

Francis Poulenc, by Yvonne Gouverné

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Yvonne Gouverné (1889-1983) for many years directed the choirs of the French National Radio and collaborated closely with Francis Poulenc who was one of her very close friend.

Since we are gathered in these venerable surroundings in the presence of Monseigneur Rabine, Bishop of Cahors, it is first of all Canon Péchuzal whom we must thank for his generous initiative, so moving for the family and friends of Francis Poulenc, as it was he who wished to pay tribute to this great musician, in this year, the 10th anniversary of his death.

I find in this event, which may reach out today to many pilgrims who did not know Francis Poulenc, a significant intervention from the Black Virgin of Rocamadour, who never ceased to watch over him from his first approaches to her, he, one of the most gifted composers of our time, who enriched French music through many works of very different character which are performed the world over; it was here, though, that his religious feelings were first revealed in the music which he wrote to the words of the Litanies to the Black Madonna, as a result of a visit he decided to make from Uzerche in August 1936. The mysterious workings of her blessing allowed him to find once more that radiant faith which was never to leave him.

It is an honour for me today to carry out a duty which I am only too aware I am not qualified for, but the friendship of certain people has guided my life and I feel, amongst those who are no longer with us, Francis Poulenc still in touch with me almost as though he were picking up the telephone to explain that I should be ready to do this or that where his music is concerned...

Of course, it would have been logical that Pierre Bernac, having travelled the world with Francis Poulenc at the piano for 25 years in countless concerts, should have been here to speak to you about someone he knew so well. As it happens, this great performer has to be in Canada where he is currently teaching, but it was on Pierre Bernac's advice that Canon Péchuzal came to me.

Francis Poulenc and Pierre Bernac, I can hardly separate them in my affections, having lived close to them almost like an older sister, sharing the joys and troubles of her brothers, working with them, supporting their efforts towards a common goal during many summers spent together, preparing concerts for the following winter. More than forty years link me to them through conversations and priceless discoveries, of which I feel the lasting value more than ever on returning here; truly a gift from God.

Francis Poulenc brings to music such an originality that it seems impossible, whichever way people's preferences may lie, not to recognise in him that rare and unique talent which springs from most of his music: the gift of melody.

As for finding out more about the man and musician for those who wish to know him, there are many valuable publications available, of which I quote only the most important:

- *Entretiens avec Claude Rostand* (1953-54)
- *Francis Poulenc, musicien français* by Henri Hell (1958)
- *Moi et mes amis*, by Stéphane Audel (1964)
- *Francis Poulenc*, by Jean Roy (1964)
- *Correspondance* of Francis Poulenc (1915-1963)

For those who are interested in the interpretation of Poulenc's vocal music, they should read his own book: *Journal de mes mélodies*, dedicated to Pierre Bernac. One should also read Francis Poulenc's delightful book on Chabrier, which gives some idea of the fluency and sensitivity of which our friend was capable when writing about his own field. So, for the moment, there is no shortage of information on our late friend, and by studying it, it is possible to have an idea of his work and the person who was Francis Poulenc.

For his contemporaries, he was someone whose curiosity was always aroused by anything which showed promise; he never closed the door on anyone's efforts...and when he was alone at home in Touraine, at Noizay where he gathered his thoughts for writing, how many hours he would spend listening to recordings, re-listening, often comparing very different works of others and his own, learning and improving himself.

His disappearance from our midst has upset a balance for his friends, so familiar and even necessary was his presence.

The disarray into which they were thrust by his absence means that Francis Poulenc will never be forgotten by them. His immense gifts hidden under a rather nonchalant exterior, he was someone who challenged every convention. We loved him because he was HIMSELF, and everything about him remained irreplaceable.

I know very well that, in time, everything dwindles and leaves us: we must therefore keep the flame of love burning, in ourselves, so that hope might overcome the trials of life, and I know too that from the invisible kingdom where he now rests, Francis Poulenc is still one of us...Is his language not woven from the various threads of his enthusiasm, his anxieties, his gaiety, his fervour, and are the accents of his Faith not seen in the innocent questioning, sudden intensity and the relief which asserts itself sometimes like an answer from God reassuring him?

But I am sinking into reflections to make me feel better before the man himself has even made his appearance and I am forgetting that many of you will know very little about him.

