Francis Poulenc's "Huit Nocturnes" for Piano: A Performer's Guide

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FRANCIS POULENC’S HUIT NOCTURNES FOR PIANO: A PERFORMER’S GUIDE

By

Renny Sie

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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the requirements for the degree of
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FRANCIS POULENC’S HUIT NOCTURNES FOR PIANO: A
PERFORMER’S GUIDE

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Although more famous for his vocal songs, French composer Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) contributed immensely to keyboard literature. Unfortunately, his works for solo piano are rarely studied and/or performed by pianists today. One of the most neglected piano works of Francis Poulenc is the set of eight pieces titled *Huit Nocturnes pour piano*. Recent research showed that there are very few scholarly studies found about Poulenc and no studies focused on his *Nocturnes* were found.

The objectives of this study are to provide a performance guide for pianists who are exploring Poulenc’s piano works, specifically directed at, but not limited to *Nocturnes* and to promote awareness of Poulenc’s piano works. In order to achieve these objectives, the *Nocturnes* will be explored historically and musically in this essay. This essay starts with an introductory chapter that describes the issues, purpose, and methodology of this study. The second chapter consists of a brief biography of Francis Poulenc and historical background on *Nocturnes*. The third chapter has eight subchapters, in which performance related issues are discussed in detail. A brief concluding chapter will complete this essay.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) first came to attention as a composer in December 1917 after the premiere of his work *Rhapsodie nègre*, for baritone, piano, string quartet, flute, and clarinet. The young composer was only eighteen years old and had been taking piano lessons with Ricardo Viñes for a mere two years. He was not formally trained as a composer but later took composition lessons with Charles Koechlin. His piano teacher, Ricardo Viñes, was a very important figure in Poulenc’s life. Viñes was not only his teacher, but also a mentor and friend. It was through him that Poulenc met Erik Satie and Georges Auric, two well-known French musicians who later became influential in Poulenc’s compositional development. Although he is mostly known for his vocal works, Poulenc composed works for solo piano, two pianos, and chamber ensemble, as well as orchestral, vocal, and ballet scores. A pianist himself, Poulenc contributed substantially to the instrument’s literature. His compositions for piano include twenty-five works for solo piano, a sonata for four hands, and five works for two pianos.¹

Although Francis Poulenc is one of the major composers of the twentieth century, very few scholarly writings about his works exist. In the past forty-five years, there have been five dissertations written about his piano works.² None of these dissertations offers in-depth information about the *Huit Nocturnes pour piano*.


Despite the number of compositions Poulenc wrote for piano, only a few are known and performed, including *Trois mouvements perpétuels* (1918) and *Promenades* (1921). It is unfortunate that pianists rarely consider the works of Francis Poulenc as standard repertoire. Moreover, these works have rarely been utilized as pedagogical tools for piano students. Among these neglected solo piano works are *Huit Nocturnes*, composed in the period from 1929 through 1938. There are several reasons for this present situation, among which are the limited number of recordings of these pieces available in the market, the works’ unusually challenging piano writing, and the fact that Poulenc’s music demands a high level of musical sophistication and maturity with regards to understanding and interpretation.

Although scholars acknowledge the significance of Poulenc’s contributions to the piano literature and have done in-depth research on his piano works, there are no scholarly writings available devoted solely to the *Nocturnes*. In previous years, scholars have researched Poulenc’s piano music in general but rarely in detail. For instance, Jon Nelson’s dissertation, “The Piano Music of Francis Poulenc,” discusses the piano music of Poulenc in general, providing only a bit of information about each work. All other scholarly writings focus more on Poulenc’s compositional features in general or important elements of his style in specific works, such as Elizabeth Laufer’s thesis

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The present study will explore Poulenc’s Nocturnes in detail, focusing on the performance elements. The Nocturnes make a suitable model for this study because they are one of Poulenc’s most representative works, according to his biographer Wilfrid Mellers. The set consists of eight pieces, which each is unique. The Nocturnes are usually performed as a cycle although they were composed within a span of nine years (1929-1938). Since the Nocturnes are a representative work, a performance guide will provide pianists with insights to other Poulenc piano works. Therefore, it is clear that this study is needed because not only does it consist of valuable material for pianists who are studying Poulenc’s piano works, but also contributes additional scholarly sources on his piano works since there are few available.

The objectives of this study are: 1) to provide a performance guide for pianists who are exploring Poulenc’s piano works, specifically directed at, but not limited to Huit Nocturnes and 2) to promote awareness of Poulenc’s piano works. In order to achieve these objectives, Huit Nocturnes will be explored historically and musically.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Although Poulenc’s contribution to keyboard literature is substantial, a scholarly work focused on his Nocturnes is yet to be produced. There are several dissertations that discuss his piano works in a broad scope. Some of these studies mention Nocturnes but none discuss all in detail. There are only a small number of books written on Poulenc’s life, his compositional styles, and cultural influences on his music. This literature review is divided into two categories: 1) historical background, which includes Poulenc biographies and cultural influences, and 2) music analysis and interpretational guides.

Historical Background

Henri Hell’s book titled Francis Poulenc: Musicien Français was the first biography published on the composer and remains one of the few comprehensive sources of Poulenc’s biographical information. This book discusses Poulenc’s life but it does not discuss his works in too much detail. It consists of five chapters; the first four chapters are arranged chronologically according to the years his works were composed. Hell only dedicated one paragraph in chapter two to the Nocturnes, simply mentioning that in his opinion, the best of the set are the first, fourth, seventh, and eighth. In the last chapter of this book, Hell describes Poulenc’s compositional styles.

In 1996, Benjamin Ivry wrote a book titled Francis Poulenc. The book was published in 1996 as part of the set 20th Century Composers. Ivry’s book offers detailed information about the composer’s life. The book is similar to Hell’s in terms of content.

The notable difference is that Ivry’s book was written and published long after Poulenc’s death while Hell’s book was published before the composer’s death. Therefore, Ivry’s book contains information about Poulenc’s life after 1959, which Hell’s book does not have. The book consists of eight chapters that are arranged chronologically. Each chapter discusses Poulenc’s life and his compositions.\(^6\)

A more recent and in-depth biographical source is Carl Schmidt’s book *Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc*.\(^7\) Published in 2001, the book is divided into fourteen chapters arranged chronologically. It includes detailed discussion about Poulenc’s life and music, including his sexuality, relationships, also brief historical background and description of every published work by the composer. The content of this book includes Poulenc’s translated letters, photographs and a catalog of published and unpublished dissertations on Poulenc.

*The Gallic Muse*, a book written by Laurence Davies, discusses six French composers: Fauré, Duparc, Debussy, Satie, Ravel, and Poulenc.\(^8\) No musical analysis or examples on any of these composers is provided. Instead, Davies writes about their lives as composers and provides general information on their works.

Other scholarly works on Francis Poulenc discuss cultural influences on his works. For instance, Daniel Weiser’s dissertation, “The Visual Stimulus: The Influence of Visual Arts on the Musical Compositions of Emmanuel Chabrier, Erik Satie, and Francis Poulenc,” discusses the influence of paintings on those composers’ works.

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study is divided into three chapters; each chapter is devoted to a composer. Another dissertation, “The Influence of Parisian Popular Entertainment on the Piano Works of Erik Satie and Francis Poulenc,” by David McKinney, discusses the influence of cabaret music, café concerts, and music hall styles on both composers.

Analytical and Interpretational Guides

The most important scholarly source for Poulenc’s harmonic style is Kent Werner’s dissertation “The Harmonic Style of Francis Poulenc.” Werner provides an array of different approaches in analyzing Poulenc’s works such as combining Schenkerian technique and a Muellerian-tone-pillars approach. Though the study includes an extensive scope of Poulenc’s harmonic vocabulary, Werner provides only segments of each work, leaving the rest of each work unexplored harmonically. Despite including a significant number of Poulenc’s works, he only provides analyses for three of his piano works: Trois Mouvements perpétuels (1918), Trois Pièces (1928), and Les Soirées de Nazelles (1936). He opted for those three works, composed about a decade apart, to represent the progress of Poulenc’s stylistic development.

Linda Stutzenberger’s dissertation, “The Published Solo Piano Works of Francis Poulenc: A Performance Tape with Commentary,” is a descriptive catalog of Poulenc’s

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11 Werner.
published piano works. Stutzenberger selected a number of solo piano pieces, including *Mouvement pérpetuels, Promenades, Nocturnes, Intermezzo*, and *Les soirées de Nazelles*, to be discussed. The study does not include an elaborate analysis of the pieces structurally or harmonically, but Stutzenberger provides brief background information and unique characteristics for each piece. The second part of this study focuses on the performance issues of these works, which include pedaling and tempo.

Wilfrid Mellers noted that his book *Francis Poulenc* could not compete with Henri Hell’s standard biography of Poulenc and Keith Daniel’s study of the composer’s artistic development. Instead of providing a complete biography, Mellers wrote in the preface of his book, “It rather attempts to discover Poulenc’s heart by way of commentary on a number of works that seem to me to be not only representative, but also good.” Among the works Mellers selected are the *Nocturnes*. He does not provide detailed analysis and historical background on them, however, he briefly discusses the first, second, third, and fourth *Nocturnes*.

Jon Nelson’s dissertation, “The Piano Music of Francis Poulenc,” is a survey of all his piano works including solo and chamber music works. The study is divided into eleven chapters with the first chapter devoted to Poulenc’s biography and the last chapter devoted to a discussion of Poulenc’s style. The remaining chapters talk about his piano works. Nelson categorizes Poulenc’s piano works according to genre and selects a number of works in each genre. In his study, he provides a brief history of each work and

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13 Mellers, v.

14 Nelson.
analyzes them structurally. Despite the extensive information about Poulenc’s piano works in Nelson’s study, there is no section devoted to *Nocturnes*.

Although not directly related to the subject of this study, Edwin Romain’s “A Study of Francis Poulenc’s Fifteen Improvisations for Piano Solo” is an excellent model. Romain divides his study into three chapters: the first chapter discusses Poulenc’s musical style, the second analyzes individual improvisations, and the third focuses on performance issues. Romain’s study provides an exemplary model for this performance guide.

With the literature review complete, it is concluded that a scholarly work that is focused solely on Poulenc’s *Nocturnes* is non-existent. A number of dissertations, both published and unpublished, discuss Poulenc’s piano works. Some of them include discussions on the *Nocturnes*, but not in as detailed manner as this study will cover.

