

= Francis Poulenc =

Francis Jean Marcel Poulenc (French : [fʁɑ̃sʁ maʁsɔl pulɑ̃ pʁɑ̃s] ; 7 January 1899 ? 30 January 1963) was a French composer and pianist . His compositions include mélodies , solo piano works , chamber music , choral pieces , operas , ballets , and orchestral concert music . Among the best @-@ known are the piano suite Trois mouvements perpétuels (1919) , the ballet Les biches (1923) , the Concert champêtre (1928) for harpsichord and orchestra , the opera Dialogues des Carmélites (1957) , and the Gloria (1959) for soprano , choir and orchestra .

His wealthy family intended Poulenc for a business career and did not allow him to enrol at a music college . Largely self @-@ educated musically , he studied with the pianist Ricardo Viñes , who became his mentor after the composer 's parents died . Poulenc soon came under the influence of Erik Satie , under whose tutelage he became one of a group of young composers known collectively as Les Six . In his early works Poulenc became known for his high spirits and irreverence . During the 1930s a much more serious side to his nature emerged , particularly in the religious music he composed from 1936 onwards , which he alternated with his more light @-@ hearted works .

In addition to composing , Poulenc was an accomplished pianist . He was particularly celebrated for his performing partnerships with the baritone Pierre Bernac (who also advised him in vocal writing) and the soprano Denise Duval , touring in Europe and America with each , and making many recordings . He was among the first composers to see the importance of the gramophone , and he recorded extensively from 1928 onwards .

In his later years , and for decades after his death , Poulenc had a reputation , particularly in his native country , as a humorous , lightweight composer , and his religious music was often overlooked . During the 21st century more attention has been given to his serious works , with many new productions of Dialogues des Carmélites and La Voix humaine worldwide , and numerous live and recorded performances of his songs and choral music .

= = Life = =

= = = Early years = = =

Poulenc was born in the 8th arrondissement of Paris , the younger child and only son of Émile Poulenc and his wife , Jenny , née Royer . Poulenc senior was joint owner of the Établissements Poulenc Frères , a successful manufacturer of pharmaceuticals (later Rhône @-@ Poulenc) . He was a member of a pious Roman Catholic family from Espalion in the département of Aveyron . Jenny Poulenc was from a Parisian family with wide artistic interests . In Poulenc 's view , the two sides of his nature grew out of this background : a deep religious faith from his father 's family and a worldly and artistic side from his mother 's . The critic Claude Rostand later described Poulenc as " half monk and half naughty boy " .

Poulenc grew up in a musical household ; his mother was a capable pianist , with a wide repertoire ranging from classical to less elevated works that gave him a lifelong taste for what he called " adorable bad music " . He took piano lessons from the age of five ; when he was eight he first heard the music of Debussy and was fascinated by the originality of the sound . Other composers whose works influenced his development were Schubert and Stravinsky : the former 's Winterreise and the latter 's The Rite of Spring made a deep impression on him . At his father 's insistence , Poulenc followed a conventional school career , studying at the Lycée Condorcet in Paris rather than at a music conservatory .

In 1916 a childhood friend , Raymonde Linossier (1897 ? 1930) , introduced Poulenc to Adrienne Monnier 's bookshop , the Maison des Amis des Livres . There he met the avant @-@ garde poets Guillaume Apollinaire , Max Jacob , Paul Éluard and Louis Aragon . He later set many of their poems to music . In the same year he became the pupil of the pianist Ricardo Viñes . The biographer Henri Hell comments that Viñes 's influence on his pupil was profound , both as to pianistic technique and the style of Poulenc 's keyboard works . Poulenc later said of Viñes :

He was a most delightful man , a bizarre hidalgo with enormous moustachios , a flat @-@ brimmed sombrero in the purest Spanish style , and button boots which he used to rap my shins when I didn 't change the pedalling enough I admired him madly , because , at this time , in 1914 , he was the only virtuoso who played Debussy and Ravel . That meeting with Viñes was paramount in my life : I owe him everything ... In reality it is to Viñes that I owe my fledgling efforts in music and everything I know about the piano .

When Poulenc was sixteen his mother died ; his father died two years later . Viñes became more than a teacher : he was , in the words of Myriam Chimènes in the Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians , the young man 's " spiritual mentor " . He encouraged his pupil to compose , and he later gave the premieres of three early Poulenc works . Through him Poulenc became friendly with two composers who helped shape his early development : Georges Auric and Erik Satie .

Auric , who was the same age as Poulenc , was an early developer musically ; by the time the two met , Auric 's music had already been performed at important Parisian concert venues . The two young composers shared a similar musical outlook and enthusiasms , and for the rest of Poulenc 's life Auric was his most trusted friend and guide . Poulenc called him " my true brother in spirit " . Satie , an eccentric figure , isolated from the mainstream French musical establishment , was a mentor to several rising young composers , including Auric , Louis Durey and Arthur Honegger . After initially dismissing Poulenc as a bourgeois amateur , he relented and admitted him to the circle of protégés , whom he called " Les Nouveaux Jeunes " . Poulenc described Satie 's influence on him as " immediate and wide , on both the spiritual and musical planes " . The pianist Alfred Cortot commented that Poulenc 's *Trois mouvements perpétuels* were " reflections of the ironical outlook of Satie adapted to the sensitive standards of the current intellectual circles " .

