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The influence of Parisian popular entertainment on the piano works of Erik Satie and Francis Poulenc

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THE INFLUENCE OF PARISIAN POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT ON THE PIANO WORKS OF ERIK SATIE AND FRANCIS POULENC

by

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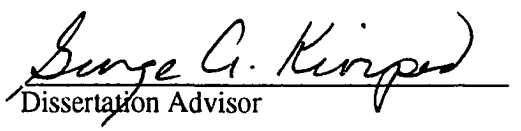

Dissertation Advisor

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The purpose of this document was to show the influence of Parisian popular entertainment on the piano works of Erik Satie (1866-1925) and Francis Poulenc (1899-1963). These two prolific and inventive composers incorporated a wide range of popular styles into their writing, from Parisian *café-concert*, music-hall, and cabaret songs, to the popular *chanson* and music for the circus. Both composers frequented popular establishments throughout their lives and introduced characteristic aesthetic principles such as diversity, parody, banality, and nostalgia into their piano writing, features all founded in Parisian popular entertainment. A myriad of books has been written on Parisian entertainments but the focus of these studies has not been Satie or Poulenc. The objective of the present study was to pull together all of these seemingly disparate constituents. Chapter I focuses on the motivations for a popular sensibility in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, Satie and Poulenc's ties to Parisian popular entertainment, and the personal relationship between the two composers. Chapter II comprises a brief history of the popular institutions that flourished in Paris at the turn of the century.

Satie's piano writing not only exemplifies characteristics from popular sources but employs quotations and transcriptions from popular music composed for various Parisian establishments. For a number of years Satie supported himself not only by composing popular music but also by playing the piano in the cabarets of Montmartre. Throughout Poulenc's career a popular-influenced vein can be traced, from the early *Mouvements perpétuels* (1918) through his last composition for solo piano, the *Hommage à Édith Piaf* (1959). The core of this paper, chapters III and IV, deals most specifically with the influence of popular entertainment on the piano works of Satie and Poulenc. Each

composer had his own personal relationship with popular entertainment. Satie was an insider, a composer of popular music and a cabaret performer. Poulenc was simply a spectator with a passion for the popular entertainments of Paris. Chapter V summarizes and draws conclusions that show the influence of popular Parisian entertainment on the piano music of these two composers.

I was in Europe for three and a half weeks during May and June, 1993, including a week in Paris. While in Paris, I was able to search for materials related to this project first-hand at various locations. I visited two music-halls, a cabaret, various museums, and the distributor for France's most important music publishers. Later I examined musical scores, recordings, and literary sources and arrived at conclusions that illuminate the influence of Parisian popular entertainment on the piano works of Satie and Poulenc. This study revealed features common to both the piano music of Satie and Poulenc and the music heard in institutions of popular entertainment in Paris.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

Erik Satie (1866-1925) and Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) were influenced by various Parisian popular entertainments more than any other composers writing for the piano in France at the time. These two prolific and inventive composers incorporated a wide range of popular styles into their piano writing, from Parisian *café-concert*, music-hall, and cabaret songs, to the popular *chanson* and music for the circus. Both Satie and Poulenc frequented popular establishments throughout their lives. Both composers introduced aesthetic principles such as diversity, parody, banality, and nostalgia into their piano writing, features all rooted in Parisian popular entertainment. Chapter I focuses on the motivations for a popular sensibility in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, Satie and Poulenc's ties to popular entertainment, and the personal relationship between the two composers. Chapter II comprises a brief history of the popular institutions that flourished in Paris at the turn of the century.

Popular music had an enormous impact on Erik Satie. His piano writing not only exemplifies characteristics from popular sources but employs quotations and transcriptions from popular music composed for various Parisian establishments. For a number of years Satie supported himself not only by composing popular music but also by playing the piano in the cabarets of Montmartre.

Throughout Poulenc's career a popular-influenced vein can be traced, from the early *Mouvements perpétuels* (1918) through his last composition for solo piano, *Hommage à Édith Piaf* (1959), a tribute to the great Parisian chanteuse whom he so admired. Unlike Satie, Poulenc was simply a spectator with a great enthusiasm for the

popular entertainments of Paris. He never earned his living as a composer of popular music nor as a performer in a popular establishment.

In undertaking this study I will illuminate this influence by examining musical scores, recordings, and literary sources. Such an investigation will reveal features common to both the piano music of Satie and Poulenc and the music heard in institutions of popular entertainment in Paris.

The core of this paper, chapters III and IV, deals most specifically with the influence of popular entertainment on the piano works of Satie and Poulenc. These sections were treated as symmetrically as possible. Each composer had his own personal relationship with popular entertainment. Satie was an insider, a composer of popular music and a performer in the cabarets. Poulenc was simply a spectator with a passion for the popular entertainments of Paris. Thus, the chapter that deals with Poulenc is no mirror of the chapter that deals with Satie. Chapter V summarizes and draws conclusions that show the influence of popular Parisian entertainment on the piano music of these two composers.

Although this paper drew from the entire pianistic output of both Satie and Poulenc, three works merited particular attention: *Sports et divertissements* (*Sports and Pastimes*) (1914) and *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire* (*Three Pieces in the Shape of a Pear*) (1890-1903) by Satie; and *Les Soirées de Nazelles* (*Evenings at Nazelles*) (1936) by Poulenc. The reasons for this are manifold. These three compositions best represent Satie and Poulenc as composers of piano music. Not only are these their finest piano works, but also their largest. And, most important of all, these compositions happen to be the ones that best exemplify ties to popular sources.

Most of Satie's piano music is written without bar lines, which makes pinpointing a particular passage within the score somewhat problematic. I chose to use the commentaries that course through the music to mark particular points (for example, the arpeggio at the commentary *Voici le vent*) rather than the troublesome and often unclear assemblage of page, system, and beat numbers.

All translations from French appearing within the text are mine unless otherwise noted. Titles and phrases that are obvious in the original French, such as "Le Yachting" and "Légende californienne," were left untranslated.

Status of Related Research

The most important work written on the influence of Parisian popular entertainment on French "art" music at the turn of the nineteenth century is Nancy Perloff's *Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). Perloff examines selected compositions, mostly orchestral, by seven different composers--not a small undertaking. The handful of piano pieces considered are given only slight attention.

A vast amount of literature has been written about Satie. The composer's most ardent defender, Ornella Volta, not only established the Fondation Satie (headquartered at 56 rue des Tournelles in Paris) but has dealt with practically every aspect of Satie's career in comprehensive detail. Two recent books on Satie, Alan Gilmor's *Erik Satie* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1992) and Robert Orledge's erudite *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), are excellent

contributions to the Satie literature, but their singular approaches are convergent neither with Poulenc nor Parisian popular entertainment.

In Keith Daniel's *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style* (Studies in Musicology Series, no. 52. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), the major recent study of Poulenc, there is more attention given to the piano music, but the popular influence is treated obliquely. Henri Hell's monograph on Poulenc, *Francis Poulenc* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), is out of print and outdated, and does not even touch on the piano music. It can hardly be considered definitive today. One of the most recent books written on Poulenc, *Francis Poulenc: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), is more bibliography-discography than biography and only touches on the popular vein in the piano writing. The very latest addition to Poulenc scholarship is Wilfred Mellers's *Francis Poulenc* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). This small volume, one in a series of studies of different composers, concentrates on the composer's best and most representative works (for example, opera, *mélodies* or art songs, orchestral works) and gives little attention to the piano music.

A myriad of books has been written on Parisian *café-concerts*, cabarets, music-halls, and circuses, but the focus of these studies is not Poulenc or Satie. The objective of the present study is to pull together all of these seemingly disparate constituents, resulting in the first substantial work written specifically on the influence of Parisian popular entertainment on the piano music of Satie and Poulenc.

Procedures of the Project

This project grew out of a deep interest in three divergent areas: piano music, France, and cabaret. The procedures I followed in accomplishing my research were widely varied, often of a special and somewhat personal nature. I unwittingly began preparing for this project years ago, absorbing books and articles on Parisian popular entertainment and two of my favorite composers, Satie and Poulenc.

I was in Europe for three and a half weeks during May and June, 1993, including a week in Paris. While in Paris, I was able to search for materials related to this project first-hand at several locations. The best place for scores was Madeleine Music, the sole distributor in Paris of France's most important music publishers: Éditions Durand & Cie, Éditions Salabert, Heugel & Cie, and Publications Lucien Vogel. The well-stocked Librairie du Musée d'Orsay turned out to be rich in Belle Époque materials. I found several books and recordings here that were important in the preparation of this study.

While in Paris I visited two music-halls, the Folies-Bergère (32 rue Richer, 9e) and the Moulin Rouge (place Blanche, 18e). Two of the most famous extravaganzas, these institutions date back to the late nineteenth century and were frequented by Satie and Poulenc on numerous occasions. I also visited a cabaret that is currently much in vogue, Piano dans la Cuisine (20, rue de la Verrerie, 4e). These experiences were invaluable in terms of bringing the project to life for me.

I visited the Musée de Montmartre (12 rue Cortot, 18e), a museum that houses a rich collection of paintings, drawings, documents, and manuscripts depicting life in the quarter during its heyday around the turn of the nineteenth century. The building itself at one point sheltered an illustrious group of painters, writers, and assorted cabaret artists.

After leaving the museum I paid my respects at no. 6, rue Cortot, the house where Satie lived from 1890 to 1898 while working in the cabarets of Montmartre.

Specific skills I possess, such as a knowledge of French, were helpful in accomplishing my research. A broad interest in French culture (literature, art, cinema, and cuisine), which I began cultivating at the age of nine, was likewise helpful. A general knowledge of cabaret and its music, for which I have a great enthusiasm, is related to this project in an important way. In the past two years I have heard performances at some of New York City's finest cabarets (The Ballroom, Bemelmans Bar, The Café Carlyle, The Duplex, Rainbow & Stars, and The Russian Tea Room) and have met some of the cabaret world's most luminous figures (Ann Hampton Callaway, Barbara Carroll, Blossom Dearie, John Epperson, Liza Minnelli, Annie Morrison, Marylyn Sokol, Billy Stritch, KT Sullivan, and Margaret Whiting).

I discussed this project with James Gavin, writer for the *New York Times* and author of the near-encyclopedic and very favorably reviewed *Intimate Nights: The Golden Age of New York Cabaret* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1991). Not only was Mr. Gavin very encouraging in my undertaking this project, but he also directed me to several sources on French cabaret of which I was unaware.

In February 1993 I saw an exhibit of vintage photographs and sculptures by Constantin Brancusi at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. This exhibit included rare photographs of the artist's friend Erik Satie. While in Washington I also went to the Library of Congress in pursuit of several secondary sources. Later, in October 1993 a visit to the John and Mabel Ringling Museums in Sarasota, Florida, stimulated a genuine interest in the circus that had previously been only a curiosity.

My own personal experience as a performer related both directly and indirectly to this study. I organized, directed, and was the main performer in *What a Swell Party*, two successful evenings of cabaret at Broach Theatre in Greensboro (July 24-25, 1992). Also, I performed Poulenc's largest and most important solo piano work, *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, on a piano recital of music exclusively by French composers, and performed (on separate occasions) piano works by Satie with Mme. Françoise Giraudet-Lay and British poet Elizabeth Sewell narrating the commentaries that run through the music.

I listened to innumerable recordings of vintage French popular music, for example the complete recordings of Édith Piaf (*L'intégrale de ses enregistrements 1946-63* EMI France 2534522-2534602) on nine compact discs and *Paris 1900--Du Moulin Rouge au Chat Noir* (Erato MusiFrance 2292-45769-2, [1992]). Also, I spent many hours with *Francis Poulenc: The Complete Solo Piano Music* (Paul Crossley, piano--CBS Records Masterworks 44921, [1987]) and *Erik Satie: The Complete Solo Piano Music* (Aldo Ciccolini, piano--Angel CDC-47474, [n.d.]) with an ear attuned to characteristics shared with popular music.

I studied as many scores of French popular songs as I could locate (many are long out of print or unavailable) and the piano music of Satie and Poulenc searching for similarities. Very often literary sources prompted my investigation of a particular comparison. After gleaning and sorting through a mountain of information from diversified secondary sources, I arrived at conclusions that illuminated the influence of Parisian popular entertainment on the piano works of Satie and Poulenc.

CHAPTER I

CONFLUENT SENSIBILITIES: SATIE AND POULENC

Motivations for a Popular Sensibility in *Fin-de-siècle* Paris

A confluence between popular and art music began in France in the late 1910s, the result of a rejection of nineteenth-century German and Impressionist "sublimity." This confluence was principally created by Erik Satie and the *Groupe des Six*, of which Francis Poulenc was a member. Banded around their spokesman Jean Cocteau (1889-1963), Satie and the *Groupe des Six* sought to establish a modern French music based on the rich assortment of popular milieus, genres, and entertainers flourishing in early twentieth-century Paris. The verbal tools of the movement were Cocteau's *Le Coq et l'arlequin* (Cock and Harlequin) (1918) and to a lesser degree *Le Coq* (1920), which employed satiric, provocative language to denounce late nineteenth-century German music and the Impressionism viewed as its follower.[1] Cocteau's principal claim was that Satie and his followers were replacing the loftiness of nineteenth-century German music and French Impressionism with a truly French music characterized by brevity, clarity, and a use of popular sources. In a letter written to Albert Gleizes, Cocteau, having nearly completed *Le Coq et l'arlequin*, expressed his firm stance against Impressionism:

> More and more I'm against impressionist decadence--which doesn't keep me from recognizing the individual values within impressionism and its unity of style. Yes . . . of course Renoir, but I say down with Renoir the way I say

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[1]Elaine Brody, Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope 1870-1925 (New York: George Braziller, 1987), 155.

> down with Wagner. . . . I'm working on a little book about music. . . . Bring me back as many Negro ragtimes and as much Russian-Jewish-American music as you can.[2]

The first edition of *Le Coq et l'arlequin* greeted the Parisian artistic world on March 19, 1918, and sold rapidly. When Milhaud returned from Brazil to Paris in 1919, where he had served as attaché to the French Embassy, he found that in the aftermath of the war Cocteau had become the spokesman and Satie the model for an intensely nationalistic movement espousing a "clearer, sturdier, more precise type of art."[3] Milhaud not only joined in the ferment but began hosting Saturday evening dinners at his apartment, followed by visits to the fairgrounds, circuses, *café-concerts*, and music-halls of Paris.

The intention behind *Le Coq et l'arlequin* lay as much in attracting publicity as it did in winning people over to a new cause. Cocteau's aim was a new French music based on the style of Erik Satie. According to Cocteau's retelling of music history, Satie represented the first truly French composer of the twentieth century: the Impressionist movement, epitomized by Debussy, was not really French at all. In order to make this argument convincing, Cocteau defined Impressionism as a "misty haze" initiated by the German Romanticism of Wagner and furthered by Mussorgsky, Debussy, and Stravinsky. It was Cocteau's view that Wagner had set an injurious precedent by writing subjective, densely textured music that devoured an audience just as an "octopus devours its prey."[4]

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[2]Francis Steegmuller, Cocteau: A Biography (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1970), 210: quoted in Nancy Lynn Perloff, "Art and the Everyday: The Impact of Parisian Popular Entertainment on Satie, Milhaud, Poulenc, and Auric" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1986), 5.

[3]Darius Milhaud, Notes sans musique (Paris: René Julliard, 1949), 108.

[4]Jerrold Seigel, Bohemian Paris (New York: Viking Penguin, 1986), 363.

Cocteau considered the atmosphere at Bayreuth a "religious complicity among the initiated" and Wagner's music dramas works which "hypnotized the audiences . . . and plunged them into semi-darkness."[5]

In Cocteau's attack on Impressionism, Debussy and Stravinsky were coupled with Wagner because both had inherited the Romantic tradition of writing music that one "listens to through one's hands."[6] Debussy's music was tainted not only by the Wagnerian "fog" but by the Russian "fire" as well--that is, the rich orchestral sonorities characteristic of Mussorgsky. Stravinsky's produced the same atmosphere of "religious complicity" as Wagner's, hence all three belonged to the category of "hazy" music which constituted Impressionism. Unlike Impressionism, Cocteau argued, which carried with it a nineteenth-century belief in the genius who defines an epoch, the simple, tuneful music of Satie resisted deification and offered a "clear road open upon which everyone was free to leave his own imprint."[7] Unlike the Impressionists who enjoyed a lofty, prolonged discourse, Satie wrote aphoristic music inspired by practices of the cabaret and music-hall. According to Cocteau,[8] Satie's emphasis on melodic simplicity and clarity and his opposition to a treatment of art as sacred and inviolate marked the blossoming of a French music freed from German Romantic influences.

The musical method incorporated a wide range of popular genres from Parisian *café-concert*, music-hall, circus, and cabaret songs to ragtime, Tin Pan Alley, and early jazz. Satie and his disciples, especially Poulenc, introduced characteristic aesthetic

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[5]Ibid.

[6]Jean Cocteau, "Cock and Harlequin," in Cocteau's World: An Anthology of Writings by Jean Cocteau, trans. Rollo Myers and introduced by Margaret Crosland (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1973), 310.

[7]Ibid., 309.

principles such as diversity, parody, banality, and nostalgia, all chosen for a modernist appeal and a foundation in Parisian popular entertainment.

Satie and Poulenc's Ties to Parisian Popular Entertainments

Satie's father Alfred (1842-1903) was a music publisher and minor composer of popular music. His inclination was towards music-hall material. Alfred's specialty was the French *chanson*. Most of his songs were published between 1884 and 1888 under his own imprint at no. 26, boulevard Magenta, and all are in the direct tradition of the French music-hall, which was entering its golden age in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The titles of his songs alone reveal the influence of father to son: "Le Dévot buveur" ("The Pious Drinker"), "C'est aussi rare qu'un merle blanc" ("It's as Rare as a White Blackbird"), "Y a vraiment d'quoi vous suffoquer" ("It's Enough to Make you Choke"), and so on. His songs invariably copy the same thirty-two-bar strophic design that has served popular song to this day, with topical texts usually couched in working-class slang or street vernacular. The pattern would be repeated tens of thousands of times in the *café-concerts* and music-halls of *fin-de-siècle* Paris.

A significant aspect of Erik Satie's style is the popular *café-concert* idiom that he cultivated assiduously off and on his entire career. Satie's first known effort at composition, the tiny *Allegro* of 1884, reveals the slender musical resources of the popular composer. The *Valse-ballet* and *Fantaisie-valse* of the following year, as well as the *valses chantées* (sung waltzes) written around the turn of the century for music-hall singers Paulette Darty and Vincent Hyspa, are unquestionably cut from the same cloth as

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[8]Ibid., 339.

the humorous and sentimental songs written by his father. Although Satie *fils* liked to refer to his Montmartre waltz-songs as *rudes saloperies* (uncouth rubbish), Pierre-Daniel Templier quite rightly suggests that "deep in his heart he probably loved them."[9] The popular origin of Satie's art left its mark on his entire output, and echoes of the cabaret and music-hall resound throughout his piano music. It was precisely this aspect of Satie's style--cabaret sprightliness and its elegant simplicity--that was championed by Cocteau and praised by *Les Six.*

Satie spent the period from 1887 to 1909 both as a composer of art music and as an adherent of the cabaret. During these years, he produced a collection of popular pieces that reflects his mastery of a wide range of French styles, from cabaret to *valse chantée.* It is important to consider Satie's cabaret songs as he drew so extensively from them in composing his "serious" piano compositions. A number of these songs Satie transcribed literally for solo piano. Even after ceasing his work for popular institutions, Satie continued to derive inspiration from Parisian popular entertainment. The piano pieces with humorous annotations and the essays on music that first appeared in the 1910s contain a blend of fantasy, wit, and parody that clearly stems from popular entertainment.

According to his friend, the poet Contamine de Latour, who accompanied Satie on his early visits to cabarets, it was the Chat Noir that "revealed to him his vocation and transformed him completely." Satie began frequenting the Chat Noir in 1887. The cabaret's atmosphere of caustic wit and mockery appealed to him instantly, and he joined the *poètes-chansonniers* and painters in their defiance of convention and their flippant disregard for the future.[10]

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[9]Pierre-Daniel Templier, Erik Satie, trans. Elena L. French and David S. French (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1973), 25.

[10]Ornella Volta, L'Ymagier d'Erik Satie (Paris: Francis van de Velde, 1979), 27.

In February of 1888, Satie became assistant to the principal pianist of the Chat Noir, Albert Tinchant. His activities involved accompanying singers, writing songs, arranging, and playing the piano for shadow plays. He continued his work here until 1891 when he left the Chat Noir and became pianist at another cabaret, the Auberge du Clou. According to Nigel Wilkins, the engagement at the Auberge du Clou was brief.[11] By 1892 Satie had taken a post at the Café de la Nouvelle Athènes. The length of Satie's stay here and the exact nature of his activities are not known. After the Nouvelle Athènes Satie no longer held a position as regular pianist at an individual popular establishment. Instead he worked in several different popular venues and shifted the focus of his activities from performer to composer. A position that exemplifies this transition is Satie's dual role as pianist and composer of waltzes and popular songs at a Montmartre cabaret called La Lune Rousse or The Harvest Moon. In 1899 Satie began collaborating with *poéte-chansonnier* Vincent Hyspa, who made nightly tours of the Montmartre cabarets. Satie served as Hyspa's pianist and by 1900 as his personal composer. During 1899 Satie composed a number of cabaret songs with texts by Hypsa, several of which he arranged for solo piano: "Un Dîner à l'Élysée" ("A Dinner at the Élysée"), "Le Veuf" ("The Widower"), "Sorcière" ("Sorceress"), "Le Picador est mort" ("The Picador is Dead"), "Enfant martyre" ("Infant Martyr") and "Air fantôme" ("Phantom Air").[12]

In addition to Satie's cabaret work with Hyspa, he composed music-hall songs for "queen of the slow waltz" Paulette Darty, an actress and performer of considerable notoriety. Two waltzes that were tremendously popular, "Je te veux" ("I Want You") and "Tendrement" ("Tenderly"), date from around 1902. Satie later arranged the former for

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[11]Ibid., 35.

