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Ravel's: Le Tombeau de Couperin

Yali Lydia Tai
San Jose State University

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Ravel's: *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Music

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Yali Lydia Tai

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Dr. Laurel Brettell

Dr. Alfred Kanwischer

Dr. William George

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Abstract

Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

by Yali Lydia Tai

This thesis addresses the topic of Ravel's piano composition *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1914-1917). The composer's musical style was influenced by his contemporaries Fauré and Debussy, among others. Therefore, some of Ravel's earlier piano works will be highlighted to show these influences. After reviewing these early piano works, I will illustrate Ravel's intention of framing his new ideas within the use of traditional forms.

Clarity of form and reliance on Baroque principles are the main characteristics of this suite. Since these features can be related to the definitions of Neoclassicism, a discussion of the Neoclassical movement is included, and an insight into Ravel's mastery in fusing old and new will be proposed.

Ravel stated that this suite was intended as an homage, not only to Couperin le Grand, but to all 17th and 18th-century clavecinists. Thus, an examination of the historical background of each movement title will be detailed. In the last part of this thesis, a pianistic perspective of the suite will be presented.

To my husband, Daniel, for his love and understanding,
and to my daughter, Phoebe, who touches my heart with
her laughter

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Chapter I

Introduction

The revival of French piano music began in 1871 at the end of the Franco-Prussian War. In this period, *Société Nationale de Musique* (1871) was founded to encourage French composers to write serious music with solid craftsmanship. The Society sponsored plenty of concert series and particularly the French contemporary music. Later, in Paris, the institution *Schola Cantorum* (1894) was established to provide instructions of all kinds of music and gained its reputation for excellence by 1900. "All these encouraging musical activities raised France to a position of world leadership in music in the first half of the twentieth century."¹

Ravel, born in the midst of this French revival, was influenced by these activities. As Marie K. Stolba mentioned:

There were several trends in France music after 1871; one trend followed cosmopolitan traditions to which representative composers were César Franck and Vincent d'Indy; another trend followed French traditions to which representative composers were Camille Saint-Saëns and Gabriel Fauré. ... Later, Claude Debussy, with the influence of Symbolist writers and Impressionistic painters, appeared to be an international well-known French composer.²

¹ Marie K. Stolba, *The Development of Western Music* (Dubuque: Wm.C.Brown Publishers, 1990), 768.

² Ibid.

Ravel believed that the mastery of musical craft was primary. Igor Stravinsky called Ravel a "Swiss clockmaker" because of his extraordinary craftsmanship. "Ravel's work was always perfectly conceived, and it demonstrated accuracy, attention to details, but also imagination and sensual refinement."³ His spontaneous and unrestrained qualities were subjected to ultimate control. "Ravel did not claim to have invented anything new; perfection, rather than innovation, was his aim."⁴

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) is considered one of the mainstream French Impressionists. His musical style was influenced by his contemporaries, particularly Debussy (1862-1918). However, in spite of this admiration, Ravel eventually developed a style less impressionistic than Debussy. His clarity of form, elegance of style and acute attention to tonal organization were distinguished from the irregular phrases and blurring of outlines characteristic of "impressionistic" music. He preferred to use modal rather than whole-tone scales. His harmonies were complex but, often, they were diatonic and functional.⁵ As Myers said of Ravel,

Even their harmonic language showed fundamental points of difference, Debussy's being characterized by a preference for chords of the ninth or whole-tone scale, while Ravel cultivated the eleventh Harmonic and never employed the whole-tone scale.⁶

³ G. W. Hopkins, "Maurice Ravel," *The New Grove Dictionary: Music and Musicians* Vol. 15 (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited 1980), 615.

⁴ Rollo Myers, *Ravel: Life and Works* (London: The Garden City Press Limited, 1960), 106.

⁵ Marie K. Stolba, *The Development of Western Music* (Dubuque: Wm.C.Brown Publishers, 1990), 777.

⁶ Myers, *Ravel: Life and Works*, 102.

“Ravel never employed the whole-tone scale,” says Myers. But, obviously, he did. For example, in *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, we find chords based on it, modulations based on it, even melodic outlines. (See figures 5, 6, 19 and 33)

There were many other influences on Ravel’s music. Ravel studied with Fauré at the Paris Conservatory from 1889-95 and again in 1897-1900. It was Fauré who equipped him with the compositional techniques that made him a skilled craftsman. Ravel’s mastery of composition enabled him to be especially attentive to details and clarity of form. As a fourteen-year-old boy, Ravel first heard oriental and other exotic music at the Paris World Exhibition of 1889, which affected the orchestration of his later works.⁷

Ravel was a brilliant orchestrator knowledgeable in the most subtle characteristics of different instruments.⁸ He notated every detail in his scores and demanded performers or conductors to follow the indications carefully. Ravel himself said: “...For heaven’s sake, do not try to interpret my music, just play it ...”.⁹ Myers said,

His orchestral scores are as highly organized as a piece of intricate machinery and as delicately balanced; nothing is left to chance or to the caprice of individual player or conductor.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 15

⁸ Stolba, *The Development of Western Music*, 777.

⁹ Myers, *Ravel*, 190.

¹⁰ Ibid., 191.

During Ravel's forty-year career, he wrote operas, orchestral pieces for the ballet, vocal, chamber, and piano works. Ravel's most impressionistic piano works are *Jeux d'eau* (1901), *Miroirs* (1904-5), and *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908). Ravel's neoclassic piano works are *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (1899), *Sonatine* (1905), *Valses nobles et Sentimentales* (1911) and *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1914-17).¹¹ Ravel's neoclassicism was essentially an outgrowth of impressionism. He modified his own idioms by further refining his taste for new elements, such as jazz, and sometimes, older elements, such as Spanish influences. Therefore, by incorporating these new ideas into the traditional system, Ravel's neoclassicism was defined as a mixture of "new" and "old".

Le Tombeau de Couperin is considered to be one of his finest composition for solo piano. It contains six movements: *Prélude*, *Fugue*, *Forlane*, *Rigoudon*, *Menuet*, and *Toccata*. The piano version was first performed by Marguerite Long in the SMI (Societe Musicale Independante) at Salle Gaveau on April 11, 1919. In this same year, Ravel completed the orchestral version which he reduced to four movements: *Prélude*, *Forlane*, *Menuet*, and *Rigoudon*, dropping the *Fugue* and *Toccata*. Rhéne Baton conducted the Padeloup Orchestra in the premiere performance on February

¹¹ Stolba, *The Development of Western Music*, 777.

