of its melodic lines. It can be that the art of our greatest musicians is an art of suggestion. Poulenc, with his great sensibility, undoubtedly excelled in the creation of a poetic climate. As Paul Valéry, the great French poet and philosopher, said, ‘He who would write his dream must be completely awake,’ Poulenc was able to write his dream in a musical language that was his own and to which throughout his life he remained true, and he enjoyed the privilege of speaking this language with the pure accent of his native land.”

November 3, 1939
“What a horrible day!!!
On the radio a lady has just been caterwauling for a quarter of an hour some songs which may very well have been mine! Ah! singers who follow only their own instinct. I ought to say instincts, since I presume this lady to be gifted in quite other directions than music. My piano pieces are often massacred, but never to such an extent as my songs and, heaven knows, I place a higher value on the songs.
I am undertaking this diary in the hope that it will serve as a guide to those interpreters who feel some interest in my poor music. I ought to call it miserable music, for that is how it appeared to me, sung in this way.”35

What are we, as singers, to deduce from this humorous, yet passionate writing of Francis Poulenc? Should we be timid, even afraid to attempt a performance of his songs for fear of “massacring” his treasured compositions?

Poulenc held many of his musical works in high regard, but it is as if this statement is a warning to singers in particular, to realize the sanctity of his songs, to dedicate the proper amount of time and hard work, and to find the true integrity of Poulenc’s compositions before one is to perform them.

This can be a daunting task for many singers. It is one thing to sing the music of a deceased composer, for criticism can only come from animate sources. But when one attempts to perform the music of a living composer in the presence of the composer himself, the bar is raised much higher, and the singer can be held in an incredibly vulnerable state.

What steps must one take to reach the point in which a composer would be satisfied, and even moved upon hearing his own music? This process becomes increasingly difficult as one descends back into time. A composer who lived three hundred years ago may have left behind very little written material on his works, or it may have been lost over time. It is often left to musicologists to interpret and define what the composer is left unable to do.

It seems as though a living composer may be the ideal source for the interpretation of his works. With technological communication so readily available, it requires relatively little effort to contact a composer directly and inquire about his music. While this may sound ideal, the reality is that many composers are either unwilling or unable to answer every inquiry. An even sadder reality is that many composers are not fully appreciated by the musical world in their lifetime. The opportunity for consultation simply slips by, and once again musicians are left with little.

There are, however, a handful of deceased composers who have left behind a large amount of information on their music. Not only is there detailed information on their life, but on each of their works. For too many composers’ vocal compositions, singers are left to interpret every facet of the music on their
own, without knowing the thoughts and feelings of the composer himself. This can be daunting, and often leaves the singer directionless with no choice but to abandon the music or perform it poorly.

Fortunately, this is not the case for Francis Poulenc. Not only did he have a close collaboration with Pierre Bernac, who documented much of his friend’s life and music, but Poulenc himself wrote a diary of his songs. In it, he addresses how and why he composed each piece, and occasionally he even recognizes the interpretations of his music by certain singers. His diary of songs can be a very helpful resource for any singer willing to attempt his compositions. But if one is to delve deeper into Poulenc’s musical aspirations, it is helpful to identify the singers who he believed brought his music to life at the level of performance he demanded.

Poulenc infrequently writes about the timbre or quality of each singer’s particular voice. (There are, in fact, many instances when he does this negatively about a singer with whom he has never worked; but this falls into his gossip-filled conversations with his beloved singers). More often than not, he comments on the personal interpretation of the poetry and how it fuses with his own rendering. It is this perspective which can be so vital to any singer of Poulenc’s music. Simply having a beautiful voice was insufficient in Poulenc’s eyes. He demanded a performer that not only possessed a beautiful instrument, but also one that captured the attention of connoisseurs of both music and poetry. It was this attention to textual detail that led to his attraction of certain singers.
Poulenc’s love and fascination of poetry bled deeply into his compositional process. He describes his procedure in the following passage:

“When I have chosen a poem of which the musical setting at times may not come to my mind until months later, I examine it in all its aspects. When it is a question of Apollinaire or Éluard, I attach the greatest importance to the way in which the poem is placed on the page, to the spaces, to the margins. I recite the poem to myself many times. I listen. I search for the traps. At times I underline the text in red at the difficult spots. I note the breathing places. I try to discover the inner rhythms of a line which is not necessarily the first. Next I try to set it to music bearing in mind the different densities of the piano accompaniment. When I am held up over a detail of prosody I do not persist. Sometimes I wait for days. I try to forget the word until I see it as a new word. I rarely begin a song at the beginning. One or two lines, chosen at random, take hold of me, and very often give the tone, the hidden rhythm, the key to the work.”

This detailed account of the composer’s method for song-writing can be illuminating for singers. One must have the desire and focus to attempt to interpret Poulenc’s compositions while simultaneously understanding his struggles with each work.

What are Poulenc’s desires for singers who attempt his works? It has been made clear by the composer that the emphasis on the study of text is crucial. This involves not only proper pronunciation and articulation, but also a deep understanding of the poem. The best way to accomplish this is to speak the poem aloud with passion and purpose, as an actor may do. Bernac believed that this

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36 Guillaume Apollinaire and Paul Éluard were two of Poulenc’s preferred poets.
would “discover the deeper meaning, the atmosphere, the vocal color, the
inflexions and expressive accents, thereby giving life to the interpretation which
must then, of course, accord with the composer’s conception.”38

A well-prepared singer of Poulenc, or of many composers for that matter,
is aware that the piano is not solely there to accompany. A significant part of
mélodie is cohesion of instrument and singer, which forms an ensemble. This is
especially true in Poulenc’s songs as he once said that the best piano music he
ever wrote was in the piano part of his songs.39 It is the duty of the singer, as well
as the accompanist, to embody this realization.

Another detail that proved to be significant to Poulenc was the choice of
tempo. His tempo markings are often very specific on this matter, and his desire
for the tempo to be maintained, unless noted, was adamant. He also did not
approve of rubato in his music. “I hate rubato (it is understood that I am referring
to my own music).”40 This strong statement further cements the idea that the
singer must be agile with the text while simultaneously adhering to the equally
significant piano line. Much of Poulenc’s tempi can be interpreted by a
mathematical approach. It is ironic, however, that Poulenc was unable to
maintain this strict rule of his during his own playing. It has been noted that the

39 Ibid., p. 43.
40 Ibid., p. 44.
composer would use rubato liberally in his own compositions\textsuperscript{41}, even when it was not marked. He was very stringent about this topic with his singers, but when it came to himself, he rarely followed his own markings.

One feature of the recitalist that Poulenc believed to be of great importance was that a singer should possess a large range of vocal timbres to accompany the wide range of emotions found in music. As is suggested by Bernac, “Each new poem, each new piece of music, must suggest to him a new timbre, at times light, clear, transparent, suspended, or very dark, warm, rich, weighty, etc…at times poetic, tender and sweet, or very intense, dramatic and even tragic, emotional or cold, with more of with less vibrato in the voice, etc…there is an infinity of shades of expression.”\textsuperscript{42} It is these qualities that humanize us. To omit them from any performance insults not only the composer and the audience, but the music.

Of course, with all of these suggestions from the composer, it could be quite easy for the singer to neglect the true purpose of the song, which is to make it beautiful. The singer must be confident enough in his technique so that he may reach the point where he overlooks these rules and relies on his instinct. It is only at this time when a performer can appear as though “the music escapes from his lips or through his fingers.”\textsuperscript{43} In Poulenc’s own words; “Above all do not analyze my music – love it!”\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 44.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 49.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 13.
October 20, 1956.

“‘Who sings your songs best?’ I was asked recently by a young American baritone. I do not hesitate: Jane Bathori for my first songs, Marya Freund and Claire Croiza for *Le Bestiaire*, Suzanne Peignot for *Airs chantés* and the *Cinq Poèmes de Max Jacob*, Suzanne Balguerie for the *Fiançailles pour rire*, Madeleine Grey (often in songs which are, paradoxically, little suited to her), Gérard Souzay, (‘Priez pour paix’ and ‘Le portrait’) and…for all the rest: Pierre Bernac, of course.45”

Poulenc’s obvious partiality toward these performers was rooted in more than a simple liking of their singing. His desire for strong musicianship and meticulous diction led him to develop a circle of singers for whom he often composed. He not only came to know these singers on a professional level; his inviting personality caused him to hold close friendships with many of them as well. In studying these women of the past, current and future generations of singers can strive to reach the level of artistry and work ethic which Poulenc so obviously desired.

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In researching the following singers, this author was hesitant to categorize them in a certain way. To do so in a chronological manner would be difficult, as many of the singers worked with Poulenc over a long period of time. Arranging them in terms of vocal characteristics was also considered. The idea was abandoned, however, because a subject such as vocal timbres can be subjective to the individual listener. In attempting to select repertoire for a particular voice, one may wish to listen to recordings of each of these singers and then reference the appendix near the end of this document for individual song dedications.
Jane Bathori

Raised in a modest home by parents with no background in music, Bathori studied at the Paris Conservatory, where she made her concert debut as a singer in 1898. Also an accomplished pianist, her small frame (she was less than five feet tall\(^{46}\)) and petite hands prevented her from having a career as a concert pianist. Determined to share her passion for music, she pursued an operatic career during which she met her future husband, Emile Engel. The well-known tenor became the catalyst for her career around the turn of the century, leading to performances at Nantes, La Scala, and the Brussels Opera. She soon turned to concert work after a career-altering opportunity presented itself. In 1904, she was asked to replace the singer on Ravel’s *Shéhérazade* just a few hours before the performance.\(^{47}\) Her ability to learn “Asie,” the first piece of the work, in less than two hours both stunned and impressed Ravel, and a series of collaborations ensued. Her reputation as not only a magnificent singer, but also an intelligent and quick musician followed her for the remainder of her career.

When World War I began, the majority of musical organizations closed in and around France. Without the help and support of these organizations, composers were left with the burden of discovering new musicians on their own. The well-recognized and reputable career of Bathori provided a link to the group


\(^{47}\)Ibid., p. 11.
of composers who would later become known as Les Six. Her relationship with the French composers heightened the careers of all involved. The composer’s works were shared with the public through her well-known voice, and she became well-versed in the French mélodie. It was during this time in her life that she became acquainted with Poulenc.

While no commercial recordings were made of Bathori performing Poulenc’s works, she played in integral part in the launching of his career. Her fame in Europe at that time united her audience with the emerging young composer’s work and gave him an advantageous start to his career. The same could be said of the rest of Les Six, as their music also benefited heavily from Bathori’s well-recognized and loved voice. Already having succeeded in a great career in opera, her relationships with these composers gave her a chance to further develop her technique in the French mélodie, leading some to call her one of the foremost interpreters of French song.48

Perhaps her aptitude for French song was due to her meticulous attention to detail and incredible ability to communicate through any type of music. Renaldo Hahn so eloquently articulates this in the following passage:

“Those who have heard her only in concert or in intimate settings, where her voice and her art perform each day so many services to music, can only imagine how interesting and arresting she is in the theater, how communicative her emotion is, and how profoundly the simplicity of her acting, joined with the perfect style and variety of her singing, moves the spectator.”49

While no correspondence between Bathori and Poulenc has been unearthed to date, it is understood that through her association with *Les Six*, the two shared a friendship and an admiration for each other’s passion in music. This is demonstrated in the fact that Bathori debuted two of Poulenc’s works: ‘Vocalise’ in 1927, and *Airs chantés* in 1928. He also dedicated several songs to her, including ‘Air vif’ from *Air chantés*, ‘A son page’ from *Poèmes de Ronsard* and ‘Une chanson de porcelaine.’