[12]Robert Orledge, Satie the Composer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 282-83.

solo piano. The *valse chantée* was Darty's specialty. Most of these had been composed by the Viennese *émigré* Rodolphe Berger. When Satie turned to the *valse chantée*, his music assumed a romantic tone strikingly different from the light, humorous style of most of his cabaret songs.

Satie was quite active as a member of a wide circle of cabaret entertainers working in Montmartre, leading the bohemian hand-to-mouth existence of the typical Parisian *chansonnier*. Satie's first address in Paris after leaving the middle-class comforts of his father's home was in Montmartre at no. 50, rue Condorcet, near the Cirque Fernando; later (after 1900), the Cirque Médrano. The circus, along with the cabaret, was a part of Satie's everyday existence. It would have been almost impossible not to be influenced as a composer of "serious" music by these experiences.

If Claude Debussy wished to be known as *musicien français*, nothing would have pleased Francis Poulenc more than to be known as *musicien parisien*. He held dear the animation, the excitement, the culture, the entertainments, and the people of Paris. In his *Diary of my Songs* (1964) Poulenc admitted, "Whenever I spend weeks working away from Paris, it is with a lover's heart that I return to 'my city'."[13] This sense of nostalgia is manifest in a great deal of his music, most notably those works influenced by Parisian popular entertainment.

Poulenc, unlike Satie, from the start was an artist with solely a spectator's enthusiasm for *café-concert*, cabaret, circus, and music-hall. In his youth Poulenc was immersed in Parisian culture by his mother and uncle, who regularly took the boy to concerts, the theater, and the circus. When Poulenc became old enough to venture out on his own (around 1914), he began to frequent the *café-concerts*, cabarets, music-halls, and

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[13]Francis Poulenc, Diary of my Songs, trans. Winifred Radford (London: Victor Gollanez, 1964), 18.

circuses of Paris, especially those near the Place de la République. It was in the *café-concerts* and music-halls that Poulenc came under the spell of Édith Piaf, Maurice Chevalier, and other well-known entertainers of the day. The lilting rhythms, amiable tunes, and popular-music harmonies that characterized their material made a permanent impression on the receptive young composer.[14]

Poulenc did, however, have a close personal tie to the Folies-Bergères. It was here that he first heard Denise Duval (b. 1921), one of the most gifted singing actresses of her time. After making her operatic debut in Bordeaux, Duval began appearing at the Folies-Bergère in Paris where she received training in musical comedy. In 1947 Poulenc selected Duval for the première of his opera bouffa *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* ("The Breasts of Tiresias") in which she triumphed. From then on Duval became the quintessential interpreter (after Pierre Bernac) of the vocal works of Poulenc. The two developed a deep personal friendship and in 1960 made a successful tour of North America. Poulenc's last song cycle, *La courte paille* ("The Short Straw") (1960), containing the whimsical patter song "Ba, be, bi, bo, bu," was written for Duval to sing to her young son.[15]

A perusal of the piano music will reveal the extent to which Satie and Poulenc were influenced stylistically by Parisian popular entertainments. These institutions--specifically the *café-concert, cabaret artistique*, circus, and music-hall--constituted sources of inspiration for the piano music of these two inventive and resourceful composers.

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[14]Keith W. Daniel, Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style, Studies in Musicology Series, no. 52 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982), 6.

[15]André Tubeuf, "Denis Duval," New Grove 5: 762.

The Relationship Between Satie and Poulenc

Poulenc's piano teacher and mentor, the great Catalan virtuoso Ricardo Viñes (1875-1943), introduced Poulenc to Satie in 1916. Viñes had cultivated the talented boy Poulenc as his protégé. Acting as propagandist for Satie as well, Viñes perhaps intuitively realized the interdependence the relatively old composer of fifty-one and the very young one of eighteen would develop. Thirty-three years Poulenc's senior, Satie was a mentor of sorts to the young Poulenc, who was just budding as a composer. Poulenc depended on Satie for guidance, as a well of inspiration, and as a friend.

In June 1917 several members of what was to become *Les Six*--Georges Auric (1899-1983), Louis Durey (1888-1979), and Arthur Honegger (1892-1955)--organized a hommage to Satie in the Salle Huyghens in Montparnasse. From this and subsequent 1917-18 concerts in the rue Huyghens at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, Satie formed a group known as the *Nouveaux Jeunes* (New Young). Soon after this, the names Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983) and Francis Poulenc were added to the list. Satie later resigned from the group, apparently to pursue his own independent course. From this loose affiliation of independent composers the *Groupe des Six* emerged, named after the title of an article by critic Henri Collet published in *Comoedia.*[16]

Satie regarded Poulenc as immature and in need of someone to look to for guidance. "He's an urchin" (*'C'est un gamin'*),[17] he told Robert Caby in 1925. Poulenc had drawn attention to himself in the autumn of 1915 by writing to France's most notable composers for their opinions on César Franck. Satie's reply was amusingly non-

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[16]Orledge, xxxiv.

[17]Ibid., 365.

committal: "Everything leads me to suppose that Franck was a huge musician. His work is astonishingly Franckist, in the best sense of the word."[18] Then in September 1917, while awaiting call-up for military service, Poulenc decided to study composition seriously. Viñes suggested Paul Dukas as a teacher, who in turn sent Poulenc to Paul Vidal at the Conservatoire. When Vidal saw the dedication to Satie on Poulenc's *Rapsodie nègre* (1917), he flew into a rage, pronouncing: "Your work is foul and inept. It's squalid *rubbish.* With these parallel fifths everywhere, you're just trying to mess me about; and where is this hole called Honolulu? Ah, I see you belong to the band of Stravinsky, Satie & Co.; so good night!"[19] Feeling bewildered and rejected, Poulenc confided the incident to his friend Auric, who spoke to Satie about the problem. On September 29, Satie sent Poulenc this advice:

> I should like to see you. You seem to me to be lost, but easy to find. Fix a time and place to meet. Who is giving you such odd advice? It's funny. Never get mixed up with *schools*: there's been an explosion--quite natural, by the way. And then, in order to give you useful advice, I need to know what you are planning to do and are capable of doing. Your visit to Vidal was that of an *amateur pupil*, not of an *artist pupil.* He showed you that. He's one of the old school and he intimidated you. Laugh, my good friend.[20]

As Satie did not give technical criticism, Poulenc's *Rapsodie nègre* was performed as it stood at the Théatre du Vieux-Colombier on December 11, 1917, and its success launched a career which, of course, far eclipsed that of Vidal. Both Satie and Stravinsky admired

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[18]Ornella Volta, Satie Seen Through his Letters, trans. Michael Bullock (London & New York: Marion Boyars, 1989), 91.

[19]Henri Hell, Francis Poulenc, trans. and introduced by Edward Lockspeiser (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 61-62.

[20]Volta, 93.

Poulenc's talent and facility, and in October 1923 Satie told Paul Collaer that his recitatives for Gounod's *La Colombe* (*The Dove*) were "staggering in their verve and exceedingly skillful. In short, the whole thing works."[21]

For a number of years Satie's relationship with Poulenc was wholly agreeable and artistically fulfilling, but after about five years Satie became estranged from his young protégé. Between 1922-23 Satie became increasingly suspicious of both Auric and Poulenc's growing attachment to the homosexual circle of Cocteau and his lover Raymond Radiguet.[22] The group's open extroverted behavior seemed unfitting and inappropriate to Satie's hyper-moral sensibilities. By January 1924 Satie had broken permanently with Auric and Poulenc. Their friendship with Cocteau and Satie's arch-enemy critic Louis Laloy (also in Cocteau's circle) was simply intolerable. The entire group, according to Satie, indulged in opium-smoking parties and other assorted "vices."[23]. Following the death of Radiguet in December 1923, Cocteau grew even more attached to Auric and Poulenc. The final blow came in the first week of January 1924 when Satie traveled to Monte Carlo for the première of Gounod's opera *Le Médecin malgré lui* (*The Doctor in Spite of Himself*), for which he had been commissioned by Diaghilev to provide harmonies for the recitatives. The program, written by Laloy, deliberately (perhaps) made no mention whatsoever of Satie's name. Completely exasperated by this, Satie was hardly in an accepting frame of mind after the performance. Supposedly he stood fuming in the corridor of the train throughout the journey back to Paris. Satie could never bring himself

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[21]Paul Collaer, "La Fin des Six et de Satie," La Revue générale: perspectives européennes des sciences humaines 6-7 (June-July 1974), 14.

[22]In his thought-provoking psychological study of Satie, Marc Bredel suggests that the composer was a repressed homosexual. Marc Bredel, Erik Satie (Paris: Éditions Mazarine, 1982), 82.

[23]Orledge, xxxviii.

to forgive Auric and Poulenc for their friendship with Laloy and Cocteau during the Monte Carlo trip. The loss of such former allies made Satie more intransigent than ever during the last year of his life. After the rift it was Auric, not Poulenc, who received the most cutting lashes from Satie's pen, which seems to indicate that he still retained a certain amount of fondness for Poulenc.

Friends and acquaintances had always found Satie alternately charming and difficult. Often behaving childishly, his entire life had seemed to be a self-conscious prolongation of childhood. The continuity of Satie's own moral stance can be seen by the fact that he was prepared to lose Auric and Poulenc as friends in 1924 when he disapproved of their activities.

Darius Milhaud (1892-1974), another member of *Les Six*, described Satie's last days in the Hôpital Saint-Joseph in 1925 in his autobiography *Notes sans musique* (*Notes Without Music*) (1949). As soon as Poulenc heard of his illness, he asked Milhaud to beg Satie to see him. Satie was touched by this, but refused, saying: "No, no, I would rather not see him; they said goodbye to me, and now that I am ill, I prefer to take them at their word. One must stick to one's guns to the last."[24] Satie died soon after this on July 1 from cirrhosis of the liver brought on by alcoholism. The fact that it was he who had said good-bye and not Auric and Poulenc shows how distorted and childlike his perception of the situation actually was.

Poulenc had always considered Satie a musical father figure and, even quite late in life, still asked himself what Satie would have done about any compositional problem that confronted him. Musically Satie was a far more radical avant-gardist than Poulenc ever was. Satie's influence on Poulenc, seemingly superficial, was in fact considerable. The

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[24]Milhaud, 167.

influence was mutual even if only slight. Satie's sketch for a Fifth Nocturne (from 1918) was clearly influenced by Poulenc's *Trois mouvements perpétuels* from the previous year. This is one of the few instances of the younger composer influencing the older.

Both composers produced approximately the same amount of piano music. Each composer's complete piano works fit neatly onto three compact discs. In February 1950 Poulenc recorded a selection of piano pieces by Satie and himself. The recording was re-released in 1991 under the title *Francis Poulenc plays Poulenc & Satie* (Sony Classical Masterworks Portrait 47684). The Satie set is comprised of the *Descriptions automatiques*, *Gymnopédie No. 1*, *Sarabande No. 2*, *Gnossienne No. 3*, *Avant-dernières pensées* (*Next-to-Last Thoughts*), and *Croquis & agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois* (*Sketches & Exasperations of a Big Wooden Fellow*). This recording is a touching tribute from Poulenc the pianist to Satie the compositional mentor and friend. On a similar note, in 1952 La Revue musicale devoted the entire June issue to Satie. Poulenc's contribution to *Erik Satie - Son temps et ses amis* was a short article entitled "La Musique de piano d'Erik Satie." The panegyrical tone of the piece further attests to Poulenc's deep affection for his mentor and his genuine enthusiasm for Satie's music.

CHAPTER II

INSTITUTIONS OF POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT IN *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* PARIS

The Café-concert

A popular institution that catered to shopkeepers, clerks, and other members of the lower and middle classes was the *café-concert.* Unlike the cabaret, the *café-concert* made no artistic claims. The tone of its material was unabashedly coarse and earthy.[25] The *café-concert* was a much older establishment than the cabaret. Its origins can be traced back to the *musicos* of the mid-eighteenth century, where people ate and drank while enjoying the entertainment of singers and fairground performers. During the 1840s, garden cafés similar to the *musicos* opened on the Champs-Elysées. Since entertainment at these cafés was strictly musical, they were called *cafés-chantants.*[26] Parisians came to indulge in chitchat, to drink, and to hear singers dressed in evening wear perform on the stage of a kiosk, or open pavilion, while an orchestra provided instrumental accompaniment. By the time of the Second Empire (1852), new pavilions and more elaborate musical programs had prompted a modification of the establishment's name to *café-concert.* Patrons enjoyed romances and light *chansons* in an extremely informal setting. During the early years of its popularity, the seating arrangement resembled that of the regular cafés--isolated tables with chairs grouped around each. The atmosphere was

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[25]Brody, 102.

[26]Perloff, 34.

noisy and somewhat obstreperous. People felt free to interject comments, join in the singing, and come and go as they liked.[27]

The *café-concert* did not charge an admission. It would have been difficult to require an entrance fee as the program was long and did not have a formal beginning. Rather it moved through rounds of song called *tours de chant* (with each series presenting a different singer), interludes of dance, or short musical comedies. Patrons came to hear a *tour de chant* or a musical comedy, and then returned home or went to another *café-concert.* In fact, the audience was discouraged from staying for the entire evening. Drinks were *de rigueur* and orders had to be renewed after each *tour de chant* or each act of an operetta.[28]

The unrefined ambiance of the *café-concert* and the low, often ribald humor that characterized many of the *chansons* caused French critics to write disparagingly about the quality of its entertainments. Jules Bertaut, for example, associated the *café-concert* with the following sights and sounds:

> The *café-concert* and its coarse music played by a vulgar orchestra, the *café-concert* and its unbreathable atmosphere of smoke clouds and stale smells of beer, the *café-concert* and its lewd or obscene refrains taken up in chorus by the public . . . the *café-concert* and its musical comedy actresses and its mundane *diseurs* and its duet singers and its soldiers and its odors of gas, oil, of cellar moisture, and of sweaty linen.[29]

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[27]Brody, 100.

[28]Harold B. Segel, Turn-of-the-Century Cabaret (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 35.

[29]Jules Bertaut, Les Belles nuits de Paris (Paris: Flammarion, 1927), 120.

The *diseurs* and "soldiers" mentioned at the end of this passage were two kinds of performers, each of whom specialized in a particular genre of *chanson* presented at the *café-concert*. The *diseur* performed in a declamatory style, using subtle vocal inflections and bodily gestures to emphasize certain words. The "soldier," known among French audiences as the *comique troupier*, was naive and bumbling, wearing pants, vest, and cap, all of which were too small. Another popular type, the *gommeuse*, was portrayed by lustful female singers who used their witless, often salacious love songs as vehicles for seducing the public and arranging rendezvous after performances. Although patriotic songs, or *chansons d'actualité*, also played an important role in *café-concert* entertainment, the comic genres were the most popular.[30]

The ribaldry that epitomized *café-concert* music is difficult to distinguish from the ribaldry that characterized analogous musics heard in the cabarets, circuses, and music-halls of Paris. Indeed there was a great deal of interchange between these institutions, which makes divisions into neat categories problematic. While distinguishing characteristics are discernible, one should keep in mind this "spilling over" of music from one institution into another. Most scholars of Satie and Poulenc use the terms *café-concert*, cabaret, and music-hall interchangeably, almost randomly.

The Cabaret artistique

The emergence of a new establishment out of the Parisian cafés and salons came to be known as the *cabaret artistique*. This institution featured *chansons* as well as

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[30]Segel, 36.

theater and provided a counterpart to the literary cafés of Paris.[31] Founded in 1881 by Rudolphe Salis, the Chat Noir was the first *cabaret artistique* to achieve fame. The Chat Noir was not only the most famous *cabaret artistique* in Paris but also the most exemplary. As this institution was a model for many later cabarets, it merits discussion in some detail.

Salis stressed the "artistic" tone of his establishment by lavish decorations in the style of Louis XIII. Murals, muskets, swords, caskets, cups reputed to have belonged to Charlemagne, and other medieval icons ornamented the walls.[32] Salis also dreamt up an evening program that suited his own literary pretensions. During the cabaret's early years, the program began with a rousing chorus performed by a group of poets and singers and led by a member of the company. From there, the cry of *A la tribune!* signaled the first in a series of performances by individual *poètes-chansonniers*--some beginners, others more experienced, some cheerful, some folk-like--who stepped up to the counter and displayed their talents in *chanson*- and poetry-writing, singing. and dramatic recitation.[33] Each performer was introduced by poet and master-of-ceremonies, Émile Goudeau, while Salis poured beer, and waiters dressed as academicians served drinks. The ambiance at the Chat Noir was informal and often uproarious. Jokers called *fumistes* interjected puns, witticisms, and humorous anecdotes between *chansons*.[34]

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[31]Klaus Wachsmann, "Cabaret," New Grove, 3: 570.

[32]Seigel, 226.

[33]Segel, 28. The standard cabaret "band" or *orchestre*, to use the French, was made up of a piano, accordion (more specifically a *musette* accordion), and bass. The timbre produced, so typically French, has long been associated with intimate *bôites de nuit* and cabarets.

[34]Sisley Huddleston, Parisian Salons, Cafés, Studios (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1928), 226.

This bohemian atmosphere went hand in hand with a tendency toward satire and hyperbole that often characterized both the *chansons* and the anecdotes appearing in the weekly journal of the Chat Noir. For example, in the May 9, 1885 issue of the journal, a dramatic announcement of the Chat Noir's upcoming move offered a clever parody of scandalous newspaper reporting:

> From May 15 to May 20 in the year of grace 1885, Montmartre, capital of Paris, will be shaken by one of those events which sometimes change the face of the earth. The Cabaret du Chat Noir will leave the boulevard Rochechouart, which its presence has adorned for a long time, and establish itself on the rue de Laval.[35]

The tone of irony and satire became a permanent feature of entertainment at the Chat Noir and many other *cabarets artistiques*. In 1885, after the Chat Noir had settled into its new quarters, Salis increased the variety of the programs by installing a small theater, or *théatricule*, for the performance of short, humorous plays with *chansons* and musical accompaniment. Salis asked the painter Henri Rivière to take charge of the new *théatricule*, and before long Rivière introduced shadow puppets. After suspending a sheet of oil paper in front of the theater's small stage, he darkened the room and depicted a story contained in the verses of a popular *chanson* by moving cardboard silhouettes back and forth behind the paper. The device of the shadow puppet was so successful that cabaret artists began writing plays--with incidental music--for the new shadow theater, and by 1886-87 shadow plays were a nightly event at the Chat Noir.[36]

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[35]Le Chat Noir, May 9, 1885 (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1971); quoted in Perloff, 29.

[36]Segel, 72.

From 1886 to 1897, when the Chat Noir closed, the programs were extremely diverse. Poetry and *chanson* still formed the staple of cabaret entertainment, but in addition the Chat Noir now offered shadow plays in twenty or thirty tableaux with music and scenery, and amusing dramatic sketches called *pochades*. *Poètes-chansonniers* generally performed their works during the interludes between the tableaux of a shadow play or the acts of a *pochade*. This order of events called attention to the wide variety of the cabaret's repertory.[37]

Many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century *cabarets artistiques* emulated the various diversions of the Chat Noir. Salis' establishment set a precedent for the artistic decor of later cabarets, the performance of *chansons*, and shadow plays, and the attraction of an elitist clientele composed of intellectuals, aristocrats, and wealthy professionals. In fact, from its inception, the Chat Noir was a fashionable spot for Parisians to meet in the evening. Guy Erismann, historian of the French *chanson*, reports that all those looked upon in Paris as "snobs, moneyed people, and overfed financiers and politicians"[38] attended the Chat Noir on Friday evening, the *jour chic*. Members of the French aristocracy were first prompted to visit the cabarets when they learned that they would by in the company of such celebrated minds as Victor Hugo, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Émile Zola, and Léon Daudet. The critical acclaim of the shadow plays appears to have been especially alluring to foreign aristocrats. The Emperor of Brazil, the kings of Portugal, Greece, and Serbia as well as French princes, grand dukes, and diplomats figured among the Chat Noir's patrons. Cabaret entertainment continued to be stylish well into the first half of the twentieth century, attracting not only the wealthy but poets, artists, and

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[37]Ibid.

[38]Guy Erismann, Histoire de la chanson (Paris: Pierre Waleffe, 1967), 32.

musicians as well. The *poète-chansonnier* Henri Fursy, who ran his own *cabaret artistique*, was so highly regarded that when a foreign monarch visited Paris, Fursy was asked to serve as representative of the French *chanson*.[39]

The Circus

The crowd that attended the Parisian circus spectacles tended to be more diverse than either the cabaret or the *café-concert* audiences. It comprised a striking mix of lower-class Parisians who stood in the large gallery overhanging the arena and paid two francs for tickets, middle-class Parisians who sat in the rows of small rocking chairs below and paid three francs, and wealthy aristocrats who rented their loges.[40]

During the early 1920s Poulenc, along with friends such as Milhaud, Cocteau, and the painter Marie Laurencin, frequently visited the circuses and fairgrounds of Paris. Three principal circuses entertained Paris during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries: the Nouveau Cirque, the Cirque Médrano, and the Cirque de Paris. Poulenc and his companions were most often habitués of the Cirque Médrano, famous for its excellent clown acts. In *Notes sans musique*, Milhaud fondly recalls evenings in which he and his friends would visit the fair or the circus:

> After dinner, attracted by the steam-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

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[39]Michel Herbert, La Chanson à Montmartre (Paris: Éditions de la table ronde, 1967), 163.

