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# RAVEL'S PIANO MUSIC – A NEW EDITION

## Editorial Method and Sources

There is no denying the excitement of holding in one's hand the autograph manuscript of a musical masterpiece; and where the autograph is itself a work of art, as many of Ravel's are, then aesthetic considerations also come into play to compound the excitement. But there is equally no denying that composers are, like all mortals, fallible, and that however beautiful and exciting an autograph is, it may nonetheless contain mistakes. The apparently laudable desire to go back to what the composer originally wrote needs therefore to be tempered with a certain amount of common sense.

With stage works, it is true, pressures of time, space, money and personalities often lead to deformations which the composer does not in any sense welcome but has to accept if the performance is to go ahead, and which may then find their way into the printed score. But in the case of piano works, the pressures on the composer in preparing an edition are much slighter, exerted for the most part by the printer in his desire for conformity with house style, so that changes introduced between manuscript and edition have a somewhat greater chance of representing decisions freely taken by the composer. Certainly, in the process of publication mistakes may be introduced as well as rectified and, when musicality and common sense indicate that this may have happened, the autograph can indeed sometimes provide vital evidence. But in the course of conversations with a number of composers of our own time, I am given overwhelmingly to understand that they would actually be angry if future editors ignored their carefully prepared printed scores and went back automatically to their original autographs for a so-called true reading.

In the case of Ravel's piano music, such a critical view of autograph evidence is more than ever justified, since the Music Department of the Bibliothèque nationale de France holds a bound volume containing Ravel's own printed copies, with autograph corrections, of the bulk of the first editions of his solo piano music.<sup>1</sup> To judge from the contents, the volume would appear to have been made up between 1911 and 1913. The works missing from this collection are *Sérénade grotesque*, *Sites auriculaires*, *Ma mère l'oye*, *Prélude*, *A la manière de...*, *Le tombeau de Couperin* and *Frontispice*. Printed copies with autograph corrections of *Ma mère l'oye* and *A la manière de...* are held separately in the same institution,<sup>2</sup> while Ravel's own printed copy of *Le tombeau de Couperin*, with autograph fingerings and one autograph correction, is on display in the Musée Ravel at Montfort l'Amaury. For *Sérénade grotesque* and *Sites auriculaires* the autographs may be said to assume paramount importance since these pieces were not published in the composer's lifetime. The autograph of *Frontispice* is also significant because Ravel's own printed copy has not been found. Unfortunately, for *Prélude* neither the autograph nor the composer's printed copy is extant.

No proofs are known to survive of the first editions of any of Ravel's piano works, apart from a set of first proofs of *Le tombeau de Couperin* in the Durand archives, marked up by the Durand editor with a request for second proofs (I am grateful to Roy Howat for providing me with a copy of this material). This set contains no autograph markings. All the editorial annotations found their way into the first edition except for the form of some of the multiple appoggiaturas in 'Prélude' and 'Forlane' of *Le tombeau de Couperin*, over which Ravel would seem to have changed his mind.

### Primary Sources

Where Ravel's own corrected edition is available, I have taken it as my main primary source; discrepancies between this corrected edition (CE), the first printed edition (E) and the autograph are duly noted.

The autograph of *Valses nobles* (nine pages in the Taverne collection) has not itself been made available for study, but a microfilm (AM) is held in the Music Department of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Vm. micr. 876).

### Secondary Sources

The secondary sources fall into four groups:

(a) Printed copies with corrections by musicians close to Ravel

(i) Copies of Ravel's piano music belonging to Robert Casadesus (CasCE), now also housed in the Music Department of the BnF; his copy of *Valses nobles* is shelved as Vm. Casadesus 940. It contains no markings in the composer's hand.

(ii) Some copies, including that of *Valses nobles*, belonging to Vlado Perlemuter (PerCE), also now housed in the BnF, but awaiting cataloguing.

(iii) Some copies with corrections by Lucien Garban. Garban worked for the Durand publishing house and was a close friend of the composer. The exact status of these corrections is impossible to determine but, given the links between the two men, it is feasible that at least some of the changes were dictated by Ravel. These copies are now in the library of Bakersfield College, California. Garban also made piano duet transcriptions of *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and *Le tombeau de Couperin*. These are published by Durand.

