

# Paris

A Concise Musical History

**Guy Hartopp**

**Vernon Series in Music**



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*For Carolyn, as always,  
and Olly, Will, Sam and Niamh,  
- the new generation*



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# Introduction and acknowledgements

Paris, the City of Light, is one of the most romantic cities in the world, perhaps surpassed only by Venice in this respect. The millions of visitors who flock to the French capital every year follow in the footsteps of countless artists, writers and composers who for centuries have been drawn to this magnificent city. Some composers, Chopin and Rossini among them, found success and contentment, and remained in Paris for the rest of their lives. But for others, Paris brought nothing but disappointment and disillusionment. Mozart, who came to Paris as a 22-year-old seeking a permanent position, was so bitter about the cavalier manner in which he was treated that he professed an aversion to all things French until the end of his days. Wagner was so upset by his treatment here that he once described Paris as “a pit into which the spirit of the nation has subsided.” And yet he was drawn back to the city time and again. Although, at certain periods, Paris has been regarded as the European capital of music, the city differs from Vienna, which also claimed that accolade, in that music is only *primus inter pares* among the arts.

There are, perhaps, three features which have characterised the musical life of Paris. The first was the emergence of the literary salon, where poets, novelists, painters, sculptors and musicians met in civilised surroundings to discuss their own work and that of others. These soirées originally took place in the homes of aristocrats, such as Princess Belgiojoso and Baron James de Rothschild, but later they were hosted by artists, including the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, the composer Ernest Chausson and, most notably, the mezzo-soprano Pauline Viardot. This “cross-fertilisation of the arts” must surely have been to the benefit of all concerned.

The second, and perhaps unique, aspect of the musical life of Paris is the long tradition of great organists. The line includes the Couperin family, Balbastre, Lefèvre-Wély, Guilmant, Gigout, Saint-Saëns, Fauré, Widor, Tournemire, Vierne, Dupré, Duruflé, Messiaen and Jehan Alain and his daughter Marie-Clare. This fine tradition was aided immensely by the instruments provided for them, notably by the Clicquot family and, above all, by Aristide Cavallé-Coll. Many of Cavallé-Coll’s organs are still in use today.

The third feature which, if it did not enrich, most certainly enlivened Parisian musical life was the full-scale musical riot. The most notorious of these took place at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées in 1913 at the première of Stravinsky’s ballet *Le sacre du printemps*. Less physical, but no less vociferous, was the reception accorded to Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* at the Opéra in 1860. Other composers who incurred the displeasure of Parisian audiences included Satie, Varèse and Xenakis. These riots were not half-hearted affairs; police involvement was required and hospital casualty departments were kept busy.

Many properties in which musicians resided are either no longer extant, or have been modified substantially. The ravages of time may have been responsible or demolition may have been the consequence of armed conflict, notably the Communard uprising in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Another factor was the remodelling of Paris by Baron Haussmann in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Haussmann's arrow-straight boulevards were driven ruthlessly through the centre of the city with scant regard for the properties of historical value which were demolished to make way for them. The re-naming of streets, or sections thereof, presented another difficulty in identifying the homes of composers and musicians. A much greater obstacle was the subsequent re-numbering of properties, a problem which occasionally defeated even the most assiduous research by officials at the relevant Mairies. In this book the street names and numbers quoted are those in current use.

The book charts the history of music in Paris chronologically. Assigning individual composers to relevant chapters was sometimes an arbitrary process. Saint-Saëns, for example, wrote his first piece at the age of four, and then composed virtually every day for the next eight decades. In general, the composers are discussed in chapters relating to periods when they were most active, or produced their most significant works.

A book of this type is dependent upon the scholarship of others. The principal sources are noted in the select bibliography. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Michel Yvon at the Département de la Musique of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and to unnamed officials at the Mairies of various arrondissements for their help. I am also indebted to Fabienne Ameisen, the daughter of Georges Hacquard of the Ecole Alsacienne, for her information regarding the last years in the life of Germaine Tailleferre and Mme Véronique Péral, the granddaughter of Jacques Ibert, for her kind letter regarding her grandfather.

