

Foundation Singer-Polignac

Chaired by the honorary Mr. Édouard Bonnefous

Chancellor of l' Institute de France

***Jean Françaix: the music
and the musicians***

Based on presentations given at
concerts of the foundation

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A serious, but not too serious, stroll through the composer's life

“Jean Françaix is a fine name; his subsequent success will depend on it. I hope to get to know his music. He is fortunate to have a grandfather who can copy his music so well. A fine manuscript helps with the interpretation. We will meet again, one way or another. In the meantime, warm handshakes from the old pal.”¹

Arnold Dolmetsch²

The study of Jean Françaix has its roots steeped in a familiar musical awareness, linked to every day life, a meeting of music lovers, autodidacts and fine performers who fed the emerging talent of the child and later supported him.

By the year of his birth, Jean Françaix sits between Maurice Thiriet (1906), Jacques Chailley (1910), Marcel Landowski (1915) and Henri Dutilleux (1916). Jean Françaix, born on May 23, 1912 in Le Mans, belongs to the generation of Igor Markevitch and Lucien Krein.

In the process of organising scores at the composer's house, a short handwritten melody on a piece of manuscript fell out of the collection with the inscription “Jean 18 months.” This seems to have been the beginning of his career... Jean Françaix could read music long before his alphabet. His father was a witness and a factor in his musical awakening. Thanks to both Alfred and Jeanne Françaix's solicitous interest, the road ahead was made smooth and clear.

¹ Arnold Dolmetsch to Paul Provost (1858-1942, maternal grandfather of Jean Françaix), Jesses, Haslemere, Surrey (Haslemere) January 5, 1935, private collection, estate of Blanche Françaix. The study of their correspondence reveals a musical friendship between Jean Françaix's grandfather, Paul Provost and Arnold Dolmetsch. They were both born in Le Mans in the same year. They met again in 1935, after a separation of about fifty years.

² Dolmetsch, Arnold (Le Mans 1858 – Haslemere 1940). Grandson of a piano manufacturer, he became professor of violin at Dulwich College in 1885, after studying with Vieutemps in Bruxelles. Known as a pioneer of ancient (Baroque) music, he restored viols, clavicords, harpsichords, lutes and flûtes à bec (recorders). Founder of a workshop for ancient instruments at Haslemere, he ran an annual festival in 1925, a journal titled *The Consort* in 1929 and published a major work called “The Interpretation of Music of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries” in London in 1915.

When in 1935 Jean Françaix dedicated his *Quatuor à cordes* (1934) to his parents, having received first prize from the Marseille Society for Chamber Music,³ it was in recognition of their support and an expression of his grateful feelings.

Before his birth, Madame Françaix made sure she was singing Bach, Händel, Mozart, Schumann, Fauré, Debussy, Chabrier, Ravel. No wonder he later showed an affinity with these composers, both in his conversations... and in his orchestrations.

Both parents invited performers and composers to their home. They sang, played and filled their drawing room with vocal creations. Paul Le Flem remembers Jeanne rocking her child to the tune *Petit grillon* ('the small cricket').

In the majority of documents written about the composer the professions of his parents are mentioned: "His father was Director of the Le Mans Conservatory, his mother was a singer who founded a woman's choir;" therefore there was really no need for him to have formal musical training in such an environment. When still very young he wrote: "My daddy's name is Alfred Françaix:⁴ he is 40 years old. My mummy's name is Jeanne Provost:⁵ she is 35 years old. My father teaches piano, my mother singing, I am Jean Françaix. I work during part of the day. In the morning I practice my piano for 2 and a half hours. In the afternoon I do my homework with my grandmother. My granny and my grandfather are now retired. I have neither brother nor sister but I have a small cousin called Jacqueline, whom I shall marry when I am grown-up, and as it will be necessary for me to earn my living, I will decide to be a composer."⁶

At twelve years of age, thanks to transcriptions for four hands, he learned symphonies and chamber music works of the great composers. He accompanied his mother in her singing of Romantic lieder, in addition to contemporary works. At home he played piano and violin sonatas with her and cello sonatas with his grandfather, who together

³ The Société de Musique de Chambre de Marseille offered a competition to encourage French musicians to compose string quartets. More than thirty string quartets were submitted. The jury was composed of A. Roussel, president; Darius Milhaud, Koechlin, Le Flem, Mme Nadia Boulanger, and M. Prunières (secretary).

⁴ Alfred Françaix (1880-1970).

⁵ Jeanne Provost (1885-1942).

⁶ Eight years old (according to his parents).

formed a piano trio. In 1922 at the age of ten, he sight-read the piano part of Debussy's cello sonata, which was only written four years previously. Subsequently he programmed this sonata in his concerts.

Jean Françaix listened to conversations, rehearsals and often went to concerts. Everyone remarked on his perfect pitch, sense of rhythm, and ability to learn new works, so when he entered the Conservatoire he knew much more about music than his other colleagues. To his teacher's surprise, Françaix demonstrated the impact his maternal grandfather, Paul Provost, had on him. Indeed although only an amateur cellist, his grandfather could sing by memory all the parts of Beethoven's trios and quartets. When a child, his grandfather would escape to the attic away from his own father to practice his cello and enjoy his own passion for playing this instrument against the wishes of his family. He married a fine pianist, Anna Leconte, who won first prize at the Lille Conservatory, also against the wishes of his father who considered musicians were 'bohemians' (her family favoured chamber music sessions). This enlightened amateur also kept in touch with his friend Arnold Dolmetsch, dealer in old Baroque instruments. He loved to sight-read with his friends and held many chamber music performances of both classical and contemporary works. Notwithstanding a deep love of music, Paul Provost offered to his grandson practical assistance in copying music for him. Jean Françaix subsequently expressed his gratitude by dedicating to his grandfather his *Fantaisie pour violoncelle* (1934). He wrote "for my dear grandfather, my first encounter with a performer and music editor, with the grateful and affectionate thanks from his grandson."

The *Quintette pour flûte à bec, deux violons, violoncelle et clavecin* by Françaix was dedicated to Carl Dolmetsch⁷ who premiered it on April 12, 1988 in London. This particular score testifies to a close relationship between members of a Sarthe family.

⁷ Dolmetsch, Carl (23.8.1911), virtuoso recorder player, son of Arnold Dolmetsch. He was director of the Haslemere Festival and of the Society of Recorder Players. He published "Ornaments and Phrasings for the Recorder" in London in 1939.

