

The Rascal and the Sparrow

POULENC MEETS PIAF

Antonio Pompa-Baldi
piano



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| 1 | Poulenc, <i>Les chemins de l'amour</i> | 3:33 |
| 2 | Poulenc, Improvisation for Piano no 15 in C minor, FP 176 "Hommage à Edith Piaf" | 3:24 |
| 3 | Monnot, <i>Hymne à l'amour</i> | 3:11 |
| 4 | Poulenc, <i>Rosemonde</i> | 1:51 |
| 5 | Monnot, <i>Un grand amour</i> | 4:03 |
| 6 | Poulenc, "Berceuse" from <i>Cinq poèmes de Max Jacob</i> | 1:43 |
| 7 | Poulenc, "Reine des mouettes" from <i>Métamorphoses</i> , <i>3 poèmes de Louise de Vilmorin</i> | 1:19 |
| 8 | Poulenc, "C'est ainsi que tu es" from <i>Métamorphoses</i> , <i>3 poèmes de Louise de Vilmorin</i> | 2:29 |
| 9 | Louiguy, <i>La vie en rose</i> | 2:07 |
| 10 | Monnot, <i>Les amants d'un jour</i> | 2:52 |
| 11 | Poulenc, "C" from <i>Deux poèmes de Louis Aragon</i> | 2:52 |
| 12 | Bernheim, <i>Paris</i> | 2:45 |
| 13 | Bouquet, <i>Je sais comment</i> | 4:08 |

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| 14 | Poulenc, "Le Pont" from <i>Deux mélodies sur des poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire</i> | 2:26 |
| 15 | Monnot, <i>Mon légionnaire</i> | 2:53 |
| 16 | Poulenc, "Je n'ai envie que de t'aimer" from <i>Tel jour, telle nuit</i> , <i>9 poèmes de Paul Éluard</i> | 1:34 |
| 17 | Monnot, <i>C'est à Hambourg</i> | 3:14 |
| 18 | Poulenc, "Couplets bachiques" from <i>Chansons gaillardes</i> | 1:29 |
| 19 | Poulenc, <i>Nos souvenirs chantent</i> | 3:48 |
| 20 | Poulenc, <i>Non, je ne regrette rien</i> | 4:17 |
| 21 | Poulenc, <i>Mon Dieu!</i> | 2:53 |
| 22 | Poulenc, "Le départ" from <i>Huit chansons polonaises</i> | :57 |
| 23 | Poulenc, "Le dernier mazour" from <i>Huit chansons polonaises</i> | 1:43 |
| 24 | Poulenc, "Attributs" from <i>Cinq poèmes de Ronsard</i> | 1:15 |
| 25 | Poulenc, "Montparnasse" from <i>Deux poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire</i> | 3:09 |
| 26 | Poulenc, "Hyde Park" from <i>Deux poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire</i> | :49 |
| 27 | Poulenc, "Vous n'écrivez plus?" from <i>Parisiana</i> , <i>2 poèmes de Max Jacob</i> | :57 |

Playing Time: 67:40

"Elaborations" of Edith Piaf songs
composed by Roberto Piana
(Tracks 3, 5, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17, 20, 21)
Arrangements of Poulenc songs by
Antonio Pompa-Baldi (Tracks 1, 2, 4,
6-8, 11, 14, 16, 18, 19, 22-27)

The Rascal and the Sparrow was record-
ed April 26–28, 2013 at Sono Luminus
Studios in Boyce, Virginia.
Producer: Dan Mercuerio
Engineer: Daniel Shores
Assistant Engineer: Steve Cusick
Equipment: Metric Halo ULN-8, AEA
a840 microphones
Executive Producers: Eric Feidner,
Jon Feidner
Art Direction: Oberlander Group
Cover Illustration: Jody Hewgill
Piano: Steinway Model D #590904 (New
York) Piano Technician: John Veitch



FRANCIS POULENC SPENT THE SUMMER OF 1959 at his home in *Bagnols-en-Forêt* at work on the *Gloria*, a sacred work scored for soprano, chorus and orchestra. It would become one of his most celebrated pieces from this “mature” period. During this time, he also found the time to compose three smaller works: a fantasy for voice and piano, the *Elegie for Two Pianos*, and the last of fifteen *Improvisations* for piano, a set of concise, lyrical, sometimes rhapsodic, solo piano works he had started back in 1932. He gave the Improvisation No. 15 in C Minor the title “Hommage à Edith Piaf,” a dedication to France’s iconic popular singer, also famously called “The Little Sparrow.”