The two careers separated soon after they crossed paths. While Poulenc continued to compose and travel throughout Europe, Bathori found herself performing annually in Buenos Aires. She eventually moved there to teach in 1940, but returned to Paris in 1946 to teach and lecture on French radio. Although she was an integral part in the beginning of his career, he did not disregard her in her later years. For her 80th birthday, in an homage to her, Poulenc composed, ‘Une chanson de porcelaine.’ She lived until the age of 92, surviving Poulenc by seven years.
Marie-Blanche de Polignac

One of Poulenc’s closest friends, Marie-Blanche de Polignac, was born to fashion designer Jeanne Lanvin and Italian nobleman Count Emilio di Pietro in 1897. Their only child together, she grew to become not only an accomplished singer, but also a generous patron of the arts. It was Marie-Blanche’s second marriage to Comte Jean de Polignac which brought her into a family of French nobility. She became a member of the Nadia Boulanger Ensemble, and was able to provide a concert venue for Boulanger in her Paris residence in the rue Barbet-de-Jouy.

Her first meeting with Poulenc took place in 1918 during one of Marie-Blanche’s Sunday soirées musicales. The two met by chance through his former classmate, Raymonde Linossier. This meeting was the catalyst of a lifetime of friendship, as well as one of musical collaboration. The intimate concerts held in her home gave a venue for the premieres of many of Poulenc’s songs, sung by Bernac, as well as other contemporary composer’s works. This concert venue is more commonly known by today’s terms as the salon. Much of the French mélodie’s history is rooted in salons of this type.

50 Lanvin became famous for designing the unfitted-chemise-style flapper dress, which she originally designed for the young Marie-Blanche. The trend-setting dress soon found its way in the closets of adult women and became a part of fashion history.
Marie-Blanche sang a number of Poulenc’s songs, and fourteen were dedicated to her by the French composer, including *Trois Poèmes de Louise de Vilmorin* and “A toutes brides” from *Tel jour telle nuit*. He also dedicated two piano pieces to her, as well as the chamber cantata *Un Soir de neige*. Marie-Blanche’s family commissioned a number of works from Poulenc, including his popular *Concerto for Organ*. The *Concerto* was premiered in the Polignac estate on December 16, 1938 with Maurice Duruflé at the organ and Boulanger conducting. Poulenc writes about the work in this 1936 letter.

129. Francis Poulenc to Comtesse Jean de Polignac
*Thursday [may 1936]*

*Chère Marie-Blanche,*
You wrote me a love of a letter and I would have replied immediately had I not been working flat out. The *Concerto* [for organ] is almost complete. It has given me a lot of trouble but I hope it is all right as it is now and that you will like it. It is not the amusing Poulenc en route for the cloister, very XVth, if you like. Granted, the other 15th also has its charm…Vaugirard, etc. ...You see how serious Poupoule is. I confess that work is the only thing that tempts me now. At Noizay I have grown into a stoutish monk, somewhat dissolute, tended by a new and excellent cook. To preserve the Parisian in me, my room in Paris is almost ready, at 5 rue de Médicis, where my Uncle Royer lives. I shall be your neighbor. The style will be pure Flea Market. I have already acquired: a bed, an armchair, a piano-stool, a chair, all for 200 francs. ...

…The important thing is that you should love me very much, as I love you and embrace you both.

Fr.  

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He later wrote of his meeting with Marie-Blanche’s aunt\textsuperscript{57}, who had commissioned the work. The two had met so that she could hear Poulenc play the organ piece. He also commented on her health.

139. Francis Poulenc to Comtesse Jean de Polignac
\textit{Château de Tremblay, Neubourg par Évreux (Eure), Wednesday [1938.]}

\textit{Chère Marie-Blanche},

...Once I got to Tours I went to see a surgeon friend who cured me in 24 hours with hot poultices and applications of Synthol. So, by Thursday, I was in a fit state to play the Concerto [for organ] to your aunt [Princesse Edmond de Polignac]. I think she was pleased. Just between ourselves, I did not find her in very good health that evening. She had a slight dizzy spell leaving the Chaplins’ home, where we had dined. Before the dinner (Avenue Henri Martin, where I was alone with her) I had been loudly singing the praises of Nadia [Boulanger] of whom – you were right – she is a little jealous, particularly as she had not seen her for some days and as Solange had had her to lunch. In the end, everything came right when we sat down at the piano.”\textsuperscript{58}

Poulenc also encouraged Marie-Blanche in her own singing, as she often found herself distracted from rehearsing. He wrote, “There is not reason, simply because we did not work on the Vilmorins together, for you to do the same thing when you are on your own. You must be \textit{ready} for the coming season.”\textsuperscript{59}

Although they shared a similar fervor for music, the pair most often wrote to each other on unrelated matters. Part of this August, 1936 letter is dedicated to the topic of politics, although his reserved humor is not lost in the subject.

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\textsuperscript{57} Princesse Edmond de Polignac
130. Francis Poulenc to Comtesse Jean de Polignac  
*Château de Tremblay, Evening of 15 August [1936]*

*Chère Marie-Blanche,*

“Marie-Blanche, I am not ‘Popular Front.’ Am I wrong? I am an old French Republican who once believed in liberty. I loathe Monsieur de La Roque but I used to like Monsieur Loubet well enough. For me, you see, the Republic as men like Clemenceau whose maxim I think of so often: on your feet!!!!! However, since yesterday I have made peace with the government and am ready to embrace (for once) Monsieur Zay for his judicious and intelligent appointment of Edouard, which makes me jump for joy. At last a tribute to competence, to taste and to intelligence. To believe, Marie-Blanche, that I have no leftish leanings is to know very little about me. I thought I had long ago given proof that popular fronts are dear to me and I confess that what pleased me about Le Quatorze Juillet was really the audience. All this is very complicated. Tell me that you still love me, Marie-Blanche, and write to me at the Hôtel du Commerce, Uzerche, where I may be made to copy a hundred times: ‘I played a wrong note’ or ‘I replied cheekily to Yvonne,’ etc.”

Poulenc’s frequent traveling isolated the social composer. He often wrote to his closest friends of the anxiety he felt about his own compositions. His many letters concerning his state of melancholy related to happier times spent in the homes of his dear friends.

167. Francis Poulenc to Comtesse Jean de Polignac  
*27 July [1944]*

*Chère Marie-Blanche,*

Thank you for your long letter which brought me a breath of tenderness. Touraine is killing me, you have said it. Every evening I become feverish, just as I did in Rome, which exasperates me. Between seven and eight at night I virtually suffocate, and the rest of the time, I rail against this place, against all my domestic problems and against my own anxiety. Consequently, for the past three weeks I have done no work, as all this is enough to curdle the milk of my Marmelles.

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60 Ibid., p. 107.
I do not know what to make of this composition and I prefer to let it rest. Of course, give me a room near Autun and some solitude, and inspiration would quickly return. But I suppose everyone has to pay his due and mine is pretty slight. I try in thought to escape from here. An album of photos of Paris charms and lulls me like a shot of morphine. I beg of you, never let anyone refer to me as *le musicien tourangeau*, for I have ALWAYS worked here as if in prison, dreaming of those magic landscapes – Monte Carlo, Nogent, boulevard de la Chapelle, etc.

Yes, July is the month I always used to spend at Kekker. If only you knew how constantly I think of this. The other day the sound of my neighbor’s old iron staircase made my heart leap. I thought I was stepping out of your Britanny hall and instinctively sought the simultaneous sound of a horse’s hoof on the gravel.

What an endless string of memories come crowding in: the fragrance of magnolias in the hallway near the rackets; your perfume in the first-floor corridor; the scent of thyme at the turning to your mother’s room, and of greengages and peaches in my own. The sound of the wood in the broiler around eight at night; and you and Jean, *always late* coming down, the black velvet dinner jacket and your dear, lovely face. All this is so pleasant to recall that it is not even sad, you see. No one can rob us of our memories – they belong to us and we must live on them. Writing all this to you today is a melancholy but sweet escape. I find my surroundings less depressing and I pity only those who have not lived. To suffer loss is hard, but never to have had anything is worse. That is why, when I picture you in the evenings alone and unhappy, what comforts me is to have known you once fulfilled.

…That you have turned to music again fills me with joy. Yes, the andante of the *Jupiter* is the height of unbelievable perfection. It has everything: line, freshness, grandeur, and what orchestration!!! Try to follow the score so as to savor the writing for woodwind. After hearing that, one wonders why one bothers to compose at all. I have become so hard on myself that there are days when, had I total faith, I would close my piano and retire to a monastery.

Fortunately there is one work, and perhaps only one, that tells me I was right to compose music, and that is my Cantata on poems by Eluard. I have a secret copy of it here. I play it every day, and its underlying integrity and faith foil my foulest mood, my harshest self-criticisms.

…I embrace you in hast, very affectionately. Fr. 61

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The two musicians were close up until the passing of Marie-Blanche in 1958. Poulenc had lost many close friends over his lifetime, but this in particular was a huge devastation to Poulenc. He chose to cope with her passing in the same way he did for others, by composing a piece in her honor. Temporarily abandoned by his love for poetry, Poulenc could not find words to express his deep sadness, and instead composed a piece for solo piano. “Elegie” is one of his longest works for keyboard. The nature of the piece may give us a glimpse into his mind after this great loss. It is more subdued than his other piano pieces, and its simplicity is quite touching.
Suzanne Peignot

Considered to be one of Poulenc’s closest life-long friends, Suzanne Peignot had the honor of premiering many of Poulenc’s most notable works. Known for her dark, rich voice, the composer singer debuted, with Poulenc as her accompanist, *Le Bestiaire* in 1919, *Poèmes de Ronsard* in 1925; *Trois Poèmes de Louis Lalanne* in 1931; and ‘Souric et Mouric’ from *Cinq Poèmes de Max Jacob* in 1932.

His love for Peignot was demonstrated not only in these premieres, but was also realized in a number of song dedications to the singer. These dedications included songs from some of Poulenc’s most treasured cycles: “Air champêtre” from *Air chantés*; ‘Atibutes’ from *Poèmes de Ronsard*; ‘La Petite servante’ from *Cinq Poèmes de Max Jacob*; and ‘Il vole’ from *Fiançailles pour rire*. Poulenc considered ‘Il vole’ to be quite a challenge, as is noted in his diary. “‘Il vole.’ One of the most difficult of my songs. It seems to me impossible to interpret it without serious work and numerous rehearsals.”62 It is perhaps this reason that it is the only work dedicated to the singer that was never recorded by her. She went on to record *Air chantés* in 1930, as well as performed in INA recordings of broadcasts, including ‘Je n’ai plus que les os’ and ‘Atibutes’ from *Poèmes de Ronsard; Cinq Poèmes de Max Jacob* (all recorded in 1945) and ‘Paul et Virginie,’ which was recorded in 1952.