Francis Poulenc was born on the 7th January 1899 at 2 place des Saussaies in Paris. Born to middle class parents, Parisian through his mother, for whom religion was only one part of a good education; it is thus from his mother's side that he developed a partiality for Paris whilst, from his father, Emile Poulenc, born in Espalion, he joined generations of practising Catholics stretching back in the Aveyron. Emile Poulenc himself had a strong faith. It was this paternal background then which, when the time was right, was clearly the source behind the spiritual strength of Francis Poulenc the man and composer.

As Poulenc's father was keen that his son should follow a classical education and sit his baccalauréat, Francis was not pointed towards the Conservatoire. The fairy who first touched him was his mother, whom he lost at a young age, and whose talent as a pianist fascinated him. It is to her that he owes having been sent in the right direction. He was sent, while still a small child to Mademoiselle Boutet de Monvel, who was rightly much admired as a pianist.

So, at the age of 15, while the genius of Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky filled his thoughts, he became the pupil of Ricardo Viñes. "I owe him everything" he always told us, as he truly worshipped this delightful teacher. Ricardo Viñes entrusted his student to Charles Koechlin as his composition teacher, although not until 1921 after the Great War. Koechlin's prodigious capabilities left him very aware of his own shortcomings. However, Poulenc's skills as a pianist gave his teacher some direction. The piano remained for him his normal, even indispensable, means of expression throughout his life.

Moreover, we must not forget that he had always been entranced by poetry – at 10, he knew Mallarmé's Apparition from memory – later on at Adrienne Lemonnier's on the rue de l'Odéon, where certain poets of the time would meet, he was able to meet Joyce, Valéry, Larbaud, André Breton, Apollinaire, Paul Eluard...and others too...

We shouldn't be surprised, then, that this meeting of words and music should have given birth to the most instinctive expression of his genius through song.

From *Le Bestaire* (1919) setting poems of Apollinaire, through *Tel jour telle nuit* (1937), *Le travail du peintre* (1956) of Paul Eluard, ending with *La courte paille* (1960) on a poem by Maurice Carême, Poulenc's vocal output, a sequence of 150 *mélodies*, is evidence of his predilection for this form whilst at the same time demonstrating a constant variety across the whole. I know that I am straying from an overview of his work by concentrating on the importance of the *Mélodies*,

which trace a path through his life and define it, but just imagine trying to give a picture of Schumann, for example, without talking straight away about the importance of his *Lieder*, which are a microcosm of the man.

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. No performer has better known how to shape them than Pierre Bernac with his unsurpassed art and precise diction. I am firmly convinced that certain of Poulenc's works, from those 25 years of close collaboration, would not have been written had the composer not felt so well understood.

As ever, when one attempts to explain the genius of an artist, we come up against the inexplicable. From his roots as much as from the whole of his work, Francis Poulenc seems to me to be the archetype of the latin temperament, sharp of understanding yet an idler, entranced sometimes by simple displays, an open-air shop, yet exceedingly refined in his tastes, possessing the gift of choice, of elegance; he knew in every town places where you could find this or that..."much better than anywhere else" as he would say. His personality could lean towards slight snobbishness or sometimes a completely bohemian lifestyle, whilst his underlying *bourgeoisie* still exerted its powers over him.

If these contradictions sometimes masked a certain lack of commitment, he was nevertheless more shrewd than he appeared and his intuition led him to discover affinities which led to close mutual understanding. Besides, nothing was more enjoyable than the intimate gatherings which he arranged, since nobody knew how to entertain better than Francis Poulenc and through his welcome and attentiveness, to make his friends feel relaxed.

Self-centred yet wonderfully good, reliable, loyal and solid as a rock as a friend, none of us will ever know how much good he did unobtrusively – though he himself was intolerant of the slightest irritation. Moreover, boredom made him seem remote...

When he was unable to get away, physically, from irksome conversations, he appeared to continue the dialogue whilst rubbing his eyes pointedly, as, slowly his long legs stretched out while he slipped quietly into a sleep like state, and with a beatific smile, he would punctuate the monologue of his voluble interlocutor with grunts from time to time.

His spirit, when he was in a good mood, surprised anyone who did not know him well. Full of good humour certainly, but not at all ironic, Poulenc was a worrier, easily demoralised, whose bouts of depression were almost as terrible for his friends as for himself. The following lines, written to me from Noizay in September 1938, are a moving example of this sort of depression:

"Dear Yvonne,

I'm writing to you today because I would love to hear from you _ that would do me good as I'm not in very good spirits at the moment...a good piano in the « Chalet Coquet » (this was a reference to our summer in Uzerche in 1936 where he wrote the *Litanies à la Vierge Noire* soon after that first visit to Rocamadour), two real friends, that's much better than composing.

