

“French music is clarity, elegance and simple and natural declamation; above all, French music wants to please.”

**Claude Debussy**, writing in *La Revue bleue*.



Francis Poulenc  
photo courtesy ChesterNovello.com

# The French Accent

Original performances of Poulenc, Auric  
and other French composers



# The French Accent

Oboe  
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**Poulenc:** Columbia D 14213/4 (WLX272/5), recorded 7 Mar 1928  
**Thuille:** Gramophone D1806 (08487) recorded 18 Mar 1929  
**Auric:** L'Oiseau Lyre OL103/4 (PART1447/8,1451/2), recorded 1938  
**Roussel:** Alpha DB65, recorded 1955  
**Roesgen-Champion:** Pathé PG74 (CPT2691/2), recorded 1936  
**Hotteterre:** Pathé PDT233 (CPTX933/4), recorded May 1950  
**Ferroud:** Pathé PG84/5 (CPT3098/3101), recorded 1936  
**Stravinsky:** Columbia LF129 (CL4371), recorded 6 June 1933  
**Jolivet:** Erato LDE3105, recorded 1958  
**Massenet:** Columbia DFX92 (WLX1526), recorded 1931

Recordings supplied and transferred from the collection of Malcolm McMillan. Malcolm is a clarinettist who has a large number of wind and brass recordings from the 78 and early LP eras. He can supply recordings on request. Details from macsworks@talktalk.net.

Additional material from Christopher Steward  
Programme notes by Geoffrey Burgess  
Mastering by Dave Rowell  
Oboe image by Howarth of London  
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**Francis Poulenc** (1899-1963) Trio for oboe, bassoon & piano (1926)

Roland Lamorlette (oboe), Gustave Dherin (bassoon), Francis Poulenc (piano)

1 Lent—Presto	4:38
2 Andante	4:03
3 Rondo	2:47

**Ludwig Thuille** (1861-1907) Gavotte from the Sextet for piano & wind quintet (1887)

Société Taffanel des Instruments à vent: René Le Roy (flute), Louis Bas (oboe), Achille Gras (clarinet), Edouard Hénon (bassoon), Jules Vialet (horn) with Erwin Schulhoff (piano)

4 Andante, quasi Allegretto	3:36
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**Georges Auric** (1899-1983) Trio for oboe, clarinet & bassoon (c.1938)

Trio d'Anches de Paris: Myrtille Morel (oboe), Pierre Lefebvre (clarinet), Fernand Oubradous (bassoon)

5 Décidé	3:32
6 Romance	2:34
7 Final	3:53

**Albert Roussel** (1869-1937) Divertissement, op.6 for piano & wind quintet (1906)

Quintette à Vent Français: Jean-Pierre Rampal (flute), Pierre Pierlot (oboe), Jacques Lancelot (clarinet), Paul Hongne (bassoon), Gilbert Coursier (horn), Robert Veyron-Lacroix (piano)

8 Animé - Lent - Animé - Lent - Animé	6:54
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**Marguerite Roesgen-Champion** (1894-1976) Pastorale for oboe, cello & piano

Louis Bleuzet (oboe), Auguste Cruque (cello), Marguerite Roesgen-Champion (piano)

9 Pastorale - Introduction à la Valse sentimentale - Ronde	6:35
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**Jacques Hotteterre** (1674-1763) Suite/Sonata in D for oboe & harpsichord (1715)

Pierre Pierlot (oboe), Pauline Aubert (harpsichord)

10 Prélude - Allemande - Courante - Grave - Gigue	7:31
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**Pierre-Octave Ferroud** (1900-36) Trio in E for oboe, clarinet & bassoon (1933)

Trio d'Anches de Paris: Myrtille Morel (oboe), Pierre Lefebvre (clarinet), Fernand Oubradous (bassoon)

11 Allegro Moderato	4:31
12 Allegretto grazioso	2:11
13 Quasi Presto	2:10

**Igor Stravinsky** (1882-1971) Pastorale arr. for oboe, cor anglais, clarinet, bassoon & violin (1907/1933)

Louis Gromer (oboe), Georges Durand (cor anglais), André Vacellier (clarinet), Gabriel Grandmaison (bassoon), Samuel Dushkin (violin)

14 Larghetto	2:44
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**André Jolivet** (1905-74) Sérénade pour quintette à vent avec hautbois principal (1945)

Quintette à vent Français: Jean-Pierre Rampal (flute), Pierre Pierlot (oboe), Jacques Lancelot (clarinet), Paul Hongne (bassoon), Gilbert Coursier (horn)

15 Cantilene	3:47
16 Caprice	3:25
17 Intermède	3:25
18 Marche Burlesque	4:36

**Jules Massenet** (1842-1912) "La Troyenne regrettant sa patrie" (*Les Erinnyes*, 1873)

Louis Gaudard (oboe), Maurice Marechal (cello), with orchestra conducted by Elie Cohen

19 Andante	3:56
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Total time 75:56



## Commentary and Track Notes (page 16) by Geoffrey Burgess



Photo: Michele Corbman

**Geoffrey Burgess** is well known as an oboist, a scholar who co-authored 'The Oboe', and the originator of the Oboe Classics CD of historical recordings, 'The Oboe 1903-1953'.

