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The purpose of this study is to explore Francis Poulenc's irreplaceable musical brilliance and distinction through his largest piano work, *Les Soirées de Nazelles* (1930-1936). To understand the styles and idioms in this work, it is essential to examine Paris' flourishing culture in the early 20th century and the multitude of inspirations in his music.

The "dazzling" piano as he called it, was the most intimate instrument to Poulenc and had the full capacity of expressing what he had in mind. Written in the 1930s, *Les Soirées de Nazelles* contains Poulenc's cherished memories of his days in cultural Paris. In that bohemian and dynamic city, he enjoyed social and artistic gatherings with poets, painters, and famed musicians, as well as popular Parisian establishments, admiring singers, actors, and comedians.

In the avant-garde movement of the period, Poulenc sought musical novelty and experimented with various musical ideas in a new artistic trend. He maintained his music in clear melodies and fresh harmonic palettes and adopted others' materials if they expressed the feeling he wanted to exhibit. Poulenc's open mind contributed to the musical diversity in *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, encompassing the French Baroque style and modern artistry.

The distinctive frame of *Les Soirées de Nazelles* presents Poulenc's musical "gallery" with a unique "hanging" of movements. Each variation is self-contained and spontaneous, filled with abundant memories and varied feelings. However, Poulenc creates unity with a cunning architecture above the unconventional variations and the outer pieces. He wanted his music to be pleasing, candid, and genuine, which is predominantly felt in *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, revealing his sensitivity and vulnerability.

FRANCIS POULENC'S *LES SOIRÉES DE NAZELLES* (1930-1936):
HIS INSPIRATIONS

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CHAPTER I: POULENC AND POPULAR PARISIAN ENTERTAINMENTS

Francis Poulenc (1899 – 1963) was born in Paris at 2 Place des Saussaies to Jenny Royer and Emile Poulenc. Poulenc's father, Emile, was an ardent Roman Catholic from Aveyron and a businessman running a pharmaceutical firm. Although he did not play an instrument, he relished the music of Beethoven, Berlioz, César Franck, and Massenet, and frequented the concerts of Colonne, the Opéra, and the Opéra-Comique.¹

Poulenc's mother, Jenny was a descendant of carpenters, bronze workers, and tapestry weavers.² She was a true Parisian with an affinity for the French art world. Jenny liked music of Scarlatti, Mozart, Schubert, and Chopin³, and used to play her son a *Berceuse* by Edvard Grieg, *Romance* by Anton Rubinstein, and pieces by Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, and Schumann as a talented amateur pianist.⁴ She wanted Poulenc to have an unbiased mind to various types of music, and from her, Poulenc came to have an affection for music and literature.

Jenny's brother, Marcel Royer, whom the young Poulenc called "Papoum," was a subscription-ticket holder at the Odéon theatre and a frequent visitor to Poulenc's house. Poulenc was delighted with Uncle Royer's visits as he brought interesting stories about theatres, pictures, and concerts, which Poulenc heard while playing with his toy under the table. Royer's close friend, Edmond Clément accompanied him to Poulenc's house and his captivating singing made the young Poulenc dream of becoming a singer until the age of 15.⁵

¹ Francis Poulenc and Audel Stéphane, *My Friends and Myself: Conversations [with] Francis Poulenc*, trans. James Harding (London: Dubson, 1978), 29.

² Henri Hell, *Francis Poulenc* (London: John Calder, 1959), 1.

³ Nicolas Southon and Roger Nichols, *Francis Poulenc: Articles and Interviews: Notes from the Heart* (Farnham: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 150, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴ Hell, *Francis Poulenc*, 2.

⁵ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 30-33.

Poulenc's older sister, Jeanne Élise Marguerite was a singer under the tutelage of Claire Croiza.⁶ Poulenc learned songs of Fauré, Debussy, and Schumann by accompanying her at the piano.⁷

Under his artistic family, Poulenc was able to attend various concerts in his youth. In 1907, he heard Debussy's *Danse sacrée et Danse profane*, whose ninth chords intrigued him to find the interval at the piano.⁸ In 1909, he heard *Manon*, sung by Edmond Clément at the Opéra-Comique, as well as *Carmen* and *La Bohème*⁹, and in 1914 Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* at the Casino de Paris. Poulenc was struck by its foreign sounds like wildness and savagery.¹⁰

Besides music, Poulenc was interested in poetry and painting. At the age of ten, Poulenc could recite from memory Stéphane Mallarmé's "Apparition," consisting of 16 verses.¹¹ He also frequented Bernheim gallery from the age of ten and could distinguish the paintings of Cézanne from those of Renoir.¹²

For several months in the summer or on holidays, Poulenc spent his youthful days in Nogent-sur-Marne (near Paris), in his maternal Grandmother's house. He recalls dance halls and tunes he heard in Nogent,

It [Nogent] was paradise, with its pleasure gardens, its sellers of fried potatoes and its dance halls, known in 1913 as 'dancings' (on the banks of the Marne this was pronounced 'dancinges'). It was there I got to know the tunes of [Henri] Christiné and [Vincent] Scotto which, for me, have become my folklore.¹³

⁶ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 96.

⁷ Diana Skroch Jewett, "The Piano Works of Francis Poulenc" (MA diss., University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, 1977), 6, UND Scholarly Commons.

⁸ Hell, *Francis Poulenc*, 2.

⁹ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 55.

¹⁰ Roger Nichols, *Poulenc: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 10, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹¹ Yvonne Gouverné, Francis Poulenc, trans. Adrian Hugues (July 1973), 2.

<https://www.poulenc.fr/en/?Articles>.

¹² Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 150.

¹³ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 185.

In the second half of the nineteenth century in Montmartre, the dance halls, such as Moulin de la Galette on the Rue Tholozé and the Ellysée Montmartre on the Champs-Élysées were soaring with visitors of diverse classes and vocations. They enjoyed waltzing, dancing polka, *quadrille*, and watching professional dancers' spectacular routines like the *cancan* and *chahut*, the high-kicking motion of the *quadrille*.¹⁴

Poulenc's lifelong friend, Pierre Bernac says that "good" people of Paris came to dance in popular dancing halls (bals-musettes) on Sundays to the sound of the accordion¹⁵, which is well portrayed in Poulenc's embryotic works, such as *Toréador* (1918), a chanson hispano-italienne, *Valse in C* (1919), a piano work, and later "L'Anguille," a song from his Apollinaire song cycle, *Quatre poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire* (1931) all with prominent bare octaves in waltz rhythm. In 1921, Poulenc also wrote a very short polka, *Discours du Général* for a team project as a member of *Les Six*.

Poulenc's happiest memories in Nogent are also well evoked with his "naughty boy" side of music, such as in his *Cocardes* (1919) for baritone and small orchestra. This piece, composed in a circus style, involving cornet, trombone, violin, bass drum, and triangle,¹⁶ contains lively rhythms and theatrical intonations between the spoken and singing quality with comical tones.

From his childhood with friends, Poulenc frequented the Cirque Medrano in Montmartre where Fratellini Brothers and Grock, known as a "musical eccentric" were renowned for their magnificent clown acts.¹⁷ Milhaud describes the entertainment in the Montmartre fair,

¹⁴ Nicholas Hewitt, *Montmartre: A Cultural History* (Liverpool University Press, 2017), 65-66. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ps31hz>

¹⁵ Pierre Bernac and Lennox Berkeley, *Francis Poulenc: The Man and His Songs*, trans. Winifred Radford (New York: Norton, 1977), 22.

¹⁶ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 211.

¹⁷ David Conley Mckinney, "The Influence of Parisian Popular Entertainment on the Piano Works of Erik Satie and Francis Poulenc" (DMA., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1994), 20-21, ProQuest.

The stream-powered merry-go-rounds, the mysterious boutiques, the Daughter of Mars, the shooting galleries, the games of chance, the menageries, the racket of the mechanical organs with perforated rolls that seemed relentlessly to grind out all the brassy tunes of the music-hall and the revues, we would go to the Foire of Montmartre and occasionally to the Cirque Medrano to watch the Fratellini Brothers' sketches. . . so worthy of the Commedia dell'Arte.¹⁸

Poulenc also haunted other artistic establishments of cabaret qualities, such as Bal des Quat'z'Arts at 62 Boulevard de Clichy, which was derived from the first artistic cabaret, Le Chat Noir in 1881, owned by Rodolphe Salis. There were poets, reciting their works, chansonniers, and composers, such as Claude Debussy and Erik Satie, providing music for puppet theatres or shadow plays. Satie was appointed as the cabaret composer of Le Chat Noir in 1887 and composed music for a shadow play, *Noël* in 1892.¹⁹ It was a bohemian, radical, and artistic atmosphere created by the mingling of social classes. Artworks incorporated the hideous and the nihilistic, and participants were immersed in a new sort of dark humor influenced by humorists, such as Alphonse Allais. As a result, nonsensical word plays, practical jokes, black humor, fantastical productions, frivolity, and absurdity appeared in their works, dominated by this shared spirit.²⁰

The music halls (many of which were transformed from café concerts) Poulenc frequented were Folies Bergère, where he met his future muse, a soprano Denise Duval, who was rehearsing *Tosca* in 1947²¹, and the Casino de Paris where French singers and actors Mistinguette and Maurice Chevalier were celebrated, and Poulenc heard jazz as well as on the rue Blanche.²² In this music hall, American popular culture of the Cakewalk in 1902 and Black

¹⁸ Darius Milhaud, *Notes sans musique* (Paris: Julliard, 1949), 108.

¹⁹ Hewitt, *Montmartre*, 51.

²⁰ Hewitt, *Montmartre*, 53-54.

²¹ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 255.

²² Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 79.

entertainers represented by Josephine Baker and Adelaide Hall for the 1920s were presented, in addition to ballets and Pétomane.²³

Singers and actors of the theatrical performances in café concerts, theatres, and music halls fascinated Poulenc. For an actress, Jeanne Bloch in *Prostitution, Vierge flétrie*, Poulenc dreamt to write an opera for her, and Maurice Chevalier's singing of "Si fatigué" thrilled him.²⁴ Poulenc's affection for songs began from his early age and played a significant role in his musical career,

I was brought up on the knees of the tenor Edmond Clément ... When I was eight, I went to see [Gabrielle] Réjane, Sarah Bernhardt, and Jeanne Granier on stage.²⁵

MUSICAL STUDIES

Poulenc's mother, Jenny bought her two-year-old son a cute little piano with white lacquer and painted cherries, which Poulenc called "do-re-mi."²⁶ When Poulenc turned five, she started teaching him the piano at an appropriate piano. Sensing Poulenc's fondness for music, Jenny entrusted the 8-year-old Poulenc to an assistant of Cécile Boutet de Monvel, a niece of César Franck. Under her guidance, Poulenc played piano for an hour every evening on his return from school, which helped him gain technical skills.²⁷

Poulenc enjoyed time at the piano by improvising, sightreading, and playing several pieces of music. When he was eleven years old, Poulenc visited a music shop in Fontainebleau to buy sightreading material and by chance, he found Schubert's *Die Winterreise*. By a magical

²³ Hewitt, *Montmartre*, 71-72.

²⁴ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 248-9.

²⁵ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 149

²⁶ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 32.

²⁷ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 191.

force, he incessantly came to play those songs and sing them at home, drawn by the power of the music,

I passed from wonder to wonder. By a strange coincidence I, a city child, was discovering simultaneously the beauty of the countryside in winter and its sublime transformation into music. Endlessly I played 'Die Krähe', 'Der Lindenbaum', 'Der Leiermann' and especially the wonderful 'Die Nebensonnen', which for me remains the most beautiful song in the world.²⁸

After he turned 14, he could play Debussy's *La Soirée dans Grenade* and *Jardins sous la pluie*, Grieg's *Piano Concerto*, Mussorgsky's *Nursery Songs*, and Schönberg's *Six Little Piano Pieces*. Due to this fondness for music, Poulenc's mother wanted Poulenc to attend the Conservatoire when he had to decide on a high school.

However, Poulenc's father, Emile did not allow Poulenc to attend the music school until his son passed the two exams for the baccalaureate. Poulenc was forced to enter the Lycée Condorcet, but he was removed from the school list in 1914, with the note "ill," not finishing the second year.²⁹ Ultimately, he failed the second exam in 1916, when he returned to school after his mom died in 1915.

In 1915, Poulenc was introduced to Ricardo Viñes (1875-1943) by Geneviève Sienkiewicz, a friend of his mother. Viñes was an accredited interpreter of French music and was a teacher of Marcelle Meyer, who later told Poulenc that playing *Petrushka* became easier thanks to Viñes.³⁰ For the first piano lesson, Poulenc played Schumann's *Faschingsschwank aus Wien, Op. 26*, and Debussy's *Preludes*, including "Minstrels."³¹ Viñes noticed Poulenc's musical gifts and encouraged him to compose piano works. Later, the early piano works by

²⁸ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 105-6.

²⁹ Nichols, *A Biography*, 9.

³⁰ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 192.

³¹ Hell, *Francis poulenc*, 3.

Poulenc were premiered by Viñes, such as *Trois mouvements perpétuels* (1918) and *Suite in C* (1920).