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Poulenc speaks of the significance of his *Poèmes de Ronsard* for her career in a 1934 letter to Peignot.

124. Francis Poulenc to Suzanne Peignot

*Nazelles, Sunday [30 September 1934]*

*Mon trésor,*

You are to me exactly what you say I am to you, and you are the only person in the world who is like a sister to me. I always open your letters with joy, and it is with even more delight that I watch the road for your arrival.

Since Salzburg I have thought of you a great deal, in many different ways, and I consider you now to be at a decisive turning-point in your career. This is why I want to help you and why I think that the Ronsards will be for you what the Concerto was for Jacques [Février].

I have already orchestrated three of them and I am beginning the last two. I am sure they will be very good for although they are for a large orchestra I am trying not to drown the voice.

I have just suggested to Morel the first performance for Lamoureux. I have also written to Lyons and to Brussels. I am hoping that next September we can organize a Promenade Concert for you in London (broadcast throughout the world). We will also try Geneva. You see we have a lot on our plate………..I have found a spot for you in another lecture at the Vieux-Colombier (The Songs of Chabrier in our Time), on 17 January. We must have a good long talk about it all. Can you come to Noizay on Saturday 14th for the weekend, with Monique? I cannot ask you before that as I am staying with my aunt [Tante Liénard] at Nazelles until the 13th (because of grape-harvesting, servants, etc.) Write to me here immediately. I embrace you affectionately.

Your Fr.

Naturally Henri is also invited for the 14th. The spring-bed is brand new.63

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In addition to debuting and recording many of Poulenc’s songs, the pair often toured together as well. In a March 1931 letter, Poulenc informs Peignot of their upcoming concert.

112. Francis Poulenc to Suzanne Peignot

*Le Grand Coteau, Noizay (Indre-et-Loire), [5 March 1931]*

*Chérie,*

I have just booked the Salle Chopin for a Poulenc Festival on the evening of 1 June.

Here is my programme:

I Sonata for two clarinets

II *Cocardes* with instruments
   Suzanne Peignot

III *Quatre poèmes d’Apollinaire* for baritone
   Gilbert Moryn – First performance.

IV Sextet for piano and winds –
   First performance.

V Piano pieces

VI *Trois poèmes de Louise Lalanne*
   Suzanne Peignot – First performance

VII Trio. 64

What do you think of it? Good, isn’t it? As I require ten instruments to satisfy my orchestral needs you will understand that I cannot exactly cover you in gold for this performance, which I am organizing at my own expense. If you will accept 300 francs towards your traveling costs, that will be perfect. Besides, it will be a very good thing for you from every point of view as I am hoping to have a full house and an elegant one at that. From now on, I am taking care of everything myself. Seats at 50 francs and 30 francs, *and no complimentary tickets.* I shall give you for your own use four tickets numbered in advance, which is much better as we are then certain of what we are offering. I shall do the same for the press and for one or two musicians. This is the only way of avoiding dissatisfaction while making sure of the takings. As for the instrumentalists – only the best: Darrieux, Dhérin, Lamorlette, Cahuzac, etc. etc.

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As you can imagine, this will not exactly work out cheaply but I thought it was the only way of adding glamour to my first performances. In all my spare moments I am now addressing envelopes made with beautiful paper, which will be stamped at half a franc and sent to all the appropriate people. In the way I am in direct contact with my public. I would like to recreate the atmosphere of that famous concert (Trio – *Gaillardes*) at Les Agriculteurs. Will you let me know immediately whether I can count on you. Contact me by telephone any morning around nine o’clock. I hope that *everything* is well with you. As for me, I am keeping busy, working and enjoying the quiet.

*Des millions de tendresses ma chérie.*

Francis

The two developed a very special relationship over the years in which they thought of each other as siblings. Peignot stated in a 1964 article for the journal *Adam*:

“For me, Francis was even more than a brother; he was an incomparable friend and the guiding light throughout my career…His judgments about music were always illuminating and right. Working with him was a thrilling and richly instructive experience.”

Perhaps it was their close relationship that gave Poulenc permission to criticize the singer. He found that she occasionally lacked motivation, and took it upon himself to remedy the problem. In an undated letter he encourages Peignot to work as diligently as Marie-Blanche de Polignac.

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66 Ibid., p. 310.
What has become of you, my blonde angel?
I feel somewhat anxious, not having heard from you. What is going on in your heart and what are your plans at this onset of winter? I have been giving you a lot of thought and would like to speak to you seriously about your life.
1. If you wish to make the most of your singing you must work very regularly, just like a pupil. Pierre [Bernac] never goes about it any other way.
2. There is only one way you can succeed, but it seems a sure one to me, and that is to get together with the group Nadia, Derenne, Cuénod, etc. In the first place, you will make some delightful friends and in addition, together with them, you will gradually get on to Radio. Only yesterday Cuénod was heard in the first performance of a cantata by Milhaud.
But you will have to tell yourself firmly that it will be a quite different life from the one you are leading now, it will be the life of a true artist and not of an amateur such as you have been living for several years. You will be very busy, from early in the morning until late at night, and you will not be able to use Henri as an excuse.
You will also have to relinquish all thoughts of self-importance and you must realize that you will not be there to steal solos from Marie-Blanche [de Polignac]. Although it might seem incredible to you, Marie-Blanche has worked far harder than you for the last two years. Should you need convincing, you have only to listen to her recordings of Monteverdi, Pierre was bowled over by them. Gradually, you will get to the top again and, taking advantage of the fact that Marie-Blanche is not always free, you will do odd things here and there, with the others. In this way, Nadia is taking Cuénad and Doda [Conrad] to America. I assure you that this is more certain and more prestigious than some hypothetical engagement by Cendrars. While great artists like Panzera and Bernac already have difficulty making it, it would be stupidly naïve to believe that it would be possible in your case. Admit it, my love.
Think about all this and you will see that everything I am telling you is absolutely right. What I am suggesting is so attractive, so lively and appealing, and would take you out of yourself so well, that if I were you I would jump at the opportunity. Otherwise,

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67 It is unclear exactly when this letter was written, as Poulenc often excluded dates from his correspondence. This date is suggested by editor Sidney Buckland, from Francis Poulenc, 'Echo and Source.' Selected Correspondence 1915-1963.
continue making your hats, have your picture in Vogue, and go on living a life that I do not believe is right for you. You have better things to do. Only a well regimented Suzanne Peignot will progress, will become a star again and make us forget the poor little wounded bird. So there you have it. Phone me one morning. Loving kisses.

Fr.

If you were a free artist you would come here and talk to me about it all this Sunday. Your room is ready.
I have reread my letter; the tone is harsh but you know that I adore you and that I am right.68

Poulenc’s final thought in this letter must have justified his criticism of the singer, although his intentions always seemed to be advocating in the best interest of his singers.

Although no one could rival the relationship between Poulenc and Bernac, however, Poulenc’s friendship with Suzanne Peignot certainly shared a similar bond. Numerous tours, recordings, dedication, and debuts cement her standing in Poulenc’s history. He described her as “the matchless interpreter of all my early melodies for female voice.”69 This statement alone demonstrates the veracity of their connection, as few greater compliments have been uttered by the composer himself. The singer died in 1993, leaving behind a legacy that will surely be missed by many admirers of Poulenc.

69 Ibid., p. 310.
Denise Duval

“For me, this girl is pure sunlight” Poulenc wrote in a letter to Bernac. These words exhibit the high-regard in which he held Duval. Poulenc possessed much admiration for the singer, as is proven by the significant works that he composed for the French soprano. In many ways, Poulenc is responsible for the level of her career achievement. The two were introduced by Max de Rieux, who heard Duval rehearsing Tosca and immediately thought of Poulenc. The composer had been working on an opera buffa for many years and was in dire need of an appropriate soprano for the lead role. Once Poulenc heard Duval’s bright, focused voice, he exclaimed, ‘Oh! She is exactly the woman I need! Max, you’re a genius!’

This initial meeting led to a life-long friendship in which compositions, letters, and recital tours were shared. The two developed a close friendship, but Poulenc always maintained a professional relationship as well. In one of his first letters to Duval, Poulenc advises the young soprano on his opera, Les Mamelles.72

191. Francis Poulenc to Denise Duval
Monday [1947]

Ma Denise,
You really are an angel, a treasure, to have phoned me this morning. I was going to phone but I was afraid of waking you. I am delighted with the good news about Les Mamelles. What luck to have a conductor [Albert Wolff] with experience of the theatre!

71 Ibid., p. 303.
72 Duval later recorded Les Mamelles de Tirésias in 1953; six years after its debut.
I will drop him a line this very day. I am working like a slave; I will have finished everything, thank God, by my return on Wednesday the 22\textsuperscript{nd}. And then I’ll make sure you really get down to work. I am so looking forward to spending a lot of time with you. I will think of you on Friday.

Do not forget ‘iddole’. Equal weight to each note in the 6/8 time, but nuances in the mirror scene with accelerando. Try to find some other shoes. Do not forget to have your blouse already undone by the time you attack the phrase on the high C\textsuperscript{73}. Aim for stability. Venus invisible yet present.

Bernard came for the weekend. We spoke of you continuously. The whole of Tourraine, by the way, talks of nothing but our marriage!!!!!!!

I embrace you tenderly, my treasure.

Francis\textsuperscript{74}

He later remarked about the Opéra-Comique’s first performance of \textit{Les Mamelles de Tirésias} in June of 1948.

“…but I was lucky enough to be supported by a charming singer I’d discovered: Denise Duval, who has since become a start and the unrivalled “lead” in Ravel’s \textit{L’Heure espagnole}. I’ve every weakness for \textit{Les Mamelles de Tirésias}; I think I prefer this work to everything else I’ve written. If you want to get an idea of my complex musical personality, you’ll find me completely myself as much in \textit{Les Mamelles} as in my \textit{Stabat Mater.”}\textsuperscript{75}

Inspired by this newly-found voice, Poulenc went on to compose several major works for Duval, including his now-frequently-performed opera, \textit{Dialogues des Carmélites}. Although first performed in Italian at La Scala in January of 1957, the original French version was performed at the Théâtre National de l’Opéra in Paris under the direction of Pierre Dervaux. It was for this

\textsuperscript{73} A comical scene where Tirésias pops her “bosom,” which are actually two balloons, with a cigarette lighter in order to shun her femininity.


performance which Duval sang the leading role of Blanche. Soon after the French premiere, Duval, along with the other original cast members, recorded the opera. Poulenc composed a letter to his close friend, Rose Dercourt-Plaut, in which he gave accolades to Duval.

281. Francis Poulenc to Rose Dercourt-Plaut
[Paris], 1 May [1957]

Ma chère petite Rose,
Forgive my long silence but writing is not my forte, as you know. Fortunately others do it for me, and so you know all about the outcome of Les Carmélites. It will be opening in Paris on 21 June. I hope you will be there. I think it will be wonderful. Milan was superb but Paris will be overwhelming. The entire cast is marvelous and Denise in the role of Blanch is superb. She really is a great actress and Bernac, with whom she has been working over the last six weeks, has done marvels with her.76

Shortly after this success, Poulenc composed La Voix Humaine for Duval.

The one-act opera in monologue form illustrates a young woman alone in her bedroom. The piece can be considered quite demanding as it forces the soprano to span an array of emotions with little other than a phone and a bed. Duval debuted and recorded the challenging work in 1959, evidently to Poulenc’s standards.