= = = First compositions and Les Six = = =

Poulenc made his début as a composer in 1917 with his *Rapsodie nègre* , a ten @-@ minute , five @-@ movement piece for baritone and chamber group ; it was dedicated to Satie and premiered at one of a series of concerts of new music run by the singer Jane Bathori . There was a fashion for African arts in Paris at the time , and Poulenc was delighted to run across some published verses purportedly Liberian , but full of Parisian boulevard slang . He used one of the poems in two sections of the rhapsody . The baritone engaged for the first performance lost his nerve on the platform , and the composer , though no singer , jumped in . This jeu d 'esprit was the first of many examples of what Anglophone critics came to call " leg @-@ Poulenc " . Ravel was amused by the piece and commented on Poulenc 's ability to invent his own folklore . Stravinsky was impressed enough to use his influence to secure Poulenc a contract with a publisher , a kindness that Poulenc never forgot .

In 1917 Poulenc got to know Ravel well enough to have serious discussions with him about music . He was dismayed by Ravel 's judgments , which exalted composers whom Poulenc thought little of above those he greatly admired . He told Satie of this unhappy encounter ; Satie replied with a dismissive epithet for Ravel who , he said , talked " a load of rubbish " . For many years Poulenc was equivocal about Ravel 's music , though always respecting him as a man . Ravel 's modesty about his own music particularly appealed to Poulenc , who sought throughout his life to follow Ravel 's example .

From January 1918 to January 1921 Poulenc was a conscript in the French army in the last months of the First World War and the immediate post @-@ war period . Between July and October 1918 he served at the Franco @-@ German front , after which he was given a series of auxiliary posts , ending as a typist at the Ministry of Aviation . His duties allowed him time for composition ; the *Trois mouvements perpétuels* for piano and the *Sonata for Piano Duet* were written at the piano of the local elementary school at Saint @-@ Martin @-@ sur @-@ le @-@ Pré , and he completed his first song cycle , *Le bestiaire* , setting poems by Apollinaire . The sonata did not create a deep public impression , but the song cycle made the composer 's name known in France , and the *Trois mouvements perpétuels* rapidly became an international success . The exigencies of music @-@ making in wartime taught Poulenc much about writing for whatever instruments were available ; then

, and later , some of his works were for unusual combinations of players .

At this stage in his career Poulenc was conscious of his lack of academic musical training ; the critic and biographer Jeremy Sams writes that it was the composer 's good luck that the public mood was turning against late @-@ romantic lushness in favour of the " freshness and insouciant charm " of his works , technically unsophisticated though they were . Four of Poulenc 's early works were premiered at the Salle Huyghens in Montparnasse , where between 1917 and 1920 the cellist Félix Delgrange presented concerts of music by young composers . Among them were Auric , Durey , Honegger , Darius Milhaud and Germaine Tailleferre , who , with Poulenc , became known collectively as " Les Six " . After one of their concerts , the critic Henri Collet published an article titled , " The Five Russians , the Six Frenchmen and Satie " . According to Milhaud :

In completely arbitrary fashion Collet chose the names of six composers , Auric , Durey , Honegger , Poulenc , Tailleferre and myself , for no other reason than that we knew each other , that we were friends and were represented in the same programmes , but without the slightest concern for our different attitudes and our different natures . Auric and Poulenc followed the ideas of Cocteau , Honegger was a product of German Romanticism and my leanings were towards a Mediterranean lyrical art ... Collet 's article made such a wide impression that the Groupe des Six had come into being .

Cocteau , though similar in age to Les Six , was something of a father @-@ figure to the group . His literary style , " paradoxical and lapidary " in Henri Hell 's phrase , was anti @-@ romantic , concise and irreverent . It greatly appealed to Poulenc , who made his first setting of Cocteau 's words in 1919 and his last in 1961 . When members of Les Six collaborated with each other , they contributed their own individual sections to the joint work . Their 1920 piano suite L 'Album des Six consists of six separate and unrelated pieces . Their 1921 ballet Les mariés de la tour Eiffel contains three sections by Milhaud , two apiece by Auric , Poulenc and Tailleferre , one by Honegger and none by Durey , who was already distancing himself from the group .

In the early 1920s Poulenc remained concerned at his lack of formal musical training . Satie was suspicious of music colleges , but Ravel advised Poulenc to take composition lessons ; Milhaud suggested the composer and teacher Charles Koechlin . Poulenc worked with him intermittently from 1921 to 1925 .

= = = 1920s : increasing fame = = =

From the early 1920s Poulenc was well received abroad , particularly in Britain , both as a performer and a composer . In 1921 Ernest Newman wrote in The Manchester Guardian , " I keep my eye on Francis Poulenc , a young man who has only just arrived at his twenties . He ought to develop into a farceur of the first order . " Newman said that he had rarely heard anything so deliciously absurd as parts of Poulenc 's song cycle Cocardes , with its accompaniment played by the unorthodox combination of cornet , trombone , violin and percussion . In 1922 Poulenc and Milhaud travelled to Vienna to meet Alban Berg , Anton Webern and Arnold Schönberg . Neither of the French composers was influenced by their Austrian colleagues ' revolutionary twelve tone system , but they admired the three as its leading proponents . The following year Poulenc received a commission from Serge Diaghilev for a full @-@ length ballet score . He decided that the theme would be a modern version of the classical French fête galante . This work , Les biches , was an immediate success , first in Monte Carlo in January 1924 and then in Paris in May , under the direction of André Messager ; it has remained one of Poulenc 's best @-@ known scores . Poulenc 's new celebrity after the success of the ballet was the unexpected cause of his estrangement from Satie : among the new friends Poulenc made was Louis Laloy , a writer whom Satie regarded with implacable enmity . Auric , who had just enjoyed a similar triumph with a Diaghilev ballet , Les Fâcheux , was also repudiated by Satie for becoming a friend of Laloy .