Viñes taught Poulenc with passion and decisively cared about the young soul. Through him, Poulenc was introduced to many influential figures, such as Satie, Auric, Ravel, Falla, and Landowska. In a letter to Elvira, Viñes' sister, Poulenc wrote,

My dear Viñes whom I adored and to whom I owe everything about my musical career, both as a pianist and as a composer'.³²

Poulenc took piano lessons from Viñes for about three years, from 1915 to 1918, before being called up to military service on January 7, 1918. During this period, Poulenc learned that the melody should always be explicit with elaborate pedaling for tender and colorful sonorities, as heard in Viñes's playing of Debussy and Albéniz.³³ Poulenc recalls Viñes and his teaching,

Viñes was a delightful man; a strange hidalgo with large moustaches, wearing a brown sombrero in true Barcelona fashion, and delicate button boots with which he would kick my ankle when I made a clumsy pedal change. Pedaling is an essential ingredient of modern music, and nobody taught it better than Viñes. His technique allowed him to play clearly amid a welter of pedal, which seems like a paradox. And what control of staccato!³⁴

Poulenc never ceased to stress the continual use of the sustain pedal in his diary of songs, but his emphasis should not be misjudged as a flooded pedaling as he and Viñes greatly cared for the clarity of melodies.

My work calls for the almost constant use of pedals to soften the severity of certain of my broken chords or of my arpeggios.³⁵ ... I like to hear some singing with a good sauce of pedal (the butter!)³⁶

³² Nichols, *A Biography*, 4.

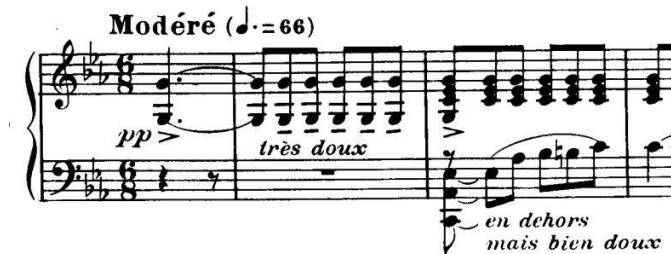
³³ Ricardo Viñes, "The Complete Recordings," Marston, 2007.

³⁴ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 192.

³⁵ Francis Poulenc and Winifred Radford, *Diary of My Songs: Journal De Mes Mélodies* (London: Kahn & Averill, 2006), 55.

³⁶ Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs*, 69.

Poulenc also perceived the contrasting effect of staccatos demonstrated by Viñes. The numerous signs of legato and staccato seem to result from these lessons, many times with a specific indication such as *mettre beaucoup de pédale* (use a lot of pedals) or *très sec* (very dry) around staccatos. However, slurs and ties appear to imply that the sustain pedal is also required; nonetheless, there is no direct marking for the damper pedal (Example 1).



Example 1. The opening of “Le cœur sur la main” from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*

Viñes was very significant in Poulenc’s musical growth; however, Poulenc had felt the need for professional composition study since the success of *Rhapsodie nègre* in 1917. At the suggestion of Viñes, he went to Paul Dukas to ask for assistance. But Dukas refused to take on Poulenc because his studio capacity was full. Viñes introduced Poulenc to his close friend, Ravel, so Poulenc had a chance to play some of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* in front of the composer. Yet Ravel stopped his playing after listening for three minutes.³⁷ Later, at Paul Dukas’s advice, Poulenc visited Paul Vidal, a composition professor at the Conservatoire and the director of the Opéra-Comique. Upon seeing his score of *Rhapsodie nègre*, Poulenc was told,

Your work stinks, it is ludicrous, it is nothing but a load of BALLS. Are you trying to make a fool of me with these consecutive fifths everywhere? And what the hell is this Honoloulou? Ah! I see you have joined the gang of Stravinsky, Satie & Co. Well then, I’ll say goodbye!³⁸

³⁷ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 125.

³⁸ Francis Poulenc, Sidney Buckland, and Patrick Saul, *Selected Correspondence 1915-1963: Echo and Source* (London: V. Gollancz), 24.

In this context of not finding a composition teacher, Poulenc went into the army service in 1918 and continued composing works, such as his first piano piece, *Trois mouvements perpétuels*, *Sonata for four hands*, *Sonata for two clarinets*, *Toréador*, a song on a poem by Jean Cocteau, *Le Bestiaire*, his famed song cycle, and *Valse*, a short piano piece. These works were written during the moves between four different locations from Vincennes to Vosges to Saint-Martin-sur-le-Pre, and the anti-aircraft school at Pont-sur-Seine.³⁹

While working as a typist for the Ministry of Aviation from July 1919 to October 1921, he also wrote several piano works, such as *Piano Suite in C* (1920), *Cinq Impromptus* (1920-21), and *Promenades* (1921).

In November 1921, Poulenc was accepted as a student of Charles Koechlin (1867-1950)⁴⁰ to whom Poulenc, advised by Milhaud, sent a letter a few months before, seeking lessons. Koechlin discerned his pupil's shallow knowledge of counterpoint and had Poulenc write four-part realizations of Bach choral themes, besides the common counterpoint exercises. It was a productive study for Poulenc, especially for his future choral writings. Poulenc said,

I studied counterpoint, with Charles Koechlin who is a wonderful teacher and whose voice I hear continually in my ear. I don't think counterpoint sits naturally with the French temperament, which is more sensitive to colours and to harmonic subtleties as well as to a single, unattached line. Every race has its own particular strengths. While I forced myself to undergo this necessary discipline for a certain time, I didn't try to go beyond my natural aptitudes which are, above all, melodic. This doesn't mean I have less admiration for those who've followed other paths out of fidelity to their nature, and in particular I'm forcibly struck by the contrapuntal vehemence of which Honegger has produced such extraordinary examples.⁴¹

³⁹ Hell, *Francis Poulenc*, 8.

⁴⁰ Hell, *Francis Poulenc*, 21.

⁴¹ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 119.

Koechlin stated, “You know how to be, sincerely and simply, yourself.”⁴² He was a wise and insightful teacher. He realized Poulenc’s intrinsic predilection for harmonic writing, so he supported the pupil’s way, ending lessons in March 1925.

Progress with contrapuntal writings is seen in Poulenc’s compositions of 1922 onwards. However, his strikingly complex work, *Promenades* (1921), should be mentioned for an obvious comparison with his later works. This work of ten movements was completed in the summer of 1921 before being under the tutelage of Koechlin. This work alludes to his curiosity about diverse methods of writing music. Each movement, titled with a different kind of transportation (e.g., car, boat) is self-contained and very experimental in terms of the rhythm, chromaticism, range, intervals, bitonality, and quasi-atonality (Example 2); “À cheval” (on horseback) and “En chemin de fer” (by rail) are, on the other hand, notably forthright and compositionally simple.



Example 2. Quasi-atonality in “À pied” (on foot) from *Promenades*

After a few months of lessons with Koechlin, he went to Mödling, near Vienna, in February 1922 with Milhaud and Marya Freund to reconstruct the relationship with Austrian

⁴² Philip Borg-Wheeler, Editorial comments to Eric Parkin, “Works for Piano,” featuring Francis Poulenc’s music, Chandos Records Ltd, 1998, 16, quoted in Gay K Grosz Gay K Grosz, “An Analysis of the Historical and Biographical Influences on the Music of Francis Poulenc As Portrayed in His Les Soirées De Nazelles” (DMA., Louisiana State University, 2009), 22.

composers, which was disturbed by the war.⁴³ Poulenc met Schönberg and played his *Promenades* to him. Poulenc was later introduced to Berg and Webern, but he confirmed his different aesthetic from their music.

Poulenc retained the admiration of the second Viennese School with their technical aspects, but he lost interest in atonal or polytonal music afterward. Poulenc told about not using new musical materials,

I considered they didn't suit my nature, my temperament – I'm not a calculator, a technician. I like music that's human, humour, laughter, or prayer ... I oscillate between gravity and fantasy.⁴⁴

Milhaud, who conducted Schönberg's *Pierrot lunaire* in Vienna also confessed that "In Schoenberg's reading the chromaticism of the work was emphasized with more harshness and frenzy, whereas I attempted to bring out the more sensitive and subtle aspects."⁴⁵

In the same year, 1922, Poulenc wrote three works, *Sonata for Horn, Trumpet and Trombone*, *Sonata for Clarinet and Bassoon*, and the first two movements of *Napoli*, which was written in Italy, a subsequent trip with Milhaud. Studying with Koechlin, his writings appear to recover their initial simplicity with an unattached melody in simple rhythms. However, there is no sharp progress in *Sonata for Clarinet and Bassoon* and the first two of *Napoli*, mainly relying on dissonant notes and ostinato patterns without a peculiar means.

⁴³ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 127.

⁴⁴ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 164.

⁴⁵ Hell, *Francis Poulenc*, 23.

Poulenc's contrapuntal study is revealed in his *Sonata for Horn, Trumpet, and Trombone* with three refined lines for each instrument. The persistent ostinato is replaced with countermelodies (Example 3).

The image displays a musical score for three instruments: Horn, Trumpet, and Trombone. The score is divided into three systems. The first system is titled "Grazioso" with a tempo marking of "♩ = 120 environ". The Horn part begins with a dynamic of *p* and a tempo of *mf* *très précis*. The Trumpet part starts with a dynamic of *p*. The Trombone part starts with a dynamic of *pp*. The second system features dynamics of *f* *très sec.* for the Horn and Trumpet, and *p* for the Trombone. The third system features dynamics of *mf* *très précis* for the Horn and *f* for the Trombone. The score is written in 4/4 time and includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Example 3. The opening of "Allegro Moderato" from *Sonata for Horn, Trumpet, and Trombone*

In this period, his piano writing became much thicker, as seen in the third movement of *Napoli*, the “Caprice italien,” written in 1925, and the piano accompaniment of his song cycle, *Poèmes de Ronsard* (1924-25). Bernac complained about the complexity and lack of spontaneity in the *Ronsard* setting, which he believed was due to the counterpoint study with Koechlin from 1921.⁴⁶ The melody is still doubled in the accompaniment, yet the piano part becomes much denser with full chords, which is very contrary to his song cycles of 1919 (Example 4).

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Ballet" from the song cycle *Poèmes de Ronsard*. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part is notably dense with full chords. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The score includes various performance markings such as "très bref" with a tempo of 144, "(sans ralentir)", "avec charme", "mf", and "très lié et sonore". The lyrics "Le bal - let fut di - vin, qui se sou - lait re - pren -" are written under the vocal line.

Example 4. “Ballet” from *Poèmes de Ronsard*, bars 19-22

In the “Caprice italien” of *Napoli*, such massive vertical writing is easily found. Unlike the two preceding movements, the melody of the last movement is constantly supported by countermelodies and colorful accompanying chords. However, it is still homophonic, residing in harmonies as Koechlin had noticed (Example 5).

⁴⁶ Bernac, *The Man and His Songs*, 207.

Example 5. “Caprice italien” from *Napoli*, bars 247-256

After the uncontrolled *Promenades*, Poulenc’s piano works, including *Napoli*, began to speak in a clearer tonality, greater precision with varied materials, and more balanced sounds. Moreover, Poulenc uses diverse ranges and techniques, trying all the possibilities of the piano through more sophisticated writing. The “Caprice italien” still possesses some superfluous and inconsistent passages; however, it foreshadows Poulenc’s vibrant and additive expression. Poulenc’s satisfaction with “Caprice italien” is revealed in this quotation,

I have finished a long piece for piano, Caprice italien, in the style of the Bourrée fantasque [of Chabrier]. I’m rather pleased with it. Anyway, I think it is quite effective – as a test I played it to Lucien and he immediately exclaimed: ‘What development, what burgeoning.’ I hope he is not mistaken.⁴⁷

Through lessons with Ricardo Viñes and Charles Koechlin and his experiments with multiple techniques, Poulenc had confirmed his relish for clear, sonorous, and harmonic sounds. Further, Poulenc’s musical style reflects his interests in and admiration for his contemporaries as well as the great masters. Poulenc was actively involved in formal and informal artistic

⁴⁷ Poulenc, *Selected Correspondence*, 80.

gatherings, and his compositions were motivated and inspired by a new approach to others' music.

CHAPTER II: HIS INSPIRATIONS

Like many artists he was egocentric, but he was disinterested and generous. There was something of the 'spoilt child' about him, but this could be readily forgiven for he possessed great and genuine kindness. He never lost his temper. He was the most natural and simple of men, the most direct and the least vain that it is possible to imagine. Nobody could be easier to approach, for he was cordial by nature. He was particularly kind to simple people; with his great intelligence and sensitivity he knew how to put them at their ease. *In all social circles he had many faithful and affectionate friends.*⁴⁸

-- Pierre Bernac

ERIK SATIE AND LES SIX

During and after the 1914-1918 war, there was a rebellious and radical movement in every facet of the French arts. The avant-garde style was widespread, and it stirred many artists, resulting in the Picasso-Matisse exhibition in 1918, the first performance of Satie's *Parade* in 1917, and the premiere of Apollinaire's play, *Les mamelles de Tirésias* in 1917.⁴⁹

In 1917, when the singer Jane Bathory began to arrange avant-garde concert series, featuring new French music, Satie formed a group of Les Nouveaux Jeunes, "The New Youngs" including Auric, Durey, Honegger, Milhaud, Tailleferre, and Poulenc, who was introduced to Satie in 1916 by Viñes. Poulenc's *Rapsodie nègre* (1917) for voice, piano, and small orchestra was publicly performed at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in Paris for the first time and his piano work, *Trois Mouvements Perpétuels* (1918), was performed by Viñes in a subsequent concert in a studio on the rue Huyghens in Montparnasse. This second evening concert brought great success and it enabled another in two weeks.

