

# Jocelyne Binet's *Cycle de Mélodies*: Unearthing a Forgotten Song Cycle

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### ABSTRACT

Jocelyne Binet (1923–1968) was a French-Canadian composer and professor of composition at the École de musique Vincent-d'Indy (1951–1957) in Montréal and Laval University (1957–1968) in Québec City. Although primarily remembered for instrumental works, her 1955 *Cycle de Mélodies sur des Poèmes de Paul Éluard* was programmed in the same year by the French baritone Gérard Souzay in a performance that was most likely the world premiere.

Unfortunately, Binet's *Cycle de Mélodies* was never published and the work was soon forgotten. In addition, Souzay—who was a prolific recording artist—never recorded the songs, further contributing to their obscurity. Upon her death, Binet's papers were donated to the Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec, where the archive has remained ever since.

In the fall of 2016, the author of this poster presentation discovered the original handwritten manuscript pages for the *Cycle de Mélodies*. He began reconstructing the score with the help of a professional engraver as well as current scholarly editions of the poetry of Paul Éluard (1895–1952). An onsite visit to the Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec in the spring of 2017 yielded some additional insights as well.

This musicological scavenger hunt led to some interesting discoveries: who—for instance—is François Bernier (to whom the score is dedicated), and how many songs are in the cycle, six or seven? Who was Souzay's pianistic collaborator at the world premiere? This poster paper introduces this work to a new generation while attempting to answer these questions and others.

Binet's cycle enters the public domain in 2018, and the *Cycle de Mélodies* will be published in this year by Classical Vocal Reprints. The author has also programmed Binet's cycle on several recent and upcoming recitals, and these are most likely the first performances of this forgotten work in over sixty years.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Éluard, Paul. *Oeuvres complètes, tomes 1 et 2*. Lucien Scheler and Marcelle Dumas, eds. Paris: Gallimard, 1968.

McGee, Timothy. *The Music of Canada*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985.

Souzay, Gérard. *Gérard Souzay raconte: Fables, dessins, dialogues, et recontres*. Paris: Archimaud, 2000.

