

Maurice Ravel

“*Alborada del gracioso*”

JOSEPH MAURICE RAVEL WAS BORN IN CIBOURE NEAR SAINT-JEAN-DE-LUZ, BASSES-PYRÉNÉES, IN THE BASQUE REGION OF FRANCE JUST A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SPANISH BORDER, ON MARCH 7, 1875, AND DIED IN PARIS ON DECEMBER 28, 1937. HE COMPOSED “ALBORADA DEL GRACIOSO” AS A PIANO PIECE IN 1905, ORCHESTRATING THE WORK IN 1918. THE ORCHESTRAL PREMIERE WAS GIVEN IN PARIS ON MAY 17, 1919, RHENÉ-BATON CONDUCTING.

THE SCORE CALLS FOR TWO FLUTES AND PICCOLO, TWO OBOES AND ENGLISH HORN, TWO CLARINETS, TWO BASSOONS AND CONTRABASSOON, FOUR HORNS, TWO TRUMPETS, THREE TROMBONES, TUBA, TIMPANI, CROTALES, TRIANGLE, TAMBOURINE, CASTANETS, SNARE DRUM, CYMBALS, BASS DRUM, XYLOPHONE, TWO HARPS, AND STRINGS.

In 1905 Ravel composed a set of five piano pieces under the title *Miroirs* (*Mirrors*). Three of the five individual works—*Une Barque sur l’océan*, *Alborada del gracioso*, and *La Vallée des cloches*—were all later orchestrated. The most successful of these reclothed pieces is certainly the *Alborada del gracioso*. In its original keyboard format, the piece is filled with powerful accents and impossibly fast repeated notes that are a challenge to even the most gifted virtuoso. Such overwhelming technical demands almost cried out to be translated to the orchestra, especially for a composer like Ravel, to whom the art of transcribing from piano to orchestra was a welcome challenge, one that he met repeatedly with remarkable success.

The title of the piece is evocative, if a bit mysterious. “*Alborada*” is the Spanish equivalent of the French “*aubade*,” the Italian “*alba*,” and the German “*Morgenlied*,” all of them “dawn songs,” a characteristic genre from the lyric poetry of the Middle Ages. Generally they are conceived as being sung by a friend watching out for the safety of two illicit lovers. As the night wanes, the friend, outside the bedroom window, sings that the dawn is approaching and that it is time for the lovers to part. (In Act II of his opera, Wagner employed the same genre of the “dawn song” in Brangäne’s unheeded warning to Tristan and Isolde that the night is drawing to its end.) As such, the poem of a song—and any music that would accompany it—is likely to be of a sentimental cast.

It is the second part of Ravel’s title that is uniquely elusive, for this is the *aubade* of the “*gracioso*”—a buffoon, a jester, a clown. So this “morning song” is not the end of a romantic interlude, but rather a vigorous Spanish dance, possibly somewhat comic in character, built up from a typical Iberian rhythm and the frequent opposition of 6/8 and 3/4 meters, often heard simultaneously in different instruments. But the rhythmic pattern here is treated with more variety than in the intentionally hypnotic *Boléro*, as the meter shifts occasionally from 6/8 to 9/8. The introductory phrase, pizzicato in the strings, suggests a guitar refrain that recurs several times between “verses” of the song, which becomes a brilliant orchestral showpiece, presented with bright splashes of color and virtuosic solo interjections culminating in a glorious racket. As a real “dawn song,” the work would be catastrophic; in addition to waking the lovers, it would arouse the entire neighborhood. But it remains one of Ravel’s most colorful evocations of Iberian dance.