(iv) Copies not consulted include those belonging to Jacques Février, whose niece and pupil Mme Aboulker-Rosenfeld has assured me that they contain no markings beyond his fingerings; and those of Henriette Faure, which cannot be located.

(b) Ravel's own orchestrations of a number of his piano pieces (RO). In chronological order of original composition (dates of orchestration in brackets), these are: *Menuet antique* (1929), 'Habanera' from *Sites auriculaires* (1908), *Pavane pour une Infante défunte* (1910), 'Une barque sur l'océan' and 'Alborada del gracioso' from *Miroirs* (1906 and 1923), *Ma mère l'oye* (1911), *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1912), 'Prélude', 'Forlane', 'Menuet' and 'Rigaudon' from *Le tombeau de Couperin* (1919).

(c) Recordings

(i) Piano rolls made by Ravel in 1913 for Welte-Mignon (*Sonatine*, movements I and II, C2887; *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, C2888), and in 1922 for Duo-Art (*Pavane pour une Infante défunte*, 084; 'Oiseaux tristes' from *Miroirs*, 082). It was claimed that at this second session Ravel also recorded 'Le gibet' from *Gaspard de la nuit* and the 'Toccata' from *Le tombeau de Couperin*, but these were in fact recorded by Robert Casadesus. It remains uncertain which of the two recorded 'La vallée des cloches' from *Miroirs* in 1929 for Duo-Art (72750), though I am almost certain it was Ravel. All these recordings have been transferred a number of times to LP, but unfortunately the piano roll equipment has not always been properly regulated.

(ii) Recordings made on disc by three pianists, all of whom had the benefit of the composer's detailed advice: Robert Casadesus (1955, CBS 13062–4<sup>3</sup>); Jacques Février (1972, ADES 7041–4); Vlado Perlemuter (1961, VOX VBX 410 1–3<sup>4</sup>; 1977, NIMBUS 2101–3, reissued CD NI 5005, 5011). Marcelle Meyer, although known to Ravel (together they gave the private two-piano performance of *La valse* which failed to impress Diaghilev), never studied his piano music with him, as her daughter, Marie Bertin, was good enough to inform me. I have therefore taken no account of Mme Meyer's Ravel recordings reissued by EMI on the Référence label.

(d) Souvenirs of Ravel as a coach of his piano music

(i) from Vlado Perlemuter in his interviews with Hélène Jourdan-

# Jeux d'eau

à mon Cher Maître Gabriel Fauré

Dieu fluvial riant de l'eau  
qui le chatouille...  
Henri de Régner (*La cité des eaux*)

Maurice Ravel  
(1875–1937)

$\text{♩} = 144$   
*Très doux*

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1-8) features a piano part with a treble and bass clef, marked *pp* and *1 Corde*. The right hand plays a melodic line with slurs and ties, while the left hand provides harmonic support with chords and single notes. The second system (measures 3-8) continues the piano part, with the right hand playing a more active melodic line and the left hand playing chords. The score is in 3/4 time, with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). A large watermark 'SHEETMUSIC' is visible across the page.

9

Musical notation for measures 9-10. Treble clef, C major, common time. Right hand: eighth-note arpeggiated chords. Left hand: quarter-note chords.

11

Musical notation for measures 11-12. Treble clef, C major, common time. Right hand: eighth-note chords with slurs and fingerings (6, 8). Left hand: quarter-note chords.

13

Musical notation for measures 13-14. Treble clef, C major, common time. Right hand: eighth-note chords with slurs and fingerings (8, 6). Left hand: quarter-note chords. Dynamic: *ff*.  
[3 Cordes]

15

Musical notation for measures 15-16. Treble clef, C major, common time. Right hand: eighth-note chords with slurs and fingerings (3, 3). Left hand: quarter-note chords. Dynamic: *f*.  
1 Corde

17

Musical notation for measures 17-18. Treble clef, C major, common time. Right hand: eighth-note chords with slurs and fingerings. Left hand: quarter-note chords. Dynamic: [*p*] and *mf*. Marking: *rapide*.