Most of all, I must thank my wife Carolyn for her unfailing support, her suggestions and always constructive criticism.

This book is for both the music specialist and for ordinary music-lovers. For those wishing to learn more about the composers and musicians mentioned in this volume the bibliography will be of help.

In conclusion the author takes full responsibility for any errors and omissions.

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## Chapter 10

# 1914-1930: EUROPE IN TURMOIL

The First World War was the most horrific that mankind had yet witnessed, with hitherto unimaginable loss of life. During the seemingly interminable conflict the musical life of Paris was much diminished. Concerts did take place however, and several featured a group of young composers who, in 1920, became known as Les Six.

At the far end of the courtyard of **6 rue Huyghens** in Montparnasse was the ground floor studio of the painter Emile Lejeune, a member of a large group of artists that flourished in Montparnasse in the first part of the twentieth century. He made the studio available to the writer Blaise Cendrars and the Polish artist Moise Kisling, who decided to celebrate the riotous première of Satie's *Parade* in May 1917 with a series of concerts of music and poetry readings. Thus there began a series of small-scale concerts on Saturday evenings at what became known as the Salle Huyghens. These concerts soon became much larger in both scale and scope. As a venue the room left much to be desired. In the centre of the room was a malodorous and unreliable stove, around which was arranged the seating, which consisted of pieces of garden furniture and backless wooden benches. Yet these concerts soon became extremely popular, attracting large fashionable audiences eager to hear new music. The audience was crammed into the room, either squeezed together on the benches or standing at the rear or side walls. Jean Cocteau recalled that "it was like being on the Métro."<sup>1</sup>

In June 1917 a memorable concert took place here which included music from Satie's *Parade* (arranged for piano duet) and pieces by three young composers who had become friends at the Conservatoire, **Arthur Honegger**, **Georges Auric** and **Louis Durey**. This concert gave Satie the idea of starting a new group, the "Nouveaux Jeunes," with him at the centre. After hearing **Germaine Tailleferre's** *Jeux de plein air*, Satie invited her to join the group. After Satie's formal resignation from the group in 1918, Jean Cocteau began to play a prominent role in the group's activities.

Cocteau enjoyed a multi-faceted career as a poet, playwright, designer and artist. In 1918 he produced a pamphlet entitled *Le Coq et l'Arlequin*, in which he called for a new direction for French music. This new music would eschew the Teutonic weight of Wagner and the limpid impressionism of Debussy and forge a new path, which would be concise, unsentimental and wholly French in character. He realised that the Nouveaux Jeunes could be integral to his ambition to create a new avant-garde musical movement which would incorporate elements of cabaret, the music hall and the new imports from America, jazz and blues.



Early in 1919 **Darius Milhaud** returned to Paris from Brazil, where he had acted as secretary to the poet/diplomat Paul Claudel. Milhaud immediately joined his old friends from the Conservatoire in the group. A friend of Auric, **Francis Poulenc**, featured in the concerts, and the Nouveaux Jeunes now numbered six. In April 1919 a concert took place at the Salle Huyghens in which all six took part. This was probably the last to be held at this atmospheric but unsuitable venue. After the soprano Jane Bathori became temporary director of the **Théâtre du Vieux Colombier**, the group staged a number of concerts there, and from 1919 the Salle Huyghens was abandoned in favour of the Salle d'Agriculteurs which stood at **8 rue d'Athènes**.

After the Saturday night concerts the young composers made their way to the rather cramped flat of Milhaud at what is today **5 rue Paul Escudier** (pictured). Here they were joined by friends, including the sopranos Jane Bathori and Claire Croiza and the pianist Andre Vaurabourg. It was at a recital at Milhaud's apartment in January 1920 that Les Nouveaux Jeunes evolved into Les Six. Among those present was the critic Henri Collet. A week later he wrote an article in *Comœdia*, a short-lived artistic journal, in which he referred to "Les cinq Russes, les six Français et M Satie."

