

A photograph of Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, an older man with white hair, wearing a dark jacket over a white shirt. He is seated at a piano, looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. His right hand is resting on the piano keys. The background is dark and out of focus, highlighting the pianist.

CHANDOS

RAVEL

COMPLETE
WORKS FOR
SOLO PIANO

JEAN-EFFLAM BAVOUZET



Maurice Ravel, seated at the piano, with the conductor Oskar Fried, mezzo-soprano Éva Gauthier, composer-conductor Manoah Leide-Tedesco, and composer George Gershwin, New York, on Ravel's birthday, 7 March 1928

Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937)

Complete Works for Solo Piano

COMPACT DISC ONE

1

Sérénade grotesque, M 5 (1892 – 93)

3:37

in F sharp minor • in fis-Moll • en fa dièse mineur

Très rude – Largo – Presto – Più lento –

Tempo I – Più lento – Tempo I – Poco più lento – Più lento –

Tempo I – Presto – Più lento –

Tempo I – Più lento – Tempo I – Poco più lento – Più lento –

Tempo I (Presto) – [Très rude] – Tempo I

2

Jeux d'eau, M 30 (1901)

5:29

in E major • in E-Dur • en mi majeur

À mon cher Maître Gabriel Fauré

Dieu fluvial riant de l'eau qui le chatouille...

[A river god laughing at the water that tickles him...]

Henri de Régnier (*La Cité des eaux*)

Très doux – [] – Premier Mouvement – [] –

Premier Mouvement – Très rapide – Un peu plus lent qu'au début –

Lent – Sans ralentir

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | <p>Pavane pour une infante défunte, M 19 (1899) 5:48</p> <p>in G major • in G-Dur • en sol majeur</p> <p>À Madame la Princesse E. de Polignac</p> <p>Assez doux, mais d'une sonorité large – Cédez – En mesure –
 En élargissant – Premier Mouvement – Très lointain –
 Reprenez le mouvement – Cédez – En mesure – Large –
 Premier Mouvement – Très grave – Très grave –
 Premier Mouvement – Cédez – Reprenez le mouvement –
 En élargissant beaucoup</p> |
| 4 | <p>Menuet antique, M 7 (1895) 5:56</p> <p>in F sharp minor • in fis-Moll • en fa dièse mineur</p> <p>À Ricardo Viñes</p> <p>Majestueusement</p> |

	Sonatine, M 40 (1903 – 05)	11:16
	in F sharp minor • in fis-Moll • en fa dièse mineur À Ida et Cipa Godebski	
5	1 Modéré – Un peu retenu – A tempo – Animé – Tempo I – Un peu retenu – A tempo – Lent	4:09
6	2 Mouvement de Menuet – Plus lent – A tempo – Sans ralentir – Un peu plus lent qu'au début – Très lent	3:07
7	3 Animé – Agité – Sans ralentir – Même Mouvement, Tranquille – Plus lent – Retenu – [] – Retenu – A tempo – Un peu retenu – A tempo – Plus lent – Accélérez – Très animé	3:57
8	Menuet, M 42 (1904)	1:15
	in C sharp minor • in cis-Moll • en ut dièse mineur Modéré	
9	Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn, M 58 (1909)	1:59
	in G major • in G-Dur • en sol majeur (Centenaire d'Haydn, Mai 1909 / Haydn Centenary, May 1909) Mouvement de Menuet – Retenu – Lent	

	Miroirs, M 43 (1904 – 05)	27:40
10	1 Noctuelles. À Léon Paul Fargue. Très léger – Poco rubato – Pas trop lent – Premier Mouvement – Poco rubato – Presque lent – Premier Mouvement	4:30
11	2 Oiseaux tristes. À Ricardo Viñes. Très lent – Lent – Encore plus lent	3:39
12	3 Une barque sur l'océan. À Paul Sordes. D'un rythme souple	7:12
13	4 Alborada del gracioso. À M.-D. Calvocoressi. Assez vif – Plus lent – Premier Mouvement – Plus lent – Premier Mouvement – Plus lent – Premier Mouvement – Plus lent – Premier Mouvement – Plus lent – Premier Mouvement – Plus lent – Même mouvement – Plus lent – Premier Mouvement – Plus lent – Premier Mouvement – Très sec et bien rythmé – Cédez très peu – Au Mouvement – Sans ralentir	6:35
14	5 La Vallée des cloches. À Maurice Delage. Très lent	5:29
		TT 63:40

COMPACT DISC TWO

Gaspard de la nuit, M 55 (1908)

22:07

Trois Poèmes pour piano d'après Aloysius Bertrand
(Three Poems for Piano after Aloysius Bertrand)

