

TRANSCRIPTION OF AN INTERVIEW WITH PIERRE ARVAY FOR THE RADIO SHOW *RENDEZ-VOUS À 5 HEURES*, BROADCAST ON 17 JANUARY 1961.

Extract from *Il a fallu*.

Pierre Divoire: This song, *Il a fallu*, sung by Yves Montand, was composed by Pierre Arvay.

You may not have heard of Pierre Arvay, but you've probably heard his music. He has made a huge contribution to radio, having written pieces of music that are often used on radio stations. But, Pierre Arvay, you have also written some songs, such as this one, *Il a fallu*, for Yves Montand.

Pierre Arvay: I was so impressed by Montand. In fact, I still am, because the more he does, the more extraordinary he is. So when I wrote this song, I always had Yves Montand in mind, and it was almost as if he became a part of it.

Michel Vaucaire gave me the lyrics and I immediately thought of Yves Montand.

P. D.: You've composed a few other songs for other artists – or that other artists have chosen (I'm not sure how these things work) – and particularly Michèle Arnaud.

P. A.: Yes, *Le Pont des Arts*.

P. D.: Who wrote the lyrics for *Le Pont des Arts*?

P. A.: Jean Lambertie.

Extract from *Le Pont des Arts*.

P. D.: Your music was also performed by an artist with a very different style: Annie Cordy.

P. A.: Ah yes! She sang *Sammy*. The lyrics were penned by Maurice Korb [Editor's note: who wrote this song under the pseudonym of Maurice Marc], who's the brother of Francis Lemarque.

P. D.: Really? I didn't know that Francis Lemarque had a brother who wrote lyrics.

P. A.: He does. In fact, not only does he write lyrics, he's also a second-hand bookseller! You'll see him on the banks of the Seine, his mind elsewhere. Often I go and see him and he always has the same 'dreadful' story to tell: 'Somebody's gone and stolen one of my books again!' He's always got his head in the clouds, and he's always writing songs.

Extract from *Sammy*.

P. D.: Of course, Pierre Arvay, you don't become a songwriter just like that, completely by chance. Well, it could happen, but that's not how it happened for you. You trained as a musician.

P. A.: But to write songs you don't really need this training. It could even be considered a handicap!

P. D.: Is that so? In what way?

P. A.: I think it can be a handicap because when you write a song and you already have a musical background, you tend to get lost in pointless harmonies. You look for beautiful chords, you change the melodic line to see if you can include a harmony that would work better, that the musicians will like, but which won't actually do any favours to the song.

For me, a song is something that should just come naturally; it should flow. There are people who are incredibly gifted at doing just that – and they're the people who are the best in this field. We have some amazing songwriters, such as Francis Lemarque, Charles Trénet, Léo Ferré – although actually Ferré had a more extensive musical background than the others.

P. D.: So to sum up, for you, songs have just been an enjoyable interlude in your life as a musician?

P. A.: Writing songs is always very enjoyable. I still write them occasionally. The last one is still sitting in the drawer. Again, it was composed to accompany the lyrics written by Jean Lambertie. It's a nice song, but now I'm not doing anything with it. I must admit that when you write songs, there's a terrible chore that comes with it: finding a well-known performer to sing it. It's unbearable.

There are some artists who'll give you very sound feedback, such as Yves Montand, for example. But then there are others who come out with meaningless gibberish and drivel.

You sit and wait for six or seven months for them to give you an answer. And then it turns out that the idea for the song was in the air, and somebody else thought it was a good idea. And without knowing it, that person wrote a similar song – a song that the artist preferred to yours. And that's it. It's all over.

I really want to put all of that behind me. I don't think I'll ever be brave enough again to do what I did back then – to just sit and wait for artists to get back to me. And then there are all the disappointments that come afterwards. It's really quite unpleasant. But most of all, I wanted to be doing something else. Maybe that's why I didn't persevere.

P. D.: I was saying earlier on that you were a bit of a godsend for people working in radio. In general, all radio show producers use accompanying music, which is usually well chosen (I say 'usually'...), and you composed several pieces of music for the radio.

P. A.: Would you like to know how this all came to be?

P. D.: Yes. Why did you do it? What made you think of it?

P. A.: One day I was in a recording studio, and a radio show producer was there. He was looking for something in a small suitcase. It turned out he was looking for particular titles, and I'd hear him say, 'This one's good.' Then he'd look again, going to the very bottom of his suitcase, and say, 'Ah, maybe this one.' And so on. And I thought to myself, 'My goodness! Wouldn't it be a great idea to make an LP with different tunes for different situations? That way a producer would only need one record to find music for lots of different moods.' I wrote these pieces of music specifically for the radio, so that producers would no longer have to look for music for their shows. And there was definitely another thought at the back of my mind. I said to myself, 'If I do this, it will be used a lot, and that could be a very good thing for me!'