311. Francis Poulenc to Denise Duval
Tuesday [December 1959]

Ma cocotte jolie,
I am not put out that you find my fellow-composers’ music harder than your Pou loule’s. Quite honestly, with us, it’s as if we were making babies together. Nobody has impregnated you more than I!!! and who would have believed it?

It was very funny to see you surrounded by all your men friends... In fact your three brawny garde du corps\textsuperscript{77} cause me much amusement. I, however, am your garde du Coeur\textsuperscript{78}, which is a far lovelier thing to be, don’t you think?

You know, when I heard the recording [of \textit{La Voix humaine}], alone, at home, I was quite overwhelmed, but not tearfully, almost joyously. Having brought this beautiful, sad child into the world, all that we went through for it seems worth while. When I think back on the period of gestation of this work – which I am now convinced is a masterpiece – I do so almost with tenderness. I see again my room in Cannes, in Saint-Raphaël. Yes, it is certainly worth while to have lived through all of that.

I am leaving for Bagnols-enForêt, Var. Write to me soon, a long letter which I’ll find when I arrive, telling me all the details of the premiere. You are alone now; it will give you something to do. How happy you will be to put on your red cloak once again and to weep about love. Deep down, we French understand each other so well.

Tender kisses from you Poupoule who adores you.

Fr.\textsuperscript{79}

Perhaps the opening of this letter gives us some amusing insight as to one of the reasons he composed \textit{La Voix humaine} for Duval. His second paragraph informs Denise of the level of success of this unusual work.

317. Francis Poulenc to Denise Duval
\textit{19 July, 1960}

\textit{Mon Rossignol à larmes}\textsuperscript{80},

I loved your joyful voice on the telephone. Like me, you are not made for solitude.

They can talk of nothing but you and \textit{La Voix} in Aix. Everything else, they say, is just an hors-d’oeuvre.

On Sunday the audience will be much more amusing: the likes of Bourdet, Lopez, etc.

\textsuperscript{77}garde du corps - bodyguards
\textsuperscript{78}garde du coeur - guardian of your heart
\textsuperscript{80}Mon Rossignol à larmes - “a nightingale who brings tears to one’s eyes.” One of Poulenc’s favorite nicknames of which to call Duval.
Be on form and keep working at your ‘je devenais fol-le’ which you do so well when you concentrate. I was really happy the other night; it was wonderful. With the two of us, you are so much me that it is as if I were split in two. When you see your impresario, try to be a little firmer with him. I know how indulgent you feel towards him but this does not make our work any easier.

Until Sunday. I adore you. Fr.  

After Poulenc’s closest friend and confidant, Pierre Bernac, retired, the composer accompanied Duval on many concert tours through Europe and the USA. Following is a letter to Duval about an upcoming recital tour in Italy.

Although quite a few concerts are given by the duo, Poulenc took special care to schedule relaxation time for him and his dear friend.

335. Francis Poulenc to Denise Duval

Thursday [early January 1962]

Ma chère enfant,

Now, I beg of you, prepare your concert. There is not much to do. I know that the theatre is your only love but you must at least allow yourself the possibility of appearing in recital. Don’t worry, I do not intend to involve you in endless concert tours, you have better things to do, but Italy must be perfect. What you have to learn is negotiable. Get the notes into your head quickly, the rest will follow quite naturally. Let’s not have a recurrence of New York now that we have all the winning cards in our hands.

As I said, you need an elegant evening gown for two concerts (Trieste and Turin) and one for the other afternoon concerts. Listen to your old maestro, who embraces you fondly.

Fr.

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ITALIAN TOUR

Depart 3rd in evening (train) for Trieste.
Arrive Trieste about 11a.m. on 4th
   Evening – dinner in our honor at Favello Bamfield’s.
5th – concert.
6th – depart for Milan where we spend three nights as we will be
   brought back by car after the concert on 7th in Turin.
8th – lunch in honor of Duval.
   Evening – grand gala from Don Carlos at La Scala.
10th – concert Florence.
11th – concert Perugia (80 km from Florence).
12th – depart for Rome where we stay with the Peccis.
13th – day of rest in Rome.
14th – depart for Naples. Retire early.
15th – concert Naples.

As you see, except for Florence-Perugia, you always have one or
two days, sometimes even three (Rome) between concerts.
Distances are short. So the whole thing will not be very tiring.

Programme:
   Chevelure’ – ‘Mandoline’ (it exists in two keys).
POULENC: (Court paille) – La Voix (with one cut which I will
   show you).
Three RAVEL. 82

Poulenc and Duval were close even in the final years of his life. He
composed his final song cycle, La Court Paille, for Duval to sing to her young
son. It was dedicated to her and Richard Schilling, but the first performance was
given by Colette Herzog, accompanied by Jacques Février. 83

82 Buckland, Sidney. Francis Poulenc, ‘Echo and Source:’ Selected Correspondence 1915-1963.
83 Poulenc, Francis. Journal de mes Mélodies. (Diary of my Songs). Translated by Winifred
In many ways, each musician aided the other’s career. It is difficult to disassociate one from the other as many of Poulenc’s best works were composed for the soprano. But possibly even more significant was their personal relationship. In a conversation with Claude Rostand, Poulenc describes what drew him to Duval. “When I met Denise Duval, I was immediately struck by her luminous voice, her beauty, her elegance, and especially by that ringing laugh of hers…”84 Perhaps it is a close and loving friendship, such as this one, that motivates composers to write such inspirational and noteworthy music. Without their relationship, many of his significant works may never have come to fruition, denying many people the beauty and exquisiteness heard in these works.

Rose Dercourt-Plaut

Literature on Rose Dercourt-Plaut is sparse, but fortunately, Poulenc and Dercourt-Plaut kept meticulous records of their correspondence. A Polish-American soprano and student of Désiré Inghelbrecht, Dercourt-Plaut came to know Poulenc in 1949 while he was on his first tour of America. Poulenc was inspired by her sweet disposition and beautiful voice, which in turn, led him to record many songs with her. In addition to his dedication of “Nuage” to her, the duo recorded “Nuage”; *Cinq Poèmes de Paul Éluard; le Travail du peintre; “Air romantique”* from *Airs chantés; “La Grenouillère”; Huit Chansons polonaises* (in Polish); and “Avant le cinéma” from *Quatre Poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire*.

Perhaps theirs was a friendship through music as well as one of convenience. Rose’s husband, Fred, was a sound engineer who worked on Poulenc’s recordings for CBS.85 In addition to this, he was also an accomplished photographer from whom many of Poulenc’s favorite photographs came.

The following letter discusses not only the state of his opera, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, it also hints at a recital between the two friends and his song [*‘Nuage’*] that he would be composing for her. The final two paragraphs exhibit the fondness that Poulenc had for Rose’s husband, as well as their affectionate banter.

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Ma Petite Rose,
It is appalling to be so lazy. I ask your forgiveness on bended knees. What a lot has happened since your departure! That famous day of the storm, and the taxi strike, etc… I finished copying out the last scene of *Les Carmélites* at five o’clock, at precisely the time my friend from Toulon was dying! Is that not strange!!!! Although expected, this death has affected me deeply. It is too long and too complex to explain in a letter. A good six years of my life now well and truly in the past. What a lot of mixed feelings, and suffering too! But all necessary for *Les Carmélites*. I am finishing the orchestration now.

In the autumn I gave a lot of concerts with Pierre Bernac, made many recordings and completed my version for piano and voice for the printer. Now I am turning my thoughts to new music, and first and foremost to your song ['Nuage']. I might be coming to New York for a week at the end of October. Why don’t I accompany you in a little recital for radio with ‘the first world’ of this song? Anyway, we will see each other before then.

I am going to spend the New Year at Raymond’s. I shall go again in February. I work very well there. I have had my upright piano moved there. Raymond finds the winter rather a trial but I don’t mind it.

Brigitte [Manceaux] has not been well. She has been suffering from lumbago. She is better now.

Fred’s photos arrived yesterday evening. What incredible marvels!!! Everybody exclaims on seeing them. It is amazing. I have never been so well photographed, and the ones of Brigitte are fantastic. I think she would be wild with joy to have two or three for herself. I have already given her one but I am keeping the other two (one for Paris, one for Moizay). I shall give the Destouches theirs on the 31 December.

I am crazy about my little radio, which works wonderfully. I take it with me on all my trips and, thanks to you, any depressing thoughts are banished from my hotel rooms. Anna and Charles are well. They send you their respects. Embrace ‘my photographer’, ‘my engineer’, ‘my friend Fred’, and let me tell you once again how precious your affection is to me.
A very fond embrace for you as well.

Francis

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In this more personal letter, Poulenc discusses his plans for Rose’s song, ‘Nuage,’ as well as demonstrates his meticulous manners in the final paragraph.

272. Francis Poulenc to Rose Dercourt-Plaut
[Brive, Corrèze], 16 June [1956]

Chère petite Rose,
Excuse my dreadful silence but I have had an insane amount of work to do recently. I have just finished the orchestration of *Les Carmélites*. It will be produced in February at La Scala and in March in Paris. I have corrected the piano score, and prepared the concert and lecture that I am giving in Aldeburgh (at the Britten Festival on 24 June). Now that the main work is over I am going to turn my mind to various other things, and primarily to your song [‘Nuage’], for which I have already found two bars!!!

Here are my plans: from 26 June to 12 July – Evian. From 12 to 20 – Milan. From 20 to 23 – Aix. From 24 to 28 – American Conservatory in Fontainebleau, where I am giving a course with Bernac on my music. From 28 July to 14 August - Normandy, at my sister’s. Then Noizay.

Couldn’t you come to Fontainebleau from the 24th, before Enghien? Or could you make a weekend at my sister’s in August (two hours away from Paris)? I am of course counting on a weekend in September at Noizay with my beloved photographer. I shall not be going to America this winter but certainly next winter. This winter I have my opera everywhere – Milan, Paris, Vienna.

Will you be an angel and slip into your luggage four pairs of socks for me, in nylon without elastic at the calf, two blue and two brown. (I take size 42 in France.) A record of *Les Mamelles* and a cheque book which dear Paffrotti and Salabert’s will give you for me. Naturally I will pay you back for the socks and record. What joy to see you again soon. I am marvelously well and am sleeping again without taking anything. Everything is fine with the Destouches. Brigitte [Manceaux] too. We cannot wait to see you. Do, do come to Fontainebleau.

I embrace both you and Fred.

Your devoted
Francis

At the end of a letter to Rose, Poulenc wrote specifically to her husband. His detailed nature bled into his concern over his appearance. Knowing his features were not typical, he had a strong desire to control which pictures would be published.

For Fred
Beloved photographer, your photos are FAN-TAS-TIC and never have I had better ones. Many thanks. Could I have, in the small size, a few of the one where I am in the armchair with my legs crossed. That is the one – if you agree – that will go at the beginning on Henri Hell’s book on me. Come quickly and see Les Carmélites. 

I embrace you.
Poupoule

Francis also discussed others’ singing with the Polish-American. In this passage, he tells her how Denise Duval’s performance as Blanche in Dialogues des Carmélites pleased him.

