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FOREWORD

The position of Maurice Ravel in the annals of twentieth-century music is enviable. His music commands admiration and respect of performers and scholars; it is very popular with audiences, and it has been well served by the recording industry. Thought to be an *avant-garde*, seminal figure during his lifetime, Ravel is today viewed as a relatively conservative Neo-classical and post-Impressionist self-contained link in a long line of French tradition.

Most characteristics of Ravel's unique style—a fondness for clear formal structures, a carefully etched rhythmic line, a biting dissonance filled with consecutive major and minor seconds, extended stretches for both hands and much use of the thumb on two notes simultaneously, *glissandi*, extensive use of the pedal (especially in the upper registers), and a preference for Hispanic elements as well as early dance forms—are present in the early piano works through the later pieces.

After *Jeux d'eau* in 1901 there is no significant change in Ravel's keyboard writing, though there is of course, an added breadth and musical mastery.

His friend Henri Gil-Marchex has described Ravel at the piano: “He takes an amazingly low seat at the keyboard, a peculiarity which is perhaps one of the reasons why he never plays octaves; his long agile fingers and slender hand attached to an extremely supple wrist seem to be those of a sleight-of-hand conjurer; his thumb comes back to the palm of his hand with incredible facility, which enables him easily to strike several notes together. It is this thumb which explains the seconds in *Scarbo*.” Ravel had a tiny hand; he could hardly stretch an octave. Nevertheless, despite the fact that his playing was not up to professional standards he had enough ability to get through *Gaspard de la Nuit*, and this is one of the most difficult pieces in the repertoire.

Ravel's pianistic concepts derived from Liszt, although his style stems from Rameau and Couperin in its Gallicism, and from Mozart in its classicism. There is a tapestry-like beauty in Ravel's pianistic textures. He was a master of color and design, and his writing was filled with unsurpassable precision, finesse and brilliance. Ravel revered Mozart as the composer who flawlessly achieved the clarity and perfection that he sought in his own compositions,

and he remarked once that his own music was “quite simple, nothing but Mozart.”

Ravel differs from earlier composers in his use of ornamentation, that is, trills and mordents. While conforming to the tradition of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century music, of playing ornaments on the beat, rather than before the beat as in much Romantic music, Ravel does not begin the trill or mordent on the upper note, as was the tradition in those periods.

He frequently indicates the use of the damper pedal and the soft pedal, but not always. I have added some pedal indications that should be tried by the performer but not adhered to slavishly. Pedaling is too subjective to identify one that will always work for every pianist. I have added some fingering in the hope that it will be helpful. Performance suggestions are given, frequently from Ravel himself.

The pieces in this collection represent some of Ravel's finest contributions to the pianist's art. I have been able to correct some mistakes in the *Menuet antique* and *Jeux d'eau*. Ravel's personal copy of the *Menuet antique*, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, contains several corrections. I have incorporated those corrections in this edition. Five measures from the end of *Jeux d'eau*, the melody in the right hand should read A, F#, E, C# (not A, F#, E, B). This correction has also been incorporated. Several alignments of notes between staves have been clarified in *Oiseaux tristes*.

Ravel was first and foremost a composer for the piano. These pieces appear always in the most concise, finished musical form, as near to technical perfection as is humanly possible.

It is the editor's hope, that having spent time AT THE PIANO WITH RAVEL, the pianist will have received much pleasure from this beautiful music and will also have a renewed appreciation for Ravel's incredible contribution to the repertoire of the piano.

This edition is dedicated to my dear friends and colleagues Nelita True and Fernando Laires (Mr. and Mrs. Fernando Laires) with much appreciation and admiration.

Maurice Hinson

NOTES ON INDIVIDUAL PIECES

MENUET ANTIQUE (Old Minuet) (1895) Page 8

This work was first performed on April 13, 1901 by Ricardo Viñes, a Spanish pianist and Ravel's life-long friend to whom the work is dedicated. Viñes reported that Ravel wanted the piece played without obvious emotion, almost impassibly. Ravel referred to the *Menuet antique* as "this little retrograde piece," probably meaning that it looked to the past, and it showed his interest in older musical forms from the beginning of his career.

This early piece already contains figures and harmonic traits recognizable in Ravel's later style. A mixture of rhythmic nervousness, linear refinement, and harmonic subtlety translates into the most limpid sonorities possible. Syncopation, numerous ritards and appoggiaturas, plus the interplay of the imitations of the subject between the hands, all clothe this work with flowing spontaneity.

