

# *Chansons à Boire* for Wind Quintet and Piano – Commentary

## Hannes Taljaard

*Chansons à Boire* is an attempt to understand the world in a playful manner. Of course, games sometimes teach serious matters. Maybe this work will encourage reflection on the world we live in. The composition is meant to evoke 'cosmic laughter' – Benjamin Zander's term – that smile we feel when we realise that our intense efforts are standing between us and our moments of insight. “*How fascinating!*”

I've never been captivated by drunkenness, mine or anybody else's. So, this work is not an 'Ode to being Drunk'. It presents a bunch of wits. Some of the wits are nitwits. Some say more, even in their inebriated state. The second movement wants to tell important stories.

The present version of the work has four movements and it was written in one university town, Potchefstroom, for another: Grahamstown.

This commentary should never be inserted into the programme. Listeners should preferably listen during concerts, and not read programme notes. The commentary can be used as a basis for a preconcert talk, or it can be distributed before or after the concert. However, the texts of the composition (or paraphrases) should preferably be available in some format for listeners during the concert. This can be in the form of printed notes, or a data projection. Even better, artists can base a dramatic sketch on the composition – similar to a project that we presented in Vienna in November 2024. This project was based upon my composition *Sing saam met My!*

### I Préambule

In 1922 Francis Poulenc composed *Chanson à Boire*, a song for the unaccompanied male voices of the Harvard's Glee Club. It is a setting of an anonymous text. I recomposed Poulenc's piece by changing the order of themes and textures and also by casting Poulenc's material into other harmonic moulds. My version also expresses the anonymous text. Listeners who are familiar with Poulenc's choir piece – especially those listeners who recognise the texts while they are being 'sung' by the woodwinds – will most likely appreciate this movement more than those who have never heard Poulenc's very entertaining chanson. The original text is presented in the programme notes, even though I have set the words in a different order. I hope that listeners will experience finding the appropriate words as a game of 'Hide and Seek' between performers and listeners.

Vive notre Hôtesse  
Qui, sans cesse,  
La verre à la main  
Nous met en train.

Long live our hostess!  
She who without fail  
and with glasses in her hands  
lifts our spirits.

Vive notre Hôtesse  
Qui, sans cesse,  
Bannit loin d'ici  
Le noir souci.

Long live our hostess!  
She who without fail  
drives our dark sorrows  
to far away places.

De mille traits elle assaisonne  
Les mets exquis qu'elle nous donne.  
Avec elle on est sans façons.  
Rien n'est si bon.

With thousand marvels  
she seasons her exquisite dishes.  
With her, one can forget ceremonies.  
Nothing is better.

Ses beaux yeux pleins de feux

Those beautiful, fiery eyes,

Sont des puissantes armes	powerful weapons!
Tout mortel sous les cieux	Every mortal on earth
En éprouve les charmes.	is charmed.
Sur les charmes les plus puissant	She carries Victory
Ele remporte la victoire.	with her potent charms.
Qu'elle reçoive notre encens!	Thus, let her receive our incens!
Et que tout parle de sa gloire!	And let all proclaim her glory!
J'ai trop bu mais ne boirai plus.	I've drunk too much, but I will stop now.
(Anonymous)	(Translated by Hannes Taljaard)

## II Choral

One often reads that Poulenc juxtaposed the sacred and the profane in his works. We might never know the reasons for this, and we might remain always curious about the 'degree of seriousness' behind his intentions. I took my cue from him when I recomposed this movement after the first performance of *Chansons à Boire* by the **Grahamstown Sextet** in June 2012 in Grahamstown. Each listener can decide how seriously this second movement should be taken.

The original version of this movement had an introduction and then five choral verses alternating with solo improvisations for each of the instrumentalists. It was rather bland.