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 0 auto;">1</div> | 1 | Ondine. À Harold Bauer. Lent – Un peu plus lent –
Encore plus lent – Au Mouvement (Un peu plus lent qu'au début) –
Très lent – Rapide et brillant – Au Mouvement du début –
Sans ralentir | 6:44 |
| <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 0 auto;">2</div> | 2 | Le Gibet. À Jean Marnold. Très lent. Sans presser ni ralentir
jusqu'à la fin | 5:56 |
| <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 0 auto;">3</div> | 3 | Scarbo. À Rudolph Ganz. Modéré – En accélérant –
Vif – Au Mouvement (Vif) – Sans ralentir –
Un peu retenu – Toujours en accélérant –
Premier Mouvement (Vif) – Un peu moins vif –
Très peu retenu – Sans ralentir | 9:18 |

- 4 **À la manière de... Borodine, M 63a** (1912 – 13) 1:37
in D flat major • in Des-Dur • en ré bémol majeur
Valse
À Ida et Cipa Godebski
Allegro giusto
- 5 **À la manière de... Emmanuel Chabrier, M 63b** 2:12
(1912 – 13)
Paraphrase sur un air de Charles Gounod ['Faites-lui mes aveux']
(*Faust*, Troisième Acte)
(Paraphrase on a Melody by Charles Gounod)
(*Faust*, Act III)
À Ida et Cipa Godebski
Allegretto – Meno mosso, rubato

	Le Tombeau de Couperin, M 68 (1914 – 17)	24:00
6	1 Prélude. À la mémoire du lieutenant Jacques Charlot. Vif	2:53
7	2 Fugue. À la mémoire du sous-lieutenant Jean Cruppi. Allegro moderato – Meno allegro – Lent	3:17
8	3 Forlane. À la mémoire du lieutenant Gabriel Deluc. Allegretto – Sans ralentir	5:06
9	4 Rigaudon. À la mémoire de Pierre et Pascal Gaudin. Assez vif – Moins vif – Tempo I	3:18
10	5 Menuet. À la mémoire de Jean Dreyfus. Allegro moderato – Musette – Très lent	5:16
11	6 Toccata. À la mémoire du capitaine Joseph de Marliave. Vif – Un peu moins vif – Premier Mouvement	4:03
12	Prélude, M 65 (1913) in A minor • in a-Moll • en la mineur À Mademoiselle Jeanne Leleu Assez lent et très expressif (d'un rythme libre) – Très lent	1:28

Valses nobles et sentimentales, M 61 (1911) 15:04

'...le plaisir délicieux et toujours nouveau d'une
occupation inutile.'
[...the exquisite and unfading pleasure of an occupation
without purpose.]
Henri de Régnier

À Louis Aubert

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 13 | 1 Modéré, très franc – | 1:19 |
| 14 | 2 Assez lent, avec une expression intense – Ralentir –
Au mouvement (un peu plus lent et rubato) –
Premier Mouvement – Ralentir – Au Mouvement (rubato) –
Ralentir – | 2:12 |
| 15 | 3 Modéré – | 1:31 |
| 16 | 4 Assez animé – | 1:02 |
| 17 | 5 Presque lent, dans un sentiment intime – | 1:33 |
| 18 | 6 Vif – | 0:40 |
| 19 | 7 Moins vif – Tempo I [Modéré] – Un peu plus animé –
Premier Mouvement – | 2:48 |
| 20 | 8 Épilogue. Lent – Plus lent – Un peu plus lent – Encore plus lent –
Au mouvement – Même mouvement, un peu plus las –
Plus lent et en retenant jusqu'à la fin – Très lent | 3:56 |

21

La Valse, M 72b (1919 – 20)

12:26

in D major • in D-Dur • en ré majeur

Poème chorégraphique pour orchestre

(Choreographic Poem for Orchestra)

Transcription for Piano Two Hands by the Composer

Des nuées tourbillonnantes laissent entrevoir, par éclaircies, des couples de valseurs. Elles se dissipent peu à peu: on distingue une immense salle peuplée d'une foule tournoyante.

La scène s'éclaire progressivement. La lumière des lustres éclate au ff.

Une Cour impériale, vers 1855.

[Whirling clouds, through which waltzing couples are now and then glimpsed. The mists gradually scatter: one perceives an immense hall filled with a whirling crowd.

The scene gradually brightens. The light of the chandeliers bursts forth at *fortissimo*.

An imperial court, c. 1855.]