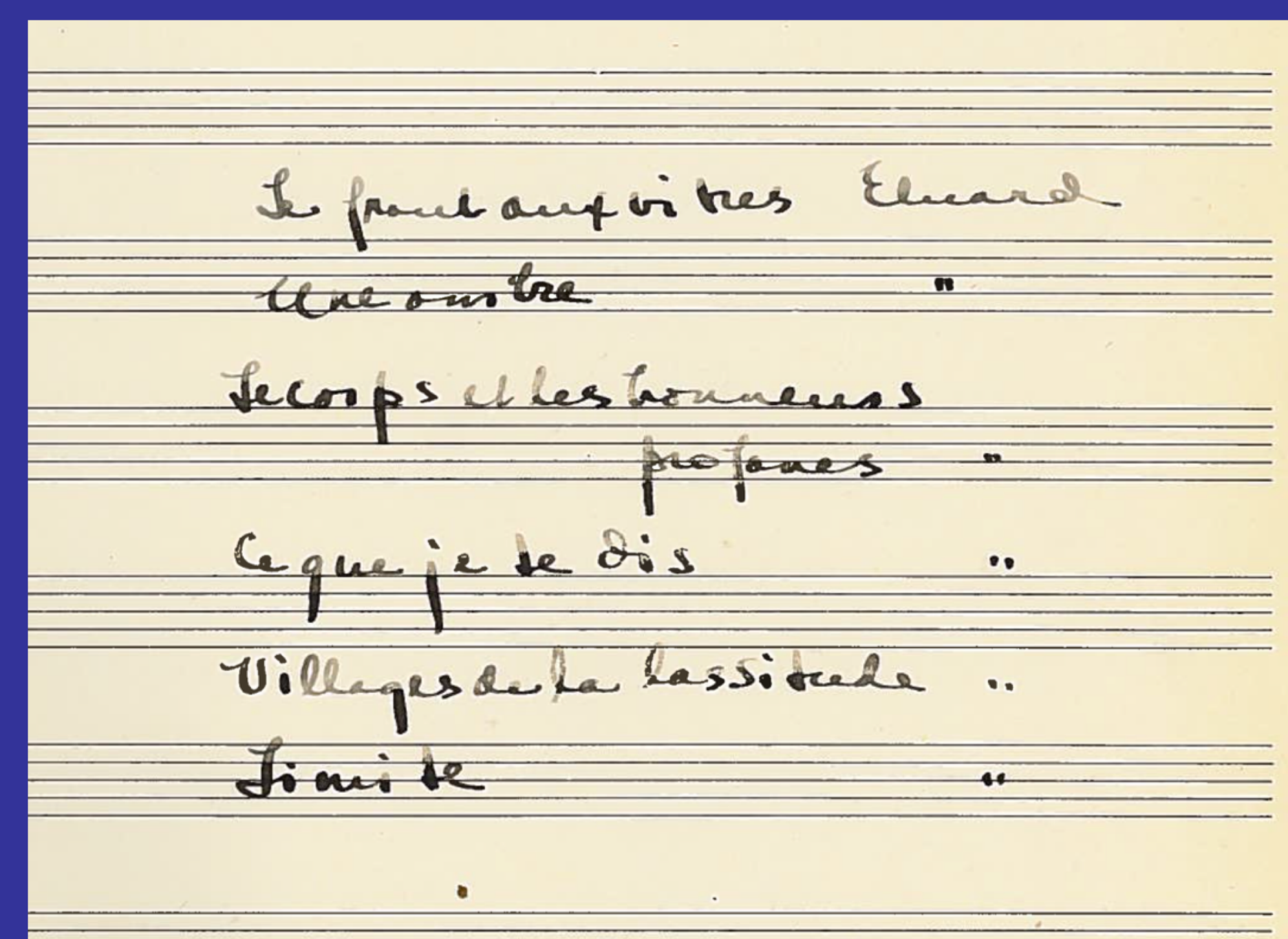
### RECONSTRUCTING THE SCORE

This project's origins are as follows: The author – a Gérard Souzay enthusiast – noticed this work listed as a piece of new music performed by Souzay in 1955, the same year the piece was written (as dated on manuscript). This performance was most likely the world premiere.

This was particularly interesting because Souzay was not particularly known as a performer of new music. Especially compared to his contemporary Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, relatively few composers wrote works with Souzay's voice in mind. Notable exceptions include Jacques Leguerney (many songs and cycles), Arthur Honegger (*La danse des morts*, 1938), and Igor Stravinsky (*Canticum Sacrum*, 1955). Mid-career, Souzay's interest in performing new music seems to wane considerably.

