



# Poulenc

The Story of Babar

**Miriam Margolyes**

**Simon Callaghan**

# Francis Poulenc

## The Story of Babar, the Little Elephant (1940-45)

Music by Francis Poulenc  
Words by Jean de Brunhoff  
(based on a story by Cécile de Brunhoff)  
English text by Nelly Rieu

1	The Story of Babar	5.17
2	After some days...	7.29
3	Meanwhile, in the Great Forest...	3.31
4	Off they went!	2.45
5	Then Cornelius, the oldest elephant...	3.44
6	The Wedding of Babar	2.33
7	The party was over	2.30
	Total playing time	27.51

Produced by Adrian Farmer & Simon Callaghan  
Music recorded by Nimbus Records at Wyastone, Monmouth, UK 9 August 2020  
Narration recorded by Rohan Onraet in London 16 August 2020.  
This recording was made under social distancing guidance relating to COVID-19  
Photo of Miriam Margolyes © Jennifer Robertson – Kyte Photography  
Photo of Simon Callaghan © Kaupo Kikkas  
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A delightful set of circumstances combined to produce the beloved masterpiece, *Babar*. The journey began in 1930 when Laurent and Mathieu, sons of French author and illustrator Jean de Brunhoff were told an enchanting bedtime story by their mother, Cécile. So moved were the young boys by the curious tale of the young elephant's adventures, that they asked their father to create illustrations. The resulting book initiated a series that was to be the crowning achievement of Jean de Brunhoff's short professional life, and that of his son Laurent, who added further volumes following his father's death in 1937. The children have acknowledged that the story originated with Cécile de Brunhoff, who, feeling that her contribution was too small to be credited, requested that her name be removed from the publications.

In a heart-warmingly similar situation ten years later, Poulenc was spending time with the granddaughter of one of his cousins. Noting that she became bored with the music he was playing, Poulenc put Brunhoff's *Babar* on the piano and began to improvise, to the great delight of the young girl. The musical ideas born that day were to simmer away at the back of Poulenc's mind until he completed the work in 1945. It was premiered on French radio the following year.

Many have drawn parallels between the narrative of the *Babar* story and aspects of Poulenc's own life, which perhaps endeared the story to him. Hervé Lacombe in *Francis Poulenc*, Paris, Fayard (2013) summarises the situation: 'the premature death of his mother, nostalgia for his original environment (for Babar, the forest), the child's gratitude and success (King Babar), naïve enjoyment and love of parties, a taste for funny situations, the ideal life of the idealised couple (papa-maman or Francis-Raymonde) and dreamy thoughts of the stars (coda)'.

Oxford born **Miriam Margolyes OBE** is a veteran of stage and screen. Winner of the BAFTA Best Supporting Actress award in 1993 for *The Age of Innocence*, Best Supporting Actress at the 1989 LA Critics Circle Awards for *Little Dorrit* and a Sony Radio Award for Best Actress in 1993 for *Oliver Twist*. Career highlights include: Film: Yentl, Little Shop of Horrors, End of Days, Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*, Cold Comfort Farm, Magnolia, The Life and Death of Peter Sellers, Being Julia, Ladies in Lavender, The Legend of Longwood, and Professor Sprout in two of the *Harry Potter* films. On Television: Bucket, The Real Marigold Series, and Margiold on Tour, Doc Martin, Merlin, Trollied, the Miss

Fisher Murder Mysteries, Life & Loves of a She Devil, Blackadder, Oliver Twist, Vanity Fair, Dharma & Greg, Murder at the Vicarage, and Dickens in America. On Stage: I'll Eat You Last, The Importance of Being Miriam, Blithe Spirit, The Importance of Being Earnest, The Way of the World, The Vagina Monologues, Romeo & Juliet, She Stoops to Conquer, Orpheus Descending, The Killing of Sister George, Dickens' Women, Endgame, Me & My Girl, A Day in the Death of Joe Egg, Neighbourhood Watch, and Madam Rubinstein. Miriam's many Audio book performances include: Oliver Twist, Great Expectations, Lewis Carroll's 'Alice' books, Matilda, Pinocchio, The Worst Witch series, The Queen & I, The Little White Horse, The Sea, and Troy & Wise. Her voice has been heard on commercials including The Manikin Cigar, Cadbury's Caramel Bunny, PG Tips and Dolmio. Miriam played the central character of Vera Sackcloth-Vest in the BBC Radio comedy-drama *Gloomsbury*.

Pianist, **Simon Callaghan** has been praised for his 'velvet-gloved pianism of ravishing sensitivity' (*The Strad*). A Steinway Artist, Simon Callaghan performs internationally as a soloist and chamber musician. His recent tours have taken him to Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Canada and throughout Europe, and he has performed at all of the UK's major concert halls. Simon has a particular interest in bringing rarely performed works to new audiences. He has made two recordings for *The Romantic Piano Concerto* (Hyperion), the first - Roger Sacheverell Coke's Concertos with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and Martyn Brabbins - reached no. 2 in the classical charts. Simon's first solo disc for Hyperion, premiere recordings of works by Nicodé, was released in 2019 to critical acclaim, with *Gramophone* praising his 'superb artistry'. Simon's discography also includes solo works by Sterndale Bennett, Parry and Sacheverell Coke, chamber music by Brahms, Schumann, Chopin and Ravel, and recordings of music for two pianos by Parry, Sherwood and Delius with duo partner Hiroaki Takenouchi. The most recent addition to Simon's catalogue of solo recordings features sets of miniatures by Schumann and Poulenc, released in 2019 on Nimbus. In chamber music he has collaborated with Feng Ning, Jack Liebeck, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Alexander Sitkovetsky, Nicholas Daniel, Raphael Wallfisch and the actors Miriam Margolyes, Timothy West, Prunella Scales, and Samuel West. Simon is Director of Music at Conway Hall, where he oversees one of the longest-running chamber music series in Europe. He recently completed a PhD at the RNCM researching the works of Roger Sacheverell Coke (1912-72).