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The Poulenc Trio

IRINA KAPLAN LANDE, piano

ALEX VVEDENSKIY, oboe

BRYAN YOUNG, bassoon

2:30 pm, Sunday, February 6, 2022

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

University of the Pacific

FRANCIS POULENC **TRIO POUR HAUTOBOIS, BASSON ET PIANO, FP 43** (c.1926)
(1899-1963) Lent—Presto
Andante
Rondo

JURI SEO **MELODIE DE POULENC** (2021)
(b. 1981) *(Commissioned by and written for the Poulenc Trio)*

GIOACCHINO ROSSINI **FANTAISIE CONCERTANTE SUR "SEMIRAMIDE"**
(1792-1868) *(Arr. Charles Triébert & Eugène Jancourt)*

— INTERMISSION —

VIET CUONG **TRAINS OF THOUGHT** (2012)
(b. 1990) *(Commissioned by and written for the Poulenc Trio)*

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH **ROMANCE, OP. 97A** (1955) *(from the film score of The Gadfly)*
(1906-1975) **A SPIN THROUGH MOSCOW** (1958) *(from the operetta
Moscow, Cheryomushki, arr. Anatoly Trofomov)*

ANDRÉ PREVIN **TRIO FOR OBOE, BASSOON AND PIANO** (1994)
(1929-2019) Lively
Slow
Jaunty

The Poulenc Trio appears by arrangement with Lisa Sapinkopf Artists
www.chambermuse.com ▪ poulenc trio.org

Season Sponsor: C. A. Webster Foundation

ARTIST PROFILE



The Poulenc Trio is the most active touring piano-wind chamber music ensemble in the world. Since its founding in 2003, the trio has performed in 45 U.S. states and at music festivals around the world, including the Ravello Festival in Italy, the San Miguel de Allende Festival in Mexico, and the White Nights Festival in Russia, where the group toured and premiered two new works with violinist Hilary Hahn.

The New York Times praised the trio for its "elegant rendition" of Piazzolla's Tangos. The Washington Post said the trio "does its namesake proud" in "an intriguing and beautifully played program" with "convincing elegance, near effortless lightness and grace." A recent performance in Florida – for which the Palm Beach Post praised the group's "polished loveliness" and the Palm Beach Daily News said the "potent combination" of oboe, bassoon and piano had "captured the magic of chamber music" — was rebroadcast on American Public Media's nationally syndicated radio program, Performance Today. The trio has garnered positive attention in full-length profiles in Chamber Music magazine and the Double Reed Journal. The group has been called "virtuosos of classical and contemporary chamber music" in one profile for Russian television.

The Poulenc Trio has a strong commitment to commissioning, performing, and recording new works from living composers. Since its founding, the trio has greatly expanded the repertoire available for the oboe, bassoon, and piano, with no fewer than 22 new works written for and premiered by the group, including three triple concertos for the trio and full orchestra.

The Poulenc Trio launched a pioneering concert series called Music at the Museum, in which musical performances are paired with museum exhibitions, with special appearances from guest artists and curators. As part of the series, the trio has collaborated with the National Gallery in Washington DC, the Walters Art Museum, the Baltimore Museum of Art, and the Hermitage State Museum in Russia.

The trio is deeply engaged in musical and educational outreach programs, including "Pizza and Poulenc," an informal performance and residency series for younger audiences. The trio regularly conducts masterclasses, most recently at the University of Ohio, San Francisco State University, Florida State University, and the University of Colima in Mexico.

Poulenc: *Trio*

Poulenc achieved a distinct musical voice and success at an early age; he was 25 years old when he composed this trio, one of his most popular chamber works. He was already well-known in France as both a pianist and composer, especially for the light-hearted humor, witty satire, simplicity, lyricism, and urbane irony in his works. Although this early work is infused with these characteristics, it also expresses rich harmonic colors and shading, as well as vigorous interplay of different qualities.

While keeping his highly recognizable stylistic identity and originality, there are also influences and echoes of other composers' styles in this work. Critics have described the intro of the first movement, with its bare open chords in the piano part, as having "a Stravinsky-like starkness" even though it is based on a Haydn Allegro. Stravinsky met Poulenc while he was composing this work and gave him advice for the final version of this movement. The lyrical and idyllic second movement recalls Mozart, especially in the opening bars, and includes a quotation from Gluck's "Dance of the Blessed Spirits." The closing Rondo's refrain is an almost perfect quote of a well-known Beethoven melody until it unsurprisingly evolves into Poulenc's own language.

