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Poulenc

LA VOIX HUMAINE
L'HISTOIRE DE BABAR



Daniela Mazzucato *soprano* · Max René Cosotti *reciting voice*
Marco Scolastra *piano*

Francis Poulenc 1899-1963

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| 1. La voix humaine
(tragédie lyrique 1958) 44'00 | 2. L'Histoire de Babar
(melodique 1945) 25'22 |
| Daniela Mazzucato <i>soprano</i>
Marco Scolastra <i>piano</i> | Max René Cosotti <i>reciting voice</i>
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Sound engineer and producer: Luca Ricci
Editing: Luca Tironzelli
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Poulenc: Innocence and Torment

Francis Poulenc (Paris, 1899-1963) was a master of lightness, even when he was delving deep into the murky bleakness of a dramatic story. He was also highly skilled in turning minor forms into the bricks with which he could construct more imposing, complex works. During the first half of the 1900s, France and Europe had been wounded and scarred by two world wars, but also exalted by an extended golden age of creativity involving not only Poulenc himself, but also various fellow countrymen: from Ravel to Satie, Proust to Cocteau, and Monet to Picasso.

One of Poulenc's outstanding traits was his discerning eclecticism. He cultivated all possible combinations of opera, theatre and chamber music. He liked to communicate what he had in mind directly from the piano, his favourite instrument, in concerts that are still fresh in the minds of those of us who are old enough to have enjoyed them first-hand.

Between his masterpiece opera, *Les dialogues des Carmélites*, the *Concerto for two pianos and orchestra* and the *Stabat Mater* of 1951, he also found the time to write two unusual works that have met with enduring worldwide acclaim in the version for voice and piano.

Histoire de Babar le petit éléphant belongs to the rich scenario of musical fables that during the 1900s featured first and foremost Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. Poulenc's contribution to the genre came about almost by chance, within the family sphere, but at a moment of extreme difficulty for France. It was the summer of 1940, and the composer was staying at Brive-la-Gaillarde. One day he found himself surrounded by children, for whom he portrayed in musical terms the famous illustrations by Jean de Brunhoff, who had created the Babar character in 1931. In this little fable for narrator and piano, arranged for orchestra by Jean Français in 1962, Poulenc's evident sense of fun embodies the candour and spontaneity of his own childhood. Delicacy and playful irony are the hallmarks of a sort of melodious musical cartoon in which the piano provides brilliant brushstrokes and colour: heady

prestos, jaunty polkas and touches of moonlight that together recall a distant, fading *gaité parisienne*. Paul Eluard conjured up a telling portrait of Poulenc in the verse he dedicated to him: «*Un enfant de jeux sans fin / dans un paysage étoilé / qui ne reflète que jeunesse*».

The appeal of *L'Histoire de Babar* transcended the repertoire intended for children, however, since the spoken voice part also drew the attention of a number of eminent adults: Pierre Fresnay, Peter Ustinov, Sophie Marceau and Jacques Brel were just some of them. And even more numerous were the actresses and singers who contributed to the success of *La voix humaine*, both in the symphonic version that was often staged by famous designers, occasionally to somewhat excessive effect, and in the more essential arrangement for the piano that the composer premiered with the soprano Denise Duval at the Salle Favart in Paris in 1959. Since then the *tragédie lyrique* that has proved to be the longest phone call in music history has been sung by Magda Olivero, Virginia Zeani, Renata Scotto, Jessye Norman, Felicity Lott, Galina Vishnevskaya and others. And if we go back to the 1930s and include Jean Cocteau's play, the list of stars is even longer, comprising the legendary Anna Magnani and Ingrid Bergman.