À Misia Sert

Mouvement de Valse viennoise – Un peu plus modéré –

Revenez au Mouvement – Premier Mouvement – Pressez un peu –

Premier Mouvement – Un peu plus vif et en accélérant –

Mouvement du début – Pressez – Assez animé –

Un peu moins vif (Mouvement du début) –

Au Mouvement (assez animé) – Pressez jusqu'à la fin

TT 79:20

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet piano

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet



© Benjamin Ealovega Photography

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet

Ravel: Complete Works for Solo Piano

Introduction

A well-known photograph of Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) taken in New York in 1928 shows him seated at the piano with, behind him, four musical friends. Three of them are smiling at the camera, but the fourth, George Gershwin, is looking at Ravel's hands, hidden from the camera. On the same visit to America, Ravel was again photographed seated at the piano, this time with the bandleader Paul Whiteman and with his hands visible, the left hand woven intricately with his right.

Like Schubert and Bizet, Ravel was an able pianist who was reluctant to play in public and never wanted to be a virtuoso. He sometimes gave concerts in which he accompanied singers or joined chamber groups, but the press were never kind when he played his own solo pieces. On that same visit to New York, in 1928, someone wrote,

Only a supreme ironist would consent to play his own beautiful music in public as badly as Ravel plays it.

He was fortunate to have some notable pianists as friends. Finest among them was Ricardo Viñes, who gave the first performances of *Jeux d'eau*, *Miroirs*, and

Gaspard de la nuit. The later works were in the sympathetic hands of Louis Aubert, who played *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, and Marguerite Long, who premièred *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and the G major Piano Concerto, and who also wrote a vivid memoir, *Au piano avec Maurice Ravel*.

Ravel would always prefer to compose at the piano rather than to practise. He told Vaughan Williams that 'without the piano you cannot invent new harmonies', and without dexterity in his fingers he would never have created the wonderfully imaginative and demanding piano works that profoundly influenced the twentieth century's approach to the instrument. *Jeux d'eau* and *Gaspard de la nuit* stand at the head of any virtuoso's ideal repertoire, and the simpler works, such as the *Sonatine*, display a classical sensitivity that tests even the humble tyro. His approach to the piano was the same as that to his writing for orchestra: he was always in search of the exact colour and sound he wanted, making full use of each instrument's resources. He understood how the pianist's ten fingers really work, just as he knew everything about the viola, the harp, and the bass clarinet.

It was at the piano that Ravel discovered a world of complex harmony that enormously enriched the language of tonal music. He was not looking for a new kind of music, as Schoenberg and Debussy were; he brought new musical inflexions into the style he had inherited from Chopin and Fauré. The music of nature (birds, bees, and water), folk songs from distant lands, ticking clocks and tolling bells, jazz – these were materials which he adapted for his own use, applying richly chromatic harmony where it was needed, not as the basis of any new style.

Sérénade grotesque

At the age of fourteen, Ravel auditioned for the Paris Conservatoire, playing a Chopin piano concerto, and was admitted along with a boy of his own age, Ricardo Viñes, of Catalan birth, a good friend from the start. His teachers were undistinguished, but outside the classroom he met far more significant musicians who had a profound influence on him, namely Chabrier, Debussy, and Satie. Chabrier's clever piano music delighted him with a style that lies behind his first surviving piano piece, the *Sérénade grotesque*, of 1892–93. At first it was simply a *Sérénade*, but it is sharply original and must have seemed grotesque to its early hearers and interpreters. Whole-tone clusters

and teasing, spiky rhythms with a Spanish flavour hardly match the common idea of a serenade, yet they form the foreground in a piece of classical roundness. The tension between anarchy and order found almost throughout Ravel's work is already evident in this teenage *jeu d'esprit*.

Menuet antique

The *Sérénade grotesque* was not published until 1975, but the *Menuet antique*, which followed soon after (1895), appeared in print in 1898 with a dedication to Viñes and a cover showing a shepherd playing panpipes. It is 'antique' in its strict classical form of *da capo* minuet with trio and perhaps in its strong modal cadences, but novel in the dissonance of its opening chord and in its intricate disposition of the hands, more subtle than anything in Fauré or Chabrier. The sweet purity of the trio section comes as something of a surprise. This piece has become better known in the arrangement for orchestra which Ravel prepared in 1928.

Pavane pour une infante défunte

The *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (1899) is similarly better known in its miraculous orchestral garb than as a piano piece, the form in which it was first heard, in Viñes's hands, in 1902. Its graceful line of melody and

stately tread fully justify the rather opaque title ('Pavane for a dead Infanta'), although there is nothing Spanish about the music. Its middle section is in the minor, more or less, and its rich parallel chords can be traced back to similar gestures in Debussy's music.