**METHODOLOGY AND OUTLINE OF ESSAY**

The subject of this study is limited to *Huit Nocturnes* for two reasons. Firstly, they provide a wide array of Poulenc’s compositional characteristics that makes them suitably representative for his piano music and a perfect model for a performance guide without needing to cover a large number of Poulenc’s piano works. Secondly, *Huit Nocturnes* is among Poulenc’s most rarely performed piano works. By focusing the

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subject to solely these pieces, this study will yield more detailed information and performance suggestions.\textsuperscript{16}

As mentioned earlier in this essay, the objectives of this study are: 1) to provide a performance guide for pianists who are exploring Poulenc’s piano works, specifically directed at, but not limited to \textit{Huit Nocturnes} and 2) to promote awareness and help eliminate the undeserved neglect for Poulenc’s piano works. In order to achieve these goals, \textit{Huit Nocturnes} will be explored historically and musically.

Due to the nature of this study, which is heavily focused on performance issues, harmonic and structural analysis of \textit{Huit Nocturnes} will be provided primarily as an aid for resolving performance issues. In instances where harmonic analysis is necessary, both Keith Daniel’s book and Roman numeral analysis along with additional methods suggested by Kent Werner’s study (Schenkerian technique and Mueller’s tone pillars approach) may be utilized. Werner also discusses numerous harmonic relationships found in Poulenc’s works such as root movements and types of cadences. Despite being non-traditional, some of Poulenc’s music can be analyzed with traditional Roman numeral analysis. Ned Rorem described Poulenc’s interesting harmonic style:

\begin{quote}
Take Chopin’s dominant sevenths, Ravel’s major sevenths, Fauré’s plain triads, Debussy’s minor ninths, and Mussorgsky’s augmented fourths. Filter these through Satie by way of the added sixth chords of vaudeville (which the French call Le Music Hall), blend in a pint of Couperin to a quart of Stravinsky, and you get the harmony of Poulenc\textsuperscript{”}.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

The harmonic movement of the opening of the first \textit{Nocturne} in C major is relatively straightforward (Example 1.1). The main harmonic changes have been marked in the

\textsuperscript{16} Mellers, 40.

\textsuperscript{17} Ned Rorem, “Francis Poulenc,” in \textit{A Ned Rorem Reader} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 276.
example. Poulenc used traditional diatonic chord progressions with chord extensions to provide change of color; this is one of his methods to remove his music from traditional functional harmony.

Example 1.1. *Nocturne No. 1*, mm. 1-7.

Kent Werner describes Poulenc’s music as a diatonic art sprinkled with highly chromatic and non-harmonic complexities.\(^{18}\) Meanwhile, Keith Daniel notes in his book, “Poulenc’s harmonic language in his piano music does not differ substantially from that of his other genres. Functional diatonic harmony is the rule, with numerous free

\(^{18}\) Werner, 31.
modulations taking the place of thematic development.”\textsuperscript{19} The performer ought to be able to identify the harmonic pillars first in order to recognize the harmonic rhythm. Doing so will help the performer to identify a suitable way of phrasing and pedaling and distinguish between the main musical materials and embellishments. This study will discuss the harmonic style of \textit{Huit Nocturnes} when it is sufficient to help performers. However, it is not the goal of this study to provide detailed harmonic analysis.

Poulenc’s style often features “interruption of cadences,” which means he often does not resolve to a cadence but diverts the resolution to a different chord. In Example 2.1, measure 17 is cut into only one beat, leaving out the expected resolution in the melody of F to E and jumping to a surprising D-major chord with an F-sharp in the melody. This requires maturity from the performer to be able to switch to a completely different mood. For further exploration of Poulenc’s harmonic style in his other works, Werner’s study is an excellent source of consultation.

Performance issues to be addressed in this study are tempo, technical challenges, and pedal usage. Poulenc’s music requires agility to accommodate peculiar shifts and positions on the keyboard. He was highly particular with regards to tempo and the use of pedal. In fact, he almost always indicated a specific tempo and pedal markings in his music.

Example 1.2. *Nocturne No.1*, mm. 24-31.

Daniel stated that Poulenc learned how to maximize the use of pedals from Viñes and it became a trademark of not only his performing style, but also an important characteristic of his piano compositions.\(^{20}\) In an interview with Claude Rostand, Poulenc went as far as saying:

As for pedal usage, it is the great secret of my piano music (and often its true drama!). *One can never use enough pedal, you hear me! Never enough! Never enough!* Sometimes, when I hear certain pianists playing my works, I want to yell at them: ‘Add more butter to the sauce! What is this, playing on a diet?’\(^{21}\)

\(^{20}\) Daniel, 10.

\(^{21}\) “Quant à l’usage des pédales, c’est le grand secret de ma musique de piano (et souvent son vrai drame!). *Onne mettra jamais assez de pédale, vous m’entendez ! jamais assez ! jamais assez ! Parfois, lorsque j’entends certains pianistes m’interpréter, j’ai envie de leur crier: ‘Mettez du beurre dans la sauce ! Qu’est-ce que c’est que ce jeu de régime!’” Francis Poulenc and Claude Rostand, *Entretiens avec Claude Rostand* (Paris: R. Juilliard, 1954), 33.
Although Poulenc fancied abundant use of pedal, one must be able to control the pedal so as not to overpower the music, thus retaining its clarity. The importance of pedal usage is not often a priority of piano students, when in fact it is as important as learning how to articulate. Because some of Poulenc’s piano works do not require a high level of virtuosity - for example, the *Mouvement perpétuels* - they are suitable as teaching tools for the aspect of pedaling.

To help solve the technical challenges in these pieces, fingering suggestions will be provided. Many of the musical materials Poulenc used in *Huit Nocturnes* are found in his other solo piano and chamber music works. Identifying them allows pianists to utilize the suggested approach to phrasing and fingerings in this study with his other pieces as well. For instance, in the first *Nocturne* in C major, the melody line in mm. 39-40 (Example 1.3) is a diminution of the piano solo in mm. 92-95 of the third movement of his *Sextet* (Example 1.4), at exactly a minor third above.

Example 1.3. *Nocturne No.1*,mm. 39-42.
Example 1.4. *Sextet*: III. Finale, mm. 90-95.

![Musical notation]

When it comes to determining interpretation, it is crucial to be familiar with aspects surrounding the music, such as trends at the time when it was composed, historical background and influences from other composers. One must be aware of all those aspects to be able to understand it. A way to be acquainted with Poulenc besides reading his biography is reading his letters. He wrote many letters to his colleagues, in which he often stated his thoughts about his own works. Another way is to research the dedicatees of his works and their relationships with the composer since Poulenc dedicated most of his *Huit Nocturnes* to different people. Information on these dedicatees and their relationship with Poulenc at the time *Huit Nocturnes* was composed will shed some light on the story behind each of these pieces.

This essay starts with an introductory chapter that describes the issues, purpose, and methodology of this study. The second chapter consists of a brief biography of Francis Poulenc and historical background on *Huit Nocturnes*. The third chapter has eight subchapters, one for each nocturne. In each subchapter, performance related issues are discussed in detail. Brief structural and harmonic analysis are provided solely to supplement the performance issues discussed of each piece. Finally, a brief concluding chapter will complete this study.
CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In the preface of his book titled Francis Poulenc, Henri Hell describes Francis Poulenc as “… one of the most endearing survivals in the golden decline of our musical civilization. Paradox, conundrums and spoof are his natural attributes. This intelligent French musician is also a child-like primitive, the last of the lyrical composers, a remote offspring of Franz Schubert.”²² Poulenc can certainly be named an offspring of Schubert not only because of his gift of melody, but also because Schubert’s Winterreise played a big role in his decision to become a composer.

Francis Poulenc was born to a devout Catholic father, Emile Poulenc, who was also a successful businessman. Both his father and uncle ran a pharmaceutical company named Rhône-Poulenc. The company was one of the biggest of its kind in 1928. Today, after going through several acquisitions, the company is named Sanofi, the world’s fourth-largest pharmaceutical company. Since he was a child, Poulenc enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle. His father sent him to Catholic schools, which later played a big role in his religious choral works. His mother, Jenny Royer, who was an amateur pianist, introduced her son to the arts. When growing up, he often heard her playing Mozart, Chopin, Schubert, and Schumann. He then began his own piano lessons at the age of five with Mademoiselle Boutet de Monvel, who was a niece of the famous composer César Franck. Not long after, Francis discovered Debussy’s Danses sacrée et profane for harp and string orchestra. This work sparked his love for the intriguing ninth chords that

²² Hell, ix.
Debussy often used. Poulenc was not able to play any of Debussy’s works on the piano until much later, but his love for Debussy’s music continued to develop and later found its way into his own style of composition.

1901 was an important year for Poulenc. Terrible flooding had caused the whole family to take refuge in a nearby city called Fountainebleu where young Francis first came across Schubert’s Winterreise in a local music shop. His favorite of the cycle was Die Nebensonnen, the song that inspired his lyricism and influenced one of his works, Le Bestiaire. Aside from Debussy and Schubert, another composer greatly influenced young Poulenc was Igor Stravinsky. In 1914, after the performance of Le Sacre du printemps at the Casino de Paris, Poulenc began to admire Stravinsky’s works.

Shortly after, Poulenc met the most important person in his musical career, Ricardo Viñes. Viñes was a prominent virtuoso pianist who was originally from Spain. Poulenc began taking piano lessons from him and Viñes also taught him some theory and music literature. In his own words, Poulenc said about Viñes, “I owe to him the entire beginning of my career, not only for the understanding of the piano that he gave me, but for the effective way in which he supported my first [compositional] efforts.”23 Another reason why Viñes was important for Poulenc was because he introduced the young composer to people such as Georges Auric, Igor Stravinsky, and Erik Satie. These three composers further influenced Poulenc’s musical style. French pianist Alfred Cortot

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23 In Lucien Chevallier, “Un entretien avec… Francis Poulenc,” Le Guide du concert, No. 30 (26 April 1929), 856. “C’est à lui que je dois tout le début de ma carrière, non seulement par la conscience qu’il m’a donné du piano, mais encore par la façon effective don’t il a secondé mes premiers efforts.”
mentioned that Poulenc’s *Mouvements perpétuels* were “reflections of the ironical outlook of Satie adapted to the sensitive standards of the current intellectual circles.”

Jeanne Bathori was another prominent musician who Viñes had introduced to Poulenc. Poulenc owed the success of his *Rapsodie nègre* premiere to Bathori, as it was she who organized the performance at Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier. Bathori also introduced Poulenc to Germaine Tailleferre, Louis Durey, and Arthur Honegger. Together with Darius Milhaud and Georges Auric, these six composers were named *Les Six*. Bathori was one of the strongest supporters of *Les Six*.

