

# Poulenc and Duruflé 'premieres' in Woolsey Hall at Yale University and the Polignac organ

Ronald Ebrecht

Maurice Duruflé altered his organ works many times from when he composed them in his youth to the end of his life. My intent to know the original led me to strip away these layers.<sup>1</sup> I now perform from my restored early versions in which I include Duruflé's later note corrections. Duruflé's changes to the *Scherzo*, opus 2 and *Prélude, Adagio et choral varié sur le thème du "Veni Creator,"* opus 4 are quite extensive. Informed listeners are often surprised to hear the original published scores.

## The Polignac organ

In the process of researching these first editions and my book, I studied the earliest version of the Poulenc *Organ Concerto* and the instrument where it was premiered by Maurice Duruflé, the Cavaillé-Coll house organ of the Princesse de Polignac, who commissioned the work—the last in her distinguished collection of commissions.<sup>2</sup> She was a capable organist and patroness of the arts, who also commissioned Poulenc's *Concerto for Two Pianos*. Poulenc, with no skills as an organist, sought advice from the Princesse's house concert director, Nadia Boulanger, regarding the solo part. Her interest in early music is revealed in the concerto's reminiscence of two German Baroque pieces: Buxtehude's and Bach's *Fantasias in G Minor*.

From manuscript sources, I have reconstructed the specification of the Cavaillé-Coll as it was for the premiere, December 16, 1938. Most performers reference the sound of the organ in the 1961 recording of the concerto as performed by Duruflé on the newly restored organ of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont; however, there was no west-end organ in this church when the concerto was premiered, nor when Poulenc consulted with him for the registrations in the published score, because it was removed in spring 1939. Two newspaper articles, one with a photo showing the pipes being removed, chronicle this planned rebuild: Anonymous, "Les Orgues de St-Étienne-du-Mont," *Le Petit Journal*, Paris (28 April 1939), and Stéphane Fauquier, "On transforme les orgues de Saint-Étienne du Mont," *Le Journal*, Paris (3 March 1939).

During the previous summer, with Felix Raugel and Marcel Dupré, Duruflé prepared a proposed specification to rebuild the organ.<sup>3</sup> The neo-Classical sounds he imagined from the 1938 specification (or those of the quite different 1956 specification of the organ once restored after the war), were not available to the performer on the Polignac organ at the time of the private premiere, nor the Mutin of the public one (see below). The Polignac concert room allowed only a small orchestra, which, combined with its Romantic Cavaillé-Coll organ, certainly produced a melded ensemble quite apart from the 'oil and water' effects of Duruflé's famous recording.

Unfortunately the manuscript does not give the registrations initially used, leaving the problem that the published registrations would not have been possible on the two organs where it was first played. On these the effect was certainly more blended with the orchestra, and more importantly, the timbre of these instruments was decidedly Romantic.

Winnaretta Singer originally commissioned her Cavaillé-Coll in 1892 for the balcony of the *atelier* of her residence on the corner of what was then the Avenue Henri Martin and is now the Avenue Georges Mandel and the rue Cortambert. After her divorce from her first husband, the Prince de Scey-Montbéliard, she married the Prince Edmond de Polignac, thirty years her senior, in 1893. When Polignac died in 1901, she took down the house leaving the *atelier*, and built a grand mansion with a sepa-

rate music room incorporated into the main house on her property. The two-story *atelier* was also reconstructed, with an apartment on the upper level and a large music room with the rebuilt organ provided on the ground floor. In these two spaces many concerts were given, and the musical and artistic elite of the age gathered: Cocteau, Colbert, Dupré, Fauré, Proust, Stravinsky, etc. Prominent organists often gave recitals, but Duruflé seems not to have been among them, and only had access to the instrument to practice the day before the premiere of the concerto.