The form of *Menuet antique* is ternary, A B A: A = measures 1-45; B = measures 46-77; A = measures 78 to 122. The two A sections are identical, which is the classical minuet form with trio.

Because of the lowered seventh degree, this work is written in the aeolian mode beginning on F sharp, or like the F sharp minor natural scale. Ravel uses melodic elements from the A section in the last nine bars of the trio (B section) in counterpoint with the melody of the trio.

The short trill in measures 29 and 33 begins on the principal note and should be played on the beat.

Menuet antique lasts 6 minutes. Ravel also orchestrated this work.

PAVANE POUR UNE INFANTE DÉFUNTE (Pavane for a Dead Princess) (1899) Page 16

This work was given its world premiere by Ricardo Viñes on April 5, 1902 and was the first of Ravel's works to achieve real popularity. It is dedicated to the Princess Edmond de Polignac, a painter and wealthy member of the French aristocracy. Ravel expressed his ideas on interpretation of the piece to Marc Pincherle:

Do not attach more importance to this title than it has. Avoid dramatizations. This is not the funeral mourning for a girl who has just died, but the evocation of a pavane which could have been danced by a small princess in days of old, at the court of Spain.

Ravel insisted that this work should be played

calmly, in strict time and without any passionate or sentimental *rubato*. He told one young pianist, in some exasperation, "I have written a pavane for a dead princess, not a dead pavane for a princess." It must have been exaggerated performances like this that called forth Ravel's response: "I hate to have my music interpreted: it suffices merely to play it." But Ravel could not have meant such a statement literally. What he probably meant was that he hated to hear his music over-interpreted.

The pavane was popular in the sixteenth century and during this time it became established as an introductory dance to the galliard. It was intended to express ceremonial dignity. Ravel's version is a piece of great charm and beautiful in its poignancy.

Try to make the accompaniment sound like a lute; this instrument was very important in early Spanish and French music.

Pavane is written in rondo form: A B A C A. A = measures 1-12; B = 13-27; A = 28-39 (with varied accompaniment); C = 40-49 and repeated, 50-59; A = 60-72 (varied with more elaborate accompaniment). It lasts ca. 6 minutes.

JEUX D'EAU (Playing Water) (1901) Page 21

Ricardo Viñes gave the premiere performance of this work, Ravel's first great piano piece, on April 5, 1902. It is dedicated to Ravel's teacher, Gabriel Fauré. The music is prefaced by a line from a poem by Henri de Régnier, which translated means: "The river god laughs at the water as it tickles him." Liszt is the main influence in this amazing little tone-picture and his work, *Jeux d'eau a la villa d'Este* was the inspiration for Ravel's masterpiece. Ravel wanted his work "played in the way you play Liszt." Ravel's technique here is very Lisztian—but with a difference. Something new is added: a feeling for prismatic color, an extension of Liszt's technique, and new ideas about sonority.

Ravel explained the program and form of the piece as follows:

The *Jeux d'eau*, which appeared in 1901, is at the origin of the pianistic novelties which one would notice in my work. This piece, inspired by the noise of water and by musical sounds which make one hear the sprays of water, the waterfalls and the brooks, is based on two motives in the manner of a first movement of a sonata, without, however, subjecting itself to the classical tonal plan.

Jeux d'eau made Ravel an important composer when it appeared in 1901, and the piece is generally considered to have begun a new era in the evolution of the technical resources of the instrument. It had a strong influence on Debussy, both musically and from the point of view of pianistic technique. The form of *Jeux d'eau* resembles sonata-allegro as there are two themes and a recapitulation. The first theme is heard in measures 1–18; the second theme, based on four notes of the pentatonic scale, is heard in measures 19–28; a transitional section (closing theme) in measures 29–37 leads to a 24-measure development that builds to a strong climax at the trill on seven black keys (bar 48) followed by the downward black key *glissando*. The recapitulation covers measures 62 to 81, including a playful and watery cadenza, and a short four-bar coda concludes this sparkling impressionistic painting. Polytonality, rippling arpeggios, tremolos, trills, double notes, major seconds, sevenths, ninths, and other high-numbered chords are featured.

Ravel recommended use of the damper pedal in the upper register in the performance of this work to produce, instead of clear notes, the vague impression of vibrations in the air. I suggest holding the pedal through measures 64–66. The final few measures should be quieted in favor of the left hand melodic line.

The entire work, which lasts ca. 6 minutes, is liquid poetry full of transparent freshness.

SONATINE (1905) Page 34

Paule de Lestang gave the world premiere of this work on March 10, 1906. It was composed for a competition conducted by a music magazine. Very few sonatinas contain great music, but Ravel's work is a notable exception—it is a masterpiece that is permeated with the essence of the French spirit and represents Ravel's neo-classicism at its best.

