

Francis
POULENC

Aubade
Le Bal masqué
Flute Sonata
Sextet



MARK BEBBINGTON
piano

RODERICK WILLIAMS
baritone

EMER McDONOUGH
flute

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC
ORCHESTRA

JAN LATHAM-KOENIG
conductor



Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

Aubade, Le Bal masqué, Flute Sonata & Sextet

Mark Bebbington *piano*
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Emer McDonough *flute*

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
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About Mark Bebbington's Poulenc Series:

'What a wonderful Poulenc journey pianist Mark Bebbington takes us on, always with a sense of passion and purpose'
Gramophone, Editor's Choice

'Bebbington captures the mood perfectly, with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra on sparkling form'
The Observer

Aubade, FP51a

1. Toccata	[2:40]
2. Récitatif	[1:39]
3. Rondeau	[3:11]
4. Presto	[1:37]
5. Récitatif	[1:48]
6. Andante	[2:58]
7. Allegro feroce	[0:42]
8. Conclusion	[4:31]

Le Bal masqué, FP60

9. Prélude et air de bravure	[4:05]
10. Intermède	[2:37]
11. Malvina	[2:01]
12. Bagatelle	[2:13]
13. La dame aveugle	[2:23]
14. Finale	[4:10]

Flute Sonata, FP164

15. Allegro malinconico	[4:56]
16. Cantilena	[4:14]
17. Presto giocoso	[3:37]

Sextet, FP100

18. Allegro vivace	[7:39]
19. Divertissement	[4:42]
20. Finale	[5:58]

Total playing time [67:53]



Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)
Aubade FP51, Le Bal masqué FP60,
Flute Sonata FP164 & Sextet FP100

Poulenc completed his **Aubade** in May and early June 1929, and it was first performed on 19 June 1929. There are many unusual features of this work, one of them being hinted at in the subtitle: ‘concerto chorégraphique’ – a choreographic concerto. In other words, this was a ballet and a piano concerto rolled into one. It was written for Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles, an aristocratic couple (Charles was the Vicomte de Noailles) who were passionate supporters of the arts. Their patronage included cinema (they not only financed Man Ray’s *Les Mystères du Château de Dé* and Jean Cocteau’s *Le Sang d’un poète* but made appearances in both films), visual art (particularly Salvador Dalí) and architecture (their homes in Paris and Hyères were handsome examples of modern design). Poulenc was not only a composer they admired, but also a close friend. In 1928, he was commissioned to compose *Aubade* for a private performance in the magnificent Noailles residence at 11, place des États-Unis in the elegant Passy district of Paris. The scenario of the ‘choreographic’ element was written

by Poulenc and it was choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska (the younger sister of Vaslav Nijinsky) whose earlier ballets included Stravinsky’s *Les Noces* (1923), Auric’s *Les Fâcheux* (1924) and Poulenc’s *Les Biches* (1924), all for Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes.

When Poulenc first got down to work, in early 1929, he found it hard going. He’d just turned thirty and was plunged into depression (from which he suffered on a number of occasions). In February 1929 he wrote to Charles de Noailles: ‘As for my poor *Aubade*, which was begun in happiness, I can’t find a way to finish it in tears. I’ve done and tried everything, but I’m giving up because I don’t even know what a sharp sign is any more. ... I’m leaving tomorrow to go and hide away in a distant corner of the Jura, which will hold no memories for me, where no one will know who I am, and where I’ll be able to indulge my tears.’ Eventually, Poulenc’s state of mind improved and he was able to finish *Aubade* in time for the ball, held on 19 June 1929. He described the audience that night as ‘a gossiping, frivolous crowd’ – but this is hardly surprising given that the costumes for this fancy-dress ball of ‘matières’ were made from things like paper, cardboard, cellophane and tin foil (as we can see from surviving photographs

of the event).