282. Francis Poulenc to Rose Dercourt-Plaut [Noizay], 9 June [1957]

Ma petite Rose,
Here I am in the throes of final preparations for my grand premiere, for as far as I’m concerned, this is truly ‘my’ premiere. In Milan they worked for me. In Paris Les Carmélites will be exactly what I imagined. Everything pleases me: sets, music, production, cast. Denise is sublime. What an actress! Blanche, so much a part of me for so long, is at last springing to life. Think of me on the 21st. One the 18th I am playing my Sonata for flute and piano in Strasbourg. This is a very full month. As for matters of the heart, things are also going very well. My Sergeant is a love. I am writing from Noizay where I came for the two days of Pentacost. I have my meals with the Raymonds who send you their love. Great news. Brigitte has bought a plot of land in St. Tropez and is busy building. She is wild with joy.

Or course you will see *Les Dialogues* when it reopens.  
[...] Thank you for the marvelous photos. I embrace both you and Fred very fondly.  

Fr.  

If I go to New York it will be in February. *Les Carmélites* is due to be shown on television then.  

Not all letters between the two friends and colleagues were uplifting in nature. Poulenc battled many periods in his life in which he felt depression. An example of this is as follows:  

294. Francis Poulenc to Rose Dercourt-Plaut  
*Hotel Ritz, Barcelona, 30 January [1959]*  

*Ma chère petite Rose,*  
I came here for *Les Carmélites.* The performance was pathetic. Disgraceful orchestra. Duval, Scharley, and Crespin remarkable but all the rest (really crude) 36th rate. Thank heavens I will have *Les Carmélites* on 12 February in Vienna with Zeefrisch [Irmgard Seefried] and all the great ladies.  

*My Voix humaine* is opening in Paris on 6 February and in Milan on the 18th. Duval is *superb* in an astonishing production by Cocteau. I will send you the music of this atrocious tragedy (my own). It is a musical confession!!!  
I am less than well but am growing used to anguish and sadness. I only hope I will be able to write music again one day. For the moment I do not have much inclination to do so.  
Will you be an angel and go and see Franco Columbo at Ricordi, 16 West 61st, who will give you a record on my account. Then let me know the exact number of the record.  
I am absolutely broke at the moment so I need to get back into work *quickly.* I am obliged to accept commissions while having very little musical appetite. And this is what love has reduced me to. Anyway, I owe him *La Voix humaine* (which is certainly something). Do not judge me severely. God on being fond of me. I think of you, of Fred, of New York as of an inaccessible paradise.  

Fond kisses  
Francis  

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The friendship between Francis and Rose continued up until Poulenc’s death in 1963. In addition to multiple songs recorded between the two, ‘Nuage,’ and a myriad of photographs, approximately sixty letters existing from Poulenc’s hand are located in the Fred and Rose Plaut Archives at Yale University, New Haven. While it is impractical to include excerpts from all of them, from these passages, one can understand a bit of the relationship that they each held so dearly. Their last correspondence with each other was in January of 1963, the month of Poulenc’s passing.

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91 Ibid., p. 302.
Yvonne Printemps

Born Yvonne Wignolle, the French soprano possessed a strong stage presence from an early age. At the young age of thirteen, she could be seen dancing in revues at the Folies Bergère in Paris. Just a few years later, she starred in the operettas Les Contes de Perrault in 1913 and Le Poilu in 1916. Her fellow chorus members nicknamed her “Printemps” because of her never-failing cheerful mood. This nickname stayed with her throughout her singing and acting career as she believed it was a good name for the stage. Her career led her to actor-playwright Sasha Guitry, whom she later married. Her reputation for a lifestyle rooted in her sexuality was not diminished as she fell in love with the French film star Pierre Fresnay, who was thought to be responsible for her divorce from Guitry. Her lavish lifestyle was known to most, as she adored being in the public eye. Even later in her life, she would be seen toting her dogs around while adorned in jewels and wearing extravagant hats.

Poulenc’s association with the diva is limited to two song dedications, ‘Les Chemins de la’mour’ from Léocadia, and ‘A song guitare’ from Margot, which she recorded with the Orchestre Marcel Cariven. In his diary he writes,

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93 French word for “springtime.”
“Yvonne Printemps has recorded ‘A sa guitare’ in a version enhanced by some instrumental additions. Unfortunately I have lost the score – a pity, because it was rather pleasing.”

Printemps continued her life of performing well into her sixties, even co-directing at the Théâtre de la Michodièrè in Paris with her lover Fresnay until 1975. She died in 1977, and was honored by France by having her image placed on a postage stamp in 1994.

Rosanna Carteri

Rosanna Carteri’s vocal career began at the unusually early age of twelve. At this time she had already given a very successful concert, and by twenty, had achieved star-status. She made her stage debut at the Rome Opera as “Elsa” in *Lohengrin* and was very successful at *La Scala*, becoming one of the best-known Italian concert sopranos of her generation. She sang at the Academia di Santa Célliana in Rome under Franco Molinar-Prandelli, as well as in Donizetti’s *Requiem* in Naples. She was also successful in her tours of Spain, England, France, and North and South America. By her mid-thirties she had created an impressive discography of standard repertoire, and decided to retire. Her early retirement is considered unusual in her generation, as many of her colleagues continued to sing well into their fifties and sixties.

She was not particularly known for her interpretation of Poulenc’s mélodies during her prime, but she did leave her mark on the French composer’s career. This was accomplished by debuting one of his most loved choral works, *Gloria*. She later recorded the *Gloria* with conductor Georges Prêtre and chorus master and longtime friend of Poulenc’s, Yvonne Gouverné. The work necessitates an incredible ability to connect between large intervals in the solo

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100 Ibid., p. 73.
line, as well as a full, rich, lyric timbre, for which Carteri was known. These vocal qualities also led her to record *Air chantés*\(^{102}\) as well as portions of *Dialogues des Carmélites*.\(^{103}\)

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\(^{102}\) With Poulenc as her accompanist.

Madeleine Grey

Madeleine Grey was born in the town of Villaines-la-Juhel, France, on the 11th of June, 1897. A classical pianist, she began her studies at the National Conservatory in Paris with Alfred Cortot. Discovering that her love of singing outweighed her desire to become a pianist, she began studying voice with Amédée-Louis Hettich at the conservatory. Many have described her voice type as having both soprano and mezzo-soprano characteristics, which may have attributed to her accomplishments. Her first Parisian vocal performance in 1921 was met with much success, and soon after, she debuted Ravel’s *Chansons Hébraïques*, and the *Chansons d’Auvergne* of Canteloube. Her life was dedicated to the interpretation of contemporary French works. This determination and natural aptitude led her to become revered for her performances of French art song.104

Known for her close relationship with Maurice Ravel, Madeleine Grey also developed a kinship with Francis Poulenc. In a letter dated December of 1937, Poulenc expresses his admiration for the vocalist:

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134. Francis Poulenc to Madeleine Grey  
*Noizay, [December 1937]*

*Irascible diva,*  
I wrote to inform Enoch\(^{105}\) that it was all right for the beginning of January. I think he has already given you my reply.  
You know perfectly well that I love you very much, that I find you talented, extremely talented, with a difficult disposition, a great intelligence, much musicality, a volatile temper, etc. etc.  
See you soon. I embrace you, Divine one!  

Francis\(^{106}\)

Soon after this letter was written, Poulenc and Grey convened to record some of the composer’s works. Apparently, the recording did not live up to Poulenc’s expectations, and he encouraged her not to release it in this most unwelcome letter.

137. Francis Poulenc to Madeleine Grey  
*Le Grand Coteau, Noizay (Indre-et-Loire), 7 June [1938]*  
*Ma chère Madeleine,*  

I was hoping to see you during one of my visits to Paris but I am stuck here with my nose to the grindstone. In a letter there is always the risk of being misunderstood and I would not want you to think for one moment, because of what I am about to say, that I do not admire you, since in fact I have always given you abundant proof to the contrary. Having made that clear, may I say that your recording is not worthy of you and that I do not advise you to allow it to be released. We are all victims of the treachery of the wax – this is the reason why six sides of Bernac-Poulenc in Fauré have just been put in the waste bin. No, quite frankly, the recording is not ‘you.’ What struck me most while listening *very carefully* to the test pressing is your lack of joy. If you had seen yourself in a mirror while you were making the recording you would have understood immediately that this was not the vivacious, *lively* Madeleine of the recital hall.

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\(^{105}\) A Parisian publisher; family-owned. Website located at:  

\(^{106}\) Buckland, Sidney. Francis Poulenc, ‘Echo and Source:’ Selected Correspondence 1915-1963.  
I think the microphone terrorizes you – only in this kind of music, naturally – and I am wondering whether we would not do better with some serious Poulenc, of the Poèmes de Max Jacob type. Think about all this, while repeating to yourself that I remain forever your devoted and admiring (but of course!)\textsuperscript{107} Poulenc

Poulenc’s polished and respectful character is well-represented in these words. Neither his demand for high-quality work, nor his friendship with the soprano were compromised as he attempted to hide bad news amidst words of flattery. Poulenc’s unforgiving words were obviously not intended to hurt the soprano, but to protect her from a possibly bleak review of the recording. He indeed felt high regard for Madeleine, even though he admitted that she possessed a few amusing idiosyncrasies. In an interview with Stephane Audel, Poulenc recalled a comical story involving Ravel.

F.P. “One day Madeleine Grey and I were rehearsing for a performance of (Ravel’s) Don Quichotte à Dulcinée songs…and I’d said to Madeleine Grey that perhaps Ravel would like to come. And Ravel, in fact, did come with his brother. He was almost in a coma at the time, I must say, and Madeleine Grey, who was an excellent singer but very wayward, said: “One of the notes is giving me trouble…I’ll sing it as a dotted note, Ravel won’t notice.”

S.A. And she dotted it?
F.P. “She did. I said: “All right Madeleine, but it may be dangerous.” “No it won’t,” she said, “he won’t notice.” Whereupon Ravel arrived, I tell you, in a state of mental coma. He sat down in a chair and we played the piece. “Ah,” he said, “that was very good, very good.” “But there’s something about it you don’t like, Ravel,” I said. “I can see it in your look. What is it? Is it too fast? Is it too loud? Is it to…?” Since he didn’t speak, I insisted: “Please, please. We’re here to rehearse with you, say anything!” And then he got up from his chair and went to the

piano – without saying a word – and put his finger on the note Madeleine Grey had dotted, and, like a child, (it was horrible, painful indeed...) he said: “There!” and he was pointing to THE NOTE!!108

In comparison to many of Poulenc’s favored singers, Grey and he shared a limited working relationship. Poulenc never composed anything for the French soprano, nor did he dedicate anything to her. Although he obviously shared a love of her voice, intelligence, and musicianship, we are currently left with little information as to why Poulenc never gifted Grey with any of his compositions.

Poulenc’s indiscreet words of Madeleine’s recording attempt show us the strength of their relationship, but they also demonstrate just how meticulous Poulenc was about his own music. In many of his other letters to his singers, his words couldn’t be more complimentary. It is important to exhibit the honesty and sincerity of his correspondence with friends and colleagues. It is thoughts of this candid nature that allow us to understand the true intents that Poulenc had concerning his music.