The musical life of a young man and his reception into the drawing rooms of Winnaretta Singer, Princesse de Polignac

Nadia Boulanger related: “I have not taught many children, I had very few opportunities to do so and the ones I have taught were so gifted that there was no merit in teaching them! But one day a child –Jean Françaix– was due to arrive for his first harmony lesson and I was thinking “How shall I teach him?” This kept me awake at night, and I worried. When he arrived I said to him “you know, Jean, today we will work on chords... “Ah!” he said, “just like this” and he played a chord. He looked so young and after two months I said to his mother “Mrs. Françaix, I do not know why we are wasting our time in teaching Jean harmony, he knows harmony. I do not know how, but he knows it. Let us study counterpoint.”⁸

Before the publications of the following works, there was an awareness of musical personalities as dedicatees. Dedicatees of pianistic sketches around Jacqueline, a suite for piano, Henri Expert, Marcelle de Manziarly, Nadia Boulanger, Georges Mignot regarding *l'Été aux Perrières, on berce Linette, Sous les ombrages, La danse de l'ours*. Impressions were aired at a meeting of the publishers Sénart in 1922, with the remarks: “Are we sure that Daddy did not lend a hand with these works?” said Mr. Expert, to which Georges Mignot answered: “But surely if that were the case nobody could believe in Jean’s talent!”⁹

The pedagogue Nadia Boulanger wrote to Alfred Françaix: “Melle de Manziarly and M. Migot have spoken to me of your wonderful little boy and I wish to let you know that although I have never met him I take a keen interest in him! Let me know when you are travelling to Paris and we will decide together on the best way to guide him without hampering his development which I am told is quite extraordinary.”¹⁰

⁸ Monsaingeon (Bruno), talks with Nadia Boulanger, Van de Velde, 1980, p. 55: Jean Françaix as a child.

⁹ Exchange translated by Serge Moreux, talking about Jean Françaix, estate of Nadia Boulanger, 80-113, Bibliothèque Nationale.

¹⁰ Nadia Boulanger to Albert Françaix, 36 Rue Ballu, 9e, Paris (December 1922) private collection, estate of Blanche Françaix.

Pour Jacqueline was published by Sénart on March 12, 1924. This was the first work in print by Jean Françaix, when he was only twelve years old. This event did not affect him in any particular way, nor did it detract from his interest in *Meccano*...¹¹

Some short messages and letters travelled to and fro about the boy, demonstrating a burst of talent that his teachers sometimes found difficult to channel. Starting with “Jean has worked well” to graduate to a telegram of congratulations for his *Bagatelles* is the proof that the artist was now a creator: “My little Jean, your *Bagatelles* are programmed to be performed on 20 June in Vienna, your parents were quite right when they said they will see you in the streets of the imperial city! I am so glad... more than I can say. I send you my love and congratulate you all.”

Nadia Boulanger¹²

To prepare for the Prix de Rome is difficult for the young enthusiast. Henri Büsser criticized Françaix’s first attempt. In a few words he stopped him: no impertinence, please, Mr. Françaix. “Nadia Boulanger wanted me to try for the Prix de Rome and I was in the class of Henri Büsser (1932-1933)¹³ where people obtained the Prix de Rome as easily as Citroën distributed their cars. Henri Büsser wanted to turn *Le Désert* of Leconte de Lisle into a musical. I composed a score that was so ‘Arabic’ that the whole class burst out laughing. The old Büsser said ‘My friend, it might be better for both of us to part company.’ I left, with the greatest of pleasure, but later he was on a jury for the Portique prize and actually voted for me!”¹⁴

The extent of Nadia Boulanger’s teaching reached its limit around 1934 and came to a close. With regret she confided in a letter “It seems strange that you do not come each week to see me, but you are never far away!” Nevertheless, she followed his progress and supported him right up to his maturity. This long period of support was not the only sign of affection shown to the composer. Nadia Boulanger was more than a teacher. He referred to her, asked her advice regarding composing, listened to her recommendations, went with her on her tours. She nurtured his career and smoothed

¹¹ Memorable extracts from: Horizons de Chatou, Les catoviens célèbres.

¹² Nadia Boulanger to Jean Françaix, from the North-Express on paper titled: Hôtel Russischer Hof (Grand Hôtel de Russie) 1932, private collection, estate of Blanche Françaix.

¹³ His participation in that class took place during 1932/33, judging by a letter of Jean Vuillermoz, 28 Rue de l’Épinette Saint-Mandé (Seine) December 27, 1932.

¹⁴ Conversation between Muriel Bellier and the composer.

the way with her influence, also helping financially. The Françaix family was very grateful to her and appreciated her tenderness towards their son who repaid her by dedicating to her all sorts of manuscripts from his compositions.

His career was woven with the correspondence received from Nadia Boulanger, at each turn she was there to provide help and administration even if this sometimes led to jealousy and lack of understanding on the part of others.

Nadia Boulanger called herself a “fairy godmother”¹⁵ who influenced his destiny. Better than a carriage, she offered him a ticket to the glittering world of the 1930s with international exchanges and drawing room invitations. She also introduced him to the magnificence of past masters and to talented new comers at her concerts held at the Ecole Normale de Musique and at the musical evenings of the Princess Edmond de Polignac.

The musical understanding between Nadia Boulanger and Winaretta Singer, Princess Polignac, strengthened during the 1930s.¹⁶ Even before Jean Françaix received commissions, he was studying piano at the Conservatoire National de Musique de Paris with Isidore Philip in 1926, and he was in touch with various important personalities through the introduction of the Princess. He was barely 12 years of age and was already turning pages for Stravinsky who was performing his works on the piano.

Françaix then began a professional connection with the prodigious company of the Russian Ballet. After the death of Diaghilev, René Blum and Nouvel, on the advice of the Princess, called on the young composer to create *Beach* and the *Scuola di ballo* (‘School of ballet’) in 1933. It was also in the drawing room of Winaretta Singer-Polignac that he met the count of Beauvau-Craon and Sacha Guitry.

¹⁵ She signed her letters to the Françaix family in this way. Officially she is godmother to Claude Françaix.

¹⁶ The relationship with the Princess of Polignac dates back to 1917: in her first letter, dated November 6, Winaretta invited him to an organ concert she was giving “in order to test the organ throughout the afternoon.” Little by little they met more frequently: from 1924, Nadia began to visit more often until finally the time came (towards 1929) when she organised the concerts in the place of Collet. Jean Gallois, *Les Polignac, Mécènes of the twentieth century*, p. 188, Editions du Rocher.

