

# Title

Crystal Mandal

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## Question 1

Unfortunately for Graham Johnson, I find very little to like in these programme notes. If we are to number and label the sentences ("first", "second", ..., "last") in order, of the six total sentences only the third, fourth, and fifth sentences border on utility as programme notes. In fact, in a bizarre stylistic choice that mimics Johnson's own description of the text - "sheer insouciant nonsense, quasi-surrealist" - the first and last sentences of the full note are only barely intelligible. Who does it serve to introduce such a delightful and "silly song" - in Johnson's own words a "popular hit" - with such densely structured and obscure language that I can hardly tell if Johnson himself even *likes* this song?

Within such a labyrinthine programme note is hidden minimal context: the publication date, a hint of lyric and musical description ("silly song", "words are sheer whimsy"), and a rigorous explanation of the narrative. Subtracting these brief and illuminating comments, I'm not sure the rest of the paragraph fulfills any requirements of an insightful programme note other than reaching a particular word count.

## Question 2

This is a beautiful song that, like much of Poulenc's mélodie, moves me Unfortunately very little. Most of my thoughts deal with the poem. Pardon the informality, but *HOW IN THE WORLD DOES A COMPOSER SET (is the word ergodic?) A POEM LIKE THIS?* I don't know if I think that the music can ever properly depict this beautiful layout and the imagery implicated by it. I'm also sure the allusion to the cornflower as noted in *A French Song Companion*<sup>1</sup> is lost on me. Also interesting to note is the subject of the World War One soldier of the original poem and the implied subject of World War Two soldier in Poulenc's setting (Poulenc's piece is from 1939, the start of WWII). Why is it that Poulenc's only musical contribution to the higher ("younger"?) "male" voice is the song of and for a dying young man sent of to war?

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1. Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes, *A French Song Companion* (Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP: Oxford University Press, 2000), 375.

## Question 3

I think this is the first set of pieces where I, as a pianist, can say that I've heard Poulenc in them. Poulenc's style on the piano is very distinct, playful, dramatic, and virtuosic. There's also a healthy nostalgia for French Romantic music in his writing, and it usually shows in the textures, melodies, and harmonic structures in his piano works. Unfortunately, I disagree with Kimball's assertion that "the piano shares equal role with voice in any Poulenc song". Many of the Poulenc songs we've so far listened to in class have been beautiful, but none of them as much as these three have so far treated the piano with the respect and experience that, in my opinion, Poulenc treats the piano soloist or the orchestral pianist. In this cycle, I'm most excited about the second and third pieces. The second piece starts with a beautifully ornamented and voiced opening with solo piano. The heavy ornamentation and counterpoint continue under the voice, with the voice frequently doubling the primary melody. The song is quite reminiscent of Schumann's *Kreisleriana* Op. 16, specifically the fourth movement. The last movement is also quite notable. "Paganini" refers, of course, to the great violinist Niccoló Paganini, but also calls into conversation the great body of Romantic Piano work that imitates Paganini. The wide leaps, quick figuration, and intensely harmonic (with very smooth voice leading, if one ignores octaves) motion is all very idiomatic both of Paganini and all the work that references his distinct style.

## Question 4

- Biography<sup>2</sup>
  - Dates: 16 September 1887 – 22 October 1979
  - Composition Dates:
    - \* Cut short by sister's death
    - \* Lili's death: 1918
    - \* Last published work of Nadia: 1922, 5 Songs after Camille Mauclair
- Components of Style
  - Beautiful, lyrical melodies
  - If Lili is the portrait of the French Radical composer, Nadia reflects a more conservative outlook
  - Simple, but not uninteresting piano parts
  - Piano in almost exclusively "accompaniment" parts, made interesting texturally by full use of range and an intimate understanding of voicing for the instrument
  - Long, moving phrases with lots of functional harmony and deceptive or otherwise "sidestepped" cadences (similar in style to Ravel's slower work. compare the "Cantique" and Ravel's Piano Concerto in G, 2nd mvt.

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2. Johnson and Stokes, *A French Song Companion*, 45–46.