Poulenc’s very first compositions were piano pieces. His *Preludes*, written in 1917, are very complex and written on three or four staves. Poulenc himself was not satisfied with this work. Later, he called these pieces inferior copies of Debussy and Stravinsky. That same year, he wrote *Rapsodie nègre*, which marked his break-through as a composer. He was only eighteen years old at the time and had not taken a composition lesson. The instrumentation for the piece is rather unique: baritone, piano, string quartet, flute, and clarinet. The baritone part was so difficult that the singer refused to perform at the last minute during the premiere. Poulenc had to step in and sing the part.

The next few years, from 1918-1921, Poulenc was drafted into the military where he kept writing during this service period. Famous for his songs, Poulenc wrote *Le Bestiaire* in 1919, a song cycle with six songs set to poems by Guillaume Apollinaire. This cycle is the first of many song cycles Poulenc wrote. His love for poetry inspired many of his song cycles. Another significant work produced during that period is *Mouvements perpétuels*, Poulenc’s most famous piece for piano. This work was written

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24 Hell, 4.
in 1918 and premiered by Viñes in 1919 at one of a series of concerts called *Lyre et Palette*. Henri Hell said of the pieces, “The qualities of these short pieces are self-evident. Spontaneous and most attractively melodious, they display, in the manner of Satie, a genre of the eighteenth-century harpsichord composers tastefully spiced with the still new twentieth-century notions of dissonance.”

Poulenc became more popular as he was named one of *Les Six* along with Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric, Germaine Tailleferre, Louis Durey, and Arthur Honegger. The six young French composers became *Les Six* not because of their united ideology or style, but because of French journalist Henri Collet. Collet wrote two articles in *Comoedia*, “Les cinq Russes, les six Français et M. Satie” and “Les Six” after attending one of the concerts organized by cellist Félix Delgrange. Darius Milhaud stated that Collet chose the name merely because they were friends and without considering their individually different ideas. Interestingly, a Poulenc scholar, George Keck, thought that they shared something important. He stated in his book, “The six young composers shared the spirit of a generation facing a new mechanistic world of machines and motion, of experimentation, of music hall and American jazz. They also shared irreverence for the artistic conventions of the time. These forces shaped their music and gave them validity as a group.”

The circumstances around the birth of *Les Six* was the driving force that kept the group together, even if only for a short period of time. The six young composers of the group became close friends, performed their new works in the same concerts, and published a journal called *Le Coq*. In 1921, a joint work by *Les Six* was born. This was

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25 Hell, 8.

Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel, produced by the Swedish Ballet of Rolf de Maré.

Unfortunately, the premiere of this joint work was a disaster that marked the end of Les Six as a group.

When he was discharged from military service in 1921, Poulenc took composition lessons with Charles Koechlin until 1924 on the recommendation of Darius Milhaud. Koechlin was his first and only composition teacher. In the next years, Poulenc’s output included works of many genres: songs, chamber music works, opera, ballet, and various piano works. Among those works were two distinctive ones composed in 1929 that boosted Poulenc’s popularity beyond Paris: Concert champêtre and Aubade. Concert champêtre was written for distinguished harpsichordist Wanda Landowska. Poulenc dedicated the piece to Madame Landowska, who premiered the piece on May 3, 1929. Concert champêtre and Manuel Falla’s El Retablo de Maese Pedro are the most remarkable of the modern works for harpsichord.27 Aubade is what Poulenc called an amphibious work, a choreographic concerto for a dancer, pianist, and a chamber orchestra of eighteen instruments.28 Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Noailles, who commissioned the piece, initially asked Poulenc to write a ballet for an event at their Paris home but the composer suggested a choreographic concerto instead. Aubade was the first choreographic concerto ever introduced and remains the only one of its kind.

In the next decade, Poulenc wrote Huit Nocturnes. The eight pieces were written sporadically from 1929-1938. More discussion about the historical background of Huit Nocturnes is to follow on the next subchapter. During this time, there were two important

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27 Hell, 36.

28 Ibid., 37.
events in Poulenc’s life: the beginning of a lifelong friendship with singer Pierre Bernac (1935), for whom Poulenc had written many songs, and the death of Poulenc’s close friend, Pierre-Octave Ferroud in 1936. The death of Ferroud brought Poulenc back to his Catholic roots and he started composing more religious choral works. More detailed information about Poulenc’s life during the composition of *Huit Nocturnes* is laid out in the next subchapter.

In 1939, World War II began and France was occupied by Germany. Poulenc did not produce new works in the beginning of the war. Ivry mentioned in his book that Poulenc was very anxiously waiting to be called up for military service and he was too apprehensive to write music.\(^{29}\) Instead, in this period that Hell called “period of consolidation”, Poulenc spent his time revising and perfecting old works, among which are his *Sextet* for piano and wind instruments and *Les Biches*. Poulenc spent most of his time in Noizay to avoid the sight of German soldiers in occupied Paris. His closest friends and advisers, such as Darius Milhaud and Wanda Landowska, had been forced into exile because of their Jewish heritage. Poulenc wrote a number of works towards the end of the war, including a ballet, his first opera *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, incidental music for *L ’histoire de Babar*, and several sets of songs. *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* was premiered in 1947 by soprano Denise Duval, who then became Poulenc’s favorite female interpreter of his works.

World War II ended officially in 1945. In the same year, Poulenc and Bernac gave song recitals in Wigmore Hall, London and in 1948 they left for their first American tour. The tour was successful and the duo returned to Paris after two months performing.

\(^{29}\) Ivry, 116.
around the United States. In the same year, The Boston Symphony Orchestra commissioned Poulenc to write *Piano Concerto*, premiered in Boston in January 1950 by the composer and conducted by Charles Münch. The *Piano Concerto* was dedicated to Denise Duval and Raymond Destouches, with whom Poulenc had intimate relationships with for several years.  

During the next few years, Poulenc’s physical and psychological conditions were declining. Ivry noted in his book that Poulenc’s “preferred nocturnal prowl was searching among Parisian pissoirs for sexual adventure,” might have been one of the reasons of his worsening health.  

Claude Rostand, a friend of Poulenc’s, coined the term “le moine et le voyou” (“half monk, half thug”) to describe Poulenc in his July 1950 article in *Paris-Presse*. In 1952, Poulenc started writing his *Sonata for Two Piano*, which is very somber in mood.

The year after, he started working on his opera masterpiece *Dialogue des Carmélites*, which was based on Georges Bernanos’ screenplay of the same name. The story is about Carmélite nuns being beheaded during the French Revolutionary era. Poulenc went through an emotionally difficult time when he was writing this opera. His relationship with Lucien Roubert was not going well and he developed what he had thought to be stomach cancer (this later was proven untrue by medical tests). He finally finished the work in 1956 and it was premiered at La Scala in Milan in 1957.  

In 1957, Poulenc had a new lover named Louis Gautier. His relationship with this young blond man was a boost to his career. His output during this period is abundant.

30 Ibid., 152.
31 Ibid., 153.
32 Ibid., 156.
Among his works composed in his final years are his *Sonata for Flute and Piano*, *Elégie* for horn and piano, a song cycle *Le Travail du peintre*, one act opera *La Voix humaine*, *Gloria* for soprano, chorus, and orchestra, *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano*, and *Sonata for Oboe and Piano*. Soon after he finished the *Sonata for oboe and piano*, Poulenc suffered a heart attack in his home in Paris. Francis Poulenc passed away suddenly on January 30, 1963. He left no unfinished works.

**HUIT NOCTURNES (1929-1938): A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Keith Daniel categorized Poulenc’s piano works into three periods based on style characteristics: The first period, 1916-1921, shows “bare, linear simplicity, modality, polytonality, and ‘wrong note’ dissonance.” The second period, 1922-1937, is marked by “virtuosic bravura; all the traditional capabilities of the piano are exploited.” The last period is 1940-1959 where one can see strong lyricism and less virtuosic approach. The *Nocturnes* fall into the second period based on Daniel’s observation, which is the period of Poulenc’s greatest pianistic failures and his least personal, most superficial works.³³

The set consists of eight nocturnes, each of which is unique. Although these eight pieces were written in the span of a decade, they function well as a cycle and are usually performed as one. Wilfrid Mellers stated in his book that *Huit Nocturnes* is Poulenc’s most subtly representative piano work of the 1930s. He continued by stating, “These nocturnes are not romantic tone-poems like Chopin’s or Fauré’s, but are rather night-scenes, sound-images of both public and private events.”³⁴

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³³ Daniel, 170.

³⁴ Mellers, 40.
During the period when Poulenc composed these pieces, he was living half the time in Paris and the other half in Noizay. Keith Daniel talked about how Poulenc’s personality and style evolved significantly, resulting in a much mature compositional style. Daniel believed that Poulenc spent some time self-contemplating and kept going back to composing his most familiar genre of music, piano music. His piano music output during 1932-1934 consists of mostly light-hearted works. However, it is quite an evolution from his earlier vocal music style.\(^{35}\)

One way to unfold the background of *Huit Nocturnes* is to gather information and get acquainted with the dedicatees of each nocturne. Doing so will provide more insights about Poulenc’s life at the time, the people around him, and circumstantial influences during the time of composition. Table 2.1 shows *Huit Nocturnes*, year of composition, and to whom it was dedicated. Since the next chapter will focus extensively on dissecting and analyzing each nocturne, it is sufficient to provide only the overview of these works in the present chapter.

**Nocturne No. 1: C major**

The first *Nocturne* was dedicated to Suzette Chanlaire. The printed score of the *Nocturne* indicates that the piece was written in 1929. However, the manuscript says year of composition is 1930. The work was published in 1931. One of Poulenc’s connections to Suzette Chanlaire is a gentleman named Richard Chanlaire.

\(^{35}\) Daniel, 35.
Table 2.1: *Huit Nocturnes.* Composition Year and Dedication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nocturne</th>
<th>Composition Year</th>
<th>Dedication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. C major</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Suzette Chanlaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A major “Bal de jeunes filles”</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Janine Salles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. F major “Les Cloches de Malines”</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Paul Collaer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. C minor “Bal phantom”</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Julien Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. D minor “Phalènes”</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Jean- Michel Frank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. G major</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Waldemar Strenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. E♭ major</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Fred Timar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. G major “pour servir de coda au cycle”</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>No dedication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Suzette was the wife of Richard’s brother, Renè. Richard Chanlaire was Poulenc’s lover. Another connection is Poulenc’s alleged daughter, Marie-Ange who was born in 1946. Her mother, known only as “Freddy” or Frederique, was a cousin of Suzette Chanlaire. In November 1929, Poulenc gave Suzette Chanlaire a sketch of his choreographic concerto *Aubade* with a note “… because this work is a wound, and that wounded yourself you knew, better than anyone, how to heal my broken heart…”\(^{36}\) Based on the time frame, it is clear that the dedication to Suzette Chanlaire was related to Poulenc’s relationship with her brother-in-law, Richard Chanlaire.

