

## *Aubade*

FRANCIS POULENC

B. January 7, 1899, Paris, France

D. January 30, 1963, Paris, France

*Poulenc premiered this work in the Paris residence of Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Noailles on June 18, 1929, choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska. A public performance was given some months later in the Théâtre des Champs Elysees, choreographed by George Balanchine.*

*Scored for solo piano, two flutes, two oboes (one doubled by English horn), two clarinets, two bassoons, two French horns, one trumpet, timpani, strings (approx. 21 minutes).*

“Above all, don’t analyze my music...love it!”

*Francis Poulenc*

During the Middle Ages, *Aubades* were common repertoire of troubadours. They were songs or poems concerning daybreak, particularly the separation of lovers at dawn. Poulenc’s “choreographic poem,” written in 10 short sections, describes the dawn of adulthood in the life of an adolescent: with severe requests and solitude, coupled with the grief of bidding farewell to childhood and its gaiety. *Aubade* expresses the anguish felt by Diana, the goddess of chastity, as she awakens from childhood to the passions of love from which, as “the huntress chaste and fair,” fate has banned her.

The gravity of the piece begins as the brass sound the opening chant. Though Diana has not yet appeared, the piano expresses the frenzied despair felt by this beautiful young woman. When the distraught Diana does enter, her young attendants are engaged in a light and graceful dance; at sunrise, the tempo increases as they prepare her toilet. Diana begins a dance-aria, dreaming of love fulfilled, and weeping at her plight. (The Mozartian flavor is, indeed, material borrowed directly from one of Mozart’s divertimenti.) As Diana bids farewell to her youth and childhood friends, she turns to the forest - and the hunt - to subdue the torments of love. She disappears into her solitude with a final wave of the hand - just as the sun appears. “Brusquement le soleil parait dans tout son éclat. C’est le jour.” (Suddenly the sun appears in all its brilliance. It’s [a new] day!)

The anguish and solitary condition of Diana in his *Aubade*, must have drawn from personal experience; for he was furious when choreographer Balanchine, for the public premiere, added a male dancer opposite Diana, thus negating her solitude.

Poulenc was primarily influenced by Ricardo Viñes, a Catalan pianist, and Erik Satie. His early music is characterized by wit, irreverence, clarity, and melodic strains. At age 18, Poulenc, encouraged by Viñes, composed *Rapsodie nègre* (1917), for which he received this scalding rejection by the director of the Paris Conservatoire: “Your music stinks, it is nothing by a load of balls!...Ah, I see you have joined the gang of Stravinsky, Satie, & Co. Well, then, I’ll say goodbye!”

Despite this rejection, Poulenc became one of “Les Six”, (The French Six, a designation inspired by “The Russian Five”). These musicians (Auric, Durey, Honegger, Milhaud, Poulenc, and Tailleferre), though composing in disparate styles, bucked the existing musical establishment, reacting to Wagnerianism (large-scale, gargantuan works, perceived as excess) and Impressionism (suggestive music, rather than programmatic or strongly emotive). Poulenc composed the finest choral work of the six, and is noted for his straightforward phrases and melodic inventions. He successfully composed major works in all genres: piano and choral works, operas and ballets, film scores, chamber and orchestral works. Later in life, as he experienced renewed faith, he composed sacred works.

This performance is the Detroit Symphony Orchestra premiere of Poulenc’s *Aubade*.

DSO SHOP @ THE MAX RECOMMENDS:

Poulenc, *Aubade*, Pascal Rogé (piano), Orchestre National de France, Decca 452937.

*Program note by Kelly Yoakam, a master’s candidate in Musicology at Michigan State University.*