As Milhaud commented, the choice of the six members of the group was purely arbitrary.<sup>2</sup> It was a disparate group with differing musical tastes, temperaments and personalities. The common bonds were friendship and pleasure in making music together. The times were also propitious. After the horrors and privation of the Great War, Parisians, always notoriously reluctant to accept new ideas, were looking for entertaining diversions, and if there was also a delicious *frisson* of scandal, so much the better. There was no hint of scandal in the first (and only) collaboration in which all six members took part, the Album des Six, a collection of pleasant and inoffensive piano pieces.

The group's favourite bar was La Gaya at **22 rue Duphot**, near the Madeleine. When the bar moved to larger premises at nearby **28 rue Boissy d'Anglas**, the enterprising proprietor renamed it *Le boeuf sur le toit* in honour of Milhaud's recently-composed ballet.<sup>3</sup> The clientele became a Who's Who of 1920s Paris;

Gide, Hemingway, Mistinguett, Coco Chanel, Diaghilev, Braque and Charlie Chaplin were often seen there.

Cocteau's ballet *Les mariés de la tour Eiffel* was premièred at the **Théâtre des Champs Elysées** in June 1921. It was a commission from the Ballets Suédois with choreography by Jean Börlin. The music was composed by five members of Les Six; Durey declined to take part. To Cocteau's delight, there was a riot as members of the audience booed, hissed and threw missiles. Perhaps there was some justification in the audience's response; Poulenc expressed his opinion of the work succinctly in one word: "merde."<sup>4</sup>

Durey's secession in 1921 signalled the end of the group, which was never more than a loose association of friends. The members subsequently went their separate ways.

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### GEORGES AURIC

Georges Auric, born in Lodève in 1899, was a child prodigy. In 1913 his parents moved to **36 bis rue Lamarck** in Montmartre in order that their precocious son could attend the Conservatoire. From 1914 he also studied with D'Indy and Rousset at the Schola Cantorum.

At the age of 14 Auric wrote a perceptive and erudite critique about a piece by Erik Satie for a music magazine, and sent a copy to Satie. In due course Satie arrived at Auric's residence, asked to see the author of the article, and was astonished when he discovered that the author was a young boy.<sup>5</sup> Auric and Satie would become good friends until a major falling-out in the 1920s.

Auric began to compose before his tenth birthday and he was just 15 when his music was heard for the first time in public. The occasion was a Société Nationale de Musique concert which included some songs of Auric. In 1916 Auric met both Francis Poulenc and Jean Cocteau, who dedicated his manifesto *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* to Auric.

Before and during the Second World War, Auric lived in the south of France. In 1945 he moved to an apartment on the fourth floor of **90 rue Faubourg St Honoré** with his wife Nora, who was an artist of moderate talent. The Aurics' marriage was unconventional, even by Parisian standards. Nora had numerous lovers before becoming enamoured with Guy de Lesseps, the grandson of the constructor of the Suez Canal. De Lesseps, several years younger than Nora, moved into the apartment, acting as chauffeur and general factotum. Auric seems to have accepted the *ménage à trois* and he remained on good terms with Nora.

Among the music composed here were the ballets *La Fontaine de Jouvence* and *Phèdre*. His largest source of income came from film scores, including “The Lavender Hill Mob,” “The Titfield Thunderbolt” and *Moulin Rouge*. His song “Where is your heart?” from *Moulin Rouge* became a top ten hit.

It has been suggested that Auric squandered his talent by abandoning “serious” music in order to compose music for the cinema, but there is no doubt that his prodigious output of film scores made him a very wealthy man. In 1962 he was able to move into a luxurious apartment at **36 avenue Matignon**.<sup>6</sup>

1962 was a significant year for Auric; he was elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts and he also assumed responsibility for both the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique. In this latter role he worked hard to arrest the decline in standards of both houses. He resigned from the post in 1968. Auric was also president of SACEM, the French performing rights society.

Nora continued to take lovers in this singularly “open” marriage. The most significant of these was de Lesseps who still shared the apartment. Nora was grief-stricken when De Lesseps died in 1967.

By the late 1960s, Auric’s career as a composer of film scores was coming to an end and he turned his attention to chamber music. Between 1968 and 1976 he composed a number of pieces for various instrumental combinations which he entitled *Imaginées*.