One of the reasons for Poulenc’s devastation was the death of Raymonde Linossier. Linossier, a very good friend since childhood, was slowly slipping away from

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him. She was said to be the only woman he intended to marry. In a letter to Raymonde’s sister, Alice Ardoin, dated July 1927, he said, “the longer I live, the more I feel that she [Linossier] is the only person with whom I would like to live.” Poulenc never asked Linossier to marry him directly. He told Ardoin that he had no sexual interest in Linossier and she would be free to go to Japan if she wanted to. The marriage proposal was more of a partnership arrangement. However, Linossier was more interested in oriental studies at the Musée Guimet than in Francis Poulenc. She was romantically involved with a Japanese man whom she met while working at the Musée. It was also speculated that Linossier rejected the proposal because she knew about Poulenc’s feelings for Richard Chanlaire. Raymonde Linossier died in January of 1930, leaving Poulenc devastated.

Another reason for Poulenc’s melancholy was his affair with painter Richard Chanlaire. Before Linossier’s death, in early 1929, Poulenc admitted to be in love with the painter and that he was his great love. During this time, Poulenc was in the midst of composing Concert champêtre for Wanda Landowska. Landowska was a counselor figure to Poulenc; she was supportive of his relationship with Chanlaire. When the piece was finished, Poulenc sent a copy of the score to Chanlaire with a note:

You have changed my life, you are the sunshine of my thirty years, a reason for living and working… May this concerto always remind you of the sweet evenings at St-Leu, the brilliant and so kind Wanda, the orchestra rehearsals at Pleyel’s, in short the real source of our admirable tenderness.

No correspondence between Poulenc and Suzette Chanlaire was found during this research except for the notes he sent her with the sketch of Aubade. In Sidney Buckland’s

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38 Schmidt, Entrancing, 160.

39 Ivry, 68.
Selected Correspondences 1915-1963, there was not a single letter from or to Richard Chanlaire. However, Chanlaire’s name was mentioned in Poulenc’s letters to Milhaud and Bernac. In his letters to them, Poulenc talked about Chanlaire in a way that a person talked about his beloved one. ⁴⁰

The piece starts in a child-like, innocent setting in C major. The distinct feature of this piece is its coda, where it is obvious that Stravinsky had a strong influence on Poulenc. The Nocturne is marked Le double plus lent, alternating between 3/4 and 4/4, with a harmonic progression that begins in E major and ends in an extended chord of C major (as shown below in Example 2.1). The innocent beginning, complicated middle section, and the much slower ending might suggest Poulenc’s personal struggle with life and relationship at the time.

Example 2.1. Nocturne No.1, mm. 87-92.

Nocturne No. 2: A major “Bal de jeunes filles”

The second Nocturne was written in 1933 and dedicated to Janine Salles. No information on Janine Salles could be found in any scholarly published works on Poulenc. However, from the subtitle of the piece “Dance of young girls,” one can

speculate that Janine Salles was a dancer. The only person with the same last name who was affiliated with Poulenc was Georges Salles. Janine Salles was most likely related to Georges. Georges Salles was the grandson of Gustav Eiffel, the architect famous for Eiffel tower. He became the curator at The Department of Asian Art at The Louvre in 1926. In 1932, Poulenc was busy writing Le Bal masque and completing his Piano Concerto. He split his time between Noizay and Paris. While in Paris, Poulenc stayed at Georges Salles’ home in Montmartre. \(^{41}\) While there was no information found regarding the relationship between Georges Salles and Jeanine Salles, one can only suspect that they were related due to their shared last name.

The piece starts in 4/4 with a marking of \textit{très anime} (see Example 2.2). One can hear a depiction of a ballet-like ambiance in the opening. Mellers describes the opening in his book by writing, “The dotted-rhythm melody, accompanied with repeated sixteenth notes in between the melody-notes, inducing a slight giddiness.”\(^{42}\) The ending of this Nocturne mimics the ending of the previous nocturne. Poulenc marked the last three measures \textit{très lent} and ends with an A minor chord (as shown in Example 2.3). The sudden changes of mood and tempo suggest that Poulenc intended to convey that youth is not going to last forever and it will someday perish. Mellers stated about the ending of the second Nocturne, “This is a delicious Poulenc image for the vulnerability of youth, perhaps even for the vanity of human wishes.”\(^{43}\)

\(^{41}\) Schmidt, \textit{Entrancing}, 190.

\(^{42}\) Mellers, 41.

\(^{43}\) Mellers, 42.
Example 2.2. *Nocturne No.2*, m.1.

Example 2.3. *Nocturne No. 2*, mm. 28-30.

*Nocturne No. 3: F major “Les Cloches de Malines”*

The third *Nocturne* was written in 1934 and dedicated do Paul Collaer. Collaer was a Belgian born musicologist, pianist, and conductor. In 1921, he founded the Pro Arte concerts in Brussels to promote awareness of contemporary music. Additionally, he was able to boost the appreciation of contemporary music through his position as the director of the Flemish music service of Belgian Radio from 1937-1953. Through the Pro Arte concerts, Collaer had contacts with many musicians, including Francis Poulenc, Erik Satie, and their peers. His experience as a musician combined with his contacts with other musicians enabled him to be a superb musicologist, writing books on music and musicians such as *Jean-Sébastien Bach* (Brussels, 1936), *Darius*...

The Nocturne was subtitled Les Cloches de Malines, which means the bells of Malines. The piece starts with bell-like tune alternating between F and C in irregular meter (as shown in Example 2.4). In his book, Mellers stated that this Nocturne depicts a small town square at night without people. He also writes, “One suspects a programmatic intention; perhaps these frantic clangings warn of some disaster, or maybe the clock’s works have gone crazy.”\textsuperscript{45}

Example 2.4. Nocturne No.3, mm. 1-4.

Malines or Mechelen is Paul Collaer’s hometown. It is situated halfway between Antwerp and Brussels in Belgium. The city is most known for its carillon school, The Royal Carillon School “Jef Denyn”, which is the first and largest carillon school in the world. The subtitle Les Cloches de Malines of Poulenc’s third Nocturne suggests that the opening of this piece mimics the sound of a carillon. A carillon


\textsuperscript{45} Mellers, 42.
consists of 23 bronze bells and is usually housed in a bell tower of a church. It is played by striking an organ like instrument; a keyboard for the hands and pedals for the feet.

![Carillon at The Royal Carillon School](image1)

**Figure 2.1** The carillon at The Royal Carillon School

![Keyboard and pedals of a carillon](image2)

**Figure 2.2** The keyboard and pedals of a carillon
Nocturne No. 4: C minor “Bal phantôme”

The fourth Nocturne was dedicated to a friend of Poulenc, a French born American writer, Julien Green. Green was born Julian Hartridge Green in Paris in 1900 to American parents. His upbringing was very strict and religious. He was raised as a protestant but later converted into Catholicism two years after his mother’s death. In 1920, his first publisher changed his name from Julian to Julien. Although he was American, he wrote exclusively in French and was the first non-French national to be elected to *L’Académie française*, an organization founded in 1635 that is in charge of regulating the French language. Most of Green’s works are very much influenced by his homosexuality and his religious Catholic beliefs. Religion and sexuality, the common factors that Green and Poulenc shared, were most likely the reasons of the beginning of their friendship.

The Nocturne itself is prefaced by a passage from Green’s work *Le visionnaire* (The Dreamer, 1934):

Not a note of waltz or schottisches lost in the house, so that the patient had his share of the feast and put his bed dreaming about the good years of his youth.”

From this text, it is clear that the piece was intended to be nostalgic for Green of his younger days when he was healthy. Julien Green became disabled and bedridden towards the end of his life.

One can hear the influence of Satie’s *Gymnopedie* and *Gnossienne* in this piece. Its harmony reminds us of *Gnossienne No.1* while its spaciousness of *Gymnopedie No. 1.*

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46 “Pas une note des valses ou des schottisches ne se perdait dans toute la maison, si bien que le malade eut sa part de la fête et put rêver sur son grabat aux bonnes années de sa jeunesse.” Julien Green, *Le Visionnaire* (Paris: Fayard, 1994).
Mellers suggested that in this piece, we are led by Poulenc through an “old-world, ‘phantom ball’ where the chromatic harmony, sensuously spaced, moves us through a by-gone-era waltz.”

Examples 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7 below show how the opening of the fourth Nocturne compares to Satie’s Gymnopedie and Gnossienne.

Example 2.5. Nocturne No. 4, mm. 1-3.

Example 2.6. Satie, Gymnopedie No. 1, mm. 1-5.

Example 2.7. Satie: Gnossienne No. 1, mm. 1-4.

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47 Mellers, 43.
Nocturne No. 5: D minor “Phalènes”

The fifth Nocturne was also written in 1934, dedicated to a French interior designer, Jean-Michel Frank. Poulenc and Frank were both commissioned by Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Noailles to provide music and décor for their fête at their Paris home in 1929. This particular event is when Poulenc wrote Aubade, while Frank created the décor. Jean-Michel Frank (1895-1941) was born to a wealthy family. He started law school in 1911 but quit when his two older brothers were killed in World War I, followed by his father’s suicide and his mother’s death in a mental institution soon after. In 1920, he found himself wealthy because of his family inheritance. Frank was well-known for his classical proportions, simple ornamentation with enhanced finishes, and Baroque Revival objects combined with Surrealism. Frank committed suicide in 1941 by jumping off from a Manhattan apartment building in New York. An example of Frank’s unique work is a collection of home furniture for elite French label Hermès in 1924, which is still considered classic and iconic until today.

This piece is subtitled “Phalènes” (moths). Mellers believes that this piece is a night-scene to balance the fourth Nocturne’s town square of Malines. He also hypothesizes that Poulenc wanted to depict the idea that humans are like moths, jitterly directionless. The beginning is marked Presto misterioso, depicting flickering moths. The opening of the fifth Nocturne is shown below in Example 2.8.

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48 Schmidt, Entrancing, 170.


