



FRANCIS POULENC
 CONCERT CHAMPÊTRE
 FOR HARPSICHORD
 AND ORCHESTRA
 AIMÉE VAN DE WIELE
 CONCERTO IN D MINOR
 FOR TWO PIANOS
 AND ORCHESTRA
 FRANCIS POULENC
 JACQUES FÉVRIER
 ORCHESTRE
 DE LA SOCIÉTÉ
 DES CONCERTS
 DU CONSERVATOIRE
 GEORGES PRÊTRE





35993

FRANCIS POULENC CONCERTO IN D MINOR FOR TWO PIANOS AND ORCHESTRA

Francis Poulenc and Jacques Février, pianists
Allegro ma non troppo / Larghetto / Finale

CONCERT CHAMPÊTRE FOR HARPSICHORD AND ORCHESTRA

Aimée van de Wiele, harpsichordist
Allegro molto / Andante / Finale

Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire (Paris)
conducted by GEORGES PRÊTRE

No one could resist the contagious joyousness, the grace and the exuberance of these two works; but the performances are something special too. The harpsichord concerto was written for Landowska; Aimée van de Wiele is a worthy successor. The other was first performed in 1932 by these two old teammates Poulenc and Février; they are still, after thirty years, the most youthful interpreters imaginable. Excellent recording . . .

CANDIDE (PARIS)



BEFORE HE BECAME A COMPOSER, the young Francis Poulenc was a pianist. His mother, an excellent musician, was his first teacher; subsequently he studied with a niece of César Franck and later the great Ricardo Viñes, to whom Poulenc has said that he owes "everything." From Viñes he learned certain pianistic "secrets" and a particularly sensuous touch. After reaching maturity as a composer, Poulenc is still a pianist, and has concertized widely with baritone Pierre Bernac; in 1957 he won a *Prix du Disque* of the Académie Charles Cros for his recording of pieces by Eric Satie.

It is only natural that Poulenc should entrust to the keyboard several of his major compositions. Aside from chamber music and solo piano works (the *Mouvements perpétuels* are only the most famous), Poulenc has composed five concertos: the two recorded here, the dance concerto *Aubade* (1929), the *Concerto for Organ* (with string orchestra and timpani) (1941) and the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (1950).

The two concertos in this album belong to the composer's "elegant" period—the *Concert Champêtre* (*Rustic Concert*) for harpsichord and small orchestra in particular. Composed in 1927-28, it is the first work

of Poulenc that is truly symphonic in construction. It stems from his friendship with the late Wanda Landowska, who was then living at Saint-Leu, France. Every Sunday in the spring, in a small studio built at the back of her garden and surrounded by cherry and peach trees, she gave recitals that will never be forgotten by those lucky enough to hear them.

Poulenc met Landowska while she was rehearsing the harpsichord part for the first production of Falla's *El Retablo de Maese Pedro* in the home of the Princess Edmond de Polignac. (Ricardo Viñes was helping work the marionettes for which this miniature opera is written.) One day Landowska said to Poulenc, "Write me a concerto!" The composer began at once, still intimidated by the great artist and not yet really familiar with the harpsichord. He soon perceived the unique qualities, the immense resources of the instrument, which was then even more neglected than now. Although he later authorized a piano version of the score, he insists that this is strictly a compromise, for it quite alters the music's character.

The composer has explained the title as follows; "For a young man who, until he was eighteen, knew

nothing of the 'country' but the Bois de Vincennes and the hills of Champigny, 'rural' means the outer suburbs. Landowska lived in Saint-Leu, not far from Ermenonville, and my work is set in a very definite atmosphere of the eighteenth century. This is the 'country' of Diderot and Rousseau... This explains the refined character of some of my melodic material. When he wrote about the piece, the critic Gabriel Marcel believed that he found in the finale shocking and inexplicable 'barracks noises.' Quite so. For me, a confirmed city-dweller, the bugles from the Fort de Vincennes, heard from the nearby woods, are as poetic as hunting horns in a vast forest were for Weber."

The *Concert Champêtre* was given its first public performance in the Salle Pleyel, May 3, 1929, with Landowska at the harpsichord and the Orchestre Symphonique de Paris conducted by Pierre Monteux. Several days before, however, a private performance had been given at Landowska's house in Saint-Leu, the composer himself playing the orchestral score on the piano. In *L'écrivain public* Jacques de Lacretelle recalled this poetic moment: "Just imagine the setting of this performance. A country house transformed by Mme. Landowska's rare instruments into a musical museum; all around the artists, young girls who—enveloped by the frailest, most tender sounds—seem touched with an especial grace. Poulenc is at the piano playing the orchestral part. His playing is nimble, spirited, brilliant. He is quite sure of himself; nourished on everything new and lively that music has produced over the last twenty-five years, he demonstrates his own newness and liveliness. And the alliance he has formed with the instrument of Rameau and Couperin clearly marks his position. Baroque style and the surprises of modern harmony are volatilized in the sounds of the harpsichord. He waits for Landowska... he calls to her... he allows himself to be subdued by her. There is a fairy-like quality in their collaboration; this is something out of *A Midsummer Night's Dream... Beauty and the Beast...*"