Here he writes about the musical and cultural milieu surrounding this rich collection of French wind recordings from the 20th Century.

## Playing with a French Accent

Over the course of the first half of the 20th century, the banks of the Seine overflowed with a confluence of cosmopolitan musical influences. Audiences at Paris' theatres and concert halls heard a succession of three musical styles. First came the uniquely French take on late Romantic tradition which wove its thread in the gossamer of Impressionist tones from Debussy, Ravel and others, across the elegance of the Belle Époque; next entered the vanguard of anti-Romantic, Neo-Classical composers — Stravinsky, Roussel and a younger generation of musicians including those known as Les Six; and finally the



Members of La Jeune France,  
L to R: Messiaen, Baudrier and Daniel-  
Lesur, with Jolivet at the piano

Modernism of La Jeune France reared its head hard on the heels of World War II with Jolivet and Messiaen. Add to these the no less significant presence of exotic influences: Parisian nightclubs and cabarets were alive with American Ragtime and Jazz, while music from the Near and Far East imported for the World Fairs permeated the concert hall.

This was the musical soundscape of Paris; the real *musique d'ameublement* (a term coined by Erik Satie and translated loosely as 'wallpaper music'). Each of these styles is represented in the works assembled in this anthology. But, as the earliest tracks were recorded at the end of the 1920s when the true Romantic performing aesthetic was already all but lost, we hear the 19th-century music played by interpreters more closely identified with the Neo-Classicalists who actively sought to curb what were seen as Romanticism's emotional indulgences.

The gradual shift in performance style was so bound up with developments in audio technology, that in many instances it is hard to tell which influenced the other. The new, slick and sassy approach of Poulenc, Stravinsky and their colleagues coincided with the switch from acoustic

to electric sound recording techniques and had a decisive impact on the progress of musical performance in the 20th century. The microphone proved far more sensitive than the horns formerly used to collect the musical vibrations, and was able to capture a wider frequency band, and a broader range of dynamic gradations. However, recordings made between the wars still seem worlds away from the style we are accustomed to today. Current style, defined largely by the post-1945 generation of players and record producers, took the Neo-Classical aesthetic a step further to create an ultra-modern, almost mechanical approach where technical perfection was often achieved at the expense of beauty of sound, graceful expression, and inspired interpretation.

As we listen across this anthology's chronological span from 1928 to 1958, a shift of attitude to the recording process is perceptible. In the earliest examples it is clear that the musicians took but little heed of the microphone, and (perhaps naively) performed almost as if they were before an audience. These performances are stamped with a strikingly different musical personality than what we expect from modern studio recordings. They are



minimal-interventionist audio snapshots — spirited performances, full of life, made without edits within the four-minutes of a 78 RPM disc which means, as every musician knows, that occasional mishaps are inevitable. The availability of magnetic tape from 1950 made editing possible, and also resulted in a growing need among musicians to put down definitive performances of exacting accuracy. In an environment where every error costs time and money there was little room, even with the safety net of editing from multiple takes, for technical blemishes or interpretative indecision, and this sometimes resulted in fewer risks being taken. These later performances, while accurate, were calculated to withstand multiple playings by evading overpersonalized interpretations, and are thus frequently less exciting, and lack the immediacy that is so evident in earlier recordings. The 1950s and 60s saw an explosion in the quantity of recorded music, and at times the musicians must have felt swallowed up by the recording-industry machine. Lucrative incomes could be earned from the plentiful session work, not only for the new long-playing discs, but for film and radio. Players like Jean-Pierre Rampal and Pierre Pierlot

were hugely successful because they were able to meet the exacting demands of the recording studio, and both artists recorded large quantities of music.



France's role in the history of recorded sound is often ignored. The international market tended to be dominated by British and American inventors and producers like Thomas Edison, Fred Gaisberg and Emile Berliner, and companies like Gramophone and His Master's Voice, but significant contributions were made by French entrepreneurs. In fact, the first person to invent a means of recording sounds in the 1850s was the Frenchman Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville — though almost half a century would pass before recordings of musical performance were made in France. The first major company to work

in this area was Pathé, initially acting as a distributor for Edison's phonograph, but soon developing its own means of capturing sound to complement its work in the field of cinematic equipment. From then on, France was not far behind with technology and activity, and as in other leading musical centres around the globe, an active studio scene flourished in Paris. French taste held to staunchly chauvinistic models, particularly in opera where the French grand opera held out against the verismo craze that filled opera houses elsewhere in Europe and the New World, and accounted for enormous numbers of record sales. This was, in part why Paris was not as high up on record companies' lists as other European capitals. Still, Paris had much else to offer — from cabaret to the finest chamber music performances — and a strong local market quickly sprang up. The fact that Stravinsky, the leading 20th-century composer to record his own music, was resident in France in the early years of electric recording was an immense boon, and the interest in historic performance also provided recording companies with a vast terrain of music to make available to the growing listening public. In 1911 Pathé proposed the establishment of the Archives de la

Parole, the world's first audio archive, to document the French spoken language, and help to define the French accent. Musical performances recorded at this time in France are just as characteristically French, but their accent is more a furtive *je ne sais quoi* that is at once both obvious and elusive.

