

# Variani records Poulenc music

By Mary Jane Doerr  
Special writer

Many classical music lovers aren't familiar with Poulenc's piano music. It has been far overshadowed by his more revered operatic, vocal and ballet music. Critics have always dismissed it as too shallow for serious consideration. The result is that only one pianist has recorded any of the piano literature.

Pianist Flavio Varani disagrees with the critics and in his first album, entitled "Poulenc Nocturnes," recently released by Orton Master Recordings of California (OIS 83451) he has recorded some of the works of this 20th century composer. Poulenc was a member of the group of "Les Six," all composers in Paris who rebelled against the excesses of Romanticism such as Wagner, the mysticism of Debussy and the vagueness of Debussy.

They were named for the similar movement in painting, Surrealism. Considered against the grandeur of Romanticism and the dissonance of so much of modern music, the simplicity of the style of Poulenc, led many people to discount the importance of their work.

Of the six, Poulenc's music is emerging as having the most endurance. Having died as recently as 1963, he is already being considered as one of the important composers of this century.

THAT POULENC is the contemporary "master of the melody" can be plainly understood when listening to his piano music. It is pleasing, always melodic, light and airy, gentle, never heavy, at times moody, with sudden changes of rhythm and feeling. Often it is very descriptive. For structure, Poulenc draws on a wide range of classical forms. No "piece" lasts more than one to three minutes with cycles never more than 10-15 minutes.

For this release of Varani's, which was recorded at the RCA studios in New York City, he has drawn a selection from Poulenc's middle period when the bulk of his piano music was composed, from 1927-1943.

"Nocturnes," from which the album is named, was a series of pieces Poulenc composed during the nine years from 1929-1938, years that span the time of his conversion to Catholicism.

The group describes a variety of moods connected with anything from balls to bells. In several pieces Poulenc's surrealism in music is clearly pictured as he alters and changes his melodies into other forms, such as in the lovely G Major Nocturne and the "Coda to the Cycle."

Poulenc was first recognized for his ballet compositions. He arranged the "Pastourelle" from his ballet "L'eventail de Jeanne." Its gentle style and changing rhythms gives a two-minute hint of the reason for that popularity in that idiom.

The Suite Française comes from a chamber music work of the composer written in 1936. It consists of a number of delightful dances in various tempos and moods, two branles, a pavane, and even a military march. The cycle concludes with a "carillon" number.

Though Poulenc's style is not muscular, the Tocata from "Trois Pieces," composed in 1928, comes the closest on the album to being anything of a

"showpiece." Though there is nothing easy in the technique, Poulenc obviously composed for melody.

BETWEEN his religious moments and his vulgarity, we are never really sure when Poulenc is being humorous. In his Valse-Improvisation he is being humorous about the number of compositions on the letters in Bach's name. Varani dedicated this number to Vladimir Horowitz who seems to be enamored of such pieces.

Varani's interpretation of this music is very spontaneous and free, using tempo rubato throughout. Comparing this record with the only other records available, the three of French pianist Gabriel Tacchino, Varani comes forth with a warmer, tone and richer elucidation of the music.

He produces a great many different sounds from the piano. While the Frenchman tends to be clearer in some of his phrases and is certainly more deliberate in his mood, his is a very dry approach.

Varani's use of the pedal is justified by Poulenc's own insistence, especially in his early piano music, on "beaucoup de pedale." The greatest difference between Varani's style and that of Tacchino's appears in the "Carillon" where Varani's jerky and erratic approach gives a rather good imitation of the sound of a carillon, more than the academic approach.

It seems rather ironic that Poulenc's music, composed in rebellion against Romantic music, benefits from the Romantic qualities Varani brings to it. It is a beautiful record and one worth adding to a record collection.

THE RECORD is jacketed with a picture of Varani in front of a Calder stable taken at the Detroit Institute of Arts and backed by a personal story of Varani's contact with Poulenc when Varani was a student in Paris.



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Discount Records in Birmingham has albums in stock (\$9.49) and other stores can order the record in about 3 or 4 weeks.

Varani, a Birmingham resident, is chairman of the piano department at Oakland University. He has appeared frequently with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra at Meadow Brook Festival. Each summer he appears at the Bay View Music Festival and with the International Chamber Music Festival in Munich, Germany. Each winter he tours South America.

Varani won first prize at the International Chopin Competition in Spain. He holds a master's degree from Manhattan School of Music.

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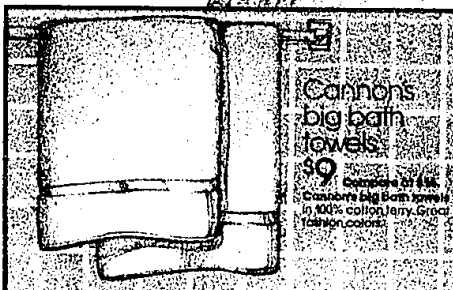
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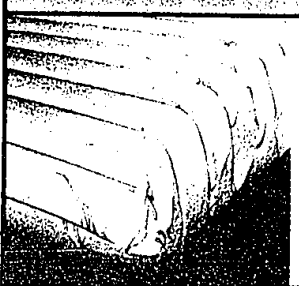
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