

TRANSCRIPTION OF AN INTERVIEW WITH PIERRE ARVAY FOR THE RADIO SHOW *CHER AMI*, BROADCAST ON 9 APRIL 1963.

Presenter: *Cher ami*, a radio show with Jacqueline Lenoir...

Jacqueline Lenoir: ... And today's show is all about Pierre Arvay.

You'll be familiar with Pierre Arvay's music. He's composed songs, such as *Il a fallu*, *Sammy*, *Le Pont des Arts* and *La Centenaire*. But he's also composed music that evokes the future, symphonic pictures, and strange and poetic legends. Pierre Arvay is a true musician, whose skills are rich and diverse, and who's embarked on a career that we will continue to hear about for years to come.

And yet Pierre Arvay is a modest person. He's not interested in advertising, which can be so lucrative these days. Nor does he resemble other musicians – either physically or morally.

I made his acquaintance through this programme, and immediately he seemed to me someone who is very different from other people working in this field, with his calm temperament, courtesy and a constantly demonstrated kindness. Like many creators, he also has a sort of inner dreaminess, which, to a certain extent, keeps him detached from everyday life. I found him very likeable, very balanced, and as far as I could tell, it would be difficult to find any significant flaws in him. Moreover, he's a Libra – and Librans are often calm and fair-minded.

So, what shall we do, my dear friend? I don't seem to be able to find any flaws in you, so which one would you like to tell me about first? Which one tips the scales of your star sign?

Pierre Arvay: My greatest flaw is pride. It's a terrible flaw. It comes, of course, from far back, and has led to other flaws; for example, it's brought out anger and violence. That's nothing to be proud of...

J. L.: I find it, above all, quite strange, because sometimes pride can be a quality, and it's not often that pride brings out anger and violence. Often, on the contrary, pride resembles scorn. So please, tell me more.

P. A.: There's also a certain sensitivity that has come from this pride. But I think we have to go back to the start. I think that it comes – or at least did come (I'll explain why later) – from a huge complex I had, and it's probably this complex that led to all these things.

J. L.: And I suppose that what lies behind your pride is an inferiority complex?

P. A.: Yes, of course, like everyone else. And I believe that these things have their roots in childhood.

And yet the first part of my childhood, from age three to nine, was wonderful. We were living in Provence and every time I think back to it – and believe me, I often do, as it's a connection that I've never broken – I can still smell the geraniums and mimosa. It's fantastic. But then my father had some major financial problems, and all the bad things arose from that...

J. L.: What did he do?

P. A.: He was a violinist. But then he made some very bad business deals and we came to Paris. And it was a disaster, a complete shock. We went from having a wonderful life to living in a small, squalid hotel – of which there are still so many in Paris. We were living in poverty, and it was just appalling.

As a 10-year-old child, I wasn't really fully aware of all that. I don't think a child really suffers from that kind of thing. He realises it afterwards, and that's what happened. It all started towards the age of fifteen, when I really became quite a bad child. And that's when this pride that I told you about was born. I didn't like to show myself as I really was – someone who was miserable physically, on the outside. And yet it was quite obvious, with my trousers full of holes and the peculiar condition of my shoes.

J. L.: And you rejected this poverty?

P. A.: Most of all, I wouldn't accept the way I felt about it. Or, to be more precise, the way others made me feel because of this poverty. Because you know, children can be very cruel.

J. L.: Between themselves, yes.

P. A.: I must admit that when I was at school, it was really unpleasant. The head teacher would ask which children needed shoe vouchers or trousers, and I'd put my

hand up. It was really difficult, because I had to put my hand up. If I didn't, I knew that I wouldn't have any shoes. It was awful. And then the children would make fun of me, quite nastily.

All this led to a certain pride at that age.

J. L.: You might say there was a need for revenge?

P. A.: Maybe. Yes, I think you're right. It all gets mixed up together: the sensitivity, the pride, the anger that came from all that.

I was very strong, physically, at that age. When I was twelve, I was already as big as I am now. At the time, of course, that made an impression. Because I was strong, it wasn't difficult for me to throw a few punches. And where I lacked satisfaction in other areas, I found it in fighting. I would punish anyone who made fun of me – and quite severely. But I also suffered terribly from this.

They'd walk away with a bloody nose and I...