La voix humaine was certainly highly demanding, calling for acting talent as well as a fine voice on the part of the singer-actress. In times when the traditional telephone with its switchboard and operators was already a regular feature in fiction, film and opera, there she was, alone on stage, clinging to the receiver as though it were a lifeline. Curiously, the resources and skills required for such a part come to the fore even more dramatically in a recording, in the absence of the imaginary world conjured up on stage. In a CD, all visual images depend on the singer's skill and the magic of the relationship between listening and the mind's eye. The continual flow of suspense, sensuality, distress and torment produces a devastating concentrate of life, of love and perhaps of death as well in a single act. It is a monologue in duet form, where the *other* voice does not take part and can only be partially perceived

through the voice of the protagonist. In this hurried, one-sided conversation Poulenc's handling of the musical idiom is also masterly in what remains unsaid: the pauses, interruptions, sudden starts, moments of fury and of extreme sweetness, all of it fluidly interwoven in *La voix humaine* where time seems to come to a standstill. Every word, every syllable is a heartbeat, a momentary expression of desperate desire (not surprisingly reminiscent of a motif from Strauss's *Salome*), neurotic and yet also lyrical, bitter and touching.

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Translation: Kate Singleton

Poulenc: L'innocenza e il tormento

Maestro della Leggerezza pure quando doveva scavare nelle cupezze torbide del dramma, artista che sapeva fare della “piccola forma” il mattoncino di una costruzione formale più vasta, testimone e protagonista nel Novecento francese ed europeo attraversato, ferito a morte da due guerre mondiali, ma esaltato da una lunga creativa età dell'oro (da Ravel a Satie, da Proust a Cocteau, da Monet a Picasso)

Francis Poulenc (Parigi 1899-1963) ha coltivato nel proprio laboratorio di acuminato eclettismo tutte le combinazioni praticabili del teatro musicale e della musica da camera, spesso comunicandole di persona al pianoforte, suo strumento prediletto, in concerti che alcuni (ed io fra questi per destino anagrafico) ancora ricordano.

Fra il suo capolavoro operistico (*Les dialogues des Carmélites*), il Concerto per due pianoforti e orchestra, lo *Stabat Mater* del 1951, si inscrivono due opere eccentriche che nella versione per voce e pianoforte girano il mondo con intatta fortuna.

Histoire de Babar le petit éléphant appartiene al ricco scenario della fiaba musicale che nel Novecento ha in *Pierino e il lupo* di Prokof'ev una sorta di modello e di best-seller. Nasce quasi per caso, nella più tenera, intima dimensione familiare l'elefantino più celebre dopo Dumbo. E nasce come un piccolo fiore nel periodo più tragico per la Francia, nell'estate del 1940 quando il compositore si trova a Brive-la-Gaillarde, tra una folla di bambini, per i quali “illustra” musicalmente le illustrazioni famose di Jean de Brunhoff, creatore nel 1931 del personaggio. La vena ludica di Poulenc ritrova il candore e la freschezza della propria infanzia in questa piccola fiaba per voce recitante e pianoforte, solo nel 1962 portata in versione orchestrale da Jean Françaix. Delicatezza ed ironia giocosa si muovono in questa “striscia” in forma di melologo dove il pianoforte rianima per pennellate deliziose o brevi guizzi (anche in sfrenati “presto”, in scatti di polka *à toute allure* e in tocchi di lunare notturno) una *gaité parisienne* lontana e polverizzata nel ricordo e negli affetti.

Quasi a confermare l'immagine che a Poulenc aveva dedicato Paul Eluard: «un enfant de jeux sans fin / dans un paysage étoilé / qui ne reflète que jeunesse».

Al di là della circuitazione nel repertorio riservato agli ascoltatori più piccoli, il

testo dell'*Histoire de Babar* ha frequentemente avuto lettori illustri: Pierre Fresnay, Peter Ustinov, Sophie Marceau, Jacques Brel.

Ancora più prestigiosa è la galleria di attrici e cantanti che hanno contribuito al successo de *La voix humaine* sia nella versione sinfonica (spesso per le messinscena di grande firma ma a volte sovrabbondanti) sia nella più asciutta stesura con pianoforte, che l'autore stesso eseguiva con Denise Duval, storica prima interprete alla Salle Favart di Parigi nel 1959. Da allora la più lunga telefonata in musica della storia, questa *tragédie lyrique* della solitudine, ha avuto protagoniste come Magda Olivero, Virginia Zeani, Renata Scotto, Jessye Norman, Felicity Lott, Galina Vishnevskaya. Ma la divistica galleria si allunga se vi si includono, dagli anni Trenta, le interpreti della pièce in prosa di Jean Cocteau, e fra queste le leggendarie Anna Magnani e Ingrid Bergman.

