



London Philharmonic[★] Orchestra

POULENC
PIANO CONCERTO
ORGAN CONCERTO
STABAT MATER

YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN *conductor*

ALEXANDRE THARAUD *piano*

JAMES O'DONNELL *organ*

KATE ROYAL *soprano*

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA *and CHOIR*

FRANCIS POULENC PIANO CONCERTO

- I *Allegretto commodo*
- II *Andante con moto*
- III *Rondeau à la française*

Francis Poulenc was a pianist as well as a composer, and wrote with facility and flair for his instrument in solo and chamber music and in two concertos, for two pianos and for solo piano. He composed the latter between May and October 1949 as a vehicle for his second concert tour of North America, which was scheduled for the following season. He gave the first performance on 6 January 1950 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra (which had commissioned the work) and its conductor Charles Munch. After further performances over the next few weeks in Boston, Washington, New York and Montreal, Poulenc wrote drily to his old friend Darius Milhaud that 'the Concerto has appealed to pianists, to the public and to certain critics.' In a collection of interviews published in 1954, he described the work as, unlike the celebrated virtuoso concertos in the repertoire, 'a light concerto, a kind of souvenir of Paris for pianist-composer'.

The first movement of the Concerto, in C sharp minor, displays the mixture of sentimental melody and brightly coloured exuberance that had marked all Poulenc's music since his emergence in the early 1920s. It begins with a

sequence of three episodes at increasingly fast tempi: the first based on a simple melody of heart-melting pathos; the second blossoming into warmer and more wide-ranging lyricism; the third introducing a cheerful neo-Classical major-key tune. Previous ideas return and are joined by new ones, decorated by glittering piano figuration, on the way to a brief, fierce climax, with a slow, solemn, declamatory aftermath. The movement ends with a new variant of the second lyrical episode, followed by the opening melody, the cheerful tune and an abrupt coda.

The E flat major *Andante con moto* begins with a calm melody, shared by the orchestra and the piano, over gently throbbing chords in a dactylic (long–short–short) rhythm. An interlude of sharp rising figures and tearing downward scales, at the initial speed of the first movement, precedes a graceful new idea for pairs of woodwind in parallel thirds. An expansion of the rising figure intervenes, amidst swirling arpeggios, and introduces a note of anguish. Calm is restored, and with it the dactylic rhythm and the opening melody.

The finale, in F sharp minor and major, is a rondo on a tune in characteristically short, stubby two-bar phrases. Amidst the wealth of subsidiary melody there are a couple of themes

ORGAN CONCERTO

that sound like updated Mozart; and Poulenc also sneaked in a reference to the opening notes of Stephen Foster's song 'Old folks at home', or 'Way down upon the Swanee river', which are also the closing notes of the French folk song 'A la claire fontaine' – a gesture of transatlantic amity to the Concerto's first audiences. All these ideas are in 2/4 time; but at the end, with characteristically winning inconsequentiality, Poulenc jettisons them to embark on a little coda of athletic triplets in 3/4.

Andante – Allegro giocoso – Andante moderato – Tempo Allegro. Molto agitato – Très calme. Lent – Tempo de l'Allegro initial – Tempo d'introduction: Largo

Poulenc composed his Organ Concerto with much difficulty and hesitation, beginning it in 1934 and completing it in the summer of 1938. It is dedicated to Princesse Edmond de Polignac (née Winnaretta Singer), the American-born patron of the arts, who had a Cavaillé-Coll organ in her Paris salon – though the first performance, in June 1939 with Maurice Duruflé as soloist, was given in the larger space of the city's Salle Gaveau. The work owes much of its continuing appeal to the wide variety of styles and sonorities in the solo part, ranging from Bach-like virtuoso declamation to fairground jollity, and including along the way several of the expressive lyrical melodies at which Poulenc excelled. In these melodies, the solo stops of the organ stand in for the woodwind of a full orchestra; elsewhere, the organ's fuller registrations supply as much weight as an orchestral brass section. So the scoring sounds complete with the organ partnered only by strings and punctuating timpani.