The *Aubade* is scored for an unusual ensemble: solo piano, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, one trumpet, timpani, two violas, two cellos and two double basses (there are no violins). The front of the printed score includes a diagram of how Poulenc envisaged the platform layout: the piano front right, lower strings front left, woodwind and timpani arrayed behind them, the horns and trumpet behind the piano. The austere opening – a fanfare for horns and trumpets – makes clear that this is going to a predominantly serious work. The solo piano launches into the ‘Toccata’ proper: a dizzying cadenza marked ‘passionate and violent’ which is a depiction of the rage and torment of the goddess Diana, the central character of the ballet. The essential element of Poulenc’s scenario is Diana’s flight (three times) into the woods to escape from the pain she feels (‘consumed with a burning passion’ but ‘sad and dejected’). After her final flight, her companions become ‘motionless with grief’. On a note printed in the score, Poulenc was at pains to downplay the choreographic elements of the work, stating that in concert performances it

should be called a ‘Concerto ... not Concerto chorégraphique’ and that ‘the choreographic explanations must on no account appear in concert programmes.’ Poulenc himself was the soloist in the private premiere, with an ensemble conducted by Vladimir Golschmann. A few months later, on 1 December 1929, Poulenc gave the first concert performance with Ernest Ansermet in Paris, and on 21 January 1930, the ballet version was presented in public for the first time, played by Poulenc with members of the Orchestre Straram conducted by Walter Straram at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées – this time with new choreography by George Balanchine (which Poulenc apparently did not like). On the two days either side of this performance, Poulenc and Straram recorded the work in the theatre for Columbia Records. Straram’s ensemble – specialists in twentieth-century repertoire – included the likes of Marcel Moyse as first flute and Louis Cahuzac as first clarinet, but despite expert advocacy, this impressive work never enjoyed the popular success of the Concert champêtre.

Le Bal masqué was another commission from Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles, for a concert they were planning for the spring of 1932, a private event to be held

in Hyères, where Noailles and his wife had built a magnificent modernist villa (designed by Robert Mallet-Stevens). By December 1931, Poulenc had decided on the texts he wanted to set: Surrealist poems by his friend Max Jacob, who was also a favourite of Marie-Laure de Noailles. At the ‘concert-spectacle’ itself, Poulenc was surrounded by prominent Surrealists and others: a photograph taken in Hyères shows him with the sculptor Alberto Giacometti, the film director Luis Buñuel, the composer Henri Sauguet and Christian Bérard, who designed the costumes for the first performance of *Le Bal masqué*. Described by Poulenc as a ‘secular cantata’, it was scored for baritone, piano, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, cornet, violin, cello and an array of percussion including whip, castanets and a whistle. At the private first performance on 20 April 1932, Poulenc himself played the piano, Roger Désormière conducted and Gilbert Moryn was the baritone soloist. Roger Nichols (*Poulenc: A Biography*, 2020) quotes Poulenc’s remarks in an interview with Claude Rostand: ‘I’d already written *Aubade* for the same patrons. The first time, I’d tried to move them; this time, I fully intended to entertain them.’ But as Nichols comments, part of the entertainment at the performance

itself ‘came from the mismatch between the posh and intellectual clientele, including aristos, musicians, surrealists and communists, and the low life so vividly resurrected in music and in [Jacob’s] words.’ Poulenc was particularly pleased with the way he evoked a ‘suburban’ atmosphere, ‘thanks to Max’s words ... and the instrumental ensemble I’ve used.’ He wanted listeners to be ‘stupefied and exhilarated, like people getting off a merry-go-round’. The music combines simple, popular melodies with deliberately disconcerting harmonies, and what Poulenc himself described as ‘implacable rhythms’. He regarded the work highly, calling it ‘one hundred per cent Poulenc.’

Poulenc was always drawn to wind instruments and the bulk of his chamber works are for wind rather than strings (though there are single sonatas for violin and cello, several other string chamber pieces were destroyed). The **Sextet** for piano, flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon was first performed in its original version at an all-Poulenc concert in the Salle Chopin in Paris on 19 June 1931, described by René Chalupt in the *Chesterian* magazine as one of two ‘very intelligent and lovely’ new compositions heard that evening. But

Poulenc was not happy with the Sextet and reworked it several times during the 1930s before arriving at its definitive form in 1939. On 29 August 1939, he wrote to Marie-Blanche de Polignac to tell her that he had 'thoroughly revised my entire Sextet (now very good).' The result of a decade of reflection and rewriting is certainly impressive, but the Sextet had always been a work over which Poulenc took trouble: soon after the first performance in 1931, he said that it had been composed 'slowly'. Since there are no surviving manuscripts, we have no idea what the 1931 original version sounded like, but the 1939 revision of the Sextet is Poulenc's most imposing chamber work. From the start, the music is notable for its muscularity and seriousness of purpose, though the central *Divertissement* provides an oasis of Mozartian repose. After a wild *Prestissimo*, the finale closes with an epilogue of great stillness and solemnity – it has an almost Stravinskian severity, but is softened by Poulenc's emollient harmonic language. The first performance of the Sextet in its final form took place during the early months of the Nazi Occupation of Paris, on 9 December 1940, at the concert given by the Association de musique contemporaine, with Poulenc at the piano