Jesse Eschbach in "A Compendium of Known Stoplists by Aristide Cavaillé-Coll 1838–1898" (*Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, Vol. I*; Paderborn: Verlag Peter Ewars, 2003, p. 557) omits the Grand orgue Bourdon 16. However, as Eschbach remarks in a footnote, it is included in René Desplat, "L'Orgue de salon dans la région parisienne depuis un siècle," *L'Orgue* 83 (April–September 1957): 79–90.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Carolyn Shuster-Fournier in "Les Orgues de Salon d'Aristide Cavaillé-Coll Paris," *L'Orgue: Cahiers et Mémoires*, 1997, p. 95, omits it in the specification but mentions it in a footnote. I will prove Desplat correct. The Bourdon 16 was present in all versions of the organ.

## Princesse de Polignac, Cavaillé-Coll, 1892, 56-note manuals, 30-note pedal

### Grand orgue expressif

Bourdon 16  
Montre 8  
Flûte harmonique 8  
Bourdon 8  
Prestant 4  
Flûte douce 4  
Basson 16  
Trompette 8  
Clairon 4

### Récit expressif

Flûte traversière 8  
Gambe 8  
Voix céleste 8  
Flûte octaviante 4  
Octavin 2  
Plein jeu  
Basson-Hautbois 8  
Clarinette 8

### Pédale

Soubasse 16  
Flûte 8

Orage  
Tirasse GO  
Tirasse Récit  
Anches Récit  
Anches GO  
Copula  
Trémolo

Nadia Boulanger, known in the USA as "the famous French organist," gave the premiere of the Copland *Organ Symphony*, written for her, with the New York Philharmonic on January 11, 1925. The Princesse was also quite an accomplished organist, and continued to play and study major works of Bach in her London exile during World War II. The Poulenc *Organ Concerto* was originally intended to be performed by the Princesse. Duruflé was Mlle. Boulanger's very natural suggestion: she knew him from having judged him in the organ contests he won in 1929 and 1930, and from his teaching of harmony at the Conservatoire Americain at Fontainebleau, which she directed.

The organ was again rebuilt in 1933 before Duruflé played for the premiere of the concerto under the baton of Nadia Boulanger.<sup>5</sup> The Princesse wrote to Nadia Boulanger from Italy October 23, 1933, authorizing the work to be done to her organ to cost 11,500 francs.<sup>6</sup> These alterations made by Victor Gonzalez, when Rudolf von Beckerath was in his employ, are as follows: make the expression boxes open more fully, repair the pedal mechanism, and most importantly, add a *Plein jeu* 4 ranks to the Grand orgue in the place of the Basson 16, which is transferred to the Pédale.<sup>7</sup> Also enumerated at a cost of 500 francs is removal of the 32' stop. Though it is possible that one may have been added in 1904, given the size and reduced height of the space where the organ was re-installed and the fact that no one who saw the organ remarked upon such an addition, I think it most unlikely. This expense was probably for the removal of the Orage mechanism.

The Princesse encloses the typed estimate from Gonzalez:

### WORK TO BE DONE

I—The most urgent

1. Take the pipes out, clean them, repair them and clean the organ: 11,000 frs
2. Take apart the bass windchests and modify them to have more wind for the pipes: 4,000 frs

3. Do away with the 32 foot stop and take it out of the organ: 500 frs X
4. Move the Bourdon 16' wood pipes to permit the placement of a three-rank cornet on the main chest: 1,500 frs
5. Redo the lead windlines that are oxidized: 4,000 frs
- XX6. Give the expression boxes maximum opening—redo the mechanism: 1,000 frs X
- XX7. Move the Basson 16' of manual I to the Pédale: 4,000 frs X
- X 8. Replace the Basson 16' on G.O. with a *Plein jeu* of 4 ranks, which will brighten the main manual: 4,500 frs X
9. Redo the voicing of the organ to make stops more distinct: 7,000 frs
- X 10. Repair the mechanism of the Pédale, which has frequent ciphers: 1,500 frs X
11. Modify the Bourdon 8' and Flûte douce stops of the G.O. which must serve as bass for the Cornet, by giving them chimneys: 800 frs
12. Make new pipes for: Nasard 2½', Doublette 2', Tierce 1½': 6,000 frs
13. Make a new chest for these three stops (Nasard, Doublette, Tierce): 2,800 frs  
= 48,600 frs X

On it she makes annotations mentioned in her letter and marked X.<sup>8</sup> The total for the work to be done equals the 11,500 francs she agrees to pay for those items on the invoice she accepts. This offers much to consider, as much by what she decides to do as by what she declines—changes that would have given the organ a neo-Classical sound. How fortunate that the efficient person who typed the estimate provides precisions that allow one to establish the original and modified specifications. The estimate references the addition of a 3-rank Cornet (by moving the Bourdon 16' pipes and modifying the Bourdon 8' and Flûte douce), and completing it with pipes and a new chest.