28, 1920.¹² This suite shows a careful and deliberate attempt to revive “old” forms and to create new ones. Not only does the title proclaim a monument to the memory of Couperin (1668-1733), but the movements reveal the use of Baroque principles as models. To quote Ravel’s words to his students: “...Copy, and if by copying you can remain yourself, then you have something to say!” Perlemuter, a pianist who studied with Ravel adds, “He tried to copy Couperin..., and did Ravel!”¹³ Certainly the structure of this suite, and characteristics of its individual dances are reminiscent of the works of the French harpsichord composers. Above all else, Ravel loved the grace, charm and formal perfection of eighteenth-century music.

Ravel always retained his ties to tradition, remaining within its framework. In an interview with the musicologist David Ewen, in the music journal *Étude*, Ravel said:

I am not a modern composer in the strictest sense of the word, because my music is an evolution, not a revolution. While I have always been receptive to new ideas in music, I have never tried to throw the laws of harmony and composition into the discard. On the contrary, I have always drawn inspiration generously from the masters. I never stop studying Mozart. To the greatest extent possible my music is built upon the traditions of the past and grows out of them....¹⁴

¹² Myers, *Ravel*, 172.

¹³ Vlado Perlemuter, *Ravel According to Ravel* (New York: White Plains, 1988), 67.

¹⁴ H. H. Stuckenschmidt, *Maurice Ravel* trans. Samuel Rosenbaum, (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Company, 1968), 224.

Indeed, Ravel's concept of perfection obviously included the necessity and the opportunity for a new challenge. Whatever Ravel did, each composition is innovative; as it strives for ultimate perfection. Thus, imagination, history, and innovation , are all one to him.

Chapter II

Background of Ravel and His Early Piano Music

Maurice Ravel was born at Ciboure, France on March 7, 1875, of Swiss-Basque descent. His father, Pierre-Joseph Ravel (1832-1908) of Swiss origin, was a distinguished engineer, while his mother, Marie Deluart (1840-1917), came from a Spanish-Basque family. The family moved permanently to Paris three months after Maurice Ravel was born. Hence, Ravel's childhood was thoroughly Parisian.¹ Ravel's younger brother Edouard (1878-1960) was born three years later.

Ravel's attachment to his mother was perhaps the deepest emotional tie of his life. Through her, he inherited a love of the Basque country and its folklore and an empathy for the music of Spain. Manuel de Falla said of Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole* (1907-8):

The rhapsody surprised me by its Spanish character... But how could I explain the subtly authentic Hispanic quality of our musician, knowing, by his own admission, that he had but neighbouring relations with our country, being born near its frontier? I rapidly solved the problem: Ravel's Spain was a Spain ideally presented by his mother, whose refined conversation, delighted me, particularly when she would recall her youthful years spent in Madrid.²

¹ G. W. Hopkins, *Twentieth-Century French Masters: The New Grove*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 151.

² Manuel de Falla, "Notes sur Ravel," trans. Roland-Manuel, *La Revue Musicale*, 3/1939, 83.

Madame Ravel was a devoted wife and mother and as a music lover took particular pride in Ravel's achievements. When the Ballet Russe premiered Ravel's new work, *Daphnis and Chloé*, on June 8, 1912, she shared a box at the Théâtre du Châtelet with Maurice Delarge, Florent Schmitt, and Igor Stravinsky.³ Ravel deeply adored his mother, and her death in 1917 grieved the composer greatly.

Ravel's parents were supportive and encouraging of their son's career choice. Ravel's father, Joseph, won a prize for piano-playing at the Geneva Conservatoire and Ravel later testified: "My father was far better educated in music than most amateurs. He was able to develop my taste and to give timely encouragement to my enthusiasm."⁴ When it became clear that Ravel's chosen career was music, the only question that remained was whether he would pursue a career as a concert pianist or as a composer.⁵

At the age of seven, Ravel took piano lessons from Henri Ghys, and at the age of twelve began to study harmony and counterpoint with Charles-René. It was Charles-René who described Ravel's childhood compositions as "works of real interest, already indicating his aspirations toward a style of original and highly condensed purity."⁶

³ Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel, Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 9.

⁴ Autobiographical sketch, *Revue Musicale* 12/1938, p19 cited from Roger Nicholes, *Ravel Remembered* (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1987), 2.

⁵ Orenstein, *Ravel, Man and Musician*, 10.

⁶ Roland Manuel, *Maurice Ravel* (London: Dennis Dobson Limited, 1947), 18.

In 1889, Ravel entered the Paris Conservatory as a student in harmony. He was placed in Anthiômés preparatory piano class, and two years later was promoted to De Bériot's class. He joined Pessard's harmony class during this same year. It was in De Bériot's class that the young Ravel first met Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes (1875-1943), who became a lifelong friend as well as the most faithful interpreter of Ravel's work.⁷ Ravel's ability over the next four years was described as "exact" but other reports commented that Ravel was careless as he was often tardy for his classes.⁸ Ravel played the Grieg Piano Concerto in January of 1893 for his half-year exam, but De Bériot disapproved of his style reporting that it was "too romantic".⁹ His June performance of Chopin's *Fourth Ballade*, resulted in De Bériot's comment, "plays with feeling and warmth, but is not always under control."¹⁰ After his next performance in January 1894 of Schumann's *Fantasie*, the comment was "plenty of temperament, but a tendency to overdo its effects." Finally, in his last report in June 1895, Bériot seemed satisfied that Ravel was at last making progress.

Ravel's passion for literature, in particular authors such as Poe, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé, became as important an influence on his music as

⁷ Myers, *Ravel: Life and Works*, 15.

⁸ Roger Nicholes, *Ravel* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1977), 4.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

what he learned from his teachers.¹¹ *Gaspard de la Nuit*, for example, displayed the imagery expressed by these writers.

Another important influence on Ravel's music began at the Paris World Exhibition of 1889 when Ravel first heard the music of the Javanese Gamelan. "These *gamelans* were a revelation with their gapped scales which form the essential fascination of the music of the Far East."¹² These exotic melodies "bewitched" and "obsessed" him.¹³ They had a similar effect on many composers, such as Emmanuel Chabrier, Claude Debussy and Erik Satie, who also heard them performed for the first time. Their works reflected the influence of these performances. The famous Russian orchestrator, Rimsky-Korsakov, recalled that it was this Far Eastern music that gave him the only pleasure he experienced while in Paris.¹⁴

At the same event, Ravel attended concerts conducted by Rimsky-Korsakov and admired his orchestration. Later Ravel said how impressed he was with the Russian's style of blending and balancing the instruments which he had learned from reading Rimsky-Korsakov's scores. M.D. Calvocoressi (1877-1944), a writer and critic, recalled: "We loved Rimsky-Korsakov's music, especially his tone-poems and some of his early operas."¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid., 3.

