
About the Music

The *Mouvements perpétuels* were composed on the piano in a local elementary school at Saint-Martin-sur-le-Pré in October 1918. They were dedicated to Valentine Cross, through whom he had met Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) for the first time.³ These pieces

were influenced by Erik Satie and Emmanuel Chabrier (1841–1894): short (Satie) and energetic (Chabrier). The lack of key signatures in all three pieces gives Poulenc the freedom to move through various keys without being restricted to any one key. Viñes gave the first performance of the pieces on February 9, 1919 at the studio of the *Lyre et Palette*.

No. 1. *Assez modéré (rather moderate)* 6

Form: **A** = measures 1–11; **B** = 12–19; coda = 20–24 (built on **A**).

The one-measure bass pattern is repeated throughout this movement except for the final measure. This constant repetition creates a rather static harmony under a nicely flowing melodic line, diatonic sounding at times with a little added dissonance. The direction *En général, sans nuances* (in general, without nuances) in measure 1 suggests a straight-forward type of interpretation, especially as it relates to dynamics: keep measures 1–4 at a *p* dynamic level; measures 5–7 = *mf*; 8–9 = *p*; 10–11 = *f*; 12–21 = *p*; 22–23 = *mf* and 24 = *pp*. This movement requires large hands to reach the numerous intervals of a ninth.

Performance Suggestions

1. Measures 1–4: be sure the melody (up-stem top voice) is well projected over the other voices.
2. Measures 5–7: the direction *en dehors* (bring out) in measure 5 refers to the melody. Play the right-hand notes in measure 7 with a little more stress than those in measures 5–6.
3. Measures 10–11: bring out the melody in these measures.

4. Measures 12–13: drop back to a quiet (*p*) dynamic level. The *doucement timbré* direction suggests to play the right-hand ninths gently but slightly stressed.
5. Measures 14–19: the direction *incolore et toujours p* indicates that these measures should be played colorless (without expression) and softly.
6. Measures 20–21: bring out the melody.
7. Measures 22–23: *ralentir en pesant sur la main droite* indicates to slow down and stress the right-hand syncopated alto voice.
8. Measure 24: the *Très lent* (very slowly) direction and *pp* dynamic indicate that this should be the slowest and quietest measure in the entire piece. Play the left-hand grace notes slowly before the beat. The single pedal indication throughout this measure is Poulenc's.

No. 2. *Très modéré (very moderate)*. 8

Form: **A** = measures 1–6; **B** = 7–12; coda = 13–14.

Although no key signature is indicated, the constant use of B-flat suggests the key of D minor (natural form), especially in the right hand. The final measure (14) uses a simple dominant-tonic C major relationship (left hand) with the last two notes (A-flat and B-flat in the right hand) adding some whimsical color. The left-hand pattern is not as regularly consistent as in No. 1. Its consistency in this movement can be gauged by the number of measures in which each left-hand pattern occurs: 2 + 4 + 4 + 2, then repeated. The duration of the dynamic marks in terms of measures are 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 1 + 1.

Performance Suggestions

1. Measure 1: the word *indifférent* means both hands are to be played equally, alike, indifferently as regards dynamics. But the different phrasing must be observed. Stress the right-hand quarter note on beat 4.
2. Measures 2–6: notice the right-hand phrasing changes in each measure.
3. Measures 7–8: stress the melody, as suggested by *très chanté* (very melodic).
4. Measures 9–10: *clair mais p* indicates to play clearly but softly.

³ Nelson, 21.

5. Measures 11–12: *légèrement timbré* indicates to produce a light quality of sound; *2 Pedales* (Poulenc's indication) means to use both damper and una corda pedals. Emphasize the lower note of the right-hand broken octaves.
6. Measures 1–12: repeat; vary dynamics from the first time, and in measures 11–12 emphasize the top note of the right-hand broken octaves.
7. Measure 14: use fingers 2, 3 and 4 together to play the right-hand glissando.

No. 3. Alerte (agile, lively) 9

Form: Introduction = measures 1–3; **A** = 4–7; **B** = 8–36; introduction = 37–39; **C** = 40–46; **C**¹ = 47–50; coda = 51–57.