Suzanne Balguerie

After beginning her career focusing on contemporary French song, Suzanne Balguerie seemed to have found a place for her full, dramatic soprano voice on the opera stage. Like so many of Poulenc’s singers, Suzanne Balguerie studied at the Paris Conservatory where she developed a love of contemporary French music. This led her to perform in concert until the age of thirty-three, when she first appeared on the opera stage. She made her debut as “Ariane” in Dukas’s *Ariane et Barbe-bleu* at the Opéra Comique, where she remained for two decades.109 Her opera career also led her to the Paris Grand Opéra, where she was greatly received by the public.110

Although she never recorded any of Poulenc’s songs, she did perform many of his works in concert, including *Fiançailles pour rire* and *Cinq Poèmes de Max Jacob*. Poulenc dedicated “Berceuse” to Balguerie from the latter cycle, and described its unusual text in his diary. Perhaps the text reminded Poulenc of his own family dynamic. “Everything is topsy-turvy in the poem: the father is at mass, the mother in 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.”111

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Poulenc writes to Bernac in June of 1944 concerning a concert program intended for Balguerie.

“I have devised a programme for a Poulenc Festival of melodies which I am submitting to you (this so as to take my mind of things and to give me hope.) I have had this idea for quite some time.

I  Bestiaire (1919) *Quatre poèmes* Apollinaire (1932) – you.
II  5 Max Jacob (1932) – Suzanne Balguerie.
III  *Tel jour* (1937) – you.
IV  *Fiançailles* (1939) – Suzanne.
V  Jardin d’Anna (1939) – you.
    Allons plus vite (1944).
    Montparnasse, Hyde Park (1943).
    2 Aragon.

Not bad, eh, with *Villageoises* as an encore, thereby paying homage to Apollinaire, Max [Jacob], Eluard, Aragon, Loulou. Festival of Songs by Fr. Poulenc with the participation of Madame S.B. Monsieur P.B. and the composer. Pretty poster.

And with that, I’ll leave you. I feel better and embrace you affectionately."

Suzanne Balguerie remained in France most of her life, where she performed until the age of sixty-two. Upon retirement from her career in performance, she became a coach at the Conservatory of Grenoble. She continued to reside in Grenoble until her death in 1973.

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112 Louise de Vilmorin
<http://www.cantabile-subito.de/Sopranos/Five_French_Divas/hauptteil_five_french_divas.html>
Marya Freund

Born in 1876, Polish singer Marya Freund originally studied the violin with Pablo Martín Melitón Sarasate. Her career as a musician, however, became noteworthy after she began to study singing. She found her true passion in the performing of Lieder as well as many contemporary works by Falla, Stravinsky, Schönberg, Ravel, Prokofiev, Kodály, Poulenc, and others.

Poulenc found that he had a preference for her voice in his first set of songs, *Le Bestiaire*, which he composed in 1918. The set originally consisted of twelve songs, but upon the advice of Auric, he reduced it to six. This particular set was significant to Poulenc not only because it was his first set of songs, but also because he discovered a connection with the poet. “Ever since *Le Bestiaire*, I have felt a definite and mysterious affinity with the poetry of Apollinaire.”

This is furthered by the following quote:

“To sing *Le Bestiaire* with irony and above all *knowingly* is a complete misconception, showing no understanding whatsoever of Apollinaire’s poetry or in music. I treasure a letter from Marie Laurencin saying that my songs had the ‘sound of Guillaume’s voice’; there could be no finer compliment. It needed Marya Freund to sing *Le Bestiaire* as gravely as a song by Schubert to prove that it is something better than a piece of nonsense.”

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116 Ibid., p. 21.
117 Ibid., p. 21.
118 Ibid., p. 21.
Freund inspired the composer to dedicate “La souris,” from *Deux melodies* (1956) and “Le Tombeau” from the *Poèmes de Ronsard*, and “le dernier mazour” from the *Chanson polonaises* to her. Unfortunately, she recorded nothing by Poulenc, and none of her other recordings have been published. She is known not only for her stage career, but also as the mother of Doda Conrad, another of Poulenc’s singers.

119 Although Doda Conrad has been excluded from this document, material is available on him from multiple sources.
Colette Herzog

Colette Herzog is best-known for her association with Poulenc through song cycles such as *La Courte paille* and *Fiançailles pour rire*. She recorded both cycles in 1963, the year of the composer’s passing, with Jacques Février as her accompanist.\(^{120}\) *La Courte paille*, with text by Maurice Carême, was originally written for Denise Duval to sing to her six-year-old son.\(^{121}\) Poulenc’s words on the cycle are gentle. “These sketches, by turns sad or mischievous, are unpretentious. They should be sung tenderly. That is the surest way to touch the heart of a child.”\(^{122}\) Herzog premiered *La Courte paille* at the Festival du Royaumont in 1960 with Jacques Février at the piano. She later recorded “Ce doux petit visage” in 1967 with Anne-Marie de Lavilléon as her accompanist.\(^{123}\)


\(^{121}\) Ibid., p. 151.

\(^{122}\) Ibid., p. 109.

\(^{123}\) Ibid., p. 151.
Marya Modrakowska

Although no recordings of the Polish singer have been traced, her career and association with Francis Poulenc are worth noting. A student of Henry Melcer and Nadia Boulanger, Modrakowska made a name for herself singing at the Paris Opéra, and the Opéra-Comique, where she debuted as Mélisande in 1932. In addition to a career in opera, she also found herself enjoying the concert stage. It was this love that drew her to tour with Poulenc in 1933 in North Africa. As her accompanist, he agreed to harmonize *Huit Chansons Polonaises* at her request. Poulenc felt as though the last song, ‘Le Lac,’ was the most successful of the set, as well as the most personal, which may be why he dedicated this particular song to her. He noted in his diary, “The others are a little conventional but nice enough for the piano. After all, was there anything to do other than to “improvise” an accompaniment?” He also commented on her exquisite singing of them; “Modrakowska sang all these divinely.”

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125 Ibid., p. 31.
126 Ibid., p. 31.
127 Ibid., p. 31.
Geneviève Moizan

Following a series of ill-fated events, including the death of a friend, Poulenc composed his *Stabat Mater* in 1950 and 1951. The powerful and moving work was composed for soprano solo, mixed chorus, and orchestra. Geneviève Moizan was the soloist for the premiere which took place under the direction of Fritz Münch on June 13, 1951 at the Strasbourg Festival. While little is published on the soprano, a recording of her singing in the *Stabat Mater* is preserved in the INA.

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128 Christian Bérard, a painter and set designer who was died suddenly in 1949.
129 Institut national de l’audiovisuel, 116 avenue President -75220, Paris, France Cedex 16
The distinctive relationship shared between Yvonne Gouverné and Francis Poulenc is unlike the others in this document. Gouverné was not a singer for whom Poulenc composed. Rather, she was a well-respected chorus master and musicologist. Her history with the composer is included here simply because of the significant role she played in the development of Poulenc’s compositions.

Her relationship with Poulenc actually began with Pierre Bernac in the early nineteen-twenties. The two worked together on a daily basis, and as his coach, she accompanied him on many of his early concerts. It wasn’t until Poulenc and Bernac began their friendship that the composer met Gouverné. The three worked concurrently, and even vacationed together from 1935 to 1939.\(^{130}\) Poulenc treasured their friendship and often sought her advice in musical matters. He dedicated ‘Nous avons fait la nuit,’ the final song in the cycle *Tel jour telle nuit* as well as the second of his *Quatre motets pour un temps de penitence* to the chorus-master.\(^{131}\)


\(^{131}\) Ibid., p. 305.
In this 1938 letter, Poulenc speaks of Sécheresses, a work that was a “disaster.” The work was successfully revived on February 16, 1941 by Gouvré at the concert of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, conducted by Charles Munch. The letter finishes with a detailed, measure-by-measure account of Poulenc’s wishes for the piece.

138. Francis Poulenc to Yvonne Gouvré
Monday [1938]

Ma petite Yvonne,

I wish I could express what happiness your all too short visit gave me. Do not thank me for my friendship; if only you knew how essential yours is to me. I am afraid, ma petite Yvonne, that I turn to you far too often. Gradually (I am in no hurry) I would like it to be said in Paris that my Mass is worth working on – with a little bit of faith in the composition itself and a great deal of faith in me. I think Vallombrosa – who wrote me a charming letter – will perhaps be able to arrange something at Saint-Eustache with you. In his letter, his intention was to speak to you about it. I am also counting on you for a revival of Sécheresses next winter with Munch. My first choice of hall would be the Salle Gaveau, perfect in size for this composition. I have just finished amending, revising and polishing it. My conscience obliges me to say that I was partly at fault. In the first place, for having given in to James by including additional bars for the orchestra between the final cry ‘hear me’ and the conclusion. The only technical thing of which I am more or less certain is my sense of prosody. Adding artificial bars between an imperative phrase and an explanation is as if a man, ranting and

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132 In a letter to Claude Rostand, Poulenc writes, “Everything seemed to conspire against me. The singers from Lyons were grossly overtaxed, having given the first performance that very morning of my Mass, in the Dominican Chapel of the rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré. In addition, there was only one rehearsal on the Saturday morning with the conductor Paul Paray who, held up in Sweden due to plane trouble, arrived in Paris 48 hours late. In spite of his skill and his immense good will, the performance was a disaster and the reception was glacial. I can still see myself coming out of that concert, saying to Auric: ‘Sécheresses will never be performed again. It is a total failure, I am going to destroy it,’ and Auric, with his usual perspicacity, relying. ‘You can quite easily destroy your Poèmes de Ronsard or your Soirées de Nazelles, but on no account this!’” Buckland, Sidney. Francis Poulenc, ‘Echo and Source:’ Selected Correspondence 1915-1963. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1991. p. 357.
133 Ibid., p. 357.
railing, were to yell ‘listen to me,’ then go into the room next door and emerge ten minutes later to explain himself. What I would never have conceded to Eluard or to Apollinaire – oh! irony – I conceded to James... because he paid me for the work. I wanted him to be happy. You saw the result.

I have also touched up the conclusion very considerably – both in the orchestral part and the choral part. I had dreamed of an unaccompanied choir simply highlighted by instrumental touches but I have come to understand that what this created was a watercolor effect in the corner of a painting done in oils.

I confess to feeling very bitter that at my age I am still prone to such errors of ‘auditory vision.’

How hard it is to acquire skills when one is still trying to find one’s way. I keep seeing this in terms of a ladder, straight and difficult to climb. May God grant me a few more years of health, wisdom and application, so that I may try to leave behind me a little more than the little I have achieved so far.

Believe me, the hours of doubt are dreadful, and the greatness of those I admire – Debussy, Ravel, Strauss, Stravinsky, Falla – must not be obscured by the mediocrity that generally prevails.

I am working feverishly on the Organ Concerto. Two or three songs for Pierre [Bernac] are coming along quickly and well. These flowers make me hopeful of truly beautiful fruits to come.

Dear Yvonne, it is very pleasant indeed to be able to say exactly what one thinks about oneself. Believe me, I suffer neither from false modesty, nor from pride, nor from an inferiority complex. I simply try to see things clearly – that is all.

Whereupon I embrace you and send you these songs, more amusing I hope than my prose.

Very fondly,

Francis

My intention is to let Munch have the first performance of the Organ Concerto in thanks for Sécheresses. See how the land lies.134

Following is the detailed measure-by-measure account of Poulenc’s own notes on Sécheresses.