## CRITICAL COMMENTARY

Sources: A1 - autograph (7pp, with many erasures and alterations; sketches on verso of 5 pages) dated "11 Novembre 1901", held in the Music Department of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (MS.15198). The title page carries an inscription in Ravel's hand "à Jean-Aubry / cordialement / Maurice Ravel / 23/12 14", and below that the epigraph "Dieu fluvial riant de l'eau qui le chatouille" in the hand of Henri de Régnier and signed by him  
 A2 - autograph (7pp), undated, held in the Robert Owen Lehmann Collection, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York  
 E - first edition published by E. Demets, Paris, 1902 (E.12.D.). Dedicated "à mon Cher Maître Gabriel FAURÉ"  
 CE, GarCE - see 'Editorial Method and Sources', p.4

The many erasures and alterations on A1 testify to its being earlier than A2, as does the relative closeness of A2 to E. Readings from A1 have therefore been taken into account only where they help resolve discrepancies between A2 and E, or where these two sources provide either incomplete or unsatisfactory information

A1, A2: no dedication  
 A1, A2: no metronome markings. ♩ = 144 taken from E  
 Bars 1-8. E: LH phrasing incomplete. Slurs taken from A2  
 A1, A2: RH slur extends over whole of bar 2 (cf. bar 8)  
 E: slur over beat 1 only  
 Bar 5. LH quavers 2 and 6, durations of dyads inconsistent or inaccurate in all sources. Presumably, when it was observed that the dotted crotchets of A2 produced an unacceptable clash *bb/bb* on quavers 4 and 8, they were altered in E to dotted quavers. Corrected editorially  
 Bar 6. A1, A2: RH quaver 8, grace notes slurred to *b'*. Slur omitted in E  
 RH quaver 8, slur added, following A1. A2: slur covers beats 3 and 4.  
 E: slur on beat 3 only  
 LH phrasing added editorially  
 Bars 7,8. A1, E: no phrasing in LH. Slurs taken from A2  
 Bars 13-14. A2: no overall crescendo and diminuendo, but each LH pair of quavers marked >  
 Bar 15. A1, A2: RH quaver 1, triplet marking. Omitted in E  
 Bar 20. A1: LH grace note slurred on to *c'*. A2: grace note omitted.  
 E: grace note not slurred  
 Bar 22. A1, A2: LH beat 1, accents on quavers. Omitted in E  
 Bar 24. A1, A2: LH beat 1, accent on first demisemi-quaver. Omitted in E  
 Bars 24,25. A1, E: LH beats 2 and 4, final demisemi-quavers, *f*. A2: *g*  
 Bar 28. A1, A2: RH quaver 6, *z* E: *z* Corrected in later reprint of E  
 Bar 33. A2: LH beat 3, *h* to *e*. Omitted in A1, E  
 A2: LH beat 4, *h* to *e*. Omitted in A1, E  
 Bar 34. E: RH beats 1 and 3, final semi-quavers wrongly engraved as quavers. Correct in A1, A2  
 Bar 35. E: LH beat 2, augmentation dot on *a* omitted. Correct in A1, A2  
 E: LH beat 3, semi-quaver rest and augmentation dot on *d'* omitted. Correct in A1, A2  
 Bar 37. A2: LH beat 3, < > marked. Omitted in A1, E.  
 Accent to *e* in all sources; dynamics from A2 therefore disregarded  
 A2: RH beat 4, note 4, *d'*. *h* omitted in A1, E  
 A1, A2: RH, final note of *rapide* group, *d''*. *h* omitted in E. Extra beam added to grace notes editorially  
 Bar 41. All sources: LH beats 1 and 2, phrasing inconsistent with bars 38,39  
 A2: RH beat 3, *h* to *g'*. Omitted in A1, E  
 A1, A2: LH beats 3 and 4, phrasing as printed here. Slur omitted in E  
 A1: this bar repeated. Repetition not observed in A2, E