⁴⁸ Bernac, *The Man and His Songs*, 30. (emphasis added)

⁴⁹ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 73.

When the six French composers were giving the third joint concert, a critic Henri Collet entitled them in 1920 as “Les Six” in his article for the journal *Comoedia* on the model of the famous “five Russians.”⁵⁰

In the premiere of *Rapsodie nègre*, Poulenc had to sing the vocal intermezzo part when the baritone turned down singing the absurd lyric at the last moment. Concerning the work, Poulenc stated that “The words of this vocal intermezzo were by a made-up black poet: Makoko Kangourou. It was the time of African wood carvings, Picasso's African period.”⁵¹ This work shows Poulenc’s humor and audacity remarkably in the third movement, “Honoloulou” with nonsensical verses and the primitive and exotic sounds, which are also heard throughout the work.

Honoloulou, poti lama!

Honoloulou, honoloulou,

Kati moko, mosi bolou

Ratakou sira, Polama!

Like Poulenc’s, the music of the other members was also distinctive. Milhaud remarked,

In an absolutely arbitrary way, he [Collet] had chosen six names: those of Auric, Durey, Honegger, Poulenc, Tailleferre, and mine, simply because we knew each other, we were good friends, and we figured in the same programs, but without regarding our differing temperaments and our dissimilar natures! Auric and Poulenc were attached to the ideas of Cocteau, Honegger to German romanticism and I to Mediterranean lyricism... But it was useless to resist! Collet's article was echoed universally so that the 'Group of the Six' was established... Since this was the case, we decided to give 'Concerts of the Six.'⁵²

⁵⁰ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 98.

⁵¹ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 97-8.

⁵² Allen Hughes, “Les Six: A generation later their youthful spirit endures,” *Musical America* 74 (February 1954): 12

As indicated in Milhaud's comment, this group gathered together casually as friends, without an explicitly unified aesthetic. Satie, who was scandalous much talked about in Paris, was admired for his musical novelty by Poulenc, Auric, Milhaud, and Jean Cocteau. As an advocate of Satie's daring music, Cocteau reproached vague impressionistic features, such as the "clouds, waves, aquariums, water undines, and perfumes of the night" in his book, *Le Coq et l'Arlequin*.⁵³ Under the umbrella of Satie and Cocteau, the young composers deemed Ravel and Debussy as old fogies.⁵⁴

After *Les Six* was labeled in 1920 by Collet, they met every week to have "Saturday Dinner,"⁵⁵ and in the same year, they published *L'Album des Six*, a piano suite of six short works. Poulenc chose his *Valse in C major* written in 1919 (Example 6) for the album.

With the premiere of the ballet *Parade* (1917) (Example 7) by Cocteau and Satie, there was a new attitude in Paris: a spirit of clarity, brevity, and lightness in the spirit of simplicity and unpretentiousness against Wagnerian hyperdrama and harmonic complexity.⁵⁶ Poulenc and other young musicians modeled their music on Satie's works, such as *Sports et Divertissements* (1914) (Example 8).

Poulenc's *Valse in C* (Example 6), which lasts less than two minutes, exhibits his alliance to such a new attitude with a light, clear, tuneful melody, simple waltz rhythm, and repetition of short phrases. These features are not abandoned in Poulenc's later musical works and can also be observed in *Les Soirées*.

⁵³ Jean Cocteau, *Le Coq et l'arlequin* (Paris: La Sirène, 1918), 17-18, quoted in Keith W Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 16.

⁵⁴ Renaud Machart, "Francis Poulenc," trans. John Tuttle, 1.
<https://www.poulenc.fr/en/?Articles>.

⁵⁵ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 108.

⁵⁶ Vera Rašín, "'Les Six' and Jean Cocteau," *Music & Letters* 38, no. 2 (January 1957): 164-167, ProQuest.

mf cinglez les appoggiatures

sf

bien chanté

Example 6. Clarity and lightness in Poulenc's *Valse in C major*, bars 9-26

I. Prestidigitateur chinois

Chinese conjurer

(♩ = 76)

Clar en La

Timb

Hpe

1 vons

2

Alt.

villes

C.B.

p

p

p

p

p

p

(♩ = 76)

Example 7. The opening of "Prestidigitateur Chinois" from Satie's *Parade*

Les Quatre-Coins

ERIK SATIE
24 Avril 1914

Example 8. Satie’s “Les quatre-coins” from *Sports et Divertissements* (1914)

Alongside his two early C major works, *Valse* (1919) and “Presto” and “Vif” from *Suite* (1920), Poulenc wrote some of his piano music without indicating a key signature, such as *Trois Mouvements perpétuels* (Example 9), *Impromptus* 1, 2, and 4 (1920-1921), and most of *Promenades* (1921). This follows Satie’s practice in some of Satie’s piano works, such as *Embryons desséchés* (1913), *Croquis et Agaceries d’un gros bonhomme en bois* (1913), and *Sports et Divertissements* (1914).

Later in 1930, in an interview with Belgian critic José Bruyr, Poulenc stated that his *Suite in C major*, the whole of which was originally written on a “ground of white paper” (no key signature), including “Andante” (revised to B-flat in the 1930s). It was related to Jules Renard’s “white style” (like C major, using largely the white keys of the piano, aiming for uncomplicated writings), which Poulenc said was a vogue of “miserable imperatives.”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 125.

Assez modéré (♩ = 114)

Ostinato with arpeggiated chords.

p

En général, sans nuances

Stepwise motions

mf *en dehors*

Scalar patterns

9ths

f

p *douxement timbré*

Example 9. The opening of the 1st movement of *Trois Mouvements perpétuels*

The opening of the first movement of *Trois Mouvements perpétuels* shows Poulenc's interest in the ostinato, prevalent in some of Satie's piano works, creating a feeling of uniformity. Poulenc's language resides in tonality with strong diatonicism (B-flat major), but he further develops music with ninths and facile musical techniques, such as scalar patterns, arpeggiated chords, and stepwise motions, emphasizing lucidity with an economical use of musical elements.

In 1921, the second collaboration of the irreverent young composers was to provide music for the ballet, *Les mariés de la tour Eiffel* on a libretto by Cocteau. In this second project, Poulenc wrote two works, *Discours du Général (Polka)* and *La Baigneuse de Trouville*, but

without Durey's participation. Not long after, Les Six dispersed to go their own separate ways after 1923.

During and after this affiliation, Poulenc had good friendships with Auric, who was, as Henri Hell calls him, a spiritual brother with precocious gifts⁵⁸, and Milhaud, with whom Poulenc enjoyed playing tennis in youth and later traveled together to Germany and Italy. Poulenc extolled the polytonal expression of Milhaud more than anyone else⁵⁹ and tried polytonality in "En avion" (by plane) from *Promenades* (Example 10).

Lent $\text{♩} = 58$
Strictement au même movt.
durant tout le morceau

E♭ major
D major

B♭ major
C major
 ➔

Example 10. Polytonality in the opening of "En avion" from *Promenades*

He also got along with Tailleferre, Durey, and Honegger through a series of concerts. In those relationships, Poulenc reflected similar or dissimilar musical outlooks from them and discussed the music of Satie and Honegger in broadcast interviews with Audel Stéphane,

Satie's music, so simple, so bare, so ingenuously clever, like a picture by the Douanier Rousseau...Satie, I repeat, set great importance on this impression of uniformity in the reading...⁶⁰

I must tell you, to speak frankly, that Arthur found my music too light and I found his too heavy! Naturally, in the end we judged each other quite differently. But we were then, in

⁵⁸ Hell, *Francis Poulenc*, 4.

⁵⁹ Nichols, *A Biography*, 53.

⁶⁰ Poulenc, *My friends and myself*, 68-9.

fact, travelling divergent ways. We admired each other greatly, but we didn't like each other's music until the end of Arthur's life.⁶¹

MANUEL DE FALLA

Poulenc met Manuel de Falla in 1918 at the house of Ricardo Viñes, to whom Falla's *Noches en los jardines de España* (*Nights in the Gardens of Spain*) was dedicated in 1915. In 1907, Falla came to Paris where he befriended Paul Dukas, Florent Schmitt, and Debussy and was able to publish his early works thanks to Debussy. However, Falla left Paris when World War I began to return to Madrid. He settled in Granada after both his parents died in 1919 to spend the rest of his days with his sister, María del Carmen.⁶²

Poulenc favored Falla's *El retablo de maese Pedro* (*Master Peter's Puppet Show*), written in 1923, among Falla's works. This puppet opera was commissioned by Princesse Edmond de Polignac and its stage was intended to be her drawing-room. It adopted the harpsichord into a modern orchestra and recitatives, some of which were sung by a young boy, between episodes. Poulenc was aware of the distinctive form:

The form of the Retablo is in fact odd. It is a series of short episodes linked by recitatives...it may look loosely put together, but it's nothing of the kind, because a secret architecture presides over the working-out of the piece.⁶³

Besides the formal aspect of the *Retablo*, Poulenc adored its authentic and picturesque orchestration, through which he could feel Castile, Spain. Poulenc said, "The *Retablo* smells of

⁶¹ Poulenc, *My friends and myself*, 109.

⁶² Michael Christoforidis, *Manuel De Falla and Visions of Spanish Music* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 15

⁶³ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 93.

Castilian wine, the queso Manchego, that thoroughbred Spanish cheese.”⁶⁴ The instrumentation includes a harp-lute, rattles, tambourine, and tam-tam.

Like his music, Falla’s speech impressed Poulenc with its “Spanish nerviness,” which he noticed from Viñes as well. “In both men, their speech took on the rhythm of a guitar peevishly tuning up!”⁶⁵ Falla’s works also entail several elements characterizing the guitar, such as triplets, staccatos, and rolled chords (Example 11).

The image shows a musical score for piano, consisting of three systems of staves. The first system has a treble and bass clef. The second system has a bass clef. The third system has a bass clef. The music features triplets, staccatos, and rolled chords. Dynamic markings include 'pp' and 'poco cresc.'. Performance instructions include '8ª bassa' and '2ª. 2do.'.

Example 11. “El paño moruno” from Falla’s *Siete canciones populares españolas*, bars 6-22

Although Falla’s style later had become more Castilian, “rectilinear, dry, severe, muscular, and sober,”⁶⁶ he was interested in Spanish folklore from his early period, such as

⁶⁴ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 95.

⁶⁵ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 90.

⁶⁶ Julián Bautista, “Lo típico y la producción sinfónica,” *Música [Valencia]* no. 3 (1938), pages 23–29, quoted in Michael Christoforidis, *Manuel De Falla and Visions of Spanish Music* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 262.

Andalusian flamenco.⁶⁷ Thus, dance figures were significant and prominent in his music. The numerous triplets with passionate accents and strumming gestures, central features of the flamenco style, can be found in Falla's triple meter songs in *Siete canciones populares españolas* (1914): "El paño moruno" (Example 11), "Jota," and "Polo."

Between 1918 and 1932, Poulenc met Falla in Paris, Venice⁶⁸, and Granada, which is implied in three letters: first, Poulenc's letter to Falla⁶⁹, informing him of Poulenc's visit to Spanish cities of Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, and Málaga to hold several "conference-concerts." Also, he was asking Falla to recommend potential players for his *Trio for Piano, Oboe, and Bassoon*, which was dedicated to Falla, as well as a pianist for the orchestral part of *Concert champêtre*. Poulenc's two letters (on April 11 and May 1, 1930) to Marie-Laure de Noailles⁷⁰ also indicated that Poulenc further planned to stay in Granada from April 12th, 1930, for about a month to compose works and go back to Paris in the middle of May.

Falla was the embodiment of Spanish musical mastery to Poulenc,

"Because Stravinsky – and here's a truism – is the great master. Russia: Stravinsky, Prokofiev. Germany: Hindemith. Spain: De Falla."⁷¹

Poulenc would have been familiar with and inspired by the fervent dance movement of Falla's music, and his influence is traced in Poulenc's fifth variation (mm. 40-47) of *Les Soirées de Nazelles* (Example 12), in addition to "Préambule" (mm. 67-79) and "Final" (mm. 59-66). Following a waltz quality (mm. 32-39) in D-flat major, swift sixteenth staccato figures and brisk

⁶⁷ Inmaculada Quintanal Sánchez, *Manuel de Falla y Asturias*, pages 12–25, quoted in *Manuel De Falla and Visions*, 69.