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The Concerto is constructed as a single movement in seven sections, alternating between slow and fast tempos. The slow introduction begins with an organ flourish in the manner of a Bach fantasia, heralding a series of exchanges between organ and orchestra. The short first *Allegro* is based on a brusque string theme, though later on another idea emerges, an insistently repeated four-note rising scale figure over a sustained bass note. The *Andante moderato* is a lyrical episode, alternating between unease and consolation – the latter provided chiefly by the strings in major-key arpeggio figures – and culminating in an anguished climax. The next, ‘very agitated’, *Allegro* is based on a transformation of the work’s opening flourish into triplet rhythms. Then comes a ‘very calm’ interlude of expressive melody, shared among the organ and the different string sections. The final *Allegro* reverts to the tempo of the first fast section, and this time concentrates on the rising four-note figure. The coda brings back the opening flourish, then pairs the organ in duets with solo viola and cello over a repeated accompaniment figure, before a stern ending.

Stabat Mater dolorosa
Cujus animam gementem
O quam tristis
Quae moerebat
Quis est homo
Vidit suum
Eja Mater
Fac ut ardeat
Sancta Mater
Fac ut portem
Inflammatum et accensum
Quando corpus

Poulenc once told an interviewer that he had put ‘the best and most genuine part of myself’ into his sacred music. He regained the Catholic faith of his childhood in 1936 on a visit to the shrine of the Virgin Mary at Rocamadour in the south of France, a place which always remained important to him; and after that he maintained it sincerely, considering it not at all at odds with his ‘Parisian sexuality’. When his friend Christian Bérard, a well-known theatre designer, died in 1949, Poulenc decided to commemorate him not with a Requiem but with a setting of the *Stabat Mater*, the 13th-century prayer for salvation addressed to the Virgin as mother of the crucified Christ. The published score is dedicated ‘to the memory

of Christian Bérard, to commit his soul to Our Lady of Rocamadour'. Poulenc wrote the work – his first sacred composition for chorus and orchestra – at high speed in the summer and autumn of 1950, and orchestrated it the following April, in time for the premiere at the Strasbourg Festival in June.

The *Stabat Mater* is scored for solo soprano, five-part choir (including baritones as well as basses) and a substantial orchestra. The twenty verses of the prayer are grouped into twelve movements, separated by shorter or longer pauses according to precise directions in the score. The musical language owes something to the Renaissance in its references to the old church modes and in passages of vocal counterpoint, and something to the Baroque in its use of rhythmic figures of the period and its foundation on a firm bass line – occasionally in familiar patterns such as the four-note descending scale underpinning the very start and the first choral entry. But the music is always characteristic of the composer, constructed in short, shapely melodic phrases, responsive to the text, over rich and supple chromatic harmonies. As for the work's overall design, Poulenc's main concern seems to have been to ensure maximum variety between and

sometimes within movements. While the prevailing mood is sombre and reverential, there are quick movements which are by turns violent, easy-going and relaxed; the 'Eja mater' is even carefree in Poulenc's blithe manner of the 1920s. And there is a wide range of textures, with a number of passages for unaccompanied voices – notably the 'Fac ut ardeat', which is effectively a motet for the three upper choral parts with instrumental interjections – and with the solo soprano adding an extra element of dramatic expression to 'Vidit suum', 'Fac ut portem' and the closing vision of Paradise.

Programme notes © Anthony Burton

I. Chorus

Stabat mater dolorosa
Juxta crucem lacrymosa
Dum pendebat filius.

The sorrowing mother stood
weeping beside the cross
where hung her son.

II. Chorus

Cujus animam gementem
Contristatam et dolentem
Pertransiit gladius.

Her groaning spirit,
saddened and lamenting,
a sword had pierced.

III. Chorus

O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater unigeniti.

Oh how sad and afflicted
was that blessed
mother of the only-begotten.

IV. Chorus

Quae moerebat et dolebat
Pia mater dum videbat
Nati poenas inclyti.

She mourned and sorrowed
gentle mother as she saw
the sufferings of her glorious son.

V. Chorus

Quis est homo qui non fleret
Matrem Christi si videret
In tanto supplicio?
Quis non posset contristari
Matrem Christi contemplari
Dolentem cum filio?
Pro peccatis suae gentis
Vidit Jesum in tormentis
Et flagellis subditum.

Who is the man who would not weep
if he saw the mother of Christ
in such distress?
Who could not sorrow
contemplating the mother of Christ
grieving with her son?
For the sins of his people
she saw Jesus in torment
and subjected to the scourge.