50 Mellers, 43.
Example 2.8. *Nocturne No.5*, mm. 1-2

Nocturne No. 6: G major

The sixth *Nocturne* was written in 1935 and dedicated to Waldemar Strenger. No information on Waldemar Strenger could be found in any scholarly published works on Poulenc. It also does not have a subtitle attached.

Nocturne No. 7: E flat major

The seventh *Nocturne* was written in 1935 and dedicated to Fred Timar. No information on Fred Timar could be found in any scholarly published works on Poulenc. It also does not have a subtitle attached. However, according to Mellers, the tune of this piece is meant to reintroduce the young dancers from the second *Nocturne*, who are now strolling or dancing in a balmy summer night.51 Mellers did not specify a reason why he believed that the tune is depicting the *jeune filles*. The two tunes are very different from each other (Examples 2.9 and 2.10).

51 Ibid.
Example 2.9. Nocturne No.2, m.1.

Example 2.10. Nocturne No.7, mm.1-2.

Nocturne No. 8: G major

The last Nocturne was written in 1938 and has no dedication attached. It is subtitled *pour servir de coda au cycle*, or “to serve as coda of the cycle.” The ending of this Nocturne is very similar to the first Nocturne (Examples 2.11 and 2.12).
Example 2.11. *Nocturne No.1*, mm. 87-92.

Example 2.12. *Nocturne No.8*, mm. 30-34.
CHAPTER 3
PERFORMANCE GUIDE

Although mostly famous for his vocal works, Poulenc’s primary instrument was the piano. He started learning the piano at a very young age, first from his mother who was an amateur pianist. He did not begin to compose until after his studies with Ricardo Viñes, starting with works for the piano. Poulenc’s performing style was very much influenced by Viñes, preferring “a full, vibrant sound, a strict observance of tempo and dynamic markings, a liberal deployment of pedal, and a lively, boisterous approach to the keyboard.”

The performance guide of each Nocturne provided in this chapter will discuss four main aspects. The first one is the form of each Nocturne. One of Keith Daniel’s observations about Poulenc’s piano works is that they are non-developmental, often with simple ABA or ABA’ form. However, that is not always the case for each nocturne. The harmonic and structural analysis will not be provided in detail, it will only be provided to aid the performer in terms of determining phrasing and sections in the pieces.

The second aspect, tempo, is almost always the biggest challenge in performance. Poulenc often provided specific metronome markings and written tempo indications (such as cédez un peu or pressez un peu). However, it is arguable that his tempo indications might not always be the most appropriate ones. Poulenc also made it clear that he despised rubato. He even went as far as saying:

Once a tempo is adopted, never change it on any account until I indicate otherwise. Never stretch or rush a tempo. That drives me crazy. I would prefer all the wrong notes

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52 Daniel, 164.
53 Ibid., 165.
in the world.\textsuperscript{54} Therefore, the performer needs to avoid excessive \textit{rubato}. However, it does not mean that the \textit{Nocturnes} must be played straight in tempo all throughout the piece. When it comes to abiding to metronome markings, Poulenc made it clear that he thought pianists ought to comply with his indications: “If pianists would have confidence in my metronomic indications, very meticulously established, much misfortune will be avoided.”\textsuperscript{55} Despite Poulenc’s detailed instructions, it is important to note that the composer himself has been caught making a number of contradictions with his own tempo indications. For example, after a performance of \textit{Sanctus} at a rehearsal of the Netherlands Chamber Choir, Poulenc commented that the piece was performed too fast. The conductor of the choir justified the tempo with Poulenc’s own metronome marking. “‘Oh, that,’ he (Poulenc) said, ‘I made it that because most choirs always sing too slowly!’”\textsuperscript{56} Based on the evidence present, Stutzenberger suggests that Poulenc’s metronome markings “need not always be scrupulously followed.”\textsuperscript{57}

The third aspect is technical challenges, which consist of mostly voicing. Poulenc once said:

I would like to persuade interpreters that it is much more difficult to learn the nuances than the notes of a work. If I find an orchestra unsatisfying it is not because of the


\textsuperscript{55} “Si les pianistes faisaient confiance à mes mouvements métro-nomiques, très soigneusement établis, bien des malheurs seraient évités,” Poulenc, \textit{Entretiens}, 35.

\textsuperscript{56} Felix de Nobel, “Memories of Francis Poulenc,” \textit{Sonorum Speculum XV} (June 1963), 39.

\textsuperscript{57} Stutzenberger, 31.
number of faults they commit but the absence of balance and proportion.\textsuperscript{58} This statement clearly highlights the importance of voicing in Poulenc’s pieces. All the voices must be balanced and proportioned. When asked about his piano music, Poulenc stated, “the arpeggios and accompaniment chords should be in the background most of the time so that the melody can be heard.”\textsuperscript{59} Suggestions as to how to achieve this are discussed for each \textit{Nocturne}.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, is the pedaling. In \textit{Journal de mes melodies}, Poulenc stated that the use of pedals holds a position of cardinal importance in his music. He then continued, “I must insist once more that my work calls for the almost constant use of the pedals.”\textsuperscript{60} In an interview with Claude Rostand, he stated that “one can never use enough pedal” and that he “often relied on the pedal for realization of a harmonic passage that could not be rendered in writing.”\textsuperscript{61}

The performance guide, based on these four issues, form, tempo, voicing, and pedaling, will give the performer helpful information to explore these \textit{Nocturnes} and mold them to his or her own artistic interpretation.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} Poulenc, \textit{Journal de més melodies} (Diary of My Songs), Bi-lingual edition, trans. Winifred Radford (London: Victor Gollancz, 1985), 53.
\item \textsuperscript{59} “Pour les batteries et les arpêges on doit les effacer la plupart du temps pour laisser le chant en dehors,” Poulenc, \textit{Entretiens}, 33.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Poulenc, \textit{Journal}, 53.
\item \textsuperscript{61} “On ne mettra jamais assez de pédales. Dans un mouvement rapide, il m’est arrivé parfois de compter sur la pédale pour réaliser, virtuellement, l’harmonie d’un dessin qu’il serait impossible d’écrire, intégralement, dans ce tempo,” Poulenc, \textit{Entretiens}, 32-33.
\end{itemize}
**NOCTURNE I: C MAJOR**

**Form**
According to Keith Daniel, the first *Nocturne* is not through-composed because it is “too long for Poulenc to sustain without a thematic development.”\(^{62}\) Therefore, Daniel concluded that the form of this *Nocturne* is a rondo form “by substitution of an unrelated coda for the final return of the theme.”\(^{63}\) Based on Daniel’s conclusion, the first *Nocturne* can be divided into five sections. Each section, except for the coda, is marked with a restatement of the main melody followed by a transition that leads to the next key. Table 3.1 outlines the structure of the first *Nocturne*. The first section comprises measures 1-17, where the main melody is in C major. The second section begins with the main theme in D major in measure 28 until measure 43. The third section in G major comprises measures 44-56. The fourth section is the lengthiest, from measures 56-86. It begins with the main theme restated in A-flat major. Keith Daniel pointed out that the coda (Example 3.1) “is a sequence of dominant-tonic cadences descending by steps of minor third.”\(^{64}\)

Example 3.1. *Nocturne No. 1*, mm. 87-92.

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\(^{62}\) Daniel, 165.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 166.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 79.
Each transition consists of a series of non-conventional modulations, one of Poulenc’s distinctive compositional styles. These modulations are often accompanied by very little or no anticipation, which Poulenc referred to as being able to “pass through a mouse-hole.” An example of the mentioned modulation is shown in Example 3.2.

Example 3.2. Nocturne No.1, mm. 27-28.

Table 3.1. Nocturne No.1: Structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td>1-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’</td>
<td>D major</td>
<td>28-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’’</td>
<td>G major</td>
<td>44-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’’’</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
<td>56-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td>87-92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tempo**

Poulenc provided plenty of information in the beginning of the piece as of how he would like it to be performed. The tempo marking says *sans trainer*, which means without dragging at half note equals eighty beats per minute. The time signature is cut time, which makes the left hand arpeggio figures flow quicker. Poulenc also noted on the bottom of the first line, “*l’accompagnement très estompé et régulier,*” which means the

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accompaniment is very dimmed and regular. It is clear that Poulenc intended this piece to flow without too much rubato. Determining the perfect tempo perhaps is the most challenging part of learning this piece. It must be fast enough that the left hand sounds like a stream of harmony rather than individual notes, but it must be slow enough that the right hand melody sounds lyrical. $\dot{=} 80$ is moderately fast. In my opinion, the biggest challenge of performing at this tempo is controlling the left hand figure. The leaps in the left hand require control of the fingers so there will not be any unwanted accents in the middle of the passage. A certain amount of time is necessary for the fingers to move and prepare before playing the keys. At $\dot{=} 80$, it is extremely difficult to keep the left hand part très estompé just like Poulenc suggested. An example of this issue can be seen in measures 5-6 (Example 3.3), where the left hand leaps from D to F, G to E, and F to A. For these instances, it is crucial that the thumb arrives early to the designated note and has ample time to prepare for the attack so unwanted accent can be avoided. Therefore, it is more appropriate to perform this piece at a slower than Poulenc’s tempo indication.

Example 3.3. *Nocturne No.1*, mm. 4-7.

In order to execute rubato and phrasing tastefully, one ought to consider the form of the piece and how the sections are divided. For example, Poulenc notated a comma in measure 23, before the pick up beat to the transitional section (Example 3.4). In that
particular measure, the comma is intended to be like a breath. In measure 27 (Example 3.5), Poulenc cuts the measure in half, making it a 1/2 instead of a 2/2, before restating the melody in D major. There is no comma written in the score, but it is impossible physically to jump from one register to another in time and still arrive without unwanted accents in *pp*. A slight hesitation before measure 28 will provide ample time for the performer to move quickly and prepare for the melody. It is important to remember that Poulenc’s melodies are to be treated like were vocal melodies. *Rubato* should sound natural, just like the human voice, without a loss of pulse. Instead, the performer needs to allow space within the music to let the sound breathe and change nuances.

Example 3.4. *Nocturne No.1*, mm. 20-23.

Example 3.5. *Nocturne No.1*, mm. 27-28.
Technical Challenges

The melody is placed traditionally on the top voice of the right hand for the entire piece. The top voice must be highlighted in order to achieve melodic clarity. However, the challenge of voicing in this piece, and many other pieces with similar configurations, is to keep the inner voices of the right hand soft but supportive harmonically. One way to execute this is for the fingers that are playing the top voice to approach the keys a little bit faster. Therefore, the sound will come out clearer. As for the rest of the fingers, flatten them out and approach the keys slowly, with an almost massage-like touch. This technique will dampen the sound yet still providing warmth and harmonic support.