Jeux d'eau

Viñes liked to couple the *Pavane* in his recitals with *Jeux d'eau* (1901), both first performed in 1902. The placidity of the first piece contrasts strongly with the turbulence of the second, its vivid description of water spouts and fountains being one of the most graphic and exhilarating pieces that Ravel ever wrote. It also pushed piano technique well beyond the boundaries of its time (literally in the case of the piano's bottom note, A, which Ravel writes when he actually requires a G sharp). Scintillating figuration in both hands calls for extreme agility in manoeuvring the hands under, over, and tangled with each other, and the effect is to create the sparkling effect of light refracted and reflected by cascading water. Ravel seems to have had in mind the fountains at Versailles, using techniques derived from Liszt and a harmonic language of sevenths and ninths which he could claim as unmistakably his own. No doubt he *could* have orchestrated this music, but he never did.

Menuet in C sharp minor

Along with the string quartet, which Ravel composed soon after (1902–03), *Jeux d'eau* marks the arrival of a truly mature and individual style. He was now free to write music of immense complexity and difficulty, or come down to the level of mere mortals and compose in a style both naïve and sophisticated. The little *Menuet* from 1904 (published only recently) is in the more modest style, probably a fragment of something larger which remained unrealised.

Sonatine

The *Sonatine* (1903–05), at least in its first two movements, is a perfectly designed essay in clarity of form and texture. Ravel is fond of placing a melody both at the top and the bottom of the texture simultaneously, also of left-hand chords moving in parallel. A sonata, unlike a sonatina, would have required a slow movement, but here, the middle movement is another minuet, and the finale is much more adventurous and extrovert than both previous movements. A touching feature is the return of the opening melody of the work in 5/4 time, which gives the opening two notes, a falling fourth, a special role as a kind of signature, like the falling fifth in *Daphnis et Chloé*.

Miroirs

Composed at the same time as the *Sonatine*, the set of five pieces with the collective title *Miroirs* (1904–05) shows Ravel allowing himself to display a more Debussyan character by giving his work an abstract plural title (cf. Debussy's *Images*, *Nocturnes*) and creating evocative pictures which might be paintings. His exploration of piano effects takes *Jeux d'eau* to the next level, and the harmonic style, as Ravel himself acknowledged, is several more steps removed from diatonic language, and more intricate than that of Debussy, too.

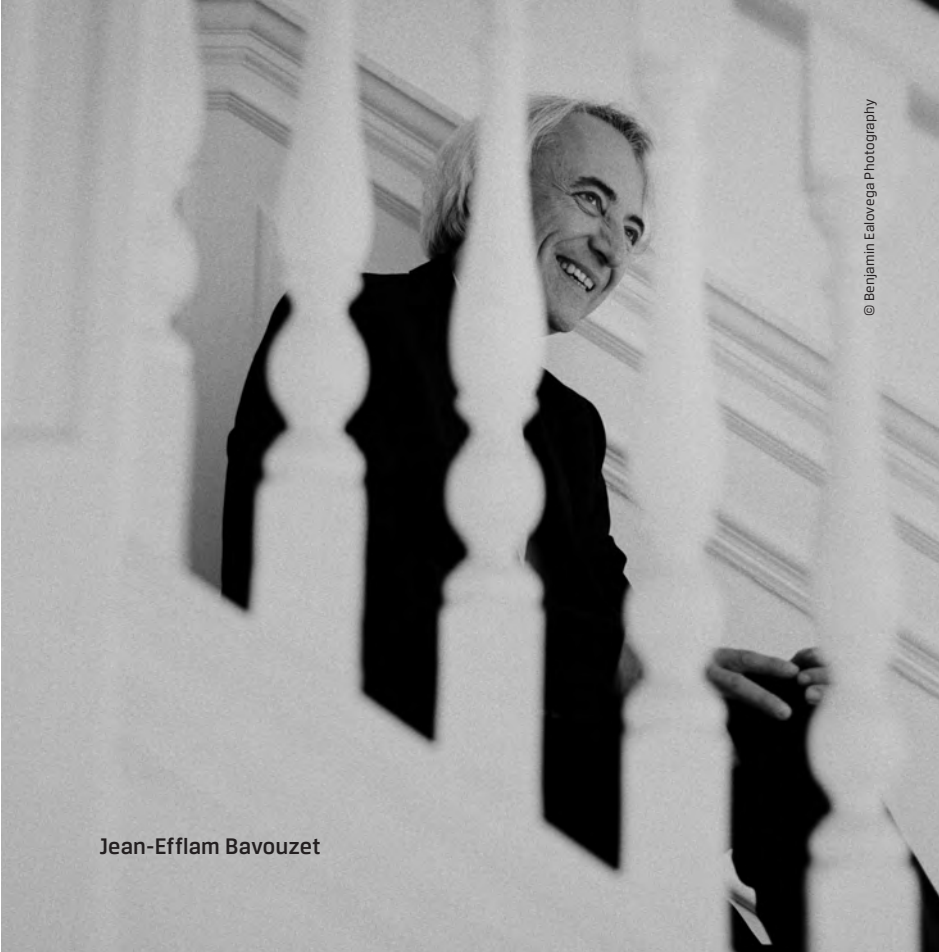
The mysterious fluttering of 'Noctuelles' (Moths) is achieved by rapid movement in both hands, not always in sync, no apparent melody, no apparent tonic root, and some brilliant Lisztian arpeggios mostly in the upper levels of the piano. For contrast, Ravel introduces a slower tempo and a bell-like *ostinato* in the middle voice.