We thus know that originally there were both 16' and 8' Bourdons on the Grand orgue and that there was no Cornet, even though Duruflé suggests Cornets on both the Récit and Positif in his concerto registrations. It is clear that it was the Baroque-minded Mlle. Boulanger who wanted the Cornet, not the Princesse herself.<sup>9</sup> More importantly, we can establish what the balance was between this organ and the small orchestra. Some have thought of the work as a chamber piece, but the Princesse's instrument was certainly very powerful relative to the smaller cubic volume of the space where it was re-installed in 1904.

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Ronald Ebrecht acknowledging applause (photo credit: Martin E. Gordon)

Thus, the *Organ Concerto* is not like the *Concert Champêtre* where the orchestra overwhelms the harpsichord, but rather the reverse. Duruflé had to exercise care in registration not to swamp the orchestra. Performers with large orchestras in large halls can therefore use more organ to achieve the appropriate balance.

**Princesse de Polignac, Cavaillé-Coll, 56-note manuals, 30-note pedal, as modified in 1933**

**Grand orgue expressif**

Bourdon 16  
Montre 8  
Flûte harmonique 8  
Bourdon 8  
Prestant 4  
Flûte douce 4  
Plein jeu IV  
Trompette 8  
Clairon 4

**Récit expressif**

Flûte traversière 8  
Gambe 8  
Voix céleste 8  
Flûte octavante 4  
Octavin 2  
Plein jeu III  
Basson-Hautbois 8  
Clarinette 8

**Pédale**

Soubasse 16  
Flûte 8  
Basson 16

Tirasse GO  
Tirasse Récit  
Anches Récit  
Anches GO  
Copula  
Tremolo

Six months after the private premiere was the first public performance, June 21, 1939 on the Mutin in the Salle Gaveau.

**Salle Gaveau, Mutin, III/36, 56/30<sup>10</sup>**

**Grand orgue**

Bourdon 16  
Montre 8  
Gambe 8

Flûte harmonique 8  
Bourdon 8  
Praestant 4  
Nasard 2½  
Doublette 2  
Fourniture III  
Basson 16  
Trompette 8  
Clairon 4

**Positif expressif**

Principal 8  
Salicional 8  
Cor de nuit 8  
Flûte douce 4  
Flageolet 2  
Carillon III  
Cromorne 8

**Récit expressif**

Diapason 8  
Flûte traversière 8  
Viola de gambe 8  
Voix céleste 8  
Flûte octavante 4  
Octavin 2  
Plein jeu IV  
Trompette harmonique 8  
Basson-Hautbois 8  
Soprano 4

**Pédale**

Contrebasse 16  
Soubasse 16  
Basse 8  
Violoncelle 8  
Bourdon 8  
Flûte 4  
Tuba Magna 16

Tirasse GO

Tirasse P  
Tirasse R  
Forte Péd  
FF Péd  
Positif/Récit  
Machine GO  
P/GO  
R/GO  
Anches GO  
Anches R  
Récit/R 16

Poulenc dedicates his score to the "Princesse Edmond de Polignac" and credits Duruflé for the registrations: "La registration a été établie avec le concours



Poulenc *Requiem, Opus 9*, with Yale Camerata (photo credit: Martin E. Gordon)

de Monsieur Maurice Duruflé." (The registration was established with the assistance of Maurice Duruflé.) The following specification is derived from Duruflé's suggested registrations for the *Concerto*. It produces an organ that is interesting to compare with those at his disposal for the first two performances, as well as that of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont at the time of the first recording: the specification as below concurs with none of these three. Normal type is used for stops inferred from generic suggestions, viz: *fonds*. Italics indicates specific stop names.