La voix humaine impegna dunque al massimo le risorse drammatiche ed il talento di una cantante-attrice, sola sulla scena, aggrappata al filo di un apparecchio telefonico come al filo della propria esistenza, in anni in cui il telefono (quello mitico, “fisso”, quello del centralino, delle centraliniste, della cabina) vantava vasta letteratura, compresi cinema e opera. Risorse e talento che in un certo senso si esaltano quando, come avviene in questo CD, manchi l'immaginario realistico della presenza scenica; quando cioè ci si deve affidare alla magia del solo ascolto ed alla bravura della cantante nel tradurre in immagine e in presenza il flusso continuo, la *suspense*, la sensualità, l'angoscia, il tormento, lo straziante concentrato di vita, di amore (e forse di morte) che si consuma nell'atto unico. È un monologo a due, dove però *l'altro* non ha voce se non nella voce della protagonista. Nel serrato colloquio di una donna sola la prosodia musicale mobilissima di Poulenc è magistrale anche nel “non detto”; pause, interruzioni, soprassalti, furori, dolcezze estreme, tutto si aggroviglia e nello stesso tempo fluisce ne *La voix humaine* e in un Tempo che si vorrebbe immobilizzare. Dove ogni parola, ogni sillaba è un battito di cuore, di voluttà disperata (non a caso spunta fin dall'inizio un motivo che par liberato dai veli straussiani di *Salome*) nevrotica e insieme lirica, aspra, emozionante.

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Marco Scolastra was born in Foligno in Italy. He studied piano at the Perugia Conservatoire with Franco Fabiani and was awarded a first-class *cum laude* diploma. He went on to study with Aldo Ciccolini and Ennio Pastorino, as well as taking specialist courses with Paul Badura-Skoda, Dario De Rosa and – at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena – with Joaquin Achucarro and Katia Labèque. As a soloist and in chamber ensembles and orchestras, he has performed at prestigious Italian and foreign music institutions, such as the Teatro Valli in Reggio Emilia, the Sagra Musicale Umbra, the Pergolesi Festival in Iesi, the Teatro Lirico in Cagliari, the Accademia Filarmonica Romana, the Oratorio del Gonfalone, the Auditorium ‘Parco della Musica’, the Teatro dell’Opera, ‘I Concerti del Quirinale’ in Rome, the Teatro Regio in Parma, the Auditorium of the ‘Giuseppe Verdi’ Orchestra in Milan, the Teatro Comunale in Bologna, the Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto, the Ravello Festival, the Teatro La Fenice in Venice; the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow (Rachmaninov Hall), the Tonhalle and Zürcherkammerorchester-Haus in Zurich, the Konzerthaus in Bern, and the Fryderyk Chopin Institute in Warsaw. He has also performed with the Orchestre National du Capitole in Toulouse, and at the Festival van Vlaanderen in Brussels.

He has played under the baton of outstanding conductors, such as Romano Gandolfi (‘Giuseppe Verdi’ Milan Symphony Orchestra), Howard Griffiths (Zurich Chamber Orchestra), Richard Hickox and Claudio Scimone (I Solisti Veneti), and Lior Shambadal (Berliner Symphoniker). He has also been involved in extensive work with Vadim Brodski, Renato Bruson, Sandro Cappelletto, Max René Cosotti, Roberto Fabbriciani, the Fejes Quartet, Arnoldo Foà, Raina Kabaivanska, Daniela Mazzucato, Elio Pandolfi, Marianna Pizzolato, Quartetto Savinio, Desirée Rancatore and Ugo Pagliai.

In 1993 he formed a piano duo with Sebastiano Brusco, and their CD *Colori e Virtuosismo del Novecento Italiano* (Colours and Virtuosity of the 20th Century in Italy), including music for two pianos and piano four hands by Busoni, Casella, Respighi, Petrassi and Malipiero, was released for the Phoenix Classics label. He has also recorded for Stradivarius, RAI (radio and television) and Radio Klara (Belgium).

Daniela Mazzucato possesses an extremely flexible vocal artistry that allows her to range from baroque repertory (Handel, Cesti, Scarlatti, Cavalli and Landi) to Mozart and Donizetti’s roles.