⁶⁸ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 88-91.

⁶⁹ Francis Poulenc and Myriam Chimènes, *Correspondance, 1910-1963* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), pages 30-33, quoted in Roger Nichols, *Poulenc: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 90.

⁷⁰ Poulenc and Chimènes, *Correspondance*, pages 30-5, and 30-7, quoted in *Poulenc: A Biography*, 90.

⁷¹ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 125.

triplets with accents would propose the flamenco steps or the guitar strumming featured in Spanish folk music.

Example 12. “Le charme enjôleur” from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, bars 30-47

IGOR STRAVINSKY

The SOUND of Stravinsky’s music was something so new to me that I often ask myself: “Well, if Stravinsky had never existed, would I have written music?” Which means to say that I consider myself as a son, the type of son he could certainly disown, but in fact a spiritual son of Stravinsky.⁷²

In 1916, Poulenc saw Stravinsky for the first time in Chester in London, which was to become his first publisher in help with the encounter. Poulenc was a huge admirer of Stravinsky since his childhood. At the age of 11, he heard the *Feu d’artifice* and the “Berceuse” from *L’Oiseau de Feu*, conducted by Gabriel Pierné, and *Le Sacre du printemps* in 1913 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. At that time, he was fascinated by Stravinsky’s peculiar and

⁷² Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 135.

dissonant chords and Nijinsky's choreography. After those concerts, he often wrote arrangements for four hands or two pianos with what struck him.⁷³

In 1917, when Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes was giving the first performance of *Parade* in Paris, Poulenc came to meet Stravinsky frequently. Later, Poulenc joined the salon of Misia Sert, who was patronizing Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, to see "the Great Igor" as Poulenc always called Stravinsky.⁷⁴

Stravinsky was kind and warm to Poulenc. When Poulenc's ballet, *Les biches* (1923) was premiered in 1924 by Ballets Russes in Monte Carlo, Stravinsky sent a letter to Poulenc, showing his sincere interest in the composition. Further, Stravinsky assisted Poulenc in the early pieces published by Chester, including *Mouvements perpétuels* and *Sonata for four hands* (1918).⁷⁵

Poulenc had helped Stravinsky's performances at the piano. Poulenc took part in one of the four pianos in Stravinsky's *Les Noces* (1923) with Marcelle Meyer, Hélène Leo, and Georges Auric for the premiere, although he was not able to perform at the first performance due to illness.⁷⁶ Poulenc also played the overture of Stravinsky's *Mavra* (1922) and the finale of *Pulcinella* (1920) for rehearsals. Roger Nichols assumes that this gave Poulenc a lesson about how to handle the "wrong" notes over diatonicism.⁷⁷

Stravinsky's rich and new materials through his three different periods were a stimulus to Poulenc. Stravinsky's constant new musical creations were what the young artistic generation of the early 20th century aimed for, the "modernistic invention," and Poulenc also endeavored to come up with his own. Stravinsky's elastic orchestral sounds affected Poulenc's *Cocardes*

⁷³ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 135-6.

⁷⁴ Claude Caré, "The Importance of Private Patronage in the Career of Francis Poulenc" (November 2007), 10. <https://www.poulenc.fr/en/?Articles>.

⁷⁵ Nichols, *A Biography*, 36.

⁷⁶ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 137-8.

⁷⁷ Nichols, *A Biography*, 40.

(1919), where he combined cornet, trombone, bass drum, triangle, and cymbals. Henri Hell also attributes the raucous brass fanfares and syncopated rhythms in Poulenc's *Les biches* to Stravinsky.⁷⁸

Poulenc respected the Great Igor's early Russian period and his twelve-tone period. Yet, he found Igor's European music closer to him, such as *Pulcinella*, *Le baiser de la fée* (*The Fairy's Kiss*), *Jeu de cartes* (*Card Game*), and *Mavra*.⁷⁹ Poulenc's defending article about *Mavra* is quoted,

In *Mavra*, Stravinsky has addressed all his efforts to the system of modulation. It is through the horizontal juxtaposition of distant keys that he has obtained a kind of music that is precise, springy and decidedly tonal (a rare quality these days).⁸⁰

As Poulenc pointed out, in "Parasha's song" of *Mavra* (1922), Stravinsky sets two distant keys around the primary B-flat minor, from B-flat minor to G minor (Example 13) and D minor to B-flat minor; Poulenc was struck by this chromatic-mediant modulatory process.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics in four languages: Russian, French, German, and English. The lyrics are: "я сьто-бой, / nous te - voir, / dich nicht mehr, / o'er and o'er, / Пов-но семьдней, какъ спо- / Huit jours où je n'ai con- / Schon acht Ta-ge muß al- / Now the se-venth finds a". The score is divided into two measures by a vertical line. A square with the number '2' is placed above the first measure of the vocal line. Below the vocal line are three staves for piano accompaniment: violin, viola, and cello/bass. The key signature changes from B-flat minor to G minor at the start of the second measure.

Example 13. B-flat minor to G minor in "Parasha's song" from *Mavra*, square 2

⁷⁸ Hell, *Francis Poulenc*, 27.

⁷⁹ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 136.

⁸⁰ Nichols, *A Biography*, 52.

Modulations to remote keys are more actively observed in Poulenc's works, beginning with his *Les biches* (1923), before which Poulenc's preferred device involving a key change was to employ a parallel major or minor key. It is also noticeable that *Les biches* was completed about a year after Stravinsky's *Mavra*.

In *Les biches*, Poulenc's language is clear and transparent, escaping from his experimental writings of 1920-21. Towards the end of the Rondeau, the brief A-flat major area is juxtaposed with C major, making the music develop in a different color (Example 14).

The image shows a musical score for Example 14, which is a modulation from A-flat major to C major in the "Rondeau" of Poulenc's *Les Biches*, square 29. The score is written for five parts: Violins I and II, Alto, Violoncello (V^{cllo}), and Contrabasso (C. B.). The key signature changes from two flats (A-flat major) to one flat (C major) at measure 29. Performance markings include *pizz.* (pizzicato) for the strings, *Div.* (divisi) for the strings, *très sec* (very dry) for the strings, *Solo* for the cello, *Tutti* for the strings, and *Unis arco* (unison arco) for the cello and contrabasso. The score is in 4/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

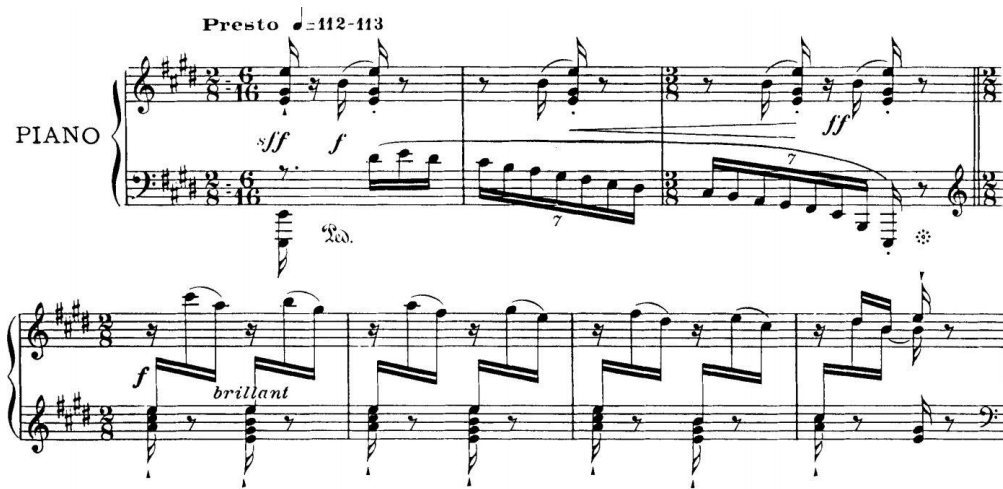
Example 14. A-flat major to C major in "Rondeau" of Poulenc's *Les Biches*, square 29

After practicing the continual shift to a remote key in *Les Biches*, this seems to occur frequently in other musical forms as well written after 1923, such as the first movement of the *Ronsard* setting ("Attributs") and "Caprice italien" from *Napoli* (Example 15).

The image shows a musical score for Example 15, which is a modulation from E major to A-flat major in Poulenc's "Caprice italien," bars 136-139. The score is written for Violin and Cello/Contrabasso. The key signature changes from one sharp (E major) to two flats (A-flat major) at bar 136. Performance markings include *céder à peine* (yield slightly), *Au mouv.* (at the movement), *mp* (mezzo-piano), and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The score is in 4/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

Example 15. Modulation from E major to A-flat major in Poulenc's "Caprice italien," bars 136-139

According to Nicolas Southon, “The year of 1922, with *Mavra*, was a turning point in Poulenc’s early career,” making him believe the power of the perfect triad,⁸¹ no longer under the influence of Schönberg and Milhaud. This is evidenced in *Les biches* and “Caprice italien” with ampleness of simple triads (Example 16).



Example 16. The opening of the “Caprice italien” from Poulenc’s *Napoli*

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Poulenc met Prokofiev in 1921, when Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes was in Paris for the performance of *Chout* at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt (today Théâtre de la Ville).⁸² Prokofiev was a very quiet man, and his independent musical style was as distinguished as Poulenc’s; Prokofiev deemed Poulenc’s early music unfavorable, so no one could anticipate their future friendship.

However, they were to become good friends because both admired Stravinsky and knew that at least their music did not neglect tonality. Prokofiev was an astonishing pianist who had

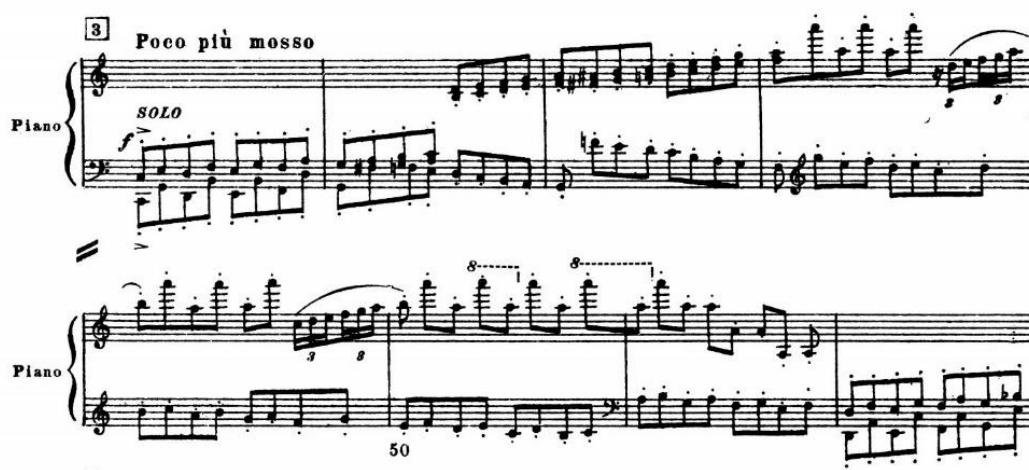
⁸¹ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 6.

⁸² Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 114.

completed three marvelous piano concertos by 1921, and Poulenc gladly helped Prokofiev practice his concertos at the piano.

During 1931-32, Poulenc met Prokofiev almost every week in the evening at Prokofiev's house. They enjoyed playing piano for four hands and bridge, which Poulenc started at the age of 12, in company with Jacques Février and an unidentified Russian lady.⁸³

Poulenc had rehearsed all of Prokofiev's piano concertos in Salle Gaveau with the composer, except for the fourth written for the left hand. In June 1932, Poulenc rehearsed the fifth piano concerto with Prokofiev, and it was the last time Poulenc saw him before Prokofiev returned to Russia in 1933. In those direct experiences, Poulenc was impressed with the intensity produced by Prokofiev's powerful staccatos and relentlessly unchanging tempo⁸⁴ (Example 17).

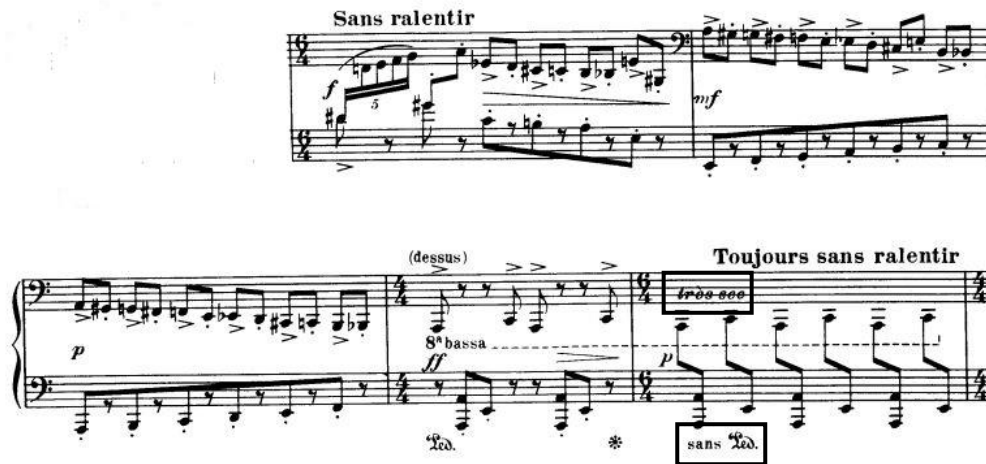


Example 17. Piano solo from Prokofiev's *Piano Concerto No. 1*

⁸³ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 116.