Bars 41,42. A1, A2: RH, no slurs to demisemi-quaver groups in bar 42 or in bar 41, beats 1 and 2. E: some slurs in bar 42. Rectified editorially  
 Bar 43. A2: RH beat 3, demisemi-quaver 6, *a'*. A1, E: *h* omitted  
 Bars 43,44,45. A1, E: LH, no phrasing. Added editorially following partial indications in A2  
 Bar 48. A1, A2: RH beat 2, *h* to *a'*. Omitted in E  
 Bar 49. A1, E: LH beat 2 *A''*. A2: *A''*, probably corrected from *G''*.  
 Pianists playing an instrument with bass extension may therefore have some licence to take lower note  
 A1: **C** time signature retained, to include first 2 beats of bar 50; last 2 beats of bar 50 missing  
 Bar 52. A1: this bar omitted. Present in A2, E  
 E: RH beat 1, chords joined by semi-quaver beam. Correct in A2  
 Bar 53. A2: RH beat 2, > . Omitted in A1, E  
 Bar 54. CE: RH beat 1, demisemi-quaver 2, precautionary *h* to *d''* in Ravel's hand  
 A1, A2: RH demisemi-quavers 8 and 16, *D*/*B* dyads. E: as printed here  
 Bar 59. A1, A2: LH beats 1 and 2, *h*s to *d''*s. Omitted in E  
 Bar 60. A1, A2: beats 1 and 2 notated enharmonically in flats  
 A2: RH and LH beat 4, *h*s to *b''* and initial *b*. Omitted in E  
 Bars 60-61. A2, E: reduced from 3½ bars in A1  
 Bars 60,61. LH beat 2, editorial slur  
 Bar 61. A1, A2: beats 1 and 2 notated enharmonically in flats  
 Bar 68. A1, A2: RH quaver 7, final note, *e''''b*. E: *g''''b*, plainly an error  
 Bar 69. CE, GarCE: LH quaver 7, *h* to *d'*. Omitted in E owing to extension of *ottava* marking to end of quaver 4. In A2 the *ottava* extends only to end of quaver 2  
 A1, A2: LH quaver 7, *h* to *e'*. Omitted in E  
 A1, A2: RH quaver 8, *h*s to *b'* and *e''*. Omitted in E  
 Bar 70. A1, A2: RH beat 1, triplet markings. Omitted in E  
 E: RH quaver 7, *c*/*h* quaver and *e* semi-quaver. Correct in A1, A2, as printed here  
 E: "2 *Ped. jusqu'au \**", but no release point is subsequently indicated. Editorial pedal release at end of bar 71 refers to sustaining pedal  
 Bar 72. E: 8 groups before end of bar, "2 *Ped*". It is unclear whether sustaining pedal is to be reapplied or kept down with soft pedal added. A1 asks for sustaining pedal to be raised and reapplied after demisemi-quaver group 8. This indication would seem to have been overruled by those in E  
 A1, E: "rall." marked 4 groups before end of bar. A2: placed 4 groups earlier  
 A1, A2: LH, group 12, *h* to *a'*. Omitted in E  
 A2: LH, group 20, *h* to *g'*. Omitted in A1, E  
 Bar 76. A1,A2: RH beats 3 and 4, *c*/*h* tied to *b*. In E and many subsequent editions this tie has been wrongly printed as a slur  
 Bar 77. RH, values of rest and grace notes halved editorially to produce 15:12, rhythmically equivalent to LH grace notes  
 Bars 79-80. A1,A2: LH grace notes *A/e* tied to crotchets at beginning of bar 80. Omitted in E. Clearly required, to permit correct chording in LH  
 Bar 81. A1,A2: RH beat 4, first note, *c''*. E: *b''* (in fact, *c''* with missing ledger line) and wrongly reprinted in most subsequent editions  
 A1, E: LH beats 3 and 4, chords not arpeggiated. Arpeggiated in A2  
 Bar 84. A1: pedal indication at beginning of this bar. A2, E: put back to end of bar 81  
 All sources: LH dyad, semibreve. Corrected editorially  
 Bar 85. A1: no change of time signature, but contains 4 beats, pedal release on 3rd. A2: no change of time signature, contains 2 beats, pedal release on 2nd. E: as printed here  
 A1: signed "Maurice Ravel / 11 Novembre 1901"