J. L.: While you were bleeding inside.

P. A.: Yes. It was quite ugly and it got worse. Then, obviously, I was incredibly lucky to have a gift. And I used this gift. I liked to take advantage of this superiority over certain others.

J. L.: When you talk about a gift, you mean music?

P. A.: Yes, music, of course. And you might say I took advantage of this gift in quite a nasty way. For example, I'd find it amusing to play a tune on the piano, off by heart, something that I'd only heard two or three times. Then I'd turn to the others with a triumphant laugh and say, 'See if you can do that!'

J. L.: So in the end, it was quite nasty, quite hateful?

P. A.: Yes, absolutely.

J. L.: And as you got older, this hate was transformed into violence?

P. A.: Yes, terribly so. Because I wouldn't accept anything anyone said, the slightest rebuke. Basically, I wouldn't accept anything.

J. L.: You wouldn't accept humiliation.

P. A.: That's exactly it. Maybe because I'd already experienced it. I was a real terror! Everyone around me was scared of me, and I hadn't yet understood that it was much easier to tame with caresses than with punches.

J. L.: So how did you come through this, Pierre Arvay?

P. A.: I can't really say that it was all down to me. I think I had a quality: I wasn't at all selfish. And I think that's maybe what helped me the most. I was lucky enough to meet the woman who is my wife and I think it was from then on that I realised, after some very violent scenes, that things just couldn't carry on like that. I couldn't make everyone around me miserable just because of my pride. Plus I was so lucky to have music, and that was something that was just wonderful. So gradually, I tried to conquer all that.

J. L.: Through love.

P. A.: Absolutely. In fact, I believe that love alone can conquer anything. Afterwards, things got better for me. I managed to overcome this flaw, and I can tell you, it was such a huge relief – not so much for me, but above all for those around me. And it was all down to constant affection and patience.

J. L.: And also the security that your wife gave you?

P. A.: Yes, but I think most of all, it was the admiration I had for her. She was very young when we got married; she was 17 years old.

J. L.: And how old were you?

P. A.: I was 25. So she was very young, but she showed so much patience... She can be very firm, and that helped me a lot. She never let me see her weaknesses. At first, I tended to see that as a problem, but gradually I realised that it was something completely different. She was driven by very strong feelings for me.

J. L.: We could just say that she loved you.

P. A.: And yet it took me ten years to overcome all that. If only you knew how simple things seem now...

J. L.: Compared with how they were then?

P. A.: Yes.

J. L.: It seems to me that you've become a very calm, level-headed, cheerful, affable man. These are all character traits that are associated with Librans. And you were born under the sign of Libra.

P. A.: And Libra is all about balance!

J. L.: Yes – which you found.

P. A.: Let's say I was given help to find it. The circumstances were right and it all came together.

J. L.: It's really incredible, Pierre Arvey, that a woman so young should have such strength of character.

P. A.: I'm going to tell you a little anecdote that will give you a very good idea of what our relationship was like.

One day, I got very angry, horribly angry. I took the table that was in front of me – it had already been laid – and I turned it over. I stamped on it and broke the legs. Then I took the chairs and I broke them too. I was in such a fit of rage; it was anger at its ugliest.

And I hadn't noticed that in my fury, my rage, my violence, my wife had left the room. Then she came back and, at the height of my rage, right in front of me, I saw the most despicable face.

J. L.: But why?

P. A.: I'll tell you why! Because my wife had placed a mirror in front of me. And I saw... What I saw was a monster, a true monster – a dishevelled, red-faced man with bloodshot eyes. Just awful.

She taught me a wonderful lesson. After that, whenever I began to get angry, whenever I began to feel that rage building inside me, I would always think of that episode with the mirror. It played a big part in helping me to get rid of this flaw.

J. L.: She had excellent teaching skills! We might say that you were brought into this world twice, Pierre Arvey: once by your parents, and once by love.

P. A.: I think so. But let's say it was love both times.

J. L.: All in all, Pierre Arvey, I'm coming to realise, with some satisfaction, that you are a perfectible man.

P. A.: I only really had one major flaw – and that was this pride of mine. And maybe there were other things, but everything's a bit mixed up; it's difficult to be precise. But I think that all of this was also due to the fact that my father had very little time to take care of us. He was always off somewhere, looking for ways to earn money. My mother looked after all of the children. There were six of us, but I had a little sister who died when she was very young. So we weren't actually looked after that much and you might say we lived a little like savages – real savages! It was very unpleasant because the only way I could defend myself was with my fists. Gradually things calmed down a bit, but the flaw was there from the beginning.