In the newer version of the movement, the introduction and the chorale verses remained the same, but now they alternate with quasi-improvisatory sections based upon exquisite folk songs from Auvergne. I took the folk songs from the collection *Chants d'Auvergne* for voice and orchestra by Joseph Canteloube, Marie-Joseph Canteloube de Malaret (1879 – 1957), a work that I love and highly recommend in spite of Béla Bartók's severe criticism of Canteloube's arrangements of the folk songs. I think Béla was a bit stiff on this matter. What's wrong with Joseph's having some fun with music? The movement will make sense when the listener follows it as if it were a scene from an opera and for this reason the lyrics of the Auvergnian folk songs can be presented in some way before or during performances in the various beautiful dialects and in (my) paraphrase translations. Listeners who are familiar with these beautiful songs will appreciate this small opera even more. Familiarising yourselves with the eight folk songs before listening to my Quintet version is advised. To me, it is as if real people are just waiting for the chance to jump out of these songs and into our lives. Listeners who prepare themselves before the performance by studying these songs, will be true participants in a 'Game to Create Meaning'.

Those who like to analyse music will find various relationships between the pitches used in the chorale verses and in the improvisations that follow each chorale verse. These hidden relationships tell their own stories and present my thoughts regarding how religious dogmas and ideas meet, or fail to meet, real people and their real needs in a real world.

The movement starts with an introduction that is a 'call to prayer'. Or is it a drunken parody of a call to prayer? The text is presented in the bassoon:

Mes Soeurs, et mes chers Frères!	My Sisters and Brothers!
Approchez-vous engouillant!	Approach while kneeling!

An overview of the movement is presented below, followed by transcriptions of the folk songs. Each wind instrument presents characters in the drama. You can imagine people sitting around a table, sharing their experiences, and telling stories of people that they know or of whom they have heard. The text of each of these improvisations is sometimes one phrase or verse only of a folk song, but sometimes also two or all of the phrases or verses simultaneously. The performers can be inspired on each occasion by their personal choice of the text that they want to convey to the listeners. The listener can attempt to guess which text is being sung.

For many years now I have been inspired by the words of the Russian linguist/philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin: “*A person has no internal sovereign territory. We are always looking through the eyes of another into the eyes of another.*” Choral is one more fruit of this inspiration.

### **The structure of this movement**

#### Introduction

#### Chorale Verse 1

Improvisation: *L’Antouèno* (flute)

#### Chorale Verse 2

Simultaneous Improvisations: *Pastouro sé tu m’aymo* (flute) & *Pastourelle* (bassoon)

Improvisation: *Lo Fiolairé* (flute)

#### Chorale Verse 3

Improvisation: *Jou l’Pount d’o Mirabel* (oboe)

Meditation: flute, oboe, clarinet

#### Chorale Verse 4

Improvisation: *Obal, din lo Coumbèlo* (horn with bassoon and clarinet)

#### Chorale Verse 5

Improvisation: *Uno Jionto Pastouro* (clarinet with oboe)

Improvisation: *La Delaïssado* (oboe)

## L'Antouéno

**Rude et Sonore** ♩ = 58

Quand o - no - rên \_\_\_\_ o lo fiè - iro, ié! \_\_\_\_ Quand o - no - ren \_\_\_\_ o lo  
 Croum - po - rên u - no ba - quet - to, ié! \_\_\_\_ Croum - po - rên u - no ba -  
 La ba - quet - to \_\_\_\_ sé - ro mé - ouno, ié! \_\_\_\_ La ba - quet - to \_\_\_\_ sé - ro

5  
 fiè - iro, ô! \_\_\_\_ Li \_\_\_\_ o - no - rên touï dous, \_\_\_\_ l'An - touè -  
 quet - to, ô! \_\_\_\_ La \_\_\_\_ croum - po - rên touï dous, \_\_\_\_ l'An - touè -  
 mé - ouno, ô! \_\_\_\_ Leï cor - noi sè - roum pèr bous, \_\_\_\_ l'An - touè -

9  
 no! Li \_\_\_\_ o - no - rên touï dous! \_\_\_\_  
 no! La \_\_\_\_ croum - po - rên touï dous! \_\_\_\_  
 no! Leï cor - noi sè - roum pèr bous! \_\_\_\_

*When we go to the fair, together; we will buy a cow, together.  
 The cow will be mine, and the horns will be yours, Antoine!*

