



Garçon!

This is perhaps going to be a difficult story to tell, because it depends on knowledge of a particular piece of music, but let's see if I can describe it well enough for this to make sense!

In my late teens, during the last couple of years at high school, and after my first (and only) year at university, I spent some time each summer at a music camp run by the youth orchestra organization in Vancouver. I say 'camp' but there were no tents or campfires involved; the organization took over an entire school in a small town in rural British Columbia, and for a period of some weeks this became a perfect 'heaven' for music buffs such as myself. Hundreds of students lived side-by-side with dozens of instructors, and all day every day was non-stop music making.

The first time I had been to this camp it had been as a very junior student, but only a couple of years later I was one of the instructors, doing double duty: teaching flute and conducting wind ensembles. There was a major concert every weekend, but in addition to this, a more informal concert was held every evening in the large school hall. It was a performance at one of these weekday concerts that I remember particularly well.

A group of the younger instructors, myself included, were scheduled to perform the Poulenc Sextet for piano and winds. We had been rehearsing it earlier in the day, and one of the senior instructors - clarinetist William McColl - had happened to pass by, heard us playing, and stopped to chat with us.

We had been playing the first movement of this piece, at a place where the fairly frantic and robust opening music gives way to a slower central section. At this point the music becomes very languid and elegiac, almost dreamlike; Bill told us how every time he heard this it conjured up for him the image of a French café, with a haughty waiter dispensing drinks to the patrons. He encouraged us to try and see this image too, to help us create the proper 'feel' for our performance.

Now these rehearsals were of course very informal; other students were constantly coming and going, and camp life was buzzing all around us. Unknown to us in the group, this conversation had been overheard ...

We now move forward a few hours, to that evening's concert. There was no formal stage; the performers sat in a cleared area at one side of the large room, and then after each piece returned to their own places in the audience. A small group of the junior students acted as floor managers, setting and resetting the chairs and music stands for each group as required. When our turn came, we moved forward and took our places, not particularly noticing that a few extraneous small tables were nearby. We began to play.

We progressed through the opening movement. The Sextet is a robust and vivid work, and you can be sure that everybody in the audience was paying attention. After a few minutes, we came to the bassoon solo that marked the change of mood, and a moment later, the piano began the languid theme, full of rubato.

And at this point, a door suddenly opened at the side of the hall. Out into the room came a waiter. A perfectly attired, perfectly French, waiter. Black trousers and white shirt, bow tie, and long white apron over his legs. His upheld arm, on which was draped a white cloth, carried a silver tray. It seems that our drink order had arrived. With an utterly disdainful look on his face, playing his part to perfection, our good friend violin-

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ist Murray Zimmerman moved quietly around the stage as the music played, placing a tall drink for each of us on the nearby small tables.

We - startled at first though we had been - didn't miss a beat; on the contrary, we played the dreamy music to perfection! The audience was spellbound, watching and listening in absolute silence.

Our waiter finished his serving work, and then - completely ignoring everybody in the hall - returned the way he had come, the door closing behind him just in time for the completion of that section of the piece.

We finished the performance as planned, but when we took our bows at the end - to very enthusiastic applause - Murray also came out to join us. Talking to him later we learned that after overhearing the rehearsal conversation he had approached Bill McColl with the idea, and the two of them had put it all together, in time for the concert.

And now, as you might expect, I can never hear that piece without seeing our waiter come into the room, and vividly feeling the appropriate languid mood of Poulenc's music.

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