[40][Adrian], Histoire illustré des cirques parisiens d'hier et d'aujourd'hui (Paris: Adrian, 1957), 53; quoted in Perloff, 42.

> 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 Médrano to watch the Fratellini Brothers' sketches . . . so worthy of the Commedia dell'Arte.[41]

In the best comic spirit of Molière, the Fratellini Brothers and a "musical eccentric" named Grock dominated the clownish realm of the Cirque Médrano.

With the three Fratellini brothers, the clown act became an art. François was the white-faced Pierrot, and Paul and Albert were the buffoons. Albert Fratellini once declared, "We are above national differences, class differences and hierarchies; we are children involved in the quest for the wonderful and the unexpected."[42] François, the leader of the troupe, wore costumes covered with spangles. Elegant, moonstruck, with white cheeks, eyes made up to look Japanese, a dab of red on the tip of his nose, he portrayed Monsieur Clown, the shrewd, irresistible talker. Paul was Auguste, a pleasant-faced character who wore practically no make-up, a huge collar, a shapeless suit, and shoes like barges. Although he was no better than the smiling François, Monsieur Auguste pretended to be a respectable citizen, forever out to humiliate the Contre-Auguste. This was an original character, invented by the Fratellinis and played to perfection by Albert.[43] The three brothers formed a brilliantly funny team and stirred in Satie and Poulenc the humorous spirit so characteristic of much of their piano music.

Grock, one of the most popular clowns at the Cirque Médrano and a personal favorite of Poulenc's, exemplified a particular class of entertainer known as the "musical

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[41]Milhaud, 98.

[42]Jacques Damase, Les Folies du Music-hall: A History of the Music-hall in Paris from 1914 to the Present Day, 3rd ed., with a foreword by Noel Coward (London: The Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1970), 31.

[43]Ibid.

eccentric." The clown presented slapstick numbers, parodistic renditions of American marches, cakewalks on the clarinet, and more serious, virtuosic performances on a number of other musical instruments. In Jacques Damase's book, *Les Folies du Music-hall* (1960), a history of the music-hall and various Parisian entertainments from 1914 through the late 1950s, the author limns an amusing sketch of just a few of Grock's antics:

> Monsieur Grock took a minute violin out of an enormous violin case, played a few delightful variations on it and sat down at the piano. From then on, things started happening. The piano stool was set too far away, so Monsieur Grock had to tug painfully at the massive grand piano to bring it closer to the stool. Then he sat down and played, beautifully.[44]

The Music-hall

Another popular establishment, the Parisian music-hall, exceeded cabaret, *café-concert*, and circus in the diversity of its attractions and in its tendency to absorb genres from other milieus. The music-hall was, and remains today, a great potpourri where one finds everything from the basest realism to the most sublime poetry.

The flexibility and diversity of music-hall entertainment makes a historical account somewhat difficult. The music-hall grew out of the *café-concert*, and for a time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the two terms and the two establishments coexisted with only the subtlest of differences between them.[45]

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[44]Ibid.

[45]Brody, 106.

In his history of the music-hall, Jacques-Charles goes so far as to state that in 1867 with the appearance of costumes (which were forbidden at the *café-concert*), plays, and dances at the *café-concert*, the music-hall was born.[46] Similarly, Jacques Feschotte calls the combination of *chansons*, operettas, ballets, and clown acts featured at the Alcazar d'Hiver in 1867 a "music-hall formula."[47] Both authors suggest that when theater, dance, and circus attractions appeared beside *chansons*, the *café-concert* soon became a music-hall. Thus, they trace the emergence of the music-hall to 1867. The term "music-hall," borrowed from the English, was not actually applied to a Parisian popular establishment, however, until 1893 when Joseph Oller opened the Olympia.[48]

The music-hall acquired an internationalism that the *café-concert* could only try to emulate. Foreign names included in newspaper announcements suggest this difference. The importance of foreign performers and entertainment, as well as the elegant façades, decorated interiors, loges, and general capaciousness and grandeur of the buildings thus distinguished the Parisian music-hall from the *café-concert.*[49] A genre that epitomized the difference in scale and breadth was the revue. Although both music-hall and *café-concert* featured revues, only the music-hall revue, with its elaborate scenery, electric lighting effects, spectacular tableaux, and mixture of circus, theater, dance, and *chanson*, became known as the *revue à grand spectacle.* According to Jacques Feschotte, the *revue*

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[46]Jacques-Charles, Cent ans de music-hall: histoire générale du music-hall de ses origines à nos jours (Geneva: Éditions Jeheber, 1956), 101; quoted in Perloff, 49.

[47]Jacques Feschotte, Histoire du music-hall (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1965), 84.

[48]Brody, 106.

[49]Ibid., 108.

à grand spectacle commanded attention as "the most original spectacle of the music-hall."[50]

The revue consisted of a succession of scenes in which the principal political, social, and artistic events of the year were "passed in review," so to speak. Two narrators, the *compère* and *commère*, linked the individual scenes together.[51] The device of *compère* and *commère* was well-known to Cocteau who introduced two "human phonographs" to relate the events of his *pièce-ballet, Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel (The Wedding on the Eiffel Tower)* (1921).

In the late nineteenth-century when *café-concerts* began presenting revues, they held fast to the concept of scenes based on current events, and employed the *compère* and *commère* as narrators. The music-hall revue, on the other hand, reduced the portion about common events until it was merely a point of departure for a series of dances, comic and dramatic sketches, *chansons*, circus numbers, visually dazzling tableaux which might evoke tropical forests or antique visions, or *tableaux vivants*. Such a revue became known as the *revue à grand spectacle*. Among the most opulent of the *revues à grand spectacle* were those held at the Folies-Bergère.[52] The grandeur and intricacy of *La Revue des Folies-Bergère* was not necessarily typical of music-hall revues in the 1890s, 1900s, and early 1910s. Furthermore, revues were not always the main form of entertainment at *café-concerts* and music-halls. On a given evening in 1899 or 1900, some music-halls and *café-concerts* offered revues, several others presented an evening of *chansons* performed by both popular *vedettes*, or stars, and singing troupes, while still

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[50]Feschotte, 76.

[51]Louis-Jean Calvet, Chanson et société (Paris: Payot, 1981), 70.

[52]Damase, 106.

others selected certain elements of the *revue à grand spectacle* and presented these as separate attractions rather than scenes or acts in a large theatrical show.[53] Equally characteristic of music-hall programs around the turn of the century was a division of the evening into a series of *parties*, one reserved for a play, one for dances and circus attractions, one for a short revue rather than a *revue à grand spectacle*, and one for *chansons*.[54]

During the 1890s, as the revue became a popular form of *café-concert* and music-hall entertainment, it also entered the *cabaret artistique* and the circus. The cabaret's and circus's adoption of the revue, like the music-hall's incorporation of *tours de chant* from the *café-concert*, reveals the easy exchange between institutions of popular entertainment in Paris.[55]

Jacques-Charles refers to 1918 as the beginning of the *grande époque du music-hall.* He selects 1918 because in this year the team of Mistinguett and Maurice Chevalier made their debut in a sensational revue at the Casino de Paris called *Pa-ri-ki-ri*.[56] Mistinguett, or "Miss" as she was affectionately known, had already begun to establish a reputation with her grueling athletic dance, the *valse chaloupée*, which she presented at the Moulin Rouge and various other music-halls. *Chalouper* is a curious verb from French slang meaning "to walk or dance with a roll." A *valse chaloupée* thus is a "waltz performed with a roll." In *Pa-ri-ki-ri* Mistinguett danced while Chevalier sang. The two were a phenomenal success, and during the 1920s they dominated the music-hall scene. In

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[53]J. S. Bratton, ed., Music Hall: Performance and Style (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986), 10.

[54]Calvet, 70.

[55]Ibid., 67.

[56]James Harding, Folies de Paris (London: Chappell and Co., 1979), 169.

the public eye they were not only stars but popular heroes who embodied the ideal of the romantic couple.[57]

The public idolized many other popular entertainers, such as Jeanne Bloch (whom Poulenc particularly admired) and Damia, and returned to hear them again and again. After the war, popular entertainment at the music-hall expanded still more. Stars became more widely acclaimed and publicized, and the revues, which had been popular since the turn of the century, became still grander and more visually resplendent, with an increase in the performing forces, the number of costumes, and the length of programs. The scenery and costumes exhibited a greater emphasis still on lavishness and opulence.[58]

Yet even with the growing emphasis on stunning costumes and scènery, the music-hall was primarily a place of musical entertainment. The *chanson* retained the prominent position it had enjoyed at the *café-concert*, and the *revue à grand spectacle* depended for its success on the support of a music-hall orchestra that provided an overture, created links between various elements of the show, performed accompaniments for each number, and offered a finale. The role of the orchestra conductor was of utmost importance as timing was a key element in a show's success. He supervised the collaboration between authors and choreographers of a revue and, as a composer, provided the musical *décor*; this involved arranging or adapting *chansons*, refrains, and dance tunes, and in each case choosing music that best suited the choreography and the singing.[59]

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[57]Damase, 25.

[58]Lynn Haney, Naked at the Feast: A Biography of Josephine Baker (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1981), 97.

[59]Bratton, 6.

CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF PARISIAN POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT ON THE PIANO MUSIC OF SATIE

Satie's entire pianistic *oeuvre* consists of just over forty titles. Almost all of the piano pieces have programmatic titles and extra-musical associations. Although Satie's stylistic variety is not exactly overwhelming, there are distinguishable directions in which he worked. The humorous works, which Satie began composing around 1913, best represent his inspiration from popular sources. For purposes of this paper, these pieces will be most carefully considered. A number of pieces, mostly early, are composed in entirely different veins. Although most of these pieces are not derived from popular sources, they do share certain broad characteristics with the humorous works. Features such as repetition, prominent melodic lines, and an overall simplicity are common in all of Satie's piano music.

In the early 1890s Satie passed through his "Rose-Croix" period. In 1890 the composer had become associated with the Rosicrucians, an esoteric religious cult founded by Joséphin Péladan. Characterized by mysticism, the years 1890-92 saw the production of such abstruse pieces as the *Sonneries de la Rose + Croix* (1892) and the *Quatre Préludes* (1892). The famous *Gymnopédies* (1888), written in an altogether different style, are archaic Greek dances that display the capacity to sound both ancient and modern.[60] Their ostentatiously plain textures, quasi-modal harmonies, and unresolved chords create an illusion of movement in pieces that are essentially static. The music

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[60]The title alludes to dances performed by naked youths in ancient Sparta.

seems to drift as if in a dead calm. The hand of the childish dreamer is evident in *Enfantillages pittoresques* (*Picturesque Child's Play*) and *Menus propos enfantins* (*Childish Small Talk*), both composed in 1913. Some pieces, like "Sur un pont" ("On a Bridge") from *Nouvelles Pièces froides* (*New Cold Pieces*) (1910), reflect Satie's mature student training at the Schola Cantorum.[61] It was, however, with the short humorous piano pieces that Satie's style crystallized. Later the composer dismissed everything he had written before 1910 with the condescending phrase "loftiest genres."[62]

Although Satie was a composer of deliberately modest and often inconsequential music, he was a model of urbane wit and eccentric fantasy. Like Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951), Satie was forced to earn a living as a cabaret pianist and composer of *café-concert* songs and incidental music for shadow plays. Despite his apparent aversion to this job, Satie continued to frequent music-halls and cabarets and to compose popular songs for a number of years.

In his late forties Satie produced over a dozen sets of humorous piano suites. Qualities virtually synonymous with his name abound: wit, parody, irony, fantasy, banality. In these works Satie reduces his musical dialogue to a strict minimum--most often two parts. Making a virtue of brevity, his writing becomes leaner, tighter, and drier than ever before. Satie's compositions are characterized by linear movement, thin textures, and barless notation. Usually the pieces lack key signatures and for the most part time signatures as well. A trinitarian obsession is evident throughout Satie's career. He composed pieces in sets of three from the early Sarabandes of 1887 through the *Avant-*

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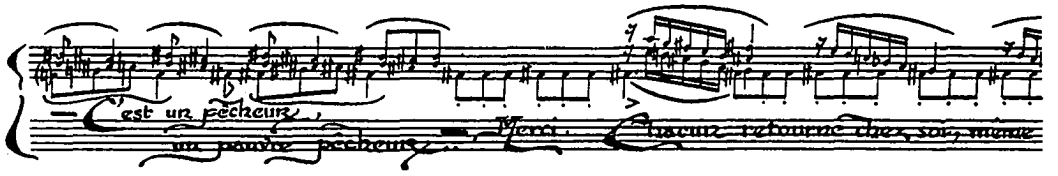
[61]Constantly reminded of his inadequate musical training, Satie had returned to the classroom at the age of thirty-nine. From 1905 to 1908 he studied harmony and counterpoint at the Schola Cantorum under D'Indy and Roussel.

[62]Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years, 4th ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 114.

dernières pensées (*Next-to-last Thoughts*) of 1915. Droll and often nonsensical commentaries are sprinkled liberally throughout his scores, and a veritable barrage of strange annotations and performance directions appear.

Satie's scores also display the composer's fascination with calligraphy. Normally, the listener is denied the pleasure of pondering the remarkable calligraphic beauty of the scores, with their impeccable Gothic script. Fanciful characters, elegant curves, and colored inks were all used to decorate his pages. A number of Satie's scores are published only in facsimile versions. The third line of "La Pêche" ("Fishing") from *Sports et divertissements* (Ex. 1) is typical of Satie's highly ornate calligraphic style.

Ex. 1: "La Pêche" from *Sports et divertissements*, line 3



In Satie one finds a unique synthesis of elements--music, poetic fancy, and calligraphy. The widely varied, often satirical world of the cabarets, circuses, and music-halls of *fin-de-siècle* Montmartre was an endless source of inspiration for the composer.

Satie's pianistic masterpiece is undoubtedly *Sports et divertissements*. Quintessentially Satiean, this collection is an intimate amalgam of succinct pianistic gems. The apotheosis of Satie's writing for the piano, *Sports et divertissements* was published in a deluxe facsimile edition with aquarelle illustrations by Charles Martin. In these twenty-one miniatures Satie's eccentric annotations (which he often wrote apart from the music) and his fanciful calligraphy are finally fused into the conception of an entire work. Ideally

no element should be left out in performance, and the result is a private art that tends to resist public performance. Most of the pieces are under one minute in length, and their highly concentrated thought shows that brevity is indeed the soul of wit. These exquisitely wrought pieces exemplify Satie's sense of clarity and restraint as a composer, coupled with his purity of style and lack of rhetoric. It has been argued that Satie's particular sensibility suits another art better than it does music. *Sports et divertissements* is perhaps the best argument for such a case.

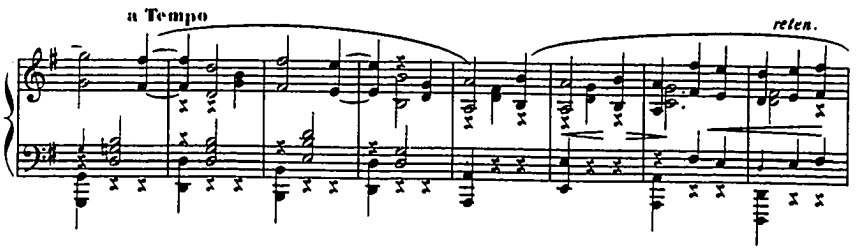
The *Café-concert* and Cabaret

Most of the popular music Satie composed falls under the general designation of *café-concert* song. In Satie scholarship, popular institution labels such as *café-concert*, music-hall, *cabaret artistique*, and cabaret are bandied about freely. "*Café-concert* song" is used interchangeably with "cabaret song" by all notable scholars of Satie. In discussions of this material no *musical* distinction between the two is ever made. *Café-concert* seems to be the one most favored. These songs were performed at both the *café-concerts* and cabarets of Paris. Satie was a gifted melodist and some of his best compositions fall within this category. Two early *café-concert* songs of a very high caliber, "Tendrement" (text by Vincent Hypsa) and "Je te veux" (text by Henry Pacory), date from around 1900. In these early songs one hears the characteristic tender melodies of Satie's *café-concert* style.

Two of Satie's finest *café-concert* songs, "Poudre d'or" ("Gold Dust") (1901) and "Je te veux," are representative of this idiom. The melody in "Poudre d'or" (arranged here for solo piano) acquires its wistful, romantic quality through occasional chromatic

inflection and the use of ties within and across the bar line so that rubato is incorporated into the piece's rhythmic fabric (Ex. 2).

Ex. 2: "Poudre d'or," mm. 49-56



Both devices were commonly found in waltz music of the period. Satie duplicates the form of Berger's *valses chantées* by creating an alternation between a thirty-two-bar refrain in the tonic and a thirty-two-bar verse in the dominant. The frequent use of ties, the division of verse and refrain into two sixteen-bar strains, and the design of refrain followed by verse were traits that also appeared in "Je te veux." This lilting slow waltz contains one of the finest melodies Satie ever wrote (Ex. 3). It is dedicated to cabaret artist Paulette Darty. Satie made an arrangement of this song for solo piano. The melody represents the characteristic lyricism found in all Satie's reflective *café-concert* songs. "La Diva de l'Empire" (text by Dominique Bonnaud and Numa Blès), also dedicated to Darty,[63] is an example of Satie's extroverted *café-concert* style. Arrangements of songs like "Poudre d'or," "Je te veux," and "Le Piccadilly" typify Satie's predilection for arranging his own songs for solo piano. Even Satie's earliest surviving piano piece, the ten-bar Allegro from 1884, points ahead to the idiom of the tender *café-concert* melody.

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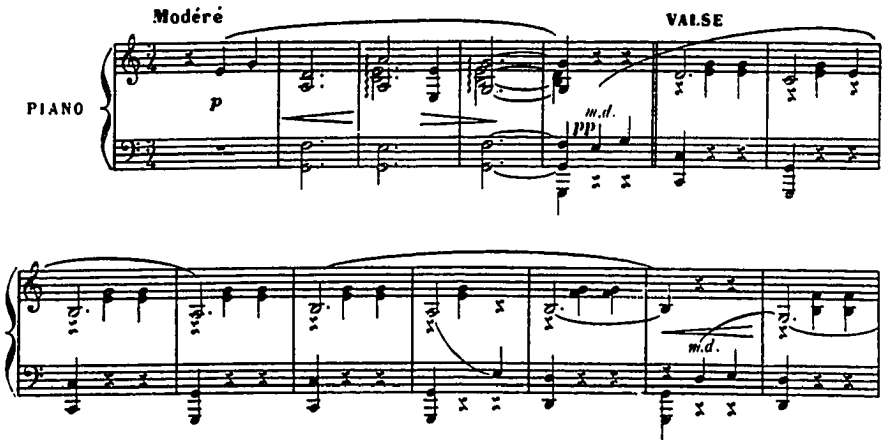
[63]"Sur un casque" ("On a Helmet") from *Descriptions automatiques* is still another piece that bears a dedication to Darty.

Ex. 3: "Je te veux," mm. 1-14



A considerable number of songs and waltzes were composed in 1905-1906. The following partial list from this single year indicates that Satie was quite prolific as a composer of popular songs: "Chez le docteur" ("At the Doctor's"), "L'Omnibus automobile," "Impérial-Oxford," "Légende californienne," "Allons-y Chochotte" ("Let's Go, Dearest"), "Rambouillet," "Les Oiseaux" ("The Birds"), "Marienbad," "Psitt! Psitt!," "Ami-Chéri" ("Dearest Love").

One of Satie's duties while working in the cabarets of Montmartre was to compose (and perform) incidental music for the shadow plays. Little is known about this "background music" except that most of it was written for plays performed at the Auberge du Clou. One such play by Vincent Hyspa was entitled *Noël.* The score is lost but was probably compiled from existing materials like the *Gnossiennes* (1890). The play was performed in December of 1892.[64]

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[64]Orledge, 276.

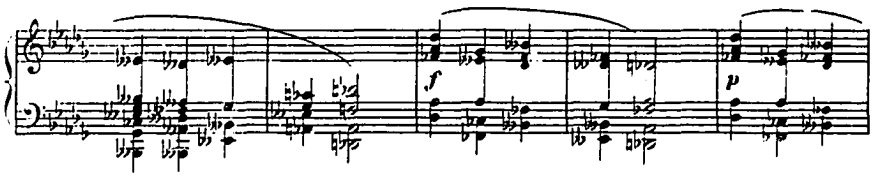
Satie's vicious wit is usually apparent in the commentaries and asides that course through the piano pieces and often appear in his titles. His iconoclasm manifests itself in the quintessentially Satiean title, *Sonatine bureaucratique*. This title could only have come from Satie. Iconoclasm and an annoyance with formality, certainly influences of the *cabaret artistique*, constitute an important aspect of Satie's style. Anything that smacked of convention or officialdom fell under general attack in the cabarets. Topical affairs were vented and scrutinized here and in Satie's titles and commentaries. The composer derides the military in "La Comédie italienne" from *Sports et divertissements*. Scaramouche is explaining the "beauties" of military life: "Soldiers are terrifically sharp. They frighten the civilians. And their amorous escapades! What a wonderful profession!" Satie also pokes fun at the academicians from the Conservatoire in his introduction to the "Choral inappétissant" from *Sports et divertissements*. The formidable dedication reads:

> For the Shriveled Up and the Stupefied I have written a serious & proper Chorale. This Chorale is a sort of bitter preamble, a kind of austere & unfrivolous Introduction. I have put into it all I know about Boredom. I dedicate this chorale to those who don't like me. I withdraw.