Little is known about why Poulenc chose this dedication, but the Italian-born pianist Antonio Pompa-Baldi has found in it an occasion to celebrate the musical connections between Poulenc and Piaf on this recording, which mixes transcriptions of selected Poulenc songs with solo piano arrangements (or elaborations) of songs from the repertoire of Edith Piaf. It might be considered as a musical conversation between the two icons who, each in their own way, brought new drama to French song.

“It is obvious that by writing that beautiful melody, and giving it that title, Poulenc wanted his admiration for Edith Piaf to be known,” says Pompa-Baldi of the Improvisation No. 15. But to what extent Poulenc admired Piaf isn’t known. There is no evidence that the two ever met, though they both rose to fame in the Paris of the 1920s and 1930s. They even had friends in common, most notably, Jean Cocteau, the poet, playwright and filmmaker who became the mentor to a group of French composers—nicknamed Les Six—of which Poulenc was a member. “I think whether Poulenc and Piaf met or didn’t meet is not very relevant. What is relevant is that, to me, they share some important traits, as musicians and human beings,” says Pompa-Baldi.

So, what is it that Poulenc and Piaf had in common? They both died in 1963, and 2013 marks the 50th anniversary of their passing. But in terms of their origins, they came from very different backgrounds. Francis Poulenc was born on January 7, 1899 in Paris into a family of means. His father, the joint director of an industrial chemical company, was the scion of a Roman Catholic family from Aveyron (a region in the South of France). His mother stemmed from a strongly Parisian family, and one that had always been enamored of the arts—literature, painting, drama and music. In some ways, these two distinct family traditions were the poles between which the composer operated all his life, the sensual life of the artist

versus the devotional pull of the Catholic Church. The critic Claude Rostand made this observation about the Janus-like Poulenc in his frequently cited Paris-Pressé article from July 1950, which depicts Poulenc as, “a lover of life, mischievous, bon enfant, tender and impertinent, melancholy and serenely mystical, half monk and half rascal [*le moine et le voyou*].”

Legend has it that Piaf was born in the gutter, her birth shielded from view by a gendarme’s cape. But, according to her birth certificate, Edith Giovanna Gassion was born on December 19, 1915 in the Hôpital Tenon, the Belleville arrondissement hospital. After being abandoned by her parents who couldn’t accommodate a sickly child into their itinerant lifestyle—her mother was an Italian café singer, and her father was a French circus acrobat—Edith grew up in a brothel until she later rejoined her father in his street performances. At 15, she took to singing, which led to her being discovered on a street corner by Louis Leplée, the owner of a successful nightclub called *Le Gerny*. It was here that the fledgling singer acquired her nickname, La Môme Piaf/The Little Sparrow, on account of her apparent nerves and her diminutive 4’9” height. It was from such humble beginnings that a star was born. She captivated Paris (and then the world) with the raw, passionate delivery of songs, including her signature number, “La vie en rose,” written in 1945.

While Piaf refined her style in the tradition of the classic French *chanson*—frequently heard within the context of the cabaret—Poulenc wrote many art songs, often based on the poetry of contemporaries (Guillaume Apollinaire, Paul Éluard, Max Jacob to name three associated with songs on this record) that had strong lyrical roots. The contexts for their performance may have been different—the cabaret versus the concert hall— but Poulenc inflected his music with the sound of Parisian music halls, and used jazz harmony when he could. And Poulenc, in all his music, maintained the songwriter’s gift for melody. “Their melodies, whether expressed

in words or purely through music, always speak about love, sorrow, and death, but there is also often a picaresque element too, that way of making light of tragedy, of making the dishonest hero or heroine an appealing if mischievous character,” says Pompa-Baldi of the qualities that the Poulenc and Piaf songs share. The Italian composer, Roberto Piana, who turned these songs into solo piano pieces, noted their often-similar musical character, what he called “a continuous swing [between] strong moments... and soft and melancholic tones.” He added: “This work was feasible because the two personalities possessed many points in common.”

Piana transcribed songs that Piaf made famous over the years, using musical solutions that evoked the harmonic language deployed by Poulenc. Included here are songs written by Marguerite Monnot, an important musical collaborator in Piaf’s life, such as “Les amants d’un jour,” “Mon légionnaire,” and “C’est à Hambourg.” Also featured is “Hymne à l’amour,” whose prescient lyrics Piaf penned for the love of her life, the French boxer, Marcel Cerdan, a few months before his death in a plane crash. Piaf later teamed up with the composer Charles Dumont, who became a favorite in the late fifties, having penned “Non, je ne regrette rien,” a song whose inclusion is mandatory on any Piaf tribute.