¹² Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, 19.

¹³ Myers, *Ravel: Life and Works*, 15.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Roger Nicholes, *Ravel Remembered* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 182.

When Ravel left the Conservatory in July 1895 at the age of 20, he began to feel inclinations toward “traditional forms.”¹⁶ An expression of this influence can be found in *Menuet Antique* (1895), his first published work, which was dedicated to his friend as well as his first interpreter, Ricardo Viñes. It is written in A-B-A form, with a brusque accentuated section alternating with a lyric section.¹⁷ Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894), a French composer and pianist, wrote *Menuet Pompeus* which inspired Ravel. Ravel’s two contrasting sections are similar to Chabrier’s Menuet in which the lyric trios conflict with the “frenzied dance rhythm.”¹⁸ As Jourdan-Morhange, a violinist, said, “... It is obvious that the *Menuet Antique* was inspired by the *Menuet Pompeus*.”¹⁹

Two years later (1897), Ravel returned to the Conservatory as a member of Gabriel Fauré’s (1845-1924) composition class. From this time on, Ravel’s style continued to grow under the guidance of Fauré. Due to Fauré’s proper guidance, Hopkins notes that the years 1897-1898 represented a “fresh” start in Ravel’s work as a composer.²⁰

¹⁶ G. W. Hopkins, “Maurice Ravel,” *The New Grove Dictionary: Music and Musicians* Vol. 15 (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited 1980), 611.

¹⁷ Orenstein, *Ravel, Man and Musician*, 141.

¹⁸ Myriam Soumagnac, “Emmanuel Chabrier,” *The New Grove Dictionary: Music and Musicians* Vol. 4 (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited 1980), 98.

¹⁹ Vlado Perlemuter, *Ravel According to Ravel* (New York: White Plains, 1988), 4.

²⁰ G. W. Hopkins, “Maurice Ravel,” *The New Grove Dictionary: Music and Musicians* Vol. 15 (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited 1980), 612.

Fauré's early works showed the influence of Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Saint-Saëns, while his appreciation for the music of Liszt became apparent at a later stage. Certainly, "Fauré passed on his veneration of formal clarity and basic Romantic harmonies, as well as the reflections of impressionists and symbolist poets to Ravel."²¹

Ravel completed his piano piece, *Pavane pour une infante défunte*, in 1899. Again, it was a piece of traditional design because of its stylized dance rhythms and its form (A-B-B'-A'-C-C'-A). Later, Ravel criticized this piece in a review of a performance of *Pavane* in 1912:

By an irony of fate, the first work which I must review is my own *Pavane pour une infante défunte*. I do not feel too embarrassed to talk about it; it is old enough for the composer to hand over to the critic. I no longer see its good points from such a distance. But, alas, I perceive its faults very clearly: the glaring influence of Chabrier and the rather poverty stricken form! The remarkable interpretation of this incomplete and unoriginal work contributed, I think, to its success.²²

Ravel knew the kind of music he intended to write would bear little resemblance to models in academic circles. His harmonies were expressive, but always blended with modality. His music sounded radical to the unfamiliar ear because of the modern harmonies and his inclination to old forms. His repeated failure with the academics was due to ignoring the

²¹ Stolba, *The Development of Western Music*, 771.

²² Perlemuter, *Ravel According to Ravel*, 4.

many rules of fugal writing which led to his continual rejection from the Prix de Rome. Again Ravel's teacher, Fauré, encouraged his studies of composition. In turn, Ravel dedicated his next important piano piece, *Jeux d'eau* (1901), to him.

Ravel first played *Jeux d'eau* for his "Apache" companions. The Apache was an artist group that gathered several times a week at the home of painter Paul Sordes and included pianists Ricardo Viñes, Marcel Chadeigne; composers Maurice Delage, Manuel de Falla; poets Léon-Paul Fargue, Tristan Klingsor; critics Michel D. Calvocoressi, Emile Vuillermoz; among others, as members.²³ They discussed literature, music, and each member would demonstrate his latest work. The Apache had their own secret theme song (the opening of Borodin's Second Symphony), their own nicknames (Ravel was called "Rara"), and their own phantom member "Gomez de Riquet," a character invented by Ravel as a signal for leaving a dull party.²⁴ After hearing Ravel's *Jeux d'eau*, Apache member, Fargue, remarked, "There was a strange fire, a whole panoply of subtleties and vibrations which none of us could previously have imagined."²⁵

"Indeed, *Jeux d'eau* opened up new horizons in piano techniques."²⁶

The characteristics were melodic but not sentimental and contain a "Lisztian

²³ Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁵ Perlemuter, *Ravel According to Ravel*, 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

exuberance.”²⁷ Ravel said to Vlado Perlemuter, pianist and author of *Ravel According to Ravel*, that he wanted the opening to be played not too fast, but without dragging. Perlemuter said: “The way to produce the floating sonority was to keep a light hand but with the fingers close to the keys.”²⁸ The pianist should keep in mind that its inspiration was taken from a line of a Henri de Regnier poem: “River god laughing as the water tickles him.”²⁹

Sonatine (1905), a piano piece with three-movements *Moderé*, *Menuet* and *Final*, is very different from the Lisztian exuberance of *Jeux d'eau*. The title, *Sonatine*, indicates the composer’s use of traditional form; its elegance and structural clarity proclaims classical design. Ravel intended this *Sonatine* exhibit the mantle of classicism, its mood and style returning to eighteenth-century elegance and formal clarity. Morhange stated of *Sonatine*: “Ravel is not yet worried about keeping up his reputation and lets his music run free. His feeling for harmonies and for new chords does not stop him from giving the *Sonatine* a classic structure.”³⁰ The theme of the first movement is cyclic and recurs both in the second and third movements. Ravel favored this classic design so much that he chose to play *Sonatine* during his tour of America (1928).³¹

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 11.

³¹ Ibid.

The tour of America was organized by Robert Schmitz, the founder-president of the Pro Musica Society which aimed to strengthen America's musical links with Europe in general, and France, in particular.³² The year 1928 was probably the most physically taxing year of Ravel's entire life.³³ The American tour lasted over three months, from the first reception held by Mrs. Thomas Edison on January 7 to his departure for Paris on April 21. Here is a portion of his demanding schedule:

February 13	Seattle (Pro Musica)
14	Vancouver
15	Portland (PM)
19	Denver (PM)
21	Kansas City (PM)
23	Minneapolis (PM)
26	New York (recording) ³⁴

Nevertheless, Ravel seemed to enjoy almost every minute, finding he was able to sleep on the transcontinental train despite suffering from chronic insomnia. During this tour, Ravel played only the first and second movement of *Sonatine*, leaving out the difficult final movement. When Robert Schmitz urged him to play the final movement Ravel retorted "I am not a pianist and I do not want to be exhibited as if I were in a circus!"³⁵.