The directions to the performer in this unsavory four-part chorale are blatantly tongue-in-cheek. The piece is to be played "seriously" with further directions to the player to be "surly, peevish, and hypocritical."

Awkward enharmonic spellings, often used solely for the sake of being abstruse, further display Satie's satiric vein. The performer, obliged to decipher these troublesome spellings, is the victim of the composer's mischievous sense of humor. The third Sarabande (1887) is chock full of such spellings (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4: Sarabande No. 3, mm. 54-58



Cabaret irreverence is further exemplified in the dedication of the *Prélude de la porte héroïque du ciel* ("Prelude of the Heroic Gate of Heaven") (1894). Satie dedicates the piece to none other than himself.

Quotations from Popular Songs and Operettas

Satie used quotations from popular sources in intriguing and inventive ways. Often fragmented, these were derived in most cases from his well-thumbed copy of Pierre Larousse's *Grand dictionnaire universel.* This is somewhat akin, as Robert Orledge suggests, "to the Dounier Rousseau using popular illustrations from *Le Petit Journal* or *Bêtes sauvages* as models for his own fantastic and naive paintings . . . and there is a two-dimensional quality to much of Satie's humoristic music as well."[64] But, unlike Rousseau, Satie transformed his sources during the creative process, and like Handel, always repaid his borrowing with interest.

Satie was simply extending the commonplace practice of the Montmartrian *chansonnier* in using preexisting tunes in new ways. The quotations often have a

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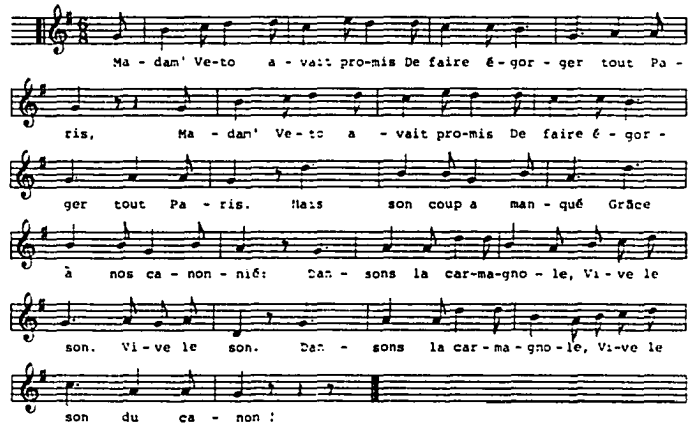
[64]Ibid., 204.

parodistic intent. Jules Jouy, one of the Chat Noir regulars during Satie's tenure there, sang a number of the same tunes that later appeared in Satie's piano works, among them "Maman, les p'tits bateaux qui vont sur l'eau ont-ils des jambes?" ("Mama, the Little Boats That Go on the Water Do They Have Legs?") and another song entitled "La Carmagnole."[65] Tunes from popular *chansons* and operettas provided a wealth of material for Satie in producing his "serious" piano compositions. The following examples demonstrate his predilection for using popular materials.

A favorite compositional device of Satie's, the quotations are well integrated into his musical contexts and often quite ingenious. "La Carmagnole" (Ex. 5) is charmingly woven into "Sur une lanterne" ("On a Lantern") from *Descriptions automatiques* (Ex. 6).

Ex. 5: "La Carmagnole," verse 1 with refrain



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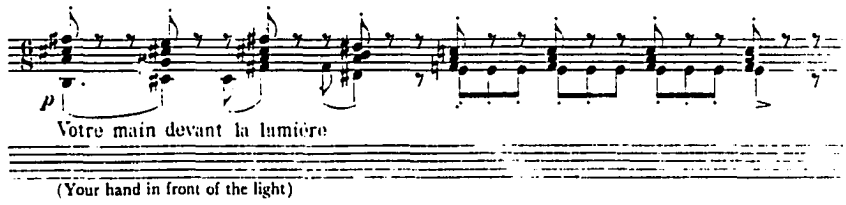
[65]Alan M. Gillmor, Erik Satie (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988), 159. The word *carmagnole* is derived from a type of short coat from northern Italy that was introduced into France in the late eighteenth century by immigrant Italian workmen from the district of Carmagnola in Piedmont. About the same time, the name was transferred to a type of round dance.

Ex. 6: "Sur une lanterne" from *Descriptions automatiques*, line 7



Satie borrowed only the opening phrase of the refrain, "Dansons la carmagnole" ("Let's dance the carmagnole"). Heard seven times in all (twice in a slightly altered form) each statement is built on a different tonal level.

Satie used "Mon Rocher de Saint-Malo" ("My Rock of Saint-Malo"), a cabaret song by Loïsa Puget with lyrics by her husband Gustave Lemoine, in the *Embryon desséché No. 1*, "D'Holothurie." Written sometime between 1830-40, the tune appears twice within Satie's piece: first at the commentary *Quel joli rocher!* ("What a beautiful rock!") (Ex. 7), then later at *C'était un bien joli rocher! bien gluant!* ("It was a fine rock! nice and sticky!").[66] Often Satie bends or reshapes his borrowed material slightly. Here he quotes Puget's melody note for note.

The musical quotations in *Vieux sequins et vieilles cuirasses* (*Old Sequins and Armor*) are a veritable compendium of material from popular sources. "Marlborough s'en va-t-en guerre, mironton, mironton, mirontaine" (1722) (Ex. 8) and "Le bon roi Dagobert avait son culotte à l'envers" ("Good King Dagobert had his Pants on inside out") (Ex. 9) are two popular French songs Satie used in *Vieux sequins No. 3*, "La Défaite des Cimbres"

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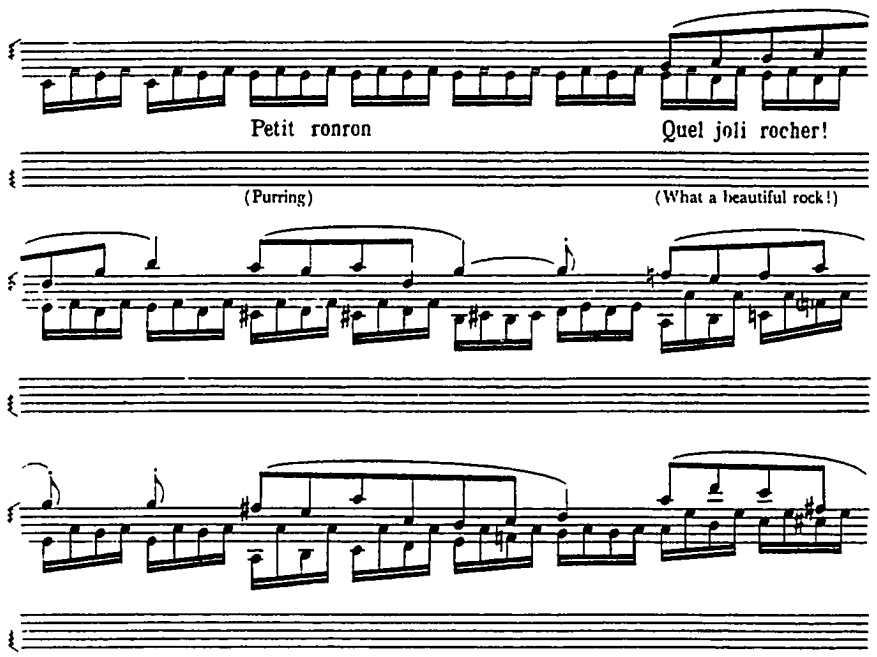
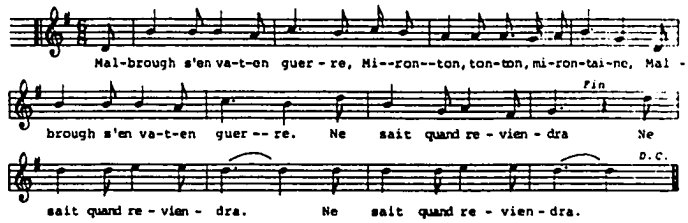
[66]Often Satie chooses, as here, not to use a traditional brace and clef signs at the beginning of each system. His intention is the usual grand staff arrangement with brace and treble and bass clefs.

Ex. 7: "D'Holothurie" from *Embryons desséchés* at *Quel joli rocher!*

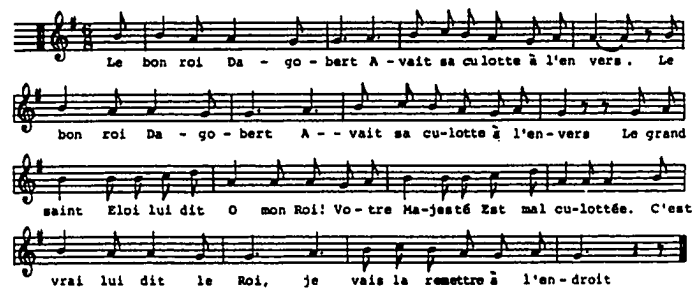


("The Defeat of the Cimbri") (14 September 1913). The former, known in English as "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," appears in its least fragmented form at line five. It is immediately followed by the quotation from "Le bon roi Dagobert" at the commentary *Boïorix, roi des Cimbres* (Ex. 10). The two songs are used in alternation throughout the piece.

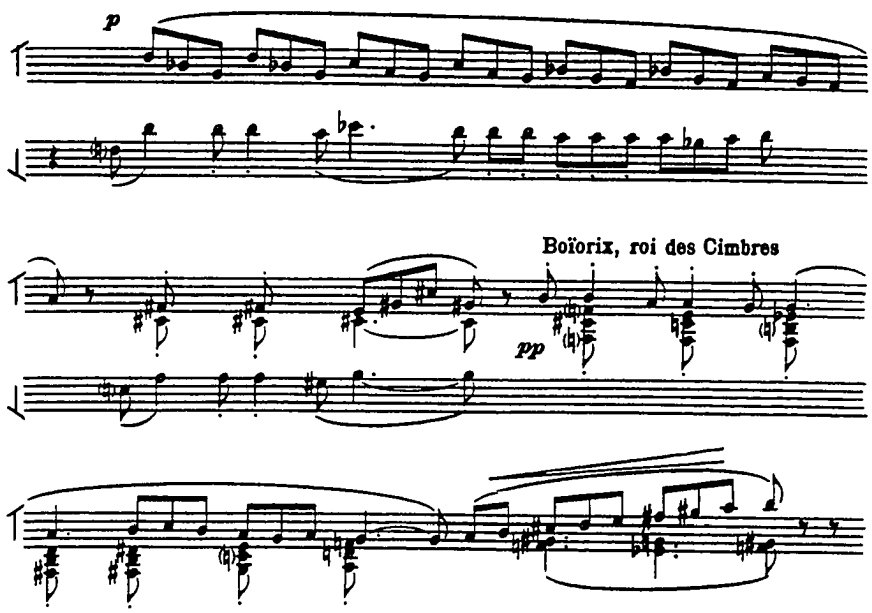
Ex. 8: "Marlborough s'en va-t-en guerre, mironton, mironton, mirontaine"



Ex. 9: "Le bon roi Dagobert avait son culotte à l'envers"

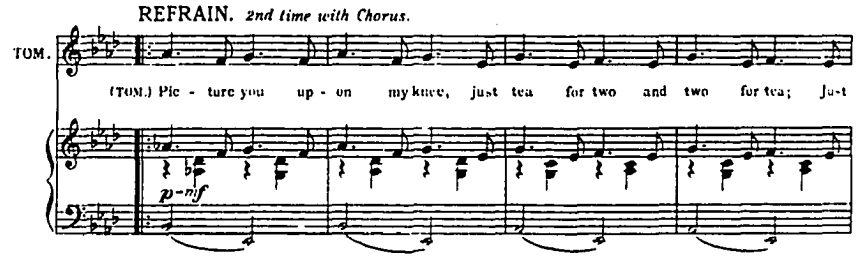


Ex. 10: "La Défaite des Cimbres" from *Vieux sequins et vielles cuirasses*, lines 5-7

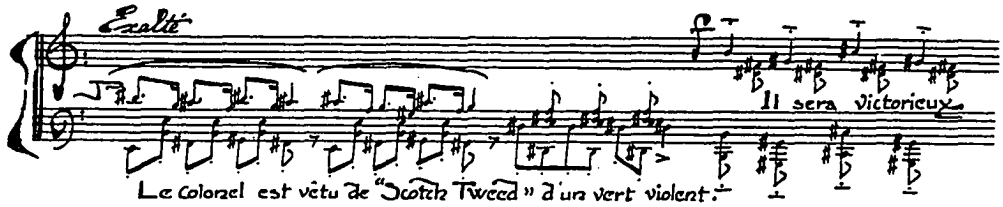


In return, Satie also invented melodies which later became popular, like the prefiguration of "Tea for Two" (Ex. 11) which begins "Le Golf" in *Sports et divertissements* (Ex. 12).

Ex. 11: "Tea for Two" from *No, No, Nanette*, mm. 19-22



Ex. 12: "Le Golf" from *Sports et divertissements*, line 1

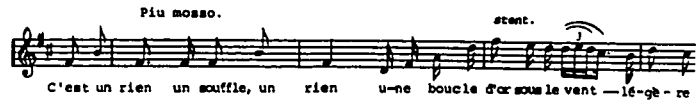


Whether Vincent Youmans knew of this when he wrote his musical *No, No, Nanette* in 1925 is another matter.

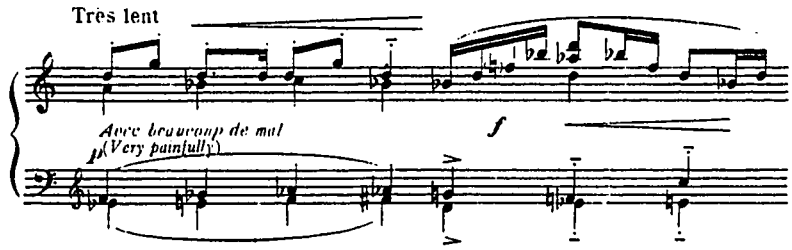
Most of Satie's operetta quotations come from works that were popular in the late 1880s, productions his father probably took him to see when he lived in the family home in Paris. In 1913 Satie used a well-known air from Robert Planquette's operetta *Rip* (1884) in "Le Porteur de grosses pierres" ("The Hauler of Big Stones") from *Chapitres tournés en tous sens* (*Chapters Turned Every Which Way*). "C'est un rien, un souffle, un rien"

("It's a Trifle, a Puff of Air, a Trifle"), the choral refrain of Rip [Van Winkle]'s aria which ends Act 1 (Ex. 13), is used as the first phrase of Satie's piece (Ex. 14).

Ex. 13: "C'est un rien, un souffle, un rien" from *Rip*, Act I, refrain



Ex. 14: "Le Porteur de grosses pierres" from *Chapitres tournés en tous sens*, line 1

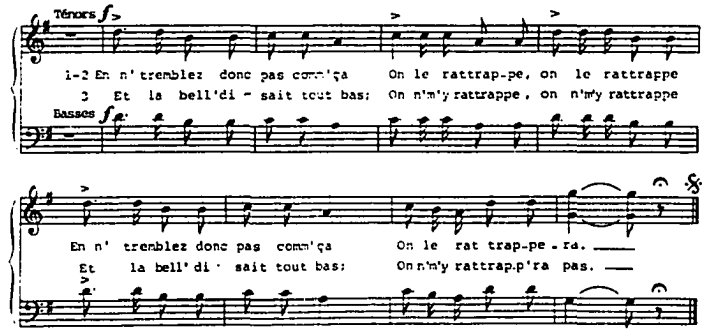


It comes as a true Satiean irony that *Rip* was diverting audiences from Satie's ballet *Relâche* (*No Performance*) (1924) in a revival at the Gaîté Lyrique in December 1924, and that Puccini's death on November 29 of the same year took up much of the press space normally available for theater coverage. Perhaps Satie was fortunate in this, for most of the reviews of *Relâche* that were published were hostile.

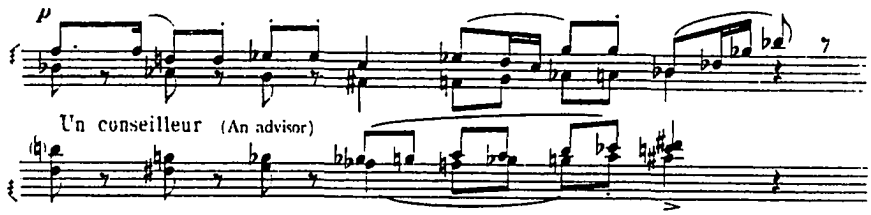
Satie's treatment of Edmond Audran's banal "Orangutan Song" from *La Mascotte* (1880), an aria sung by the character Fiametta in Act 3, is ingenious. The refrain, "En n'tremblez donc pas comm'ça" ("Then Tremble Not Like That") (Ex. 15), appears in

Satie's *Embryons desséchés No. 3*, "De Podophthalma," at the commentary *Un conseilleur* ("An advisor") (Ex. 16) and elsewhere in the piece.

Ex. 15: "Orangutan Song" from *La Mascotte*, Act III, refrain, mm. 5-8

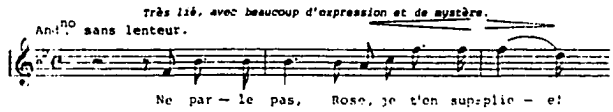


Ex. 16: "De Podophthalma" from *Embryons desséchés* at *Un conseilleur*

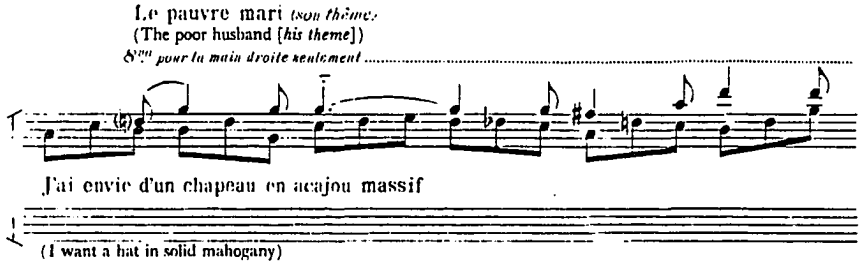


Satie used a fragment of the romance "Ne parle pas, Rose, je t'en supplie!" ("Don't Talk, Rose, I Beg You!") from Act 1 of Aimé Maillart's operetta *Les Dragons de Villars* (1856) (Ex. 17) in *Chapitres tournés en tous sens No. 1*, "Celle qui parle trop" ("She Who Talks Too Much") at the commentary *Le pauvre mari* ("The poor husband") and elsewhere (Ex. 18).

Ex. 17: "Ne parle pas, Rose, je t'en supplie!" from *Les Dragons de Villars*, Act I, mm. 1-3



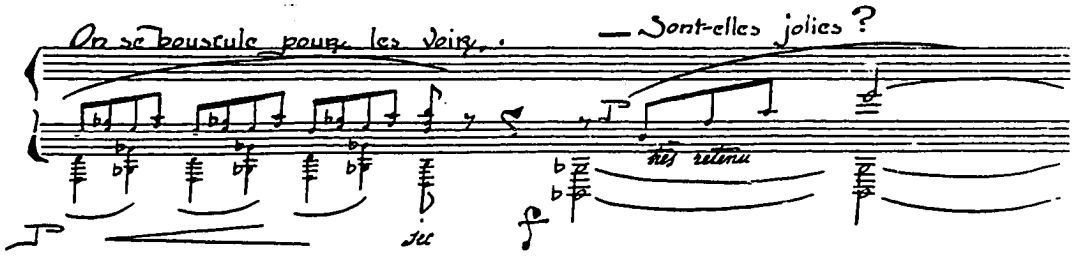
Ex. 18: "Celle qui parle trop" from *Chapitres tournés en tous sens* at *Le pauvre mari*



The Circus

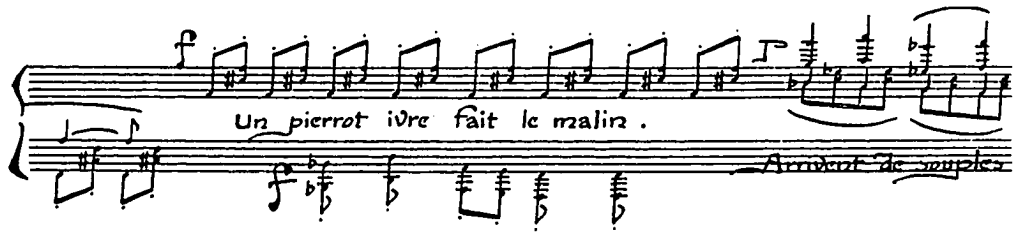
The influence of circus music is evident in a number of Satie's pieces. "Le Carnaval" from *Sports et divertissements* is a fine example. One can hear the organ grinder's ostinati in the seven beats at the commentary *On se bouscule pour les voir* ("People jostle one another to see them") (Ex. 19).

Ex. 19: "Le Carnaval" from *Sports et divertissements* at *On se bouscule pour les voir*



A sort of musical clownish jeering is heard at the commentary *Un pierrot ivre fait le malin* ("An intoxicated Pierrot acts smart") (Ex. 20).