Winaretta financed three works: the *Sérénade pour douze instruments*, *Trois duos* and *Le Diable boiteux* ('The Lame Devil'). He dedicated the *Sérénade pour douze instruments* (1934) to the Princess. She chose the character and the shape of the compositions, and by so doing placed her favourite performers who then became specialists of Jean Françaix's music, inspiring him to compose. Such inspiration came from Doda Conrad who lent his bass voice to the performance of the *Cantata de Méphisto* (1952) and Hugues Cuénod for the *Prière d'un soir* ('Prayer one evening') of 1947.

In the drawing room of the Princess of Polignac on January 17, 1934 you were likely to meet: Paul Valéry, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Serge Lifar and the prince Pierre of Monaco. Many well-known personalities and friends were invited to a special concert arranged by Nadia Boulanger. The program comprised of a Cantata by Schütz, a favourite of the Princess's. The countess Jean de Polignac, nièce of the hostess, sang the *Trois duos* of Jean Françaix, accompanied by Madame Modrakowska. Their interpretation of *Oiseaux* ('Birds'), the *Prière de Sulpicia* ('Prayer of Sulpicia') and *Grenouilles* ('Frogs') on words of Aristophane, was admirable.

"My little Jean, I cannot tell you how pleased I am; the *Duos* are extraordinary and I am more than happy with them. They spring from the mind and from the heart – naturally – spontaneously – what is there to add! On May 2 will be the premiere...¹⁷ I hope that you will travel to Florence.¹⁸ My thoughts will be with you. Do try to see Markevitch, he is an extraordinary human being, very deep and faithful if one understands him – I am sure that you will feel this! Thanks for the *Duos*, in haste, most affectionately."¹⁹

The *Mercure de France* also reported "Amongst the really young composers, M. Jean Françaix seems to head the list."²⁰ The composer Marcelle de Manziarly saw the name of her young friend join her own in concert programmes, twelve years after

¹⁷ In reality the première took place on June 14, 1934 at the Ecole Normale as mentioned in the weekly diary of the composer, 1934. Diaries of Albert Françaix, private collection of Catherine Françaix.

¹⁸ The international festival of contemporary music took place in Florence in 1934.

¹⁹ Nadia Boulanger to Jean Françaix, 36 Rue Ballu, 9e Paris, 1934, private collection, estate of Blanche Françaix.

²⁰ *Mercure de France*, Music, August 15, 1933.

their first meeting. The Princess of Polignac presented them both as “modern composers” on the night of February 13, 1934. Between the *Concerto pour clarinette* by Mozart and some Bach Cantatas, two “firsts” appeared: The *Triptyque pour une Madone de Lorenzo d’Alessandro*, by Manziarly and the *Concertino pour piano* by Françaix. On March 31, 1935 Nadia Boulanger presented *Le Roi Arthur* by Henry Purcell, a Cantata of J.S. Bach’s, a choral work of Igor Markevitch’s, *l’Ave Maria* by Igor Stravinsky, *Chœur* by Jean Françaix and the *Duos* by Marcelle de Manziarly.

It is possible that *Diable boiteux* brought Francis Poulenc and Jean Françaix together in 1937. This particular comic chamber opera, commissioned by Winaretta Singer-Polignac, was composed at the same time as the *Concerto pour orgue, cordes et timbales*. Since the Princess had commissioned both works one would have thought that the two masterpieces would have had double billing. But Poulenc’s composing was slow and Françaix was very impatient to have his work performed. This happened on June 20, 1938, whereas Poulenc’s was premiered on December 16 of the same year.²¹ “My dear Françaix, sincere congratulations. I am happy for you and wish you all the best in your life because you deserve it. How I regret not having heard this marvellous ‘Devil’ of which everyone talks with such enthusiasm. Send it to me when it is in print. I hope to see you during the autumn when in Touraine. A thousand sincere greetings, Poulenc.”²² On perusal of the score, he was convinced. Poulenc commented: “Your *Diable boiteux* is a delightful masterpiece full of lightness and poetical insight.”²³

Francis Poulenc recognised the successes of Jean Françaix and advised the children of the Stravinsky family to settle near he and his wife in the Sarthe countryside a few months before World War II. This enabled Jean Françaix to get to know the painter Théodore Stravinsky, son of Igor Stravinsky.

²¹ Studio of the Princess Edmond de Polignac, by Maurice Duruflé, under the direction of Nadia Boulanger.

²² Francis Poulenc to Jean Françaix from Summer 1938, private collection of Blanche Françaix.

²³ Conversations, Poulenc, p. 195.

Jean Françaix dedicated several of his works to Poulenc, including *l'Adolescence clémentine* and *Musique Pour Faire Plaisir* ('Music to please') for orchestra.²⁴

Together with the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, on March 27, 1956, Jean Françaix and Francis Poulenc shared the billing for the concert and performed the *Concerto en ré mineur pour deux pianos et orchestre*, conducted by John Prichard and the *Concertino*. Françaix won the Prix du Disque on December 2, 1954 with a performance of Poulenc's *Sextuor pour piano et instruments à vent*, a prize which rewarded him as a composer for his *Quintette pour flûte, hautbois, clarinette, basson et cor* and also as a virtuoso pianist.²⁵

A small elephant made his appearance in 1936, which closed the parade and greeted their last meeting. *L'Histoire de Babar*, orchestrated by Jean Françaix, was presented on March 4, 1963 at the Palais de Chaillot. This was a fair exchange for a work commissioned by Brunhoff which Françaix could not deliver as he was busy composing *Perles de la Couronne* ('Pearls for the Crown').²⁶ He gave the commission to Poulenc, who he believed created wonderful melodies. In 1962 Poulenc was busy with his *Le Dialogue des Carmélites* and so sent Françaix his score and suggested to him to orchestrate it. A true musical success followed which Poulenc greeted with enthusiasm: "To christen Babar my dear Jean, with my warmest gratitude."²⁷ On May 25, 1962²⁸ Poulenc read the orchestral score and did not wish to alter a single note.²⁹ This was the last meeting of the two musicians, indeed Poulenc died on January 30, 1963 without hearing the new version.

The Princess of Polignac received innumerable numbers of artists in her Paris house and her Venetian Palace, artists whom Jean Françaix came to know. Whilst on his

²⁴ "This orchestration was the idea of my old friend Philippe Marietti to honour the memory of a composer who was not afraid to write music 'to give pleasure'." Mentioned in writing on the score originally for piano by Francis Poulenc and orchestrated by Jean Françaix, Nice, September 17, 1981.

²⁵ With participation of the members of the National Orchestra (Dufrène, Goetgheluck, Cliquenois, Plessier, Courtinat).

²⁶ After a conversation with the composer, confirmed by private documentation of the family.