³² Nicholes, *Ravel Remembered*, 134.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Roger Nicholes, *Ravel* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1977), 135.

³⁵ Perlemuter, *Ravel According to Ravel*, 11.

Gaspard de la Nuit (1908), subtitled “Three Poems for Piano,” is one of Ravel’s most important works. Its supernatural characteristics were inspired by Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841), a strange romantic poet influenced by the Gothic fairytales then in fashion. Ravel was fascinated by this tormented poet who took pleasure in the infernal visions of the Middle Ages.³⁶ The three poems chosen by Ravel are quite dissimilar, but fit the contrasting movements perfectly. The three movements are *Allegro* (Ondine), *Adagio* (Le Gibbet) and a dazzling *Finale* (Scarbo).

Ondine

...I thought I heard a vague harmony enchanting my slumber
and, near me, spreading, a murmur like the interrupted songs of
a sad, tender voice.

C. Brugnot.—*The Two Genii*.

The first movement, *Ondine*, dedicated to Harold Bauer, was among Ravel’s most elaborate compositions. Technically, *Ondine* develops from the earlier water-piece *Jeux d’eau*; “its melodies and arpeggios are the basic material and the fast rippling of demisemiquavers within a heavily pedaled texture serve as an ostinato.”³⁷ It is interesting to compare this with Debussy’s *Ondine* (*Prelude*, Book 2.1913) which is much smaller in scale, more fragmentary and impressionistic.

³⁶ Ibid., 43.

³⁷ Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1977), 61.

Le Gibet

What do I see moving around that gibbet?
Faust

The second movement, *Le Gibet*, dedicated to Jean Marnold, evokes a macabre landscape with the use of bell effects.³⁸ Within the short space of four pages, Ravel created a highly poetic force, with an “obsessive tolling pedal point” which seems to conjure up the tension and terror found in the works of Edgar Allan Poe.³⁹ The music frequently appears in three staves; one with the pedal point presenting the melody, and the other two containing the bass and the inner voices, suffused in a web of intricate chordal progressions.⁴⁰ See the following example:

³⁸ Ibid., 62.

³⁹ Perlemuter, *Ravel According to Ravel*, 43.

⁴⁰ Orenstein, *Ravel, Man and Musician*, 171.

Scarbo

He looked under the bed, in the fireplace, in the chest: nobody.
He could not understand where he had entered or where he
had escaped.

Hoffman.—Nachtstücke

The third movement, *Scarbo*, dedicated to Rudolph Ganz, is replete with nervous agility and unusual technical demands.⁴¹ The introduction contains a repeated figure and a rhythmic pattern. As Jankélévitch says: "...*Scarbo*...is like a fiendish encyclopedia of all the traps, obstacles and snares that an inexhaustible imagination can devise for a pianist's fingers: repeated notes, trills, alternating chords, headlong leaps, passages of wrist staccato ...The hand can never settle down."⁴² Beveridge Webster recalled a performance of *Gaspard* given by Robert Casadesus in the 1920's at which many musicians in the audience asked "How can one be sure all the right notes are being played in *Scarbo*?"⁴³ This movement is even more elaborate than *Ondine*.

Alfred Cortot (1877-1962), one of the most famous pianists of his time and Ravel's fellow pupil at Conservatoire, summed up the importance of *Gaspard de la Nuit*:

The precision of a musical interpretation only makes the romantic exaltation of the literary argument more pronounced.
...These three poems ...enrich the repertory of our time by one

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Maurice Ravel* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1959), 87.

⁴³ Orenstein, *Ravel, Man and Musician*, 172.

of the most astonishing examples of instrumental ingenuity ever contrived by the industry of composers.⁴⁴

Ravel was in the midst of composing *Gaspard de la Nuit* in 1908 when his father died on October 13. This event overshadowed a year which had begun so happily with the first successful performance of *Rapsodie espagnole*.⁴⁵ Roland Manuel said that Ravel was so grief-stricken after his father's death that he withdrew from the outside world, finding consolation only in solitude and silence.⁴⁶

Valse Nobles et Sentimentales (1911) contains seven waltzes and is dedicated to Louis Aubert, who premiered the piece at Societe Musicale Indépendante on May 9, 1911. At this first performance, the music was introduced anonymously and the audience was invited to guess its composer. Although a large portion of those attending the concert were musicians or critics, only a small number recognized that this piece was written by Ravel, while most believed it to be composed by Kodály or Eric Satie. This demonstrated Ravel's ability to write in new musical styles.⁴⁷

Henri de Regnier placed a description above the title of the *Valse*: "The delicious and ever-changing pleasure of a useless occupation" which clearly indicates the "spirit of the moment" in this piece.⁴⁸ Indeed, it can be

⁴⁴ Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, 54.

⁴⁵ Nicholes, *Ravel Remembered*, cronology xx.

⁴⁶ Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, 55.

⁴⁷ Myers, *Ravel: Life and Works*, 41.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

described as a “little microcosm” in which the whole of Ravel’s “formidable musical equipment is displayed, both technically and emotionally.”⁴⁹ “The lilting rhythms, rubatos, balanced phrases, clear forms and unexpected harmonies make this piece a treasure-house of subtleties and refinements of many kinds.”⁵⁰ Ravel believed the title of *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* adequately conveyed his intention of composing a chain of waltzes following the example of Schubert.⁵¹ Giesecking also said the virtuosity of *Valses* came from the basis of *Gaspard de la Nuit* and the writing appeared to be more transparent. It contains the “firmness of harmonies” and shows the “contours of the music in more relief.”⁵² After hearing this piece, Debussy said that Ravel had the finest ear which had ever existed.⁵³

Ravel’s early piano works were composed at a time when Paris was considered the world leader in music. Many artists were attracted to Paris in the first half of the twentieth- century because of the opportunities available in composition, performance, education and scholarship.⁵⁴ As a Parisian, Ravel was exposed to these activities. The warm support of his parents, together with his studies in the Paris Conservatory, gave Ravel solid training and knowledge at an early age.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 169.

⁵¹ Ibid., 169.

⁵² Perlemuter, *Ravel According to Ravel*, 43.

⁵³ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁴ Stolba, *The Development of Western Music*, 768.