As the decade progressed , Poulenc produced a range of compositions , from songs to chamber music and another ballet , Aubade . Henri Hell suggests that Koechlin 's influence occasionally inhibited Poulenc 's natural simple style , and that Auric offered useful guidance to help him appear in his true colours . At a concert of music by the two friends in 1926 , Poulenc 's songs were sung for

the first time by the baritone Pierre Bernac , from whom , in Henri Hell 's phrase , " the name of Poulenc was soon to be inseparable . " Another performer with whom the composer came to be closely associated was the harpsichordist Wanda Landowska . He heard her as the soloist in Falla 's *El retablo de maese Pedro* (1923) , an early example of the use of a harpsichord in a modern work , and was immediately taken with the sound . At Landowska 's request he wrote a concerto , the *Concert champêtre* , which she premiered in 1929 with the *Orchestre Symphonique de Paris* conducted by Pierre Monteux .

The biographer Richard D E Burton comments that , in the late 1920s , Poulenc might have seemed to be in an enviable position : professionally successful and independently well @-@ off , having inherited a substantial fortune from his father . He bought a large country house , *Le Grande Coteau* , at Noizay , Indre @-@ et @-@ Loire , 140 miles (230 km) south @-@ west of Paris , where he retreated to compose in peaceful surroundings . Yet he was troubled , struggling to come to terms with his sexuality , which was predominantly gay . His first serious affair was with the painter Richard Chanlaire , to whom he sent a copy of the *Concert champêtre* score inscribed , " You have changed my life , you are the sunshine of my thirty years , a reason for living and working " . Nevertheless , while this affair was in progress Poulenc proposed marriage to his friend Raymonde Linossier . As she was not only well aware of his homosexuality but was also romantically attached elsewhere , she refused him , and their relationship became strained . He suffered the first of many periods of depression , which affected his ability to compose , and he was devastated in January 1930 , when Linossier died suddenly at the age of 32 . On her death he wrote , " All my youth departs with her , all that part of my life that belonged only to her . I sob ... I am now twenty years older " . His affair with Chanlaire petered out in 1931 , though they remained lifelong friends .

= = = 1930s : new seriousness = = =

At the start of the decade , Poulenc returned to writing songs , after a two @-@ year break from doing so . His " *Epitaphe* " , to a poem by Malherbe , was written in memory of Linossier , and is described by the pianist Graham Johnson as " a profound song in every sense " . The following year Poulenc wrote three sets of songs , to words by Apollinaire and Max Jacob , some of which were serious in tone , and others reminiscent of his earlier light @-@ hearted style , as were others of his works of the early 1930s . In 1932 his music was among the first to be broadcast on television , in a transmission by the BBC in which Reginald Kell and Gilbert Vinter played his *Sonata for Clarinet and Bassoon* . At about this time Poulenc began a relationship with Raymond Destouches , a chauffeur ; as with Chanlaire earlier , what began as a passionate affair changed into a deep and lasting friendship . Destouches , who married in the 1950s , remained close to Poulenc until the end of the composer 's life .

Two unrelated events in 1936 combined to inspire a reawakening of religious faith and a new depth of seriousness in Poulenc 's music . His fellow composer Pierre @-@ Octave Ferroud was killed in a car crash so violent that he was decapitated , and almost immediately afterwards , while on holiday , Poulenc visited the sanctuary of Rocamadour . He later explained :

A few days earlier I 'd just heard of the tragic death of my colleague ... As I meditated on the fragility of our human frame , I was drawn once more to the life of the spirit . Rocamadour had the effect of restoring me to the faith of my childhood . This sanctuary , undoubtedly the oldest in France ... had everything to captivate me ... The same evening of this visit to Rocamadour , I began my *Litanies à la Vierge noire* for female voices and organ . In that work I tried to get across the atmosphere of " peasant devotion " that had struck me so forcibly in that lofty chapel .

Other works that followed continued the composer 's new @-@ found seriousness , including many settings of Éluard 's surrealist and humanist poems . In 1937 he composed his first major liturgical work , the *Mass in G Major* for soprano and mixed choir a cappella , which has become the most frequently performed of all his sacred works . Poulenc 's new compositions were not all in this serious vein ; his incidental music to the play *La Reine Margot* , starring Yvonne Printemps , was pastiche 16th @-@ century dance music , and became popular under the title *Suite française* .

Music critics generally continued to define Poulenc by his light @-@ hearted works , and it was not until the 1950s that his serious side was widely recognised .

In 1936 Poulenc began giving frequent recitals with Bernac . At the École Normale in Paris they gave the premiere of Poulenc 's Cinq poèmes de Paul Éluard . They continued to perform together for more than twenty years , in Paris and internationally , until Bernac 's retirement in 1959 . Poulenc , who composed 90 songs for his collaborator , considered him one of the " three great meetings " of his professional career , the other two being Éluard and Landowska . In Johnson 's words , " for twenty @-@ five years Bernac was Poulenc 's counsellor and conscience " , and the composer relied on him for advice not only on song @-@ writing , but on his operas and choral music .

Throughout the decade , Poulenc was popular with British audiences ; he established a fruitful relationship with the BBC in London , which broadcast many of his works . With Bernac , he made his first tour of Britain in 1938 . His music was also popular in America , seen by many as " the quintessence of French wit , elegance and high spirits " . In the last years of the 1930s , Poulenc 's compositions continued to vary between serious and light @-@ hearted works . Quatre Motets pour un temps de pénitence (Four Penitential Motets) (1938 ? 39) and the song " Bleuets " (1939) , an elegiac meditation on death , contrast with the song cycle Fiançailles pour rire (Light @-@ Hearted Betrothal) , which Henri Hell considers to capture the spirit of Les Biches .