Steven Ledbetter

Maurice Ravel

“*Pavane for a Dead Princess*”

JOSEPH MAURICE RAVEL WAS BORN IN CIBOURE NEAR SAINT-JEAN-DE-LUZ, BASSES-PYRÉNÉES, IN THE BASQUE REGION OF FRANCE JUST A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SPANISH BORDER, ON MARCH 7, 1875, AND DIED IN PARIS ON DECEMBER 28, 1937. THE “PAVANE FOR A DEAD PRINCESS” WAS COMPOSED ORIGINALLY FOR PIANO IN 1899; RICARDO VIÑES PLAYED THE FIRST PUBLIC PERFORMANCE ON APRIL 5, 1902, AT A CONCERT OF THE SOCIÉTÉ NATIONALE IN PARIS. THE ORCHESTRA TRANSCRIPTION DATES FROM 1910 AND HAD ITS FIRST PERFORMANCE ON DECEMBER 25, 1911, AT THE CONCERTS HASSELMANS WITH ALFREDO CASELLA CONDUCTING.

THE SCORE CALLS FOR TWO FLUTES, OBOE, TWO CLARINETS, TWO BASSOONS, TWO HORNS, HARP, AND STRINGS.

Ravel inherited from his mother, whose early years were spent in Madrid, a strong feeling for the people, folklore, and music of Spain. His father, a Swiss civil engineer who played an important role in the development of the automobile, instilled in both sons—the elder Maurice and the three-years-younger Edouard, who would go on like his father to become an engineer—a love for things mechanical, frequently accompanying them on visits to factories of all sorts. That the boy Maurice would undertake a musical career seemed clear from the start; the only question was whether he would become a concert pianist or a composer. Following lessons in piano, harmony, counterpoint, and composition, he was enrolled in the preparatory piano division of the Paris Conservatoire in November 1889, but his early years there were marked by a succession of academic failures; he was finally expelled in July 1900, though he continued to audit the classes of his “dear teacher” Gabriel Fauré, to whom he would later dedicate his *Jeux d'eau* for piano and his string quartet.

On five occasions, Ravel competed for the Grand Prix de Rome, a state-subsidized prize designed to further the winning composer’s artistic development with a four-year stipend, the first two years to be spent at Rome’s Villa Medici. In May 1905 he tried for the last time (he had recently turned thirty, the age limit for the competition)—and was not even admitted to the finals! There was an uproar: debate among the music critics was heated, the news made the front pages, and the integrity of the jury was suspect, especially considering that all six finalists were pupils of one of the judges, Charles Lenepveu, who was a professor of composition at the Conservatoire. Without question, a variety of musical/political factors were involved. Ravel was by now a prominent figure in Parisian musical life, recognized as the leading French composer of his generation and presumable successor to Debussy. But at the same time, his preliminary submission for the 1905 Grand Prix contained enough errors and infractions to suggest that he was being flippant, scornful, or both, and his teachers had frequently and consistently found him lacking in discipline despite his natural talents.

Ravel’s first published work was the *Menuet antique* of 1895, published in 1898. His formal debut as a composer came at the Société Nationale concert of March 5, 1898. The *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (*Pavane for a Dead Princess*), in its original piano version of 1899, was premiered together with *Jeux d'eau*. The latter was the historically more significant and held, in the composer’s words, “whatever pianistic innovations my works may be thought to contain,” but it was the charmingly elegant *Pavane* that was immediately popular and which drew the attention of both the listening public and amateur pianists. The orchestral transcription of 1910 served further to broaden its audience. The *pavane* was a ceremonial dance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its name most likely deriving from “Pava,” a dialect form of “Padua” in Italy. The infanta or Spanish princess of the title is nobody in particular: the piece was commissioned by the Princess Edmond de Polignac, whose salon Ravel frequented in Paris, and the composer, by his own admission, simply concocted a title that pleased him by its sound. In the *Pavane*’s orchestral guise, Ravel makes full and masterful use of his instrumental palette to draw the listener more and more deeply into the magical world he has conjured.

Marc Mandel

Maurice Ravel

“Shéhérazade,” Three poems for voice and orchestra

JOSEPH MAURICE RAVEL WAS BORN IN CIBOURE NEAR SAINT-JEAN-DE-LUZ, BASSES-PYRÉNÉES, IN THE BASQUE REGION OF FRANCE JUST A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SPANISH BORDER, ON MARCH 7, 1875, AND DIED IN PARIS ON DECEMBER 28, 1937. “SHÉHÉRAZADE” WAS COMPOSED IN VERSIONS FOR VOICE AND ORCHESTRA AND VOICE AND PIANO IN 1903; THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF THE ORCHESTRAL VERSION TOOK PLACE ON MAY 17, 1904, WITH SOPRANO JEANNE HATTO AND ALFRED CORTOT CONDUCTING, AT A CONCERT OF THE SOCIÉTÉ NATIONALE IN PARIS.