Towards 1980 Nora developed Alzheimer’s disease. Her condition deteriorated rapidly and she died in 1982. Later in that year Auric married the soprano Michèle Battaïni in his apartment.<sup>7</sup> Michèle was some 50 years Auric’s junior. The marriage would be short-lived; Auric developed dementia and died in this apartment in July 1983 at the age of 84. He lies buried in the **Cimetière de Montparnasse**.

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### LOUIS DUREY

Louis Durey, the oldest member of the group, was born in an apartment at **46 rue de Rennes** on the Left Bank in 1888 to a bourgeois family; his father ran a printing business. Durey, the eldest of three brothers, showed little interest in music as a child, and the family assumed that he would, in due course, be involved in the family business. The property in which Durey was born is no longer extant.

In June 1901 Louis Durey’s father had a house built at **53 rue Boissonade** and moved in with his wife and three sons. Louis was the eldest and the second son, René, became a well-known painter in the artistic milieu that was Montparnasse.

Durey came to music late; for some years he assisted his father in the family business. The turning point was a performance of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* that Durey witnessed in 1909. He attended classes at the Schola Cantorum, but was largely self-taught. He came under the influence of the music of Satie and also of Arnold Schoenberg, who was beginning to experiment with atonal techniques and was moving towards serialism and the dodecaphonic music of the 1920s.

Durey served in the army during the early part of the First World War, an experience which entrenched his left-wing views. He would become a life-long member of the French communist party.

It was at the house in rue Boissonade, following the riotous performance of Satie's *Parade* in May 1917, that there took place meetings attended by Auric, Cocteau, the writer Blaise Cendrars and the artists Kisling and Durey's brother René. These meetings would culminate in the series of concerts at the Salle Huyghens. The first piece of Durey to gain public attention was *Carillons* in 1917. In 1921 his antipathy to Cocteau's publicity campaign prompted him to leave the group, and he moved to the south of France. The family home was demolished in 1959 to make way for an extension to the St Vincent de Paul hospital.

Durey did not return to Paris until 1930, after his marriage to Anne Grangeon, but retained his home in St Tropez. The rise of fascism and the Second World War entrenched his left-wing views and his politics became increasingly hard-line. He made settings of words by Ho Chi Minh and Mao Tse Tung.

Durey never wavered in his friendship with the other members of Les Six and, in 1952, he took part in a reunion concert. He died in St Tropez in 1979.

## ARTHUR HONEGGER

Honegger, born in Le Havre to Swiss parents, attended the Conservatoire from 1911 until 1918. He described his flat at **21 rue Duperré** (pictured), close to Pigalle, as “the apartment of my dreams.”<sup>8</sup> He lived there from October 1916 until the autumn of 1931. His flat on the fourth floor was spartan and rather austere, but clean. He was still a student at the Conservatoire but after Debussy’s death in 1918 he decided to leave. It was at the Conservatoire that he had met a fellow student, Andrée Vaurabourg, known as Vaura, who became his constant companion as well as the foremost interpreter of his piano music.



During his fifteen years here Honegger composed prolifically. In 1923 he produced his most famous work, *Mouvement Symphonique no. 1*, better known as “Pacific 2-3-1” which reflected his passion for railways. There was an opera in 1926, *Antigone*, a setting of a libretto by Jean Cocteau, after Sophocles.

Honegger also composed two large-scale biblical dramas, *Le roi David* (1921) and *Judith* (1925). The latter work was dedicated to the mezzo-soprano Claire Croiza who sang the title role. Honegger’s relationship with Vaura cooled as he became closer to Claire and, in 1925, Vaura learnt that not only was Honegger having an affair with Croiza, the singer was also pregnant. The following year Claire gave birth to a son. Honegger immediately acknowledged paternity and, just three weeks later, he married Vaura.<sup>9</sup>

Although now married to Vaura, Honegger insisted that he still lived alone in order to concentrate on composition in solitude. Vaura therefore continued to live in her old apartment, meeting her husband in the evenings and for holidays. This arrangement remained for most of their married life.