Ex. 20: "Le Carnaval" at *Un pierrot ivre fait le malin*

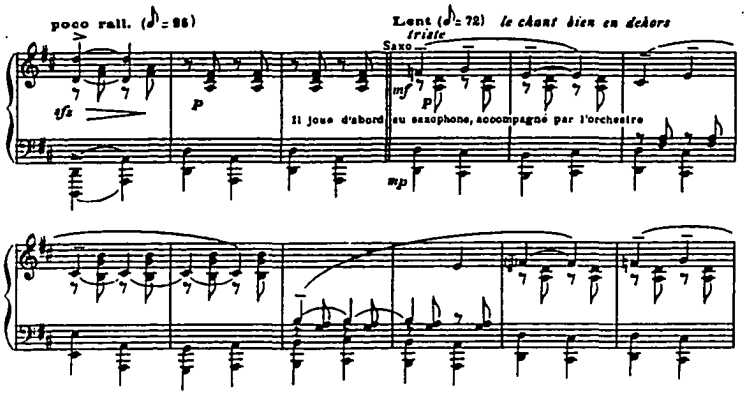


The "Danse maigre (à la manière de ces messieurs)" or "Skinny Dance (in the style of these men)" from *Croquis & agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois* (1913) was probably inspired by such circus attraction grotesqueries as bearded ladies, fat ladies, and pencil-thin gentlemen.

Petite musique de clown triste ("A Little Music of the Sad Clown"), a little piece of miscellany dating from 1900, comes straight out of the realm of circus amusement. Like so much of Satie's music, *Petite musique de clown triste* appears on the surface utterly

trivial. As a musical and poetic entity, however, it has a deeper charm which transcends the commonplace banalities of its popular idiom. The commentary asks the listener to imagine a white-faced clown who hobbles into the arena and proceeds to play a sad little tune on the saxophone (later the trumpet), its "wrong" notes clashing pitifully with the "orchestra" which, mirroring the clown's stumbling gait and inept musicianship, limps along in irregular phrases in an attempt to follow his hopeless noodling (Ex. 21).

Ex. 21: *Petite musique de clown triste*, mm. 6-17



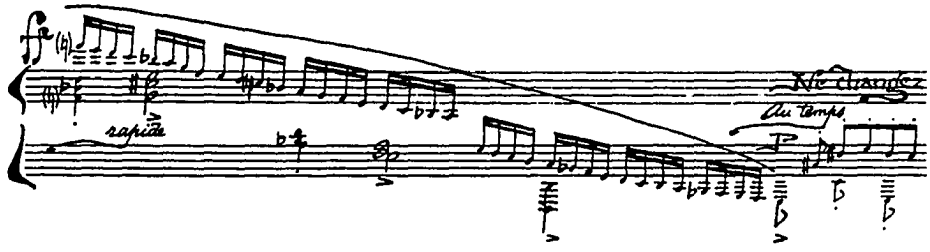
On a personal note, Satie was involved briefly with a turbulent young woman who began her career as a circus acrobat. After a trapeze accident put an end to her career, Suzanne Valadon (1865-1938) took up painting. An important Post-Impressionist painter in her own right, Valadon was also the mother of painter Maurice Utrillo (1883-1955). The stormy six-month affair between Valadon and Satie, which lasted from January through June 1893, was the only substantial relationship the composer ever had with a woman.

The Music-hall

Spectacular effects and exoticism were important aspects of entertainment in the music-hall, especially in the *revue à grand spectacle*. Evocations of everything from inundations of the Nile to Venezuelan waterfalls, Chinese earthquakes to Polynesian seaquakes, were depicted on the stage as well as in the music, vividly enlivening such dazzling special effects. Satie's "Affolements grantiques" or "Stampeding Boulders" from *Heures séculaires & instantanées* (*Age-old & Instantaneous Hours*) (1914) is such an example.

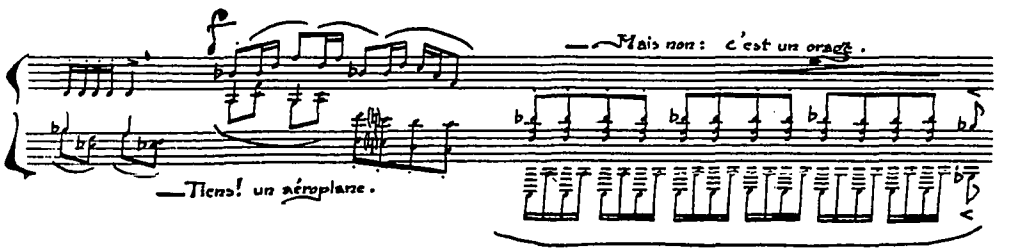
Graphic representations in Satie's piano music are seemingly endless. He depicts the downward plunge of a water slide in "Le Water-chute" from *Sports et divertissements* by using a rapid scalar figure spanning five octaves on the piano (Ex. 22).

Ex. 22: "Le Water-chute" from *Sports et divertissements*, line 3



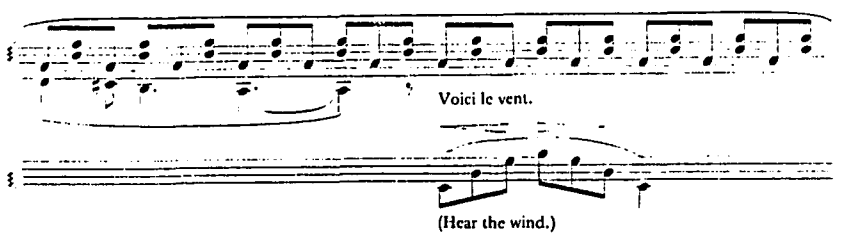
Satie conjures up a storm at the end of "Le Pique-nique" from *Sports et divertissements*. A low rattling tremolo and a crescendo of right hand staccato chords depict an oncoming storm (Ex. 23).

Ex. 23: "Le Pique-nique" from *Sports et divertissements*, line 3



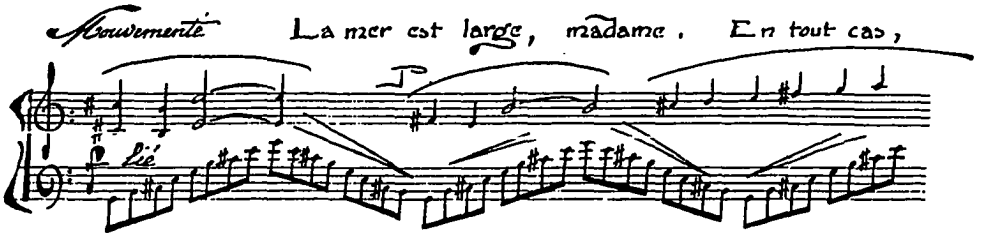
Another depiction of weather can be found in the "Méditation" from *Avant-dernières pensées*. The arpeggio figure found at the commentary *Voici le vent* ("Here is the wind") simplistically represents the wind (Ex. 24).

Ex. 24: "Méditation" from *Avant-dernières pensées* at *Voici le vent*



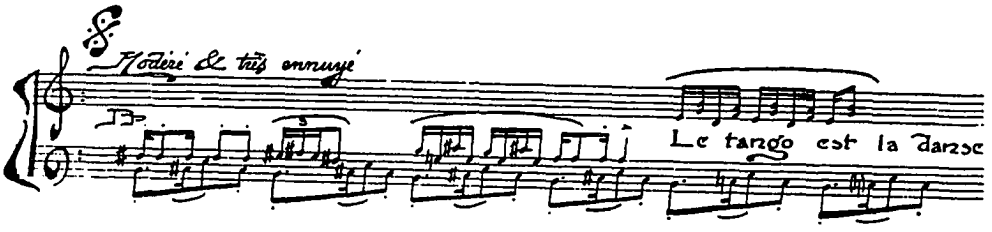
Another graphic depiction is that of the ocean's waves in "Le Bain de mer" ("Ocean Bathing"), again from *Sports et divertissements*. The rise and fall of notes on the staff conjures up, both pictorially and acoustically, an image of the undulation of the ocean's waves (Ex. 25).

Ex. 25: "Le Bain de mer" from *Sports et divertissements*, line 1



"Españaña" from *Croquis & agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois* conjures up an Iberian setting. Despite Spain's adjacency to its northeastern neighbor France, a feeling of distance and exoticism has always prevailed. Satie occasionally uses non-European dances to evoke exotic settings. In "Le Tango (perpétuel)" from *Sports et divertissements* the rhythms of this South American dance pulse through the entire composition, creating a strange and sensual mood (Ex. 26).

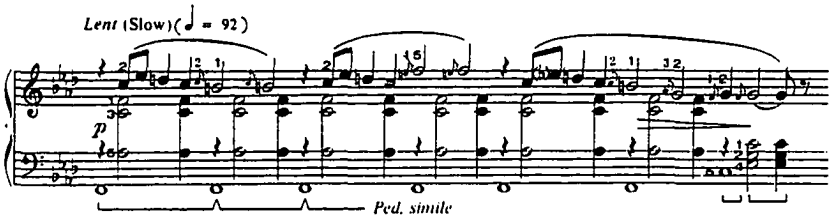
Ex. 26: "Le Tango (perpétuel)" from *Sports et divertissements*, line 1



The player is instructed to play the piece over and over again. This prefigured in a remarkable way the Dada spirit that swept over post-war Paris in 1919. The orientally-

tinged *Gnossiennes*, which Satie probably played during the shadow plays at the Auberge du Clou, certainly evoke a mysterious and sinuous setting of oriental exoticism (Ex. 27).

Ex. 27: *Gnossienne No. 1*, line 1



Trois Morceaux en forme de poire

Along with *Sports et divertissements*, Satie's popular-influenced piano music is best represented by the *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire*, a work for piano four hands. This piece merits detailed attention as it exemplifies better than any other single work a close attachment to Parisian popular entertainment. One of his best-known compositions, *Trois Morceaux* is Satie's first original piece for piano four hands. It dates from between 1890 to 1903. Of the seven sections only the first and the first page of the third appear to have been newly composed. The rest is an anthology of assorted music written between 1890 and 1903. The music is in the *café-concert*/cabaret idiom and is not idealized as has been claimed in past scholarship; it is indeed the real thing.

Trois Morceaux en forme de poire is the singular major musical achievement during Satie's twelve long years of isolation from 1890 to 1903. Debussy reportedly told Satie in

1903 that his works did not observe a strict form; a few weeks later, according to this widely accepted version, Satie turned up with the sardonic title *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire*, followed by a deliberately formless composition that had nothing to do with pears or the number three. Whether or not Debussy ever offered such advice, we now know that *Trois Morceaux* is an amalgam of short compositions, some of which date back fifteen years, others of which Satie borrowed from the *café-concert* and cabaret songs he was composing in considerable number at the time. Satie's letters to Debussy of that year as well as the manuscript preserved in the Bibliotèque de l'Opéra reveal that he worked through the summer of 1903 on what had begun as a shorter work entitled *Deux Morceaux en forme de poire.*[67]

In some respects *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire* is Satie's most successful piano composition. The music is demanding musically without requiring a great deal of virtuoso technique. Thumbing his nose at the title, Satie divides the piece into seven sections, to four of which he gave titles used at the Conservatoire to designate examination exercises.

After a playful double opening, the first "morceau" consists of only thirty-six simple measures in 2/4 time, yet its construction shows as much originality as any section of the work. Starting with a tranquil melody in C minor, the harmony descends by thirds until everything is halted by a fortissimo cadence in D minor which negates all previous harmony. For once Satie uses the leading tone and lets the listener feel the full tonal finality of the V-I progression. After this he happily proceeds. Arbitrary fortissimo cadences occur three times in the smoothly flowing line, as if such pure movement could not be left unmolested.

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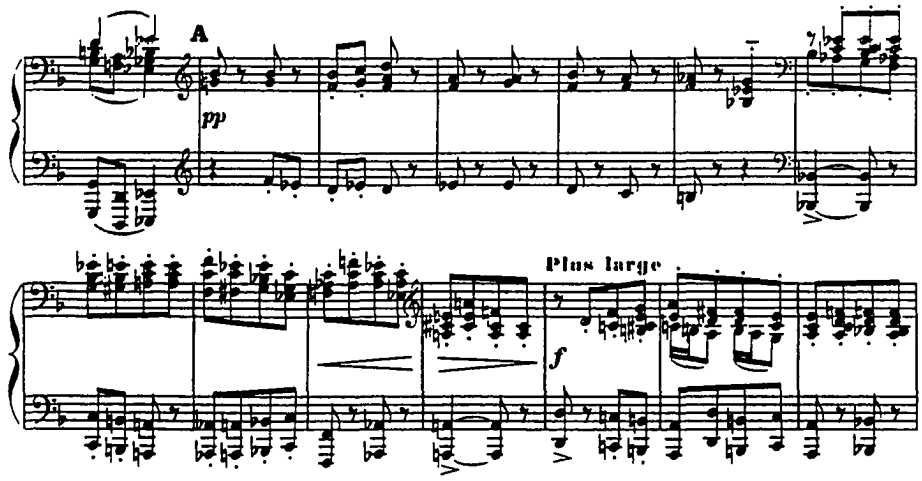
[67]Erik Satie, "Trois lettres d'Erik Satie à Claude Debussy (1903)," Revue de musicologie 48 (1962): 73.

The second movement, entitled "Prolongation du même" ("Prolongation of the Same"), is based on a sprightly duple-meter tune derived from an uncompleted *café-concert* song entitled "Le Roi soleil de plomb" ("The Leaden Sun King"), dating from the summer of 1903 (Ex. 28). The application of irregular phrasing to a simple tune represents a stylistic device common in popular music that Satie applied to many of his "art" compositions. Asymmetrical phrasing shapes the *café-concert* tune in this movement.[68]

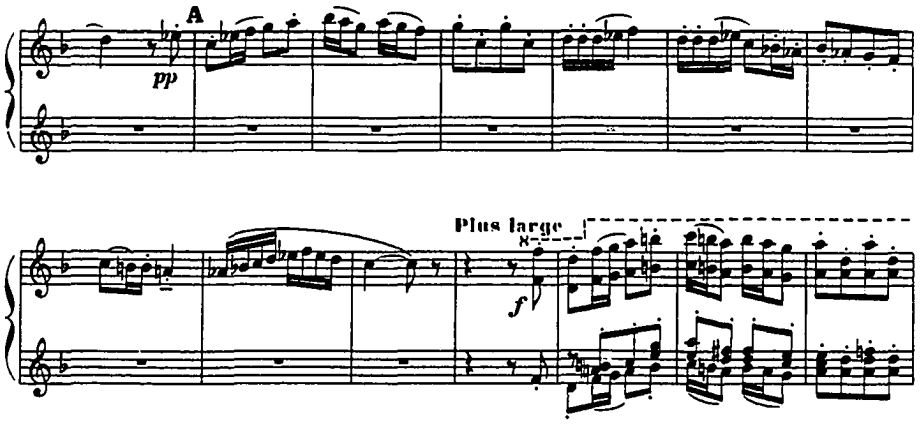
Ex. 28: "Prolongation du même" from *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire*, mm. 13-26

Prima



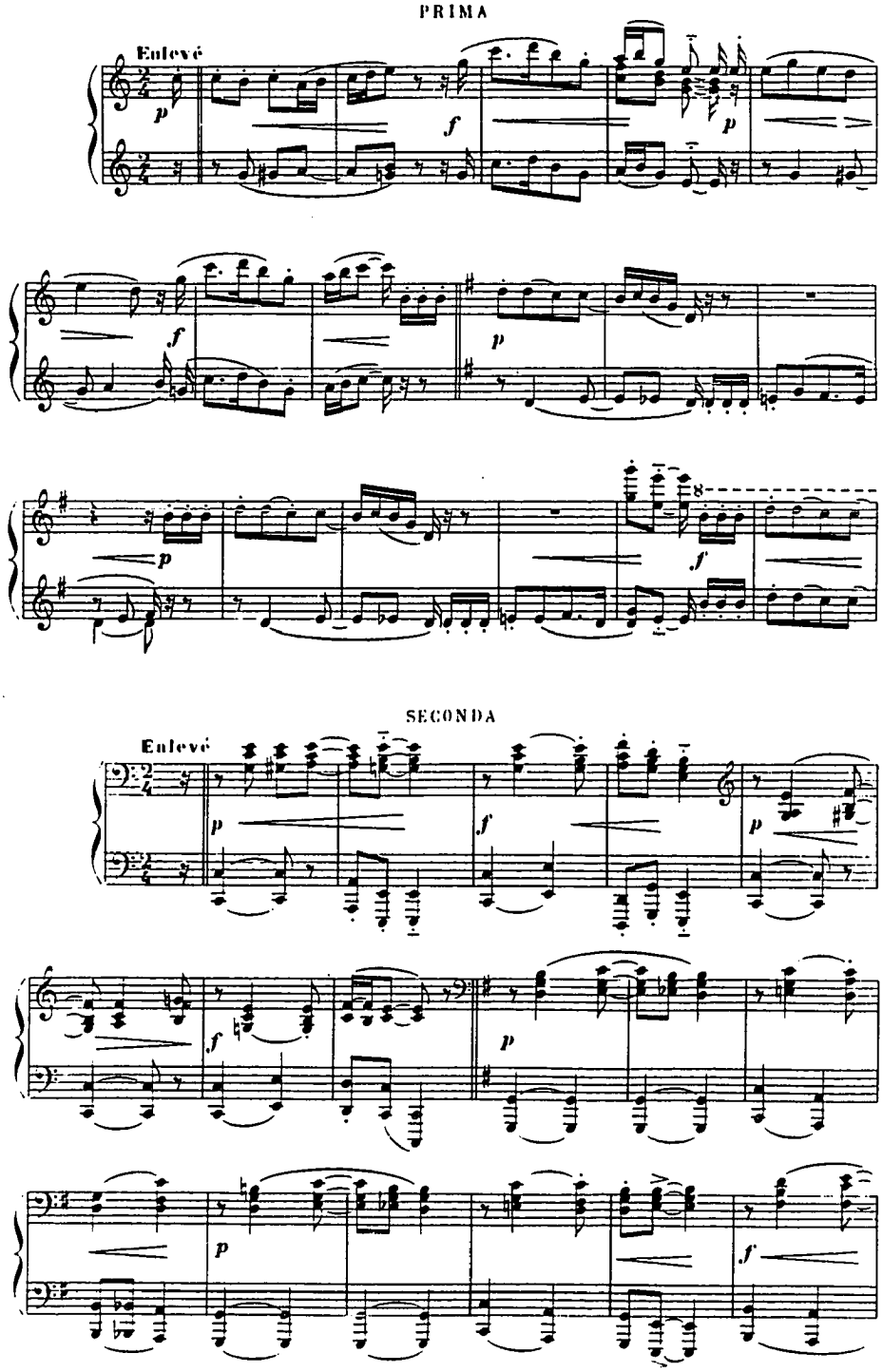
[68]The melody of the "Choral inappétisant" from *Sports et divertissements* is another example of asymmetrical phrase shaping.

Seconda



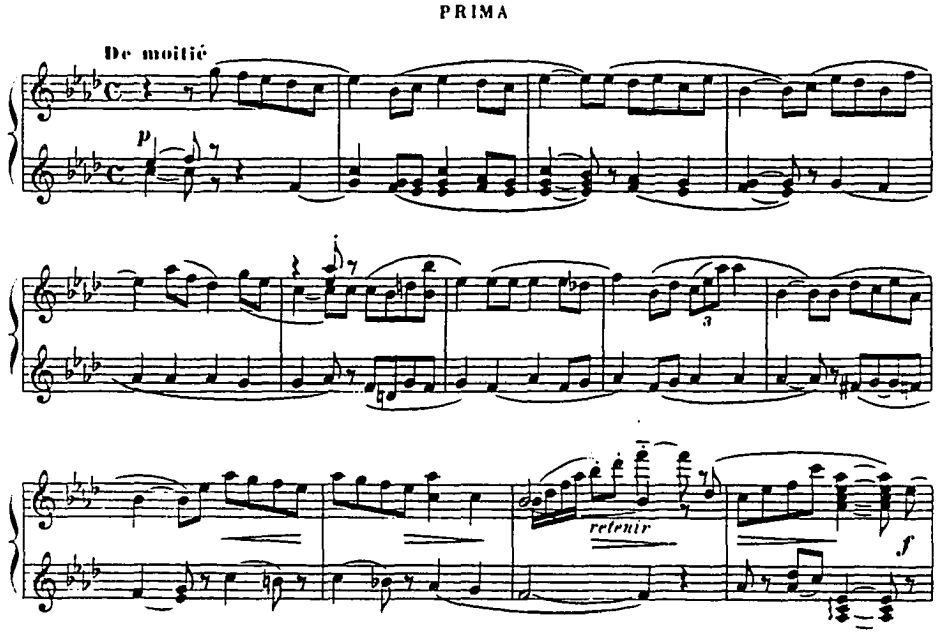
The heart of *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire* is "Morceau II" (the fourth movement) the longest and the only one in ABA form. All of it, in its melodic and rhythmic characteristics, shows the influence of popular music. Inscribed *enlevé*, this ABA construct consists of two *café-concert* songs. The first, "Impérial-Napoléon" (listed as the Romanian song "Impérial César" in the manuscript), dates from 1901. It comprises the brisk A section (Ex. 29).