Poulenc, who was open about his homosexuality, had his own share of love and heartbreak, especially as he was drawn to flighty young men who did not always move in the same intellectual circles as him. Often what he called his “Parisian sexuality” would lead to despair and depression. One of his best love songs—and one that seems to straddle the gap between art song and cabaret—“Les chemins de l’amour” features on the record. It’s a lilting French waltz that Poulenc wrote as incidental music for the play, *Léocadia*, written in 1940 by Jean Anouilh. A torch song, it burns with long-lost love:

*Chemins de mon amour,
Je vous cherche toujours.
Chemins perdus vous n'êtes plus
Et vos échos sont sourds.*

*Paths of my love
I try to find you always
lost paths, you don't exist anymore,
And your echoes have been muffled.*

Inevitably, there is also a deep vein of melancholy, of grief, that both Poulenc and Piaf shared in life that reveals itself in their work. Though Poulenc's music, especially at the beginning of his career, could be irreverent, sparkling, and witty—music-hall nonchalance, one critic called it—his life was marked by tragedy. He became an orphan in his late teens: his mother, who was an accomplished pianist in her own right, died when he was 16, and his father just two years later. Later on, in 1936, Poulenc was devastated when his friend and fellow-composer, Pierre-Octave Ferroud, was decapitated in a road accident. The violence of this loss led Poulenc back to the church, where the composer rediscovered his Catholic faith, a return that yielded works like *Litanies à la vierge noire*, *The Mass in G*, and later on the *Stabat mater* and the *Gloria*. As he matured as a composer, his music reflected this conflict between the whimsical and the tragic in idiosyncratic ways. This combination of sensual music with a strong spiritual component is powerfully evident in the composer's masterpiece opera, *Dialogues des carmélites*.

When Poulenc wrote his Improvisation No. 15 in 1959, Piaf was regularly selling out concerts at the famous Olympia Theater in Paris. It's not known whether Poulenc ever attended these shows, though it's a pleasure to imagine the composer taking it all in as La Môme Piaf—now a legend in her black dress—enthralled the audience with any one of her searing renditions. One of the songs that she could have performed was “Les feuilles mortes.” Penned in 1945, it later became famous in English as “Autumn Leaves.” Piaf sang the song, which captures the melancholy ache of a lost love, reaching its culmination in the lines, *Et la mer efface sur le sable/ Les pas des amants désunis* [And the sea erases on the sand /The separated lovers' footprints]. Poulenc's Improvisation seems to evoke the song's melancholy, hinting at the melody, even using a similar, jazz-like cycle-of-fifths chord progression. If he's not quoting exactly, Poulenc captures the same spirit, the ghost of another song, in this piece of music that now connects these two French artists for all time.

—Damian Fowler



ANTONIO POMPA-BALDI was born and raised in Italy, Antonio Pompa-Baldi has toured extensively in five continents, performing in some of the world's major concert venues including New York's Carnegie Hall, Cleveland's Severance Hall, Milan's Sala Verdi, Boston's Symphony Hall, Beijing's Forbidden City Concert Hall, and Paris' Salle Pleyel. He has also appeared in London, Rome, Tokyo, Auckland, Houston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Kiev, Seoul, Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Hong Kong.

First prize winner of the 1999 Cleveland International Piano Competition, Pompa-Baldi was also a top prize winner at the 1998 Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaud Competition, and a silver medalist at the 2001 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

Mr. Pompa-Baldi's recordings include an all-Brahms disc, a live and unedited recital from his award-winning Cliburn Competition performances, the Josef Rheinberger Piano Sonatas, the entire piano music of Edward Grieg, in 12 volumes, a Rachmaninoff disc, a Schumann album, as well as Sonatas by Johann Nepomuk Hummel.

Antonio Pompa-Baldi is a Steinway Artist. He serves as Distinguished Professor of Piano at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He also gives master-classes around the world, often in conjunction with his performing engagements.



Pianist and composer, ROBERTO PIANA was born in Sassari, on the Italian island of Sardinia, in 1971. He composed his first works in 1985, and began performing in 1990. While maintaining a busy performance schedule, Roberto is also committed to the study of lesser known composers, such as Ansgore, Gutmann, Ornstein, Pomè, Rebello, Tellefsen, Wolff, and many others. He has dedicated particular attention to the Sardinian composer Lao Silesu (1883-1953). As a composer, Roberto Piana is the author of various piano, voice and chamber music works. His *Interludi* for trio and quintet have been recorded For the Editoriale Documenta label.