**Grand orgue expressif**

Montre 16  
*Bourdon 16*  
Montre 8  
*Flûte 8*  
Bourdon 8  
Gambe 8  
Octave 4  
Flûte 4  
*Mixture*  
Trompette 8  
Clairon 4  
*Positif/G.O. 8*  
*Récit/G.O. 8*  
*Positif/G.O. 4*  
*Récit/G.O. 4*

**Positif expressif**

Montre 8  
Flûte 8  
*Bourdon 8*  
Gambe 8  
*Dulciane 8*  
Octave 4  
*Flûte 4*  
*Nasard*  
*Mixture*  
*Cornet*  
*Clarinette 8*  
Trompette 8  
Clairon 4  
*Récit/P.*

**Récit expressif**

*Quintaton 16*  
Montre 8  
*Gambe 8*  
*Flûte 8*  
*Cor de nuit 8*  
*Voix céleste*  
Octave 4  
*Flûte 4*  
*Octavin 2*  
*Cornet*  
*Mixture*  
*Hautbois 8*  
Trompette 8  
Clairon 4

**Pédale**

*Bourdon 32*  
Montre 16  
*Bourdon 16*  
Montre 8  
*Flûte 8*  
*Bourdon 8*  
Octave 4  
Bombarde 16  
Trompette 8  
Clairon 4  
*Grand orgue/Péd.*  
*Positif/Péd.*  
*Récit/Péd.*

Since these Poulenc *Concerto* registration suggestions follow those of Duruflé for his own works so closely, readers seeking more background are referred to my discussion of the organs he knew at

this time.<sup>11</sup> Of note, there is no request for sixteen-foot manual reeds. The suggestions of mixtures on secondary and tertiary divisions and for super-couplers to the main division are curious, as these were normally not commonly available in France at that time. Also of particular interest is the Dulciane in the Positif, which he did not have on any organ he knew or designed, but he also suggested in the "Sicilienne" of *Suite*, opus 5.

The Princesse wished to perpetuate her artistic and philanthropic activities by establishing the Fondation Singer-Polignac in 1928. The first president was Raymond Poincaré, former President of France. After the Princesse's death in London during the war (November 26, 1943), she left her organ to the singer Marie-Blanche, la comtesse Jean de Polignac, niece of Edmond. Marie-Blanche was not an organist, and the organ remained in the house until she donated it to the Séminaire du Merville, where it was reinstalled by Victor Gonzalez with a revised specification and electric pedal chest. Carolyn Shuster-Fournier publishes its present disposition in her excellent book.<sup>12</sup> Though the organ is no longer extant in the Paris house, the spaces are still used regularly for performances sponsored by the foundation.

**The Woolsey Hall performance**

The New Haven Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1894, is the fourth oldest in America. Since the completion of Yale's splendid Woolsey Hall in 1901, the NHSO has performed on that stage, beneath one of the grandest of all organ façades in an ample, embracing acoustic. The orchestra programs an occasional organ concerto, featuring the 200-rank E. M. Skinner organ. When I was asked to perform, nothing seemed more appropriate than the Poulenc with my new registrations, which I premiered two years before at the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing. Given the Poulenc/Duruflé connection, some of Duruflé's music was *de rigueur*. I invited the Yale Camerata, directed by Marguerite Brooks, to perform the *Requiem*, opus 9, and I arranged with the Association Duruflé to include the American premiere of the orchestrated "Sicilienne."

As far as we know, Duruflé orchestrated only two of his organ works: the *Scherzo*, opus 2, published as *Andante and Scherzo*, opus 8, and the "Sicilienne," from *Suite* opus 5 (b), which is unpublished. Duruflé's adaptation of these scores is quite similar in approach. I have long theorized that harmonic and stylistic links join the *Scherzo* and "Sicilienne." I add to that argument another: Duruflé orchestrated them alike.