In order to uncover the distinctive qualities of this French musical accent, it is instructive to establish what was not. It does not involve the same heart-on-the-sleeve emotion as heard in Italian bel canto, nor was the grandiosity and goal-orientated harmony of Wagner and his followers a common feature. The logical predictability and psychological expressionism of the Second Viennese School was also not a hallmark, nor was Anglo-Saxon well-ordered correctness such as we hear on Elgar's recordings a characteristic of French style.

In essential terms, French music evokes rather than states, and French musical performance is more than anything about the evanescence of the moment: the wafting suggestion of presence that perfumes Debussy's *Prélude à l'après midi d'un faune* or Ravel's playful *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*.



This elusive quality is, in part, what makes these recordings so alluring. Listening to them, I cannot help observing that, rather than intelligible, clearly-intentioned readings of the score, French performers and composers alike speak to the intangibility of the sonic object. As much as we are drawn to come to know the musicians, their recordings project an almost impersonal superficiality that exposes the limitations of the musical encounter. Still, their nonchalance is tempered with a beguiling grace.

We hear this when Poulenc rushes off impetuosity at the beginning of the Presto in the first movement of his Trio (track 1) and leaves his double-reed colleagues in the dust. This is not done in a competitive or disdainful way, but in the spirit of play. Likewise, just when carefree lyricism seems to be descending into music-hall sentimentality, there is a glib check on excesses. We are made aware that the artists are always conscious in the music-making process, but that they do not necessarily identify with the voice of the music. This might give an impression of distance or even disinterest, but it is very much part of the French accent. Particularly in the 1920s and 30s, French performances are



Francis Poulenc  
in 1935

seasoned with a generous dose of wit and tongue-in-cheek impishness that is often lost when performers remove the ironic edge and mistakenly take the whole as a sincere expression of personal emotion. Of course, the extent to which these elements are a product of the dehumanizing recording studio is difficult to say.

French wind playing both before and after World War II combined showy virtuosity based on solid technique with sweetness of tone and flexible phrasing. The calibre of playing on these records demonstrates why orchestras around the world sought out wind players trained at the Paris Conservatoire. Even if their technical achievements were emulated abroad, the French artists remain unmistakable for

their uniquely French flair. Up to well after World War II, French bassoonists played on instruments and reeds that were vastly different from those of their foreign counterparts, and differences between national styles, and current practices are discernible in the other instruments. The Quintette à Vent Français, founded in 1942, presents a palette of colours lost from modern woodwind playing. This ensemble of individuals placed more importance on the cultivation of each instrument's characteristic tone than on homogeneity. The result is a transparent texture of clear individual lines in which Jean-Pierre Rampal's elegant slickness, Pierre Pierlot's clear vibrant playing, Jacques Lancelot's quasi kazoo clarinet tone, Gilbert Coursier's suave vibrato and Paul Hongne's French bassoon all blossom alongside each other.



The Quintette à Vent Français: L to R: Pierre Pierlot (oboe), Jean-Pierre Rampal (flute), Jacques Lancelot (clarinet), Gilbert Coursier (horn), Paul Hongne (bassoon)

This approach belongs to the end of an era. Whereas up to World War II, French wind players dominated orchestras throughout the world, since that time they have lost out to the more robust, darker tones of the German school. The present predilection is for oboists to find a tone colour to match the covered sound of the clarinet, so it is refreshing to hear a clarinetist like Lancelot who produces a brighter, reedier tone than the oboist.

Some musicians had particularly enduring careers as recording artists. Poulenc, for instance, recorded his Trio twice at the interval of thirty years. While they have equal claims to authenticity, in aesthetic 'feel' these recordings are worlds apart. In the 1928 version (tracks 1-3), the emphasis is on lightness and tonal clarity. Phrases are shapely and supple, while at the same time there is a vibrant drive that eschews the Romantic excesses that Poulenc so adamantly opposed. But in the more widely-distributed stereo recording from 1959<sup>1</sup> the work's fresh, fleet-footed spirit is clouded with a deliberateness in a quest for accuracy and rhythmic precision. Also lost is the work's parodic quality that was so vital to the Neo-Classical aesthetic. The players are in full command of the work's

technical challenges, but when compared with the vivacious frolic of 1928, their attempt sounds like a pedestrian stroll. Surprisingly, all movements are slower in the later recording. Did Poulenc feel compelled to produce a definitive rendition of a score that had by that time accrued classic status? He adhered rigidly to the published metronome markings in the fast movements; the Andante, however, is taken considerably slower than the indicated crotchet=84 (even in 1928 he didn't dare take it that fast). On the earlier recording he not only executed the fast movements at break-neck speed, but rushes in the most capricious and almost erratic fashion. This would have been disastrous if it were not done with the utmost deftness and lightness.