⁸⁴ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 120.

In contrast, Poulenc's staccatos have more to do with light-hearted feelings such as delight, mischief, or indifference. Nevertheless, the rather mechanical passage in the eighth variation of *Les Soirées de Nazelles* is likely to be associated with Prokofiev's "hammer-like" language (Example 18).



Example 18. "L'alerte vieillesse" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, bars 44-48

THREE LADIES AND POULENC'S HISTORICAL INTERESTS

After WWI, patrons such as Princess Edmond de Polignac felt the necessity of supporting promising young composers who would succeed the great masters of French music. Claude Caré elucidates the role of the patron,

They [Princess and Prince Edmond de Polignac] had seen that their true role as patrons lay in using their reputation as real connoisseurs to give those who chose to follow their example a taste for trying harder; their devotion to seeking whatever was not already worn out would be a model and would take with it anyone who trusted their judgment.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Caré, *Private Patronage*, 8-9.

Polignac's salon in Paris was a critical place where new contemporary music was promoted with funds, and the budding musicians could contact outstanding specialists. Poulenc first saw this respected lady in 1919 at her salon. The 20-year-old Poulenc did not know well about the relationship between patrons and musicians, and it was hard for him to deal with the princess, who was about 30 years older.

In 1923, Poulenc, possibly guided by Viñes, came to see a rehearsal of Falla's *Retablo* in the princess' salon, who commissioned it to Falla. Viñes was manipulating the puppets and introduced Poulenc to Wanda Landowska, who was playing the harpsichord.

Landowska's harpsichord playing enchanted Poulenc, and through her, Poulenc came to discover "the key to Bach's harpsichord music" as well as French harpsichordists.⁸⁶ The harpsichord, which demands a very different approach to the piano, drew Poulenc's attention with its unique sounds. When Poulenc was following all the rehearsals of the *Retablo*, Landowska suggested he write a harpsichord concerto for her.

Landowska helped him have a deeper understanding of the harpsichord and proofread the composition of *Concert Champêtre* (1927-1928) with Poulenc. She kept it almost the same but suggested clarifying the writing by simplifying chords or taking out notes.⁸⁷ In 1929, *Concert Champêtre* was premiered by the dedicatee, Landowska at the Salle Pleyel in Paris.

Poulenc describes an outskirts of Paris, Forêt de Saint-Leu, which spurred his writing,

I got the idea of composing a *Concert Champêtre* with something of the atmosphere of the Forêt de Saint-Leu where Rousseau and Diderot used to go for walks, the place where Couperin, like Landowska, had stayed...For a townsman like me it was a pretty sort of countryside, that Parisian suburb where so many eighteenth century houses drowse on among the market garden that supply the Halles in Paris.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 215.

⁸⁷ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 120.

⁸⁸ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 46.

Poulenc's interest in the organ is traced from 1923 in a letter from Poulenc to Count Etienne de Beaumont. In this letter, Poulenc apologizes to the Count for not being able to complete a dance piece for the Louis XIV ball and sets forth a plan to write an organ sonata for his wife,

Don't count on my piece for your party. Anyway, I won't be in Paris at the time as the doctor is sending me to Vichy at the end of May. I can't tell you how annoyed I am that I won't be able to write this dance which I was so keen on (organ registrations) for you, and for which you would have been my ideal performer, who would have been very lovely to watch, I'm sure. Happily, I hope that there will be another chance soon to make music for one of your parties. Besides, I mean to write an organ sonata for your wife this summer. I hope I will be more lucky this time.⁸⁹

The Cavaillé-Coll organ, situated in the salon of Princess Edmond de Polignac,⁹⁰ would become a fascinating resource to Poulenc. The princess was a skilled pianist and organist, whose organ teacher was Nadia Boulanger. Jeanice Brooks presumes that those two women would have met through Boulanger's teacher, Gabriel Fauré.⁹¹ Since 1917, Boulanger had appeared in the princess' music rooms to perform as an organist, and they came to be closer in 1932 with the princess' attendance to Boulanger's "Wednesday cantata sessions."

They shared an interest in young composers, and the students of Boulanger, such as Igor Markevitch and Jean Françaix, were objects of the princess' attention. In 1934, Françaix was offered a commission to write an organ concerto for the princess through Boulanger, but he refused and turned over the offer to Poulenc. Poulenc willingly accepted it and began to work with Boulanger, who suggested her assistance to him for organ writing,

The princess de Polignac tells me you intend to write something for her, for organ. Need I say how much this project interests me, and makes my heart glad – as well as my ears! I always have confidence in you, yet I wonder if you know the organ of the rue Cortambert well, its resources, its limits... So, I would have like to talk about all that with

⁸⁹ Caré, *Private Patronage*, 11.

⁹⁰ Caré, *Private Patronage*, 9.

⁹¹ Jeanice Brooks, "Nadia Boulanger and the Salon of the Princesse de Polignac," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46, no. 3 (1993):425.

you, and the possibility of writing a work that the princess herself might play whether with quartet, or with piano – all so difficult – because the organ runs the risk of disappearing.⁹²

Poulenc studied “ancient music,” works by composers such as Tomas Luis de Victoria, Dieterich Buxtehude, and Girolamo Frescobaldi, under the influence of Boulanger over the years.⁹³ In the meantime, Poulenc composed his first sacred music, *Litanies à la Vierge noire* (1936) for a three-part choir and organ, shortly after learning of the death of his friend Pierre-Octave Ferroud, and the work was premiered by Boulanger and her ensemble in 1936.

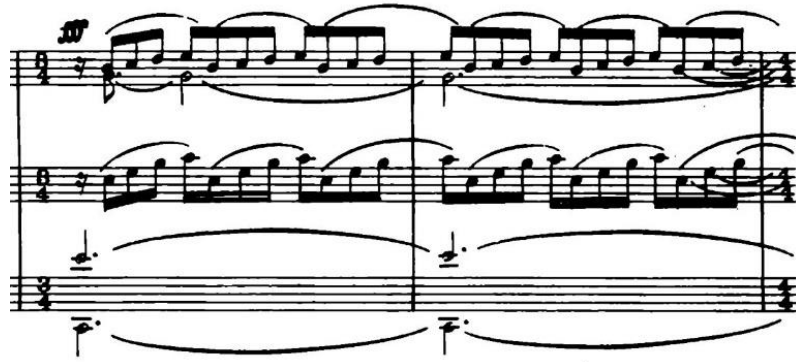
Two years later, Poulenc’s second organ work, the *Concerto for Organ in G minor* (1938), consisting of seven movements, came out as an achievement after four years of work with Boulanger. Compared to the *Litanies*, the concerto shows more accomplished writing with rhythmic and textural diversity. One can sense that Poulenc and Boulanger did consider making the work less intricate for the princess but still created a solemn and splendid ambiance.

Noticeably, the pedal part is less involved than the part for the hands, but there are several instances of pedal points (Example 19), reflecting similar usage by Frescobaldi in his Toccata “Quinta” and “Sesta” from *Il Secondo Libro di Toccate* (Example 20). There are triplets and sextuplets in the fourth movement in uniform appearance, and constant dotted rhythms extensively in the first and third movement (Example 21), techniques employed by Buxtehude in his *Prelude in C major, BuxWV 137* (Example 22).

The organ concerto was privately premiered in the princess’ salon and publicly by the organist, Maurice Duruflé in 1939 at the Salle Gaveau in Paris.

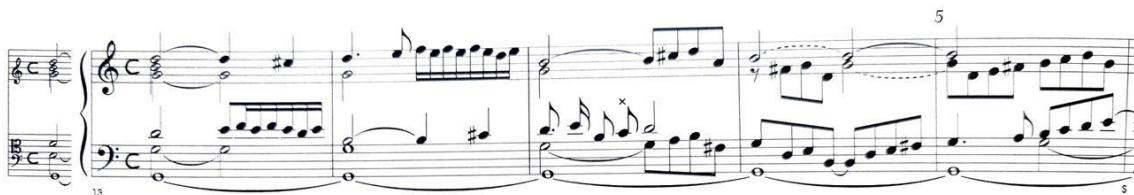
⁹² Brooks, “Nadia Boulanger,” 456.

⁹³ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 235.

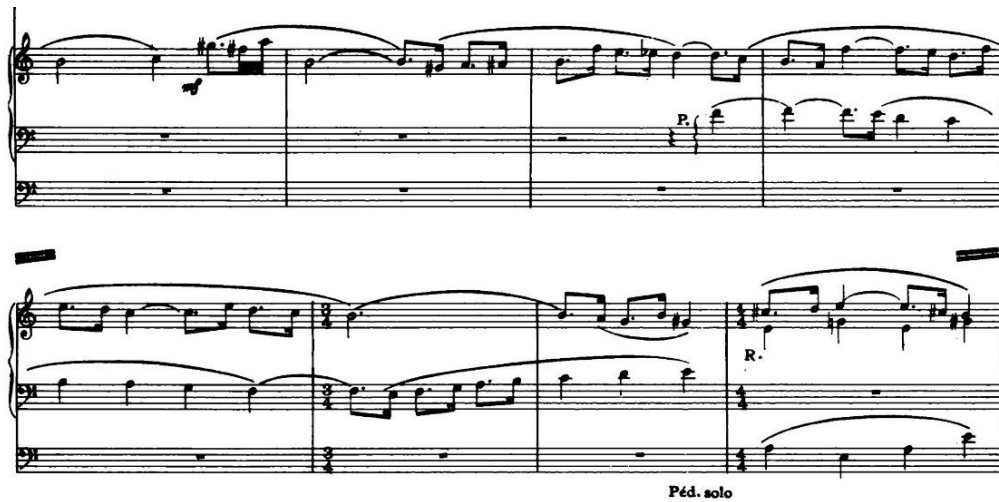


Example 20. A pedal point in 1st movement of the Poulenc's *Organ Concerto*, bars 75-77

Quinta Toccata sopra i pedali per l'organo, e senza



Example 19. Toccata "Quinta" from *Il Secondo Libro di Toccate* by Frescobaldi



Example 21. Persistent dotted rhythms in 3rd movement of the *Organ Concerto*, bars 99-106

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. Each system consists of three staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a separate bass staff. The first system shows a treble staff with a melodic line of eighth notes, a bass staff with a descending eighth-note scale, and a separate bass staff with a few notes. The second system shows a treble staff with chords and a bass staff with a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

Example 22. *Prelude in C major, BuxWV 137* by Buxtehude, bars 10-17

CHAPTER III : *LES SOIRÉES DE NAZELLES* (1930-1936)

The variations that form the center of this work were improvised during long country evenings when the author played musical “portraits” with his friends gathered around the piano. We hope today that these variations, presented here between a Prélude and a Finale’ will have the power to evoke this game in the frame of a Touraine salon, with a window open to the evening.⁹⁴

Les Soirées de Nazelles is a collection of eight portrait-variations, encapsulated within a Prélude and a Final, each having a Cadence before or after. Usually, Poulenc tends to give an abstract title to his piano works such as *Improvisations*, *Novelettes*, or *Intermezzi*, avoiding explicit extramusical meanings. However, for *Les Soirées* Poulenc had a concrete inspiration, the banks of the Marne, with which his childhood memories are reawakened.

This game of musical “portraits” was played at Virginie (tante) Liénard’s house in Nazelles, a town in Touraine. However, he did not specify who these portraits were, except for a self-portrait in the Final.⁹⁵ Poulenc recollects his memories on the banks of the Marne,

The music is inspired by the banks of the Marne, where I was so happy as a child: Joinville with its pleasure gardens, its fried potatoes, its trumpet-shaped phonographs, its boats full of lovers; Champigny and its Ile d’Amour, where I loved strolling about with Raymond Radiguet; and then Nogent, where I spent my whole childhood. It was there, sprawled out in the suburban family garden, that I read Fantômas, and maybe, without realising it, rubbed shoulders on the river bank with the ‘Bonnot gang’, whose raided house at the foot of the Le Tremblay viaduct stirred my imagination for years.⁹⁶

Southwest of Paris, Touraine was a countryside where he would meet his respectable old friend, Tante Liénard, starting in 1922. In 1928 he bought an eighteenth-century house named “Le Grand Coteau” at Noizay, a few miles away from Touraine to be liberated from

⁹⁴ Francis Poulenc, *Les Soirées de Nazelles* (Paris: Durand & Co., 1937)

⁹⁵ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 100.