²⁷ Francis Poulenc to Jean Françaix, postcard (May 1962) collection Françaix, estate of Blanche Françaix. This card follows one sent by Françaix to Poulenc, Chatou, April 23, 1962, to announce his orchestration. Cf. Francis Poulenc, correspondence 1910-1963, collected by Myriam Chimènes, pp. 993-994, letter 62-8.

²⁸ Letter from Francis Poulenc to Jean Françaix May 14, 1962, private collection, estate of Blanche Françaix.

²⁹ After rough notes on a single sheet by Alfred Françaix.

honeymoon in Venice, the couple were invited by the Princess. The first hearing of his *Concerto pour piano* took place in Italy at the Theatre Goldoni on September 6, 1937.

Jean Françaix met his 'muse' in a female choir at Le Mans, who became his companion and shared in his musical life. Françaix opened his heart to Nadia Boulanger: "I am in love with a young woman from here, have been for a long time, and have told my parents about it but they were quite upset. I am indeed very young and this young lady is not rich, comes from a modest background and I do not know how soon I can really earn my living. We have decided to wait as long as necessary, even for years... However I am quite sure of her love, her understanding and devotion and she knows she can trust me. Besides my love for composing I wish that the sweetness and pride in my life shall be to make her happy and to love her totally until I die. I wish this would be the case concerning the small number of people I really love. I am sure that you will agree with my choice and that she will please you. I have told her that I shall not sacrifice her as far as money goes and I know she is prepared for all eventualities. Do not think that we are acting thus because of our youth because we hope to have the courage to face up to every trap or temptation. Dear Mademoiselle, I feel my heart overflows with tenderness, I dream to express this in music and I trust in God."³⁰

Blanche Yvon, 'the chosen one', sang the soli in the female choir with talent. She gave the first performances of *Une maison sur la colline* ('A house on the hill') and *Une Immortalité* ('An immortal tale') by Aaron Copland at the Ecole Normale de Musique on May 28, 1932. She also performed the première of Emilie Sarlat's³¹ *La Montagnarde* on March 2, 1936 in Le Mans. She appeared again at the international exposition in Paris, at the Champs Elysées, on June 26, 1937 where she sang Emmanuel Chabrier with the Female Circle for Voices at the invitation of Henri Barraud.

³⁰ Jean Françaix to Nadia Boulanger, Saturday October 10, 1936, Bibliothèque Nationale.

³¹ Composer born in Marseille who received a warm acclaim from the audiences present at the Lamoureux Concerts and from the Parisian critics around the 1930s, notably for a symphonic poem with choirs, *Voix au bord de la Mer* ('Voice by the seaside') and *La Montagnarde* ('The mountain girl') for choir and orchestra on themes of bourrées auvergnates and *Ouverture pour un Conte de fées* ('Fairytale overture').

Blanche, musician, violinist and a singer with a perfect diction, accompanied Jean Françaix. She was the first to read her husband's music, the first to discover the beauty of the song of the virgin in *l'Apocalypse*. Through her expertise, she illuminated the orchestral gifts of her husband. She inspired, guided and supported him in total empathy. She answered his questions relating to music, dedicating her life to her husband's gift of creation. They were married in the Saint Julien cathedral in Le Mans on August 17, 1937. Doda Conrad gave an empathetic and joyful account of the ceremony.³² On the menu, musicians and friends signed: Erwin Bischoff, Nadia Boulanger, Doda Conrad, Louise Talma. The following 10 years blossomed with social, musical and home life.

Jean Françaix always remained loyal to the friends who helped his rise and success as a composer. At the inauguration of the concerts of the Fondation Singer-Polignac he showed his feelings. What a beautiful homage paid by the composer to his beloved pedagogue.

It was Nadia Boulanger who presented him with the cross of the legion d'Honneur at the American Conservatory of Fontainebleau during the summer of 1959. After the formal address he answered with a musical discourse, an early performance of the *Concerto de clavecin*. His eldest daughter Claude and he performed the orchestral reduction and his youngest daughter, Catherine, the solo in the harpsichord.

A Cantata for Nadia, to celebrate her fiftieth birthday reminds one of the mutual 'presents' offered to one another over the years for each birthday. For her eightieth Birthday he composed a March. Markevitch and Menuhin participated in the festivities organised by Doda Conrad, with guests from America and most European countries. It was Françaix's mission to transport everyone into a mood of joy and fantasy and create a party atmosphere.

³² Conrad (Doda), 44 years of friendship with Nadia Boulanger, Buchet/Chastel, Paris, 1995 p. 98-99.

A life devoted to composition

“To the unlucky ones: they have created two perfect chords!”³³

Long before he notated music, similar to the song of birds, were the first melodies of a child who breathed in the sweet air that surrounded him. As he accompanied his grandmother on country roads his steps were ‘counted’ in time, also measured in double time, for fun. His musical thoughts fascinated him so much that he passed hours working on them in his mind, to understand and to choose, to identify and to prolong his preferences towards this strange, nameless material. “You spend many hours standing in front of the grand piano, your foot on the pedal, writing, trying out themes which flow without ceasing, harmonising in a most concentrated manner; very often you asked your mummy to help you choose suitable subjects to set to music. You liked particularly strange, bizarre rural scenes... and with what pleasure you ‘surprised’ me after dinner.”³⁴

As an adult, Françaix remembered that to create was an instinct that he had as a child: a crucible full of unformed matter which, with age, thanks to the development of a technical skill, would become a gold mine, developed into an ulterior production as Françaix was often compared with Prokofieff. Françaix possessed this treasure from day one, which grew through his melodies and took shape to become real masterpieces. It has often been said, “when you are young you imitate.” But Jean Françaix was born a composer!

Technique and the teaching of others only served as formal means to an end. Françaix put his tools to the service of an inspiration, which, since the tender age of five, he already had in place. He was helped by a family who encouraged him, moved by his construction of such a personal apprehension of his world. Thanks to their playing of chamber music, the three generations of his family gave him the means to meet and recognise the various aspects of music. Together with his mother tongue, Françaix was able to develop various expressions through sound, and one cannot help but feel

³³ Retort from the ‘Snob’ in *Paris à nous deux* (‘Paris for us two’), a lyric fantasy in two parts, words by France Roche and Jean Françaix, music by Jean Françaix, created on August 7, 1954 at the Municipal Theatre of Fontainebleau. Editions Transatlantiques.

³⁴ Extract from the diary of Alfred Françaix, estate of Blanche Françaix.

the delight of such a little boy face to face with the many facets that he intended as a special game.