IN ADDITION TO THE VOCAL SOLOIST, THE SCORE OF THE ORCHESTRAL VERSION CALLS FOR TWO FLUTES AND PICCOLO, TWO OBOES AND ENGLISH HORN, TWO CLARINETS, TWO BASSOONS, FOUR HORNS, TWO TRUMPETS, THREE TROMBONES, TUBA, TIMPANI, SNARE DRUM, BASS DRUM, TAMBOURINE, TRIANGLE, GLOCKENSPIEL, CYMBALS, GONG, TWO HARPS, AND STRINGS.

Ravel inherited from his mother, whose early years were spent in Madrid, a strong feeling for the people, folklore, and music of Spain. His father, a Swiss civil engineer who played an important role in the development of the automobile, instilled in both sons—the elder Maurice and the three-years-younger Edouard, who would go on like his father to become an engineer—a love for things mechanical, frequently accompanying them on visits to factories of all sorts. That the boy Maurice would undertake a musical career seemed clear from the start; the only question was whether he would become a concert pianist or a composer. Following lessons in piano, harmony, counterpoint, and composition, he was enrolled in the preparatory piano division of the Paris Conservatoire in November 1889, but his early years there were marked by a succession of academic failures; he was finally expelled in July 1900, though he continued to audit the classes of his “dear teacher” Gabriel Fauré, to whom he would later dedicate his *Jeux d’eau* for piano and his String Quartet.

On five occasions, Ravel competed for the Grand Prix de Rome, a state-subsidized prize designed to further the winning composer’s artistic development with a four-year stipend, the first two years to be spent at Rome’s Villa Medici. In May 1905 he tried for the last time (he had recently turned thirty, the age limit for the competition)—and was not even admitted to the finals! There was an uproar: debate among the music critics was heated, the news made the front pages, and the integrity of the jury was suspect, especially considering that all six finalists were pupils of one of the judges, Charles Lenepveu, who was a professor of composition at the Conservatoire. Without question, a variety of musical/political factors was involved. Ravel was by now a prominent figure in Parisian musical life, recognized as the leading composer of his generation and presumable successor to Debussy. But at the same time, his preliminary submission for the 1905 Grand Prix contained enough errors and infractions to suggest that he was being flippant, scornful, or both, and his teachers had frequently and consistently found him lacking in discipline despite his natural talents.

Ravel’s first published work was the *Menuet antique* of 1895, published in 1898. His formal debut as a composer came at the Société Nationale concert of March 5, 1898. By the time of the 1905 Prix de Rome affair his list of works included, among other things, the *Pavane for a dead Infanta* (1899), *Jeux d’eau* (1901), the String Quartet (1902-03), and the *Shéhérazade* song cycle. The decade preceding the outbreak of World War I was one of astounding and virtually uninterrupted productivity, witnessing the creation of such compositions as the *Sonatine* and *Miroirs* (1905), the *Histoires naturelles* (1906), *Mother Goose* (1908-10), the *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1911), *Daphnis et Chloé* (1909-12), and the Trio for piano, violin, and cello (1914). During this time, too, Ravel established his lifelong relationship with the publishing company of August and Jacques Durand, founded his own Société Musicale Indépendante for the performance of new music, and began to be known outside his native country.

Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette, who was to be Ravel’s librettist for the opera *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* (1920-25), has left a description of the composer from the early years of the century: “He wore side-whiskers! Yes, side-whiskers! And a thick crop of hair accentuated the contrast between his large head and tiny body. He had a taste for conspicuous ties and shirt-frills.

