

The extraordinary life of the *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano* (1962) by Francis Poulenc

David Kirby

This presentation explores some of the myths that have emerged concerning Poulenc's famous *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano* since its posthumous publication in 1963. The presentation covers both the written evidence, including multiple manuscripts, and performance tradition of the piece.

This is a major clarinet work and is unique in the second half of the twentieth century in that it was taken into the repertoire almost as soon as it was written. It has been used as a test piece in many competitions, and was recently on the repertoire list for both the *José Augusto Alegria* Prize (July 2010) and the *International Clarinet Competition* (30 October- 6 November 2010). It also appears on all the examination syllabuses in the United Kingdom. A brief glance at the concerts being given at the prestigious Wigmore Hall in London between September 2010 and July 2011 show that there are three clarinet and piano recitals. Julian Bliss (10 October 2010), Sharon Kam (3 April 2011) and Michael Collins (5 May 2011) have all programmed the Poulenc Sonata. Martin Fröst performed it at recitals at both the Lincoln Center, New York (December 2010) and the Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles (December 2010) and Hermann Stefánsson, principal clarinet of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra is performing it at the Stockholm Concert Hall in February 2011.

Although it was written less than fifty years ago, the Sonata has, to date, been published and edited many times- by the same publisher. At first glance it may be assumed that these may just be disingenuous reprints, but there are some significant differences between the editions, which will be explored in this presentation. As the first edition was published posthumously, there is now some doubt whether Poulenc had actually worked on the proofs before his death. Poulenc was a prolific letter writer and the compositional period can be identified. My

presentation will trace the compositional timetable via both published and recently-discovered unpublished correspondence.

This presentation will also reflect on the reasons behind the re editing of the piece, which was first undertaken in 1964, and most recently in 2006. I will also discuss the disagreements about the veracity of some of the notes within the editions which can be seen to reflect the various schools of clarinet playing as each sought to claim the work for its repertory. The recording legacy of the Sonata is also important, since the work has been recorded on numerous occasions. Currently there are more than thirty versions readily available. A selection of these will be played, demonstrating not just the diversity of interpretations to which the work is receptive, but the differences in pitch that these contain! These differences are evident from the first recording by Andre Bouthard and Jacques Fevrier (1963) through those of Tom Kelly (1980) and Gervase de Peyer (1985 and 1988) as well as Karl Leister (1995) and Fredrik Fors (2004).

This presentation will reveal, for possibly the first time, the differences in the sixteen editions, and in so doing, demonstrate how the French performing tradition, handed down from Andre Bouthard, Ulysses Delècluse and Guy Deplus, differs from those in other areas in which the Sonata achieved popularity.

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Poulenc, Francis. *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano*. Autograph clarinet part unknown hand, ink on 8 stave 'KING BRAND MUSIC PAPERS CO.' manuscript paper. A tone high throughout.

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Fanfare, reduction for piano, in Poulenc's hand, dated 1921

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Mouvements Perpétuels, in hand of copy editor 1944

Mouvements Perpétuels, arranged by the composer 1946, corrections in Poulenc's hand

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