This wonder never left him, neither towards other people's music which he perpetuated by playing it, nor towards scientific discoveries which are part of human life and seem to come from the divine as they are so inexplicable and expand in such an aleatory fashion amongst humans. Françaix performed his own music from an early age and he was used to having contact with the public throughout his adolescence. He was an excellent pianist at only eleven years of age, proven when he played Ravel's *Sonatine* and Chabrier's *Scherzo-valse* for his second exam at the Le Mans Conservatory. A year later he also played his *Suite pour piano* in front of a panel that were to decide on the publication of his work.

Françaix was accepted into the class of Isidore Philip on November 19, 1926. Philip recognised his gifts and tempered his enthusiasm: "You nearly obtained the 1st Prize. But you should thank those people who did not vote for you instead of cursing them. This will enable you to work for another year, you see, I always say 'the 1st Prize is nothing' what is important is to know your art through and through. So don't worry, have a good holiday and a good rest!"³⁵ Françaix obtained the 1st Prize together with Jean Hubeaux in 1930.

Isidore Philip was cross to hear that his pupil composed. He would forage in Jean's music case looking for samples of compositions. Indeed the journeys from Le Mans to Paris (three hours in 1920) enabled Françaix to compose. Isidore Philip tried to stop Françaix and persuade him to become a pianist. But Françaix remained faithful all his life, without compromise, to his activities of creator and interpreter.

Therefore, Françaix composed *meno presto* with happiness. "Jean will arrive on the 9th of January (1930) delirious with joy at the thought of showing you his concerto. If only you could see him laugh as he is writing it!"³⁶ Françaix took six days in November 1931 to write the *Bagatelles*, a few hours for the *Marche funèbre*

³⁵ Isidore Philip to Jean Françaix (July, 1929) private collection, estate of Blanche Françaix.

³⁶ Alfred Françaix to Nadia Boulanger 1930, letter 44, Bibliothèque Nationale, donated by Nadia Boulanger.

(composed at the beach), a fortnight for the orchestration of *Scuola di ballo* (work accomplished between two rehearsals). His impressions of travel explain this way of working and the enthusiasm with which he manages his time in an almost metronomical way.

Since 1932, Françaix has had adversaries and followers. Reactions were present and contradictory. He was compared to Stravinsky. People judged his orchestrations as instrumentally too ‘garish’. From such comments he was automatically classified; his capacity as a composer predicted and his ability as an original composer questioned. Why all this controversy? A symphony directed by Pierre Monteaux at the Salle Pleyel, on November 6, 1932. The public came to hear Georges Till singing Wagner and was not receptive to the new work.

Not interested in teaching in an institution – contrary to his colleagues – Jean Françaix chose exclusively to compose. As Georges Auric claimed, he was “inebriated by the blank page,” meaning that he could not rest twenty-four hours without writing music.

Daniel-Lesur showed his esteem and admiration when Jean Françaix received the Prix de Portique in 1950. “His only fault – and this might be quite serious – is that he never manages to bore us. One could also reproach him with his lack of interest towards theories and systems. A musician without theoretical interest who writes true music cannot be analysed seriously with the appropriate words and talked about in a serial journal.”³⁷

Variety of language and musical ideas give composers a choice of routes. Françaix retained his chosen way: tonal, with forms based on tradition, his free style referring to well-explored paths. Whilst recognising the mastery of Françaix’s writing, Marius Constant declared, “Jean Françaix is today’s watchmaker!”³⁸ Thus sharing the well-known saying about Maurice Ravel.

³⁷ Opéra, April 5, 1950.

³⁸ Radio Program by Jean-Christopher Marty, France Musique, for the eightieth anniversary of the composer, 1992.

Françaix's skill as an orchestrator has already been mentioned regarding his work for Poulenc. As a mirror image to the original instrumentations he created for his Mother's Female Choral Circle, his orchestrations became more and more personal and his models and filiations revealed: Mozart, Schubert, Chabrier. "A dear photo of Chopin. What a pity that photography was not invented sooner. To think that we have a picture of Massenet! I am heartbroken"³⁹ he confides to his pedagogue... To flee wrong notes and boredom like the plague. "In reality dear Emmanuel Chabrier is my good master," he declared in the introduction to his *Quintette*. In homage to the neglected composer of the *Roi malgré lui* ('King in spite of himself'), which Sacha Guitry described as an invented relative. "Emmanuel Chabrier, French composer with an incredible verve was born in 1841 and died in 1894... As it happens in 1892 he had a son who himself was the father of a child born in 1922... This child was called Jean Françaix. What I have just told you is completely fabricated: Jean Françaix is not the grandchild of Emmanuel Chabrier... But if he is not related to him, at least he goes back to him, he has the same traits and the same verve. He matches his strength, his happiness, his constant inventive nature – and his music is honest, without double meaning and without pretention, it is indeed very French, and as he always has something interesting to say he does not look for words!"⁴⁰

The producer Sacha Guitry gave exemplary historical lessons. Apart from a common project which took place when Jean Françaix was still young, the work on *Perles de la Couronne*, then a fortuitous meeting in 1953, Guitry was the source of a remarkable historical production: they agreed on stylistic matters. The conciseness of their conversations, the affinity of their choice of subjects and discourses, the excess of each personality led to the strengthening of an artistic understanding which formed the basis of hugely successful films. Their two natures were spiritually at one in films such as *Si Versailles m'était conté* ('Tales of Versailles'), *Napoléon*, *Si Paris m'était conté* ('Tales of Paris'), *Assassins et voleurs* ('Murderers and thieves')...

In 1950 Jean Françaix came across the work of Denis de Rougemont, *l'Amour et l'Occident* ('Love and the West'). The author put forward his thesis of the 'obstacle'

³⁹ Jean Françaix to Nadia Boulanger, December 1, 1946, BnF, letter no. 173.

⁴⁰ Harlequin in his shop, recorded May 18, 1955, broadcast on channel C, May 19, 1955.

in the chapter called the *Mythe de Tristan*.⁴¹ The wording used by Rougemont to qualify “the last and virginal reflection” of this cycle brought about the necessary spark in the composer. Too many commissions interfered with the transcription of the novel. “I have been thinking of the Princess of Clèves for the last 10 years”⁴² meant that the conclusion of the libretto and its music culminated in a work lasting two and a half hours, created on December 11, 1965 at the Arts Theatre in Rouen. “The papers are unanimous and declare this work to be one of the best scores composed today.”⁴³ Yet no French stage, nor foreign one, ever put it on again.

As for the *Concertino pour piano et orchestre* (1932) and the *Concerto pour quinze instruments solistes* (1988), they display roughly the same orchestration.