Even during the Great Depression, French record companies resisted retreating to mainstream classics, and instead continued to promote modern works, and forays into forgotten repertoires. One of the most significant contributions to the rediscovery of early repertoires was the 169-disc *Anthologie Sonore* initiated in 1933 by the ex-patriot German musicologist Curt Sachs. Still, the L'Oiseau Lyre label exemplified the fad for exploring the old in tandem with the new. Directed by Louise

Hanson-Dyer, an Australian heiress of untameable energy with a passion for both early and contemporary music, L'Oiseau Lyre was initially a publishing house. Later in 1937 Dyer established a record label as a parallel means of promoting her interests, particularly the music of the Ars Nova and of Les Six, whose work she popularized around the world. Each L'Oiseau-Lyre disc was personally supervised by Dyer, who also hand-picked the musicians and repertoire. Without premises of its own, the company was reliant on Pathé, not only for the availability of their Paris studios, but their record pressing facilities. Dyer established an enduring relationship with the bassoonist Fernand Oubradous. One of the most respected French bassoonists of his day, Oubradous' recording of a Boismortier concerto had won a Grand Prix du Disque in 1949. With the Trio d'Anches de Paris he recorded some of Dyer's first releases of 18th-century music as well as contemporary music



Trio d'Anches, L to R:  
Myrtille Morel, Pierre  
Lefebvre, Fernand Oubradous

that Hanson-Dyer had commissioned and published. Typical of the label's dual interests, the recording of Auric's Trio was issued between music from the 14th century by Don Paolo da Firenze and sonatas by Handel. Oubradous also conducted the Ensemble Orchestrale de L'Oiseau-Lyre and introduced players from the next generation of Parisian virtuosi to Hanson-Dyer. Before Pierre Pierlot and Jean-Paul Rampal became household names in the LP era on recordings of Classical standards with the Paillard Chamber Orchestra and I Solisti Veneti, they recorded for L'Oiseau-Lyre.

The roots of woodwind playing reach deep into French history and while the Austro-Germanic Classics emphasized strings and piano, it is woodwinds that have been foremost in France musical culture. The instruments of the modern woodwind family owe their invention to dynasties of players and makers employed at the court of Louis XIV. Later, virtuosi trained at the Paris Conservatoire were responsible for an upsurge of interest in wind music, and the Belle Époque nurtured more than one group dedicated to this repertoire. The legendary flautist Paul Taffanel took the lead by founding the Société de musique

de chambre pour instruments à vent in 1890. The original group boasted some of the finest virtuosi of the day as its principal members. In addition to Taffanel on flute, there was Georges Gillet (oboe), Charles Turban (clarinet), bassoonist Jean Espaignet, François Brémond (horn), and the pianist Louis Diémer. In 1890 the Société premiered Ludwig Thuille's Sextet. From 1893, Taffanel found that he had less time and energy to continue with the Société, and it drifted into a period of intermittent activity. The ensemble we hear playing the Thuille on track 4 was related to the group that premiered the work in little more than name. Among the recording artists, only the oboist Louis Bas could claim to have played in the original group, but all the others were trained by members of the original group. This is the only recording featured on the anthology made outside Paris.

How Taffanel's Société came to record in England needs some explanation. Taffanel took a small group with him to London in 1894, and their performances generated enthusiastic response. The group's reputation in England was further enhanced with frequent concert engagements beginning in 1929. The Gavotte was recorded in the



famous Kingsway Hall by the Gramophone Company as a one-side filler for the group's performance of the Mozart Quintet for piano and winds (K452), a work that may well have served as an inspirational model for Thuille.

The lacuna left by Taffanel's Société was filled in part by the Société moderne d'Instruments à Vent that Taffanel's pupil Georges Barrère assembled in 1895. Roussel's *Divertissement* was composed specifically for this group which gave the first performance with the pianist Eugène Wagner in 1906.<sup>2</sup> The group did not survive to record Roussel's work; what we hear on track 8 is a performance from half a century later by the Quintette Français.



Albert Roussel  
photo approx 1910-14

On a smaller scale, the reed trio was invented in Paris at the turn of 20th century. Inspired by the trios of paired treble instruments and bassoon that proliferated in the Baroque and Classical periods, the combination of oboe, clarinet

and bassoon was still a novelty and, if not for the remarkable playing and pioneering enthusiasm of the Trio d'Anches de Paris, may have never come about. This group was founded in 1927 and enjoyed a successful career, supported as much by recording ventures as performances in and around Paris. Its members held prestigious appointments: Oubradous was principal bassoonist of the Paris Opéra orchestra and the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, while his colleagues Myrtille Morel and Pierre Lefebvre were both soloists with the Garde Républicaine. It would be hard not to be impressed by these players' acrobatics as they negotiate the technical challenges of the new music written for them.