VI. Soprano and chorus

Vidit suum dulcem natum
Morientem desolatum
Dum emisit spiritum.

She saw her sweet child
dying in desolation
as he gave up the spirit.

VII. Chorus

Eja mater, fons amoris,
Me sentire vim doloris
Fac ut tecum lugeam.

Ah mother, source of love,
let me feel the force of grief
that I may weep with thee.

VIII. Chorus

Fac ut ardeat cor meum
In amando Christum Deum
Ut sibi compleaceam.

Make my heart blaze
with love of Christ God
that I may please him.

IX. Chorus

Sancta mater, istud agas,
Crucifixi fige plagas
Cordi meo valide.
Tui nati vulnerati,
Tam dignati pro me pati,
Poenas mecum divide.
Fac me vere tecum flere
Crucifixo condolere
Donec ego vixero.
Juxta crucem tecum stare
Te libenter sociare
In planctu desidero.
Virgo virginum praeclara,
Mihi jam non sis amara,
Fac me tecum plangere.

Holy mother, grant this,
stamp the wounds of the crucified
firmly on my heart.
That thy wounded son,
who deigned to suffer for me,
may share with me his sufferings.
Make me truly weep with thee
grieve with thee for the crucified
as long as I live.
Beside the cross to stand with thee
to join thee willingly
in mourning I desire.
Virgin supreme among virgins,
do not now be harsh to me,
let me weep with thee.

X. Soprano and chorus

Fac ut portem Christi mortem,
Passionis fac consortem,
Et plagas recolare.
Fac me plagis vulnerari,
Cruce hac inebriari
Ob amorem filii.

XI. Chorus

Inflammatum et accensum,
Per te, virgo, sum defensus
In die iudicii.
Christe cum sit hinc exire
Da per matrem me venire
Ad palmam victoriae.

XII. Soprano and chorus

Quando corpus morietur,
Fac ut animae donetur
Paradisi gloria.

Amen.

Grant I may bear Christ's death,
grant me a share in his passion,
and remembrance of his wounds.
Let me be wounded with his wounds,
by this cross be filled
with love for thy son.

Inflamed and afire,
through thee, virgin, let me be defended
on the Day of Judgement.
Christ, when I must pass away
grant that through thy mother I may come
to the palm of victory.

When my body dies,
grant that my spirit may be given
the glory of paradise.

Amen.

English translation © Eric Mason

YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN

conductor

In 2012, Montreal-born Yannick Nézet-Séguin added the Music Directorship of the Philadelphia Orchestra to his roles as Music Director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra and long-time Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Orchestre Métropolitain of Montreal, where he has served since 2000. He also became an Honorary Member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe in 2016/17.

In 2018, he completes his engagement with the Rotterdam Philharmonic for whom he'll stay Honorary Conductor, and becomes Music Director of the Metropolitan Opera, New York, remaining in post with the Orchestre Métropolitain of Montreal and The Philadelphia Orchestra, until at least summer 2026.

Yannick has worked with many leading European ensembles and enjoys close collaborations with the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra of Europe; between 2008 and 2014 he was also Principal Guest Conductor of London Philharmonic Orchestra.

ALEXANDRE THARAUD

piano

Alexandre's international career continues to flourish with concerts in Northern America, Asia and Europe. His latest recording projects include Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 2 with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, the three last Beethoven sonatas, Brahms' cello and piano sonatas (with Jean-Guihen Queyras) and a much awaited French Baroque CD.

He gave the world premiere of Hans Abrahamsen's Left-Hand concerto, *Left, Alone*, with the WDR Symphony Orchestra at the Cologne Philharmonic (Ilan Volkov), and subsequent performances with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra (Thomas Dausgaard), Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra (Yannick Nézet-Séguin), Cleveland Symphony Orchestra and Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (Franz Welsler-Möst).

A highly regarded interpreter of French music, Alexandre Tharaud recorded the complete Poulenc chamber music works, as well as a Rameau CD, which was followed by a Couperin disk. His double Ravel album with the complete solo piano works was voted best CD by all major international magazines on its release in 2003.

Alexandre Tharaud appears by kind permission of Erato/Warner Classics. warnerclassics.com

JAMES O'DONNELL

organ

James O'Donnell is one of Britain's leading organists and choral conductors. Since 2000 he has been Organist and Master of the Choristers of Westminster Abbey. Recent highlights have included directing the music at the wedding of The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, the visit of Pope Benedict XVI, and concert tours to the Far East, Australia and the USA.