= = = 1940s : war and post @-@ war = = =

Poulenc was briefly a soldier again during the Second World War ; he was called up on 2 June 1940 and served in an anti @-@ aircraft unit at Bordeaux . After France surrendered to Germany , Poulenc was demobilised from the army on 18 July 1940 . He spent the summer of that year with family and friends at Brive @-@ la @-@ Gaillarde in south @-@ central France . In the early months of the war , he had composed little new music , instead re @-@ orchestrating Les biches and reworking his 1932 Sextet for Piano and Winds . At Brive @-@ la @-@ Gaillarde he began three new works , and once back at his home in Noizay in October he started on a fourth . These were music for Babar the Elephant , the Cello Sonata , the ballet Les Animaux modèles and the song cycle Banalités .

For most of the war , Poulenc was in Paris , giving recitals with Bernac , concentrating on French songs . Under Nazi rule he was in a vulnerable position , as a known homosexual (Destouches narrowly avoided arrest and deportation) , but in his music he made many gestures of defiance of the Germans . He set to music verses by poets prominent in the French resistance , including Aragon and Éluard . In Les Animaux modèles , premiered at the Opéra in 1942 , he included the tune , repeated several times , of the anti @-@ German song " Vous n 'aurez pas l 'Alsace et la Lorraine " . He was a founder @-@ member of the Front National (pour musique) which the Nazi authorities viewed with suspicion for its association with banned musicians such as Milhaud and Paul Hindemith . In 1943 he wrote a cantata for unaccompanied double choir intended for Belgium , Figure humaine , setting eight of Éluard 's poems . The work , ending with " Liberté " , could not be given in France while the Nazis were in control ; its first performance was broadcast from a BBC studio in London in March 1945 , and it was not sung in Paris until 1947 . The music critic of The Times later wrote that the work " is among the very finest choral works of our time and in itself removes Poulenc from the category of petit maître to which ignorance has generally been content to relegate him . "

In January 1945 , commissioned by the French government , Poulenc and Bernac flew from Paris to London , where they received an enthusiastic welcome . The London Philharmonic Orchestra gave a reception in the composer 's honour ; he and Benjamin Britten were the soloists in a performance of Poulenc 's Double Piano Concerto at the Royal Albert Hall ; with Bernac he gave recitals of French mélodies and piano works at the Wigmore Hall and the National Gallery , and recorded for the BBC . Bernac was overwhelmed by the public 's response ; when he and Poulenc stepped out on the Wigmore Hall stage , " the audience rose and my emotion was such that instead of beginning to sing , I began to weep . " After their fortnight 's stay , the two returned home on the first boat @-@ train to leave London for Paris since May 1940 .

In Paris , Poulenc completed his scores for Babar the Elephant and his first opera , Les mamelles de Tirésias , a short opéra bouffe of about an hour 's duration . The work is a setting of Apollinaire 's play of the same name , staged in 1917 . Sams describes the opera as " high @-@ spirited topsy @-@ turveydom " concealing " a deeper and sadder theme ? the need to repopulate and rediscover a France ravaged by war " . It was premiered in June 1947 at the Opéra @-@ Comique , and was a critical success , but did not prove popular with the public . The leading female role was taken by Denise Duval , who became the composer 's favourite soprano , frequent recital partner and dedicatee of some of his music . He called her the nightingale who made him cry (" Mon rossignol à larmes ") .

Shortly after the war , Poulenc had a brief affair with a woman , Frédérique (" Freddy ") Lebedeff , with whom he had a daughter , Marie @-@ Ange , in 1946 . The child was brought up without knowing who her father was (Poulenc was supposedly her " godfather ") but he made generous provision for her , and she was the principal beneficiary of his will .

In the post @-@ war period Poulenc crossed swords with composers of the younger generation who rejected Stravinsky 's recent work and insisted that only the precepts of the Second Viennese School were valid . Poulenc defended Stravinsky and expressed incredulity that " in 1945 we are speaking as if the aesthetic of twelve tones is the only possible salvation for contemporary music " . His view that Berg had taken serialism as far as it could go and that Schoenberg 's music was now " desert , stone soup , ersatz music , or poetic vitamins " earned him the enmity of composers such as Pierre Boulez . Those disagreeing with Poulenc attempted to paint him as a relic of the pre @-@ war era , frivolous and unprogressive . This led him to focus on his more serious works , and to try to persuade the French public to listen to them . In the US and Britain , with their strong choral traditions , his religious music was frequently performed , but performances in France were much rarer , so that the public and the critics were often unaware of his serious compositions .

In 1948 Poulenc made his first visit to the US , in a two @-@ month concert tour with Bernac . He returned there frequently until 1961 , giving recitals with Bernac or Duval and as soloist in the world premiere of his Piano Concerto (1949) , commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra .

= = = 1950 ? 63 : The Carmelites and last years = = =

Poulenc began the 1950s with a new partner in his private life , Lucien Roubert , a travelling salesman . Professionally Poulenc was productive , writing a seven @-@ song cycle setting poems by Éluard , La Fraîcheur et le feu (1950) , and the Stabat Mater , in memory of the painter Christian Bérard , composed in 1950 and premiered the following year .

In 1953 Poulenc was offered a commission by La Scala and the Milanese publisher Casa Ricordi for a ballet . He considered the story of St Margaret of Cortona but found a dance version of her life impracticable . He preferred to write an opera on a religious theme ; Ricordi suggested Dialogues des Carmélites , an unfilmed screenplay by Georges Bernanos . The text , based on a short story by Gertrud von Le Fort , depicts the Martyrs of Compiègne , nuns guillotined during the French Revolution for their religious beliefs . Poulenc found it " such a moving and noble work " , ideal for his libretto , and he began composition in August 1953 .