In 1931 Honegger moved to **1 square Emmanuel Chabrier**, not far from Parc Monceau, which would be his home until March 1936. Here Honegger composed much of his opera *Jeanne d’Arc au bûcher*. While living here he also wrote the strange little *Prélude* for sub-bass and piano and the *Sonatina* in E minor for violin and cello, both in 1932, the year in which he received a commission from

Wilhelm Furtwangler's Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra for a work which became the Symphonic Movement no. 3.

In 1932 his wife Vaura gave birth to their only child, a daughter named Pascale. At Honegger's insistence the couple still lived apart in order that Honegger should not be distracted from composition.

In September 1934, while on a motoring holiday in Spain, Honegger crashed his Bugatti at high speed. He escaped with a broken ankle but Vaura's injuries were much more serious, and for twelve months she was unable to walk unaided. She became so lonely and depressed that Honegger relented and agreed to allow Vaura to live with him for a trial period. The new arrangement lasted for less than a year; in 1936 Honegger moved back to Pigalle. He rented a studio on the third floor at **71 boulevard de Clichy** while Vaura and Pascale found another apartment nearby. Honegger lived here for the rest of his life. He still insisted that he live by himself. His wife and daughter were therefore ensconced in the rue Vintimille nearby while Honegger lived a semi-bachelor life with his vast collection of pipes.

In the seventeen years of life remaining to him Honegger composed a large body of work in every genre. Operas included *L'aiglon* (1936-7, in collaboration with Jacques Ibert) and ballets including *Le cantique des cantiques* (1937). Of his orchestral music Honegger considered his Symphony no. 3, (*Symphonie Liturgique*) composed in 1946, his finest symphony. He also composed much music for films. His last, and one of his most popular works, completed in 1953, was *Une Cantate de Noël*.

After composing the cantata, Honegger's health declined rapidly due to progressive heart disease. In 1955 Vaura moved into the apartment to care for him for the last few months of his life, and he died in her arms.

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## DARIUS MILHAUD

In 1909 17-year-old Darius Milhaud travelled to Paris from his home in Aix-en-Provence to become a student at the Conservatoire. He found lodgings in an apartment at **2 boulevard des Italiens** with a charming and hospitable family, the Montels.<sup>10</sup> Milhaud quickly immersed himself in the cultural life of the city, attending as many concerts as he was able. His friend from Aix, Armand Lunel, was also in Paris to study literature. Lunel wrote a number of poems which Milhaud set to music. His landlady, Mme Montel, had a pleasant voice and the ability to sing them at sight. With fellow students Milhaud also formed a string quartet which met here every Tuesday.

Milhaud had entered the Conservatoire as a violin student but he soon realised that his desire to become a composer could not be denied. He therefore resigned from the violin class in order to study with the pedagogue André Gédalge.<sup>11</sup>

In 1912 he decided that the time had come for him to live in his own flat and he moved to a small apartment at what is today **5 rue Paul Escudier**. An inveterate collector of antiques, Milhaud gradually acquired Second Empire furniture at Parisian flea markets and also coloured prints and some rare books.



One of the early pieces composed here was his String Quartet no. 1, a predominately diatonic work. Two years later, in his String Quartet no. 2, he began to explore the possibilities of polytonality. In 1915 Milhaud composed *Les Choëphores*, a setting of the second part of the *Oresteia* trilogy by Aeschylus, in the translation by the dramatist-diplomat Paul Claudel. After completing this astonishing work Milhaud joined Claudel's ambassadorial entourage in Brazil as his secretary, returning to Paris in 1919.

On his return to Paris Milhaud resumed his friendship with the young composers who had been his contemporaries at the Conservatoire who had formed the nucleus of the Nouveaux Jeunes. For two years the group met here together with guests including the soprano Jane Bathori and the pianist Andrée Vaurabourg. After visits to local restaurants and bars they would return to the cramped apartment to play their latest compositions. Favourites were Auric's *Adieu New York*, Poulenc's *Cocardes* and Milhaud's own *Le boeuf sur le toit*.