⁹⁶ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 100.

phone calls and the distractions of Paris.⁹⁷ This true Parisian was reluctant to walk out of his new countryside home, but it was a perfect place to work in solitude, preferably before noon.⁹⁸

This intense work, *Les Soirées de Nazelles* was completed at Noizay in October 1936; a significant portion was also written at Poulenc's sister's house at Eure.⁹⁹ Poulenc considered this grand suite as "twenty minutes of music for piano brillantissimo."¹⁰⁰ The first sketch was done in 1930 and it was quite different from the final version (Example 23). According to Daniel, several variations were excluded because they lack the charm of others.¹⁰¹

Although Poulenc defines this work as *Variations*, the featured theme only appears in Prélude, the fifth variation, and Final. Moreover, this dance theme is not the main discourse in each of them, appearing as an episode. Although the partial theme (the first four bars) appears in three movements, there seem no other unifying elements throughout the variations. However, Poulenc places the theme at the beginning, middle, and the end, and this orderly disposition seems to be his best plan for unity.

Poulenc used a similar technique in his *Thème varié* (1951), whose partial *Thème* (the first four bars) appears only in a few variations, cunningly unifying the variations by providing the first four descending notes (in the smallest unit) of *Thème*, but not always at the opening of each, mostly either starting with the tonic or dominant.

The exterior appearance of *Les Soirées* is also unusual. Interestingly, it may be related to the strange form of his *Le Bal masque* (1932), a secular cantata for baritone and chamber orchestra, comprising four vocal and two instrumental movements, enclosed by the Prélude

⁹⁷ Bernac, *The Man and His Songs*, 30-31.

⁹⁸ Poulenc, *My friends and myself*, 60.

⁹⁹ John Rank, "John Rank plays Poulenc, Tcherepnin, Griffes, Werlé," New York: International Piano Archives, 1977, From the notes on the back of the LP, written by Donald Garvelmann.

¹⁰⁰ Poulenc, *Selected Correspondences*, 107.

¹⁰¹ Keith W Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982), 187.

and Finale. Impressively, Poulenc describes this cantata as “A gallery of odd portraits, separated by instrumental interludes.”¹⁰²

- I - Prélude et air de bravoure
- II - Intermède (Instrumental)
- III - Malvina
- IV - Bagatelle (Instrumental)
- V - La dame aveugle
- VI - Finale

The “hanging” of those musical movements was, Poulenc said, “essential in music as in painting.”¹⁰³ In *Les Soirées*, the odd insertions of the two Cadences, which are stylistically very disparate to other movements appear to be purposeful, “amusing the audience,”¹⁰⁴ and they recall the bizarre hanging of Picasso, shown in his exhibition in June 1932. In the 1932 Picasso exhibition guidebook, it is said that Picasso deliberately jumbled up his different periods of works in a dense hanging without indicating the date of each work. The composition dates of the variations in *Les Soirées* also are not marked.

Picasso took full control of his show. When asked how he would curate his retrospective, Picasso replied provocatively: ‘badly’. Resisting attempts to provide a chronology of his artistic development, Picasso chose instead to mix up works from different periods in a dense hang, and did not provide dates of individual works. Those of 1932 were interspersed throughout as if to indicate that all his output was equally contemporary.¹⁰⁵

Les Soirées results from Poulenc’s improvisation, whose agogic intricacies were challenging to notate. He was a hard-working composer and often not satisfied with his notational recreations of his spontaneously composed music, unlike his more balanced two sets

¹⁰² Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 29.

¹⁰³ Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs*, 79.

¹⁰⁴ Carl B Schmidt, *The Music of Francis Poulenc (1899-1963): A Catalogue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 263.

¹⁰⁵ Tate Modern Exhibition, *The Ey Exhibition: Picasso 1932 Love Fame Tragedy* (8 March-9 September), Large Print Guide, Room 6, 88.

of *Improvisations*, written between 1932-1941. However, he knew that he was harsh with *Les Soirées* listening to and praising John Ranck's recording, issued in 1955.¹⁰⁶ When *Les Soirées* was completed, Poulenc claimed,

In conclusion, I'll say something about *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, a work that goes further than any other in expressing a generalised spiritual and emotional atmosphere, which may puzzle a number of critics.¹⁰⁷

After finishing the *Final* in 1936, Poulenc turned away from piano writing to devote himself to religious works, songs, and operas. In 1940, he resumed composing piano works with *Mélancolie*, and wrote seven more works during the rest of his life.

¹⁰⁶ Rank, "John Ranck plays Poulenc," LP.

¹⁰⁷ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 100.

1930 Sketch	1936 Final Version
Ouverture	Préambule
Le Contentement de soi	Cadence
Le Joie de vivre	1. Le Comble de la distinction (The height of distinction)
L'Instinct	2. Le Coeur sur la main (Heart in Sleeve)
La Suite dans les idées	3. La Désinvolture et la discretion (Offhandedness and Discreetness)
Le Comble de la distinction	4. La Suite dans les idées (A series of Ideas/Logically Speaking)
Le Charme voulu	5. Le Charme enjôleur (Cajoling charm)
Les Points de suspension	6. Le Contentement de soi (Self-content)
Romance	7. Le Goût du Malheur (A Taste for Unhappiness)
Frissons	8. L'Alerte vieillesse (Sprightly old age)
Nerfs	Cadence
Soupirs	Final
L'Alerte vieillesse	
Final	

Example 23. Poulenc's 1930 sketch and final version of *Les Soirées*¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Schmidt, *A Catalogue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 263.

Préambule

For this grand suite, sinister octaves open the first movement in the key of B-flat minor. The chromatic motions create brusque and dark images, such as criminals or gangs whom Poulenc read about in *Fantômas*, a French crime fiction in the family garden in Nogent. Poulenc also draws aggressive sounds purposely using adjacent dissonances (see circles in Example 24). The opening B-flat minor travels freely to G major to E-flat major, and B-flat major, reflecting the “springy” modulations he found in *Mavra* by Stravinsky.

Extrêmement animé et décidé (♩ = 76 à 1 temps)

PIANO

ff

mf

Red.

*

Example 24. The opening of the “Préambule”

Shortly, the music becomes animated and developed with sequential patterns, brisk “V – I” motions, and appoggiaturas, which make a unifying long line before entering a distant G major key (Example 25). In this passage, Poulenc exploits the “V – I” gesture, passing through three different tonalities in succession; each gesture is a step-down apart from each other. This technique similarly reoccurs in other places (mm. 27-34 and 93-100), and such harmonic audacity by swift free modulations in sequences indicates Poulenc’s attempts for his inventive style.

V (Bb) → I (Eb) V (D7) i (Gm) V (F7) I (Bb)

(A7) G: I (G)

Example 25. Explorations with “V – I” patterns, bars 44-54

The waltz is frequently featured in Poulenc’s music appearing in this Préambule and other variations, reflecting his familiarity with the dance in the thriving cultural Paris of the 1920-30s. Poulenc’s delightful evenings in the dance halls, cabarets, or café-concerts, such as “Le Jardin de ma Sœur” are summoned where he saw Cecile Sorel and Max Jacob waltzing in 1925.¹⁰⁹

The triple meter dance is continued in the E-flat major area with triplets in the right hand, recalling a Spanish dance (Example 26). Grosz claims that this theme indicates homage to Falla.¹¹⁰ The passionate triplets around staccatos and accents as discussed on pages 27-28, suggest Poulenc’s inspiration from Falla’s Spanish folk music. Poulenc develops this theme in

¹⁰⁹ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 79-80.

¹¹⁰ Gay K Grosz, “An Analysis of the Historical and Biographical Influences on the Music of Francis Poulenc As Portrayed in His *Les Soirées De Nazelles*” (DMA., Louisiana State University, 2009), 43.

the next phrase (bar 80) with variations, such as rich chords and free decorative figurations in the left hand, creating an elegant atmosphere (Example 27).

Example 26. Guitar-like triplets in E-flat major, bars 65-75

Example 27. Variations with the same subject, bars 80-83

This E-flat major theme ends in an A-flat dominant 7th, which serves as a dominant chord to the next chord (D-flat 7th) in the reoccurring key, B-flat minor (bar 93). The “V – I” motion conveniently chains the two different episodes, different in character and key, although the shift of episodes still sounds abrupt. This method continually appears for the rest, leading to the next section.

Poulenc’s musical phrasings are often varied with several changes of the time signature, producing a sense of improvisation. His musical ideas are also not systematically developed but sectional as shown in the attached short coda of seven bars. In the key of B-flat major, he

enjoys the “brilliant” piano with notes in all ranges, extreme dynamics, and long pedaling deriving beautiful sonorities (Example 28).

Example 28. A short coda of “Préambule,” bars 97-110

Cadence

In the *Largo* section at the end, the appearance of these ten measures (Example 29) resembles the recitative part in *Fantasia* from *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D minor* by J.S. Bach (Example 30). It is noteworthy that Poulenc labels this section “Cadence,” an allusion to a cadenza and hence improvisatory in nature. Completing his *Concert Champêtre* in 1928 with Landowska, Poulenc’s intensive studies of Bach’s harpsichord works would help such recitative writing.

The improvisatory gestures Poulenc utilizes are in two different types of scales: harmonic minor scales in C, E-flat, and G, and an octatonic scale (bar 5); all is to be played freely. Clear tonality is only perceived at the end, D7 going to the “tonic,” G major.

Poulenc's dynamic markings in this closing section are explicit, from *pp* to *ff*, as are his clear indications of the sustaining pedal use and expression (*très librement*, *doux*, *très doux*); it is slightly ironic that Poulenc would be so dictatorial in notating a passage that is supposed to sound extemporaneous, but this is yet another example of his complex personality. The insertion of this historical flavor in the surrounding contemporary movements is quite striking. Possibly, it is a portrait of J.S. Bach and Poulenc placed this Cadence purposely between other modern movements, creating pleasant confusion between such shifting periods, as Picasso did in his 1932 Retrospective.

The musical score consists of three systems of piano accompaniment. The first system begins with the tempo marking 'Largo (♩=52)' and the dynamic 'f très librement'. The second system starts with 'mf' and includes several 'Ped.' markings. The third system begins with 'p' and 'doux', followed by 'pp' and 'm.d.'. A circled section of the bass line in the third system is labeled 'Octatonic scale'. The score concludes with 'molto cresc.' and a final 'Ped.' marking.

Example 29. The opening of the first Cadence, bars 1-5

Example 30. Recitativo in *Fantasia* from Bach's *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*

Variation I. Le Comble de la distinction (The height of distinction)

The first variation in G minor is very lively and lighthearted. There are two dominant musical characters: comical in G minor and lyrical in A-flat major.

The opening statement is humorous with effective use of staccatos, accents, and commas (Example 31). Remarkably, there are four commas in the first four bars, which are related to timing, and they evoke the antic wit of comedians or clowns, such as Grock, who was Poulenc's favorite clown at Cirque Medrano.¹¹¹ The intentional delay of motion by commas, a way of expressing the suggested "exag erement rubato," brings to mind an image of Grock, who plays with the audience while playing a soprano saxophone (*B uhnen-Sketch*, 1931). The descending chromatic lines and bitter clashes of 2nds with cheerful accents further increase the comicality.

¹¹¹ McKinney, "Parisian Popular," 21.

In square A, the humor is continued with the use of patter-like sixteenths and sudden *sforzando* on beat 4, followed by a comma (mm. 9-10), whose drollery conjures up theatrical performances of the entertainers (Example 32).

Commencer très au-dessous du mouvement et *exagérément rubato* jusqu'à **A**

Vif et gai

PIANO

mf *f* *p*

A Au mouvement (♩=116)

p *sf* *p sec*

Example 31. Humor with commas, clashes of 2nds, and an off-beat entrance in “Le Comble de la distinction,” bars 1-10

After a witty, short bridge-like interlude in bar 12, Poulenc skillfully leads to a lyrical part in A-flat major (Example 32). These six bars (mm. 13-18) in elegance and suavity sound volatile because this part is gone shortly upon arrival and a fragment of the clownish figure reappears (Example 33).

Such continuous fragmentary passages generate carnivalesque images, and they would illustrate both Poulenc's pure improvisation and his complex mind about which more will be discussed in the Final.

The image shows a musical score for a piano and voice. The top system is the vocal line, starting with a fermata and the instruction 'Cédez un peu'. The second system continues the vocal line with the instruction 'A peine moins vite'. The piano accompaniment is shown in two systems below. The first system has a 'Red.' marking and an asterisk. The second system has a 'pp' dynamic marking. The score is in C minor, 4/4 time.

Example 32. A singing melody in "Le Comble de la distinction," bars 11-16

The image shows a musical score for a piano, consisting of two systems. The first system has a 4/4 time signature. The second system has a 3/4 time signature. The score is in C minor and features a complex, rhythmic piano accompaniment with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes.

Example 33. Reappearance of the clownish figure in "Le Comble de la distinction," bars 17-20

II. Le Coeur sur la main (Heart in hand)

Poulenc's melancholy is predominantly felt throughout this variation, aptly expressed with the key of C minor. In the beginning, dialogues of the long outer singing voices occur and Poulenc reveals his sensitivity employing extended tertian chords, such as 9ths or 13ths, nuanced accents, and poignant neighboring chords (Example 34).