Ravel's style grew continually during the composer's life. The antiquary writing of *Menuet Antique* shows the early influence of Chabrier, the Lisztian style of *Jeux d'eau* reveals the larger shadow of Romanticism, and the classical design of *Sonatine* demonstrates the composer's interest in the eighteenth century. Ravel's passion for literature is reflected in *Gaspard de la Nuit*, as well as his unexpected harmonies in *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*. Through his studies of the past, Ravel incorporated traditional forms, modes, modern harmonies and contrapuntal techniques into new ideals with the skill of a master craftsman.

Chapter III

Neoclassicism - Historical Background and Development

One of the major traits of Neoclassicism is a return to older, traditional forms of music. In a reaction to the excesses of Romanticism and Impressionism, composers found inspiration in Baroque forms and instruments. A review of the nineteenth-century Romantic and Impressionist periods will precede the discussion on the development of the Neoclassical movement.

“Nineteenth-century Romanticism was not a break from eighteenth-century Classicism, but an extension, alteration and expansion of the original movement.”¹ Romantic composers were also striving for perfection of forms, both new and old. The major trait of Romanticism was the emphasis on emotional expression. This expression of personal feelings became so profusive by the end of the century that many composers rededicated themselves to the study and performance of past masters. This study of past masters' works by Romantic composers laid the foundation for the Neoclassical movement. Composers of the Romantic period such as Mendelssohn, Brahms, Schumann, and Busoni, to mention a few, led the way for later composers to embrace the neoclassic style.

¹ Stolba, *The Development of Western Music*, 580.

Felix Mendelssohn's affection for the eighteenth century, especially the music of J. S. Bach and Mozart, made him a neo-classicist. *Songs Without Words* reflects Mendelssohn's romantic tendencies because of their lyrical melodies. However, his inclination to traditional form was obvious in his piano works, *Variations Serieuse* (op.54), *Prelude and Fugue in E minor* (1827, 1841), *Six Sonatas* (op.65, 1845) and *Six Preludes and Fugues* (op.35, 1827-1837). Mendelssohn, as a young man, championed Bach. He began a revival of Bach's music by performing not only the St. Matthew Passion, but many of his compositions in new ways. He performed Bach's *Preludes and Fugues* on the organ as well.

Robert Schumann (1810-56) was influenced by Schubert in his lyrical melodies, and by Bach in his contrapuntal technique. At the same time, his style showed the inspirations of his contemporaries Chopin, Paganini, Weber, and Clara Wieck. Schumann's early piano works, *Toccata in C Major* (1829-32), *Six Fugues On B-A-C-H* (Op.60), and some unpublished Fugues, are examples of his neoclassical disposition.

Johannes Brahms (1833-97), could be considered a neo-classicist. His rich harmonies and lyric melodies expressed his Romanticism, but his use of strong contrapuntal techniques showed the Baroque influence of Bach. Many of his piano works have neoclassical features, such as *Presto after J.S. Bach* (1st and 2nd version) and *Chaconne by J.S. Bach* (arranged for the left

hand). His *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel* (op.24, 1862) showed a deep influence of Handel. This large-scale set of variations with its simplicity of theme, clarity of mode and traditional cadences reflected Brahms's refined ideas on composition in this classic-type of form.² Brahms became an astute student of all musical history, including Bach, Palestrina, Schutz and Haydn, as well as Chopin and Liszt. His neoclassicism extended to a deep study of folk music, as well.

Another composer, Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924), tended to use a dry and unsentimental "intellectual" style to express his outspoken aversion to Romanticism.³ Neoclassical tendencies appeared in many of his compositions, as well as through his transcriptions of *Bach's Choral Preludes*, and *Bach's Chaconne*.

Even Franz Liszt, a towering figure of Romanticism, wrote transcriptions of Bach's organ preludes and fugues. In addition, through his transcriptions, Liszt included the largely forgotten lieder of Schubert in his concerts in various Italian cities and Vienna.⁴ Liszt also transcribed Schubert's *Divertissement a l'hongroise* which is noted for the rapid

² Michael Musgrave, *The Music of Brahms* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 54.

³ Willi Apel, "Neoclassicism" *The Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1944), 484.

⁴ Humphrey Searle, *The New Grove: Early Romantic Masters: Chopin, Schumann and Liszt* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 243.

consecutive 10ths. Even though these pieces were “pure Liszt,” and the passages reflected his grand virtuosity, they still relied on earlier models.

Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, Busoni, and Liszt’s compositions emulated the great masters; this was evident in their contrapuntal writing and employment of classic forms. These elements foreshadowed one of the major features of Neoclassicism: the “emphasis on contrapuntal texture, and the revival of early forms.”⁵

Several performers, including the great pianists Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann, brought great works of the past onto the stage. While it was standard practice to play contemporary pieces of Chopin, Brahms, Schumann, and the pianists’ own compositions, it was unusual to perform the older masters’ works, such as Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. However, these performers, like the neoclassic composers, in light of the Romantic trend of their time, rediscovered worthiness in the masterworks of the past.

It is necessary to discuss Impressionism because Ravel’s art is a mixture of both Impressionism and Neoclassicism. The Impressionistic trend was lead by Debussy who was influenced by a group of French Impressionist painters and poets. His style suggested vivid instrumental colors, static melodies, harmonies in parallel motions, and juxtaposition of complex

⁵ Apel, “Neoclassicism” *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 484.

textures. Also, his music included elaborate figurations, and evolving forms without sharp sectional divisions.⁶

Debussy's influence on twentieth-century music was felt not only through his treatment of the orchestra, which was influenced by the works of Rimsky-Korsakov, but also through his own piano music. The impressionistic piece, *Estampes* (Prints; 1903), illustrates his use of pentatonic scales, whole tone scales and parallel chords. It also shows the influence of oriental and gamelan music.

Debussy's neoclassic tendencies can also be found in his piano work, *Suite Bergamasque* (1890-1905). It contains *Prelude*, *Menuet*, *Clair de Lune*, and *Passepied*. *Prelude* and *Menuet* certainly illustrate the use of traditional titles. In addition, the fourth movement, "Passepied," is a popular Baroque dance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Traditionally, it was a dance in triple meter. However, Debussy revived this old tradition into the twentieth century by changing its meter into 4/4 common time.

Debussy's *Suite: Pour le piano* (1894-1901) contains *Prelude*, *Sarabande*, and *Toccata*. It is considered one of his early important piano pieces. This piece included not only the impressionistic features such as

⁶ Robert P. Morgan, "Neoclassical" *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (USA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 391.

watery effects, but also neoclassical design. Neoclassic features are evident in the movement titles and the overall structure.