James O'Donnell studied at the Royal College of Music and then as Organ Scholar of Jesus College, Cambridge. After having served for six years as Assistant Master of Music, he was appointed Master of Music at Westminster Cathedral at the age of 26. Under his direction the Cathedral Choir won the Gramophone Record of the Year award with a Hyperion recording of Masses by Martin and Pizzetti and became the first choir to be honoured with a Royal Philharmonic Society Award.

KATE ROYAL

soprano

Kate Royal was born in London and studied at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Awards include the 2004 Kathleen Ferrier Award, the 2004 John Christie Award and the 2007 Royal Philharmonic Society Young Artist Award.

In concert Kate has appeared with the world's leading orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic with Sir Simon Rattle, the Cleveland Orchestra with Franz Welser-Möst, the Rotterdam Philharmonic with Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra with Daniel Harding. Her opera roles include Pamina (*The Magic Flute*) for Glyndebourne and the Royal Opera; Countess (*The Marriage of Figaro*) and Governess (*The Turn of the Screw*) for Glyndebourne on Tour; Helena (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) for the Teatro Real, Madrid and Glyndebourne; Poppea (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*) for ENO, Miranda (*The Tempest*) for The Royal Opera, Handel's L'Allegro and Pamina for the Paris Opera; Micaela (*Carmen*) for Glyndebourne, Countess for the Aix-en-Provence Festival and Euridice for the Metropolitan Opera.

Her discography includes *Midsummer Night* with the Orchestra of ENO and Edward Gardner (Warner) and a solo recital disc with Malcolm Martineau, *A Lesson in Love*.

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LONDON PHILHARMONIC CHOIR

Founded in 1947 as the chorus for the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Choir is widely regarded as one of Britain's finest choirs. For the last seven decades the Choir has performed under leading conductors, consistently meeting with critical acclaim and recording regularly for television and radio.

Enjoying a close relationship with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Choir frequently joins it for concerts in the UK and abroad. Highlights in recent years have included Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* with the Choir's President, Sir Mark Elder; Haydn's *The Creation* with Sir Roger Norrington; and Mozart's *Requiem* under Nathalie Stutzmann. The Choir was delighted to celebrate its 70th anniversary in April 2017 with a highly acclaimed performance of Tallis's *Spem in alium* and Mahler's Symphony No. 8 under Vladimir Jurowski.

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

One of the finest orchestras on the international stage, the London Philharmonic Orchestra was founded in 1932 by Sir Thomas Beecham. Since then, its Principal Conductors have included Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In 2007 Vladimir Jurowski became the Orchestra's Principal Conductor.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra has been performing at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall since it opened in 1951, becoming Resident Orchestra in 1992. It also has residencies in Brighton and Eastbourne, and performs regularly around the UK. The Orchestra frequently tours abroad: highlights of the 2017/18 season include visits to Japan, China, Romania, the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria and France.

The Orchestra broadcasts regularly on television and radio, and has recorded soundtracks for numerous films including *The Lord of the Rings*. In 2005 it began releasing live, studio and archive recordings on its own CD label.

FRANCIS POULENC (1899–1963)

19:00 Piano Concerto in C sharp minor

- 01 09:37 Allegretto comodo
02 05:20 Andante con moto
03 04:00 Rondeau à la française

22:25 Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani in G minor

- 04 03:09 Andante
05 02:06 Allegro giocoso
06 07:20 Andante moderato
07 02:36 Tempo Allegro, molto agitato
08 02:28 Très calme: Lent
09 01:55 Tempo de l'Allegro initial
10 02:46 Tempo d'introduction: Largo

30:56 Stabat Mater

- 11 04:00 Stabat Mater dolorosa
12 01:05 Cujus animam gementem
13 02:39 O quam tristis
14 01:29 Quae moerebat
15 01:26 Quis est homo
16 03:19 Vidit suum
17 01:05 Eja Mater
18 02:22 Fac ut ardeat
19 03:08 Sancta Mater
20 03:20 Fac ut portem
21 02:01 Inflammatus et accensus
22 04:48 Quando corpus

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Recorded live at *Southbank Centre's*

ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, London