Woodwinds were also key players in the Neo-Classical movement. As much as Stravinsky made cryptic remarks on the relative emotional restraint of wind instruments compared to strings, he must have taken pleasure in working with players of the calibre he encountered in Paris. Poulenc also had a predilection for wind instruments. Prior to starting work on the Trio, he worked on a *Caprice espagnol* for oboe and piano which, like the Trio, he intended to dedicate to Manuel de Falla. With their incisive attack and fairly limited

frequency range, reed instruments were ideally suited to the recording technology available in the 78 era. The players could easily group around the recording horn or single microphone, and there is less loss of dynamic nuance than is the case with string instruments.



Wanda Landowska with  
Francis Poulenc  
photo: Bibliothèque  
nationale de France

The revival of the harpsichord was another manifestation of the twin interests in early and modern music cultivated in France between the wars. The early 20th-century harpsichord was no less a new invention than a revival of a historic design, and played a decisive role in the Neo-Classical movement. In addition to Wanda Landowska, two other women who fell under the spell of the harpsichord's charm are heard on this disc. Pauline Aubert, who accompanies Pierre Pierlot in the Hotteterre Sonata (track 10),

was a veteran to the studio, having recorded in the 1930s with Marcel Moyse and a series of discs of François Couperin released as part of the *Anthologie Sonore* in the early 1940s. While to us, Pierlot's and Aubert's performance sounds patently at odds with Baroque performance practices, for its day, it was informed with the latest scholarship, and drew on a new edition of the sonata published the previous year. Marguerite Roesgen-Champion also made a special study of the harpsichord and its repertoire, and her *Pastorale* (track 9) was one of some twenty works she wrote for the instrument, in this case we hear it performed in the alternative version for piano.

The inclusion of Stravinsky's *Pastorale* (track 14) is a reminder of the seminal role played by Stravinsky in France in the early decades of the 20th century. In addition to being active as a composer between the wars and the foremost proponent of Neo-Classicism, Stravinsky was busy as performer and recording artist, and exercised a decisive influence on Les Six and their contemporaries. Les Six, a randomly-nominated clique bound by friendship more than musical taste, attracted notoriety in the early 20s for

their sassy, sophisticated music, but after giving a few joint concerts, the members drifted apart.



Igor Stravinsky  
photo approx 1905-10

Echoes of Stravinsky's *Symphonies d'Instruments à Vent* can be heard in Pierre-Octave Ferroud's Trio (tracks 11 - 13). Georges Auric's rhythmic inventiveness (tracks 5 - 7) enters the world of *L'Histoire du Soldat*, while the cool classicism of the Poulenc Trio follows the Russian's early essays in Neo-Classicism.

While Poulenc and Auric were the only composers on the disc to belong officially to Les Six, Ferroud's writing for the Trio d'Anches closely resembles Auric's work for the same ensemble. Likewise, Albert Roussel, although born a good twenty years before any of Les Six, adumbrated their quest to redefine French music. The exoticism he developed in his music after travels to the East certainly may sound to many like a fresh take on Impressionist Orientalism, but Roussel repeatedly denied his allegiance to Debussy.

Ferroud, stationed in Strasbourg when Les Six were most active, only heard of their ascendancy from a distance, and arrived in Paris in 1923 after musical studies in Lyon with the influential Florent Schmitt. Later in 1932, he played a decisive role in the promotion of new music. With the support of a committee of leading composers and an international network of connections, his chamber music society named Triton was responsible for significant musical exchanges. Along with premières of chamber music, including wind trios by Roussel, Ibert, Lazar and Ferroud himself (as well as the Oboe Sonata by Paul Hindemith), the society's concerts occasionally included revivals of early works. One of the most notable was the first modern performance of Monteverdi's *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*. Despite Triton's cosmopolitan membership, the emphasis remained firmly on French products. The programming never featured works by the Viennese 12-tone school. Ferroud may have been setting



Pierre-Octave Ferroud

out to redress with planned meetings with Central European composers, but plans were aborted by his tragic death in an automobile accident.



André Jolivet in 1954  
photo: studio Harcourt,  
© ministère de la  
culture, France

In 1945, the same year as his *Sérénade* (tracks 16–19), André Jolivet penned his essay entitled 'Assez Stravinsky' in which he attempted to discredit Stravinsky's impact on French music. This was a clear denial of not only his contemporaries' but his own debt to Stravinsky. Jolivet's folk-like melodies, additive rhythms as well as his aesthetic of music as a ritualistic

practice are virtually unthinkable without the backdrop of Stravinsky's Russian-period scores. The final cadence to Jolivet's *Sérénade* is enough to prove that he had fully digested *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Jolivet's provocative remarks may have been intended to drive a wedge between La Jeune France — the group with which he

identified, comprising Olivier Messiaen, Jean-Yves Daniel-Lesur and Baudier — and the older group of Les Six who had readily embraced Stravinsky's influence and, in the case of Poulenc, came to Stravinsky's defence.