During the composition of the opera , Poulenc suffered two blows : the Bernanos estate made unforeseen difficulties about allowing him the rights to set the text , and simultaneously Roubert became gravely ill . Intense worry pushed Poulenc into a nervous breakdown , and in November 1954 he was in a clinic at L 'Haÿ @-@ les @-@ Roses , outside Paris , heavily sedated . When he recovered , he resumed work on Dialogues des Carmélites in between extensive touring with Bernac in England . As his personal wealth had declined since the 1920s he required the substantial income earned from his recitals .

While working on the opera Poulenc composed little else ; exceptions were two mélodies , and a short orchestral movement , " Bucolique " in a collective work , Variations sur le nom de Marguerite Long (1954) , to which his old friends from Les Six Auric and Milhaud also contributed . As Poulenc was writing the last pages of his opera in October 1955 , Roubert died , at the age of forty @-@ seven . The composer wrote to a friend , " Lucien was delivered from his martyrdom ten days ago

and the final copy of *Les Carmélites* was completed (take note) at the very moment my dear breathed his last . "

The opera was first given in January 1957 at La Scala in Italian translation . Between then and the French premiere Poulenc introduced one of his most popular late works , the *Flute Sonata* , which he and Jean @-@ Pierre Rampal performed in June at the Strasbourg Festival . Three days later , on 21 June , came the Paris premiere of *Dialogues des Carmélites* at the Opéra . It was a tremendous success , to the composer 's considerable relief . At around this time Poulenc began his last romantic relationship , with Louis Gautier , a former soldier ; they remained partners to the end of Poulenc 's life .

In 1958 Poulenc embarked on a collaboration with his old friend Cocteau , in an operatic version of the latter 's 1930 monodrama *La Voix humaine* . The work was produced in February 1959 at the Opéra @-@ Comique , under Cocteau 's direction , with Duval as the tragic deserted woman speaking to her former lover by telephone . In May Poulenc 's 60th birthday was marked , a few months late , by his last concert with Bernac before the latter 's retirement from public performance .

Poulenc visited the US in 1960 and 1961 . Among his works given during these trips were the American premiere of *La Voix humaine* at Carnegie Hall , New York , with Duval , and the world premiere of his *Gloria* , a large @-@ scale work for soprano , four @-@ part mixed chorus and orchestra , conducted in Boston by Charles Munch . In 1961 Poulenc published a book about Chabrier , a 187 @-@ page study of which a reviewer wrote in the 1980s , " he writes with love and insight of a composer whose views he shared on matters like the primacy of melody and the essential seriousness of humour . " The works of Poulenc 's last twelve months included *Sept répons pour les ténèbres* for voices and orchestra , the *Clarinet Sonata* and the *Oboe Sonata* .

On 30 January 1963 , at his flat opposite the Jardin du Luxembourg , Poulenc suffered a fatal heart attack . His funeral was at the nearby church of Saint @-@ Sulpice . In compliance with his wishes , none of his music was performed ; Marcel Dupré played works by Bach on the grand organ of the church . Poulenc was buried at Père Lachaise Cemetery , alongside his family .

= = Music = =

Poulenc 's music is essentially diatonic . In Henri Hell 's view , this is because the main feature of Poulenc 's musical art is his melodic gift . In the words of Roger Nichols in the Grove dictionary , " For [Poulenc] the most important element of all was melody and he found his way to a vast treasury of undiscovered tunes within an area that had , according to the most up @-@ to @-@ date musical maps , been surveyed , worked and exhausted . " The commentator George Keck writes , " His melodies are simple , pleasing , easily remembered , and most often emotionally expressive . "

Poulenc said that he was not inventive in his harmonic language . The composer Lennox Berkeley wrote of him , " All through his life , he was content to use conventional harmony , but his use of it was so individual , so immediately recognizable as his own , that it gave his music freshness and validity . " Keck considers Poulenc 's harmonic language " as beautiful , interesting and personal as his melodic writing ... clear , simple harmonies moving in obviously defined tonal areas with chromaticism that is rarely more than passing " . Poulenc had no time for musical theories ; in one of his many radio interviews he called for " a truce to composing by theory , doctrine , rule ! " He was dismissive of what he saw as the dogmatism of latter @-@ day adherents to dodecaphony , led by René Leibowitz , and greatly regretted that the adoption of a theoretical approach had affected the music of Olivier Messiaen , of whom he had earlier had high hopes . To Hell , almost all Poulenc 's music is " directly or indirectly inspired by the purely melodic associations of the human voice " . Poulenc was a painstaking craftsman , though a myth grew up ? " la légende de facilité " ? that his music came easily to him ; he commented , " The myth is excusable , since I do everything to conceal my efforts . "

The pianist Pascal Rogé commented in 1999 that both sides of Poulenc 's musical nature were equally important : " You must accept him as a whole . If you take away either part , the serious or

the non @-@ serious , you destroy him . If one part is erased you get only a pale photocopy of what he really is . " Poulenc recognised the dichotomy , but in all his works he wanted music that was " healthy , clear and robust ? music as frankly French as Stravinsky 's is Slav " .