The *Andante and Scherzo*, and "Sicilienne" together with the *Trois Danses*, opus 3, comprise the entire solo orchestral oeuvre of Duruflé. William Boughton, the new conductor of the New Haven Symphony Orchestra, shares my passion for them. Eventually the NHSO will present the complete orchestral pieces over the next few seasons, but in Boughton's October 18, 2007 début



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Reception by patroness Ruth Lapidès, with Wesleyan organ students (photo credit: Martin E. Gordon)

concert with the orchestra it seemed appropriate to begin with a premiere of the unpublished "Sicilienne." Though presented several years ago at the American Cathedral in Paris, it has not been programmed by a regular orchestra. Though his instrumentation of the largest version of the *Requiem* and of his *Trois Danses* for orchestra has the punch and verve of the most energetic orchestral compositions of Dukas or Ravel, the gentle, intimate and lilting "Sicilienne" required a quite different approach.

Maestro Boughton began the program with Fauré's orchestral suite *Pelleas et Melisande*. Much of Fauré's music gained a hearing only in the salons of cultivated aristocrats like the Princesse Edmond de Polignac, to whom this piece is dedicated. Fauré's haunting "Sicilienne" set the scene for that of Duruflé—not just in genre and atmosphere, but it also prepared the audience with the familiar Fauré work to appreciate the unknown one that followed. Organists in the audience were given much to think about from hearing the orchestrated version of the second movement of the *Suite*. For instance, a clarinet plays the triplets in the accompaniment in the final da capo of the A theme. At the organ, this is often played faster than is possible for a clarinet. One also could note solo lines given to a single stop on the organ that are shared between instruments quite different in timbre in the orchestrated version. Closing the first half of the program, I played the Poulenc.

Readers may be interested in a synopsis of what is unique about my re-edition of the registrations and how I adapted it to this large symphonic organ. As an example, phrases in the concerto pass from first violins to second violins when they are repeated. Since this organ has multiple possibilities—with two clarinets, several solo flutes, two French horns, etc.—I followed the orchestration and registered repeated phrases on similar solo stops in alternate locations. Since the timbres suggested by Duruflé in the score were not available to him in the first two performances nor to me on this instrument, I applied the pattern of Duruflé's revisions of registrations in his organ works. In these, as an example, Flûte harmonique later becomes Flûte, then even later in some cases Cornet. Neither the Princesse's Cavaillé-Coll nor the Salle Gaveau Mutin had a Cornet. The Princesse had a solo flute, a Clarinette, a Basson-Hautbois, and a Trompette. In the Poulenc, I therefore used a few beautiful solo flute registrations rather than synthesizing a poor cornet with the available stops where it was suggested, except in the left-hand entry at measure 142, where I used alternating French horns instead of a cornet. Similarly, I used the two exquisite orchestral clarinets for the clarinet lines and did not try to produce a buzzy Baroque-sounding one. For some other solo lines, I used various oboe stops.

In general the effect made the organ more blended into the orchestra because the Woolsey solo stops are more orches-

tral in timbre than neo-Classic ones, and the foundations are smoother. The solo lines therefore arose from the organ-plus-orchestra texture sounding like orchestral instruments. Even informed audience listeners thought they were hearing orchestral wind instrument solos. At other points, to bring out the organ more, I made other adjustments. For instance, the multiple mixture plenums suggested in the score are not as snappy as reed choruses, and Duruflé did not have access to them. In Woolsey at measure 325 I used the Great mixtures, but answered with the Swell chorus reeds.

After intermission, to accompany the procession of the choir onto the stage, a select group of Yale Camerata men sang the Gregorian *Introit*. Thus began a marvelous rendition of the *Requiem*, opus 9. I am very grateful to the Yale Institute of Sacred Music (Martin Jean, director) for their substantial support of this concert. To introduce the audience to the program, musicologist and Polignac biographer Sylvia Kahan gave a pre-concert lecture.<sup>13</sup> All were gratified to read the review by David J. Baker in the *New Haven Register*, which appeared on October 21. ■

#### Notes

1. See Ronald Ebrecht, *Maurice Duruflé, 1902–1986, The Last Impressionist*, Scarecrow Press, 2002. In the chapter "Ties that Bind," I explain some ideas about the early versions. See also Ronald Ebrecht, "Understanding Maurice Duruflé, 1902–1986," *THE DIAPASON*, August 2007, and a forthcoming article in Russian from a lecture delivered in Moscow at the Second International Organ Symposium.