I'm sorry that you are so busy from October, as I would have liked you to have chosen a room here which would have become « Yvonne's bedroom», I'm sure that that would make me work, and work well.

I am trying "Plainchant" but I haven't yet got into the style. I am (as so often when I'm here by myself) having days when I couldn't give tuppence for my music...I'm just dreaming about next summer when I'd like to work for a long time with you around.

That's all the news,
With my fond love,
Francis"

Poulenc was happy in this world – it goes without saying – yet, he was wracked by contradictions which struggled within him, almost as if his imagination and his feelings had created several personalities locked into one; even without the weight of genius, it is only human to be easily hurt, especially when history promises an enviable future.

The activity which Poulenc could not shirk meant that he had to make frequent journeys even though he detested travelling. Having the benefit of a stupendous visual memory, he could remember the smallest details of a landscape, a building or especially a painting, but his curiosity never seemed to be aroused by foreign lands. The terse style of a card which I received from Egypt where so many wonders were there for him to see is an amusing example: whilst Pierre Bernac, who was touring with him, wrote to me from Luxor on the 24th March 1952: "Dear Yvonne, we are

dazzled and dumbfounded and we are sorry not to be able to share these experiences with our friends. Love, Pierre”, on the same postcard Poulenc confided: “Dear Yvonne, I can’t wait to show you my *Camélites*! Pierre is completely rejuvenated by the trip and I’m happy to see him on form. It’s nice here, but as the song says, it’s nice but it’s sad. Love, Francis”.

Like Joachim du Bellay, Poulenc seems to say:” Ah, when will I see the smoke from the chimney of my little village again, And in what season will I see my poor dwelling, which to me is a province, and much more ?”

Francis Poulenc is then from the same country as Ronsard, Rabelais and La Fontaine, of all the French, the most French of French musicians. It is also perhaps one of the reasons why his music was so quickly accepted abroad, at a time when everyone was keen to discover the detail which defines national characteristics, for one must realise that many of Poulenc’s works have found unquestionable fame overseas.

Is it not strange, for example, that his *Organ Concerto*, still infrequently heard in France and which, by the way, is one of his most personal works, should have been played more than three hundred times in the space of a year and that the *Dialogues des Camélites*, Bernanos’ play with its specifically national and catholic subject from the French Revolution, should go round the world and fascinate non-latin countries with its seriousness. In saying this, I’m thinking of Britain and North America.

I won’t overstress this, as I have drawn your attention to this long lineage of *mélodies* which in the context of his whole work, are to Francis Poulenc what the backbone is to our bodies, but I do wish to show you the lasting qualities of other parallel strands.

Throughout his life, Poulenc was aware of the shimmering blends of sounds from the brass and woodwind families, much more so than the possibilities which the strings offered, and showed his mastery when he had this sound palette to hand.

In 1918 Poulenc was 19; the *Sonata for Two Clarinets* had already appeared, then in 1922 came two further sonatas, one for clarinet and bassoon, the other for horn, trumpet and trombone, which paved the way for the *Trio* of 1926 written for piano, oboe and bassoon and dedicated to Manuel de Falla: with its carefree cheerfulness, it is the classic divertimento, as is the *Sextet* from 1932.

From 1957, the *Sonata for Flute and Piano* has a deeper message but manages to keep the grace of his youthful works, while lastly the *Sonata for Oboe and Piano*, written in 1962 as homage to Serge Prokofiev ends the cycle and contains a moving lament which seems truly to be a farewell to life.

1919 gave us the first works for piano too; the *Mouvements Perpétuels* played in their first performance by Ricardo Viñes, the *Sonata for Piano Duet*, less well-known but ravishing, coming from that spring whence flow all the keyboard concertos which are so successful.

By keyboard, I mean harpsichord, piano and organ. The first so-called *Concert Champêtre*, dedicated to Wanda Landowska, was premiered by this celebrated performer herself on the 3rd of May 1929 in the old Salle Pleyel, under the direction of Pierre Monteux.

Jacques Février, on the other hand, never ceased throughout his life to support the pianistic output of his friend.