But in fact how many works has Jean Françaix composed? The important thing for him was to write them. Let us consider a certain number from the publisher, who calculated about 115 pieces were performed (copyrighted) and let us appreciate such a diversity in the compositions as a symbol of a natural facility to write in all styles, although Jean Françaix demonstrates an original experience in some of his lyrical and sacred works.

His work *l'Apocalypse selon Saint Jean* is such an example. Jean Françaix went for a walk in the old part of Le Mans, where he took his first steps, accompanied by his granddaughter Christine.⁴⁴ Their walk carried them past a school of music and a cathedral which inspired his only oratorio. From 1937 he spent his time studying the text of the Apocalypse. The writings of the Reverend Father Bernard Allo⁴⁵ helped him with a musical setting of the text through revealing the meaning of the symbolism. He worked under the direction of this specialist of the apocalyptic text and when he went to Solesmes⁴⁶ it was to steep himself in the words. He read widely: *l'Apocalypse* of Bossuet, the thoughts of Father Clérissac on the mystery of the

⁴¹ The last name of the parts of this novel ends with “the Princess of Clèves.”

⁴² Title given to an interview with Jean Françaix by Denise Bourbet.

⁴³ “Music and Instruments,” February 1966.

⁴⁴ Joint-producer with Raymond Pinoteau of a documentary on Jean Françaix which shows him walking through his native city.

⁴⁵ Allo, *l'Apocalypse*, 3rd ed., augmented, Paris 1933.

⁴⁶ He went to the Abbey in May 1931 (mentioned in the diary of Alfred Françaix) where he was shown the palaeographic literary (letter of Joseph Gaspard to Alfred Françaix, June 16, 1931); on July 3, 1937 he took Roland Emmanuel to Solesmes and saw Bourdariat (letter from Jean Françaix to Nadia Boulanger July 2, 1937, Estate N.L.A. 71, Bibliothèque Nationale).

Church, the reflections of Friedrich Wilhelm Forster on the situation in Europe after the Apocalypse.

From the “Queen Mary” in 1939 he described to his dear godmother as an ever grateful pupil the pleasure of returning to the warmth of his home, the financial security he obtained thanks to her, conscious of the task he must accomplish in this particular venture in a different idiom.⁴⁷

As for *Eclairs sur l’au-delà*,⁴⁸ Jean Françaix’s score is the extension of the quartet “to the end of time” where the depth of an abyss merges with a ritualistic tenderness. In three affirmations *Il est, il était, il vient* (‘He is, he was, he comes’), sung by a mixed choir and repeated by the contraltos the *Prologue* exposes the principles of the existence of God in eternity. The prophecy takes place on this sonorous background. To the solo voices he gives the apparition of the Lion-lamb given by the choir in a lulling rhythm, the opening of the seven seals from which the scourges will descend, affecting the earth, the Prayer of the Martyrs as well as the Right of the sixth seal. The vision of celestial Jerusalem impresses by its clarity and simplicity; in an obvious rhythm Jean Françaix leads us in a single line into the light towards a happy Apocalypse. This score expresses the composer’s faith. It is a clear expression of his belief and his intellectual conviction. He is sure that with the means given to him by God, his gifts, his work, he can give back to his creator the message for which he was destined.

The orchestration was completed on December 31, 1939. *L’Apocalypse* was performed in June 1942 with Charles Munch conducting the second part of the programme after Bach’s *Magnificat*.

The performance revealed the undeniable inheritance of an aesthetic that was continuous and faithful. *L’Apocalypse* links one century with another with its performance in 1999 at the Trinity and at Le Mans, after forty years of neglect, which unfortunately the composer could not witness.

⁴⁷ Manuscript letters, estate of Nadia Boulanger, Bibliothèque Nationale, letter no. 138.

⁴⁸ Composed and orchestrated by Olivier Messiaen from 1987 to 1991, *Eclairs sur l’au-delà* (‘Flashes on the beyond’) is a work that borrows largely from *l’Apocalypse de saint Jean*. Six of the eleven movements were composed with reference to quotes from chapters 1, 7, 8, 21 and 22.

Changes to his works, scores to discover, the wealth and creative activity filled the hours allocated to music. Why wait for a shortened version of his life? The letters of his father to a friend⁴⁹ serve as a reminder of an activity in which the whole family participated, invitations to reading and listening to discover a rich catalogue of works that through performers will free themselves from shy discoveries nurtured by his native land.

⁴⁹ Gift of Madame Boulet to Muriel Bellier. Madame Boulet was a member of the Female Choral Circle and pupil of the Françaix parents; she exchanged letters with the father of the composer.

Beyond the frontiers

Jean Françaix lived in his native town of Le Mans until 1952. This social and geographical belonging created a tendency in the composer to withdraw from an exhausting journey of discovery to the calming influence of a provincial and family life. He shared this time of musical awareness with the tranquil walks through the Sarthoise countryside, notably the road to Bonnétable which leads to the Perrières. “I only feel comfortable in my work at Le Mans”⁵⁰ he sighed. Yet although the composer remained faithful to his hometown, in which he stayed for fifty-two years, he still travelled extensively. In order to facilitate his journeys he decided to live nearer the capital. He chose Chatou near the river Seine, quiet and favourable to composing. Le Beausset, a holiday place hidden amongst pine forests, not far from the rocky inlets of Cassis, remained a place where music and friendship was found during the summer holidays when orchestral musicians from all over the world came to visit.

Françaix’s numerous voyages were out of Europe, though he was not multi lingual. Never mind, his language was music, and therefore universal. It was his only passport and remained for the composer the means of communication which broke down all barriers. His first journeys began during the thirties, ten years rich with exchanges which ended in the U.S.A. in January 1939 together with Nadia Boulanger. This was an obvious choice for his musical voyages. He was invited. His works were performed. He represented French music. The years from 1960 confirm this feverish activity.

The quality of the ‘vintage’ grew. Those years were good years, even excellent years. “He is especially performed in Germany, England, U.S.A... Even in Japan and the Gendron-Françaix team functions with great success.”⁵¹ His performing career was very important during this time. International tours and tours in France gave him the recognition he deserved as a pianist. His participation in chamber music groups was part of his musical life. His programs illustrated his artistic tendencies, demonstrating his relationship with works of the past, going back to the traditional masters of the

⁵⁰ Letter from Jean Françaix to Nadia Boulanger April 24, 1933 letter 133, Bibliothèque Nationale.