While anxious to attract attention, he was afraid of criticism.... Secretly, he was probably shy; his manner was aloof and his way of speaking somewhat curt.” We also learn a great deal about Ravel from the journal of his friend and Conservatoire classmate, the pianist Ricardo Viñes, who introduced much of Debussy’s and Ravel’s piano music in the course of his own career. With Viñes, Ravel was a member of the *Apaches* (“hooligans”), a group of young intellectuals who saw themselves as artistic outcasts and who met regularly from around the turn of the century until the beginning of World War I to discuss painting, poetry, and music. Another member of the *Apaches* was the poet, painter, art critic, and composer Tristan Klingsor, whose real name was Arthur Justin Léon Leclère and from whose collection of one hundred poems entitled *Shéhérazade* Ravel drew the texts for his own *Shéhérazade* composed in 1903.*

*Ravel’s first orchestral composition was a *Shéhérazade* overture composed for a projected opera in 1898. The overture was premiered to prevailing negative reaction in May 1899, one critic suggesting that Ravel “think more often of Beethoven.

When Klingsor’s collection appeared earlier that year, Ravel was instantly taken with the Oriental lure of his fellow-*Apache*’s poetry and immediately chose three of the poems for musical setting. Klingsor was surprised at Ravel’s choice of *Asie* (*Asia*), feeling that that poem’s length and narrative form would pose considerable difficulty, but Ravel was particularly concerned at that time with the relationship between music and speech and with the transformation of speech accent into melody; he even requested that the poet read the words to him out loud. (Ravel’s treatment of text in the *Histoires naturelles* three years later would cause something of a furor.)

The key to the first song, *Asie*, and to the composer’s setting may be found in the words “*Je voudrais voir...*” (“I’d like to see...”). The subtly evocative music brings to life the imaginings of the text, but always in the background, always distant, until the music bursts forth to travel on its own, freed from the bonds of both words and thought in a brief interlude near the end. The singer reenters to imagine herself recounting her journey, Scheherazade-like, “to those curious about dreams.”

Le Flûte enchantée (*The enchanted flute*) depicts a slave tending her sleeping master, hearing from outside her beloved’s flute “pouring out first sadness, then joy, an air by turns languorous and carefree,” its notes suggesting the feel of his longed-for kisses on her cheek. Finally, there is *L’Indifférent* (*The indifferent one*), which Ravel once suggested held the key to his own emotional character. Here, a young man passing the door of the poet ignores the latter’s attentions; the music is at once distant, suggestive, and questioning.

Marc Mandel

Shéhérazade

Three poems by Tristan Klingsor

ASIE

Asie, Asie, Asie,
 Vieux pays merveilleux des contes de
 nourrice
 Où dort la fantaisie comme une
 impératrice
 En sa forêt tout-emplie de mystère.
 Asie,
 Je voudrais m'en aller avec la goëlette
 Qui se berce ce soir dans le port
 Mystérieuse et solitaire
 Et qui déploie enfin ses voiles violettes
 Comme un immense oiseau de nuit
 dans le ciel d'or.
 Je voudrais m'en aller vers les îles de
 fleurs
 En écoutant chanter la mer perverse
 Sur un vieux rythme ensorceleur.
 Je voudrais voir Damas
 et les villes de Perse
 avec les minarets légers dans l'air;
 Je voudrais voir de beaux turbans de
 soie
 Sur des visages noirs aux dents claires;
 Je voudrais voir des yeux sombres
 d'amour
 Et des prunelles brillantes de joie
 En des peaux jaunes comme des
 oranges;
 Je voudrais voir des vêtements de
 velours
 Et des habits à longues franges.
 Je voudrais voir des calumets entre
 des bouches

ASIA

Asia, Asia, Asia,
 wonderful old land of nursery tales
 where fantasy sleeps like an empress
 in her enchanted forest.
 Asia,
 I'd like to leave with the vessel
 that rides this evening in port
 mysterious and solitary
 which will unfurl its violet sails at last
 like a great night bird
 in the golden sky.
 I'd like to travel to the isles of flowers
 listening to the perverse sea sing
 in an old, incantatory rhythm.
 I'd like to see Damascus
 and the cities of Persia
 with their slender minarets in the air;
 I'd like to see beautiful silk turbans
 on black faces with bright teeth;
 I'd like to see the dark amorous eyes
 and pupils sparkling with joy
 in skins yellow as oranges;
 I'd like to see velvet cloaks
 and the garments with long fringes.
 I'd like to see long pipes between lips