## Track Notes

When **Francis Poulenc** composed the *Trio in the Spring* of 1926, Jazz was filling the air of Paris nightclubs, Diaghilev's Ballets Russes had presented Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*, and Stravinsky himself had premiered his *Octet* for wind instruments. The 27-year-old Poulenc eagerly kept abreast of fashion, and influences from both Jazz and Stravinsky's Neo-Classical trail-blazing found their way into his music. His own ballet, *Les Biches*, signalled his participation in the Neo-Classical movement by drawing on the French musical style of the age of Louis XIV. The jazz and Neo-Classical streams converge in the *Trio* to create a highly idiosyncratic and entirely convincing style. As much as it is ripe with Blues notes, tonal ambiguities, 'up in the air' final chords and frenetic rhythms evocative of the *pêle-mêle* of life in the smart set whose company Poulenc so relished, its three movements follow strict

classical models. Poulenc explained that the first was modelled on Haydn, and the third on the second Piano Concerto by Saint-Saëns. His sweet-sour blend of acerbic harmonies and saccharine melodies may be what prompted the critic Louis Laloy to label his compositions, along with those of Auric, as *limonade musicale*. At any rate the impulsive, impassioned but at the same time cool nonchalance of Poulenc's style was a perfect foil to the *mélange* of joy and melancholy that characterises the poetry of his friend Guillaume Apollinaire, or Jean Cocteau's cutting wit in his staunchly anti-German *Le Coq et l'Arlequin*, that Les Six adopted as their manifesto of style. By dedicating his *Trio* to Manuel de Falla, Poulenc underscored his connection with a fellow spirit who had also taken pleasure in a witty synthesis of historical models, new harmonies and forms in harpsichord works for their mutual friend Wanda Landowska.

The *Trio* was less than two years old when the composer, joined by Roland Lamorlette and Gustave Dhérin, recorded it for Columbia. Their reading exudes



*joie de vivre*, and any blemishes in ensemble or note inaccuracies pale in the wake of the vivacious sweep of their playing. After the restrained repose of the introduction, Poulenc takes off in the Presto at a treacherously fast pace that would surely have faltered if it were not for his mercurial lightness of touch. The notated rubatos are taken with elegant grace, while the more heartfelt sections and the lyrical middle movement are never over-sentimentalized.

Notice how Poulenc artfully smudges the beats in the accompaniment in the section after the little cadenza in the first movement (2:50). (Later in his 1959 recording he would line up the chords with the winds, but at the expense of the effortless free-floating quality achieved in the earlier performance.) And with what sheer abandon they charge to the movement's ecstatic conclusion! Despite the sonic limitations of the early recording (noticeable in the shallowness of the piano's bass), a finely graduated palette of dynamics and tonal nuance is still audible. Phrase endings are gracefully tapered, the winds add stylish nuances, and Poulenc is sensitive to issues of balance. The playing of oboist Roland Lamorlette is known only from this recording. Fernand Gillet recalled his consummate technical skill, and suggested that he may have been the first to introduce double tonguing on the oboe,

a credible claim based on the remarkable rapid and seemingly effortless articulation heard in this Trio. Gustave Dhérin (1887-1964) was the bassoon professor at the Conservatoire and played in Concerts Colonne and Straram, where he must have been known to Stravinsky who invited him to play on the first recording of the *Octet* (1923). When Lamorlette and Dhérin use vibrato, it is a shallow and fast form that does not interfere with either pitch or the music's forward momentum.



Ludwig Thuille

The short career of Tyrolean-born **Ludwig Thuille** was centred in Munich where he cultivated a distinguished circle of colleagues and students. Like Richard Strauss, he studied with Alexander Ritter, under whose direction he developed a fairly conservative compositional style.

Nevertheless, Thuille built a reputation himself as a composer of chamber music at a time when many composers were turning to larger-scale works. His Sextet was completed 1887, and premiered in

Paris by Taffanel's wind group in 1890. The following year it earned praise from Richard Strauss, who recommended the composer enter it in the Beethoven competition. The Gavotte is a Gothic vision of the antique dance featuring a trio section in imitation of a bagpipe. Instead of beginning with an anacrusis, the melody starts on the downbeat, suggesting an off-balance feel. Placed in the traditional position as third movement in this classical four-movement work, the Gavotte exudes charm, and was encored at the work's première. Saint-Saëns wrote his oboe sonata for Louis Bas, the oboist on this recording; tantalisingly, he never recorded it.