His ballets give us another perspective; Diaghilev noticed the young composer and commissioned *Les Biches* from him in 1923, a work whose musical quality was noted by Stravinsky. *Aubade* from 1929, to Poulenc’s own scenario, is a ballet about women entitled Concerto Choréographique for Piano and 18 instruments; its first performance was at the home of the Vicomtesse de Noailles under the direction of Roger Desormière; finally in 1940-41, based on the fables of La Fontaine, the *Animaux Modèles* added to the repertoire one of the best-structured works, and also one of Poulenc’s most beautiful.

Then again, there are his works for voice and chamber orchestra: in 1917, when he was 18, came the *Rapsodie Nègre*, for baritone and small orchestra, given its first hearing at the concerts organised in those pioneering days by Jane Bathori at the Vieux Colombier theatre and sung by the composer himself in the absence of any other artist, to a text by Makoko Kangourou whose appealing lyrics were "Honoloulou, poti lama, Honoloulou, honoloulou ..."

It was an effort which, by its boisterousness and zaniness gave an insight into what, 15 years later with his *Bal Masqué* of 1932 also for baritone and small orchestra, would confirm his comical gaiety. We should see here an indication of Poulenc's frequent preferences for this eccentric style which culminated in a theatrical work of the first order, given on 3rd June 1947 at l'Opéra Comique: *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, to a text by Apollinaire, with music whose boisterous rhythms pitilessly drive the play of the characters. This score is a total success and is the culmination of an irresistibly humorous streak whose preposterousness and activity are non-stop.

Poulenc had an amazing flair for sensing artists whose gifts could be incorporated into the style of his writing. For *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* at the Opéra Comique he had insisted on Denise Duval whom he had discovered, I believe, at the Folies Bergères, knowing that she had the necessary stagecraft to play Apollinaire's crazy, incredible character, who is so difficult to bring off. What was astonishing, was the ease with which, a few years later in 1952, Denise Duval became Blanche de la Force, this picture of Fear and Heroism, so typical of Bernanos, that she portrayed so unforgettably in the opera *Dialogues des Carmélites*, and I ask myself if Francis Poulenc would have chosen as the text for his last stage work, Jean Cocteau's *La Voix Humaine* had he not been so sure that Denise Duval was able to do it. Here, she personified an image of anxiety which drew nothing at all from religion, but instead from basic, I was going to say ordinary, emotional reactions, such as one would hardly admit to oneself, so pathetic are they: a woman alone on stage with a telephone.

...by her responses, she allowed one to guess the sense of the words of the man she loved who was cheating her and who would say anything to rid himself of a lover he no longer loved...Although it's the old story, the device may have tired quickly, and whilst a quite surprising success, it could be that *La Voix Humaine* may no longer be relevant to newer generations who might today be tempted or captivated by other subjects.

It is nonetheless true though that the musician who was able to write *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, *La Voix Humaine* with such insight into the texts he set is a great artist and that one single talent in the person of Denise Duval could bring alive three works of such differing character remains a stunning fact.

You will notice that I have not yet talked to you about the musical form which would become so beloved, so familiar and almost indispensable to our composer: unaccompanied choirs and the works for chorus and orchestra which may be regarded as his finest achievements in the last 25 years of his life. It was quite late, then, that Francis Poulenc saw how the choir, this instrument with such varied possibilities, could measure up to the extent of his creative quest!

Besides, before 1936, his spiritual life had not yet developed to include the mysteries which would reveal to him a whole new side of himself. Is it not strange that it should be on this unlikely temperament that God set his heart, so that those cries of anguish or praise which ascend to him are, without doubt, among the most original and finest of all our contemporary French music?

I can still remember Francis Poulenc getting off the train in Uzerche, where Pierre Bernac and I had come to meet him in that fateful month of August 1936. He said to us straight away, "Ferroud has just been killed in a dreadful car accident near Salzburg." Now, we had spent the two previous summers in Salzburg where we had come into daily contact with this very bright musician, Pierre Octave Ferroud, whose intense energy led us to take part in many of his projects. He had founded a chamber music society "Le Triton" where we often heard first performances. His death hit Poulenc very hard.

This area around Uzerche where we were staying brought Francis close to the Aveyron, the birthplace of his father; it was the right place for a kind of revelation to manifest itself. Poulenc wanted to go to Rocamadour, a very ancient place of pilgrimage which did not draw, thirty years ago, the crowds that you meet there today. All three of us had gone into the noiseless chapel where the statue of the Black Madonna is found, "Our Lady whose pilgrimage is enriched with special favours" according to the litanies...; nothing happened outwardly, yet everything in the spiritual life of Poulenc changed.