More meter changes are seen here than in the first two movements. While no key signature is indicated, the consistent use of the B-flat suggests a modal orientation. Measures 1–7, 20–23 and 37–39 center around F major. The other measures could be analyzed in the Dorian mode on G (G A B-flat C D E F G) or as a ii⁷ of F major. The interesting phrase structure (different from the form) works out as follows: **A** = 1–7 (3 + 2 + 2; measure 3 is a 7/4 compression of measures 1–2); **B** = 8–36 (4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 5); **A**¹ = 37–39 (measure 39 is a 7/4 compression of measures 37–38); **C** = 40–50 (40–46 = 3 + 2 + 2 and 47–50 = a varied repeat of 40–44 with octaves); **C**¹ = 51–57 (4 + 1 [first time] and 4 + 2 [second time]).

Performance Suggestions

1. Measures 1–3: the melody must always be heard over the accompaniment even though part of the accompaniment is in the right hand with the melody. This happens also in measures 4–5, 8–11, 16–19, 24–27, 37–39 and 47–48. If the left-hand tenths (measures 1, 3 and similar places) must be broken, play the low note before the beat and the top note on the beat. Fingerings in the last beat of measure 3 and the first beat of measure 4 are Poulenc's.

2. Measures 4–5: the direction *sans dureté-très lié* suggests to play without harshness and very legato.
3. Measures 6–7: *en s'apaisant un peu* suggests quieting down.
4. Measures 8–36:  *précédente* indicates to keep the eighth note the same value as in measures 1–7. The direction *le chant en dehors* indicates to bring out the melody (top voice).
5. Measures 20–23: keep the touch even and unvarying as indicated by *uniforme*.
6. Measures 28–36: *avec charme* indicates with charm.
7. Measures 37–39: return to the opening tempo, keeping the eighth note the same value as the preceding measures.
8. Measure 40 to the end: *Un peu moins vite* says to play a little slower than the tempo in measures 37–39. *Gris pp* in measure 40 suggests this section (through measure 46) be played without much color (gray tinted) to provide more contrast with the section beginning at measure 47. Poulenc indicated to use both damper and una corda pedals in measures 40 and 47 (*les deux pédales*).
9. Measure 47 to the end: *flou* suggests hazy and blurred. Use a great deal of pedal from here to the end.
10. Measures 51–52: the right hand crosses over the left (*croisez*). Bring out the right-hand melody.
11. Measure 55: repeat to measure 1 as indicated by *la première fois* (the first time).
12. Measure 56: the last time (*la dernière fois*), the phrase *ralentir en s'effaçant* means to slow down and fade away to the end.
13. Measure 57: allow beat 2 through the end of the measure to ring (*laisser vibrer*) until the sound has disappeared.

About This Edition

This edition is based on the first edition published in 1919 by J. W. Chester, Ltd., London. All parenthetical material is editorial. Pedaling is also editorial except for Poulenc's indications in No. 1, measure 24; No. 2, measure 11 (*2 Pedales*); and No. 3, measures 40 and 47 (*les deux pedales*). Metronome marks are the composer's as well as the right-hand fingering "1" in No. 2, measure 13, beat 4; and fingerings in No. 3, measure 3, beat 7 and measure 4, beat 1. All French terms are translated in the section "About the Music."

Sources Consulted

- Irving Kolodin, "The Merits of Poulenc," *Saturday Review*, XLVI (1963): 49–50, 60.
- Jon Ray Nelson, "The Piano Music of Francis Poulenc," diss., University of Washington, 1978.
- Roger Nichols. *Francis Poulenc*, in *The New Grove Twentieth-Century French Masters*. London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1986.
- W. Kent Werner, "The Piano Music of Poulenc," *Clavier*, 9 (March 1970): 17–19.

Mouvements perpétuels

(1918)

No. 1

Francis Poulenc
(1899–1963)

Assez modéré, ♩ = 144

En général, sans nuances

ⓐ Grace notes in measures 10, 14–17 and 24 are played before the beat.