Georges Auric in 1940  
photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France



The plethora of grace notes that enliven the gossipy opening movement of **Georges Auric's** Trio hark back to the French Baroque style of ornaments as used by Hotteterre. This first movement is in ternary form. The outer sections are full of rhythmic games that throw the listener off the scent of the time signature, and there are abrupt alternations of major and minor in toy-trumpet fanfares. A cheeky cabaret tune with sexy chromatic pick-ups serves as contrasting middle section. The Romance, with its rocking motifs and quieter texture, could equally qualify as a lullaby. The last movement returns to high energy, with jovial fairground music. Altogether a great showpiece for the technique of the virtuosic Trio d'Anches<sup>3</sup>. Auric dedicated this work to Henri Sauguet, another composer whose activities overlapped with those of Les Six and whose *Rustiques* of 1936 was also written for the Trio d'Anches. The publication of Auric's trio had to wait until after the war when Hanson-Dyer advertised the L'Oiseau Lyre recording, then ten years old.

**Albert Roussel's** one-movement *Divertissement* dates from 1906, the middle of his early period when he was both a student of Vincent d'Indy, and

professor of counterpoint at the Paris Conservatoire. Shortly after, he changed his style decisively, based on musical experiences in South East Asia. A freely-constructed rondo with tempo indication *Animé*, the *Divertissement* juxtaposes rhythmically vigorous tutti passages built over piano ostinati that might conjure up the hoi-polloi of *fin-de-siècle* Parisian life, with more lyrical sections where Roussel already displays a penchant for languid circling pentatonic scales, painted on a canvas reminiscent of impressionist watery reflections. With his non-conventional harmonies, and the percussive effect of stomping repeated tonally-ambiguous chords, Roussel asserts himself as a new voice against Romantic indulgence. The music is constantly energetic and engaging, but without the smugness that characterized Les Six of the next generation.

The compositions of Swiss-born **Marguerite Roesgen-Champion**, who joined the Parisian scene in the 20s, mostly involve piano, organ, or her instrument of choice the harpsichord. Her earliest compositions show a debt to the style of Debussy and Ravel, coupled with a sense of religious devotion arising from





Marguerite Roesgen-Champion

her Catholic faith. The three-movement *Pastorale* is characterized with simple melodies played in alternation by the three instruments, supported by rich harmonies on the piano. In the *Valse sentimentale*, the oboe's lyricism glides above a skating cello part while the piano outlines a characteristic waltz accompaniment to evoke the swoosh of dresses on the dance floor. This movement is prefaced by a verbal announcement — a vestige of the acoustic era when recordings were routinely identified in this way, and a beguiling glimpse of the composer's poised, genteel voice. The short suite, unified by

the melodic rise of a fifth (a hallmark of the composer's works), concludes with a bucolic rondo based on the theme of the *Pastorale*. The oboist here is Louis Bleuzet, who can also be heard on 'The Oboe 1903-1953', playing the *Sonatine* by Mihalovici (see the note on Ferroud below).

**Jacques Hotteterre** (called Le Roman after his studies there) was a member of a significant dynasty of flute and oboe players bridging the 17th and 18th centuries. He published his op. 5 in 1715, when the death of the long-reigning Louis XIV would signal a shift in musical taste in France. The third work in the collection bore the dual title of both 'Suite' and 'Sonate', probably to indicate that some movements were dance-inspired and others abstract instrumental pieces in a mixed Franco-Italian style.

A special feature of this style is the intricate ornaments detailed in the score with specialized symbols. On this



Jacques-Martin Hotteterre engraving by Bernard Picart

relatively early recording, Pierlot's tone is beautifully centred, with graceful phrase endings and dynamic nuance, while the dance rhythms bounce without the imposition of excessive vibrato as is often the case with his later recordings. It is interesting to note that Pierlot, who was often criticized (particularly by non-French listeners) for his pronounced bright, reedy sound, complained that his L'Oiseau-Lyre recordings produced by André Charlin, favoured by Hanson-Dyer because he was also a flute player, were tonally too bright for his taste.

**Pierre-Octave Ferroud** wrote his *Trio* in 1933, and dedicated it to Filip Lazar who, together with his fellow ex-patriot Rumanian composer Marcel Mihalovici were co-founders of the Triton music society where the work received its première in January 1934. The *Trio d'Anches* were regular visitors to the Triton concerts where they had already performed a number of new works, including trios by Roussel and Ibert. Another trio would be forthcoming from Lazar in 1934. Ferroud produced only a small quantity of music in his short life, but what he wrote — mostly for piano, voice or chamber ensembles — shows daring originality. In the wind trio the emphasis is

on virtuosity. The first movement, which takes the form of an old *sinfonia italiana*, is tonally ambiguous and laced with the same type of grace-note ornaments found in Auric's trio. The calmer slow movement features lyrical exchanges between paired instruments set against an oscillating accompaniment. After an arresting unison opening, the finale resembles a tarantella with blues notes. Hysterical explosions of virtuosic energy are thrown together with distorted cabaret songs, marching motifs and exotic themes in a bizarre *pot pourri* that resembles a musical transcription of a canvas by Salvador Dalí, then also active in Paris.