## Pastouro, sé Tu m'aymo

**Un peu animé** ♩ = 104

Pas - tou-ro, sé tu m'ay - mo, sou - la - djé lou mió mal! Croum - po - rês u - no rau - bo, un  
 Pas - tou-ro, sé tu m'ay - mo, sou - la - djé lou mió mal! Tou - toi ley flours nou - bè - los, t'en  
 Lèys o - gas - sos t'en cri - doun: "Mi - o, ré - bi - lho - té! E! days - so leys o - gas - sos, o

7  
 pou - lil do bon tal; c lèys au - très pos - tou - ré - los n'au - ron pas un oy - tal! Ti ou - li ou -  
 fo - ray un ro - mèl; e leys au - très pos - tou - rè - los n'au - ron pas un ton bel!  
 may les o - gas - sous! E te - nèn nos - tré prou - mes - so: Nous cal ay - ma tony - dous!

13  
 li ou - li ou - li ou - li ou - la la! Ti ou - li ou - li ou - li ou - li ou - la! Ti ou - li ou - li ou - li ou - li ou - la!

*If you love me, ease my pain: Buy me a dress, a beautiful apron that will fit me perfectly.  
 Then the others will not have something like that!*

*I will make you a bouquet of fresh flowers, and the others will not have anything as beautiful.  
 The magpies are chattering: "Beloved, wake up!"*

— Oh, let them be, the magpies and their chicks! And let us keep our promise: let us love each other!

## Pastourelle

Doux et tendre ♩ = 44



E pas - so \_\_\_ dè dè - saï! \_\_\_ E pas - so \_\_\_ dèl - laï l'aï - o! \_\_\_  
 Né po - no - di pas pas - sa! \_\_\_ Cou - çï bo - nos qué ièu pas - si? \_\_\_  
 Au - rias lèu \_\_\_ un ba - tèu \_\_\_ sé tu è - ros pou - li - do! \_\_\_

5  
 \_\_\_ Bèn - dras ol - près dè ièu qué d'o - faï - ré \_\_\_ par - lo - ren, \_\_\_ e  
 \_\_\_ N'aï pas dé pount d'ar - ca - dos è n'aï pas \_\_\_ de ba - tèu; \_\_\_ ni  
 \_\_\_ Au - rias un pount d'ar - ca - dos, au - rias un \_\_\_ pas - tou - rel \_\_\_ què

10  
 lou re - stan del jjour \_\_\_ n'en par - lo - ren d'a - mour! \_\_\_  
 maï dé pas - tou - rel \_\_\_ què mè sias - co fi - dèl! \_\_\_  
 té sé - rio fi - del \_\_\_ è maï djus - qu'al toum - bel! \_\_\_

*Ah! Come here, to this side! Meet me here and we will talk of love the whole day!*

*I cannot. How can I? I don't have a bridge with arches. I don't have a boat.*

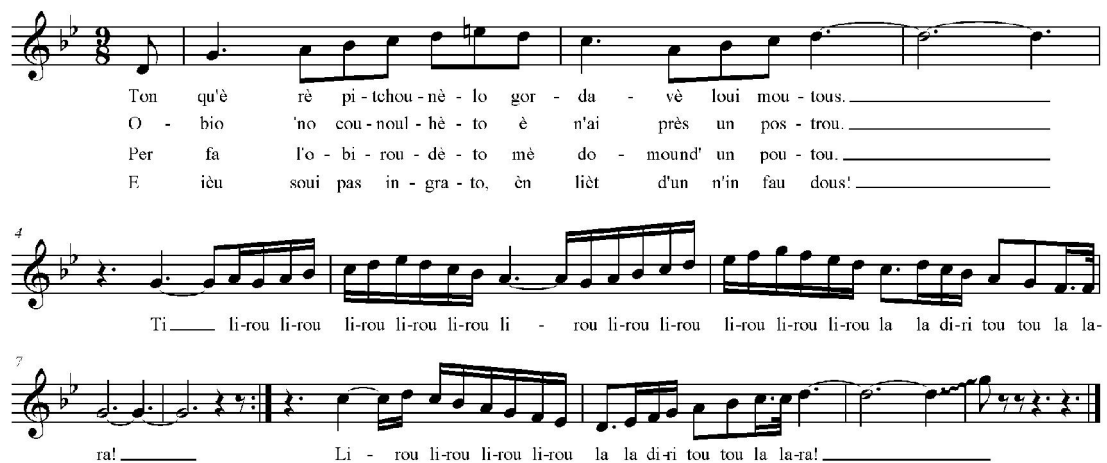
*I don't even have somebody who will remain true to me.*