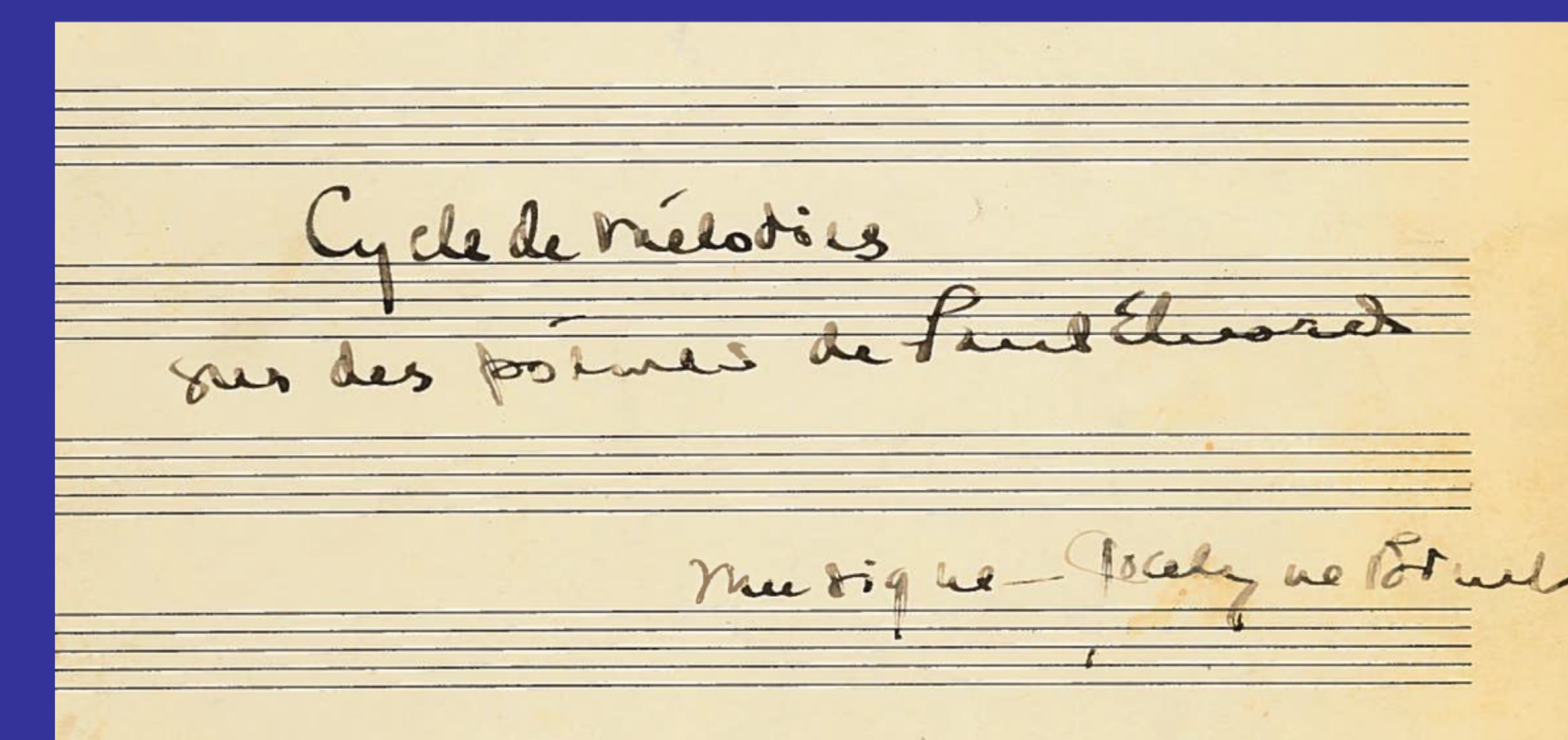
The author's extensive personal Gérard Souzay discography and online database searches (OCLC and others) revealed that the piece had never been recorded. This was significant, because Souzay was a prolific recording artist. In addition, Glendower Jones initially had never heard of the piece. This is also significant, because Jones's knowledge of song literature is exhaustive. He later confirmed that it had never been published.

Liza Weisbrod, music librarian at Auburn University, helped the author track down the Jocelyne Binet archives, which are currently housed in the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ). French-language request was then submitted to BANQ inquiring about the manuscript to *Cycle de Mélodies*.