⁵¹ Alfred Françaix to Madame Boulet, Opus cit.

beginning of the twentieth century. A friendly remark made by the head of the Conservatoire, Henri Rabaud, at the hearing of a Quartet by Fauré describes his first venture into chamber music, a public concert (exam), at the end of his studies: “You know, you play the piano very, very well but as for your colleagues, I don’t know how they play because I have not heard them.” “This was a good lesson for me. So now, when I accompany, I withdraw my claws,” said the toughened master.

Françaix preferred to play his works himself on piano, though of course he would advise others of how his scores should be played. He performed with pleasure concerts of his own works, demonstrating his brilliant pianistic ability, although he always declared that he detested practicing his instrument! It is with pleasure and amusement that one remembers a concert where he played a reduction of his music, which he composed fifty years previously, cursing the arrangement for its difficulties!

During the 1950s Françaix continued to compose on the train journeys with his partner Maurice Gendron, which brought about some fine virtuosic cadenzas. The first recitals with this cellist go back to 1943. From London to Lisbon, Brest to Vienna, they obtained considerable success and their temperaments were suited to each other so marvellously which contributed to their partnership for over twenty years. “Since a creaking Joséphine with an uncertain tone [grandfather Provost’s cello] but at the service of Boccherini through to Debussy scores,” Françaix stayed in touch with the cello.⁵²

The reports of Alfred Françaix were enlightening: “Jean is happy with the year 1964: numerous representations of *Demoiselles de la nuit* [ballet] at la Scala in Milan and of *Diable boiteux* in Naples.” The reception of *Diable boiteux* was excellent.⁵³ This comical cantata on a subject by Lesage obtained considerable success at Palermo on April 22, 1942. The evolution from the concert hall to the stage was thanks to the

⁵² Debussy’s Sonata, Fauré’s Sonata no. 2 and Messiaen’s *Louange à l’Eternité de Jésus* programme recorded at the Town Theatre in Vevey, Switzerland from November 27-29, 1964, Philips Phonographic.

⁵³ The “Private Society for Chamber Music” was founded in the autumn of 1942 by Paul Collaer, in order to bypass the German control – they gave about ten concerts during the years 1942/1943 and 1943/1944. *Le Diable Boiteux* was part of the second planned evening of chamber operas. The first took place in April 1943; in April 1944 it was on the program at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels together with *Le Voyante* of Sauguet and *Moretus ou le Damné recalcitrant* by Marcel Poot.

producer Bronislaw Horovicz and to the gifted Hugues Ceunod who played the two roles of Zambullo and the Devil, climbing out of the orchestral pit. It was produced in November 1950 at Carnegie Hall in New York and encored thanks to the enthusiasm of the public having been given a splendid performance by the original performers and the instrumental group conducted by Frédéric Waldman. In 1964 The Symphony Orchestra of Limbourg in Holland programmed it during their season, which took place in Maastricht and Brussels as well as a proposed performance of *Musique de Cour*, which was not played in France since Charles Munch conducted it on December 2, 1937.

1965 was a peak year. Alfred Françaix described it in broad terms in a most enthusiastic manner:⁵⁴ “Greetings and best wishes for such a promising year. Let us hope it will be as good as the last one, from a general point of view, one of the best amongst the last 20 years. Jean has finished it with a flourish... After winning the Grand Prix du Disque (on November 26), his *Concerto pour deux pianos et orchestre* was performed (together with Claude) on 27 and 28 in Healen and Maastricht. (They got a good review) then on December 11 at l’Opera, *Adage et variations* was performed, music by Poulenc, orchestrated by Jean... And the same night at the Théâtre des Arts in Rouen they gave the world premiere of *La Princesse de Clèves*, which was magnificently produced and was a great success (critique by Clarendon on December 14).⁵⁵ The superb costumes were designed and fabricated by a former pupil of my wife (Jeanne Françaix) Quinton, alias J. P. Holtay... and, finally, on the 22nd, at the cinema Marignan, was the first showing of *Lady L.* of Peter Ustinov... His 6 *Préludes* for string orchestra premiered at the Lucerne Festival in September 1964 also received an unexpected success. The Colson ensemble played them 25 times in Germany (once in France!) and carried on with a tour of 50 concerts in Turkey, Israël etc... Also the ensemble Kuents will play them 70 times throughout a tour of the U.S.A. and Canada...”

As Balanchine choreographed his dancers of the New York City Ballet to the *Sérénade* in 1950, the choreographer decided to pre-name his ballet “A la Françaix...” Here is a composer with a label... Which does not deprive him of certain

⁵⁴ Alfred Françaix to Mme Boulet, Opus cit.

⁵⁵ Clarendon, *La Princesse de Clèves*, “Le Figaro,” December 13, 1965.

truthfulness: “They give me the Légion d’Honneur in France and my works are played abroad! What does it matter! They are performed with more humour, in the true spirit in which they were composed and with an excellent interpretation.” One way to make friends in France.

However it is impossible to leave a composer behind whose pianistic talent and creative works met success on other continents.⁵⁶ Germany comes notably to the fore. It is not by chance or due to an appreciation of a peculiar style appreciated beyond the Rhine. The sincere friendship with the conductor Klaus Schöll had much to do with it. One of his artistic endeavours was to disseminate the wind pieces (of Françaix) in Mayence and in the whole of West Germany, and beyond.⁵⁷ The seat of Schott happened to be in the same town. The wind ensemble run by Klaus Rainer Schöll seems to have played a part in this interest towards Jean Françaix’s creation, also towards a friendship and a publisher. The *Sirène musicale* contacted him in October 1933, but to no effect. Then the partnership between Editions Schott and Max Eshig brought about an agreement with a French concern. There was an editorial truce during the War which enabled the Editions Transatlantiques to only credit certain works in the catalogue.⁵⁸

The meeting with the Schott editors goes back to the creation of the ballet *Scuola di ballo*. That the critics appreciated Françaix’s music must have been of great comfort to Ludwig Strecker, head of Editions Schott. Indeed he tested the candidate Françaix at his own risk.⁵⁹ Having collected some unknown melodies by Boccherini from a library in Darmstadt he suggested to Léonide Massine, the choreographer of *Scuola di ballo*, to ask the composer to orchestrate them in order to test him. After the first performance on April 29, 1933, success followed and he told Jean Françaix that he would publish all his works, past and present, having control over them. Jean

⁵⁶ The analysis of the copyrights is incontestable.

⁵⁷ Klaus Schöll was born in Stuttgart in 1931. He studied at the Musikhochschule and acted as coach and assistant to the choir master of the Stuttgarter Staatsoper. In 1957 he was the Kappellmeister of the Landestheater in Tübingen where he wrote several stage pieces. Since 1959 he was given the post of director of stage and concerts Editions Schott. His wind group (Bläser Ensemble Mainz) performed many of Jean Françaix’s works and were often broadcast and televised, producing many recordings.