*You would have had a boat, if you were pretty.*

*You would have had a bridge with arches, and a faithful lover, loving you to the grave.*

## Lo Fiolairé

Rapide et léger ♩ = 92



Ton qu'è rè pï - tchou - nè - lo gor - da - vè loui mou - tous. \_\_\_  
 O - bio 'no cou - noul - hè - to è n'ai près un pos - trou. \_\_\_  
 Per fa l'o - bi - rou - dè - to mè do - mound' un pou - tou. \_\_\_  
 E ièu soui pas in - gra - to, èn lièt d'un n'in fau dous! \_\_\_

4  
 Ti \_\_\_ li-rou li-rou li-rou li-rou li-rou li - rou li-rou li-rou li-rou li-rou la la di-ri tou tou la la-

7  
 ra! \_\_\_ Li - rou li-rou li-rou li-rou la la di-ri tou tou la la-ra! \_\_\_

*When I was young, I guarded sheep. And when I was older, I found a shepherd.*

*As payment to look after my sheep, he asked for a kiss.*

*And because I am not an ungrateful person, I gave him two.*

## *Jou l'Pount d'o Mirabel*

Assez allant mais simple ♩ = 64

Jou l'pount d'o Mi - ra - bel \_\_\_\_\_ Co - to - ri - no lo -  
 Ben - guè - rou o pos - sa \_\_\_\_\_ très co - bo - lhès d'or -  
 Jou l'pount d'o Mi - ra - bel \_\_\_\_\_ Co - to - ri - no plou -

4  
 ba - - - - bo. \_\_\_\_\_ Jou l'pount d'o Mi - ra - bel \_\_\_\_\_ Co -  
 ma - - - - do. \_\_\_\_\_ Ben - guè - rou o pos - sa \_\_\_\_\_ très  
 ra - - - - bo. \_\_\_\_\_ Jou l'pount d'o Mi - ra - bel \_\_\_\_\_ Co -

8  
 - to ri - no lo - ba - - - - bo. \_\_\_\_\_  
 - co - bo - lhès \_\_\_\_\_ d'or - ma - - - - do. \_\_\_\_\_  
 - to ri - no plou - ra - - - - bo. \_\_\_\_\_

*At the Mirabel bridge, Catherine was bathing.*

*Three soldiers on horseback passed.*

*At the Mirabel bridge, Catherine was crying.*

## *Obal, din lo Coumbèlo*

Large ♩ = 52

O - bal, din lo \_\_\_\_\_ coum - bè - lo... \_\_\_\_\_ Tro - lo - lo-lo \_\_\_\_\_ lo lo lè - ro lô!  
 Los très fil - hoy \_\_\_\_\_ del Prin - ce...  
 N'yo duoy qué ri - zou \_\_\_\_\_ è con - tou...

6  
 O - bal din lo \_\_\_\_\_ coum - bè - lo \_\_\_\_\_ l'yo un pom-mié \_\_\_\_\_ d'o-mour.  
 Los très fil - hoy \_\_\_\_\_ del Prin - ce \_\_\_\_\_ l'y soun o l'oum-bro de - jiou. \_\_\_\_\_  
 N'yo duoy qué ri - zou \_\_\_\_\_ è con - tou, \_\_\_\_\_ l'au - tro plou-ro \_\_\_\_\_ tou-tjiour.