In order to make arpeggios in the left hand très estompé et régulier, it is necessary to keep the fingers rather superficial, almost brushing through the keyboard instead of articulating each note. Poulenc believed that arpeggios and repeated chords are to be played faded and without much articulation. The benefits of keeping the fingers on the surface of the keyboard are: (1) it allows the production of murmuring, faded sound, and (2) it allows the fingers to move faster to the next note, providing enough preparation time and avoiding unwanted accents. A similar technique should be employed in the repeated chords found in measures 36-40 (Example 3.6). The fingers are never to come up completely to the surface when playing repeated chords therefore the sound can stay soft and precise at the same time. In measure 36, where the repeated chords are in the left hand, it is best to avoid using the thumb or the little finger because those two fingers tend to project more sound. It may be more beneficial to use fingers 2 and 4. In measure 39 (Example 3.7), where the repeated chords are in the lower voices of the right hand, there

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66 “Le trop d’articulation de certains dessins en batteries ou arpèges qu’il faut, au contraire, jouer très estompés,” Poulenc, Entretiens, 32.
is no other option but to utilize the thumb and second finger. In order to keep the sound soft, both fingers playing the repeated chords are to be kept slightly flat.

Example 3.6. Nocturne No.1, mm. 36-37.

Example 3.7. Nocturne No.1, mm. 39-40.

In the ending where it is marked le double plus lent (Example 3.8), the chords are to be played calmly with very balanced voicing. The melody no longer exists in this section; it is merely a progression of harmony. The top voice must remain slightly highlighted to provide a sense of direction.

Pedaling

In the first Nocturne, Poulenc did not provide pedal marks. One needs to listen carefully to the harmonic changes in order to place the pedal correctly. There is no absolute right or wrong as to how the pedal is placed; every artist has a different perception of sound that they would like to achieve.
Example 3.8. *Nocturne No. 1*, mm. 88-92.

Poulenc marked rests in the left hand part in the score and no pedal marking. The harmony needs to be sustained, therefore the pedal should be held for the whole measure through the rests. A suggestion for pedal usage is shown in Example 3.9.

Example 3.9. *Nocturne No. 1*, mm. 20-21.

In some instances, the pedal needs to be held for longer than a measure so the harmony will be sustained. This happens in measures 16-17 and 18-19 where the bass note is only an eighth note. A suggestion for pedal usage for this passage is shown in Example 3.10.

In instances where the harmony changes progressively and many dissonances are found, the pedal needs to be toned down. One suggestion is to change the pedal according to the harmony and only use half pedal instead of full pedal. One of these instances happens in measures 32-35 (Example 3.11).
Example 3.10. *Nocturne No. 1*, mm. 16-19.

![Example 3.10](image1)

Example 3.11. *Nocturne No. 1*, mm. 32-35.

![Example 3.11](image2)

**NOCTURNE 2: “Bal de jeune filles”**

**Form**

The second *Nocturne* can be divided into three major sections. The form of this nocturne follows the conventional ternary form, A B A’. The first section starts in A major (measures 1-13). The second section starts with a different mood in what seems to be C major. However, the key in the second section keeps modulating until finally it goes back to A major and restates the first melody in measure 24. Similar to the first *Nocturne*, the modulations are without preparation, often utilizing chromatic modulation. Example 3.12 below shows one of the instances in the middle section where it modulates from F-sharp minor to A minor with only utilizing the leading tone of A minor.

Poulenc concludes this *Nocturne* similarly to how he concluded the first *Nocturne*, a slow section marked *très lent*. This time, Poulenc does not end the piece in its home key, but in its parallel key, A minor. The coda is a “change of perspective,” according to Mellers. Mellers describes the last three measures (Example 3.13) as “a delicious Poulenc image for the vulnerability of youth, perhaps even for the vanity of human wishes.”


Table 3.2. *Nocturne No.2*: Structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A major</td>
<td>1-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>14-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’</td>
<td>A major- A minor</td>
<td>24-32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67 Mellers, 42.
Tempo

The tempo marking indicates très anime (very spirited) and \( J = 104 \). Poulenc does not put any other tempo indication throughout this short piece until three measures before the end, which is marked très lent (very slow). However, in the middle section, starting from measure 16, Poulenc indicates the passage to be played très souple et très allant, meaning very flexible and dynamic.

In the first section, there is very little room for tempo flexibility. At \( J = 104 \), the nocturne paints a beautiful picture of young, energetic dancers moving around in a relatively fast pace. In the second section, the tempo is flexible, but one ought to be careful not to put too much rubato. The leaps in the melody make it very difficult to sustain the lively tempo. Example 3.14 shows the leap in the right hand that requires the performer to have time to prepare playing the next note.


As the texture becomes thicker in measure 19, Poulenc marked avec passion, which can be translated into even more tempo flexibility. Finally in très lent, one can be as free and expressive as possible but still without losing the sense of pulse.
Technical Challenges

The melody is single-lined, accompanied by repeated sixteenth chords in both hands. The rhythmic pattern of the main melody induces “a slight giddiness, both literally and in the colloquial sense.” The main challenge is to voice the melody to ensure that it sounds crisp and not overpowered by the accompaniment. It is crucial to keep repeated chords soft but still supportive and playful. This can be achieved by using minimal wrist movement and keeping the fingers curved so the fingers will not come out of the keys when they play the same chords. Example 3.15 shows the beginning of this Nocturne.

In measures 5-8, the melody is in a lower register, which creates an even bigger challenge now that the right hand repeated chords are “in the way.” One solution is to stretch the melody and physically hold the dotted note for its full value. With that said, the dotted notes of the melody should be played with stronger fingers such as the thumb or middle finger.

Example 3.15. Nocturne No.2, m. 1.

\[\text{Example 3.15. Nocturne No.2, m. 1.}\]

\[\text{Dans un halo de pédales}\]

\[\text{68 Mellers, 41.}\]
Since the melody in these measures is in a lower register than initially stated, a slight hesitation followed by a change of color is appropriate. The subtitle “Bal de jeunes filles” should inspire performers to treat the melody as characters. For example, the melody in the higher register measures 1-4 portrays a young girl. Then, in measures 5-8, an older character is represented by with the melody in the lower register.

Example 3.16. *Nocturne No. 2*, mm. 4-5.

**Pedaling**

In the beginning of the piece, the marking is *dans un halo de pédale*, which means that the melody is to be accompanied in a halo of pedals. The repeated chords are not meant to sound crisp. Instead, they should sound veiled in order for the melody to stand out. To achieve the “halo” sound of the pedal without being unclear, the performer can use half pedal instead of full pedal. In the middle of the piece, measures 16-23, the pedal needs to be lighter than the previous section because the register is now lower and the accompaniment parts are thicker. Finally, in the last three measures (mm. 28-30), the pedal needs to be retained longer to achieve the open, echoic sound. Suggestions for pedal usage are shown in Example 3.17.
Example 3.17. *Nocturne No.2*, mm. 27-30.

![Musical notation image]

*NOCTURNE 3: “Les Cloches de Malines”*

**Form**

The third *Nocturne* is also in ternary form. It can be divided into three major sections. The first section is comprised of measures 1-42. The middle section, measures 43-67, is completely different from the first and third section. Lastly, the third section is comprised of measures 68-98. The division of sections in this nocturne is fairly straightforward because (1) Poulenc placed a long silence in between each section and changed the meter and the tempo of the second section (2) the musical material in the second section is very different than the first and the third section is a restatement of the beginning.

Mellers stated in his book that the unrelated middle section is perhaps “a programmatic intention.” He explained that when the bell fades, a long silence that follows “may be ominous, for the cacophony that forms a brief middle section that is agite and mysterieux, just like Poulenc indicated. After another long silence, the bells come back and “restore the primal scene.”

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69 Mellers, 42.
Table 3.3: Nocturne No. 3: Structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>F major</td>
<td>1-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>43-67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>F major</td>
<td>68-98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 3.18. Nocturne No. 3, mm. 38-43. First – Second Section.


**Tempo**

In the first section, Poulenc writes *modéré mais sans lenteur*, which means moderately but without slowing down, at $J=98$. The piece begins with oscillations between F and C, depicting the sounds of bells in a town square. In order to achieve that nuance, the indicated tempo must be slowed down. At $J=98$, the bells sound too hurried
and do not have time to ring. The tempo must remain unchanged throughout the first section to retain the calm and serene atmosphere, which means there is very little or no room at all for *rubato*.

The second section is marked *agité et mystérieux*, which means agitated and mysterious, at a much faster tempo, $\text{♩}=138$. In this section, it is appropriate to speed the tempo up to the indicated metronome marking. This is because the second section depicts “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, things that go bump in the night.”

After another long silence, the last section returns to its original tempo. Poulenc also indicates the tempo to be $\text{♩}=98$. This section should be played like the first section. If the performer starts the piece faster, then it is appropriate to recall its tempo from the beginning of the piece. Like the first section, a constant unchanged tempo is important in order to achieve atmosphere of the town square with tolling bells.

**Technical Challenges**

The texture of this piece is relatively simple in its first and last sections. The main challenge is to keep the left hand stable because of “frequent changes of meter and rhythmic motives which is often accompanied by shifting accents result in instability.”

Another layer of challenge added to the left hand part is dynamic markings. Even though there are accents, the bells need to sound somewhat distant, keeping the dynamic level no louder than *mezzo piano* and going as soft as *pianissimo*. Therefore, the accents must not sound forceful; instead, the accents should be slightly stronger than the other notes. One must remember to refrain from accenting every downbeat since the meter keeps changing.

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70 Mellers, 43.

71 Daniel, 169.
and the accents written are not always on the downbeat. One solution is to keep the left hand fingers completely controlled, slightly flat, and close to the keys.

The middle section is challenging in its own way. The grace notes preceding the chords in the right hand and the chords themselves can be awkward to play. For example, in measure 44, the second chord’s largest interval is a minor tenth, which is farther than a typical reach. In order to play the chord, one will need to split it between the right and left hands. A similar situation happens in the third chord of measure 46, where the grace note is actually played by the left hand crossing over the right hand. A suggested solution is shown in Example 3.20. Blue denotes the left hand and red denotes the right hand.

Example 3.20. Nocturne No. 3, mm. 44-48.