Debussy and Ravel were two of the most important composers of piano music in the early twentieth century. Ravel, thirteen years younger than Debussy, was often misidentified as an “imitator” of Debussy’s impressionism. Ravel’s early works showed Debussy’s influence, but Ravel’s treatment of rhythm and phrase structure was already distinctly different from that of Debussy. Ravel was more “classical” when choosing his forms and harmonies. As Myers said:

The classicism of Ravel’s form alone was in marked contrast with Debussy’s much more fluid construction, and whereas the former made a point of addressing the clarity of his formal design, the later was especially anxious that his music should sound like an improvisation.⁷

Impressionistic features were used in many of Ravel’s piano pieces, such as *Jeux d’eau*, *Miroirs*, and *Gaspard de la nuit*. *Jeux d’eau* marked a new direction in Ravel’s piano compositions. It musically mimicked the sounds emitted by fountains and waterfalls. Thus, it requires of the pianist great technical agility and attention to details of color, atmosphere and pedaling. However, it also has a neoclassical essence which is evident from

⁷ Myers, *Ravel: Life and Works*, 97.

Ravel's writing the piece in the style of a sonata. Nicholas Slonimsky, famous author of *Music Since 1900*, wrote:

When the luxuriance of Impressionism reached its highest point, it became clear to many composers that further amplification of colorist devices was no longer stimulating. It was to be expected that composers and audience alike would rebound from such sonic inundation. This reaction coincided with the economical collapse following World War I, which made it financially impossible to engage large orchestras or operatic companies. Thus the cry "Back to Bach!" went out all over Europe.⁸

Maurice Ravel, a product of this time, was influenced by Romanticism as well as Impressionism. His lyrical line and his deep self-expression proclaimed the romantic spirit of the time. However, Ravel, as a contemporary of Debussy, reflected the Impressionistic style in many of his piano works. Ravel realized the importance of the great masters and from this understanding as well as many other influences (even the First World War), he began composing in a neoclassic style.

Slonimsky also wrote:

Musical tastes with the aid of intellectual rationalization made a 180° turn toward the past. But the past could not be recaptured in its literal form, and the new retrograde movement was launched under the name of neo-classicism.⁹

Slonimsky defines Neoclassicism in nine points. They are:

⁸ Nicolas Slonimsky, *Music Since 1900*, 5th Ed. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1994), 1155.

⁹ Ibid., 1153.

- 1) rehabilitation of diatonicism as the dominant idiom,
- 2) elimination of all programmatic and romantic associations either in the titles or tonal contents of individual works,
- 3) a demonstrative revival of the Baroque as passing notes,
- 4) demotion of chromatic elements of the scale to their traditional role,
- 5) restrained use of massive sonorities,
- 6) cultivation of compact forms, such as Symphonies, Sonatas, and reduced orchestral contingents,
- 7) reconstruction of old Baroque instruments, particularly the harpsichord,
- 8) exploration of canonic and fugal writing without adherence to strict rules of classical polyphony,
- 9) radical curtailment of the development section in Baroque forms with a purely nominal recapitulation, and a concise coda free from redundant repetition of final tonic chords.¹⁰

Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin* illustrates the neoclassical features listed by Slonimsky. The title order of *Prelude* and *Fugue* was a typical arrangement of Baroque compositions, and *Forlane*, *Rigoudon*, *Menuet* and *Toccata* were of French Baroque tradition.

A characteristic of Neoclassicism is the emphasis on exact execution of the composers' indications. This is evident in the first movement of Ravel's *Prelude*, where he indicated his embellishments to be played as correctly as

¹⁰ Ibid., 1153.

possible. In *Prelude*, Ravel indicated the grace notes needed to be played on the first beat. This tendency was also found in Couperin's *Ordres*, which included *Explication des Agrémentes et des figures* to explain how to play the ornaments. Both Ravel and Couperin wanted their embellishments to be played as precisely as possible.

Ravel uses a consistent key throughout the whole suite, very seldom varying from it. For example, he uses E minor in the first three movements, changes to C major in the fourth movement, and returns to E minor in the fifth and sixth movements. This "rehabilitation of diatonicism as the dominant idiom" is another neoclassic feature.¹¹ At the same time, Ravel uses chromaticism and free modulation to produce musical tension.

All six movements of the suite are modeled after traditional forms, the adherence to which exemplifies the features of Neo-classicism. In each case, Ravel creates new, innovative, highly imaginative works based on these "old" forms. Ravel did not allow his "perfection" of form to confine his range. Qualities of improvisation emerge in his writings as exemplified by *Prélude* and *Toccata*. Thus, his adherence to traditional musical forms did not limit his innovation.

Ravel certainly applied canonic and contrapuntal techniques in the second movement of the *Fugue*. These strict contrapuntal writings were

¹¹ Ibid., 1154.

common to Bach, but Ravel added the essence of twentieth-century harmonic language making it his own unique style.

Simplicity and transparency of sound are found in *Forlane* and *Menuet*. The first and the sixth movements, *Prelude* and *Toccata* respectively, are in sonata form, while the second movement, *Fugue* is in strict contrapuntal style. The third, fourth, and fifth movements, *Forlane*, *Minuet*, and *Rigaudon* respectively, are based on ABA form.

The history of Neoclassicism went beyond Ravel to such towering composers as Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Hindemith. It also included premier teachers, such as Nadia Boulanger, who influenced many American composers. However, detailed discussion of these artists is beyond the scope of this paper. Needless to say, each composer expresses Neoclassicism in his or her own individual way.

Chapter IV

A Pianistic Look at *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

Le Tombeau de Couperin was originally composed for piano between 1914-1917. Madame Marguerite Long gave the first piano performance at a concert of the Societe Musicale Indépendante at Salle Gaveau in April 1919. The front page illustration, a funeral urn was drawn by Ravel. Each one of the six pieces is in part dedicated to the memory of one of Ravel's friends who died in the First World War. He also declared that this piece was a homage to eighteenth-century French clavicinists, rather than a personal tribute to François Couperin (1668-1733).¹ This suite, Ravel's last solo piano work, was a return to more traditional style and is considered one of his finest piano achievements.

Le Tombeau de Couperin contains six dance movements which will be discussed separately below. *Prelude*, the first movement, is characterized by its liveliness of expression. The second movement, *Fugue*, features the manipulation of subject and counter-subject. Simplicity and transparent texture are the essence of the next three movements which Ravel named *Forlane*, *Rigoudon* and *Menuet*, and the final movement, *Toccata*, demonstrates the pianist's virtuosity.

¹ Orenstein, *Ravel, Man and Musician*, 185.