10  
 \_\_\_\_\_ L'yo un pou - mié \_\_\_\_\_ d'o - mour. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ L'y soun o l'oum - bro de - jiou. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ L'au - tro plou - ro - tou - tjiour. \_\_\_\_\_

*Far away in a valley three princesses were passing time in the shade of an apple tree, a tree of love.*

*Two were chatting and singing. One was crying.*

## *Uno jionto Pastouro*

Modéré ♩ = 60

U - no jion - to pas - tou - ro, un d'o - què - cé mo - tis, os - sí -  
 "Ga - ro, sé - rio bè ou - ro qué fou - gues - so tour - nat! Cáu -  
 "Ah! pau - ro pos - tou - rè - lo! Dé - lays - sa - do soui yèn cou -

5  
 ta - do su l'er - bè - to, plou - ro soun bel o - mi.  
 co pos - tou - ro may - to soun cur au - ro dou - nat!"  
 mo lo tour - tou - rè - lo qu'o per - du soun pou - riou!"

*One morning a beautiful shepherdess was sitting on the grass, mourning her beloved.*

*"It will soon be time for his return. He gave his heart to another.*

*Ah! How pitiful I am, forsaken like the dove who has lost her companion."*

## *La Delaïssado*

Triste ♩ = 52

U - no pas - tou - rè - - - lo, ès - pèr' o laï al capt del  
 "Ay! soui de - laïss - sa - - - do! Qué n'aï pas vist lou mio ga -

4  
 bouès lou ga - lan do - gué - lo, mè né bèn pas!  
 lant... Cré-sio qué m'aï - ma bo, è ton l'aï - mé iéu!"

7  
 Lau-zi-guèt l'es - tè - - - lo, a - què - lo qué mar - co la nuèt, é lo

12  
 pau - ro pas - tou - re - let to dé - mou - rêt à plou - ra.

*Since dawn she had been waiting for her beloved, but she did not see him.*

*"Ah! I am forsaken. I believed that he loved me, and I love him."*

*When the evening star appeared the frail, unfortunate shepherdess was still crying.*

### III Complainte

This simple and short movement is an arrangement of the melody of *Complainte* for solo piano by Francis Poulenc. The simplicity of the arrangement is deceptive, especially for the clarinet, bassoon and flute. The harder they work, the simpler the music will sound. There is no text for this movement, and every listener can take this third movement as a commentary on the drama of the previous movement (Choral) of my composition.

### IV Cadence

Composing literally means ‘putting together’. When I was assembling this movement, I had loads of fun with a well-known piano piece by Poulenc, which served as the mental backdrop – the stage, props and characters – for the drama of my *Chansons à Boire*. Poulenc created *Les Soirées de Nazelles* in 1936 to the memory of his ‘Tante Liénard’ who had passed away the previous year. By 1954 he was already condemning this very popular composition of his. Even as early as 1938 the composer George Auric (a friend of Poulenc’s) suggested that *Les Soirées de Nazelles* lacked merit and could just as well be destroyed. Nevertheless, the idea of Poulenc sitting at the piano in La Lézardière (the house of Virginie Liénard in Nazelle) improvising short compositions in order to sketch (maybe tease?) some of his friends is very entertaining. Fun with music...

I took Poulenc’s ambivalence towards his composition as a starting point for parodying a few themes from *Les Soirées de Nazelles* in the second and fourth (penultimate) section of this movement. You might forever be wondering about the degree of irony behind my intentions when I quote Poulenc’s music in this movement. The surprising closing section of this movement obviously draws its inspiration from another of Poulenc’s works. But which one?

### Closing Comments

Over the last hundred years or so composers have often been reproached or reprimanded when their compositions ‘fail to communicate’. We should indeed be concerned and passionately involved with the communicative potential of music. Lack of communication can certainly be the result of certain choices made by composers. A lot has been said and written about **Those Bad Modern Composers** and there is often truth in the accusations. But nowadays it is really quite common, even commonplace, to allocate the blame to composers exclusively as if there were nobody else who can and should take responsibility for communication.

This document is an invitation to listeners (and performers) to become co-creators of meaning and to enter into a rich interaction with composers and performers, and even other listeners. To experience my *Chansons à Boire* as communication, listeners can prepare themselves by studying Poulenc’s *Chanson à Boire*, his *Soirées de Nazelles* and the folk songs from Auvergne quoted above. I hope it will be worth the effort! When we explore together the rich communicative potential of music in terms of processes of interaction between real people in the real world, we will discover something even more precious. We will learn the many ways in which music is a *transformative* art.