Tango du clown.

P. D.: Having listened to *Tango du clown*, we're going to try and find a different mood. What piece of music could we listen to?

P. A.: I have a suggestion: a compromise between Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky, a piece of music with a romantic mood. Let's listen to *Concerto Digest*.

Concerto Digest.

P. A.: I'd like to add that I'm not the only person who's written music for radio. Roger Roger wrote some very good music, and André Popp as well of course. And Calvi.

P. D.: Ah yes, Gérard Calvi, of course!

P. A.: And there must be others too. I apologise for any I've forgotten!

P. D.: There are foreign composers – British ones, for example.

P. A.: Ah yes. The British write a lot of production music. The French not so much.

P. D.: Given that you're someone who's very gifted at creating a particular mood, it seems only natural to me that you should compose film music.

P. A.: Of course, but then it's a different problem. Up to now, I've written lots of film music, but for short films. I've written eighty pieces of music. I've never been asked to write music for a feature film, or else I've been asked to do so but under rather irregular conditions. I'd be told, 'So-and-so is a well-known name; you're not. So it would be good if we could put his name to the music, but you orchestrate it.' I've always refused that kind of thing. I don't want anything to do with it.

P. D.: Earlier, you mentioned Gérard Calvi. You were one of his fellow students.

P. A.: That's right. Gérard Calvi was at the Conservatoire with me [Editor's note: Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse de Paris] – or you might say I was at the Conservatoire with him!

But I didn't stay there very long, for various reasons. The main person responsible for my musical education (or lack of it) is my father, who was a wonderful violinist and an extraordinary man.

P. D.: You too, you played a musical instrument, didn't you? Weren't you a pianist?

P. A.: I must admit that I have completely given up the piano. I never play it anymore.

P. D.: But don't you compose music on the piano?

P. A.: Oh no, certainly not!

P. D.: How do you compose your music? Do you just take a sheet of paper and write the notes?

P. A.: Yes, that's right.

P. D.: And can you hear the notes in your head as you write them? I always find that so amazing...

P. A.: Yes, everyone says that. But it's not really that amazing. Although maybe it is one of the magical sides to music. A magical, marvellous side.

P. D.: So when you write a score, without ever having listened to what you've written, do you imagine exactly what the final result will be like?

P. A.: Not exactly, no. I don't think so. I wouldn't go that far! You can hear the music in your head, but when it's played by an orchestra, there are always surprises. Always! There's some truth in what Ferruccio Busoni said: 'Music is made to be read, not heard.' He was exaggerating, of course, but there's something to it all the same.

P. D.: You mentioned the orchestra. You compose 'serious' music – symphonic music, concert music.

P. A.: Yes. But most of all, I write the music I want to write. If I want to write a song, then I write one. If I want to write library music, then I do. I'm lucky to be able to do that.

P. D.: You don't agree with classifying into genres. For example, you don't agree when someone says, 'Ah, he's just a songwriter'?

P. A.: No, not at all. It's important to write what you want to write, but trying not to go too far from what the audience likes or expects; I think that's the trend for symphonic music at the moment.

You write what you want to write, the rest doesn't matter.

P. D.: Could you give us an example of one of your purely symphonic compositions?

P. A.: Well, there's *Images Symphoniques*, which includes a piece of music called *La Fête fantastique*. It was performed this year by the Orchestre de la Société des concerts du Conservatoire symphony orchestra, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and conducted by Manuel Rosenthal. I must say, this was one of my greatest joys.

Extract from *La Fête fantastique*.

P. D.: Do you enjoy listening to your own music?

P. A.: Yes, it's very enjoyable! It can also be quite moving. You always wonder, despite yourself... You can say time and again that you don't write for the public, of course, but you always wonder how the public will react.

P. D.: Well I'm going to do something that you'll like, and that I hope – in fact, I'm sure – our listeners will also like. I'm going to play an extract from a concert that was recently given in Cannes. Do you know what I'm referring to?

P. A.: Yes, you're referring to the concert conducted by Jacques Bazire.

P. D.: That's right. And it included one of your works, whose name, moreover, is quite surprising, given the names of your other compositions.

P. A.: The *Suite biblique*, or at least an extract from the *Suite biblique*. There was *Sabaoth* and *Le Quatorze du mois de Nisan*.

Sabaoth and *Le Quatorze du mois de Nisan*.

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