Prélude

A Baroque prelude is defined as a quasi-improvisatory piece which was written for solo lute or solo keyboard. "It demonstrates idiomatic virtuosity, rhythmic freedom and loose thematic construction."² A composed prelude has no single form but is always a self-contained piece. "Its improvisatory element was particularly evident in the unmeasured preludes of seventeenth and eighteenth-century French clavecinists, many of which were written for lute by Denis Gaultier and for harpsichord by Louis Couperin, and D'anglebert."³

Ravel, as a twentieth-century neoclassicist, limited the improvisational nature of his *Prelude*. The notations which include grace notes, slur markings, pedaling and dynamics are precisely marked. By using these strict notations, Ravel transformed the prelude from an improvisational piece played before a church liturgy into a pre-set more highly organized composition. Yet, elements of improvisation contributes to a ceaseless variety in the treatment of its themes. This *Prelude* is, in fact, an ingenious blend of high organization, development, and improvisation. There are all ideals of the *Prélude* of the high Baroque.

² Arthur J. Ness, "Prelude," *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (USA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 653.

³ Stolba, *The Development of Western Music*, 351.

As previously mentioned, Ravel required precision in the execution of the grace notes. In the beginning of the *Prélude*, the grace notes are footnoted to indicate that they were to be played on the beat.⁴ Another particular notation is found in the chromatic descending passage in measure 14, where Ravel marked a specific sixteenth rest. This rest indicated the “D” could best be played by the left thumb. The rest was marked in the treble clef which indicated Ravel’s attention to details. In the following passages, Ravel did not mark the sixteenth rest. Due to the inconsistent usage of the pattern of the rest, the right hand naturally takes over the melodic line in treble clef. Thus, the D in m14 should naturally sound as an accent.

Measure 14-17:

Figure 1. Sixteenth Rest Usage in *Prelude*

⁴ Music Score, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Durand S.A. Editions Musicales

The slur markings in this chromatic passage are peculiar because the right hand phrase and the left hand phrase are of different lengths. The slur of the right hand lasts only one measure, while the left hand slur continues for an entire two measures of the chromatic passage. The player should make an effort to articulate both phrasing instructions.

A close look at Ravel's pedaling marks for the swift passage at the end of the *Prélude* reveals a break between the starting pedal at bass E and the final E chord which must fall immediately after the run but before the chord (5 bars from end). The pianist should stay in tempo while playing this passage (without rushing), and produce the sound of running water, while maintaining the clarity of each note.

The last five bars m 90-94:

Figure 2. Pedaling Marks Usage in *Prelude*

A consistent characteristic of Ravel's piano compositions is his technical demands of the pianist. The composer's strict notations make the

compositions more difficult to play. For example, the *Prélude* is difficult because the right hand must play the indicated grace notes on the beat while the left hand is contending with the sixteenth notes. His dynamics change from double piano (*pp*) to double forte (*ff*) by the end of the exposition, adding to the difficulty of the piece. A similar situation is found in the quasi-recapitulation (m58), which also starts very softly and develops to double forte (m77) in a relatively lengthy period of time, making it technically difficult for the pianist to maintain a gradual, yet controlled crescendo. Another difficulty is maintaining evenness of touch. The pianist must control each 16th-note precisely, voice and gain nuances, emphasize the dynamics, and yet absolutely control the tempo.

Techniques used in this *Prélude* include pentatonic melodies, atonal chromaticism, modality, tonal ambivalence, variation, augmented and whole-tone chords, tritone relationship and a unique blend of dry linearity and impressionism.

Pentatonic melodies are evident in the opening theme and measure seven. See figure 3. The opening theme contains a G-pentatonic melody (G-A-B-D-E) and measure seven contains an A-pentatonic sound in the bass (A-B-C#-E-F#). Meanwhile, atonal chromatic passages are found in m14-15 and m18-19 in the tenor and bass. Modality is found in m73-76 in the bass line where the passage contains a Dorian fall: D-C-B-A-G-F-E-D. See figure 4.

Opening Theme, Measure 1-2 and Measure 7:

Figure 3. Pentatonic Melody Usage in Prelude

Measure 73-76:

Figure 4. Dorian Fall Usage in Prelude

The key is not clearly announced in the opening theme; it seems the key is in E minor but the G-pentatonic melody hints the key of G major. Such tonal ambivalence is evident in m21 where the cadence (G chord) hints the key of C major, but it changes to D major in m22 on the third beat. It seems that Ravel is first suggesting one tonality, but then denies it by an unusual chord.

The *Prélude* contains numerous variations. For example, in m34-37, the main theme has been varied by using different harmonies while in m38-44, it is varied by augmentation. Another melodic variation is found in m50-52. This three-measure phrase is extended to a five-measure phrase in m53-57. A variation of m14-21 begins at m58-67. The secondary theme (m14) is varied into a higher range and the bass line is transformed into a whole-tone fall (see Figure 6). Ravel reapplied these techniques in m68-82, a variation of m22-30, which ends up with a passage of Dorian fall (see Figure 4).

A close look at m50-51 reveals an augmented chord (F#-Bb-D), a whole-tone scale (F#-G#-Bb-C-D-E), a tritone relationship (F# to C in bass), and quartal harmony (D-G-C). See figure 5. These elements appear again in m53-54. The passage from m58-67 contains a whole-tone fall (G#-F#-E-D-C-Bb-Ab) illustrating the composer's intent of using the whole-tone scale (see Figure 6).

Measure 50-51:

Figure 5. Augmented Chord, Whole-Tone Scale, Tritone and Quartal Harmony Usage in Prelude

Measure 58-67:

Figure 6. Whole-Tone Fall Usage in Prelude

Fugue

The term *fuga* in Latin means “chasing of voices.” In the Middle Ages, *fuga* was used synonymously with *chace* and *caccia* to denote canon. The term fugue was not formally coined until the eighteenth century and reached its climax through Bach’s instrumental fugues.⁵

J.S. Bach is traditionally regarded as the dominant figure of fugal writing. His fugal style can be briefly summarized as follows: (a) strictness of counterpoint and exposition procedure, (b) the evolution of the episode as a feature in its own right, (c) the use of recapitulation, and (d) frequent use of subject entry position.⁶ Ravel understood Bach’s contribution to the fugue and thus based his style of fugue on Bach’s high standards.

The *Fugue* in *Le Tombeau de Couperin* is Ravel’s only work in this style and required intensive study on his part. He composed several short fugues as informal exercises, and even rewrote one of Bach’s fugues. He claimed later that his interpretation of Bach’s fugue was an improved version, and helped ensure that his *Fugue* would be perfect.⁷ On Ravel’s final accomplishment, Orenstein states, “This fugue...is at once distinguished

⁵ Ernest D. May, “Fugue,” *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (USA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 328.