After her debut at the age of nineteen in *Rigoletto* (Gilda) at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, she appeared in Italy’s most famous opera houses and music festivals, such as: Teatro alla Scala in Milan; Teatro dell’Opera in Rome; Teatro San Carlo in Naples; Arena di Verona; Teatro Comunale in Bologna; and Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto. She also performed at the Royal Opera House-Covent Garden in London; Opéra National de Paris; New Israeli Opera in Tel Aviv; Glyndebourne Opera Festival; Hamburgische Staatsoper; and opera theatres in Frankfurt, Bordeaux, Marseilles and Ottawa.

Her operatic repertory includes, among others: *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Susanna) with Claudio Abbado and Giorgio Strehler for her Teatro alla Scala debut in 1973 and in Palermo; *Così Fan Tutte* (Despina) conducted by Karl Böhm and directed by Patroni Griffi in Naples, with Claudio Abbado in Ferrara, Modena and Reggio Emilia, at the Oviedo Opera, at the Opéra de Lausanne, at the Teatro Argentina in Rome and in Genoa; *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*; *Il Campiello* (Gasparina) at the Japan Opera Foundation in Tokyo and at the Teatro Sociale in Rovigo; *I Quattro Rustegbi* (Siora Felice) at the Théâtre du Capitole of Toulouse; Wolf-Ferrari’s *The Cunning Widow*; *Werther* conducted by Georges Prêtre; *Un Ballo in Maschera* (Oscar) conducted by Claudio Abbado and directed by Franco Zeffirelli; *Il Matrimonio Segreto*; *Kiss me Kate* (Kate) and *Orphée aux Enfers* (Euridice) at the Teatro Regio in Turin; *L’Elisir d’Amore* (Adina) opposite Luciano Pavarotti in Berlin; *Hänsel und Gretel* (Gretel); *Orfeo ed Euridice* (Euridice); *La Bohème* (Musetta) opposite Mirella Freni and conducted by Gianandrea Gavazzeni; *L’Incoronazione di Poppea*; *La Cecchina*; Purcell’s *Dido and Æneas*; Luciano Chailly’s *Trittico*; Britten’s *The Turn of the Screw* (Miss Jessel); *L’Impresario delle Smirne* staged by David Livermore at the Teatro Stabile in Turin; and *La Voix Humaine* at the Teatro Verdi in Trieste.

She is very experienced in operettas, having performed: *Ball im Savoy*, *Orphée aux Enfers* and *Al Cavallino Bianco* at the Operetta Festival in Trieste; *The Merry Widow* at the Teatro Comunale in Bologna conducted by Daniel Oren, and in Rome, Naples,

Bari and Palermo; *Orphée aux Enfers* and *Die Fledermaus* at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice and at the Teatro Massimo in Palermo. Her repertory also includes: *Cin-Ci-La; Eva; La Principessa Sissi* (Elisabetta); *La Scugnizza; Il Paese del Sorriso* (Lisa); *Sogno di un Valzer*; Offenbach's *Barbablù*; Mayr's *L'Intrigo della Lettera*; and a "triptych" by Offenbach including *Croquefer, I Due Ciechi* and *Il Signor Choufleury*.

She recently performed: the musical *To be or not to be* music by Nicola Piovani, Antonio Calanda direction, on tour in Italy; *Sissi* (Elisabetta Sissi), Poulenc's *La voix humaine* and *I Sette Peccati Capitali* at the Teatro Verdi in Trieste, *The Merry Widow* in Padua, Bassano del Grappa, Turin, Genoa and Salerno and in a new production, Hugo de Ana direction, Asher Fisch conduction in Padova, Bassano del Grappa and Rovigo; *I quattro rusteghi* (Siora Felice) and *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Marcellina) at the Théâtre du Capitole in Toulouse; *La Bohème* in Trieste, Udine and Pordenone; *Cenerentola.com* and *La fille du régiment* (La duchesse de Krakenthorp) in Palermo, on tour also in Oman, and in Beijing; *Il Campiello* (Gasparina) at the Teatro Sociale in Rovigo and in Trieste and Paisiello's *La grotta di Trofonio* in Martina Franca for the Valle d'Itria Festival and in Naples; *La Traviata* in Genoa; *La voix humaine* in Trieste; *Il cappello di paglia di Firenze* in Naples.