The musical score is divided into four systems, each with specific harmonic and performance instructions:

- System 1:** Chords G9(b9) and Eb9(b9). Performance instruction: *très à l'aise*.
- System 2:** Chords Bdim.7 Gb and C#7. Performance instruction: *rubato*. Dynamics: *p* and *mf*. Text: *m.g. en dehors*.
- System 3:** Chords Bbb(A), Bbdim.7, Ab13, DbM9 (b9), and F13(b9/b13). Performance instruction: *pp très rubato*. Dynamics: *p*. Text: *Red.* and ***.
- System 4:** Chord Bbm7. Performance instructions: *Pressez*, *Cédez*, and *Au mouvement*.

Example 34. Elegant harmonic passages in “Le Coeur sur la main,” bars 6-26

Poulenc sets four different key signatures: E major, C major, D-flat major, and A-flat major. There are two very brief key areas, E major and C major, each only two bars long, and they help to convey the erratic emotional state.

With the sign of *rubato* (bar 15), a beautiful episode of four bars (first bracket, mm. 15-18) is sung in support of rich chords, a G-flat major, followed by a C half-diminished 7th, B double-flat (A major), and B-flat fully diminished 7th chord. Poulenc’s harmonic progression is

unconventional, unpredictable, but sensuous, possessing very smooth lines in the bass and tenor.

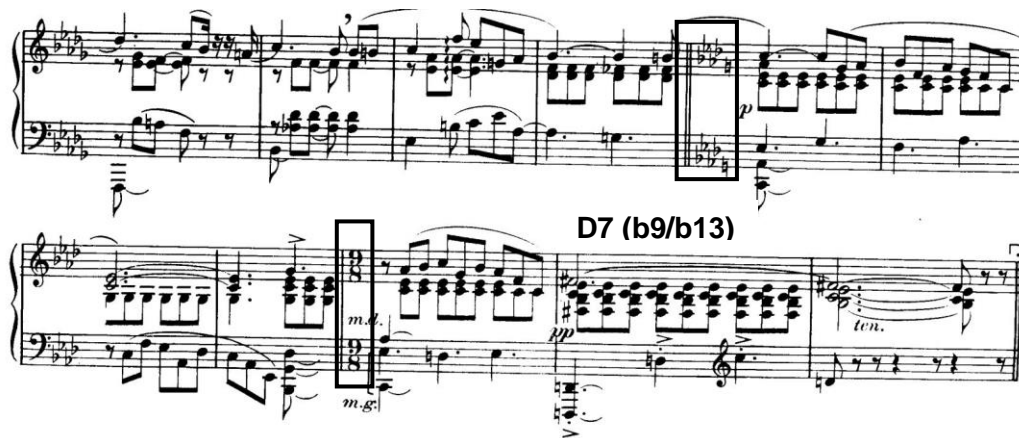
Shortly, a graceful dance (mm. 19-22) is followed with a linear melody, whose gradually descending line recalls a tune of *Paris Je t'aime d'amour* (Example 35), a song sung by Maurice Chevalier in a musical comedy film “The Love Parade” (1929). This melody reappears two times later in varied iterations (mm.25-28 and 44-47) and they comprise the same chords with the same functional basses as the initial one (A-flat (V) – D-flat (I) – F (V) – B-flat (I)), but interestingly the last one is written in the key of D-flat major, while the first two are written with a key signature of C minor. This tonal uncertainty may also have an existential meaning, reflecting Poulenc’s bigger questions about life’s meaning.

Example 35. Refrain of *Paris Je t'aime d'amour* from “The Love Parade” by Maurice Chevalier

This variation ends in the key of A-flat major and in 9/8 time, which reveals Poulenc's liberal mind to musical traditions (Examples 36 and 37). The last D7 flat 9 & 13 chord only functions as a dominant chord to the tonic of the next G major variation.



Example 36. The opening in C minor in 6/8, bars 1



Example 37. The ending in A-flat major, 9/8, bars 46-56

III. La désinvolture et la discrétion (Offhandedness and Discreetness)

Unlike the preceding variations, this third variation is established in balanced four-bar phrases except for the last six bars. It is in a classical form with straightforward components, such as triadic variants, fewer notes, and repetition of the same motive, which are redolent of his simple and concise early works under the influence of Satie and Cocteau.

As indicated in the title, two contradictory natures—casualness and discretion—are expressed in two different keys, G major and C minor. In the given metronome marking, a half-

note 104, the carefree character in G major is restless and scampering, attached with busy accents and staccatos illustrating Poulenc's harmonic acrobatics (Example 38).

D major with C#

Presto (♩=104)

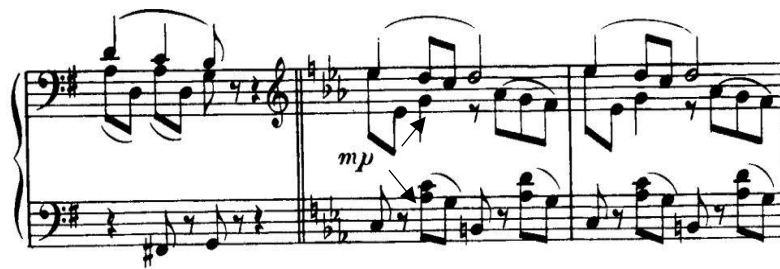
PIANO

Example 38. A sudden modulation in the beginning of
 "La désinvolture et la discretion," bars 1-24

There are several sudden modulations from the beginning. The opening G major key modulates to D major (mm. 3-4), returning to G major in bar 9. When the beginning octave gesture reoccurs in G major in bar 13, two other modulations occur. After an immediate

transformation to G minor, it is resolved in the key of D minor in “iv – i” motion, and after a written comma, the same motion is repeated during the next three bars in C minor. Similar to Poulenc’s preferred means with “V – I,” the modulations through the “iv – i” gesture display Poulenc’s exploration of harmonic novelty. Yet he punctuates this G major section with a G major chord, functioning as a dominant to the next section in C minor.

The opposing personality in C minor, discretion, contrasts with the previous section coming in with sultry legato lines. This section sounds hesitant with the repetition of the first part of the melody (bars 21-22) and also melancholic with the use of an added 6th (A-flat), arousing a bittersweetness by friction with G (Example 39), and with three commas (Example 40). Above all, the oscillations between minor and major appear to reveal Poulenc’s precarious mindset.



Example 39. Added 6th in the beginning of C minor section of “La désinvolture et la discrétion,” bars 20-22



Example 40. Oscillations between minor and major chord, bars 25-34

IV. La Suite dans les idées (A Series of Ideas, Logically Speaking)

This fourth variation stands out from the other variations due to its very vertical writing on three staves. For the English translation of the title, Grosz gives “A series of Ideas” whereas Garvelmann calls it “Logically Speaking.” Poulenc’s indication *Très large et pompeux* gives a clue for this adventurous and unusual writing: very big and pretentious, which is quite opposite to Poulenc’s aesthetic for unaffectedness.¹¹²

The persistent dotted rhythm recalls his Hymne from *Trois Pièces* (1928) and the third movement of his *Organ Concerto in G minor* (1938). As well, there is a similarity with the recitative-like quality of the opening of Liszt’s second *Hungarian Rhapsody*.

The emphatic and serious tone of this variation gives an impression of dramatic German music whose grandiloquence Poulenc denounced as a German disease.¹¹³ The vertical sounds, however, are reinterpreted and tenderized with Poulenc’s sensuous and subtle harmonies (mm. 5-8 and 13-16); he utilizes richer chords than the mere 7th chords he previously used. Throughout the work, the tonality is not felt with unsystematic harmonies, but such large chords are mostly constructed over functional basses (F – E-flat – D-flat – C-flat) (Example 41).

¹¹² Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs*, 63.

¹¹³ Nichols, *A Biography*, 3.

F13(b9)
Eb13(b9/b13)
Db13(b9/b13)

The image displays a musical score for Example 41, consisting of two systems. The first system features a piano part with a treble and bass clef, and a cello part below it. The piano part includes dynamic markings *pp* and *m.d.*, and an *8* marking above the first measure. The cello part has three boxed chord diagrams. The second system continues the piano part with markings *très doux et express.*, *ten.*, and *pp*, and the cello part with *pp*, *express.*, and *attaquer de suite*. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/C minor).

Example 41. Rich harmonies above functional basses, bars 13-18

V. Le Charme enjôleur (Cajoling Charm)

The tender and long legato lines of this variation recall a lyrical voice, such as that of Edmond Clément, a French lyric tenor whose voice Poulenc loved when he heard Clément sing the role of Le Chevalier des Grieux in *Manon*.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 33.

Similar to the second variation, “Le Coeur sur la main,” the countermelodies are engaged in supporting the melody in the bass, while the inner accompanying chords are filling the space, supporting the harmony like his song accompaniments (Example 42). He also employs pedal points at the beginning for about two bars (also mm. 68-72 for five bars), a practice that often appears in his first sacred work, *Litanies à la Vierge Noire* (1936) (see page 38).

The image shows a musical score for the opening of "Le Charme enjôleur" by Maurice Ravel. The score is in 3/4 time and F-sharp minor. It consists of three systems of music. The first system is marked "Très allant (♩ = 104)" and includes the instruction "p lancer le mouvement". A box highlights the first two bars of the left hand, which contain a pedal point. The second system is marked "mp". The third system is marked "Animer peu à peu" and includes a box around the last two bars of the right hand. The score features a right hand with a melodic line and a left hand with a bass line and chords.

Example 42. The opening of “Le Charme enjôleur,” bars 1-14

While the key moves from F-sharp minor to D-flat major, there are two clean slates without key signatures (mm. 14-31 and 56-100), which allow Poulenc freer modulations.

In bar 40, the Fallaesque theme from “Préambule” appears in a transformed and extended form (Example 43). The accompanying figure of the left hand is much drier, and more triplets are engaged in the right hand.

Example 43. Shared theme preceded in “Préambule” (mm. 67-74), bars 36-59

VI. Le Contentement de soi (Satisfied with Himself)

Très vite et très sec, as marked by the composer, this variation in C major is elated and high-spirited throughout. Poulenc’s detailed markings of dynamics and articulations actualize the quality of contentment as well as the farcicality. The cheerful rhythm in the bass evokes confident and bantering footsteps.

His use of commas, dissonance, and chromatic and octatonic scales vividly depicts joyful and humorous atmosphere of the music halls in Paris (Example 44). When the music moves up to a very high register (from bar 19), the boisterous up-down figures suggest a bustling *cancan* (Example 45), as heard in the Casino de Paris or Moulin Rouge. Such dancing

seems to be accompanied by a full orchestra conceived with thick chords towards the end, creating even more excitement.

The dry staccatos and light-hearted feelings also recall Prokofiev's *Scherzo Humoristique Op. 12 No. 9* (Example 46), where the downward motion of the opening theme is quite similar to Poulenc's *cancan* figures (see squares in Examples 45 and 46).

Notably, Poulenc barely uses a minor chord in this variation and his harmonic chord progressions are spontaneously constructed by relying on octatonic scales, besides dominant-tonic structures. Also, he merely stacks all major 3rds on octatonic scales (Example 44). This approach represents Poulenc's novel approach to harmony and at the same time his aesthetic of the unpretentious, claimed by Satie and Cocteau. The same technique of using octatonic scales is also found in the coda of his first nocturne from *Huit Nocturnes*.

The image shows a musical score for the piano accompaniment of "Le Contentement de soi" from Maurice Ravel's "Le Tombeau de Couperin". The score is divided into three systems. The first system is marked "très sec" and "f". The second system is marked "p très sec m.d." and "f turbulent". The third system is marked "ff" and "clair, précis et sec mf". Annotations include "Major 3rds" with a bracket over the second system, and "Octatonic scale" with an arrow pointing to the bass line of the second system. Circled notes in the first system and the second system highlight specific harmonic elements.

Example 44. Elements of drollery in the opening of "Le Contentement de soi," bars 5-21

8

pointu

Octatonic scale

8--

p

mf très sec

très sec

f

Example 45. Major chords over octatonic scales in
 “Le Contentement de soi,” bars 22-36

Allegro

p

Example 46. Prokofiev's *Scherzo Humoristique Op. 12 No. 9*, bars 1-6

VII. Le Goût du Malheur (A Taste of Sorrow)

In this *Lent et mélancolique* variation, Poulenc exhibits his mature and refined melodic writing (Example 47). The opening material closely resembles the fourth movement (*Rôleuse*

au front de verre) of his Éluard setting, *Cinq poèmes de Paul Éluard* (1935) (Example 48).

Bernac states, “This [poem setting] belongs to the extremely melodic type of song by Poulenc, which demands a sustained legato with sufficient strength in the lower register.”¹¹⁵

Bbm9(b9)

Lent et mélancolique ♩ = 66

le chant doucement en dehors

pp *doux et clair (l'harmonie très estompée)*

long

le chant très doux et très lié

p

un peu en dehors

Example 47. The opening of “Le Goût du Malheur”

¹¹⁵ Bernac, *The Man and His Songs*, 96.