Sonatine is a cyclical work whose thematic material uses primarily the interval of the perfect fourth and its inversion, the perfect fifth. Ravel was meticulous in specifying dynamics, phrasing, and tempo changes, but he was less precise about pedaling and he indicated no fingerings.

The first movement (*Modéré*) is in F sharp minor (natural minor) which is a transposition of the Aeolian mode and is written in sonata-allegro form. The first theme is heard in measures 1–12: use very little pedal in this opening section; the short second theme is stated in measures 13–19; a transition leads to a repeat of the exposition (first ending), and then

to the development (second ending). The development section covers measures 26² to 55. The first theme is developed in measures 26² to 39; focus on the second theme occurs in measures 40–55. The recapitulation from measures 56 to 84 is a repetition of the exposition with appropriate key changes.

Ravel's recommendation regarding this movement was "to avoid emphasizing the rhythm; the theme would become vulgar."

The second movement (*Mouvement de Menuet*) in D flat major bears a spiritual affinity with Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony*: both are modal, antique, and utterly delightful. The traditional trio is missing. The form is sectional and might be described as rondo-like: A B C A B. A: bars 1–12 and repeated—all the motifs are present in various guises. B: bars 13–33—romantic and impressionistic harmony tinged with whole-tone color (bar 14). C: bars 33–52 serve as a linking passage that could be thought of as taking the place occupied by a trio in a more traditional movement. A: bars 53–64, modified to end in the tonic. B: bars 65–82, modified to center on the tonic. Use the sostenuto pedal to catch the bass grace notes D flat and A flat at the end of measure 80. Be careful of too much pedal in this movement. The harmonies must not sound thick.

The third movement (*Animé*) is brilliant, toccata-like, and is written in sonata-allegro form. Introduction: bars 1–3, modal opening with Dorian mode transposed. Exposition: (A) bars 4–36, (B) bars 37–53; Codetta: bars 54–59. Development: bars 60–105. Recapitulation: (A) bars 106–139, (B) bars 140–156. Coda: bars 157 to the end.

Sonatine lasts ca. 11 minutes.

MENUET SUR LE NOM D'HAYDN
(Minuet on the Name of Haydn) (1909) Page 52

Ravel composed this piece to commemorate the centenary of Haydn's death. The method of writing a piece on Haydn's name was set up by renaming the notes of the theme. The German variant of B natural is H, so Ravel set up the pitches: H = B, A = A, Y = D, D = D, N = G. The entrance of the musical anagram is indicated by the corresponding letters of Haydn's name. The five notes are also heard in mirror inversion, in cancrizans (backward), in transposed form, and repeated in various permutations.

Ravel purposely did not intend to imitate Haydn's musical style of the minuet.

The tempo needs to be graceful and dignified, more like those of the Baroque era than like the faster and more humorous minuets found in Haydn's sonatas and symphonies.

The form is binary: A = measures 1–16; B = measures 17 to 46; a short coda of the last 8 measures concludes this charming piece. There is no trio section in this work, as in the *Menuet* of the *Sonatine*.

Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn lasts ca. 1 minute and 45 seconds.

OISEAUX TRISTES (*Sad Birds*) (1905) Page 54

This melancholy piece is from *Miroirs*, a collection of five pieces Ravel composed that reflect the Symbolist poets and the Impressionist painters' efforts to capture moods of nature. Ricardo Viñes gave the first performance on January 6, 1906 and *Oiseaux tristes* is dedicated to him. The five works are entitled *Noctuelles* (Moths), *Oiseaux tristes*, *Une barque sur l'océan* (A Boat on the Ocean), *Alborado del grazioso* (Morning song of the Jester), and *La vallée des cloches* (The Valley of the Bells). Ravel said of this collection: "The *Miroirs* form a collection of pieces for piano which mark, in my harmonic evolution, a very considerable change which disconcerted the musicians who, up to that time, had been accustomed to my style. The first of these pieces to be written—and the most typical of all, is the second in the collection: *les Oiseaux tristes*. I evoke some birds lost in the torpor of a very gloomy forest in the warmest hours of the summer."

The fact that each piece carries a suggestive title led some listeners to look for a program: mistakenly so. Ravel purposely avoided anything like a specific program. The *Miroirs* are picture music but not program music. *Miroirs* is not a suite that must be performed as an integral group, but may be played as separate selections. Ravel used the word "collection" rather than "suite" in describing *Miroirs*. It is a collection of pieces linked only by their "reflective" character.