2. I have discovered no note changes in the manuscript.

3. Ebrecht, *Maurice Duruflé*, p. 173.

4. The Eschbach version has a slight difference in nomenclature, calling the Grand-Orgue Expressif 4' flute "Flûte à Cheminée."

5. Although his colleague and friend Mlle Boulanger was an intimate of the Princesse, it was not Duruflé's habit to frequent mundane salons. This seems to have been his only contact with the American heiress who was for other composers an important patroness.

6. "Chère Nadia—Je reçois à l'instant votre lettre au sujet de l'orgue. Je suis d'avis de commencer de suite les travaux 1, 2, et 3 que vous proposez: suppression du 32 p., ouverture des boîtes, réparation du mec. pédale - mais si vous croyez que le plein-jeu de 4 r au Gd-orgue serait d'un bon effet, je suis toute disposée à ajouter à 1, 2, et 3 : 1o le transfert de basson 16 du G.o. à la pédale, et 2do remplacement au Gd-O par un plein jeu de 4 r, ce qui reviendrait en tout à 11,500F."

7. From Marcel Dupré's annotated manuscript of specifications of organs visited by him: *Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Mus NLa 94, 217, 218, 219.*

8. We are grateful to the Fondation Singer-Polignac and to Marie-Odile Andrade, Director of Publications, for permission to print this invoice.

9. Readers may be interested to examine the Juilliard doctoral dissertation of John W. Sherer, "The *Organ Concerto* by Francis Poulenc," New York, 1999. The author explores registration questions that arise from those indicated, which would be the more interesting compared with the specifications of the original organs. He also discusses tempi and many other performance traditions that have evolved.



Woolsey Hall (photo credit: Martin E. Gordon)

10. Rés. Vm. 923 (1) p. 38.

11. See "Ties that Bind" in Ebrecht, *Maurice Duruflé*, pp. 156–180.

12. "Les Orgues de Salon d'Aristide Cavaillé-Coll," *Cahiers et Memoires*, #57-58, 1997, p. 99.


13. Her excellent Polignac biography, *Music's Modern Muse*, University of Rochester Press, 2003, is being translated into French in collaboration with Dennis Collins. The book is projected for release next year by Les Presses du réel, Dijon, under the title *Une muse de la musique moderne—Une vie de Winnaretta Singer, princesse de Polignac (1865–1943)*.

While preparing my edition of the collective biography, Maurice Duruflé, 1902–1986, *The Last Impressionist*, Scarecrow Press, 2002, I was privileged to have access to pertinent archives in France, including those of the Association Maurice et Marie-Madeleine Duruflé, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Fondation Singer-Polignac, and the private library of the Prince de Polignac, where I was invaluablely assisted by Sylvia Kahan, the curator. Many other individuals also aided my study, especially Eliane Chevalier. My curiosity about Duruflé has since led me to write several articles, and

give lectures and masterclasses. I continue to give many performances, especially of the organ integral from my reconstruction.


Ronald Ebrecht, an international performer for more than three decades, has been heard in concert on four continents. His articles have been published on three continents, including two forthcoming in Russian and the present article, which was requested for the *Bulletin de l'Association Maurice et Marie-Madeleine Duruflé*, where it appeared in a French version in December 2008. He continues work on his next book on the Cavaillé-Coll project for Saint Peter's, Rome, to be published in 2011.

As University Organist at Wesleyan University, he has taught for more than twenty years. Ebrecht has commissioned works from composers such as William Albright, Xiaoyong Chen, Raul de Zaldo Fabila, David Hurd, Christian Wolff and Wesleyan composers Anthony Braxton, Neely Bruce, Jay Hoggard, Ron Kuivila and Alvin Lucier. Many are available from major publishers. His latest performances of the Poulenc Concerto were at Minsk Philharmonic Hall on November 5.



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