Max René Cosotti made his debut in *Rigoletto* at the Teatro Grande in Brescia, after winning the 21st edition of the "As.Li.Co." Competition, the 26th edition of the "Teatro alla Scala" Competition and the "Voci Verdiane" Competition of the Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa.

Thanks to his natural inclination for character roles, he prefers a repertory that includes: *I Pagliacci* (Arlecchino); *Madama Butterfly* (Goro); *La Traviata* (Gastone); *Falstaff* (Cajus and Bardolfo); *Carmen* (Remendado); *Manon Lescaut* (Edmondo); *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Arturo); *Francesca da Rimini* (Malatestino); *Il Compleanno dell'Infanta* (Nano); *Turandot* (Pang, Pong); *Adriana Lecouvreur* (Abate di Chazeuil); *Andrea Chénier* (Incredibile); *Il Convitato di Pietra*; *La Vedova Scaltra*; *I Quattro Rusteghi* (Riccardo); *Bastiano e Bastiana*; *La Danza delle Libellule*; *Die Fledermaus*

(Blind); *Die Lustige Witwe*; *La Bajadera*; *La Cenerentola*; *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*; *Il Turco in Italia*; *La Rondine*; *Don Pasquale*; *L'Elisir d'Amore*; *La Sonnambula*; *Angélique*; and *Orfeo all'Inferno* (Aristeo and Plutone).

He is regularly invited to perform at numerous prestigious opera houses (Bologna, Venice, Naples, Trieste, Turin, Rome, Palermo, Verona, Cagliari, Florence, Nice, Toulouse and Innsbruck) and international festivals, such as the Glyndebourne Opera Festival, the Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto and the Salzburg Festspiele. In 1992, he received the "Abbiati" Award by Italy's critics.

His career highlights include: *La Bohème* (Alcindoro and Benoit) at the New Israeli Opera; *Die Fledermaus* (Alfred), *Die Zauberflöte* and *Al Cavallino Bianco* at the Teatro Massimo in Palermo; *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* and *Manon Lescaut* at the Teatro Comunale in Bologna; *Francesca da Rimini* and Respighi's *Marie Victoire* at the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome; Gurlit's *Wozzeck*, *Manon Lescaut* and *Khovanchina* at the Teatro del Maggio Musicale in Florence; *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Opéra de Montecarlo; *La Traviata* at the Teatro Lirico in Cagliari; *Duchessa di Chicago* (Bondy), *Werther* (Schmidt), *Al Cavallino Bianco*, *Les Dialogues des Carmélites* and *Turandot* at the Teatro Verdi in Trieste; *Turandot* (Imperatore Altoum) at the Terme di Caracalla in Rome; *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Basilio) in Klagenfurt; *Il Campiello* in Bologna and Tokyo; *Falstaff* (Cajus) in Cleveland, Lucerne, Berlin and New York; *Eva* in Naples; *Die Lustige Witwe* in Rome, Palermo, Cagliari, Bologna and Modena; *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Maestro di ballo) in Lausanne; *Fedora* in Genoa; *Orphée aux Enfers* in Palermo, Turin, Novara and Trieste; and *Eugene Onegin* (Lenskij) in Florence, Rome and Klagenfurt.

He recently performed: *Die Lustige Witwe* (Raoul de St. Brioche) in Bari, in Padua, Turin and Rovigo; *Turandot* as Imperatore Altoum at the Teatro Regio in Parma and Bari and as Pong in Naples, Vicenza and Rovigo; *Manon Lescaut* in Trieste; *La Zingara* at the Opéra Royal de Wallonie in Liège; *Orphée aux Enfers* and *La Sonnambula* in Cagliari; Lombardo's *Il Re Nudo* in Rome; *La Traviata* in Pescara; *Carmen* in Rovigo, Padova and Bassano; *Rigoletto* in Padova; *Anna Bolena* and *L'Amico Fritz* in Trieste; *Rigoletto* and *Carmen* in Rovigo; *La Bohème* in Savona; *Il Campiello* in Trieste; *Turandot* in Rome and Genoa; *Madama Butterfly* in Padua.