



resonus



Francis Poulenc

Les œuvres de sa jeunesse

Sam Alexander, Soraya Mafi,
Julien Van Mellaerts, Lawrence Zazzo
MANCHESTER CAMERATA
John Andrews conductor

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

Les œuvres de sa jeunesse

Soraya Mafi *soprano*
Julien Van Mellaerts *baritone*
Lawrence Zazzo *countertenor*
Sam Alexander *actor*
Manchester Camerata

John Andrews *conductor*

Cocardes, FP 16b

- | | |
|---------------------|--------|
| 1. Miel de Narbonne | [2:38] |
| 2. Bonne d'Enfant | [1:36] |
| 3. Enfant de troupe | [2:32] |

Le Bestiaire, FP 15b

- | | |
|------------------------|--------|
| 4. Le Dromadaire | [1:22] |
| 5. La Chèvre du Thibet | [0:43] |
| 6. La Sauterelle | [0:27] |
| 7. Le Dauphin | [0:33] |
| 8. L'Ecrevisse | [0:44] |
| 9. La Carpe | [1:18] |

Le Gendarme Incompris, FP 20

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| 10. Overture | [3:43] |
| 11. Scène I | [1:03] |
| 12. Scène II | [7:14] |
| 13. Impromptu de Monsieur Médor | [0:45] |
| 14. Duo | [2:23] |
| 15. Duo | [2:26] |
| 16. Scène III | [0:39] |
| 17. Madrigal | [2:07] |
| 18. Scène IV (Final – Danse) | [2:40] |

Trois mouvements perpétuels, FP 14b

- | | |
|------------------|--------|
| 19. Assez modéré | [1:29] |
| 20. Très modéré | [1:45] |
| 21. Alerte | [3:41] |

Quatre poèmes de Max Jacob, FP 22

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 22. Est-il un coin plus solitaire... | [2:56] |
| 23. C'est pour aller au bal | [1:07] |
| 24. Poète et Ténor | [2:29] |
| 25. Dans le buisson de mimosa | [1:05] |

Suite Française d'après Claude Gervaise, FP 80a

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| 26. Bransle de Bourgogne | [1:26] |
| 27. Pavane | [2:37] |
| 28. Petite marche militaire | [1:09] |
| 29. Complainte | [1:37] |
| 30. Bransle de Champagne | [2:06] |
| 31. Sicilienne | [2:03] |
| 32. Carillon | [1:54] |

Total playing time [62:31]



Francis Poulenc (Library of Congress)

Francis Poulenc: Les œuvres de sa jeunesse

'My outlook is too concrete to believe in speculations of the mind alone outside the religious faith which is instinctive and hereditary in me. As to my aesthetic, I have no preconceived idea. I compose as seems best to me when the wish takes me.'

(Francis Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*)

Although famously born with a 'plentitude of silver spoons' (Mellers: *Poulenc*), Poulenc's final years as a teenager cannot have felt terribly privileged at the time. However much Parisian society stubbornly ignored it, the trenches of the First World War were less than a hundred miles away and eligibility for military service was fast approaching. Born in 1899 to wealthy parents Poulenc had, at their insistence, completed a formal education prior to any serious musical training before a series of blows fell. In 1915 his mother, profoundly cultured, intellectually curious, religiously freethinking, and a huge influence on his artistic and creative development had died. His father followed in 1917. The premiere of his first mature work, *Rhapsodie Nègre* brought some much-needed attention, but in 1918, he was drafted into the army in what was to be the last year of the war.

Although Poulenc was yet to find himself

an actual composition teacher (he would try unsuccessfully many times), his mother had arranged piano lessons with Ricardo Viñes. A noted exponent of the eighteenth-century repertoire, Viñes had also given premieres of Ravel, Debussy, and Satie. Introducing the last of these to the young Poulenc proved to be a huge influence, which only deepened when the student saw the premiere of Satie's *Parade* in 1917. Here seemed a way of sidestepping not only the emotionally overwrought excesses of German Romanticism, but also the overt sensuality of the Impressionists, a French tradition 'of whom grace, elegance, humour, lightness of touch and sense of proportion are all key ingredients.' (Nichols: *Poulenc, a biography*)

It has been argued that the demands of his military duties encouraged Poulenc to focus on smaller musical forms though it is hard not to think that his musical personality would have found this path naturally. What is surprising though, is that the graceful and sunny miniature, **Mouvements Perpetuelles** should have emerged from a period of depression, with military drudgery compounded by a brief falling-out with Satie. Originally for piano, they were first performed by Viñes at the end of 1918. The title refers to the manner in which each of the three movements ends without a

definite resolution. Crystalline and elegant, they were deliberately written with the widest range of performers in mind. Such was their enduring popularity that they remain one of his most performed pieces, and Poulenc made the version for nine instruments in 1925, adding another layer of delicate colour.