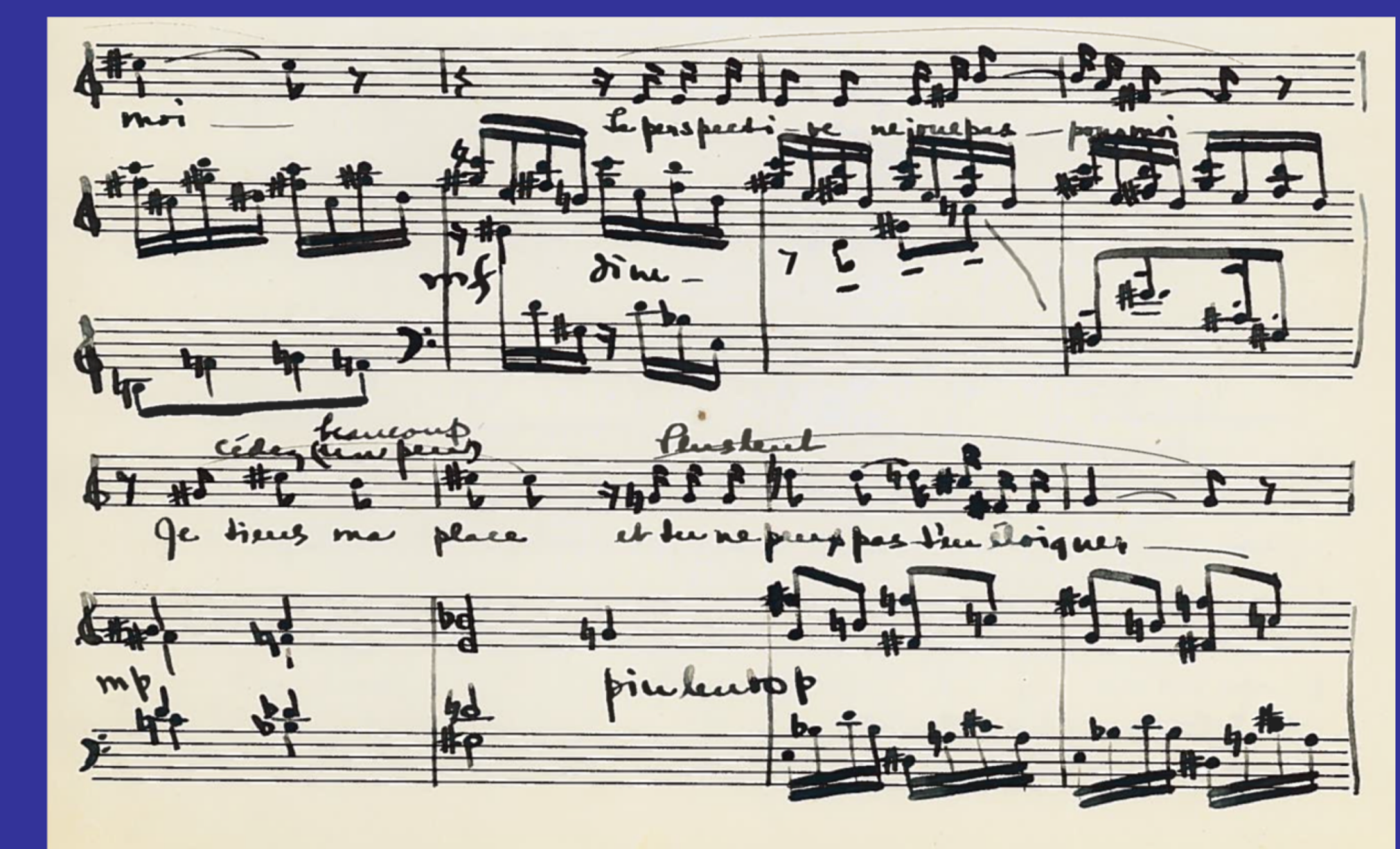
In September of 2016, PDF scans of the complete manuscript are emailed to the author. The score consists of ten pages (one cover page, one contents listing, and eight pages of music) in Binet's handwriting. While the music is somewhat clear, much of the French is maddeningly indecipherable.

The total number of songs, according to both the contents page and the music itself, is six, not seven as indicated in *Historica Canada* and other online databases that catalog Binet's works. This determination was an important discovery.



Range and tessitura of the *Cycle de Mélodies* strongly suggests that Binet was writing with Souzay's baryton voice in mind. The style of the cycle owes much to Francis Poulenc (1899–1963) and Jacques Legerney (1906–1997), both of whom were writing in a similar style during this time period. Like Poulenc and Leguerney, songs are not unified by any sort of tonal or pitch-class cohesion. Motives and ostinatos support freely chromatic melodic lines that are governed more by the natural declamation of Éluard's poetry. Form is dictated by punctuated stanzas and shifts in poetic meaning. Double inflections in the same vertical sonority indicate Binet's preoccupation with the linear nature of lines as opposed to the spelling out of chords/vertical harmony in the traditional sense. Like Poulenc, Éluard's poems are drawn from disparate collections with little thematic unity between them. Cohesion is brought about through the composer's overall organization, stationing of content, and motivic ideas as opposed to unification of text and imagery. All songs are rather short, ranging from only 9 measures (Songs II and VI) to 29 measures (Song I). Erratic tessiturae (similar to Poulenc's songs written for Bernac's baryton-martin voice) are also a hallmark of the cycle.

### ÉLUARD SOURCES



#### Song I:

"Le front aux vitres..."  
Poem XXII from "Premièrement"  
from *L'amour la poésie* (1929)

#### Song II:

"Une ombre..."  
Excerpt of "Sans rancune"  
from *Mourir de ne pas mourir* (1924)

#### Song III:

"Le corps et les honneurs profanes..."  
Excerpt of "L'univers-solitude"  
from *À tout épreuve* (1930)

#### Song IV:

"Ce que je te dis..."  
Excerpt of "Défense de savoir, Part II"  
from *L'amour la poésie* (1929)

#### Song V:

"Villages de la lassitude..."  
Excerpt of "L'univers-solitude"  
from *À tout épreuve* (1930)

#### Song VI:

Limite ("Le corail imprévu de la fureur...")  
"Limite" from "Draperies noires et blanches"  
from *Le livre ouvert, Part II* (1942)