'Oiseaux tristes', the first of the set to be written, evokes, according to the composer, 'birds lost in the oppressiveness of a very dark forest during the hottest hours of summer'. It feels like an improvisation, experimental perhaps, and it approaches closer to free form than anything else Ravel wrote. It may seem obvious, but with a few rapid figurations he directs us to hear the

birds in the higher pitches while the forest is sombrely portrayed at the lower end.

'Une barque sur l'océan' appears to portray not a sea voyage but simply the image of a ship of moderate size sailing, or merely drifting, entirely in rhythm with the waves. The sea is its partner, not its foe. The harmony moves slowly while the notes themselves race from one end of the keyboard to the other. Ravel's resourcefulness in suggesting water knows no bounds. A few strands of melody are heard in the middle register, but they never amount to a theme.

This piece, like the next, 'Alborada del gracioso', was orchestrated by Ravel. From the sea, we move to dry land, specifically Spain, for a 'dawn-song of the clown'. The clown strums a guitar, with a piquancy in the harmony that neither *Carmen* nor Chabrier's *España* had attempted, although the genuine Spaniard Albéniz came close in his once popular piano works. Ravel's piece demands repeated notes and *glissandi* that only virtuosos should attempt and a rhythmic vitality that leads to a thrilling close. This brings to mind the intoxicating atmosphere of the *Feria*, which happens to be the title of a Ravel piece for orchestra (the concluding movement of *Rapsodie espagnole*, of 1907–08). It is easy to imagine the whirl



Jean-Efflam Bavouzet

© Benjamin Ealovega Photography

of dancers on a crowded Spanish street at night, but harder to reflect that Ravel conceived this to be heard at dawn. The central section reveals the secret melancholy of clowns the world over, hidden behind the grinning mask.

Tranquillity returns with 'La Vallée des cloches'. Exuberance and virtuosity are left behind as we hear bells from different directions and different distances, skilfully intermingled. The middle section provides the only lyrical melody of the whole set, rising from the lower regions and then fading, leaving the bells and their elusive overtones lingering in the air.

Gaspard de la nuit

The Mount Everest of Ravel's output for piano is surely *Gaspard de la nuit*, 'three poems for piano', which amount to a quasi-sonata in three movements. In the year that it was written, 1908, Ravel also worked on the suite for piano duet, *Ma Mère l'Oye*, familiar to English speakers as the Mother Goose Suite. Where the latter work is modest and charming, *Gaspard de la nuit* is extravagant and unbridled. Each of its three component movements is headed by a prose poem by Aloysius Bertrand, a romantic poet from Dijon who died young, in 1841. The poems use elaborate, fanciful language to evoke a world

of ghosts and spirits, spooky and macabre, very much to Ravel's taste. By dedicating each movement to a different friend he hints that these pieces may be performed separately, although there is a clear unity of spirit in their derivation from the same poetic source.

In 'Ondine', the first piece, the techniques and textures explored in *Jeux d'eau* and *Miroirs* are displayed in their full richness, and the sheer precision of Ravel's disposition of the two hands – constantly overlapping and interweaving, but never colliding – is beyond admiration. The sprite's watery home is portrayed in the constant flow of notes, mostly in the upper register, and her alluring description of a palace at the bottom of the lake is carried by a calm expressive melody. The music generates its own growth to a tremendous climax, but the poet is not seduced. The water sprite has a few bars of quiet recitative (self-pity perhaps?) before the tranquil but ambiguous close.

'Le Gibet' is a *tour de force* in presenting a long, slow, chordal melody, bleak and painful in character, against a constantly tolling bell which never reacts to its background and never changes. The music faultlessly represents the hanged man on a gibbet and the distant bell which inspired Bertrand's poem.