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COMMENTS OF SÉCHERESSES

I The grasshoppers
Orchestra: entire opening section relentless
   bar 17: tenor attack very violent
   bar 22: burning hot
   bar 30: altos very sonorous
   29-40: very violent
       This whole opening section blind with sand, sun and blood.
   bar 46: Sudden transition. The thermometer leaps from +50 to -10. Everything becomes clear – the ‘clear, lucid cold’ of Mallarmé.
   bar 60: Revert to the atmosphere of the opening section.
   bar 87: very gentle
   bar 91: very lyrical
   95-96: very gentle and clear
   From 107 on: very gentle and clear
   114-115 (and especially 16-17): harp very important, a rush of lyricism – ending in the greatest calm.

II The abandoned village
Orchestra: very delicate from 172 to 183
   At 189: altos and basses very sonorous

III The false future
At 220: Above all, do not fail to press forward with the tempo à la Schumann.
   At 239: The tenors must on no account stress beats like a theatre chorus but should maintain a long melodic line.
   bar 247: exactly the tempo of 220
   bar 255: altos well marked – very important
   bar 273: Mephistophelean pianissimo
       fairly long silence before

IV The skeleton of the sea
   bar 275: calm and solemn
   bar 288: The accelerando must heighten the impression of mystery and anxiety (of anguish, to be more precise).
   bar 303: Bring out clearly the beginning of the new stage in the tempo. This is the start of the crescendo and the accelerando that extends to bar 333, at which point it runs abruptly into the lyricism of the conclusion.
bar 334: Find a lovely sonority for the tenors, then the whole choir melancholy and tender.
entire ending: orchestra intense but not loud

Orchestra:
At bar 346: Bring out the ascending scale clearly.
bar 354: choir really dazzling
bar 356: orchestra ditto

Many thanks. 135

Gouvréne’s coaching and direction of her choirs was always admired and appreciated by Poulenc, as is evidenced in the following letter.

232. Francis Poulenc to Yvonne Gouvréne
Bastide du Roy, Antibes, Friday 3 April [1953]

Mon Yvonne,
I will never be able to thank you enough for the performance of the Stabat last night. It was quite simply wonderful – never before have I heard it like that. Everything was perfect: tempi, nuances, pauses. Say thank you to your choir very, very warmly. Rosenthal136 was stunning and Moizan137, as always, so moving. I listened alone, in the night, in Marie-Blanche’s big American car which had been left in the garden – so I was able to get the most out of the broadcast. I did not know it was a public performance. There seemed to be a lot of applause. Were there any fellow-composers in the audience?
I am staying here until the 11th because on the 10th in Monte Carlo there is a Poulene Festival: Sinfonietta – Concerto – Aubade – Biches. It is the first time this has happened to me. I am extremely touched. Very good tour in Italy with Fournier and also…but keep this a secret…I am doing an opera for La Scala based on Le Dialogue des Carmélites. Surely a fitting subject for me.
Happy Easter – again very fondly.

Francis138

136 Manuel Rosenthal (1904-2003) - French conductor and composer
137 Geneviève Moizan. Premiered the Stabat Mater in 1951.
The connection between the two continued well after Poulenc’s death, as is evidenced in Gouverné’s speech¹³⁹ at the tenth anniversary of the composer’s passing. “Richly gifted, Francis Poulenc was, beneath a somewhat nonchalant exterior, the most unconventional of people. We loved him because he was HE and everything about him remains irreplaceable.”¹⁴⁰

Geneviève Touraine

Better known for being the sister of the famed Gérard Souzay, Geneviève Touraine also found her time in the spotlight. In addition to recital performances, Touraine impacted mid-century French mélodie by making several recordings. She recorded songs by Roussel and Debussy, as well as many by Poulenc, including *Fiançailles pour rire* and *Trois Chansons de Garcia Lorca* accompanied by the composer himself in 1954.

Poulenc dedicated ‘L’Enfant muet’ from *Trois Chansons de Garcia Lorca* to the French soprano even though the set was not favored by the composer. He wrote, “What difficulty I have in proving musically my passion for Lorca! My sonata for piano and violin, dedicated to his memory, is, alas, very mediocre Poulenc, and these three songs are of little importance in my vocal work.”

Poulenc seldom used poetry in any language other than French in his melodies. His passion for Spanish writer Federico Garcia-Lorca, however, allowed for an exception. Despite his love of Lorca’s writing, Poulenc was never able to produce a foreign accent when speaking or composing. He described the final song in this set as “being ‘nobly’ French whilst it ought to have been ‘gravely’ Spanish.”

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Touraine also recorded three other melodies of Poulenc, ‘C’ from *Poèmes de Louis Aragon* and ‘Reine des mouettes’ and ‘C’est ainsi que tu es’ from *Métamorphoses*. But unlike her first Poulenc recording, this recording was accompanied by Jacqueline Bonneua.144

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Ninon Vallin

Quintessentially one of her generation’s finest sopranos, Ninon Vallin made a career for herself on the opera, operetta, and recital stage. She also appeared in the French film La fille de la Madelon,145 which increased her popularity in the public eye. Despite her first ambition to become a recital performer, she sang many significant roles at the Opéra-Comique, Teatro Colón, and La Scala, as well as in San Francisco and South America.146

She worked extensively with many composers, including Debussy, Hahn, and Roussel. Vallin was known for her strong middle and lower registers, as well as her precise diction. It was these characteristics that Poulenc was attracted to, and subsequently he dedicated ‘Mon cadavre est doux comme un gant’147 to her.148

The beloved soprano continued to perform well into her sixties, and her last recording was made at the age of seventy. Her spectacular voice remained in good shape even after she retired from the stage. The remaining years of her life were spent teaching near Lyon, until she died in 1961.149

147 Translation – “My corpse is as limp as a glove.”
Claire Croiza

Born of an expatriate American father and Italian mother, the mezzo-soprano developed an unlikely reputation for understanding multifaceted nuances of the French language. Although she is now known for her recital singing, she originally established herself as an operatic singer early in her career. Her stage debut was in 1905 at *Messaline* by Isidora de Lara, which was followed by performances at Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels in 1906, as well as the Paris Opéra in 1908. Her stunning voice and high-level of musicianship encouraged many composers to develop an association with her. She worked extensively with Fauré, as she sang the title role in his *Pénélope* at its first performance in Belgium, as well as Saint-Saëns, d’Indy, Bréville, Duparc, Debussy, Roussel, Caplet, and Honegger. Interestingly, Arthur Honegger fathered Croiza’s only child, although they never married.

Her affiliation with so many well-known composers led her to record multiple songs accompanied by the composer themselves, including Debussy, Duparc, Fauré, and Poulenc. Poulenc was so inspired by Croiza’s interpretation

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150 Also referred to as a contralto in other sources.
of *Le Bestiaire* that he asked her to make a recording of the work. In addition to this 1928 recording,\(^{154}\) the two performed in concert together. Poulenc spoke of this in a letter to Serge de Diaghilev:

97. Francis Poulenc to Serge de Diaghilev

83 rue de Monceau, Paris [June 1926]

_Cher Diaghilev,_

You must have heard through the grapevine that Madame Croiza, Maestro Auric and I myself will be giving a prestigious concert on Tuesday 5 July (5:15 p.m.) at the home of Maroness d’Erlanger – quite an occasion, don’t you think? I will be playing the famous Trio that you have not yet heard……\(^{155}\)

Although Croiza believed Poulenc’s songs had unusual tessitura and were difficult for the voice,\(^{156}\) Poulenc dedicated ‘Je n’ai plus que les os’ from *Poèmes de Ronsard* to the popular singer. Claire Croiza continued her relationship with music even after she retired from singing. She held a professorship later in her life at the Paris Conservatory,\(^{157}\) and her many masterclasses have been notated in a compilation, translated and edited by Betty Bannerman.\(^{158}\) Claire died in her hometown on Paris at the age of sixty-four and was considered by Poulenc to be among his best interpreters.

\(^{154}\) *Le Bestiaire* as well as recordings of other composer’s works.


CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

There is an unmistakable similarity between Poulenc’s letters to each of these singers. Each performer was clearly more than just a colleague to the composer. Something about his spirit, his humanity, and his undeniable love for music made him tangible. These traits allowed for a substantial level of closeness for anyone fortunate enough to have personally known Poulenc.

Studies such as this one are undertaken not purely for the sake of advancing research in musicology, but also for the betterment of today’s musicians. It is through the words of incredible musicians like Francis Poulenc that we can further our understanding of a composer’s true intentions. There are countless factors in the interpretation of music, and to leave them all to the discretion of the individual performer can violate the aspirations of the composer. It is the duty of each composer to leave behind materials that can aid future generations in this endeavor.

Current and future performers are incredibly fortunate to have access to so many words of Poulenc. Not only did he leave behind a diary of his songs, he also, perhaps unintentionally, left us with hundreds of letters to fellow composers, poets, and performers in which he meticulously dissects much of his music. If a
singer is willing to take the time to research these words, his performances can be greatly enhanced, simply by understanding the circumstances surrounding a particular piece.

Future composers can learn a great deal from Poulenc’s meticulous record-keeping. Even though he never thought of himself as a significant composer of his time, he maintained a high-quality level of commentary. These notes are invaluable to singers of today, and it is this author’s hope that composers of the present and future will follow Poulenc’s incredible foresight.

Although many have a preconceived notion of the difficulty of Poulenc’s mélodies, this can be altered with a little research of the composer’s words. In his intent of minimizing “caterwauling,”159 he has left us with clear guidelines on his music. Through his words we are able to give validity to his wishes. Our best chance at achieving what Poulenc had intended in his music is to heed his own words while applying our own interpretations. We are incredibly fortunate to have such detailed notes on the majority of his works, as it provides any singer with a wealth of knowledge.

Today’s music culture has succeeded in documenting the lives and performances of many singers. We have the capabilities to easily research singers of all levels of fame, however, information on singers who were in their prime as recently as fifty years ago is often inconsistent. It can be a daunting task to gather

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details on the lives and careers of singers of the past. Some performers, like Suzanne Peignot, have left behind numerous documents as well as many recordings. Other singers, such as Marya Modrakowska and Colette Herzog, have left behind very little. A few words scattered throughout articles and books must be consolidated so that we can have an idea of what their career consisted.