Tout entourées de barbe blanche;
 Je voudrais voir d'âpres marchands
 aux regards louches,
 Et des cadis, et des vizirs
 Qui du seul mouvement de leur doigt
 qui se penche
 Accorde vie ou mort au gré de leur
 désir.
 Je voudrais voir la Perse,
 et l'Inde et puis la Chine,
 Les mandarins ventrus sous les
 ombrelles,
 Et les princesses aux mains fines,
 Et les lettrés qui se querellent
 Sur la poésie et sur la beauté;
 Je voudrais m'attarder au palais
 enchanté
 Et comme un voyageur étranger
 Contempler à loisir des paysages
 peints
 Sur des étoffes en des cadres de sapin
 Avec un personnage au milieu d'un
 verger;
 Je voudrais voir des assassins souriant
 Du bourreau qui coupe un cou
 d'innocent
 Avec son grand sabre courbé d'Orient.
 Je voudrais voir des pauvres et des
 reines;
 Je voudrais voir des roses et du sang;
 Je voudrais voir mourir d'amour
 ou bien de haine.
 Et puis m'en revenir plus tard
 Narrer mon aventure
 aux curieux de rêves
 En élevant comme Sindbad
 ma vieille tasse arabe
 De temps en temps jusqu'à mes lèvres
 Pour interrompre le conte avec art...

surrounded by white beards;
 I'd like to see sharp merchants
 with suspicious glances
 and cadis and vizirs
 who with one movement of the finger
 that they bend,
 grant life or death just as they wish.
 I'd like to see Persia
 and India and then China,
 and mandarins paunchy beneath their
 umbrellas,
 and the princesses with slender hands,
 and the learned quarreling
 about poetry and beauty;
 I'd like to linger in the enchanted palace
 and like a foreign traveler
 contemplate at leisure landscapes painted
 on cloth in fir-wood frames
 with a figure in the midst of an orchard;
 I'd like to see murderers smiling
 while the headsman cuts an innocent neck
 with his great, curved oriental sword.
 I'd like to see beggars and queens;
 I'd like to see roses and blood;
 I'd like to see those who die for love
 and those who die for hatred.
 And then I would return
 to tell my adventure
 to those curious about dreams,
 raising, like Sinbad,
 my old Arabian cup
 to my lips from time to time
 to interrupt my tale artfully...

Please turn the page quietly, and only after the music has stopped.

LA FLÛTE ENCHANTÉE

L'ombre est douce et mon maître dort,
 Coiffé d'un bonnet conique de soie
 Et son long nez jaune en sa barbe blanche.
 Mais moi, je suis éveillée encor
 Et j'écoute au dehors
 Une chanson de flûte où s'épanche
 Tour à tour la tristesse ou la joie,
 Un air tour à tour langoureux ou frivole
 Que mon amoureux chéri joue,
 Et quand je m'approche de la croisée,
 Il me semble que chaque notes s'envole
 De la flûte vers ma joue
 Comme un mystérieux baiser.

L'INDIFFÉRENT

Tes yeux sont doux comme ceux d'une fille,
 Jeune étranger,
 Et la courbe fine
 De ton beau visage de duvel ombragé
 Est plus séduisante encor de ligne.
 Ta lèvre chante sur le pas de ma porte
 Une langue inconnue et charmante
 Comme une musique fausse...
 Entre!
 Et que mon vin te réconforte...
 Mais non, tu passes
 Et de mon seuil je te vois t'éloigner,
 Me faisant un dernier geste avec grâce
 Et la hanche légèrement ployée
 Par ta démarche féminine et lasse...