Although we cannot be sure what Poulenc envisioned for his version of a "piano trio" as he made this choice of instrumentation, it was the special sonority of woodwinds that intrigued him to write a piece that sounds like it only could have been written for woodwinds. The brilliant but rounded sound of the oboe is well suited for the humor and joking elements without sounding edgy, and at the same time perfectly capable of delivering luscious, singing melody. The broad and warm sound of the bassoon, which resembles the voice of a resonant baritone singer, conveys a sense of nostalgia and melancholy in the lower range. Poulenc uses the words *très doux et mélancolique* (very sweet and melancholy) on the score as a musical direction. Although highly contrasting in character and thus creating an almost operatic-style dialogue, the overall rounded and warm sound quality that these two instruments share enables

them to blend and create a harmonious soundscape which matches the work's spirit.

Poulenc's professional success was steady; his music was a welcome breath of fresh air, perceived as natural and impulsive, unrestricted by the overt formalism and intellectual games that many of his modernist contemporaries were accused of. Although known for his self-criticism, after hearing a performance during the last year of his life, Poulenc noted with satisfaction that this work, "retained an extraordinary fresh force and fantastic individuality." Today, as we join here and listen to this trio almost 100 years after it was composed, may we also marvel in its freshness.

Seo: *Melodie de Poulenc*

Korean-American composer and pianist Juri Seo writes music that encompasses extreme contrast through compositions that are unified, fluid, and complex. She merges many of the fascinating aspects of music from the past century with a deep love of functional tonality, counterpoint, and classical form. With its fast-changing tempi and dynamics, her music explores the serious and the humorous, the lyrical and the violent, the tranquil and the obsessive. She hopes to create music that loves, that makes a positive change in the world through the people who are willing to listen.

Her composition honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Koussevitzky Commission from the Library of Congress, a Goddard Lieberston Fellowship and the Andrew Imbrie Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Kate Neal Kinley Memorial Fellowship, Copland House Residency Award, and the Otto Eckstein Fellowship from Tanglewood. She holds a DMA from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She also attended the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome and Yonsei University in Seoul. She has been a composition fellow at the Tanglewood, and SoundSCAPE festivals, the Wellesley Composers Conference, and the Atlantic Center for the Arts. She is Associate Professor of Music at Princeton.

The composer writes: "There's much to love about Poulenc's Trio. The shockingly bare opening sonority is immediately contradicted by a harsh dissonance. The

form is elusive, with the motives moving from one section to another, from pathos to bathos, in lively virtuosity. One of my favorite moments, somewhere in the middle of the first movement, is when the oboe introduces a lyrical theme in A minor, lushly harmonized by the piano. The theme is unusually sincere, but its journey is short-lived. Poulenc is aware of the theme's affective potential, marking *très tendre*, *très chanté*, and *très expressif* at each turn of the phrase. My *Mélodie de Poulenc* is built almost entirely on this theme. The theme is fragmented and altered; it blossoms contrapuntally and is incessantly re-harmonized, never appearing the same way twice. The music's allusion to Poulenc is both relentless and futile, like an earworm of a song one can't remember. My decision to work primarily with melodic materials comes from a conversation I had with the members of the Poulenc Trio early in the process. While I admired their agility and playfulness, the members expressed a yearning for long tones and melodies (which have become somewhat scarce in contemporary music). It seemed apt to merge our love for lyricism while sending a nod to the eponymous composer."

Rossini: *Fantaisie Concertante*

This "Concert-Fantasy," constructed on tunes from Rossini's final Italian opera, *Semiramide*, is from an assortment of delicious opera-inspired compositions dating from 19th century Paris and the soirée music of that period. It contains works by the opera composers Rossini and Donizetti, favorites of the Parisian audiences, in arrangements by the oboe and bassoon virtuosos (and Conservatoire professors) of the day, Charles Triébert, and Eugène Jancourt. These efforts were not only "tuneful" but also facilitated the performers in showing off their ample and superb virtuosity.

Cuong: *Trains of Thought*

Described as "show-stealing" and a "dazzler", Viet Cuong's music has been performed in venues across the USA, Canada, South Africa, Singapore, and Japan. He has been a Naumburg and

Roger Sessions Fellow in Princeton University's doctoral program and holds Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the Peabody Conservatory, where he received the Presser Undergraduate Scholarship, the Peabody Alumni Award, and the Gustav Klemm Award for excellence in composition.