= = = Orchestral and concertante = = =

Poulenc 's principal works for large orchestra comprise two ballets , a Sinfonietta and four keyboard concertos . The first of the ballets , *Les biches* , was first performed in 1924 and remains one of his best @-@ known works . Nichols writes in *Grove* that the clear and tuneful score has no deep , or even shallow , symbolism , a fact " accentuated by a tiny passage of mock @-@ Wagnerian brass , complete with emotive minor 9ths " . The first two of the four concertos are in Poulenc 's light @-@ hearted vein . The *Concert champêtre* for harpsichord and orchestra (1927 ? 28) , evokes the countryside seen from a Parisian point of view : Nichols comments that the fanfares in the last movement bring to mind the bugles in the barracks of Vincennes in the Paris suburbs . The *Concerto for two pianos and orchestra* (1932) is similarly a work intended purely to entertain . It draws on a variety of stylistic sources : the first movement ends in a manner reminiscent of Balinese gamelan , and the slow movement begins in a Mozartian style , which Poulenc gradually fills out with his own characteristic personal touches . The *Organ Concerto* (1938) is in a much more serious vein . Poulenc said that it was " on the outskirts " of his religious music , and there are passages that draw on the church music of Bach , though there are also interludes in breezy popular style . The second ballet score , *Les Animaux modèles* (1941) , has never equalled the popularity of *Les biches* , though both Auric and Honegger praised the composer 's harmonic flair and resourceful orchestration . Honegger wrote , " The influences that have worked on him , Chabrier , Satie , Stravinsky , are now completely assimilated . Listening to his music you think ? it 's Poulenc . " The *Sinfonietta* (1947) is a reversion to Poulenc 's pre @-@ war frivolity . He came to feel , " I dressed too young for my age ... [it] is a new version of *Les biches* but young girls [*biches*] that are forty @-@ eight years old ? that 's horrible ! " The *Concerto for piano and orchestra* (1949) initially caused some disappointment : many felt that it was not an advance on Poulenc 's pre @-@ war music , a view he came to share . The piece has been re @-@ evaluated in more recent years , and in 1996 the writer Claire Delamarche rated it as the composer 's finest concertante work .

= = = Piano = = =

Poulenc , a highly accomplished pianist , usually composed at the piano and wrote many pieces for the instrument throughout his career . In Henri Hell 's view , Poulenc 's piano writing can be divided into the percussive and the gentler style reminiscent of the harpsichord . Hell considers that the finest of Poulenc 's music for piano is in the accompaniments to the songs , a view shared by Poulenc himself . The vast majority of the piano works are , in the view of the writer Keith W Daniel , " what might be called ' miniatures ' " . Looking back at his piano music in the 1950s , the composer viewed it critically : " I tolerate the *Mouvements perpétuels* , my old *Suite en ut* [in C] , and the *Trois pièces* . I like very much my two collections of *Improvisations* , an *Intermezzo* in A flat , and certain *Nocturnes* . I condemn *Napoli* and the *Soirées de Nazelles* without reprieve . "

Of the pieces cited with approval by Poulenc , the fifteen *Improvisations* were composed at intervals between 1932 and 1959 . All are brief : the longest lasts a little more than three minutes . They vary from swift and balletic to tender lyricism , old @-@ fashioned march , *perpetuum mobile* , waltz and a poignant musical portrait of the singer Édith Piaf . Poulenc 's favoured *Intermezzo* was the last of three . Numbers one and two were composed in August 1934 ; the A flat followed in March 1943 . The commentators Marina and Victor Ledin describe the work as " the embodiment of the word ' charming ' . The music seems simply to roll off the pages , each sound following another in such an honest and natural way , with eloquence and unmistakable Frenchness . " The eight nocturnes were composed across nearly a decade (1929 ? 38) . Whether or not Poulenc originally conceived them as an integral set , he gave the eighth the title " To serve as Coda for the Cycle " (*Pour servir de Coda au Cycle*) . Although they share their generic title with the nocturnes of Field , Chopin and

Fauré , Poulenc 's do not resemble those of the earlier composers , being " night @-@ scenes and sound @-@ images of public and private events " rather than romantic tone poems .

The pieces Poulenc found merely tolerable were all early works : *Trois mouvements perpétuels* dates from 1919 , the *Suite in C* from 1920 and the *Trois pièces* from 1928 . All consist of short sections , the longest being the " *Hymne* " , the second of the three 1928 pieces , which lasts about four minutes . Of the two works their composer singled out for censure , *Napoli* (1925) is a three @-@ movement portrait of Italy , and *Les Soirées de Nazelles* is described by the composer Geoffrey Bush as " the French equivalent of Elgar 's *Enigma Variations* " ? miniature character sketches of his friends . Despite Poulenc 's scorn for the work , Bush judges it ingenious and witty . Among the piano music not mentioned , favourably or harshly , by Poulenc , the best known pieces include the two *Novelettes* (1927 ? 28) , the set of six miniatures for children , *Villageoises* (1933) , a piano version of the seven @-@ movement *Suite française* (1935) , and *L 'embarquement pour Cythère* for two pianos (1953) .

= = = Chamber = = =

In *Grove* , Nichols divides the chamber works into three clearly differentiated periods . The first four sonatas come from the early group , all written before Poulenc was twenty @-@ two . They are for two clarinets (1918) , piano duo (1918) , clarinet and bassoon (1922) and horn , trumpet and trombone (1922) . They are early examples of Poulenc 's many and varied influences , with echoes of rococo divertissements alongside unconventional harmonies , some influenced by jazz . All four are characterised by their brevity ? less than ten minutes each ? their mischievousness and their wit , which Nichols describes as acid . Other chamber works from this period are the *Rapsodie nègre* from 1917 (mainly instrumental , with brief vocal episodes) and the *Trio for Oboe , Bassoon and Piano* (1926) .