THE ENCHANTED FLUTE

The shadows are cool and my master sleeps,
 wearing a cap of silk,
 his long, yellow nose in his white beard.
 But I am still awake
 and I hear from outside
 a flute song pouring out
 first sadness, then joy,
 an air by turns languorous and carefree,
 played by my beloved;
 and when I approach the lattice
 each note seems to fly
 from the flute to my cheek
 like a disembodied kiss.

THE INDIFFERENT ONE

Your eyes are soft as a girl's,
 young stranger,
 and the fine curve
 of your pretty face, shadowed with down,
 is even more seductive in profile.
 Your lips sing at my doorstep
 a language unknown and charming
 as music out of tune...
 Come in!
 Let my wine cheer you...
 But no, you pass on
 and I see you recede from my doorway,
 with a final, graceful wave of your hand,
 your hips gently swayed
 by your feminine and indolent walk...

trans. David Johnson

Maurice Ravel

“*Daphnis et Chloé*”

JOSEPH MAURICE RAVEL WAS BORN IN CIBOURE NEAR SAINT-JEAN-DE-LUZ, BASSES-PYRÉNÉES, IN THE BASQUE REGION OF FRANCE JUST A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SPANISH BORDER, ON MARCH 7, 1875, AND DIED IN PARIS ON DECEMBER 28, 1937. SERGE DIAGHILEV COMMISSIONED THE BALLET “DAPHNIS ET CHLOÉ” IN 1909. RAVEL COMPOSED THE BALLET IN 1909-10 (A PIANO SCORE WAS PUBLISHED IN 1910) AND COMPLETED THE SCORING IN 1911, THOUGH THERE WAS SOME RECASTING OF THE CONCLUDING BACCHANALE AFTER A PRIVATE HEARING, SO THE WORK WAS NOT READY UNTIL APRIL 5, 1912. BY THAT TIME THE FIRST CONCERT SUITE HAD ALREADY BEEN PERFORMED, ON APRIL 2, 1911, AT A CONCERT IN THE THÉÂTRE DU CHÂTELET IN PARIS UNDER THE DIRECTION OF GABRIEL PIERNÉ. PIERRE MONTEUX CONDUCTED THE FIRST STAGE PERFORMANCE, IN A PRODUCTION BY DIAGHILEV’S RUSSIAN BALLET, ON JUNE 8, 1912, ALSO AT THE CHÂTELET. SCENARIO AND CHOREOGRAPHY WERE BY MIKHAIL FOKIN (MICHEL FOKINE), SCENERY AND COSTUMES BY LÉON BAKST; THE PRINCIPAL DANCERS WERE VASLAV NIJINSKY AND TAMARA KARSAVINA. THE SCORE OF “DAPHNIS ET CHLOÉ” CALLS FOR THREE FLUTES, ALTO FLUTE, AND PICCOLO, TWO OBOES AND ENGLISH HORN, TWO CLARINETS, E-FLAT CLARINET, AND BASS CLARINET, THREE BASSOONS AND CONTRABASSOON, FOUR HORNS, FOUR TRUMPETS, THREE TROMBONES, TUBA, TIMPANI, SNARE DRUM, CASTANETS, CROTALS, CYMBALS, WIND MACHINE, BASS DRUM, TENOR DRUM, TAMBOURINE, TAM-TAM, TRIANGLE, CELESTA, GLOCKENSPIEL, XYLOPHONE, TWO HARPS, STRINGS, AND WORDLESS CHORUS (TYPICALLY OMITTED FROM PERFORMANCE OF THE CONCERT SUITES), PLUS OFFSTAGE PICCOLO, E-FLAT CLARINET, HORN, AND TRUMPET.

The ballet *Daphnis et Chloé* is Ravel’s longest and most ambitious work. Both his operas (*L’Enfant et les sortilèges* and *L’Heure espagnole*) are in a single act, and he preferred to work on Chopin’s rather than on Wagner’s scale. He was not exactly a miniaturist, but his consummate precision in matters of detail and technique spared him the need for a broad canvas or for any Mahlerian endeavor to search endlessly for the essence of his own ideas. They are perfectly formed and whole from the start.