At the same time as the *Mouvements*, Poulenc was also at work on **Le Bestiaire, ou le Cortège d'Orphée**, based on Apollinaire's thirty poetic quatrains. It was originally planned to be performed with matching pictures by Picasso, but in the end, it was Raoul Dufy who provided the famous, vivid woodcuts. It's no exaggeration to say that Poulenc was obsessed with Apollinaire. Hearing the poet speak, shortly before his death that year, left a lasting impression: 'I believe it is essential to a composer who does not want to betray his poet. The timbre of Apollinaire's voice is like that of his works, melancholy and joyful at the same time. This is why my Apollinaire Songs must be sung without emphasising the ludicrousness of certain phrases.' This attention not merely to the natural and elegant intonation of speech in general, but to the poet's own personal diction is evident throughout his setting. Poulenc originally wrote twelve movements but

published only six in the glorious miniature cycle we have today. Unlike the *Mouvements Perpetuelles*, it was the instrumental version which was conceived first, for the highly unusual combination of voice, flute, clarinet, bassoon, two violins, viola and cello. Sadly, this hugely individual sound-world is rarely heard now, eclipsed by the latter version for voice and piano.

If *Le Bestiaire* represents crisp, clear pictures represented in music, then the **Cocardes** feel more like fleeting memories given musical form. Written in the first half of 1919, in a quite calculated evasion of the Wagnerian tradition, the cycle pairs metaphysical chastity with physical sensuality (Mellers), a hallmark of Poulenc's style and musical personality to the end of his life. It also marked his first collaboration with the poet, playwright and polymath, Jean Cocteau. Cocteau would go on to be the 'friend and our brilliant spokesman' of the composers who would become known as Les six. Again, Poulenc's commitment to capturing the cadence of the poet's own voice can be seen in his letter of August 1919:

My dear Jean,
Cocardes, piano and voice version is finished. Ouff! I was terrified of upsetting the balance at the very last moment. Thank heavens this did not happen.

I hope you will not be disappointed. I found a phrase of great gentleness for 'uniforme bleu' – is it all right?

He was immensely proud of the work, despite a later doubt that he had 'filled it with too many intentions, as I wrote it in the midst of the very people synthetically portrayed in it.' This last reference is tantalising as Cocteau's deliberately dreamlike evocations of fading childhood memories seem the very antithesis of 'synthetic portrayal.' Poulenc claimed that the scoring of voice, violin, cornet, trombone and two percussionists was influenced by Stravinsky (perhaps *Ragtime*) and it bestows a fairground quality on proceedings. Alas, it is now heard almost exclusively in the subsequent version for voice and piano. Like *Le Bestiaire*, Poulenc insisted that 'this cycle must be sung without irony. The crucial thing is to believe in the words which fly like a bird, from one branch to another.' The essence of Poulenc's ability to be both deeply moving and elegantly wry simultaneously, without either compromising the other.

'Doubtless our past always takes on magic colours, yet I don't think I'm misleading you when I say that the first visit to Max Jacob...is one of the dearest memories of my life.'
(Poulenc: *My Friends and Myself*)

Before he and Cocteau would collaborate again on **Le Gendarme Incompris**, in 1920, Poulenc set to work on a cycle of songs by the poet and painter Max Jacob. Jacob had been born in Brittany in 1876 and moved to Paris where he had quickly befriended Picasso. Born Jewish, Jacob had converted to Catholicism after a series of religious visions in 1909 (he would later voluntarily don the yellow star during the Nazi occupation). It is no surprise that Poulenc found him a kindred spirit. His combination of worldly wit and devout mysticism made a deep impression that would bring the two men even closer together after Poulenc's subsequent religious reawakening. And yet their first collaboration was not, at least in Poulenc's eyes, a success. Soliciting unpublished verses from Jacob, Poulenc set to work in 1920 scoring them for the colourful combination of voice and wind quintet. Although they were encoored at their premiere in January 1922 (the only performance in the composer's lifetime), Poulenc quickly turned against them, dismissing them as 'adrift in polytonality.' His attempts to destroy the manuscript were thwarted by Milhaud's widow and the score resurfaced in 1993. A modern audience will likely come to a rather different conclusion about the **Quatre Poèmes de Max Jacob** from the Poulenc of 1923. Certainly, the four poems eschew