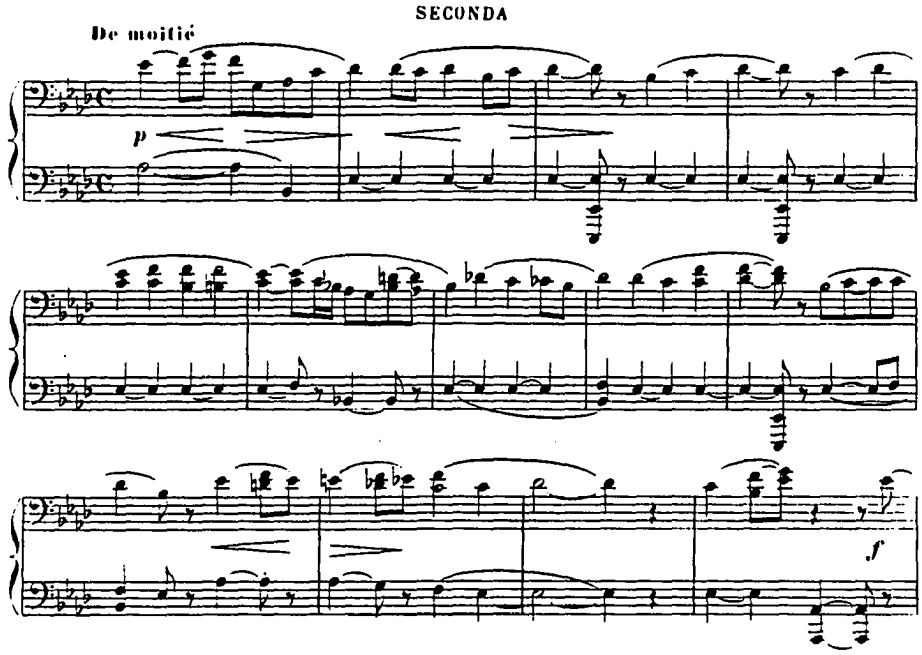
Ex. 29: "Morceau II" from *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire*, mm. 1-17



Between the opening and closing sections lies a slow, lightly contrapuntal passage in A-flat major that introduces one of Satie's most sustained melodies. Again derived from popular material, it makes use of a lovely *café-concert* song entitled "Le Veuf," composed for Vincent Hyspa at the turn of the century. These fourteen measures comprise the central section of the ABA design. The song verse is quoted note for note, the *prima* taking the soprano and alto voices, the *seconda* the tenor and bass (Ex. 30).

Ex. 30: "Morceau II" from *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire*, mm. 33-45





The progressions and melody are classic in their simplicity, with only a few chromatics towards the end. After a third "morceau" full of syncopations, Satie added an "En plus" ("A Little More") very much like another *Gymnopédie* (here in 4/4 time) for four hands. Its almost motionless sway between the first and second scale degrees instead of a conventional cadence has the effect of suspending the music in mid-air. The concluding "Redite" ("Repetition") with its wandering tonal center and unemphatic cadence provides a mere "flattening out" at the end rather than a true recapitulation.

Trois Morceaux contains everything Satie had learned up to 1903--and more. It surpasses such works as the Rose-Croix-influenced *Pièces froides* (*Cold Pieces*) (1897) in rhythmic variety and sureness of melodic line. The composer showed surprising skill in assembling such heterogeneous materials and coupling these pieces into a convincing whole. The fact of a sustained composition running almost twenty minutes in length implies Satie's growing confidence; up to this point his longest work had been the highly

repetitive *Messe des pauvres* (*Mass for the Poor*) from 1895. Most important of all, Satie now reunited the elements of a seriously split musical career. Along with the semireligious, experimental, and often heavy-handed music written between 1887 and 1900, he was also composing popular waltzes and songs for the cabaret artists he accompanied, pieces in which his fascination with sonority gave way to horizontal movement and melody. In *Trois Morceaux* the popular side of Satie's work made its presence felt alongside his sonorous "serious" style. Without this coupling, both styles might have declined into something completely without interest or charm. But in 1903 cabaret sprightliness blended constructively with the modal and harmonic tendencies of the Rose-Croix style. The new style revived early accomplishments of the quasi-archaic *Gymnopédies* and the oriental *Gnossiennes* and opened a new path into the future.

CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCE OF PARISIAN POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT ON THE PIANO MUSIC OF POULENC

Poulenc composed some thirty compositions for solo piano. These pieces span his entire compositional career, from the early *Mouvements perpétuels* of 1918 to the "Piaf" Improvisation, written in 1960, a few years before the composer's death. Poulenc, essentially a miniaturist, cast the bulk of his piano writing into one of the short, lyric forms (for example, ternary or rondo) easily grouped by genre, such as impromptu, nocturne, improvisation, or intermezzo. Several works, however, are suites or multimovement compositions, for example the *Promenades* (1921) which consist of ten pieces; the *Suite française* (1935), seven; and *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, eight. Poulenc favored the more intimate lyric forms which allowed his melodic gifts to unfold and meander without the discipline imposed by large-scale musical structures. In spite of his quite substantial contribution to twentieth-century keyboard literature, Poulenc felt that the piano works were among his weakest efforts, suffering to some degree from superficiality and over-facility. In essence, he thought he had written twentieth-century salon music. Such works as the *Trois pièces* (1928), *Napoli* (1925), *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, and most of the Improvisations escape this charge of superficiality and render Poulenc's judgment misleading. These works display sound musical values and amply reward the pianist's efforts. In addition to these somewhat large-scale, difficult works, there is a body of less difficult literature for young pianists as, for example, the three *Novelettes* (1927, nos. 1-2; 1959, no. 3), *Villageoises* (1933), and *Mouvements perpétuels*.

Although Poulenc's entire compositional output (including the piano music) displays an exceptional homogeneity and continuity of style, there are sufficient differences between early, mature, and late works to warrant a division into three stylistic periods.[69] The first of these is imbued with the artistic ideals of the *Groupe des Six.* This period stretches from Poulenc's first published work, the *Mouvements perpétuels* (1918), through the *Dix Promenades* (1921). This early influence was manifested in a linear style of writing that places a great deal of importance on ostinato patterns, bitonality, an occasional use of modal and pentatonic figures, a somewhat liberal handling of meter and barring, and a carefree, flippant attitude inspired by popular entertainment.

The second, or mature period, begins after Poulenc's three years of study (1921-24) with Charles Koechlin (1867-1950), the eminent French composer and contrapuntist. Poulenc's study consisted primarily of free four-part harmonizations of Bach chorale melodies.[70] The first piece to fall within this period is the *Napoli* suite from 1925. Now Poulenc begins to use the complete resources of the piano: brilliant passage work, staccato chord technique, luxuriant supertertian harmonies supporting a soprano melodic line, wide stretches and extensions, and more dependence on the pedal. All of Poulenc's significant works for the piano belong to this middle period.

After the composition of *Les Soirées de Nazelles* in 1936, Poulenc seems to have lost interest in any further large-scale piano works. Choral music, *mélodies*, and opera consumed his creative energies to such an extent that from 1940 onward only seven piano pieces can be listed: *Mélancolie* (1940), an Intermezzo in A-flat major (1944), three Improvisations (1958-60), a Novelette in E minor (1959), and the *Thème varié* (1951), the

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[69]Warren Kent Werner, "The Piano Music of Francis Poulenc," Clavier 9 (1970): 18.

[70]Milhaud, 95.

only work of major proportions in the last period.[71] Bravura and brilliance have all but disappeared from Poulenc's piano writing. Instead we find lean, Fauré-like melodic lines supported by flowing left-hand chordal figurations. The compositions of the third period are elegant, lyrical, and effective, but hardly of the stature of the best works of the late 1920s through the 1930s.

Throughout Poulenc's career a popular-influenced vein can be traced, from the early *Mouvements perpétuels* through his last composition for solo piano, the Improvisation No. 15, subtitled *Hommage à Édith Piaf.* This popular atmosphere, redolent of the *café-concert,* cabaret, circus, and music-hall, creates a gaiety, charm, and sentiment that is continually enjoyable and stimulating to the listener.

The *Café-concert*

A number of features from *café-concert* music are distinguishable in Poulenc's piano music and are illustrated by examples from *Les Soirées de Nazelles.* The satirical or mocking quality found in *café-concert* music is apparent in the close of "L'Alerte vieillesse" ("Sprightly Old Age"), the eighth variation of *Les Soirées de Nazelles* (Ex. 31). The "salacious love songs" mentioned earlier most likely resembled the seductively melodramatic theme seen in Ex. 32, from the "Final."

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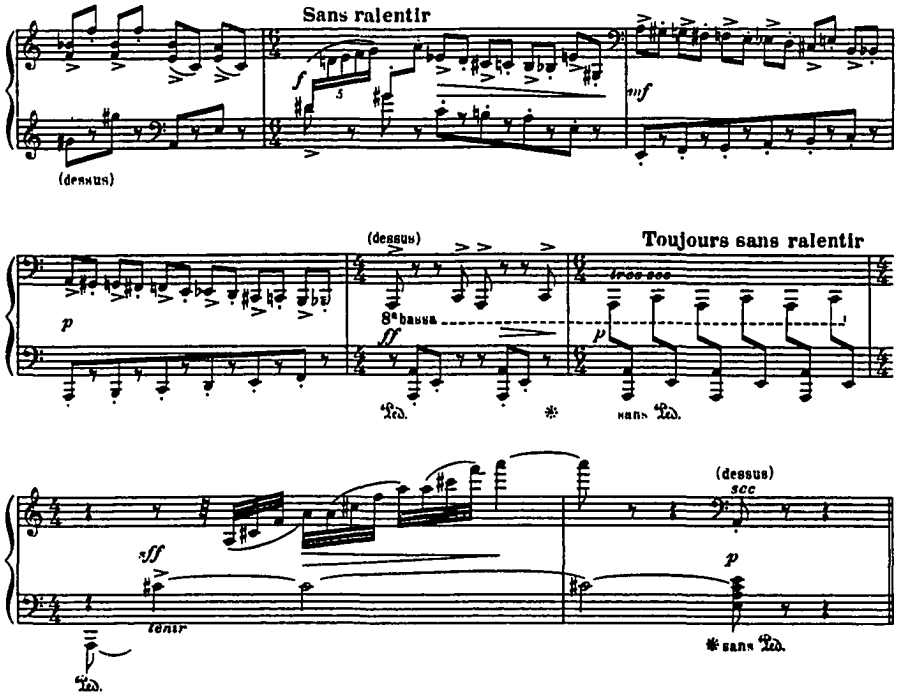
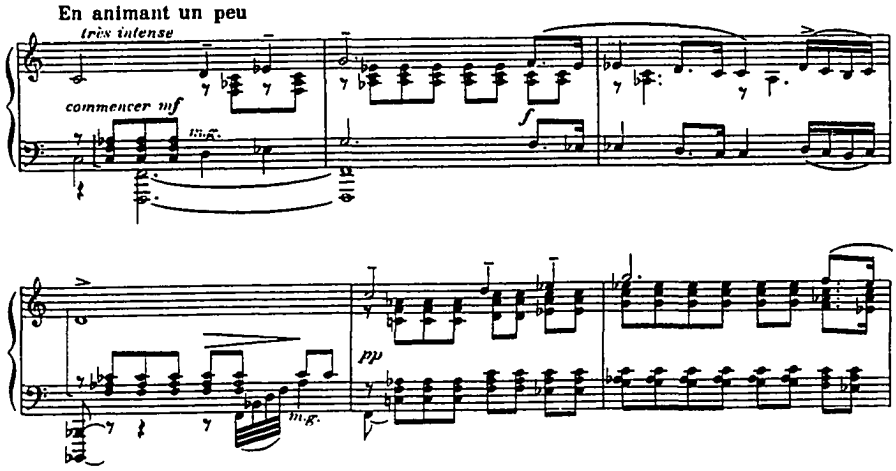
[71]Werner.

Ex. 31: "L'Alerte vieillesse" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 44-50

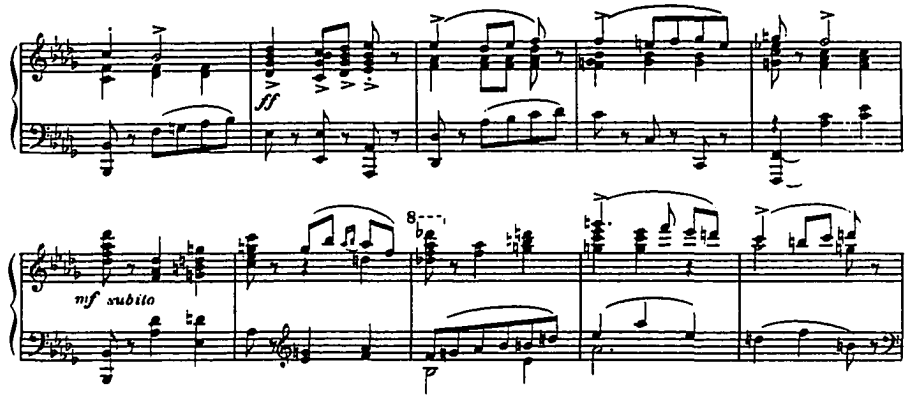


Ex. 32: "Final" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 27-32



A general mood of gaiety and foolery epitomizing the *café-concert* is displayed in an example from the "Préambule" (Ex. 33).

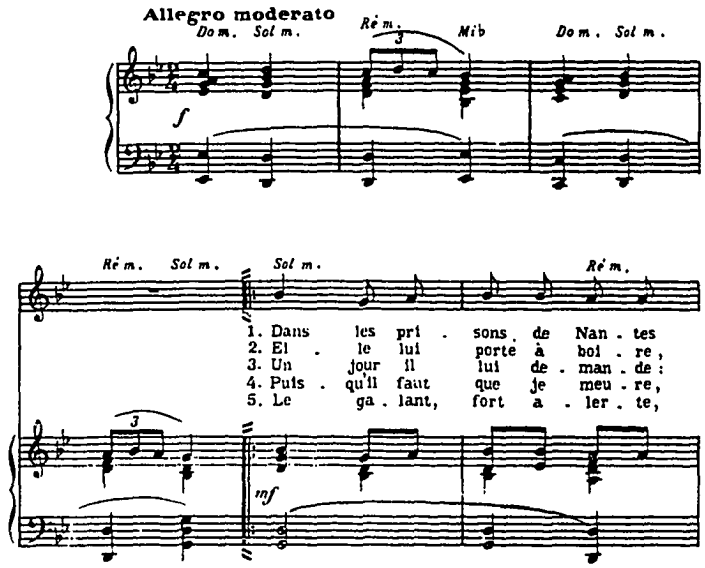
Ex. 33: "Préambule" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 30-39



The *Cabaret artistique*

The repertory of the *poètes-chansonniers* of the *cabarets artistiques* included *chansons* that were plaintive and folk-like and ones that were boisterous in character. As the latter tend to overlap with similar music performed in the music-hall and *café-concert*, only the folk-like *chansons* will be considered here. One such *chanson* is the anonymous ballad "Dans les prisions de Nantes" ("In the Prisons of Nantes"). Only eighteen measures in length, this dirge in the key of G minor comprises an introduction and five verses. The melody is completely diatonic and the accompaniment is characterized by a sorrowful triplet figure (Ex. 34).

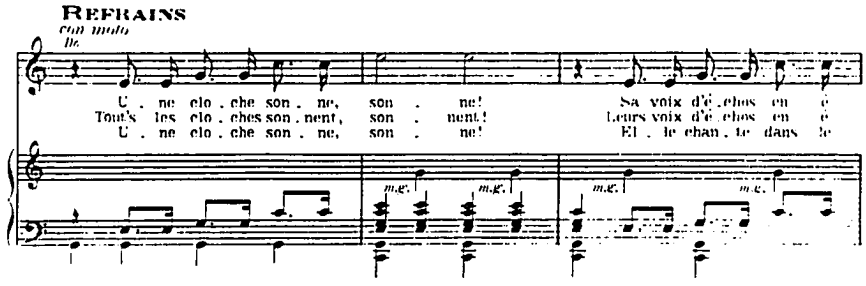
Ex. 34: "Dans les prisions de Nantes," mm. 1-6



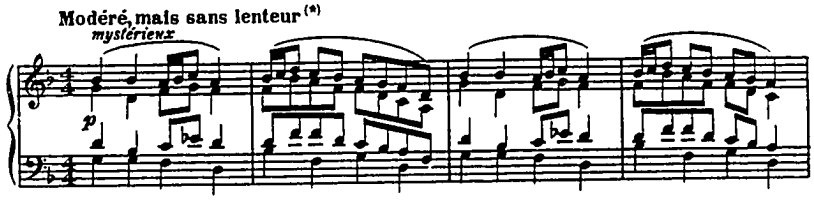
A more recent *chanson* and one that was extremely popular during its time is "Les Trois cloches" ("The Three Bells"), written by Jean Villard. Here the key is major and the *chanson* is strophic with three verses and a refrain. The melodic range covers only a minor third excepting one note that reaches up a perfect fourth. The opening of the refrain has a wider melodic range, outlining an ascending diatonic triad (Ex. 35).

The most exemplary folk-like material found in Poulenc's piano music is contained in the *Suite française*. Here, as in the popular *chansons* discussed above, we are confronted with like materials, all characterized by folk-like elements: diatonic melodies, often melancholy or pensive in character (Ex. 36), narrow melodic ranges (Ex. 37), and modal progressions and cadences. The *Villageoises* collection likewise illustrates similar characteristics.

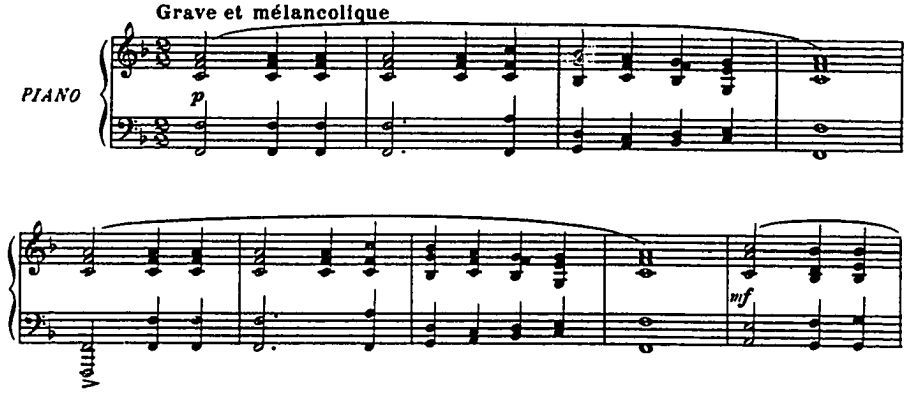
Ex. 35: "Les Trois cloches," mm. 17-19



Ex. 36: "Bransle de Champagne" from *Suite française*, mm. 1-4



Ex. 37: "Pavane" from *Suite française*, mm. 1-9



The antithesis of this rather melancholic music was that heard at the circuses of Paris, a music utterly comedic in character.

The Circus

The special prominence the circuses and fairgrounds held in Parisian entertainment during the first quarter of the twentieth-century is manifested in various ways in popular *chansons* of the day: the sheer number of *chansons* dealing with circus subjects, the use of instrumental colors associated with circus music, and such circus-related words as "merry-go-round" or "clown" found in the titles. Three *chansons* illustrate relevant points: "Mon manège à moi" has been translated into English as "My own Merry-go-round," "Je n'en connais pas la fin" as "A Merry-go-round," and the bittersweet "Bravo pour le clown" as, of course, "Bravo for the Clown."[72] The sounds of the calliope and mechanical organ (with or without bells, drums, and cymbals) is also frequently heard on early recordings of French popular music.

The piano music of Poulenc influenced by the circus and fairground is gay and frivolous as one might expect. But unlike the music-hall, cabaret, and *café-concert's* lighter-veined musics, the circus-influenced music strikes one as particularly comic or even ridiculous and ludicrous. Several splendid examples are found in *Les Soirées de Nazelles*. The very opening of the piece seems to be beckoning, "Step right up, *mesdames et messieurs*!" (Ex. 38) with its fortissimo octaves in the extreme low register of the piano.

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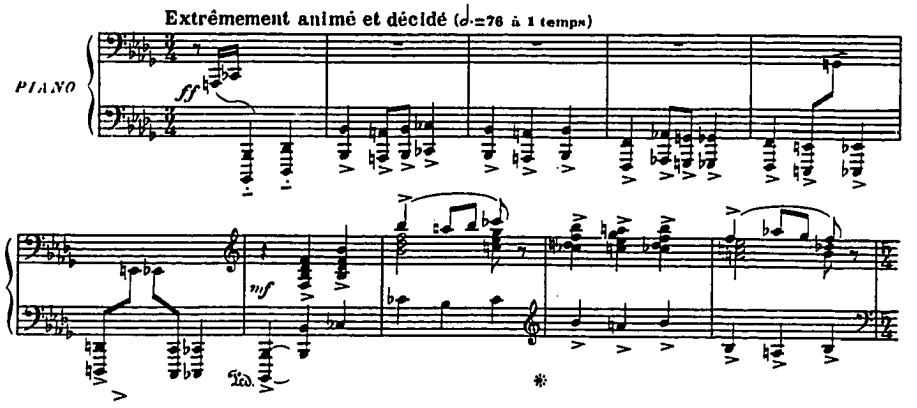
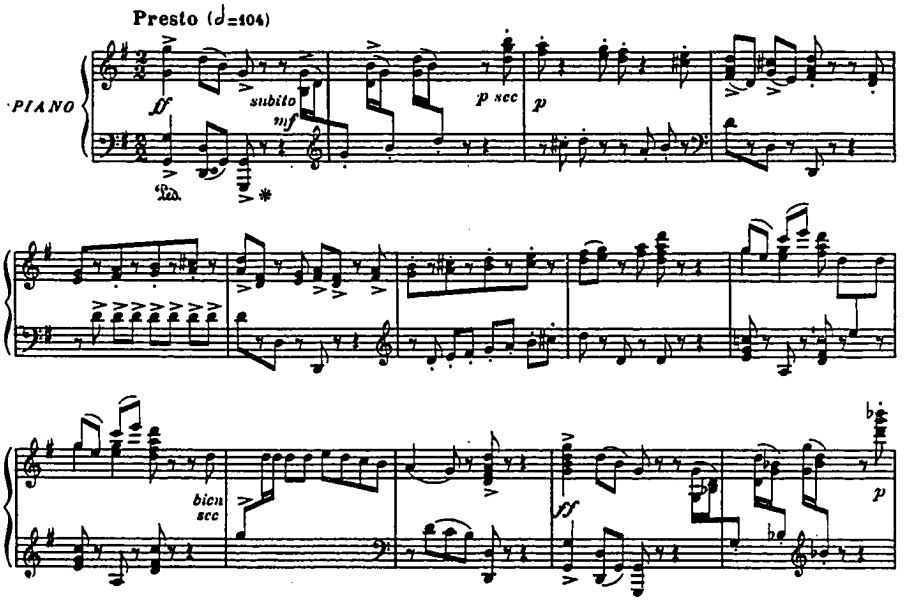
[72]François Ruy-Vidal, ed., 25 chansons d'Édith Piaf (Paris: Alain Pierson, 1982), 112.