The chamber works of Poulenc 's middle period were written in the 1930s and 1940s . The best known is the *Sextet for Piano and Wind* (1932) , in Poulenc 's light @-@ hearted vein , consisting of two lively outer movements and a central divertimento ; this was one of several chamber works that the composer became dissatisfied with and revised extensively some years after their first performance (in this case in 1939 ? 40) . The sonatas in this group are for violin and piano (1942 ? 43) and for cello and piano (1948) . Writing for strings did not come easily to Poulenc ; these sonatas were completed after two unsuccessful earlier attempts , and in 1947 he destroyed the draft of a string quartet . Both sonatas are predominantly grave in character ; that for violin is dedicated to the memory of Federico García Lorca . Commentators including Hell , Schmidt and Poulenc himself have regarded it , and to some extent the cello sonata , as less effective than those for wind . The *Aubade* , " *Concerto choréographique* " for piano and 18 instruments (1930) achieves an almost orchestral effect , despite its modest number of players . The other chamber works from this period are arrangements for small ensembles of two works in Poulenc 's lightest vein , the *Suite française* (1935) and the *Trois mouvements perpétuels* (1946) .

The final three sonatas are for woodwind and piano : for flute (1956 ? 57) , clarinet (1962) , and oboe (1962) . They have , according to *Grove* , become fixtures in their repertoires because of " their technical expertise and of their profound beauty " . The *Elégie* for horn and piano (1957) was composed in memory of the horn player Dennis Brain . It contains one of Poulenc 's rare excursions into dodecaphony , with the brief employment of a twelve @-@ note tone row .

= = = Songs = = =

Poulenc composed songs throughout his career , and his output in the genre is extensive . In Johnson 's view , most of the finest were written in the 1930s and 1940s . Though widely varied in character , the songs are dominated by Poulenc 's preference for certain poets . From the outset of his career he favoured verses by Guillaume Apollinaire , and from the mid @-@ 1930s the writer whose work he set most often was Paul Éluard . Other poets whose works he frequently set included Jean Cocteau , Max Jacob , and Louise de Vilmorin . In the view of the music critic Andrew

Clements , the Éluard songs include many of Poulenc 's greatest settings ; Johnson calls the cycle *Tel Jour , Telle Nuit* (1937) the composer 's " watershed work " , and Nichols regards it as " a masterpiece worthy to stand beside Fauré 's *La bonne chanson* " . Clements finds in the Éluard settings a profundity " worlds away from the brittle , facetious surfaces of Poulenc 's early orchestral and instrumental music " . The first of the *Deux poèmes de Louis Aragon* (1943) , titled simply " C " , is described by Johnson as " a masterpiece known the world over ; it is the most unusual , and perhaps the most moving , song about the ravages of war ever composed . "

In an overview of the songs in 1973 , the musical scholar Yvonne Gouverné said , " With Poulenc , the melodic line matches the text so well that it seems in some way to complete it , thanks to the gift which the music has for penetrating the very essence of a given poem ; nobody has better crafted a phrase than Poulenc , highlighting the colour of the words . " Among the lighter pieces , one of the composer 's most popular songs is a setting of Jean Anouilh 's " *Les Chemins de l'Amour* " (1940) as a Parisian waltz ; by contrast his " monologue " " *La Dame de Monte Carlo* " , (1961) a depiction of an elderly woman addicted to gambling , shows the composer 's painful understanding of the horrors of depression .

= = = Choral = = =

Apart from a single early work for unaccompanied choir (" *Chanson à boire* " , 1922) , Poulenc began writing choral music in 1936 . In that year he produced three works for choir : *Sept chansons* (settings of verses by Éluard and others) , *Petites voix* (for children 's voices) , and his religious work *Litanies à la vierge noire* , for female or children 's voices and organ . The Mass in G major (1937) for unaccompanied choir is described by Gouverné as having something of a baroque style , with " vitality and joyful clamour on which his faith is writ large " . Poulenc 's new @-@ found religious theme continued with *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence* (1938 ? 39) , but among his most important choral works is the secular cantata *Figure humaine* (1943) . Like the Mass , it is unaccompanied , and to succeed in performance it requires singers of the highest quality . Other a capella works include the *Quatre motets pour le temps de Noël* (1952) , which make severe demands on choirs ' rhythmic precision and intonation .

Poulenc 's major works for choir and orchestra are the *Stabat Mater* (1950) , the *Gloria* (1959 ? 60) , and *Sept répons des ténèbres* (1961 ? 62) . All these works are based on liturgical texts , originally set to Gregorian chant . In the *Gloria* , Poulenc 's faith expresses itself in an exuberant , joyful way , with intervals of prayerful calm and mystic feeling , and an ending of serene tranquillity . Poulenc wrote to Bernac in 1962 , " I have finished *Les Ténèbres* . I think it is beautiful . With the *Gloria* and the *Stabat Mater* , I think I have three good religious works . May they spare me a few days in Purgatory , if I narrowly avoid going to hell . " *Sept répons des ténèbres* , which Poulenc did not live to hear performed , uses a large orchestra , but , in Nichols 's view , it displays a new concentration of thought . To the critic Ralph Thibodeau , the work may be considered as Poulenc 's own requiem and is " the most avant @-@ garde of his sacred compositions , the most emotionally demanding , and the most interesting musically , comparable only with his magnum opus sacrum , the opera , *Dialogues des Carmélites* . "

= = = Opera = = =

Poulenc turned to opera only in the latter half of his career . Having achieved fame by his early twenties , he was in his forties before attempting his first opera . He attributed this to the need for maturity before tackling the subjects he chose to set . In 1958 he told an interviewer , " When I was 24 I was able to write *Les biches* [but] it is obvious that unless a composer of 30 has the genius of a Mozart or the precociousness of Schubert he couldn 't write *The Carmelites* ? the problems are too profound . " In Sams 's view , all three of Poulenc 's operas display a depth of feeling far distant from " the cynical stylist of the 1920s " : *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (1947) , despite the riotous plot , is full of nostalgia and a sense of loss . In the two avowedly serious operas , *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1957) and *La Voix humaine* (1959) , in which Poulenc depicts deep human suffering ,

Sams sees a reflection of the composer's own struggles with depression .