The start of 'Scarbo' might seem to resume the same idea, with a repeated note at variance with dense chords. But the energy that rises from the depths announces a virtuoso piece which tests the player's technique to the limits while causing the flesh to creep. For the poet's nightmarish vision is Ravel's, too: half-formed snatches of melody, fragments plucked out of the air, frightening images flashing by, unsettled and unsettling harmony, and a relentless pace. Hardly a phrase goes by without both ends of the piano and everything in between being called breathlessly into service. Inevitably, it ends on a question mark as the vision of Scarbo, the black beetle of Bertrand's imagining, simply vanishes.

Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn

In 1909, the editor of the *Revue musicale* invited a number of composers to write pieces in honour of the centenary of Haydn's death, proposing a theme based on Haydn's name. As Saint-Saëns pointed out, only three of the five letters – H (= B natural), A, and D – represented notes in the German system. By cycling through the alphabet the letter Y was assigned to D (again) and N to G. This rather awkward theme, B – A – D – D – G, thus appears at the start of Ravel's *Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn* and, as the printed score

helpfully points out, also in inversion and retrograde inversion. With his customary skill Ravel crafts a tidy miniature out of this material, unmistakably his in style, and, being a minuet, not uncongenial to his tastes.

Valses nobles et sentimentales

On 9 May 1911, the Société Musicale Indépendante presented a concert in the Salle Gaveau, Paris, in which twelve works were played without advance announcement of the composers' names. Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales* was the fourth item in the programme, played by Louis Aubert, to whom it was dedicated. Four of the pieces, including Ravel's, were correctly identified by a majority of guesses, though some attributed the work to Satie and some to Kodály. The experiment was amusing, if not instructive. A year later, Ravel orchestrated the work for a ballet entitled *Adélaïde*, applying such skill that the orchestral version never once suggests its origin as a work for solo piano.

The *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, from his most fertile and most mature period, has none of the stylistic ambiguities of his later music and the dances rejoice in their classic perfection of workmanship and style. The allusion of the title is to Schubert's *Valses sentimentales*, published in 1825, and *Valses nobles*, published in 1827, pieces of which

Ravel was particularly fond. At the head of the score Ravel inscribed a line from the symbolist Henri de Régnier: 'the exquisite and unfading pleasure of an occupation without purpose'. Whatever Ravel may have meant by quoting these words, his purpose was, at least in part, to work out the subtle nuances of his advanced harmonic style, already revealed in *Gaspard de la nuit* but without sharing its staggering demands on the fingers. Not even Debussy had this assured control of chromatic colouring, and Ravel would never polish it to a finer lustre.

Most of the eight waltzes use the simple property $3 \times 2 = 2 \times 3$ in developing cross-rhythms and shifts of pulse. Each waltz proceeds directly into the next, sometimes with very little change of tempo, yet each has a distinctive character and mood. The seventh is the longest and the most exuberantly Viennese, complete with an introduction and a middle section of piquant harmony and rhythm. The 'Épilogue' recalls each waltz in turn, in the order IV, V, IV, I, VI, VII, VI, III, IV, I, and II.

À la manière de... Borodine; À la manière de... Emmanuel Chabrier; Prélude

Three small pieces belong in the chronology here: *À la manière de... Borodine*, *À la manière de... Emmanuel Chabrier*, and *Prélude* – all

three within the scope of modest pianists and all three in Ravel's favourite triple time. The two pastiche pieces were composed in 1912–13 at the request of Alfredo Casella, and allowed Ravel to express his fondness for both composers in his own idiom. The Chabrier piece is based on a theme from Gounod's *Faust*. The *Prélude* was composed in 1913 as a sight-reading test for female students at the Paris Conservatoire, none of whom should have been troubled by the gentle pace and modest scope of this piece.

Le Tombeau de Couperin

While serving in the 1914 war, Ravel still managed to work on smaller pieces such as songs and choruses. His main achievement at this time was the piano suite *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, its six movements conceived in the spirit of the French baroque. Romanticism was far from dead, but a return to the more modest demands and the rhythmic clarity of the early eighteenth century was in the air. This is modern music nonetheless, thanks to sophisticated harmony, especially in the 'Forlane', and a free-flowing keyboard style.

Ravel orchestrated four of the movements, omitting the 'Fugue' and the 'Toccata', which are consequently less well known. The 'Fugue' is appropriately severe, closer to Ravel's Conservatoire training than to Couperin, let

alone Bach, while the 'Toccata' is unashamedly exuberant, leaving only its title to recall a past age. Written in 1917, it builds to a strong positive close which was perhaps an escape from the grim spirit that beset France at that time.