He had bought a small image printed with the text of the *Litanies à la Vierge Noire*. On his return to Uzerche, he set to work straight away writing that perfect piece for women's choir and organ that many of you will already know. I have kept, almost like a relic, this image which he gave me subsequently, on which he had jotted down the sequence of notes which were the musical development of his own prayer. And how could I not have been profoundly moved by the significance which another small picture of the Black Madonna dated August 1962 has assumed for me long after that distant time, since this was the final message that I was to receive from the grateful pilgrim who did not fail to return every year to the blessed place where God's mercy had touched him in 1936.

"How long it is since the time of the Litanies," he wrote, "but still warm in my heart, dear Yvonne. I asked Our Lady for a lovely recording of *Figure Humaine* this winter. Delightful holiday. Divine weather. Have a good summer. Love, Francis."

Alas, the recording was never made in his lifetime.

Let us now take a broad look at the religious works which follow the *Litanies*, in the shadow of the protection offered by *La Vierge Noire*. In 1937, the *Mass in G major*, dedicated to the memory of his father, assumed a pre-eminent place in the development of the composer. With its vitality and joyful clamour on which his faith is writ large, it has something of a piece in baroque style, full of vigour and promise. Its first performance was given in Paris by Les Chanteurs de Lyons under their excellent conductor Bourmarck, at the UCTM in May 1938 in the chapel of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. Next came the *Four Motets for a Time of Penitence* for which I have a personal predilection (1938-39) – two joyful motets: *Exultate Deo* and *Salve Regina* (1941) – *Four Short Prayers of St. Francis of Assisi* for men's voices (1948).

1950: the *Stabat Mater* for orchestra, mixed choir and soprano solo, one of the keystones of our building; the suffering of the Virgin inspires the musician, the soul of the believer is preparing for the drama of the *Carmélites* and renunciation of everything apart from Hope. After a performance of this magnificent music given by the orchestra and choirs of the ORTF, without the composer, I was sent these lines which confirm the extent to which he was concerned with the fulfilment of his intentions:

3rd April 1953

" My Yvonne,

I can never thank you enough for the performance of the *Stabat* last night. It was simply admirable and I had never heard it like that. Everything was perfect: tempi, shading, pauses. Do thank your choirs most warmly. Rosenthal was splendid and Moizan, as always, moving. I listened alone, in the dark, in Marie Blanche's big American car, which was left in the garden. Thus, I enjoyed listening to the full...

Keep it quiet, I am doing an opera for La Scala on the "Dialogues des Carmélites". This subject should suit me. Happy Easter. Yours, as always, very affectionately,
Francis"

There followed in:

1952: the *Four Motets for Christmas* for unaccompanied choir

1957: *Ave Verum*, a very short piece for female voice

1958: the *Laudes de Saint Antoine de Padoue* for unaccompanied men's voices

1960: *Gloria* for orchestra, mixed choir and soprano solo, where the Church Triumphant asserts itself totally

1961: *Répons des Ténèbres* Ecce Quomodo moritur Justus, for children's and men's voices

So, the effect on Poulenc of this fragile and fleeting quality, expressive and nuanced, which is the voice, led him to discoveries which are the equal of the great musical masters. I hope I will be allowed now, as it seems vital to me, to list also the astonishing list of secular choral pieces without which Poulenc would not be Poulenc.

In 1936, the *Sept Chansons a Capella* for mixed voices, on texts by Eluard and Apollinaire, appeared; the music is a marvel of conciseness and colour. It could only be from the pen of Poulenc, just as certain paintings, from the freshness of their tones, could only be by Claude Monet or Raoul Dufy.

Petites Voix, for children's voices, showed, when Francis Poulenc turned his attention to childhood, the same spontaneity, the sense of fun that he found when he sat down at the piano to set, in quite a different way, yet with the same originality, the stories of *Babar*.

I have often been rebuked for my predilection for a cantata for choir and orchestra to a text by Edward James, *Sécheresses*; at its first performance in May 1938 at the Concerts Colonne it had no success, but under the direction of Charles Munch during the war, this cantata took its revenge and its rightful place.

In 1944: *Un soir de Neige*, a small-scale cantata on poems by Eluard, for six a capella voices, is a little masterpiece. 1945: I mention in passing the *Huit chansons sur des thèmes populaires*, as amusing as Janequin, that is to say, deftly arranged. And so we come to *Figure Humaine*, written by Poulenc during the Occupation and the pinnacle of this series of choral works.