In *Daphnis et Chloé*, though, he attempted the larger scale, and perhaps it is no surprise that the work is better-known in the form of orchestral suites that divide it into sections of a more typically Ravelian dimension. It belongs to the most fertile period of his life and provides an invaluable glimpse not only of his incomparable musicianship but also of the extraordinary wealth of artistic activity in Paris just before the Great War.

Much of the credit for this surge of creativity must be accorded to Serge Diaghilev, the Russian impresario who commissioned scores from Debussy, Ravel, Dukas, and Satie (to name only the French composers on his list) and who had a knack for throwing together collaborators in different spheres (painters, dancers, musicians) who could work enthusiastically together. But even without Diaghilev the age was teeming: the rapid expansion of orchestral technique at the turn of the century, the prosperity of the European capitals, and the sense of unstoppable cultural advance—all this came together to produce an artistic heritage that dwarfed the output of the rest of the twentieth century.

Diaghilev came to Paris in 1907 with some Russian concerts, in 1908 with Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov*, and in 1909 with the first season of the famous Ballets Russes. On each visit his ear was tuned in to local talent. Ravel was producing a series of masterpieces, mostly for piano or chamber ensemble, and although he completed the one-act opera *L’Heure espagnole* in 1907, it was not staged until 1911. Diaghilev can only have guessed at Ravel’s sense of stagecraft at that time; perhaps he heard the orchestral *Rapsodie espagnole* in 1908. By 1909 he had brought together Ravel and Mikhail Fokin, his choreographer, and had commissioned a ballet. The proposed subject was a touchingly sensuous romance, “The Pastoral Loves of Daphnis and Chloé,” attributed to Longus, a Greek author of the third century A.D. This story entered French literary consciousness in 1559 when Jacques Amyot translated it from Greek. Amyot’s translation was reprinted in Paris in 1896. In June 1909 Ravel wrote: “I’ve just had an insane week: preparation of a ballet libretto for the next Russian season. Almost every night work until 3 a.m. What complicates things is that Fokin doesn’t know a word of French, and I only know how to swear in Russian.” Although Fokin is usually credited with the idea for the ballet, his ignorance of French suggests that the originator was more probably Diaghilev himself.

Despite Ravel’s haste, it was to be three years before *Daphnis et Chloé* reached the stage. A

piano draft was ready by May 1910 and was in fact published that year. The first orchestral suite was played by the Colonne Orchestra and published in 1911, presumably with Diaghilev's approval, and the full ballet was first staged at the Théâtre du Châtelet on June 8, 1912, with Karsavina and Nijinsky in the main parts, with décor by Bakst, and conducted by Monteux. There had been disagreements and delays, and Ravel's conception of an idealized Greece, based on 18th-century French paintings, clearly differed from Bakst's, although he later described Bakst's design for the second part as "one of his most beautiful." The dancers found the music unusually difficult to dance to and the production was notable for its "deplorable confusion," yet it was a triumph for the principal dancers and the music was recognized from the first as a masterpiece.

Ravel liked to think he had written a "symphonic" score. He even called it a "choreographic symphony." He is certainly meticulous and inventive in his use of principal themes, but his primary purpose was to convey action and atmosphere. The score closely describes the stage action, which must largely be missed in concert performances, although the character of individual dances and ensembles is clear enough. Ravel calls on the full modern orchestra, with infinite resourcefulness in his use of string effects, harps, muted brass, alto flute and other rarities, a wide selection of percussion, and a wordless chorus. Nowhere is his orchestral brilliance more varied and more vivid than in *Daphnis et Chloé*. When the upper woodwinds are in full spate and the lowest instruments are firmly anchored to slow-moving bass notes, the characteristic sound of the late-romantic orchestra is displayed at its richest.

The score is in three continuous parts with concerted dances and set pieces at intervals: in between are passages of action or "recitative" to convey the interaction of characters or events. The opening scene is a grotto in a woody landscape where young shepherds and shepherdesses gather round the figures of three nymphs carved in a rock. Daphnis and Chloé are childhood companions who learn jealousy first through the attentions of Dorcon, an oxherd. He and Daphnis compete for her by dancing: Dorcon's grotesque dance arouses derision, and Daphnis is left to discover the ecstasy of Chloé's kiss. Lyceion, a shepherdess (two clarinets), then tempts Daphnis and leaves him troubled.