In terms of musical technique the operas show how far Poulenc had come from his naïve and insecure beginnings . Nichols comments in Grove that *Les mamelles de Tirésias* , deploys " lyrical solos , patter duets , chorales , falsetto lines for tenor and bass babies and ... succeeds in being both funny and beautiful " . In all three operas Poulenc drew on earlier composers , while blending their influence into music unmistakably his own . In the printed score of *Dialogues des Carmélites* he acknowledged his debt to Mussorgsky , Monteverdi , Debussy and Verdi . The critic Renaud Machart writes that *Dialogues des Carmélites* is , with Britten's *Peter Grimes* , one of the extremely rare operas written since the Second World War to appear on opera programmes all over the world .

Even when he wrote for a large orchestra , Poulenc used the full forces sparingly in his operas , often scoring for woodwinds or brass or strings alone . With the invaluable input of Bernac he showed great skill in writing for the human voice , fitting the music to the tessitura of each character . By the time of the last of the operas , *La Voix humaine* , Poulenc felt able to give the soprano stretches of music with no orchestral accompaniment at all , though when the orchestra plays , Poulenc calls for the music to be " bathed in sensuality " .

= = = Recordings = = =

Poulenc was among the composers who recognised in the 1920s the important role that the gramophone would play in the promotion of music . The first recording of his music was made in 1928 , with the mezzo @-@ soprano Claire Croiza accompanied by the composer at the piano , in the complete song cycle *La bestiaire* for French Columbia . He made numerous recordings , mainly for the French division of EMI . With Bernac and Duval he recorded many of his own songs , and those of other composers including Chabrier , Debussy , Gounod and Ravel . He played the piano part in recordings of his *Babar the Elephant* with Pierre Fresnay and Noël Coward as narrators . In 2005 , EMI issued a DVD , " Francis Poulenc & Friends " , featuring filmed performances of Poulenc's music , played by the composer , with Duval , Jean @-@ Pierre Rampal , Jacques Février and Georges Prêtre .

A 1984 discography of Poulenc's music lists recordings by more than 1 @,@ 300 conductors , soloists and ensembles , including the conductors Leonard Bernstein , Charles Dutoit , Milhaud , Eugene Ormandy , Prêtre , André Previn and Leopold Stokowski . Among the singers , in addition to Bernac and Duval , the list includes Régine Crespin , Dietrich Fischer @-@ Dieskau , Nicolai Gedda , Peter Pears , Yvonne Printemps and Gérard Souzay . Instrumental soloists include Britten , Jacques Février , Pierre Fournier , Emil Gilels , Yehudi Menuhin and Arthur Rubinstein .

Complete sets of Poulenc's solo piano music have been recorded by Gabriel Tacchino , who had been Poulenc's only piano student (released on the EMI label) , Pascal Rogé (Decca) , Paul Crossley (CBS) , Eric Parkin (Chandos) and Olivier Cazal (Naxos) . Integral sets of the chamber music have been recorded by the Nash Ensemble (Hyperion) , and a variety of young French musicians (Naxos) .

The world premiere of *Dialogues des Carmélites* (in Italian , as *Dialoghi delle Carmelitane*) was recorded and has been released on CD . The first studio recording was soon after the French premiere , and since then there have been at least ten live or studio recordings on CD or DVD , most of them in French but one in German and one in English .

= = Reputation = =

The two sides to Poulenc's musical nature caused misunderstanding during his life and have continued to do so . The composer Ned Rorem observed , " He was deeply devout and uncontrollably sensual " ; this still leads some critics to underrate his seriousness . His uncompromising adherence to melody , both in his lighter and serious works , has similarly caused some to regard him as unprogressive . Although he was not much influenced by new developments in music , Poulenc was always keenly interested in the works of younger generations of composers .

Lennox Berkeley recalled , " Unlike some artists , he was genuinely interested in other people 's work , and surprisingly appreciative of music very far removed from his . I remember him playing me the records of Boulez 's *Le marteau sans maître* with which he was already familiar when that work was much less well @-@ known than it is today . " Boulez has not taken a reciprocal view , remarking in 2010 , " There are always people who will take an easy intellectual path . Poulenc coming after *Sacre [du Printemps]* . It was not progress . " Other composers have found more merit in Poulenc 's work ; Stravinsky wrote to him in 1931 : " You are truly good , and that is what I find again and again in your music " .

In his last years Poulenc observed , " if people are still interested in my music in 50 years ' time it will be for my *Stabat Mater* rather than the *Mouvements perpétuels* . " In a centenary tribute in *The Times* Gerald Lerner commented that Poulenc 's prediction was wrong , and that in 1999 the composer was widely celebrated for both sides of his musical character : " both the fervent Catholic and the naughty boy , for both the *Gloria* and *Les Biches* , both *Les Dialogues des Carmélites* and *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* . " At around the same time the writer Jessica Duchen described Poulenc as " a fizzing , bubbling mass of Gallic energy who can move you to both laughter and tears within seconds . His language speaks clearly , directly and humanely to every generation . "