Ex. 38: "Préambule" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 1-10



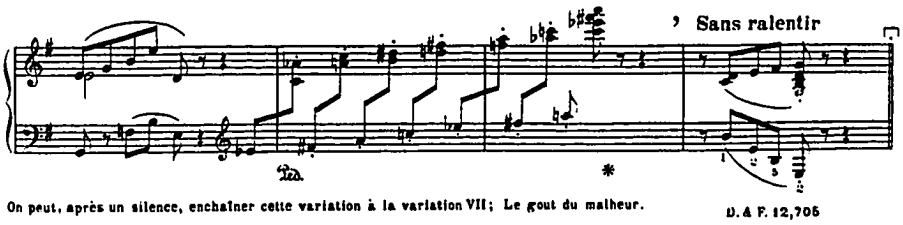
The third variation, entitled "La désinvolture et la discrétion" ("Offhanded and Discreet"), is in the same lively spirit. This piece achieves its comic effects by sudden dynamic contrasts of fortissimo (pedaled) and piano (sec), a presto tempo inscription, and unexpected accents (Ex. 39).

Ex. 39: "La désinvolture et la discrétion" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 1-14



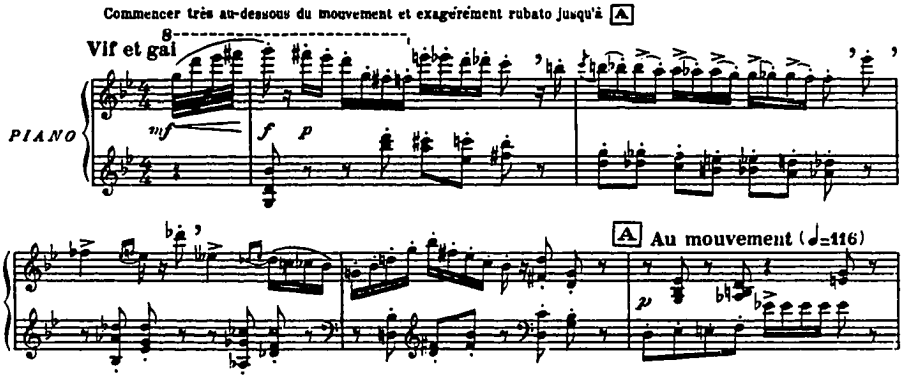
Three measures from the end staccato chords and a comma further display comic effects (Ex. 40).

Ex. 40: "La désinvolture et la discrétion" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 47-50



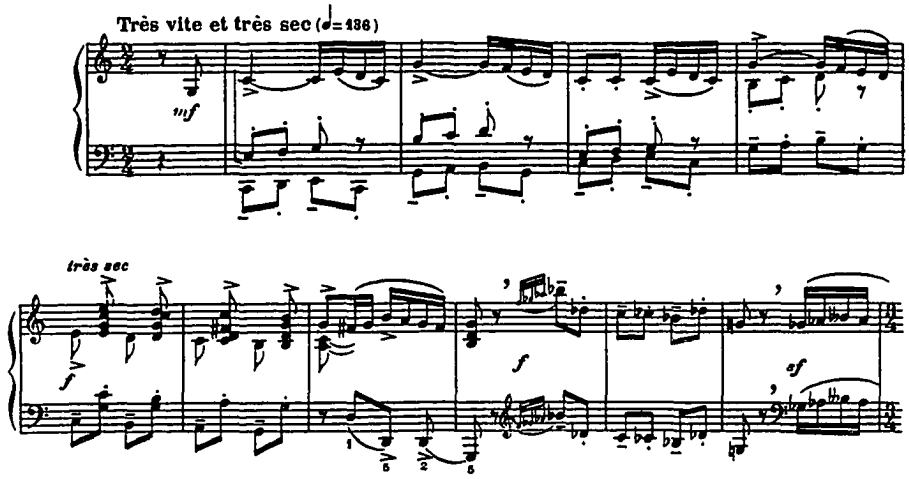
Other subtle uses of commas create comedy in the second variation, "Le Comble de la distinction" ("The Height of Distinction") (Ex. 41).

Ex. 41: "Le Comble de la distinction" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 1-5



The sixth variation, "Le Contentement de soi" ("Self-Contentment"), manifests a clownish spirit from start to finish. The opening theme is comedic in nature with its misplaced accents and breakneck tempo (Ex. 42).

Ex. 42: "Le Contentement de soi" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 1-10

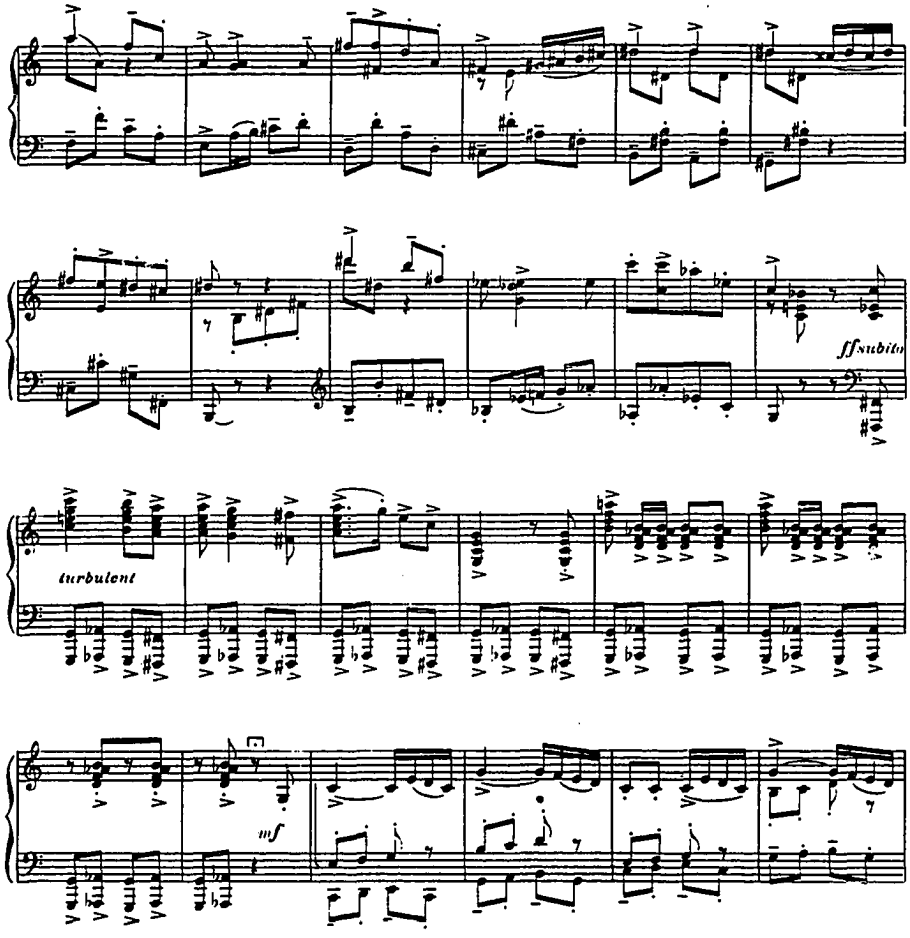


The "big top" spirit is displayed marvelously later in the piece by more misplaced accents, a sudden fortissimo, and a series of rapid chords (Ex. 43).

The Music-hall

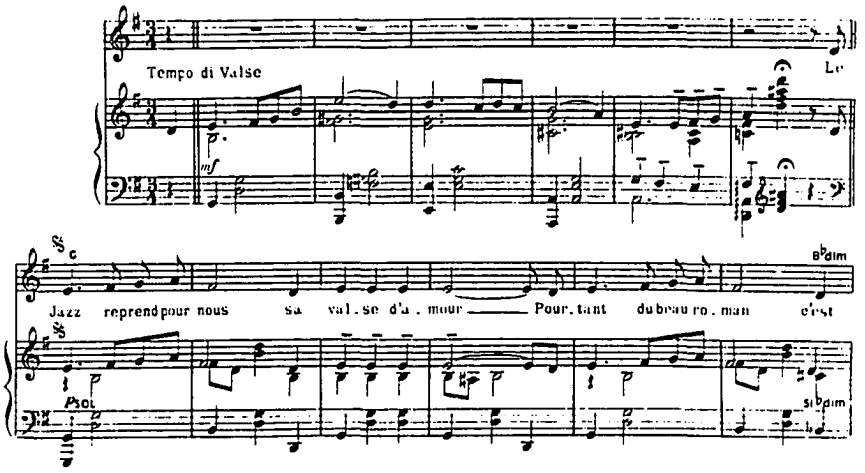
The music heard in Parisian music-halls during the first quarter of the twentieth century divides easily into two categories. The first is extrovert, carefree, and good-natured, while the second is sentimental, reflective, and melodramatic. Both are essentially melodic and both appear throughout Poulenc's pianistic *oeuvre*. Gay and unblushingly youthful, the former, generally dance-like in character, at times approaches vulgarity (the directions *très rude* and *très brusque* appear). It is essentially monothematic and strongly diatonic. The introspective *chansons*, on the other hand, are pervaded by an air of melancholy often bordering on sentimentality, yet they are poignant and even compelling. The music features a luxuriant broken-chord accompaniment and a melodic line of great allure.

Ex. 43: "Le Contentement de soi," mm. 46-69



The early *Valse pour piano* in C major epitomizes the charming qualities of sophisticated simplicity and light-heartedness found in a music-hall *chanson* such as "Fais-moi valser" ("Ask Me to Waltz") by Charles Borel-Clerc (Ex. 44).

Ex. 44: "Fais-moi valser," mm. 1-12



Poulenc completed this frivolous waltz in July, 1919. Later in 1920, after critic Henri Collet's pronouncements about *Les Six*, the *Valse* joined five other compositions by members of the group which were published as *Album des Six.*[73] The piece is characterized by an irreverent tunefulness, slow harmonic rhythm, and piquant appoggiaturas. Stylistically there is nothing unusual in this work. Its importance lies in its enormous popularity among *Les Six* and their admirers.

A myriad of examples representing the light-hearted music-hall vein can be found in *Les Soirées de Nazelles*. At measure 67 of the opening "Préambule" a jolly café tune characterized by a triplet figure is presented (Ex. 45).

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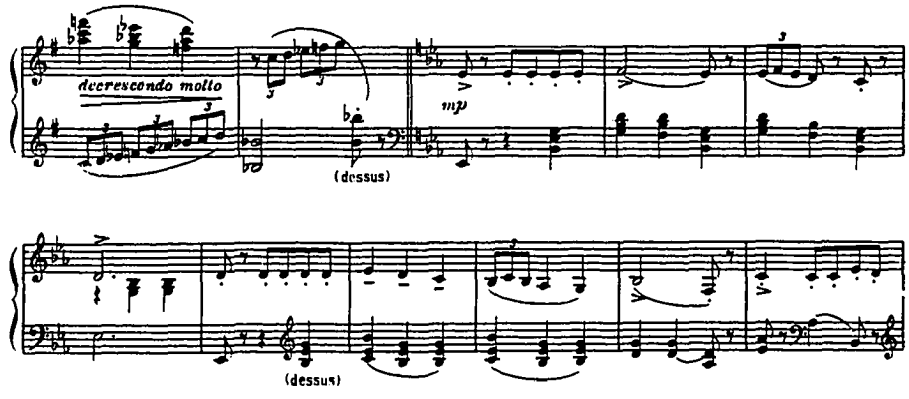
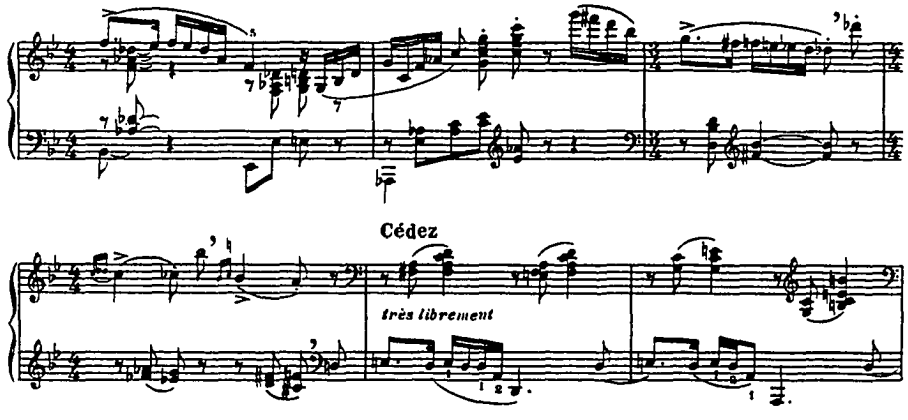
[73]Jon Ray Nelson, "The Piano Music of Francis Poulenc" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1978), 27.

Ex. 45: "Préambule" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 67-74



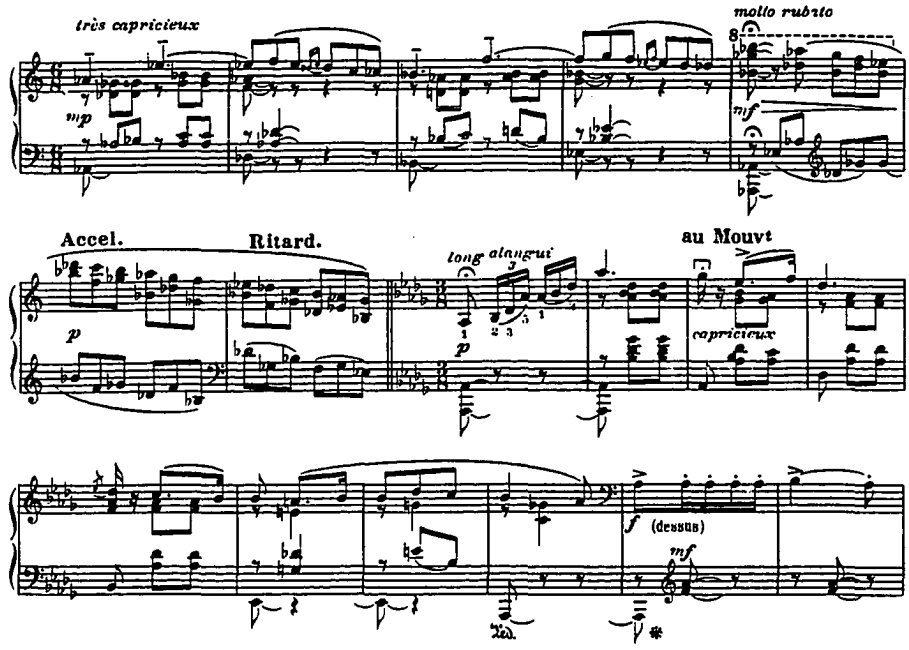
Material of the same character, sophisticated and gay, appears at measure 17 in "Le "Comble de la distinction" (Ex. 46).

Ex. 46: "Le Comble de la distinction" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 17-22



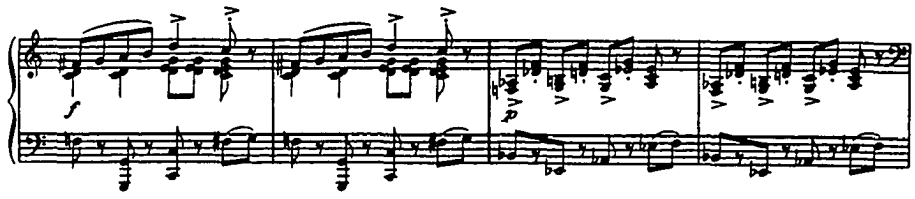
The fifth variation, "Le Charme enjôleur" ("Seductive Charm"), offers musical materials of a like nature, ebullient and carefree, with a reworking of the theme from the "Préambule" (Ex. 47).

Ex. 47: "Le Charme enjôleur" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 25-41



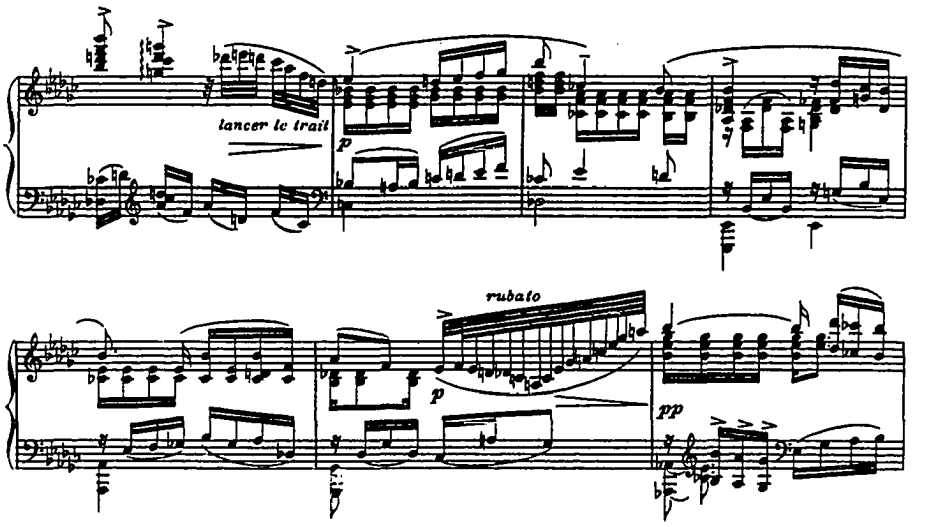
An example from variation VIII, "L'Alerte vieillesse," conjures up an image of high kicking cancans danced by the long-legged show girls of the Moulin Rouge (Ex. 48).

Ex. 48: "L'Alerte vieillesse" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 23-26



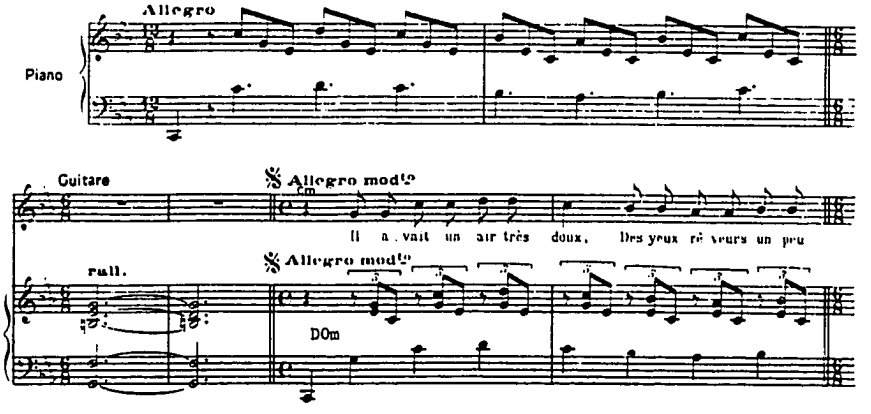
The introspective vein found in music-hall entertainment is prominent to some degree in most of Poulenc's piano music. Luxuriantly beautiful melodies are the hallmark of this material. Poulenc loved hearing the famous chanteuses of his day (Jeanne Bloch, Damia, Édith Piaf, etc.) and was, no doubt, deeply influenced by their singing. As a composer Poulenc's outstanding gift was melody. It is only fitting that this category should receive his most personal musical thoughts. "Le Goût du malheur" ("A Taste of Unhappiness") from *Les Soirées de Nazelles* presents one such beautiful passage, outstanding not only in melody but in harmony as well (Ex. 49).

Ex. 49: "Le Goût du malheur" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 15-21



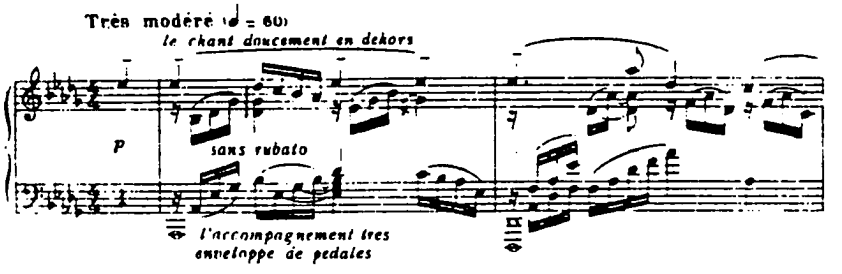
Akin to this is the opening of a *chanson* written in 1936 by Marguerite Monnot entitled "L'Étranger" (Ex. 50).