Pedaling

The pedaling indication in the first measure is mettre beaucoup de pédale along with dynamic indication p, doux et mélancolique. Those terms translate to “put a lot of pedal” and “soft and melancholy.” To portray the bell tolls, the pedal may be sustained for an extended period of time. From the beginning to measure 17, the pedal should be sustained the whole time. Starting in measure 18, everything moves a little bit lower so a new pedal should be employed until measure 24. In measures 25-30, the pedal should be changed accordingly because of the call and response figure between the left and right
hands (Example 3.21). The melody in the right hand moves back to a higher register in measures 31-34, therefore, one pedal should be used for the whole four measures. When the melody returns to a lower register in measure 35, the pedal should be held until right before the marked long silence. When the dynamic level drops to pp, such as measures 18 and 31, the soft pedal should be utilized. The melodic line in the left hand in measure 25-31 is shown in Example 3.21.

In the middle section, Poulenc notes *bref pédale sur chaque temps*, which means to use a brief pedal each time but on top of the left hand octave. One can assume that the right hand chords are to be played with very little pedal and the left hand octaves are to be played in an almost *staccato* manner.


In contrast to the first and last sections where the pedal is to be held throughout, the pedal needs to be changed according to the right hand chords in this section. Example 3.22 shows pedaling suggestions for measures 49-54. In the last section, the pedal should be employed in a similar manner as the first section. The pedal should be held continuously from measures 68-80 and changed accordingly in measures 81-88, where the left hand plays the melody. The rest of the section should have continuous pedal as
well with a small exception of the second to last measure, where Poulenc marks a *fermata* above a quarter rest. That rest denotes total silence; therefore no pedal should be placed.

Example 3.22. *Nocturne No.3*, mm. 49-54.

![Example music notation](image)

**NOCTURNE 4: “Bal fantôme”**

**Form**

This relatively short *Nocturne* only has 36 measures. It is similar to the previous two nocturnes, also in ternary form. The first section is comprised of measures 1-16. The second section begins in measure 17 and lasts until measure 28 before the opening theme returns. The last section is much shorter than the first one, only lasting for 8 measures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>1-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>17-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>C minor - C major</td>
<td>29-36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tempo

The initial tempo indication in “Bal fantôme” is *lent, très las et piano* at $\textit{j}=96$.

Before the return of the opening theme in measure 27, Poulenc also marks *cédez*, indicating that tempo should be slowed down before coming back to Tempo I in measure 28. Finally, in the last measure, to indicate a final *ritardando*, Poulenc marks *cédez un peu*. In general, the tempo in this piece is fairly simple. There is not much room for tempo fluctuations except for a little bit of *ritardando* at the end of each section as indicated. However, this does not necessarily mean that the tempo has to be strictly at $\textit{j}=96$ throughout. A factor that needs to be taken into account is that “Bal fantôme” means “Ghost Dance.” Therefore, any tempo adjustment should be done appropriately, while keeping the dance mood.

Technical Challenges

The most difficult challenge of this piece is not technical. The texture of the piece makes it relatively simple to learn. However, the true challenge lies in bringing the old-world waltz to life. Mellers suggests that this piece is indeed “an exercise in nostalgia, in which the chromatic harmony, sensuously spaced, lends fragrance to an old-world, dotted-rhythmmed waltz.” Other challenges include balance and voicing in the right hand. The piece begins very soft (*pp*) but it gets even softer halfway through the first section (*ppp*). The melody needs to be heard clearly while keeping the bass in the left hand substantial. In order to keep the voices balanced, the left hand must move swiftly to the chords after playing the bass and prepare to play very close to the keys to keep the sound soft yet firm. The middle voice played by the right hand must remain subtle at all times.

\footnote{Mellers, 43.}
Keeping the fingers that are not playing the melody line flat and close to the keys will be helpful in keeping the middle voice veiled.

In measure 9, where the dynamic is marked $ppp$, the melody moves up in register. Due to the high register, it should be relatively easy to keep the sound very soft. However, one needs to keep in mind that the dynamic range of the piece is relatively small, with $ppp$ being the softest and $mp$ being the loudest. Therefore, the beginning should not be too soft, considering that it will lower down to $ppp$ later in the piece. Example 3.23 shows the softest part of the piece, where there are leaps in the left hand and the melody in the high register.

Example 3.23. *Nocturne No.4*, mm. 8-11.

**Pedaling**

The pedal usage in the fourth *Nocturne* is relatively simple and self-explanatory. The pedal should be changed according to harmonic changes, which happens frequently due to its chromatic nature of the harmony. When the dynamic is marked $ppp$, the soft pedal should be utilized.
NOCTURNE 5: “Phalènes”

Form

The simplest way to identify the form of the fifth Nocturne is to observe the opening melody and its restatements. “Phalènes” has three main melodies: the opening theme in the first two measures, the next melody in measures 17-19, and the third one in the middle voice in measures 28-29. This set of three melodies is then repeated in a similar manner. All three melodies are shorter than the first section of the piece. The first one happens in measure 34, where the right hand melody is a third lower than the original and the left hand part is a tritone lower. The second melody restatement is found in measures 39-40, a fifth higher than its original statement. The last melody restatement happens in measures 47-48. Examples 3.24-3.29 show the comparisons between melodies.


Example 3.25. Nocturne No.5, mm. 33-35.

Example 3.27. *Nocturne No. 5*, mm. 36-42.
Example 3.28. Nocturne No.5, mm. 26-30.

Example 3.29. Nocturne No.5, mm. 46-50.

Based on the observations above, the fifth Nocturne can be divided into two big sections with three sub-sections each.

Table 3.5. Nocturne No.5: Structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>1-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B</td>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>17-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1C</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>28-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A</td>
<td>B minor</td>
<td>34-38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B</td>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>39-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2C</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>47-54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the composer indicates the key of this *Nocturne* (D minor), the tonality is not clear throughout the piece, as it is mostly bitonal. According to Mellers, this nocturne “is a night-scene to balance the town square of Malines.” He explains that it is about “moths flicker in iridescent bitonality based on D minor” with a lyrical section in the “region of B major, leading to a tune related to the first theme.” The piece ends in a bitonal manner with D minor in the right hand and B-flat major in the left hand.

**Tempo**

The tempo indication marked in the beginning is *Presto misterioso* at $\frac{d}{d}=112$. Although the tempo is marked very fast because of its programmatic value of depicting buzzing moths, $\frac{d}{d}=112$ is too fast to successfully execute dual articulations that are happening between both hands. In the beginning, the right hand is slurred while the left hand part has *staccati* constantly. In order to keep both articulations distinct, the tempo needs to be reduced.

Poulenc did not indicate many tempo changes in this piece. Due to the nature of this piece, which Mellers calls “jitterly directionless,” there’s very little room for *rubato* since there is hardly any sense of direction. The only tempo changes Poulenc marks are *cèdez un peu* in measure 16 and in measure 17, before the second melody emerges, where Poulenc marks *reprendre exactement le Tempo* (recapture exactly the first tempo). Notice that Poulenc deliberately used the word *exactement* to ensure that the tempo matches the tempo of the beginning.

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73 Mellers, 43.

74 Ibid.
Technical Challenges

The technical challenge in the fifth Nocturne involves voicing. The main concern in this section with the main challenge to keep the other voices sounding veiled. This can be achieved by keeping the fingers slightly flat and close to the keys. A similar situation also happens in measures 39-41.

Example 3.30. Nocturne No.5, mm. 17-19.

Starting in measure 28, the melody is placed in the middle voice and marked f while other voices are marked p. In order to bring this melody out, it is recommended that fingers 1 and 2 be used while fingers 4 and 5 play the top chords lightly. A similar situation happens in measure 47 to the end of the piece with the melody placed in the middle (Examples 3.28 and 3.29).

Pedaling

In general, this piece is relatively dry. Although the opening melody of the right hand is marked très lié (very connected), the left hand part is marked the opposite, sec et très rythmé (dry and very rhythmic). Therefore, the legato in the right hand part must be done physically, not with pedal. The only instances where pedal can be appropriately used are during the “lyrical” sections, which happen in measures 17-21 and again in measures 39-41.
NOCTURNE 6: G MAJOR

Form

The sixth Nocturne appears to be in ternary form. Poulenc explores symmetry in this piece. The piece starts in the key of G major. The second theme emerges in measure 12 before the piece undergoes a series of free modulations throughout the middle section, reaching its climax at measure 41. After the climax, the restatement of the second theme appears first before the main theme. The tonality eventually returns to the home key of G major with a restatement of the opening theme in measure 64. Similar to several previous Nocturnes, the sixth Nocturne also has with a brief coda, ending in G minor. Mellers briefly explained the overview of this piece in a single paragraph:

A stepwise-moving tune in G alternates with a chromatic undulation as tight as the first theme is relaxed. Broken but calm arpeggiated fifths accompany the first theme, and there is a passionate climax to the middle, before the themes are recapitulated in reverse order. The open-fifth arpeggios dissipate into silence and the coda, mutating E major unisons to an E flat major triad in first inversion, resolves gravely and mysteriously on to G minor.\[75\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.6. Nocturne No.6: Structure.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tempo

Poulenc marks several tempo indications in this piece. In the beginning (A Section), it is marked très calme mais sans trainer (very calm but without dragging) at \[\text{♩}\]

\[75\] Mellers, 43.
=56. After the double bar at measure 11, which marks the beginning of the B section, the tempo is noted as \( J = 60 \), slightly faster than the beginning. The tempo then goes up to \( J = 66 \) in measure 17. Approaching the climax, beginning at measure 34, the tempo accelerates more. When the A’ section begins, the tempo is back to its original speed.

The piece starts calmly and it becomes frantic gradually until the climax. Then it dies down gradually until it becomes calm again. The beginning tempo of \( J = 56 \) is appropriate for this piece and should be followed as such. After that, the tempo moves to \( J = 60 \), then \( J = 66 \), then there is an accelerando before returning to the original tempo. The tempo changes combined with meter changes, especially in measures 34-41, create a sense of agitation until the climax at measure 40 (see Example 3.31). Following the climax, the dynamic level drops to \( p \), marked doucement expressif (gently expressive). The tempo should be slowly but steadily adjusted when this section begins until it reaches the original tempo by the time section A’ starts.

**Technical Challenges**

According to Daniel, the sixth Nocturne is well written, but pianistically challenging.\(^{76}\) The first challenge is found in the beginning where the right hand has to simultaneously play the melody in octaves and the sixteenth-note accompaniment. It is crucial to physically hold the right hand melody whenever possible in order to avoid unwanted accents and interrupted phrases. Example 3.32 shows where the right hand can be held physically until the next melody octaves.