J. L.: So in the end, you were a rebel.

P. A.: Let's say I was full of hate. I had this hatred for society. For example, at the time, I couldn't understand why my father wasn't able to find work. And then later, of course, I knew why: it was because he wasn't French. At that time, he was still Hungarian and there was a law – I can't remember what it was exactly – but there was a limit on the number of foreigners an orchestra was allowed to hire. So he couldn't work. And we had nothing. And I couldn't understand why, because my father was so talented. But that's another matter... All these things meant that I hadn't had a proper upbringing and I couldn't defend myself with words. All I had was my physical strength.

J. L.: And you left home when you were young?

P. A.: Very young. I argued with my father – we didn't see eye to eye. I was fifteen and a half when I left home and then I began to struggle on my own. I was lucky at the time, because I met a very kind woman. She was the wife of a painter and extremely knowledgeable. She'd had a very good education. And she'd known me since I'd lived in Montmartre. She helped me to understand many things, and I studied a lot with her. Obviously, I'd given up school and I wasn't attending secondary education. It was pretty bad! But she helped me a lot.

J. L.: And did you immediately know that you wanted to make music?

P. A.: Oh yes, straight away. I'd always known. Even when I was little, when we lived in Cannes, I learned to play the violin. I couldn't have imagined doing anything other

than music. And I continued my studies afterwards. Some very kind teachers gave me free lessons. It was very generous of them, and a great show of friendship.

J. L.: But in addition to this major flaw, which had such a devastating effect during your early years, I suppose there must be other, smaller ones?

P. A.: Oh yes. I'd even say there are quite a few! But they're all related. For example, there's greed. I'm a gourmand, I love to eat. Actually, now I'm not so much a gourmand anymore; I'm a gourmet. But after life had been so cruel to me when I was younger, I had my revenge. When I began to make money, I'd go to the bakery and splurge on cakes. I'd become a terrible pig. I would eat and eat; I'd stuff myself with food! There's no other way to describe it.

J. L.: It was a sort of bulimia.

P. A.: Absolutely. And there was something else too. It was such a joy for me when, one day, I stepped into a men's clothing boutique on the Champs-Élysées and had twelve shirts tailor-made for me, with my initials on them. I was so happy, it was amazing! This was also about me taking revenge. But when I think about all that now, it seems so ridiculous at the end of the day.

J. L.: I don't know... You know Gilbert Bécaud, of course. And perhaps you know that he, like you, had a very difficult, quite miserable childhood. Like you, he had to wear patched-up trousers and socks full of holes, and he was terribly ashamed of it all. When he was invited to another child's house with other children, he didn't like to go, because he didn't want to be seen. And then, I think it was two years ago, he went to Spain and he ordered a 'traje de luces' – a 'suit of lights'. Basically, he spent a fortune on an item of clothing that he will never wear. I think that, too, was a sort of revenge for him. It's a bit like your 12 monogrammed shirts!

P. A.: That's exactly what it's like!

J. L.: And as for all those cakes, you devoured them as an adult, while as a child, you would never have been able to buy them. You're right when you say that all of this is a kind of revenge. But in the end, you don't really have a flaw, Pierre Arvey. You went through a difficult time in your life and now it's behind you.

P. A.: You know, I think that in reality, no-one really has flaws. I think that there's a reason behind these things. And once that flaw has been born, it's because there was a

reason for it to be born. Consequently, the flaw itself is not really a terrible thing for the person once he or she is fully aware of it. I think that the most important thing is to be aware of it. And above all, we must remember that we live with people who love us, and that if we don't get rid of some of these flaws, life is just impossible.

J. L.: Pierre Arvey, how long do you think it's taken you to learn all this?

P. A.: Well, I'm 38 years old now, but it's only really now that I'm beginning to live my life. Now I have the chance to start life properly – a chance I didn't have during my adolescence. And the more recent years – let's say from age 23 to now – have taught me many things: how to be calm, to have confidence.

I know that in the end, life's what you make it. I think that now I have the right conditions – I've brought love and security into my personal life, and my professional life. And I think, because of that, I can now say that I really am a happy man and above all capable – I hope – of making others happy.

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