The composer writes: "As I was writing the piece, it began to take on quite a similar atmosphere to my older piece named *Pulse Train*...so much, that I chose to continue this theme of trains that aren't actually locomotives, yet still evoke the feeling of a moving train. The piece has a consistent tempo for the entire duration, but the colors, registers, and even harmonies vary widely. My goal was to unify these different elements through a consistent, intense rhythmic drive. In addition, I thought (even more than I usually do) about a listener's expectations and how to successfully set up these expectations and manipulate them. Both ideas touch on the 'train of thought' concept. Ideas often meander aimlessly in one's mind, and one's stream of consciousness can end up somewhere very unexpected. However, different thoughts are usually connected through some sort of common thread."

The piece was premiered by The Poulenc Trio at the National Gallery of Art, in May 2017, accompanied by an original film.¹

Shostakovich: *Romance*

In a musical career spanning half a century, Shostakovich engrossed himself with a staggeringly diverse range of genres and styles. Although remembered principally for his fifteen symphonies and fifteen string quartets, Shostakovich's output for the big screen was also prolific. He was, in essence, the Russian John Williams of his day: between 1929 and 1970 Shostakovich wrote more than thirty movie soundtracks, but it is his score for the 1955 film *The Gadfly* that remains the big hit in this century.

"The Gadfly Suite" is a proudly boisterous affair: a swashbuckling costume drama depicting the life of a Russian hero in 1830s Italy. The setting of the film gave Shostakovich the excuse to borrow musical ideas from

Italian Romantic composers such as Verdi and Bellini. It is a story of faith, revolution, disillusionment, romance, and heroism.

Shamelessly inspired by Massenet's poignant *Méditation* from the opera *Thaïs*, it's a classy, twelve-part, heart-on-your-sleeve air, which yearns with grace and poise.

Spin Through Moscow

"A Spin Through Moscow" is the first of the four dance-like movements of the orchestral suite from the three-act comic operetta, "Moscow, Cheryomushki," written in a bewildering variation of styles, from the Romantic idiom to vulgar popular song. It is a fascinating work in which Shostakovich pokes gentle fun at the problems of suburban expansion in the Russian capital. "Cheryomushki" translates as "bird-cherry trees," the name of a real housing estate in southwest Moscow. Composed during the Khrushchev era, it is full of subversive undercurrents, disguised by the innocence of the music which contains parodies of Offenbach and several Russian composers. In 1962, with some changes to the music and a simplified title, this operetta was turned into an ebulliently vulgar film, which will appeal to anyone with a taste for mid-20th-century kitsch.

Previn: *Trio*

André Previn was born in Berlin to a Jewish family and, in 1939, emigrated to the United States growing up in Los Angeles. He became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1943. His career had three prongs: Hollywood, jazz, and classical music. On each he achieved success, and the latter two were part of his life until the end. In movies, he arranged and composed Oscar-winning music. In jazz, he was a celebrated, trio pianist, a piano-accompanist to singers of standards, and pianist-interpreter of songs from the "Great American Songbook". In classical music, he also worked as a pianist but gained television fame as a conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic from 1985-89, and during his last thirty years created his legacy as a composer of art music. In the UK, where he was knighted in 1996, Previn

is particularly remembered for his 1971 conducting spoof of the Grieg Piano Concerto, still considered one of the funniest comedy moments of all time.²

Andre Previn composed his Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon in 1994 on a joint commission from the Orchestra of St. Luke's, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust. Previn's Trio comes across as typically French: clarity, sensitive awareness of the nature of the different instruments, and a feel for amusement and pleasure. Nevertheless, if the impetus driving this music is judged French, this piece has an American accent: Previn's Trio is redolent of vigor, jazz rhythms, and the open harmonies that distinguish American music.

The opening, marked "Lively," moves from a bristly start to a fluid second theme-group introduced by the bassoon and notated *espressivo*. You will hear the basic metric markings 2/4 and 4/4, but Previn repeatedly disrupts this even pulse with individual measures in sections of 7/8, 5/8, 3/4, 7/16(!), and others. It closes on a unison B-Flat.

In the second movement, a piano preface, marked "Slow" and lonely, leads to the solo oboe entry. This entrance marking could be used appropriately for the entire movement as protracted woodwind lines coil above chordal accompaniment. The climax then falls away concluding on varied opening material.

The third movement, "Jaunty," shifts meter nearly with each measure. Previn treats the two wind instruments as a group and sets them in contrast to the piano, which has extended solo passages. Near the end, the tempo speeds ahead as Previn specifies that the music should be played with "Jazz phrasing": these riffs alternate with brief piano interludes marked "Simply." Slowly the movement's opening theme reiterates itself, and the Trio dashes to its scorching finish, again on a unison B-flat.

— notes © Dr. Michael Spencer

¹ [youtube.com/watch?v=yamkFOZo3fA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yamkFOZo3fA)

² <https://www.avforums.com/threads/andre-previn.2218822/>

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