In researching Poulenc, this author found it obvious that he was motivated, both on a personal and compositional level, by the many close relationships that he kept. His inspiration was the artistic beauty of those who surrounded him. His music was incredibly personal to him, as it was a form of expressing his feelings for his friends. By knowing more about these singers, one can compare their own interpretations and vocal characteristics with theirs so that one can aspire to accurately perform as Poulenc had originally intended. This knowledge and understanding can provide the highest level of sophistication in the vocal music of Francis Poulenc.
APPENDIX

SONG DEDICATIONS OF FRANCIS POULENC
1918-1919
*Le Bestiaire* or *Cortège d’Orphée* (G. Apollinaire) Published by Max Eschig
- dedicated to Louis Durey
  1. Le dromadaire
  2. La chèvre du Thibet
  3. La sauterelle
  4. Le dauphin
  5. L’écureuil
  6. La carpe

1919
*Cocardes* (Jean Cocteau) Published by Max Eschig
- dedicated to Georges Auric
  1. Miel de Narbonne
  2. Bonne d’enfant
  3. Enfant de troupe

1924-1925
*Poèmes de Ronsard* Published by Heugel
  1. Attributs
     - dedicated to Suzanne Peignot
  2. Le tombeau
     - dedicated to Marya Freund
  3. Ballet
     - dedicated to Madame Vera Janacopoulos
  4. Je n’ai plus que les os
     - dedicated to Claire Croiza
  5. A son page
     - dedicated to Jane Bathori

1926
*Chansons gaillardes* (Anonymous 17th century texts) Published by Heugel
- debuted by Pierre Bernac with Poulenc as his accompanist
  1. La maitresse volage
  2. Chanson à boire
  3. Madrigal
  4. Invocation aux Parques
  5. Couplet bachiques
  6. L’offrande
  7. La belle jeunesse
  8. Sérénade
1927
Vocalise - Published by Leduc
   - debuted by Jane Bathori

1927-1928
Air chantés (J. Moréas) Published by Salabert
   1. Air romantique
      - dedicated to François Hepp
   2. Air champêtre
      - dedicated to Suzanne Peignot
   3. Air grave
      - dedicated to Jacques Lerolle
   4. Air vif
      - dedicated to Jane Bathori

1930
Épitaphe (Malherbe) Published by Salabert
   - dedicated to Raymonde Linossier

1931
Trois poèmes de Louise Lalanne – Published by Salabert
   - debuted by Suzanne Peignot with Poulenc as her accompanist
     1. Le Présent
     2. Chanson
     3. Hier

Quatre poèmes (G. Apollinaire) Published by Salabert
   1. L’anguille
      - dedicated to Marie Laurencin
   2. Carte postale
      - dedicated to Madame Cole Porter
   3. Avant le cinéma
      - dedicated to Madame Picasso
   4. 1904
      - dedicated to Jean-Arthur Fontaine
Cinq poèmes (Max Jacob) Published by Salabert
1. Chanson bretonne
   - dedicated to Marie-Blanche de Polignac
2. Le cimetière
   - dedicated to Madeleine Vhita
3. La petite servante
   - dedicated to Suzanne Peignot
4. Berceuse
   - dedicated to Suzanne Balguerie
   - debuted by Suzanne Peignot with Poulenc as her accompanist
5. Souric et Mouric
   - dedicated to Eve Curie
   - debuted by Suzanne Peignot with Poulenc as her accompanist

1934
Huit chansons polonaises – Published by Salabert
- this cycle was harmonized for Marya Modrakowska
1. La couronne
   - dedicated to Ida Godebska
2. Le départ
   - dedicated to Misia Sert
3. Les gars polonaise
   - dedicated to Madame la Contesse Elisabeth Potocka
4. Le dernier mazour
   - dedicated to Marya Freund
5. L’adieu
   - dedicated to Madame Kochanska
6. Le drapeau blanc
   - dedicated to Madame Arthur Rubinstein
7. La Vistule
   - dedicated to Wanda Landowska
8. Le lac
   - dedicated to Marya Modrakowska
1935
*Cinq poèmes* (P. Éluard) Published by Durand

1. Peut-il se reposer?
   - dedicated to Madame la Vicomtesse de Noailles
2. Il la prend dans ses bras
   - dedicated to Valentine Hugo
3. Plume d’eau Claire
   - dedicated to Suzanne Nivard
4. Rôdeuse au front de verre
   - dedicated to Pierre Bernac
5. Amoureuses
   - dedicated to Nora Georges Auric

*A sa guitare* (Ronsard) Published by Durand
- dedicated to Yvonne Printemps (with harp accompaniment)

1937
*Tel jour telle nuit* (P. Éluard) Published by Durand

1. Bonne journée
   - dedicated to Pablo Picasso
2. Une ruine coquille vide
   - dedicated to ‘Freddy’
3. Le front comme un drapeau perdu
   - dedicated to ‘Nush’
4. Une roulette couverte en tuiles
   - dedicated to Valentine Hugo
5. A toutes brides
   - dedicated to Marie-Blanche de Polignac
6. Une herbe pauvre
   - dedicated to Marie-Blanche de Polignac
7. Je n’ai envie que de t’aimer
   - dedicated to Denise Bourdet
8. Figure de force brûlante et farouche
   - dedicated to Pierre Bernac
9. Nous avons fait la nuit
   - dedicated to Yvonne Gouverné

*Trois poèmes* (Louis de Vilmorin) Published by Durand
- dedicated to Marie-Blanche de Polignac

1. Le garçon de Liège
2. Au-delà
3. Aux officiers de la Garde Blanche
1938

*Deux poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire* Published by Salabert

1. Dans le jardin d’Anna
   - dedicated to Reine Bénard
2. Allons plus vite
   - dedicated to Georges Auric

*Miroirs brûlants* (P. Éluard) Published by Salabert

1. Tu vois le feu du soir
   - dedicated to Pierre Bernac
2. Je nommerai ton front
   - dedicated to Marie-Laure

Le portrait (Colette) Published by Salabert
- dedicated to Hélène Jourdan-Morhange

La grenouillère (G. Apollinaire) Published by Salabert
- dedicated to Marie-Blanche de Polignac

Priez pour paix (Charles d’Orléans) Published by Salabert

*Ce doux petit visage* (P. Éluard) Published by Salabert
- dedicated to the memory of Raymonde Linossier

1939

*Bleuet* (G. Apollinaire) Published by Durand
- dedicated to André Bonnélle

*Fiançaille pour rire* (Louise de Vilmorin) Published by Salabert

1. La dame d’André
   - dedicated to Marie-Blanche de Polignac
2. Dans l’herbe
   - dedicated to ‘Freddy’
3. Il vole
   - dedicated to Suzanne Peignot
4. Mon cadavre est doux comme un gant
   - dedicated to Ninon Vallin
5. Violon
   - dedicated to Denise Bourdet
6. Fleurs
   - dedicated to Solange d’Ayen
1940
_Banalités_ (G. Apollinaire) Published by Max Eschig
1. Chanson d’Orkenise
   - dedicated to Claude Rostand
2. Hôtel
   - dedicated to Marthe Bosredon
3. Fagnes de Wallonie
   - dedicated to Madame Henri Fredericq
4. Voyage à Paris
   - dedicated to Paul Eluard
5. Sanglots
   - dedicated to Suzette

1942
_Chansons villageoises_ (Maurice Fombeure) Published by Max Eschig
1. Chanson du clair tamis
   - dedicated to Louis Beydts
2. Les gars qui vont à la fête
   - dedicated to Jean de Polignac
3. C’est le joli Printemps
   - dedicated to Roger Bourdin
4. Le mendicant
   - dedicated to André Schaeffner
5. Chanson de la fille frivole
   - dedicated to André Lecœur
6. Le retour du sergent
   - dedicated to André Dubois

1943
_Métamorphoses_ (Louise de Vilmorin) Published by Salabert
1. Reine des mouettes
   - dedicated to Marie-Blanche de Polignac
2. C’est ainsi que tu es
   - dedicated to Marthe Bosredon
3. Paganini
   - dedicated to Jeanne Ritcher

_Deux poèmes de Louis Aragon_ Published by Salabert
1. C.
   - dedicated to ‘Papoum’
2. Fêtes galantes
   - dedicated to Jean de Polignac
1945
Montparnasse (G. Apollinaire) Published by Max Eschig
   - dedicated to Pierre Souvtchinsky

Hyde Park (G. Apollinaire) Published by Max Eschig
   - dedicated to the memory of d’Audrey Norman Colville

1946
Le pont (G. Apollinaire) Published by Max Eschig
   - dedicated to the memory of Raymond Radiguet

Un poème (G. Apollinaire) Published by Max Eschig
   - dedicated to Luigi Dallapiccola

Paul et Virginie (Raymond Radiguet) Published by Max Eschig
   - dedicated to Lucien Daudet

1947
Trois chansons de F. Garcia Lorca – Published by Heugel
  1. L’enfant muet
     - dedicated to Geneviève Touraine
  2. Adelina à la promenade
     - dedicated to Madame Auguste Lambiotte
  3. Chanson de l’oranger sec
     - dedicated to Gérard Souzay

…Mais mourir (P. Éluard) Published by Heugel
   - dedicated to the memory of ‘Nush’

Hymne (Racine) Published by Salabert
   - dedicated to Doda Conrad

Le disparu (Robert Desnos) Published by Salabert
   - dedicated to Henri Sauguethym

Main dominée par le cœur (P. Éluard) Published by Salabert
   - dedicated to Marie-Blanche de Polignac
1948
*Calligrammes* (G. Apollinaire) Published by Heugel
1. L’espionne  
   - dedicated to Simone Tilliard
2. Mutation  
   - dedicated to Pierre Lelong
3. Vers le Sud  
   - dedicated to Jaqueline Apollinaire
4. Il pleut  
   - dedicated to the memory of d’Emmanuel Fay
5. La grace exile  
   - dedicated to Jeanne
6. Voyage  
   - dedicated to Jacques Soulé

1949
*Mazurka* (Louis de Vilmorin) Published by Heugel

1950
*La fraîcheur et le feu* (P. Éluard) Published by Max Eschig
   - dedicated to Igor Stravinsky
   1. Rayon des yeux…
   2. Le matin les branches attisent…
   3. Tout disparut
   4. Dans les ténèbres du jardin…
   5. Unis la fraîcheur et le feu…
   6. Homme au sourire tender…
   7. La grande rivière qui va…

1951
*Stabat Mater*
   - debuted by Geneviève Moizan

1954
*Parisiana* (Max Jacob) Published by Salabert
1. Jouer du bugle  
   - dedicated to the memory of Pierre Colle
2. Vous n’écrivez plus?  
   - dedicated to Paul Chadourne

Rosemonde (G. Apollinaire) Published by Max Eschig
   - dedicated to Comtesse Pastré
1956
*Le travail du peintre* (P. Éluard) Published by Max Eschig
- dedicated to Alice Esty
  1. Pablo Picasso
  2. Marc Chagall
  3. Georges Braque
  4. Juan Gris
  5. Paul Klee
  6. Joan Miró
  7. Jacques Villon

*Deux melodies 1956* – Published by Max Eschig
  1. La souris (G. Apollinaire)
    - dedicated to Marya Freund
  2. Nuage (Laurence de Beylié)
    - dedicated to Rose Dercourt-Plaut

Dernier poème (Robert Desnos) Published by Max Eschig
- dedicated to Youki Desnos

1958
*Une chanson de porcelaine* (P. Éluard) Published by Max Eschig
- written in homage to Jane Bathori for her 80th birthday

1959
*Gloria*
- commissioned by the Serge Koussevitzky music foundation
- dedicated to the memory of Serge and Nathalie Koussevitzky
- debuted in Europe by Rosanna Carteri

1960
*La courte paille* (Maurice Carême) Published by Max Eschig
- composed for Denise Duval to sing to her six-year-old son
- dedicated to Denise Duval and Richard Schilling
- debuted by Colette Herzog
  1. Le sommeil
  2. Quelle aventure!
  3. La reine de cœur
  4. Ba, be, bi, bo, bu
  5. Les anges musiciens
  6. Le carafon
  7. Lune d’Avril
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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