La Valse

Throughout the war Ravel had pondered a symphonic poem about Vienna, which emerged in 1919, as *La Valse*, a 'choreographic poem' raising Vienna's most popular export, the waltz, to celestial heights. By the time it was performed, ironically, the Austrian Empire had turned to dust. Despite the standing of *La Valse* as a great orchestral showpiece, the arrangements which Ravel made for solo piano and for two pianos can have an equal impact. The solo arrangement leaves some orchestral elements to the discretion of the player, but no arrangement of this music could ever be anything but a mountainous challenge. The music suggests streams of waltzing couples and the glitter of an imperial ball with a dynamism and rapture that no Strauss or Lehár could ever have matched. At the end, when the dance builds to a 'fantastic and fatal whirling' (in Ravel's own description) the weight of sound rises to crushing proportions. Eat your heart out, Blue Danube!

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A note by the performer

There have been few important composers whose entire pianistic output may be heard in a single concert. In the case of Ravel, the contrast is remarkable between the considerable position which he occupies in the history of music, and in our hearts, and the short duration of the totality of his work. Two reasons may be cited: the relative slowness with which he composed and the uncompromising demands he placed on the quality of his compositions, few of which, in his view, were worthy of publication. The result is that nearly all his works remain, to this day, in the concert repertoire.

There are many advantages to surveying a complete collection. The interpreter, and thus likewise the listener, finds herself given a sufficiently elevated vantage point to allow her to recognise all the compositional similarities among certain works, connecting threads that run from one piece to another, thematic recurrences, or a development of the musical language.

Now, regarding Ravel specifically, I do not detect that he underwent much of a development. Already in his *Jeux d'eau* (1901), he found his style, his voice, and remained faithful all his life to the principle of classical form and harmony, despite his sometimes highly 'spiced' and readily recognisable chords.

In a complete traversal, we may also appreciate certain subjects that inspired Ravel throughout his life: the reverberating sounds of bells ('La Vallée des cloches', 'Le Gibet', the epilogue to *Valses nobles et sentimentales*), the rushing of water (*Jeux d'eau*, 'Une barque sur l'océan', 'Ondine'), Spain (*Sérénade grotesque*, 'Alborada del gracioso'), dance – and the minuet more than any other (he wrote five examples of it!).

On the subject of the minuet, and notwithstanding my respect for the principle of playing nothing except that which Ravel himself had authorised for publication, I have included in this complete set the one in C sharp minor. In view of the brevity of this piece, I take the liberty of repeating the first phrase, just as Ravel himself does in all his other minuets. This score, in its touching simplicity, has come for me to represent the quintessence of Ravellian sadness.

Schubert

Even in its most euphoric moments, all the music of Ravel is written against the background of melancholy, of a certain sadness and of a nostalgic memory of childhood. 'Poor Ravel', wrote the violinist Hélène Jourdan Morhange who was a close friend. Although the lives of Ravel and of Schubert diverge on many points, one may

also speak of 'poor Schubert', both of them surrounded by their faithful friends, but living alone, their lives entirely devoted to music, 'my one and only mistress', as Ravel put it.

The miracle of Ravel

For it is really a matter of a miracle! Ravel's writing for the piano is very often and justly compared to that of Liszt for its ingeniousness, its most 'ergonomic' deployment of the hand. But Liszt, the pianist of pianists, able to play all his own works, could at any moment 'confirm' an effect he had just conceived.

How then does one explain the case of Ravel who, far from being a virtuoso, was capable of inventing the most magical pianistic effects without being able to try them out himself? The opening of 'Ondine' is a striking example: no one before Ravel had had the idea to evoke the shimmering of water by means of the rapid alternation of a chord of three notes and a single note. Now, this effect does not 'function' except when executed at a certain speed, acquired through hundreds of hours of practice; it is one that Ravel was most certainly incapable of producing! And there are numerous other examples: the runs in seconds in 'Scarbo', the alternating chords at the end of the 'Toccata', the repeated notes and the *glissandi* in thirds

and fourths in 'Alborada del gracioso'. To say nothing of his magisterial Concerto for the Left Hand Alone, which must sound as though the pianist is equipped with three hands!

Orchestra

Ravel approaches his piano as though in orchestral terms. Thus, he orchestrated three quarters of his works for piano, giving us a precise idea of the timbres he imagined and, by way of the indispensable presence of a conductor, the necessity of a certain metrical rigour.

In this respect, it is said that Ravel frowned upon performers who took too many interpretative liberties with his text.