A band of pirates approaches and they carry Chloé off. Daphnis, searching for her, finds her sandal and curses his ill-fortune. Suddenly the statues glow and come to life. The nymphs' solemn dance leads Daphnis to the god Pan.

A distant chorus covers a change of scene to the pirate camp where celebrations are in full swing. Bryaxis, the pirate chieftain, orders the prisoner Chloé to dance. In the middle of her dance she vainly attempts to flee, twice. Bryaxis carries her off, whereupon a mysterious atmosphere overtakes the scene and the pirates are pursued by cloven-hoofed followers of Pan, whose formidable image then appears. The pirates scatter and the scene returns to the grotto of the beginning for the famous dawn music (which is the start of the Suite No. 2 drawn by the composer from the complete score). The shepherds have come to reunite Daphnis and Chloé. In gratitude the pair reenact the story of Pan and Syrinx (*pantomime*), and the ballet ends with the tumultuous *Danse générale*.

Hugh Macdonald

Maurice Ravel

Piano Concerto in G

JOSEPH MAURICE RAVEL WAS BORN IN CIBOURE NEAR SAINT-JEAN-DE-LUZ, BASSES-PYRÉNÉES, IN THE BASQUE REGION OF FRANCE JUST A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SPANISH BORDER, ON MARCH 7, 1875, AND DIED IN PARIS ON DECEMBER 28, 1937. HE COMPOSED HIS PIANO CONCERTO IN G, ALONG WITH HIS OTHER PIANO CONCERTO (THE ONE FOR LEFT HAND), IN 1930 AND 1931; HE CONDUCTED THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF THE G MAJOR CONCERTO, WITH PIANIST MARGUERITE LONG, AT A RAVEL FESTIVAL CONCERT IN THE SALLE PLEYEL, PARIS, ON JANUARY 14, 1932, WITH THE LAMOUREUX ORCHESTRA. IN ADDITION TO THE PIANO SOLOIST, THE SCORE CALLS FOR AN ORCHESTRA OF PICCOLO, FLUTE, OBOE, ENGLISH HORN, CLARINETS IN E-FLAT AND B-FLAT, TWO BASSOONS, TWO HORNS, TRUMPET, TROMBONE, TIMPANI, TRIANGLE, SNARE DRUM, CYMBALS, BASS DRUM, TAM-TAM, WOOD BLOCK, WHIP, HARP, AND STRINGS.

At about the same time that Paul Wittgenstein, a concert pianist who had lost his right arm during World War I, asked Ravel if he would write a concerto for him, Ravel's longtime interpreter Marguerite Long asked for a concerto for herself. Thus, although he had written no piano music for a dozen years, he found himself in 1930 writing two concertos more or less simultaneously. The concerto for the left hand turned out to be one of his most serious compositions, but the G major concerto, dedicated to and first performed by Madame Long, falls into the delightful category of high-quality diversion. Ravel's favorite term of praise was *divertissement de luxe*, and he succeeded in producing just such a piece with this concerto.

The motoric high jinks of the first movement are set off by the cracking of a whip, though they occasionally yield to lyric contemplation. The second movement is a total contrast, hushed and calm, with a tune widely regarded as one of the best melodies Ravel ever wrote. The effort cost him dearly, and it may have been here that he first realized that his powers of composition were failing; they broke down completely in 1932, when the shock of an automobile collision brought on a nervous breakdown, and he found himself thereafter incapable of sustained work. For this concerto, he found it necessary to write the Adagio assai one or two measures at a time. The final Presto brings back the rushing motor rhythms of the opening, and both movements now and then bear witness that Ravel had traveled in America and had become acquainted with jazz and recent popular music. He also met George Gershwin and told him that he thought highly of his *Rhapsody in Blue*; perhaps it is a reminiscence of that score that can be heard in some of the "blue" passages here and there.

Steven Ledbetter