⁵⁸ Some works of the composer appeared through Billaudot Editions.

⁵⁹ In June 1932, during the contemporary music festival in Vienna, Schott made advances so he sent some of his good compositions to Mainz by September 1. Letter 271, Estate Nadia Boulanger, Bibliothèque Nationale.

Françaix did not immediately agree to this; in the careful manner of a young man he had to be contacted three times before he answered favourably. Since then his relationship with the Mayence business have remained constant. “They let me compose what I want without bothering me about style or technique.... The Strecker’s welcomed me as their own child. Thanks to the music they behaved as we have always known each other, indeed no hitch however terrible could separate us.⁶⁰ It was possible for us not to meet for years; this did not cause any cooling off of our relationship and they in turn did me the honour to also remain friendly once and for all.”⁶¹

Jean Françaix had the good fortune to hear all his compositions performed. Still, from the birth of a composition to its later performance, over the years there was inequality: the hearing of a work was inadequate because there was a lack of a second hearing, particularly of the works which lasted since the 1930s in contrast to works which could be appreciated in one hearing close to their creation. There is no doubt that his works were performed by orchestras all over the world under illustrious conductors: this is confirmed by a catalogue known, but not generally. His conductors were Ernest Ansermet, Marius Constant, Roger Desormière, Antal Dorati, Manuel Rosenthal, Charles Munch, Georges Prêtre, Hermann Scherchen ... And Jean Françaix himself. “Let the lovers of a straight line be reassured, I know how to play and conduct my works, in Carnegie Hall, in Munich or in Rome; or to follow the famous ‘sticks’, of the old Keilberth to the young Klaus Rainer Schöll -without forgetting my *Concertino* with a certain Karajan...” Until the last year of his life he directed the organization of his works. His exceptional endurance, noticeable in the stories of his childhood musical journeys was still obvious in his last endeavours when aged eighty-five.

The most successful compositions belong to the chamber music works. Carried by reputed groups, transmitted by soloists and pedagogues to whom they are dedicated, over two generations of performers, his works reduced in number reaching the 1990s, having travelled around the world. The propagation of the music of Jean Françaix is boosted by an important discography.

⁶⁰ This is an allusion to the War, which interrupted their publishing relationship.

⁶¹ Sonderdruck aus Festschrift für einen Verleger Ludwig Strecker zum 90* Geburtstag, herausgegeben von Carl Dahlhaus, B. Schott’s Söhne Mainz, pp 19-24. *Written for the ninetieth year of Dr Ludwig Strecker.

Conclusion

These pages are an open invitation to the discovery of Jean Françaix's music; those that follow belong to him and can be appreciated by anyone. It is up to you to agree with his words, or to read the introductions cleverly written by a composer who toyed with the art of improvisation. In his original musical introductions you can find the man, his loves, his preferences. Small essays about themes and instrumentation for a learned public, the addresses spoken by Jean Françaix represent a 'fishpond' of commentaries on music and composers of explanations of his musical thoughts, thanks to his views on his contemporaries as well as the views he held about the old masters. The reticence of the composer is of no avail, he believed it embarrassing to present his own works himself,⁶² he often communicated by writing or talking to the performers who were keen to ask his advice.

He took pleasure to whet our appetite through a consummate art of conversation. Our musical tastebuds are effectively awakened through the composer's clever 'spicing' of the meal. The splendour of the music takes on a particular highlight thanks to the 'Françaix' manner of presentation. Françaix concocted his discourses with love and humour and they reveal themselves as pages of musical history reminiscent of Sacha Guitry and also as a wealth of musical memories and emotion. Digressing from historical facts the process became instructive. To liven up his retelling of funny moments became an art of formulating with Françaix. Around a quaver one can see a young composer –Emile Naoumoff– next to the old lady Nadia Boulanger; here and there the spreading of an adventure to recreate a score on the stage. Also the fleeting moments when Françaix remembered a feature, a presence amongst some of the composers dear to him.

As in the morality of *Judgement d'un fou* ('the evaluation of a lunatic') based on a text by Rabelais, a ballet he composed in 1937, he brought us "le fumet du rôti" ("the smell of the roast"). Elegantly he gave us a lecture on music history in a few short phrases... with a smile. To do the rounds of his musical entertainments was to sometimes meet his claws unsheathed towards fastidious technicians. Hiding behind a

⁶² Introductory talk for the Foundation Singer-Polignac, concert of May 13, 1992 at the occasion of the Symposium on "the Silk Roads."

certain mockery towards those people who would have the temerity to start a discussion other than related to music itself, the preference would go to those who compose and perform, much more than to those who attempt to talk about it (far from the “musicological and unclear explanations”). Let us get near to the man and the artist, to his musical predilections, to his affinity with the artistic world, to his real pleasure in meeting performers. Many are those that remember the time spent with him in his flat Rue de Turbigo, where he lived since 1972. Receiving musicians and lovers of music with pleasure, he let them hear his recent compositions interspersed with evocations, musical pictures, remarks on the modern world. If the questions asked were too detailed the answers tended to be more allusive, a thousand fascinating, sometimes amusing, events would emerge from his memory. Such were the conversations with Jean Françaix, a man who preferred intellectual improvisation to serious, learned talk.

The journey brought the listeners to the magnetism of Arturo Toscanini, to *La Mer* by Debussy conducted by Georges Prêtre, to the first performance in New York of *Pierre et le Loup* (Peter and the Wolf) by Serge Prokofiev and diverge towards the *Grande Fugue* of Beethoven, also to progress in science, bouncing onto a story by Jules Verne, which he transformed into an explosive *Ville mystérieuse* (“Mysterious town”!) or to a thought borrowed from an old writer of centuries past, for writings reassured and comforted him more than humans.

Over the piano the friendly portrait of Igor Stravinsky looked over the latest works of Françaix. A drawing from the son Théodore brought back past memories. Some many years ago page turning for Stravinsky, the shadow of Ravel, and memories of childhood. This was during the year 1930, the year he gained his Prix: “We talked music for one and a half hours. The following week we met again and talked music again.” This happened to be at the feast of Toro de fuego at Saint Jean de Luz, when at midnight the soul of the bull takes flight...

“I am now 85 years old, I had a happy, full life,” he confided in his cousin, Jacqueline during the Summer of 1997, who was the inspiration of his first compositions.

This musical stroll was written by Muriel Bellier in homage to the composer.