The *Pastorale* was one of several works that **Stravinsky** arranged in the 1930s for his own use on concert tours with the violinist Samuel Dushkin. Originally written in 1907 as a vocalise for performance in the Rimsky-Korsakov circle, it was arranged for voice and wind instruments by the composer in 1923. The violin version dates from another ten years later, just prior to this recording. Being derived from a work reliant on simple



classical harmonies from earlier in Stravinsky's career cast in a scoring with his favoured wind instruments, this version of the *Pastorale* serves as a demonstration of Neo-Classicism in miniature. Dushkin, a Polish Jew raised in New York and educated at the Paris Conservatoire, met Stravinsky in 1930. The two quickly developed a close friendship and formed a touring duo. Both artists came under scrutiny from the Nazis, and their 1933 German tour was one of Stravinsky's last engagements there until after the war. This recording was originally coupled with a dazzling arrangement of the 'Danse Russe' from *Petroushka* for violin and piano they had recorded a couple of months earlier. A British reviewer in *Gramophone* recommended the disc as 'the most favourable possible introduction to [Stravinsky's] later style. Hear it, and hear it many times if necessary. I need scarcely say, Stravinsky's texture is perfect, ideal, delectable. The composite conception is certainly one of a supreme musical genius. I have heard no record more enjoyable than this, more refreshing or soothing, for a long time.' With its charming cantilena and piquant subtleties, the *Pastorale* was a welcome addition to wind players' repertoire, and Stravinsky conducted another two recordings of it that span his

career<sup>4</sup>. (Of the players on this recording, oboist Louis Gromer can also be heard playing a Handel Sonata on 'The Oboe 1903-1953'.)

From its first rich dark chords, **André Jolivet's** *Sérénade* transports the listener to a primitive world of sacred mysteries. Fragmentary melodies repeated with ritualistic insistence but with continuously modulating rhythmic profile, lead us on a solemn procession through ancient forests. The title is doubtless a reference to the classical wind serenade of Mozart's time, and should be taken to mean no more than a work for wind instruments with no particularly serenading quality — indeed the immediate effect is highly choreographic and even disturbing in its dramatic effect. The shadow of Stravinsky is pervasive in its musical makeup and also in the spirit of the work. What clearer evocation of *Le Sacre du Printemps* can be imagined than the stamping repeated unison rhythms that interrupt the accumulation of frenzied energy in the final Marche Burlesque?

The curiosity of a wind quintet with a solo oboe part is explained by the fact that *Sérénade* was commissioned as a *pièce de concours* for the oboe students of the Paris

Conservatoire. Published in parts and a reduction to allow the contestants to rehearse with piano, it bore the customary dedication to the professor, Pierre Bajeux. The oboe part is throughout extremely taxing, and got the better of even Pierre Pierlot, who passed on some of the passages in the highest range to the flute for the recording. The year 1945 announced a new start after the war, and the opportunity to return to a more normal life. Some of the Conservatoire students who graduated with Jolivet's *Sérénade* had been obliged to defer their studies with Bleuzet (track 9) because of wartime service, and rejoined the class under Bajeux's direction.

In 1873, before he had made a name for himself as an opera composer, **Jules Massenet** wrote incidental music to a *tragédie antique*



Jules Massenet

by Leconte de Lisle entitled *Erinnyes*. While not as famous as the 'Elégie' where a solo cello representing Electra lamenting at her father's grave, 'La Troyenne regrettant sa patrie' follows a tradition established by Gluck and common in French

dramatic music from the late 18th century of coupling melodic simplicity with the plaintive tones of the oboe to express grief, loss or homesickness. Massenet's melody seems so naturally suited to the oboe that it may come as a surprise to learn that he originally scored it for a string ensemble. The poignancy of this musical moment is all the more telling with Gaudard's ringing pure tone that belongs to the older school of French oboe playing dominated by Georges Gillet and his pupils (both Gillet and Gaudard can be heard on 'The Oboe 1903-1953').



Louis Goudard  
photo c.1901-5  
collection Octave Mans

#### Notes referred to in the text:

1. Released originally on Vega C35A18 (1959), presently available on *Composers in Person* EMI 17575 (2008). Poulenc is heard with oboist Pierre Pierlot and bassoonist Maurice Allard.
2. The music publication bears the names of all the group's members as dedicatees — Fleury and Blanquart (flutes), Gaudard and Leclercq (oboes), Guyot and Cahuzac (clarinets), Capdeville and Mellin (horns), Flament and Hermans (bassoons).
3. The Trio d'Anches can also be heard in four movements from Milhaud's *Suite d'après Corrette* on 'The Oboe 1903-1953'.
4. The first of these was with Joseph Sziget and the legendary Mitch Miller playing oboe was made under the composer's direction in New York in 1946, the third with the Columbia Chamber Ensemble, recorded in Hollywood in 1965.