The musical texture of *Oiseaux tristes* is constructed on a persistently repeated note, interspersed with bird-like trills against which can be heard at the opening and closing, a plaintive descending major third suggesting the sound of a distant cuckoo. A considerable elasticity and rubato should be present in thematic passages, especially in the opening bird-call motif. Alfred Cortot advises the performer that *Oiseaux tristes* depicts "not only the monotonous

cooing of birds but also the autumnal panorama with its denuded trees and setting sun."¹

The form of *Oiseaux tristes* is sectional: A = measures 1–9; B = 10–22; A = 23–26; A¹ = 27 to the end which consists of a cadenza bar and coda following a much condensed recapitulation. The cadenza bar that appears at measure 27 is full of Ravel's incipient polytonality: two superimposed keys—E flat minor over D flat major. The main part of the piece, i.e., the first 24 bars, forms a dynamic arch beginning and ending *pp* with an agitated central episode which reaches *f*. A short coda, from measure 28 to the end re-established the tonic key of E flat minor with a reminiscence of the opening bird call.

The piece is technically easy, but musically subtle.

Oiseaux tristes lasts ca. 2 minutes and 30 seconds.

LA VALLÉE DES CLOCHES
(*The Valley of the Bells*) (1905) Page 58

This slow mood picture, number five from the collection *Miroirs*, is dedicated to Maurice Delage, Ravel's composer-pupil and intimate friend. It is characterized by a vague impressionistic atmosphere filled with delicate tints of syncopated bell-like sounds and is the most Debussyesque of the set.

An important feature of this piece is the harmonic interval of the perfect fourth. Hold one long pedal from measure 1 to measure 6 (second half of the second beat). Catch clearly the low G at measure 6. Hold this pedal through measure 11. Pedal from bars 16 to the first beat of bar 20. Bring out the top notes of measures 24–27 and keep the inner triplet bell sounds very quiet; do not hurry. Hold one pedal for measures 29–30 as well as for measures 46 to 49. Keep in tempo from measure 52 to the end. The rich octave melody passing from left to right hand in measures 19–21 must be carefully controlled. Clarity of line, tonal beauty and rubato must never be threatened by too fast a tempo. Have a sensitive ear for orchestral timbres.

The form of *La Vallée des cloches* is sectional. Introduction: measures 1–2; A: 3–11; B: 12–18; C: 19–23; C¹: 24–27; C²: 28–41; B¹: 42–48; A¹ Coda: 49 to end. The final three bars sound the harmonies of the great chime on the Church of Sacre-Coeur of Montmartre in Paris.

La Vallée des cloches lasts ca. 4 minutes and 10 seconds.

¹ Alfred Cortot. *La musique française de piano*. Paris: Les Editions Rieder, 1932, Vol. II, p. 34.

Menuet antique

(Old Minuet)

Majestueusement $\text{♩} = 76$
(Majestic, stately)

Piano

f *sf* *sf*

très marqué
(very accented)

The first system of the musical score for 'Menuet antique' is written for piano in G major and 3/4 time. It begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and features a series of accented chords and melodic lines. The tempo is marked as 'Majestueusement' with a quarter note equal to 76 beats per minute. The performance instruction 'très marqué (very accented)' is placed below the first staff.

3

p

The second system of the musical score continues the piece. It starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The music consists of a series of eighth-note chords in the right hand and a more active bass line. A measure rest of three measures is indicated at the beginning of the system.

5

f *ff*

The third system of the musical score continues the piece. It features a forte (*f*) dynamic in the right hand and a dynamic increase to fortissimo (*ff*) in the bass line towards the end of the system.

8a

1. a

8b

2. a

sf *très décidé*
(very determined)

The fourth system of the musical score contains the first and second endings. The first ending (1. a) and second ending (2. a) are marked with measure rests. The system concludes with a fortissimo (*sf*) dynamic and the performance instruction 'très décidé (very determined)'.

Pavane

Pour une Infante défunte
(Pavane for a Dead Princess)

(Gentle, but resonant)
Assez doux, mais d'une sonorité large ♩ = 54

Measures 1-3. Dynamics: *p*. Tempo: ♩ = 54.

Measures 4-6. Dynamics: *mf*. Performance instruction: *(retard) cédez*.

Measures 7-9. Dynamics: *p*. Performance instruction: *(in tempo) en mesure*.

Measures 10-12. Dynamics: *pp*, *f*, *P*. Performance instructions: *(a little retard) un peu retenu*, *(broaden) en élargissant*, *(a tempo) 1^{er} mouvement*.