

Senior Citizens Music Appreciation Program

Date: April 14, 2025

Time: 10:30-noon

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### **April in Paris—Encounters with “Les Six”**

#### **I. Announcements**

- A. Blawenburg Band 135<sup>th</sup> Annual Concert: Kendall Hall, The College of NJ, Sunday May 18, 2025 at 3 pm (Free, donations accepted)
- B. PBS: “Now Hear This”, on Great Performances—April 11 (Chopin), 18, (Boccherini), 25 (Rachmaninoff) and May 2 (Ponce) Fridays on WNET, check dates and times for Philadelphia PBS station.

#### **II. Who Were “Les Six?”**

- A. A group of six French composers (George Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, and Germaine Tailleferre), initially labeled “Les Six” in a magazine article in 1920. Some were students together at the Paris Conservatoire while almost all were influenced by the composer Erik Satie. They also had a brash spokesperson in the poet Jean Cocteau, who in 1918 praised “avant-garde” music, gave an enthusiastic endorsement to Satie, criticized Richard Wagner’s operas and thought Debussy and impressionism in music were no longer quintessentially “French”, being too influenced by Russian music, such as the works of Stravinsky.
- B. Cocteau called for a return to melody, and an emphasis on simplicity and clarity in music. This was all happening after the end of World War I, when France had been the primary battlefield in the West and had suffered enormously. The artistic “explosion” of the post WW I era was underway, not only in music but in the visual arts—Pablo

Picasso, Georges Braque, Fernand Leger, Marie Laurencin and others were revolutionizing art, and works for the stage often involved collaborations between major figures from the visual, spoken and musical arts, such as Satie's ballet *Parade*.

- C. Even though "Les Six" were viewed as a group, they were individuals with their own voices. The group only produced two collective works—a suite of piano pieces and a play/ballet called "Les Mariés de Tour Eiffel" (which Durey did not work on), with a text by Jean Cocteau. Otherwise, they all had important careers in music, each going their own way and pursuing their personal artistic visions.
- D. Francis Poulenc reflected on the group in an interview in 1953.

"Our six names were often teamed up, and that was all it took for a critic looking for a slogan to call us Les Six, echoing the name given to the famous group of Russians [The Mighty Five of Russian Composers from the 19<sup>th</sup> century]. We never had a common aesthetic and our music was always quite different. For example, Honegger never liked the music of Satie, but he admired [Florent] Schmitt, who was Milhaud's and my bete noire."

- E. Sources of inspiration: Music hall music, jazz, music from non-Western cultures, Catholicism, Judaism, and many others. Roger Nichols summarizes well the overall "sound" of Les Six in this excerpt from his book *The Harlequin Years: Music in Paris, 1917-1929* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002).

'Just as the [Russian] Five had shaken off the earlier Italian influence on Russian music, so now the Six shook off the German. Both groups espoused a certain technical roughness, partly to demonstrate that they were not in thrall to an academic past, partly for the opportunities this roughness gave for individuality of expression...In the longer term, it led to many examples of fruitful cross-fertilization, bringing with them a number of more or less concealed political messages: that France was tough, that she still held to many of her traditional characteristics, that she was nonetheless flexible and accommodating

and that her elan vital was undiminished after four years of appalling slaughter.” (p. 265).

### III. Sampling of Works

- A. Georges Auric: Imaginees pour piano et clarinette sib, Opening Title for the film Beauty and the Beast (1946)
- B. Louis Durey: Sonatine pour flute et piano
- C. Arthur Honegger: Pacific 231, Symphony 5, “Di Tre Re”, final movement
- D. Darius Milhaud: Le Creation du Monde, Suite Provencale (selected movements)
- E. Francis Poulenc: Concerto for Two Pianos, first movement; Gloria (excerpt)
- F. Germaine Tailleferre: Ballade for Piano and Orchestra

### IV. Today’s Recordings

Music in Paris in the 1920s	Vox Alegretto ACD 8157
Auric...Poulenc Le Groupe des Six	Arion ARN 68652
Milhaud Symphonies 1 and 2, Suite Provencale	DG 435 437-2
Milhaud Le Carnaval de Aix, Other Works	Erato 3984-21347-2
Poulenc Gloria (with other French works)	Urania Arts WS 121.262-2
Francis Poulenc	Sony Classical
88875192942	
Honegger Symphonies 4 and 5, Pacific 231	EMI Classics 7 64275 2
Georges Auric: Beauty and the Beast	Naxos 8.557707

### V. YouTube Films

- A. Louis Durey: Trio for Oboe, Clarinet and Bassoon  
<https://youtu.be/s66no5pHjiQ?feature=shared>
- B. Georges Auric: Phedre, Suite Symphonique  
[https://youtu.be/dv0bnE\\_1O6Q?feature=shared](https://youtu.be/dv0bnE_1O6Q?feature=shared)
- C. Germaine Tailleferre: Sonata for Harp  
<https://youtu.be/Jkeg3fSGaHk?feature=shared>

- D. Arthur Honegger: Une Cantate de Noell  
<https://youtu.be/shTDEWgHNgQ?feature=shared>
- E. Darius Millhaud: Le Boeuf sur le Toit  
<https://youtu.be/9iqZ-lyUsNM?feature=shared>
- F. Francis Poulenc: Organ Concerto  
<https://youtu.be/HsFsBNAmCd0?feature=shared>

## **VI. Internet Sources**

- A. Louis Durey: Wikipedia  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis\\_Durey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Durey)
- B. Georges Auric: Interlude  
<https://interlude.hk/georges-auric-french-composer/>
- C. Germaine Tailleferre: Interlude  
<https://interlude.hk/the-turbulent-life-of-composer-germaine-tailleferre/>
- D. Arthur Honegger: Arthur-Honegger.com <http://arthur-honegger.com/en/biography/>
- E. Darius Milhaud: Darius Milhaud—Orphus en Aix  
<https://dariusmilhaud.org/biography/>
- F. Francis Poulenc: Biography  
<https://poulenc.fr/en/biography/>

## **VII. Next Session: May 19: The End of WW II—Music from 1945**