Sans lenteur ($\text{♩} = 80-84$)

CHANT *p*

Rô - deuse _____ au front de ver - - re,

Sans lenteur ($\text{♩} = 80-84$)

PIANO *p clair*

Example 48. “Rôdeuse au front de verre” from *Cinq poèmes de Paul Éluard*

They share a soft dynamic, texture, troubled atmosphere, added 9ths, and the same starting key, B-flat minor. This variation is written in the key of G-flat major, but the precise tonality is delayed by the opening B-flat minor chords.

In this variation, Poulenc shows choral writing, which was learned from Koechlin. He considered it as a compromise between counterpoint and harmonic writing (bars 6-8), and frequently used such sophisticated writing for the Éluard settings and religious works from 1936.

In the poem, “Rôdeuse au front de verre,” Éluard talks about a “prowling” woman, so in this variation Poulenc might be expressing the loss of his beloved Raymonde Linossier, who died in 1930.

VIII. L’Alerte vieillesse (Sprightly Old Age)

This rapid movement is believed to be a portrait of Tante Liénard¹¹⁶ (Example 49), who, in her seventies, was healthy enough to go to Brussels to see Wagner’s *Lohengrin*, to Italy for a concert of Franz Liszt, and to Paris for Stravinsky’s first performance of *Les Noces*.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Grosz, “An Analysis,” 40.

¹¹⁷ Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, 32

Bb13

Très rapide et bien sec $\text{♩} = 92$

très articulé
pp léger

pp

Am Bbm7 Em

mf

Am Fm

mp

la m. g. bien en dehors

Fm Em Dm C#7 Fm

ten

Example 49. The opening of “L’Alerte vieillesse,” bars 1-15

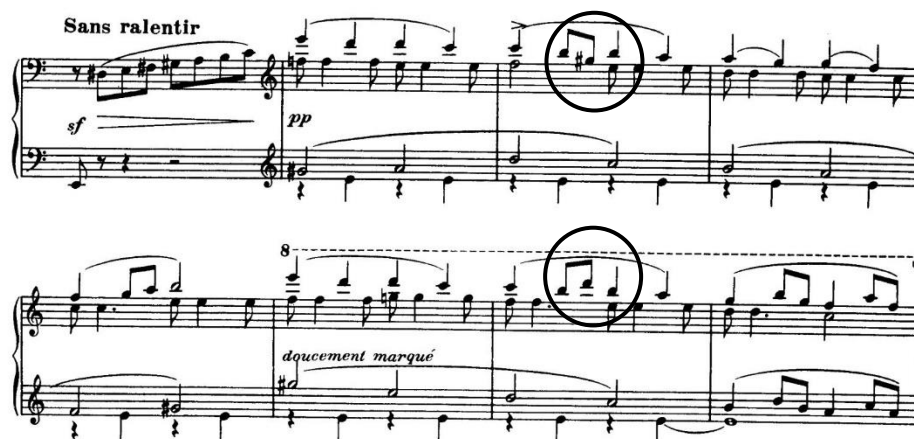
Poulenc’s beloved Tante Liénard is represented with a bustling figure of numerous staccatos, accents, and chromatic lines, vividly expressing the healthy, impish elderly woman. A similar musical character is also found in Prokofiev’s “Scherzo” of his *Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 14* (1912). Poulenc’s chromatic lines and seesaw-like accompaniment resemble similar textures in Prokofiev’s Scherzo and it is also striking that both are in A minor (Example 50).



Example 50. The opening of Prokofiev's "Scherzo" of his *Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 14*

Like the mischievous personality, the harmonic progressions are also freely shifting. As seen in the marked three brackets in Example 49, unexpected chords such as B-flat minor, E minor, and F minor enter the otherwise clearly diatonic progression. Also, Poulenc's unconstrained mind derives a chord progression arbitrarily going down stepwise with parallel minor triads, F minor to E minor to D minor (mm. 11-14).

After a restatement of the initial theme in F-sharp minor (mm. 19-22), and brief excursions in C major (mm. 23-24) and A-flat major (mm. 25-26), a flowing melody appears on an E pedal tone (mm. 28-35) (Example 51).



Example 51. A floating melody in "L'Alerte vieillesse," bars 27-34

This melody was formerly used in the second movement, “Larghetto” of his *Concerto for two pianos* (1932) (Example 52) and Poulenc confided that this similar-looking tune performed by the second piano in the “Larghetto” is recognizably his, while the opening tune begun by the first piano was a gesture of admiration toward Mozart.¹¹⁸

His melodic line is rhythmically simple and includes some undulating shapes. It contains several extended chordal tones, which are also commonly used in the accompaniment.

The image displays a musical score for Example 52, which is a tuneful melody from the 2nd movement of Poulenc's Piano concerto for two pianos, square 31. The score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes two piano parts (1 and 2) and four chamber ensemble parts: Vons (Violins), Alt. (Alto), Vlies (Violas), and C.B. (Cello/Bass). The piano parts feature a melodic line in the right hand and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The chamber ensemble parts are marked with 'Arco' and 'pp tres doux' (pianissimo, very soft), with some parts also marked 'Pizz' (pizzicato). The second system continues the piano parts and the chamber ensemble parts, with the Vlies part marked 'Arco' and 'pp tres doux'. The score is written in a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature.

Example 52. A tuneful melody in the 2nd movement of Poulenc's *Piano concerto for two pianos*, square 31

¹¹⁸ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 219.

Cadence

This second Cadence, which starts out in D major displays divergent writing similar to the first Cadence. After the first bar, which sounds like an introductory call to attention, grand brass instruments, such as horns, trumpets, and trombones are connoted with large chords and dotted rhythms (Example 53). They conjure up the majestic and ceremonial France of the 17th century in the style of *Concert champêtre* (Example 54).¹¹⁹

After the first fermata (bar 4), Poulenc brings a peaceful atmosphere with two-voiced figures, perhaps recalling the rural locales he used to visit such as the old quarter of the Marais, Bois de Vincennes, and Forêt de Saint-Leu. This episodic development fulfills Poulenc's "poetic flow" and continues to a brilliant harpsichord cadenza, similar to the first Cadence, implying Wanda Landowska's admirable playing.

The musical score for Example 53 is presented in three systems. The first system is in D major, 2/4 time, and is marked "Très large et très librement" with a tempo of 52. It begins with a fermata over the first bar. The dynamics are "ff" and "ff éclatant". The second system is marked "pp m.g.", "très atangui", and "long ten". It features a fermata over the first bar and a "ff subito" marking. The third system is marked "Très librement" and "p". It includes a fermata over the first bar and a "m.d." marking. The score includes various dynamics, articulations, and fermatas.

Example 53. The opening of the second Cadence

¹¹⁹ Southon and Nichols, *Articles and Interviews*, 120.

The image displays a musical score for a grand passage of brass instruments. The score is organized into two systems. The first system includes parts for Horns (Hrb.), Basses (Bsns.), Cors (1 and 3), Trumpets (Trp. 1), Clav., Viols (Violins), Alto (Alto Solo), and C. B. (Cello/Bass). The second system includes parts for Cors (1 and 2), Trp. 1, Trb. (Trumpet), Tuba, and Clav. The score features various dynamics such as *p*, *mf*, *f*, and *sf*, and includes performance instructions like *Tutti*, *Tutti Arco*, and *Solo*. The music is in a grand staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 3/4. The passage is marked with a tempo of 'Andante'.

Example 54. A grand passage of the brass instruments in "Andante" from *Concert champêtre*, bars 107-114, squares 8-9

Final

Being a portrait of the composer himself, this movement is the longest and the most diverse in style and mood. It has five episodes, and the tonality moves among A major, C major, F minor, E-flat major, and D-flat major.

Poulenc's indication, *Follement vite, mais très précis* (wildly fast but very precise) describes his own personality. There is a childlike simplicity, straightforward Poulenc with jaunty articulations and movements over three different registers (Example 55).

The image shows a musical score for the first theme of "Final" by Maurice Ravel. The tempo is marked "Follement vite, mais très précis" with a metronome marking of quarter note = 138. The score is in 4/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with dynamic markings like "ff" and "mf", and a circled "8va!" marking. The score is written for piano and includes a circled "8va!" marking.

Example 55. The first theme of "Final"

All throughout, each different personality is juxtaposed continuously and abruptly. A gentle and sensitive character comes in suddenly on beat 4 of bar 14, bringing seductive melodies and rich harmonies (Example 56). His emotion further flows to C major (bar 23), which is followed by an intense quality (bar 27) around an F minor chord. However, the intensity is shortly transmuted to a calm nature in choral writing (bar 31).



Example 56. Sudden entry of lyrical theme of “Final,” bars 13-16

Such continual musical changes are likely to be related to Poulenc’s erratic mental state as depicted by Bernac regarding Poulenc’s emotional disposition,

... a disconcerting mixture of cheerfulness and melancholy, seriousness and futility, triviality and nobility. He could be the very example of the bon vivant, loving life and all that was in it to be enjoyed, but he could also fall into grave depths of depression. His mood could vary from one day to the next, even from one moment to another, for he was extremely sensitive and emotional, actually an anxious person.¹²⁰

His unreserved mind is also perceived in the music. It wanders around without a definite destination as revealed with the irregular phrasings, 3 (mm. 31-33) + 4 (mm. 34-37) + 6 (mm. 38-43) + 7 (mm. 44-50). Meanwhile, Poulenc’s three different emotional planes are markedly discerned with his choice of three different registers (Example 57).

After these free passages, Poulenc brings back the recognizable dance theme (bar 59) in D-flat major, the same key as the one in the fifth variation, but different from the one in Préalambule, which is in E-flat major. This returned theme, however, no longer sounds playful. Instead, his inner suffering is greatly sensed with his languid tone, involving more legato lines,

¹²⁰ Bernac, *The Man and His Songs*, 29.

ties, tenutos, chromaticism, and dark chords, such as a G diminished and A diminished 7th chord (mm. 67-89) (Example 58).

Example 57. Three different emotional ranges in “Final,” bars 27-35

Example 58. Returned theme in languid tone in “Final,” bars 59-74

In the last episode, he revives the full chords used in the opening of the second Cadence. Yet, they are now calm and peaceful in *pp*, evoking the countryside, such as Noizay, where he was finishing this suite. The meandering octaves at the end (mm. 95-100) seem to present his recollection in the calm of bygone times spent with his precious friends. But he surprisingly concludes his portrait in a strong C major chord, the simplest chord he could use.

Poulenc's concept of *Variations* is new and enigmatic. But his unique hanging of the musical "portraits" is constructed over two common tones: Prélude and the first three variations on G and the eighth variation, the second Cadence, and Final on A. Poulenc sometimes unifies two distant pieces in "V – I" motions, such as variation 4 with 5 (Ebm to F#m) and variation 5 with 6 (F#m to C).

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

Better known as a song composer, Poulenc wrote melodies that are undoubtedly charming and distinguished. They are reflective of the human voices Poulenc heard and as sensitive as the subtle nuances people have. Such singing quality is predominant in his piano works and central to *Les Soirées de Nazelles*. Poulenc's exposure to and interest in poetry and paintings of the avant-garde of the early 20th century also seem to contribute to the abundance of imaginative, unorthodox, and rather absurd qualities in *Les Soirées*.

In his most productive period of piano writing in the 1930s, *Les Soirées* is marked as the culmination. Owing to his study with Viñes and Koechlin, he had acquired a heightened technique for writing piano music which allowed his numerous inspirations in *Les Soirées* to flourish. First, *Les Soirées* conveys precise images of alluring singers, elegant and passionate dancers, amusing comedians of popular Parisian establishments, such as dance halls, circuses, and the music halls. Second, it reveals Poulenc's espousal of the prevailing refusal to create something serious and strict in favor of producing humors and joy. He effectively employs different types of articulations, commas, chromaticism, dissonances, and registers to express the various tones and nuances he had in mind. Third, it shows that Poulenc followed the early 20th-century aesthetic claimed by Satie and Cocteau for clear, precise, light and unassuming music, mainly remaining in a clear texture, simple rhythm, and repetition of musical units. Lastly, it shows that Poulenc admired new approaches and characteristics of others' music and reproduced them in an elegant or light-hearted way. At the same time, Poulenc constantly sought his own modern musical language, exploring harmonies and modulatory processes within tonality, and allowing form to evolve in a non-prescribed and sometimes whimsical way.

Although Poulenc's musical materials were not radically innovative, his music is easily recognizable: dominant and sonorous singing voices, sensual and shimmering harmonies with

lots of altered chords, poetic flow for musical development, inventive chord progressions, charming free modulations, and emotional swings.

Les Soirées displays Poulenc's unstable and vulnerable mind. His self-portrait, "Final," along with some other "portraits," has large portions of disorderly and abruptly shifting episodes. He did not force himself to conform to a certain musical form or tradition, but, instead, he followed his inner voice and sensibility to make his music. *Les Soirées* shows critical aspects of Poulenc's personality, such as his naughty, humorous side, penchant for singing, inclination to melancholy, and longing for a bright side.

Les Soirées de Nazelles is an extensive and demanding work to interpret, but it is an attractive and intriguing composition with colorful and appealing vignettes. His vivid and inviting "portraits" reflect a rich variety of influences but Poulenc's own original voice always shines through.

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