His numerous indications for phrasing, for dynamics, and for the distribution of the hands is highly precise. Even his metronome speeds are the fruit of long maturation, 'and they work!', as Pierre Boulez told me. 'Play only what is written!', Ravel is said to have repeated to his interpreters. 'But surely we are not your slaves?'; one of them is to have responded. 'Oh, but you are!', Ravel retorted. A scathing reply that speaks volumes of his intransigence and the clarity of his musical vision.

And yet...

in frequently encountering the marking 'expressif' (expressive) or 'très expressif' (intensely expressive) in his scores, how

may the interpreter then convey expressivity without taking at least some personal initiatives? Here we touch on a fascinating paradox between interpretation and fidelity to the text, one that constitutes the very essence of that which is the Ravellian style: between restraint and intensity, clarity and poetry.

In *La Valse*, I have based myself on the version for orchestra which, apart from the addition of supplementary voices, departs a little from the version for piano, notably at the very end, in the number of swirling, intensifying bars before the fatal quadruplet.

I subscribe completely to Ravel's idea that a composer does not have to be sincere in order to write good music. And furthermore, owing no doubt to his modest character, Ravel rarely addresses us in the first person. He does not confide in us intimately except on the rarest occasions. At these exceptional moments, our admiration for this musical giant, for his intelligence and elegant style of writing, for his perfect proportions, give way to a wave of emotion that is difficult to contain.

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His multi-award-winning recordings and dazzling concert performances have long

established **Jean-Efflam Bavouzet** as one of the most outstanding pianists of his generation. Considered as Sir Georg Solti's last discovery, he works regularly with orchestras such as The Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, NHK Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, and London Philharmonic Orchestra and collaborates with conductors such as Vladimir Jurowski, Gianandrea Noseda, François-Xavier Roth, Nicholas Collon, Edward Gardner, Vasily Petrenko, Gábor Takács-Nagy, and Sir Andrew Davis.

An equally active recitalist, chamber musician, and soloist, he regularly performs at Wigmore Hall, in London, Cité de la musique and Musée du Louvre, in Paris, Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw, in Amsterdam, BOZAR, in Brussels, Schwetzingen SWR Festspiele, and Forbidden City Concert Hall, in Beijing.

An exclusive Chandos artist, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet is particularly celebrated for his work in the recording studio, his complete survey of Haydn's piano sonatas and the first volume in his series 'The Beethoven Connection' having received accolades from publications including *Gramophone*, *BBC Music*, *Classica*, and *The New York Times*. Other ongoing cycles include the complete piano concertos by Mozart, with Manchester

Camerata and Gábor Takács-Nagy, the fourth volume of which was nominated for a *Gramophone* Award in 2020.

He has recorded the complete piano concertos of Beethoven with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra, whom he also directed, and the concertos of Bartók and Prokofiev with the BBC Philharmonic and Gianandrea Noseda, the latter set winning a *Gramophone* Award in 2014. Under Yan Pascal Tortelier, he has recorded Stravinsky's complete works for piano and orchestra with the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra, while their recording of Ravel's piano concertos with the BBC Symphony Orchestra won both a *Gramophone* and a *BBC Music Magazine* Award. His recordings have garnered Diapason d'Or and Choc de l'année awards as well. In May 2023, *Sancan: A Musical Tribute*, with the BBC Philharmonic under Yan Pascal Tortelier, was released, featuring the Piano Concerto amongst other works.

A former student of Pierre Sancan, at the Paris Conservatoire, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet made his American début, in 1987, through Young Concert Artists, in New York. As well as directing concertos from the keyboard, he has prepared a transcription for two pianos of Debussy's *Jeux*, published by Durand with a foreword by Pierre Boulez.
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RAVEL: COMPLETE WORKS FOR SOLO PIANO – Bavouzet

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Complete Works for Solo Piano

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3	Pavane pour une infante défunte, M 19 (1899)	5:48
4	Menuet antique, M 7 (1895)	5:56
5–7	Sonatine, M 40 (1903 – 05)	11:16
8	Menuet, M 42 (1904)	1:15
9	Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn, M 58 (1909)	1:59
10–14	Miroirs, M 43 (1904 – 05)	27:40
		TT 63:40

COMPACT DISC TWO

1–3	Gaspard de la nuit, M 55 (1908)	22:07
4	À la manière de... Borodine, M 63a (1912 – 13)	1:37
5	À la manière de... Emmanuel Chabrier, M 63b (1912 – 13)	2:12
6–11	Le Tombeau de Couperin, M 68 (1914 – 17)	24:00
12	Prélude, M 65 (1913)	1:28
13–20	Valses nobles et sentimentales, M 61 (1911)	15:04
21	La Valse, M 72b (1919 – 20)	12:26
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Jean-Efflam Bavouzet piano

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