In 1923 Milhaud left this flat for a much more spacious apartment at **10 boulevard de Clichy** (pictured). The first work composed here is perhaps his best known, the ballet *La création du monde* in which he incorporated elements of jazz. In 1925 he married his cousin Madeleine, a talented actress who also became a noted producer and designer. Their marriage was a particularly happy one, spanning nearly fifty years.

Milhaud was an astonishingly prolific composer with over 400 works to his name, although the quality of his output was somewhat uneven. He was a versatile composer who produced music in virtually every genre, and in various styles.

His operas ranged from *Les opéras-minutes* (1927) to the large-scale *Christophe Colomb* (1928). There are also ten symphonies. Much of his chamber music is delightful, ingenious and shows superb craftsmanship.

At the outset of the Second World War Milhaud left Paris for America where he taught at Mills College in California. On his return, after the war, he discovered that his apartment had been ransacked by the Germans.

In 1947 he was appointed Professor of Composition at the Conservatoire, although he maintained his connection with Mills College. Milhaud gradually became incapacitated by rheumatoid arthritis, and towards the end of his life he was wheelchair-bound. He often gave lessons to his students from his bed.

He died in this apartment in 1974 at the age of 81. After his death his widow Madeleine continued to live here. She died in January 2008, shortly before her 106<sup>th</sup> birthday, having lived in this apartment for 83 years.

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### FRANCIS POULENC

A small plaque records that Francis Poulenc was born at **2 place des Saucisses**, (pictured) in January 1899. He came from a wealthy family; his grandfather was a founder of the Rhône-Poulenc chemical and pharmaceutical company.

Poulenc began to have piano lessons with his mother at the age of 5, before moving on to more advanced teachers. He also developed a taste for literature, in particular the works of Gide, Claudel and Valéry. In 1914 he heard Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" and became an admirer of that composer for the rest of his life. But it was listening to a recording of the music of Chabrier which transformed his life and made him determined to become a composer.<sup>12</sup> In 1915 Poulenc met the



Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes, who in turn introduced Poulenc to Georges Auric and Erik Satie. Poulenc would later hold Auric's musical judgement in high regard, and frequently submitted new works to Auric for his opinion.

Poulenc's mother died in 1915 and his father two years later. After the latter event Poulenc left this house to live with his sister and brother-in-law, a successful lawyer, at **83 rue de Monceau**. Poulenc's rooms were at the end of the courtyard above the former stables. His first compositions here were the *Trois Mouvements Perpétuel*, the Piano Sonata for piano duet and the *Rapsodie nègre*.

In 1918 he was called up for military service and hated every minute of it. After four miserable months he was imprisoned for ten days for overstaying his leave. He was finally demobilised in 1921. Realising that his knowledge of musical techniques was inadequate, he approached the pedagogue Charles Koechlin for lessons in harmony and counterpoint.<sup>13</sup> In 1923 Diaghlev commissioned Poulenc's best-known work, the ballet *Les biches*, which today is usually heard in the form of an orchestral suite. It was premièred in 1924.

As a young man Poulenc had difficulty in reconciling his homosexuality with his Roman Catholic faith. He referred to his sexual orientation as his "Parisian sexuality." His first serious relationship was with Richard Chanlaire, a young artist to whom he dedicated his *Concert Champêtre*.<sup>14</sup>

Poulenc was financially independent; his family's wealth was founded upon the chemical and pharmaceutical industries. In 1927 he was able to purchase a country house at Noizay in the Touraine. The house was in a poor state of repair and Poulenc took great pride in the painstaking renovation of the property.



In the late spring of 1936 François Poulenc acquired unfurnished rooms at **5 rue de Médicis** (pictured), a property owned by an uncle. To a friend he remarked that his new home "would be furnished in the style of a flea-market." For 200 francs he purchased a bed, an armchair and a piano stool. This property would be his home for the rest of his life, although he also spent time at Noizay.

In August 1936 the composer Pierre Feroud was killed in a horrific car accident in which his head was severed from his body. Poulenc was affected deeply by the gruesome nature of the death. When the news reached him he was staying near the

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