and the Quintette à vent de Paris. Poulenc kept the manuscript to himself during the war years and eventually sent it to Wilhelm Hansen in Copenhagen for publication in 1945. This brought to an end what Carl B. Schmidt in his biography of Poulenc described as 'one of the most complicated compositional sagas in Poulenc's career.' Poulenc made no record of the Sextet with the original French players, but in March 1960 he recorded it with the Philadelphia Wind Quintet during one of his last visits to the United States.

In April 1956, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. commissioned Poulenc to write a work in memory of Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, a tireless patron of new chamber music who had died in 1953. She had commissioned music from Ravel, Bartók, Britten, Copland, Stravinsky and Schönberg (among others), and endowed the auditorium that bears her name at the Library of Congress, where chamber music is performed to this day. Originally Poulenc had been asked for a new piece for two pianos, but he had another idea. He wanted to write something for the flautist Jean-Pierre Rampal and the Coolidge commission was the ideal opportunity to do so. The result was the **Flute Sonata**, which the composer himself described as 'simple but subtle', adding that its plangent



harmonies reminded him of the music for Sister Constance in his opera *Dialogues des Carmélites*. The first performance was given by Rampal and Poulenc at the Strasbourg Festival on 18 June 1957. The day before the premiere, Rampal and Poulenc gave a private performance for an audience of one: the great pianist Arthur Rubinstein was unable to stay for the concert, but instead he heard the work sitting alone in the front row of the hall. Rampal gave the American premiere, in the Coolidge Auditorium of the Library of Congress on 14 February 1958, with Robert Veyron-Lacroix at the piano.

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Mark Bebbington (piano)

Mark Bebbington is fast gaining a reputation as one of today's most strikingly individual British pianists. His thirty discs of British music for Somm have met with international acclaim and notably, his recent cycles of Frank Bridge, John Ireland and Vaughan Williams have attracted nine consecutive sets of five-star reviews in *BBC Music Magazine*.

Over recent seasons, Mark has toured extensively throughout Central and Northern Europe, the Far East and North America and has performed at major UK venues with the London Philharmonic, Philharmonia and Royal Philharmonic orchestras and the London Mozart Players. As a recitalist, he makes regular appearances at major UK and international festivals.

Recently, Mark made his highly successful Carnegie Hall debut with Leon Botstein and the American Symphony Orchestra in the US premiere of Richard Strauss's *Parergon*.

Upcoming projects include continuing releases for the Resonus and Somm labels, performances with the South Florida Symphony and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras during 2021/22 and appearances at major Concert Series and Festivals both in the UK and throughout Europe.

www.markbebbington.co.uk



Jan Latham-Koenig (conductor)

Jan Latham-Koenig was born in 1953 in England. He was educated at the Royal College of Music in London, where he won numerous prizes as conductor and pianist. Since 1981 he has concentrated on conducting, and conducted most of the major English orchestras, including the Royal Philharmonic, the London Philharmonic, and all the BBC ensembles as well as his own Koenig Ensemble, which he founded in 1976. Jan Latham-Koenig is frequently employed as guest conductor by leading international orchestras all over the world. His great interest in opera has taken him to the Vienna State Opera, the English National Opera, the Bavarian State Opera, La Fenice (Venice), Deutsche Oper, Berlin, the opera in Verona, the Danish Royal Theatre, and to the opera in Rome, where he was appointed Principal Guest Conductor. To this may be added opera festivals and radio transmissions for the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, West Deutsche Rundfunk and others. Jan Latham-Koenig's recordings include a Weill cycle comprising, *Mahagonny*, *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren*, *Der Lindberghflug*, *Magna Carta*, *Der Silbersee*, *Happy End* and *Der Kuhhandel*;

William Walton's violin and viola concertos; Donizetti's *Poliuto* and *Elisabetta al castello de Kenilworth*; Catalani's *Dejanice*; Henze's *La cubana*; and Leoncavallo's *La Bohème*.