the clear diatonic lines, narrow vocal ranges and clear prosody of Poulenc's other settings. The baritone is often in his extreme upper range and the tonality is more distorted than usual for Poulenc. However, these are surely an understandable and deeply musical reaction to the experimental nature of Jacob's Cubist poetry, with words being broken up, re-ordered and moved around both for comic effect and for sheer enjoyment of the sounds. If Poulenc remained unconvinced, we can be grateful that he made amends to Jacob with the *Bal masqué*, and a decade later with the *Cinq Poèmes de Max Jacob*, which better satisfied both its creator and posterity.

Le Gendarme Incompris also suffered obscurity after its first run. Whilst this is understandable from the circumstances of its conception and performance, its sheer vivacity and musical inventiveness surely deserved better. Billed as a one-act farce by Raymond Radiguet and Cocteau with a series of musical numbers by Poulenc, it was first performed in May 1921 at the Théâtre Michel as one of five(!) shows that evening. It is an extended burlesque on Stéphane Mallarmé's poem *L'Ecclesiastique*. In the original poem, a priest is discovered in woodland in an auto-erotic ecstasy. The wry humour

emerging from the disjunction of the perfumed eroticism of the symbolist verse and the tawdry act.

Cocteau and Radiguet's joke-built-on-a-joke was to dramatize the scene where the policeman (an actor speaking entirely in Mallarmé's – uncredited – verse) brings the priest (counter-tenor) back to the police station for questioning by the inspector (baritone). The priest is then revealed to be a Marquise in disguise. The joke that overblown poetry has become indistinguishable from a beat copper's bureaucratise fell flat as nobody in the audience or press appears to have recognised the original poem. After a desultory run the piece was never performed again. Poulenc made a suite which had some performances that summer ('there was a lot of booing' he wrote to Cocteau), but whilst the text was published, the full score remained lost until rediscovered by Daniel Swift in 1971 revealing a work of wonderful spirit, humour and musical wit.

The **Suite Française** dates from a decade later, and like the *Cocardes* and *Le Bestiaire* is now far-better known in its piano solo incarnation, but it began life as incidental music for Édouard Bourdet's play *La Reine Margot*, on the same subject as the Dumas

novel and several subsequent films. Georges Auric wrote the music for Act One and Poulenc supplied seven movements for Act Two. On Nadia Boulanger's advice he arranged the numbers from Claude Gervaise's sixteenth-century *Livre de danceries*. This approach falls squarely in line with Stravinsky's *Pucinella* and Warlock's *Capriol Suite*, but in Poulenc's case the brashness of the orchestration for oboes, bassoons, trumpets, trombones, percussion and harpsichord, is in contrast to a fairly faithful reproduction of the original harmonies.

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Manchester Camerata

First Violin

Caroline Pether

Second Violin

Gemma Bass

Viola

Alex Mitchell

Cello

Hannah Roberts

Double Bass

Diane Clark

Flute

Sarah Whewell

Oboe

Rachael Clegg

David Benfield

Clarinete

Fiona Cross

Bassoon

Ben Hudson

Rachel Whibley

Horn

Naomi Atherton

Trumpet

Peter Mainwaring

Graham South

Trombone

Chris Jones

Jack Rowlands

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Percussion

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Harpichord

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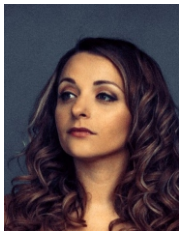
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Manchester Camerata believes in the transformative power of music and wants to share these moments with you.

Soraya Mafi (soprano)



Soraya Mafi studied at the Royal Northern College of Music and the Royal College of Music. A former English National Opera Harewood Artist she won the 2014 Maggie Teyte Prize and the 2016 Susan Chilcott Award.