Ex. 50: "L'Étranger," mm. 1-6



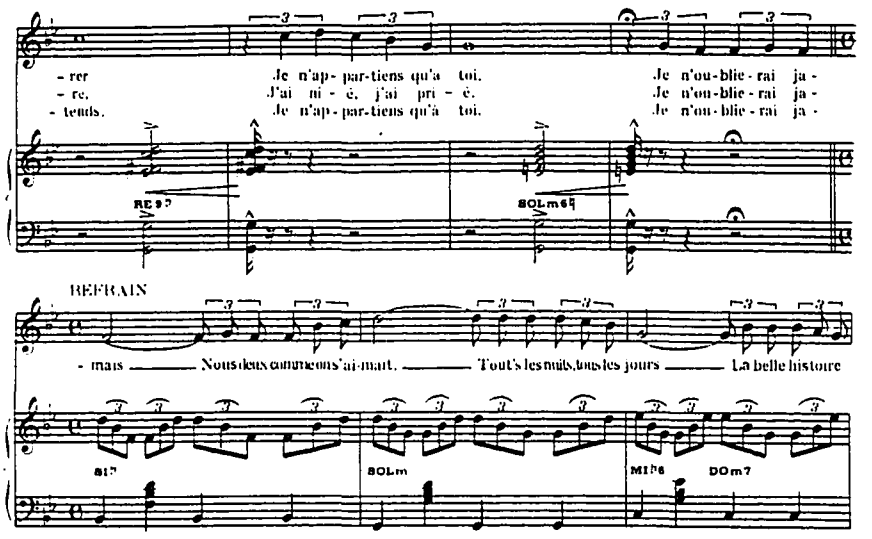
A feeling of sadness typifies a great deal of the music belonging to this category. *Mélancolie* (1940) exemplifies this quality not only in its title but also in its musical content. The arrestingly beautiful opening melody and its accompaniment (Ex. 51) exhibit Poulenc's typical piano textures in this, his longest single-movement composition.

Ex. 51: *Mélancolie*, mm. 1-2



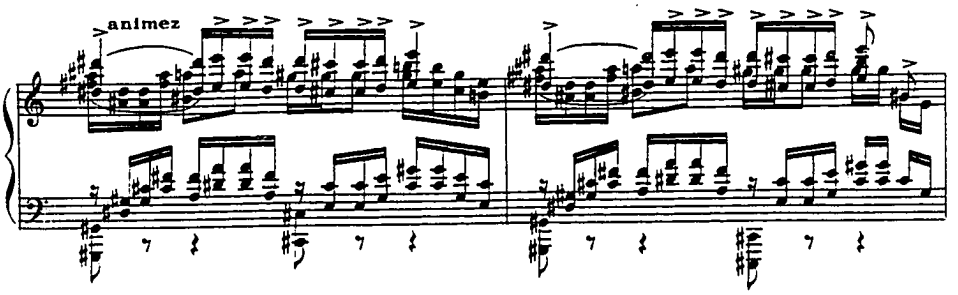
In the same spirit is the exquisite "La Belle histoire d'amour" ("The Beautiful Story of Love"), lyrics by Édith Piaf and music by Charles Dumont (Ex. 52).

Ex. 52: "La Belle histoire d'amour," mm. 14-20



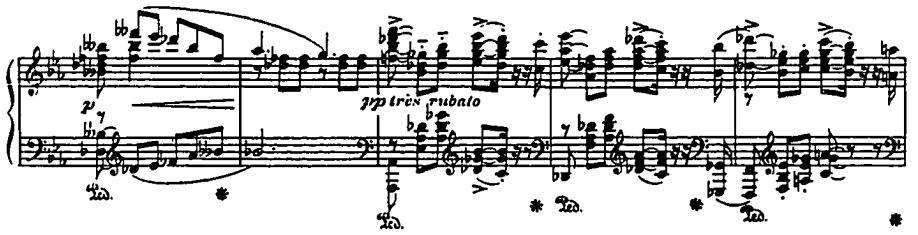
The last two examples from Poulenc's piano music displayed rather slow, unhurried tempos. Perhaps just as frequently material with great melodic appeal, yet more impassioned in character, appears in Poulenc's piano writing. "Hymne" from the *Trois pièces* (1928) illustrates this point (Ex. 53).

Ex. 53: "Hymne" from *Trois pièces*, mm. 33-34



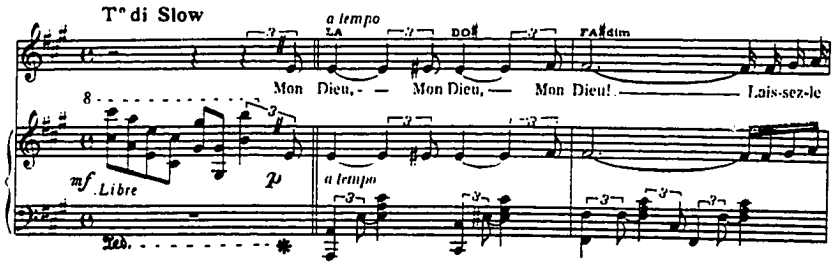
Upon occasion Poulenc flirts with sentimentality in his piano writing. An example from "Le Coeur sur la main" ("Heart on Sleeve") from *Les Soirées de Nazelles* vividly conjures up the image of a chanteuse lamenting her lost loves in a smoke-hazy *boîte de nuit* (Ex. 54).

Ex. 54: "Le Coeur sur la main" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 17-21



Poulenc's last piano piece epitomizes the introspective vein found in music-hall entertainment. The fifteenth improvisation, written in 1959, is entitled *Hommage à Édith Piaf*. Poulenc's pianistic tribute to the great chanteuse is much like one of Piaf's own laments, for example "Mon Dieu" ("My God") (Ex. 55) or "La Belle histoire d'amour," both by Dumont.

Ex. 55: "Mon Dieu," mm. 1-3



Margaret Crosland, who described the unique style of Édith Piaf (1915-63) as an art form in itself, has written that "Piaf was so French she took the essence of France wherever she went."[74] Born in utter destitution on the sidewalk near a squalid tenement house, Piaf became one of the world's most beloved singers and a virtual symbol of France. In his introduction to Piaf's autobiography, *Au Bal de la chance* (*Wheel of Fortune*) (1958), Cocteau aptly compares Piaf to the nightingale:

> This tiny person . . . how will she project the powerful laments of night? And then . . . she sings, or like the April nightingale, she ventures the first notes of her song of love. Have you ever heard the nightingale? She strains. She hesitates. She grates. She chokes. Her voice rises and falls again. And then, suddenly, she sings. You are captured. Like the nightingale, Édith Piaf explores herself and her audience; quickly she finds her voice. Piaf, like the invisible nightingale on her branch, becomes invisible. We are aware only of her eyes, her pale hands, that waxen forehead which reflects the light, and the voice.[75]

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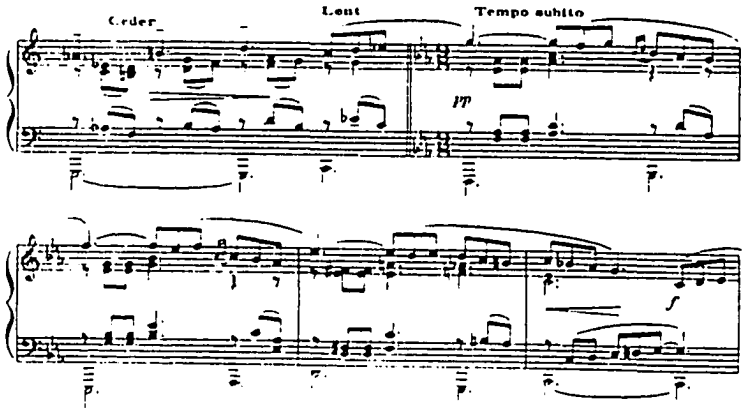
[74]Margaret Crosland, Piaf (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1985), 17.

[75]Jean Cocteau, My Contemporaries, ed. and introduced by Margaret Crosland (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1968), 93.

It is remarkable that Poulenc, Piaf, and Cocteau all died within the same year--1963. The deaths of Piaf and Cocteau followed Poulenc's by only nine months. Cocteau, on learning of Piaf's death, died four hours later of a heart attack.[76] After a graveside ceremony for Piaf at Père Lachaise Cemetery, chanteuse Marlene Dietrich, as if on tour, went on to Cocteau's funeral at Milly-la-Forêt.

Poulenc's hommage to Piaf is extremely romantic, tinged with melancholy, and redolent of his devotion. Consisting for the most part of the relentless repetition of the main thematic material (Ex. 56), this improvisation is more strongly influenced by the traditions of popular music than any other in the series. The formal and harmonic simplicity are characteristic of the sentimental music-hall *chanson*. There is, likewise, a great deal of repetition (mm. 7-12 return at 19-24 and, in another key, at 32-37; mm. 7-22 return verbatim at 41-56), suggesting the Parisian *chanson*.

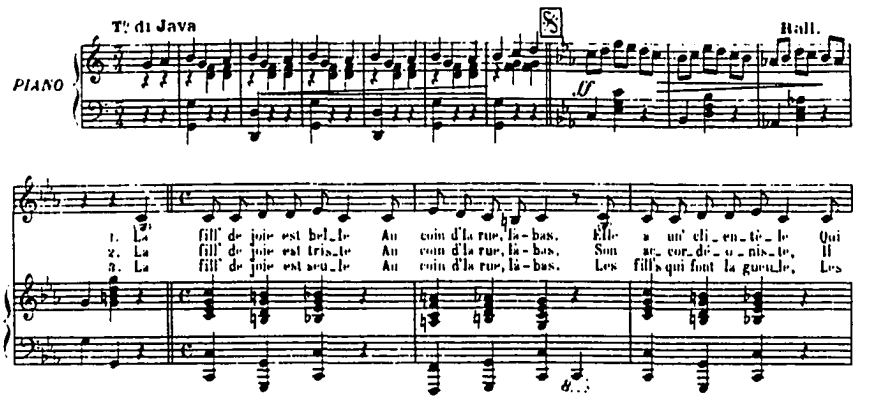
Ex. 56: Improvisation No. 15 (*Hommage à Édith Piaf*), mm. 40-44



[76]Poulenc had also died prematurely of a heart attack.

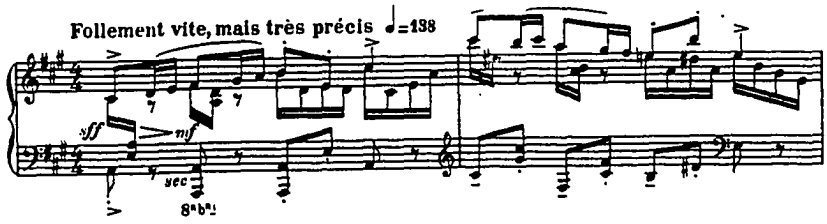
Often one finds both the carefree and sentimental music-hall veins juxtaposed within the same piece. This dichotomous aspect is exemplified in "L'Accordéoniste," written by Michel Emer and made popular by Piaf. The *chanson*'s introduction begins with a gay diatonic melody in C major, yet within six measures the key has changed to C minor (Ex. 57).

Ex. 57: "L'Accordéoniste," mm. 1-6

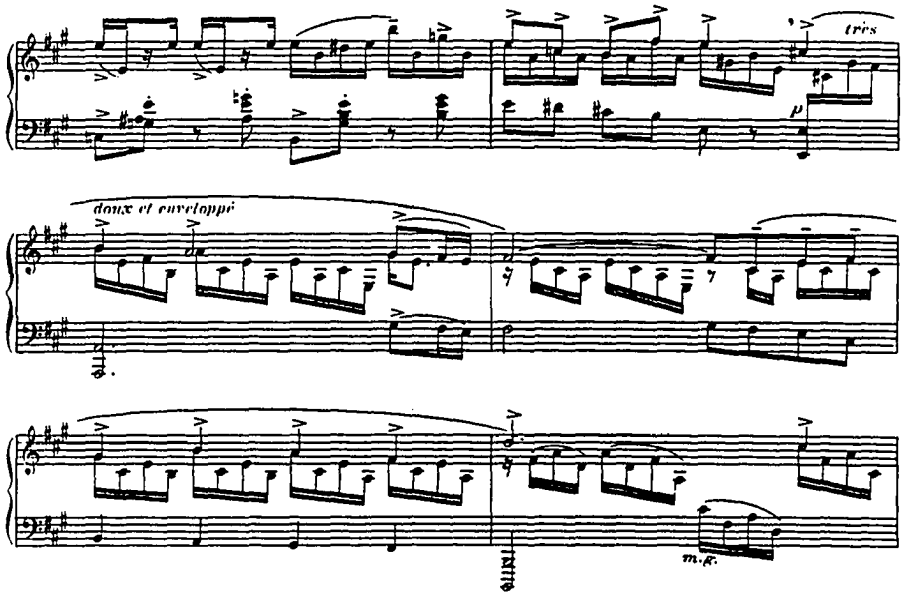


The minor key is chosen for the verse of the *chanson* with the refrain, marked *Java*, in C major. Poulenc juxtaposed two types of music next to each other in the opening of the "Final" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*. The first fourteen measures (two of which are seen in Ex. 58), marked "madly fast, but very precise," explode like an Offenbach cancan. In highest of spirits, Poulenc exploits the extreme bass register of the piano in an almost comic way. At the fourteenth measure the marking "soft and enveloped" appears. Although the key (A major) does not change to minor, a very lyrical and tender melody is presented (Ex. 59). The similarity to "L'Accordéoniste" is striking and pertinent.

Ex. 58: "Final" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 1-2



Ex. 59: "Final" from *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, mm. 13-18



CHAPTER V

EMBRACING THE POPULAR: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The popular aesthetic embraced by Satie and the *Groupe des Six* involved principles contrary to the nineteenth-century German ideal of a sublime, well-integrated work. Principles such as diversity and incongruity of material, repetition of banal musical gestures, simple tunefulness, and satire were espoused. Advocating such principles was not simply a novel diversion for Satie and Poulenc, but the manifestation of a true love for the popular entertainments of Paris. The exuberance of the *café-concert*, the internationalism of the music-hall, the harlequinade of the circus, and the profoundly Parisian atmosphere of the cabaret were all cults in themselves. Popular entertainment was an aesthetic and a way of life. A love for these institutions developed early in life for both Satie and Poulenc. Both men were pianists and knew how to write effectively for their instrument. The body of their piano music displays the influence of popular entertainment from the first pieces to the last.

In April 1915 Satie had his greatest single stroke of fortune when a performance he gave with Ricardo Viñes of his *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire* was heard by young Jean Cocteau. The composer's meteoric rise to fame after W.W.I was entirely Cocteau's doing. Cocteau wrote and lectured about Satie assiduously, particularly in *Le Coq et l'arlequin.*

Satie's highly individual style gives him a unique place in modern music. He made a deliberate cult of eccentricity by giving his works strange titles and sprinkling their pages with comical annotations, but the genuine originality of his music won him the admiration of composers greater than himself, including Debussy. He composed a number

of humorous and whimsical piano suites which, taken together, constitute a significant body of work in the repertoire of contemporary French piano music and which, more than any other of Satie's creations, remain the purest examples of his genius.

The reasons why Satie turned to popular sources so extensively during 1913-14 were at least fourfold. First, they helped him sustain the unaccustomed bout of creativity that followed the sudden demand for novel groups of pieces from his publisher. Second, they gave these humorous piano pieces greater popular appeal. Satie hoped that, set down in a familiar context, the general public might be more disposed to follow his future compositional pursuits. Third, guessing their sources provided a sort of musical quiz that helped sustain public interest after their initial vogue had faded. The way Satie succeeded in this respect can be seen from the number of editions these pieces enjoyed in subsequent years. Lastly, popular sources helped the composer rediscover his path forward by taking some of the responsibility for inventing new material from his shoulders. For many these humorous pieces represent Satie at his best. Works such as the *Sports et divertissements* and *Embryons desséchés* ("Dried-up Embryos") are veritable compendiums of popular sources that still sound fresh and amusing whenever they are played.

Poulenc regarded the piano as his basic medium for social music. For polite French society the piano was still a "home" instrument, and much of Poulenc's piano music is domestically functional. Poulenc once declared, "It is paradoxical, but true, that my piano music is the least representative genre in my output."[77] The composer's honesty in evaluating his piano music is indeed refreshing, but more objective studies suggest that he was too harsh in his self-judgments. Poulenc often had to cope with bouts of uncertainty which understandably led to periods of depression. He judged the piano music more

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[77]Helène Jordan-Morhange, Mes amis musiciens (Paris: Les Éditeurs français réunis, 1955), 133; quoted in Daniel, 163.

severely than any other genre of his output, although on another occasion, he tempered his earlier condemnation somewhat: "I feel, quite sincerely, that my piano music is neither as good as some virtuosi contend, nor as bad as some critics think it is. The truth lies somewhere between these two opinions."[78]

The key to an enlightened appraisal of Poulenc's piano music is that "virtuosi" have often sung its praises, while critics have been less than ardent. Poulenc himself seems to have discovered the reason for this:

> Many of my pieces have failed because I know too well how to write for the piano. It is curious, but true, that as soon as I begin writing piano accompaniments for my songs, I begin to be innovative. Similarly, my piano writing with orchestra or chamber ensemble is of a different order. It is the solo piano that somehow escapes me. With it I am a victim of false pretenses.[79]

Poulenc was, quite simply, too good a pianist, and his familiarity with the literature of the piano frequently led him to facile borrowings. Moreover, much of what he borrowed has its source in the lighter salon music of the second half of the nineteenth century, in what the composer called "*L'adorable mauvaise musique*" (adorable bad music)[80] and, of course, in French popular music. If Poulenc expressed his most profound thoughts in his choral music and the operatic masterpiece, *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1953-56), he entrusted, by comparison, superficialities to much of the piano music.

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[78]Francis Poulenc, Entretiens avec Claude Rostand (Paris: René Julliard, 1954), 31; quoted in Nelson, 284.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid., 32; quoted in Daniel, 2.

The piano music derives from a plethora of styles. Poulenc's popular haunts extended beyond Parisian cabarets, *café-concerts*, circuses, and music-halls to *bals musettes* (dancing halls), *guingettes* (suburban cabarets), and ordinary bars. Yet the establishments discussed above represent the favorite and most widely frequented milieus.[81] Entertainment was not, however, exclusively French. Especially at the circus and the music-hall, American popular dance and music played an important role. Yet Poulenc remained virtually uninfluenced, adhering faithfully to the motley world of Parisian popular entertainment.

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[81]Daniel, 7.

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APPENDIX A

THE PIANO WORKS OF ERIK SATIE

Below is a chronological listing of the complete solo piano works of Erik Satie. This list also includes a single work for piano four hands, *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire*, one of the pieces that best exemplifies a tie to popular entertainment.

Allegro (1884)

Valse-ballet (1885)

Fantaise-valse (1885)

Quatre Ogives (1886)

Trois Sarabandes (1887)

Trois Gymnopédies (1888)

Trois Gnossiennes (1890)

Trois Morceaux en forme de poire (1890-1903)

Première pensée Rose + Croix (1891)

Quatre Préludes (1892)

Vexations (1893)

Danses gothiques (1893)

Modéré (1893)

Pièces froides (1897)

Petite musique de clown triste (1900)

Poudre d'or (1901)

Le Piccadilly (1904)

Prélude en tapisserie (1906)

Passacaille (1906)

Nouvelles pièces froides (1906-10)

Quatre Préludes flasques (pour un chien) (1912)

Trois Véritables préludes flasques (pour un chien) (1912)

Descriptions automatiques (1913)

Embryons desséchés (1913)

Croquis & agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois (1913)

Chapitres tournés en tous sens (1913)

Vieux sequins et vieilles cuirasses (1913)

Menus propos enfantins (1913)

Enfantillages pittoresques (1913)

Peccadilles importunes (1913)

Les pantins dansent (1913)

Sports et divertissements (1914)

Heures séculaires et instantanées (1914)

Les Trois valses distinguées du précieux dégoûté (1914)

Avant-dernières pensées (1915)

Sonatine bureaucratique (1917)

Cinq Nocturnes (1919)

Rêverie de l'enfance de Pantagruel (1920)

Premier menuet (1920)

APPENDIX B

THE PIANO WORKS OF POULENC

Below is a chronological listing of the complete solo piano works of Francis Poulenc.

Trois Mouvements perpétuels (1918)

Trois Pièces (1918-28)

Valse in C major (1919)

Suite in C major (1920)

Cinq Impromptus (1920-21)

Dix Promenades (1921)

Napoli (1922-25)

Pastourelle (1927)

Trois Novelettes (1927-59)

Pièce brève (sur le nom d'Albert Roussel) (1929)

Huit Nocturnes (1929-38)

Les Soirées de Nazelles (1930-36)

Valse-Improvisation (sur le nom de Bach) (1932)

Improvisations (15) (1932-59)

Six Villageoises (Petites pièces enfantines) (1933)

Feuillets d'Album (1933)

Presto in B-flat major (1934)

Badinage (1934)

Humoresque (1934)

Trois Intermezzi (1934-43)

Suite française (d'après Claude Gervaise) (1935)

Bourée au pavillon d'Auvergne (1937)

Française (d'après Claude Gervaise) (1939)

Mélancolie (1940)

Thème varié (1951)