"If only you knew, Yvonne, how awful it is at sixty, to have kept the heart of a twenty year old!" This plea of Francis Poulenc's was uttered by him in a moment of indescribable emotion, throwing himself into my arms like a child, after we had just celebrated his 60th birthday in June 1959 at the Salle Gaveau... with an unforgettable concert of his music, a programme he himself had chosen. *Figure Humaine* was the inevitable apotheosis.

Dear Francis, you are as old as your music. And that, for all that it belongs to a particular period, shows no signs of ageing. *Le Bestiaire* had already showed your colours when you were twenty, your gifts have not lost anything of that first breath of spring! A twenty year old's heart, well that's simply because you were born a poet and your music has retained this marvellous freedom, through all the periods of your life, of beating to the tempo of the instinctive! In your music you have a gift rarely granted by the muses: a flair for gaiety, for the comical, the preposterous, even indeed sloppiness, but without ever descending into ordinariness.

After Chabrier, I do not know which musician, could have shown, in such a delightful way, the exuberance we find in *le Bal Masqué* (1932) or *les Mamelles de Tirésias* (1944), none of which stopped you in that painful period from sparing yourself the anguish and menace of torture and prison with that song of deliverance – perhaps the most beautiful ever to have sprung from your heart - *Figure Humaine*, that great panorama for unaccompanied double choir on Paul Eluard's famous poem. It was one of the most significant works for you, I would even say that it was a rightful favourite because it reflected a deep shock which allowed your genius to go right to the heart of a fundamental rule, the renewal which comes from a freedom, so hard won, being ultimately regained.

If I had to choose only one work to characterise Francis Poulenc and the contrasts which shaped his personality, I think I would pick *Figure Humaine*, because there he is completely himself and his language is truly his own. After the long litany in eight parts evoking the images which haunted the poet, there comes, with growing excitement, the great climax of the last section, which confirms convincingly the lyric power of Francis Poulenc. It is an act of faith, a cry torn from the depth of his being.

As he progressed, the road ahead became clearer and wider, much like the Carmélites singing the *Salve Regina* as overwhelming proof of their faith.

This triumph of the spiritual over the temporal is seen in the setting of the *tenebrae* which contains the final notes written by the composer, who had arrived unknowingly at his journey's end here

below. I do not believe in chance, especially when thinking about the moment when we are called by God. Listen to these few lines written to Pierre Bernac, dated March 26th 1962, ten months before death overtook him:

My little Pierre,

The *Ténèbres* are finished. I'm not sorry that I took so much time as it is quite meticulously laid out; with the *Gloria* and the *Stabat*, I think I have three good religious works. They might spare me a few days of purgatory, if I manage to escape hell. It was with sadness that I completed this last work written in Bagnols, next winter I will be on the move endlessly. Bagnols and the *Gloria* and *Ténèbres* will join my treasured memories of Anost. I feel happily free of everything now and from Providence, musically speaking, I await another creative period.
Francis"

To write the *Répons des Ténèbres* when you are Francis Poulenc and then depart this world without leaving an unfinished page...Is that not something miraculous, even more miraculous when, in January 1963, only a few days before his death, he entrusted the manuscript of this score to his friend Stephane Audel to take to his publisher?

"This will be my last religious work" he told him gravely. So, the Lord took him at his word, opening the heavens to him, and the *Répons des Ténèbres* took him from the world, finding at last the light which he had so anxiously sought.

I have often thought since the sudden death of our friend that if Francis Poulenc left this last work to the world of the living, then it was perhaps a reward. What do we know? Because, to make the pulsing of fear and agony palpable through his own musical language and the work of Bernanos in the drama of the *Carmélites*, it was necessary for Poulenc to understand the worst of human anguish. Although we might consider some aspects of his musical language worthy of enhancing the wayward development of communication in this world, at the same time we cannot ignore how zealous subsequent generations can be when dealing with matters which appear to contradict their own beliefs.

But what is certain, what the future will not be able to deny – assuming our descendants' ears are built like ours - is that one page, a few bars even, are enough for Francis Poulenc to take us into the world of his emotions.

By I know not what rhythmic balance in his style, nor what simplicity in his inspiration, his music awakens images seemingly dormant deep in the past, which only the subtlest of our storytellers or our greatest poets have had the privilege of awakening and reviving from their mysterious abode.

Translation : Adrian Hugues