Career highlights include Tytania *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Glyndebourne Festival and Opéra de Rouen), Susanna and Gilda *Rigoletto* (Seattle Opera), Ismene *Mitridate, re di Ponto* and *Nettuno e Polissena* (Garsington Opera), Musetta *La bohème*, and Despina *Così fan tutte* (English National Opera), Gretel *Hänsel und Gretel* (Grange Park Opera).

In concert, Soraya has performed with many of the finest conductors and orchestras. She has a fast-growing discography that includes Lucy in Menotti's *The Telephone* (Edinburgh International Festival) for Linn Records.

Lawrence Zazzo (countertenor)



American countertenor Lawrence Zazzo studied English and Music at Yale University, King's College, Cambridge, and the Royal College of Music. He has appeared at the Royal Opera Covent Garden, the Metropolitan Opera,

Opera de Paris, Salzburg Festival, Vienna State Opera, Opernhaus Zurich, Staatsoper Berlin, Bayerische Staatsoper Munich, Teatro Real Madrid, La Monnaie Brussels, Canadian Opera Company and Glyndebourne.

His recordings include operas and oratorios (*Giulio Cesare, Rodelinda, Rinaldo, Serse, Partenope, Riccardo Primo, Saul, Samson, Semele, Deborah, Athalia and Messiah, Apollo et Hyacinthus, Mitridate, Hojoki*) and solo recordings (*Handel Uncaged, Byrdland, Lunarcy, A Royal Trio, Baroque Gender Stories, Weeping Philosophers*).

Julien van Mellaerts (baritone)



Winner of the Maureen Forrester Prize and the German Lied Award at Concours Musical International de Montréal, Winner of the Wigmore Hall / Kohn Foundation International Song Competition and the

Kathleen Ferrier Awards, Julien Van Mellaerts represented New Zealand at Cardiff Singer of the World. Recital appearances include Wigmore Hall, London, Salle Cortot, Paris, Pierre Boulez Saal, Berlin, Chamber Music New Zealand and LIFE Victoria. Operatic engagements include Salzburg Mozart Week, Opéra national de Lorraine, Göttingen Festival, Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe, Israeli Opera, New Zealand Opera and Verbier Festival. He sings Samuel Barber's *Dover Beach* on Resonus Classics' *Samuel Barber: The Complete Songs*.

Sam Alexander (actor)



Sam studied French and Drama at the University of Bristol. Having spent a few summers performing street-theatre in festivals and campsites in Brittany (with, among others, future mezzo-soprano Isabelle Druet) he went to LAMDA.

Since graduating in 2004 he has worked extensively on stage and screen. Notable roles include: Dromio of Syracuse in *The Comedy of Errors* (Shakespeare's Globe); the King of Navarre in *Love's Labour's Lost* (Royal Shakespeare Company); Stanley Stubbers in *One Man Two Guvnors* (National Theatre at the Theatre Royal Haymarket); and Teddy in *The Homecoming* (Theatre Royal Bath). He plays the lead role in *The Murder Retrial* on Channel 4 (broadcast spring 2024).



John Andrews (conductor)

Born in Nairobi and brought up in Manchester, John Andrews graduated from Cambridge University with a doctorate in music and history. He won the Orchestra Prize at the Bela Bartok international Opera Conducting Competition and the Leonard Ingrams Memorial Prize from Garsington Opera. With a special affinity for Italian bel canto and English baroque, he has conducted over forty operas with companies including Garsington Opera, the Grange Festival, Buxton Festival, Opera Holland Park, English Touring Opera, Opera de Baugé and the Volkstheater Rostock in Germany.

An exponent of neglected English music, he is Artistic Director of Red Squirrel Opera. He has recorded works by Sir Arthur Sullivan including *The Light of the World* and *Haddon Hall*, and *The Judgement of Paris* (Arne). His recordings of Arnold's *The Dancing Master* with the BBC Concert Orchestra and Lampe's *The Dragon of Wantley* for Resonus Classics both won the BBC Music Magazine Opera Award in 2021 and 2023 respectively. Andrew's major recording of Ethel Smyth's opera *Der Wald* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra received a Presto Music Award in 2023. He is Principal Guest Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra, and Conductor-in-Association with the English Symphony Orchestra.

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'[...] a cast that does Smyth's music full justice.'
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