\(^{76}\) Daniel, 179.
Another challenge is to keep the sixteenth notes accompaniment subtle throughout the piece. The low register makes it harder to project a clear tone while remaining quiet. One suggestion is to keep the tempo no faster than indicated to allow ample time to prepare playing the accompaniment figures. Starting in measure 12, the middle voice, played by the right hand, and the left hand must be played flowingly, evenly, and like a whisper. A possible solution is to keep the fingers playing the middle and lower voices on
the surface of the keyboard, thus making them easier to move across or in and out of the keys.

**Pedaling**

The pedal markings in the piece are not as extensive as we have seen in the previous *Nocturnes*. Poulenc did not indicate any pedal markings in the piece except for where it says *sans pédale* (without pedals) in measures 11 and 43. The pedal usage in the beginning of this piece should be similar to the first *Nocturne* considering that both pieces have similar textures (melody with arpeggiated accompaniment). In measure 12 (Example 3.33), where it is marked *murmuré*, the soft pedal should be used to accommodate the soft dynamic and create a change of color.

Example 3.33. *Nocturne No.6*, mm. 10-13.

![Example 3.33](image)

**NOCTURNE 7: E-FLAT MAJOR**

**Form**

The seventh *Nocturne* is comprised of three sections, making it another *Nocturne* with a ternary form. The first section of the piece runs from measures 1-16. The second
section is a series of modulation in the style of Fauré, according to Mellers. Finally, the third section begins in the same manner as the beginning and ends in an extended E-flat major chord. According to Mellers, the seventh Nocturne reintroduces the young dancers from the second Nocturne, “now strolling or dancing in a balmy summer night.” He continues his observations on this piece by writing, “A guideless tune—a typical Poulenc invention—flows in arches, with an arpeggiated accompaniment luminously spaced. The Fauréan middle is more rhythmically energetic, though no less lyrical. The da capo smiles sweetly but wistfully, especially in the chromaticized cadence.”

Table 3.7. Nocturne No.7: Structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>E♭ major</td>
<td>1-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Progressively changing</td>
<td>17-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A'</td>
<td>E♭ major</td>
<td>25-34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tempo**

The tempo in the beginning of this piece is marked *assez allant* at♩=84.

Throughout the piece, Poulenc reinforces his desire for an unchanged tempo with instructions such as *surtout sans ralentir* (always without slowing down) when approaching the end of the first section and *toujours strictement au meme movement* (always strictly in the same movement) in the middle section. Aside from those indications, Poulenc also marked *céder un peu* (slow down a little bit) at the end of the middle section and *céder beaucoup* (slow down a lot) at the end of the piece. With few

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77 Mellers, 42.

78 Ibid, 43.
tempo changes, the piece should have a calm, flowing mood. Therefore, it is important to adhere to \( j=84 \) metronome marking and not go faster.

**Technical Challenges**

In general, the technical challenges found in the seventh *Nocturne* are very similar to the first and sixth *Nocturnes* since all three have almost the same texture. One difference is that the melody of this *Nocturne* is more fast-flowing, with sixteenth-note descending and ascending figures instead of larger values found in melodies in both the first and sixth *Nocturnes*. Also, the middle voice in this piece is relatively bare. Like the other similar *Nocturnes*, the accompaniment needs to always be under the melody. Keeping the fingers on the surface will give greater mobility when moving across the keys and help to keep the tone at a softer dynamic.

Another challenge in this piece is to create color changes. In the first section, the melody moves down to a lower register in measure 7 that requires a color change. It then moves back up to a higher register in measure 9, but now in chords instead of a single-lined melody. This texture also happens in the second *Nocturne*. Example 3.34 shows the melody in different registers. It is crucial to treat the melody as a vocal line and take a slight breath after long phrases. This is because the jumps between registers require time for the fingers to move and prepare so no unwanted accents will occur.

In the middle section, the voicing becomes a little more challenging because the middle voice now requires more effort to play. Poulenc indicates that the melody must be very connected (très lié) so it needs to be physically held whenever possible instead of relying on the help of the pedal.
Example 3.34. *Nocturne No. 7*, mm. 7-10.

The call and response between the left and right hands also needs to be highlighted. The right hand fingers playing the middle voice should be kept slightly flat and very close to the keys (see Example 3.35).

Example 3.35. *Nocturne No. 7*, mm. 17-18.
Pedaling

The pedal usage in the seventh Nocturne is relatively straightforward. In the beginning of the piece, although there is no pedal indication, the performer should use a lot of pedal. Poulenc indicates pedal markings where the harmony needs to be sustained over more than one measure, such as measures 13-14 and at the end of the piece. Here, the final chord is an extended E-flat major chord with the E-flat major harmony carried over from the previous measure (see Example 3.36 below).

Example 3.36 Nocturne No.7, mm. 33-34.

In some instances, Poulenc also marks sec (dry), such as in measure 14, the middle section, and measure 24. In measures 14 and 24, no pedal should be used since the left hand part needs to be staccato. Poulenc also indicates sans pédale in those two measures. However, in the middle section, the performer should use very minimal pedal instead of no pedal at all. Pedal should be placed very briefly with each down beat during this section.

**NOCTURNE 8: G MAJOR**

**Form**

The eighth Nocturne is the last of the cycle. It has a non-programmatic subtitle: “pour servir de Coda au Cycle,” which means to serve as the coda of the cycle. Perhaps Poulenc was also implementing the idea of symmetry with this piece because the end of the cycle mostly resembles the beginning of the cycle. According to Daniel, this last Nocturne is most similar to the first Nocturne.79 This piece is in monothematic ternary form. Since the theme returns no more than three times, ternary form suits this piece better than rondo form. The sections are divided based on the return of the main theme in G major. The last section has a coda similar to the first Nocturne. The main melody is similar to the first Nocturne, but in G major instead of C major, which Mellers explains as a “positive evolution, reinforced by the pulsing quavers that make the tender harmony.”80

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79 Daniel, 179.

80 Mellers, 44.
Table 3.8. *Nocturne No.8*: Structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>G major</td>
<td>1-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’</td>
<td>G major</td>
<td>13-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’’</td>
<td>G major</td>
<td>25-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td>30-34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tempo**

The tempo indication is marked *très modéré* at \( \text{♩} \)=72. There is no other tempo change indicated throughout the piece, not even at the coda. Since the coda is very similar to the coda found in the first *Nocturne* (see Example 3.38), it is appropriate to slow down the tempo to create a sense of finality. Since the last *Nocturne* is the shortest out of all eight *Nocturnes*, there is not much room for tempo fluctuations in the piece.

Example 3.38. *Nocturne No.8*, mm. 30-34.

**Technical Challenges**

The main, and perhaps the only, technical challenge in this piece is voicing. The main tune is doubled in both hands, with eighth-note accompaniment in both hands as well. The piece is marked *le chant doucement en dehors, les batteries très discrètes*,
which means the melody is to be played gently on the outside while the accompaniment is very discrete. For the right hand, the accompaniment should be played with slightly flat fingers and close to the keys. For the left hand, thumb and second fingers should be used to play the melody and the rest of the fingers should also be kept slightly flat and close to the keys.

Example 3.39. Nocturne No. 8, mm. 1-3.

Pedaling

Pedal should be used abundantly throughout the piece since Poulenc uses the indication *mettre beaucoup de pédale*, which means, “to put a lot of pedal”. Since the piece is very short and does not have a wide array of dynamic range, pedal usage is relatively straightforward. In the coda, soft pedal may be used to accommodate the *pp* dynamics.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Based on the study done on Francis Poulenc’s *Huit Nocturnes*, several points can be drawn. Firstly, most of the *Nocturnes* have simple, traditional forms. *Nocturne* Nos. 1 and 8 both have rondo form, *Nocturnes* Nos. 5 and 6 are in binary form, and the rest of the *Nocturnes* are in ternary form.

Table 4.1 *Huit Nocturnes*: Forms and Division of Sections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nocturne No.</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Sections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rondo</td>
<td>A-A’-A”-A’’-Coda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ternary</td>
<td>A-B-A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ternary</td>
<td>A-B-A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ternary</td>
<td>A-B-A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Binary</td>
<td>1(A-B-C)- 2(A-B-C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Binary</td>
<td>A-B-transition-B’-A’-Coda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ternary</td>
<td>A-B-A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Monothematic Ternary</td>
<td>A-A’-A”’-Coda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secondly, as mentioned previously in this study, Poulenc utilized mostly diatonic harmony with free modulations, which are often unprepared and “slippery.” For further study about Poulenc’s use of harmony, Kent Werner’s study titled “The Harmonic Style of Francis Poulenc,” is an excellent source to be consulted.\(^8\)

\(^8\)Werner.
Thirdly, Poulenc almost always marked specific tempo indication: descriptive text, metronome markings, or both. However, tempo indication is not absolute and the final performance tempo should depend on the performer’s interpretation. As Stutzenberger mentioned in her study, titled “The Published Solo Piano Works of Francis Poulenc (1899-1963): A Performance Tape with Commentary,” Poulenc’s tempo indications were not always consistent with what the composer had in mind.82 A journal article written by Stutzenberger in 1982 titled “Poulenc’s Tempo Indication: To Follow or Not to Follow,” is an excellent source for further research regarding Poulenc’s tempo indications.83

Poulenc also often marked detailed pedaling instructions. Most of the time, he indicates to use a lot of pedal or no pedal at all (dry). These indications are also to be taken with a grain of salt. A performer needs to listen carefully in order to place pedals appropriately. Just because it says a lot of pedal, does not necessarily mean the work should loses clarity. The numerous challenges in the Nocturnes include: repeated notes and/or chords in a very soft dynamic, peculiar shifts, the frequency of color or mood changes due to the number of free modulations, and voicing issues. Most of the time, these challenges can be resolved by choosing the appropriate tempo, experimenting with fingerings, and experimenting with pedals to change nuances.

Upon completion of this study, I conclude that Francis Poulenc’s Huit Nocturnes is an excellent representative of his piano works. These pieces are not extremely demanding in terms of technique although they have unusually challenging piano

82 Stutzenberger, “Published Solo Works.”

writings; therefore, they are excellent pieces to teach performance aspects such as choosing the right tempo, possibilities with pedaling, phrasing and voicing. *Huit Nocturnes* will benefit advanced piano students because they require detail-oriented thinking and a mature musical sense. For performance purposes, *Huit Nocturnes* is an excellent programming choice. Although it is not always necessary to perform all eight pieces together, they make a great cycle as a whole. They are also unique enough to be performed separately. It is my hope that this study will be a valuable resource for pianists as they explore and perform more of Francis Poulenc’s piano works.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