The work is in three movements. The first is introduced by several slow and solemn measures whose forbidding, haughty character rather reminds us of Stravinsky's strong contemporary influence on French musicians. The *Allegro molto* proper is in pure 18th Century style, and unfolds in the joyous and impertinent mood that characterizes Poulenc's style in this period. The

second movement, *Tempo de sicilienne*, is one of great tenderness, probably one of Poulenc's most successful creations melodically and harmonically. The Finale, *Presto (très gai)*, is a charming meeting between the glib agility of Handel and the harmonic and rhythmic roughness of Stravinsky; yet Poulenc is clearly in control of the piece from start to finish.

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In the *Concerto for Two Pianos* Poulenc took a new step forward in his evolution. It too is Baroque to a certain extent, but it goes beyond Baroque conventions. It is free—completely free—and free in spite of the rather precise models which Poulenc set before himself: the two-piano concerto, of which Bach, Mozart and Mendelssohn had contributed just about the only examples in the history of music. Moreover he elected to follow their spirit of the brilliant divertimento.

The *Concerto for Two Pianos* is also connected with the memory of that patroness of the arts the Princess Edmond de Polignac. It was she who commissioned the work from Poulenc in order to have him play it at the International Festival of Contemporary Music at Venice in 1932. It was there that the work was first performed, with Jacques Février at the second piano. "Having always played two-piano music with my old boyhood friend Jacques Février," says Poulenc, "I must immodestly testify that the first performance was

flawless. Désiré Defauw, the Belgian conductor, directed the orchestra of La Scala. It was a smash success, for the piece is gay and uncomplicated."

It is surely gay and uncomplicated, and remains one of Poulenc's most typically inventive, spontaneous and free compositions. As in most of his works during this period, the influence of Stravinsky is still perceptible, but Poulenc's personality triumphs, as usual, over all clichés and allusions.

The *Concerto for Two Pianos* is in three movements corresponding to the classical plan. The opening *Allegro* is marked by an irresistible, buoyant energy, with a slightly acid charm. Here his sonic preoccupations are most evident and most skillfully realized. We should note in this regard the ingenious dialogue between the two pianos and the coloristic effects in the Coda, where the composer was admittedly thinking of the Balinese music he had heard at the Colonial Exposition of 1931. Next is a *Larghetto*, whose broad outlines are quite classical, with outer sections in a spirit of homage to Mozart, while the central episode reveals the more distinctive Poulenc, with its unashamed sentimentality. The Finale is an *Allegro molto*, perhaps not always as well disciplined as the preceding movements; here Poulenc's melodic and harmonic facility is almost too bountiful, yet Poulenc is still triumphant, imposing a unity of inimitable brilliance.

From notes by CLAUDE ROSTAND

MORE BY PRÊTRE ON ANGEL

(S) indicates Stereo.

POULENC: Gloria (Rosanna Carteri, soprano; Chorus of the RTF); Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani (Maurice Duruflé). Orchestre National de la RTF. Winner, *Grand Prix du Disque*. (S) 35953

"CONTEMPORARY BALLETS FROM FRANCE"—Poulenc: Les Biches; Dutilleux: Le Loup; Milhaud: La Création du monde. Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, Paris. (S) 35932

"RUSSIAN ORCHESTRAL MASTERPIECES"—Moussorgsky: A Night on Bald Mountain; Rimsky-Korsakov: Capriccio espagnol; Borodin: Polovtsian Dances from "Prince Igor" and In the Steppes of Central Asia. Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. (S) 35951

"THE VOICE OF WAGNER"—Five Wesendonck Lieder and excerpts from Die Walküre, Parsifal and Lohengrin (Régine Crespin, soprano). Orchestre National de la RTF. Winner, *Grand Prix du Disque*. (S) 35832





Angel

SIDE 1

35993

(2XLA-X-742) 33 1/3

POULENC — CONCERTO IN D MINOR

- (1) First Movement: Allegro ma non troppo
- (2) Second Movement: Larghetto
- (3) Third Movement: Finale

**FRANCIS POULENC (Piano) & JACQUES
FÉVRIER (Piano) and ORCHESTRE DE LA
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*Recorded in France
Mfd. in U.S.A.*

MONOPHONIC



Angel

SIDE 2

35993

(2XLA-X-743) 33 $\frac{1}{3}$

POULENC — CONCERT CHAMPÊTRE

- (1) First Movement: Allegro molto
- (2) Second Movement: Andante
- (3) Third Movement: Finale

AIMÉE VAN DE WIELE (Harpsichord)

and ORCHESTRE DE LA
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