Roderick Williams (baritone)

Roderick Williams is one of the most sought after baritones of his generation. He performs a wide repertoire from baroque to contemporary music, in the opera house, on the concert platform and is in demand as a recitalist worldwide.

He enjoys relationships with all the major UK opera houses and has sung opera world premieres by David Sawer, Sally Beamish, Michael van der Aa, Robert Saxton and Alexander Knaifel. Recent and future engagements include the title role in *Eugene Onegin* for Garsington, the title role in *Billy Budd* with Opera North, Papageno for Covent Garden, and productions with Cologne Opera, English National Opera and Netherlands Opera.

Roderick sings regularly with all the BBC orchestras and all the major UK orchestras, as well as the Berlin, London and New York Philharmonic Orchestras, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France,

Ensemble Orchestral de Paris, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, Cincinnati Symphony, London Symphony and Bach Collegium Japan amongst others. His many festival appearances include the BBC Proms (including the Last Night in 2014), Edinburgh, Cheltenham, Bath, Aldeburgh and Melbourne Festivals.

Roderick Williams has an extensive discography. He is a composer and has had works premiered at the Wigmore and Barbican Halls, the Purcell Room and live on national radio. In December 2016 he won the prize for best choral composition at the British Composer Awards.

In 2015 he started a three year odyssey of the Schubert song cycles culminating in performances at the Wigmore Hall in the 2017/18 season and has subsequently recorded them for Chandos.

He was Artistic Director of Leeds Lieder in April 2016, is Artist in Residence for the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra from 2020/21 for two seasons and won the RPS Singer of the Year award in May 2016. He was awarded an OBE in June 2017.

Emer McDonough (flute)

Emer McDonough is principal flute of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra,

Britten Sinfonia and is also the flute player for the Haffner Wind Ensemble. She was previously principal flute of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra. Emer has performed, recorded and toured extensively with these and many other orchestras including Opera de Lyon, the Hallé, London Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic and many others.

Emer's solo work has included the British premiere of the Christopher Rouse Concerto with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and concertos with Britten Sinfonia, RPO, BSO, HKPO and National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland.

Also an enthusiastic teacher, Emer is a professor at The Royal College of Music and has also given masterclasses at the Royal Northern College of Music, Royal Academy of Music, The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Royal Irish Academy of Music and the Oxford Flute Summer School. Emer was born and raised in Dublin. She received her education through the Irish language and studied flute, recorder and piano at The Royal Irish Academy of Music with the inspirational Doris Keogh. Later Emer was privileged to learn with Peter Lloyd at the Royal Northern College of music.

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

For more than seven decades the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) has been at the forefront of music-making in the UK. Its home base since 2004 at London's Cadogan Hall serves as a springboard for seven principal residencies as well as more than forty-five concerts per year in long-term partnership venues across the country, often in areas where access to live orchestral music is very limited. In London, the Orchestra's regular performances at Cadogan Hall are complemented by a distinguished series at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall and a hugely popular series at the Royal Albert Hall. With a wider reach than any other UK large ensemble, the RPO has truly become Britain's national orchestra.

Alongside its concert series, the RPO embraces twenty-first-century opportunities, including appearances with pop stars and on video game, film and television soundtracks, whilst its artistic priority remains paramount: the making of great music at the highest level for the widest possible audience. This would have been lauded by its Founder and first conductor, Sir Thomas Beecham, who set up the RPO in 1946, leading a vital revival in the UK's

orchestral life after World War II. Since then, the Orchestra's principal conductors have included Rudolf Kempe, Antal Doráti, Walter Weller, André Previn, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Yuri Temirkanov, Daniele Gatti and Charles Dutoit.

The RPO's commitment to working with the finest conductors continues and in July 2018, the RPO announced Vasily Petrenko as the Orchestra's new Music Director, assuming the title of Music Director Designate in August 2020 prior to commencing the full role in August 2021. Vasily Petrenko joins the RPO's roster of titled conductors which includes Pinchas Zukerman (Principal Guest Conductor), Alexander Shelley (Principal Associate Conductor) and Grzegorz Nowak (Permanent Associate Conductor).

The Orchestra maintains a busy schedule of prestigious international touring throughout Europe, the Far East and the USA. It appears regularly at major festivals, including, most recently, events in Poland, Austria and Italy.

As the RPO proudly looks to its future, its versatility and high standards mark it out as one of today's most open-minded, forward-thinking symphony orchestras.

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