⁶ Roger Bullivent, “Fugue” *The New Grove Dictionary: Music and Musicians* Vol. 7 (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited 1980), 15-6.

⁷ Myer, *Ravel: Life and Works*, 172.

from its predecessors by its triadic subject, its three-part texture, making it the only such fugue that Ravel ever wrote, and, above all by its sensibility.”⁸

Although it is a well-written fugue, it was omitted in the orchestral version. There are several difficult aspects to this *Fugue*. First, to play the accent of the weak beats versus the lyrical line is challenging, especially when these accents are to be played by the “weak fingers.” This occurs at the beginning, m2 and m3, where the second subject entry is accompanied with the lyrical counter-subject (see Figure 7).

Measure 1-4:

Figure 7. Subject and Counter-Subject Usage in Fugue

Second, playing the contrast between the “drier” beginning, which only has one voice, and the colorful middle section, which contains two voices and pedal point is a challenge. Extra finesse is needed when playing this colorful middle section within the dynamic of pianissimo.

⁸ Orenstain, *Ravel, Man and Musician*, 152.

Measure 35:

Figure 8. Subject, Counter-Subject and Pedal Point Usage in Fugue

Third, in my opinion, the application of the damper pedal and soft pedal should be simultaneous in m35. In addition, the pedal-point in bass adds an impressionistic essence. Finally, extra effort is necessary to play the subject and countersubject clearly in order to keep the beautiful tone color. Pedaling every beat appears to solve this problem.

The first exposition contains subject, counter-subject and a chromatic phrase. Ravel created his subject from four notes: A, G, B, and E, which relates to the opening phrase of the *Prelude* (see Figure 9). The *Prelude* begins with a hint of a G Chord and an E chord which are broken into two groups of sixteenth-notes starting on A, through G, descending to D. The same motif is found in the opening of *Fugue*: A goes to G and forms the

outline of a descending E chord. Clearly, Ravel based his *Fugue* on the previous theme of the *Prelude*.

Prelude Measure 1-3:

Figure 9. Opening Theme Usage in Prelude

The piece begins with three entries of the subject. The first entry of the subject lasts three measures and has an accented character (implying appoggiaturas). The second subject entry (the answer) starts in m3 on the dominant minor. The third entry of the subject appears on tonic in m5, one octave lower than the first entry. This form of introducing the subject follows traditional Bachian practice. The counter-subject appears in the fourth measure as an accompaniment of the first subject. Because of its syncopation and inclusion of a triplet, this counter-subject creates the sense of hesitation which makes it more sustained and legato when compared to the accented subject.

The two upper voices of the counter-subject alternate in a descending manner in measures 7 and 8 (see Figure 10). The chromatic passage that

appears in measure 9 (in the soprano) is a derivation of the previous counter-subject. A close look at the chromatic passage in measures 9-10 exposes the fourth entry of the subject, this time in the alto. The harmonic progression i-vi-iii-iv-i (E-C-G-A-E) is apparent in the bass line which leads to the three-voice counterpoint.

Measure 5-12:

Figure 10. Two Upper Voices of Counter-Subject, Chromatic Passages and Harmonic Progression Usage in Fugue

The following section in the dominant is simply an inversion of the passages of the first exposition. It contains a chromatic passage in the bass (m11) that is an inversion of the preceding chromatic passage in the soprano (m9). The subject reverts to the soprano in the dominant minor, and the

counter-subject moves to the alto. In fact, Ravel simply reverses the location of subject and counter-subject. Ravel does not change the key until all four subject entries have appeared. With the fourth subject entry (alto, m9) and the fifth subject entry (soprano, m11), the key switches from tonic to dominant B minor. This is further evidence of Bachian style.

The chromaticism in the Fugue shows the knowledge of the practices of J. S. Bach. Bach uses chromaticism often during the course of a fugue, to increase expressivity, interest, or excitement; here Ravel uses it at first, rather than at last. The chromatic passages in this *Fugue* are first found in m9 in the soprano voice, and later in m11 in the bass voice. Ravel's Fugue, like Bach's Fugue in D# minor (The Well Tempered Clavier, Book one, No.8), shows Ravel's study of Baroque contrapuntal devices, such as inversion, invertible counterpoint, canon, canonic inversion, and stretto.

Ravel modulates from the key of B minor to the key of G major in measure 15 (which starts the second exposition) (see Figure 12). He knits his texture so well that it is difficult to discern its similarity to the first exposition. The subject appears again in the soprano but this time in the tonic of G (m15). The counter-subject appears later in m16, and the subject entry returns in m17 as an announcement of the key of D major. This follows the Bachian pattern of subject entries (see Figure 11).

m1-- tonic
 m3--dominant
 m5--tonic
 m9--tonic(exception)
 m11--dominant

Figure 11. Chart of Subject Entries Usage in *Fugue*

Measure 13-21:

Figure 12. Second Exposition in G major Usage in *Fugue*

An inversion of the subject is found in the alto and soprano starting in m22 and m24 (see Figure 13). The inverted counter-subjects are found in the bass in m26, in the soprano m27, and the bass again m28. Through the next four measures, Ravel shortens the distance between each appearance of counter-subject leading our attention to the coming stretto in m33 and m34 (see Figure 14).

Measure 22-33:

Handwritten musical score for measures 22-33 of a fugue. The score is written on three systems of grand staves. Measure numbers 22, 24, 26, 30, and 33 are circled. Dynamics include *p*, *ppp*, *mf*, and *f*. The notation shows complex polyphonic textures with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes.

Figure 13. Inversion of Subject and Counter-Subject Usage in Fugue

Handwritten musical score for measures 30-35 of a fugue. The score is written on two systems of grand staves. Measure numbers 30, 33, 34, and 35 are circled. Dynamics include *p*, *mf*, and *pp*. The notation shows complex polyphonic textures with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Handwritten notes "Exps. 4." and "stretto M33-34" are present.

Figure 14. Stretto Usage in Fugue

From m35, Ravel brings us back to pianissimo, which was used to shade the opening. The *pp* in the opening should be played with a “dry” sense, however, the *pp* in m35, with the pedal point on B, should project a dim but clear tone.

The overform of this fugue is based on several expositions and episodes (see figure 15 with its relevant measures):

Exposition 1.	m1-12	tonic
Episode	m13-14	
Exposition 2.	m15-19	in G major
	m17-19	dominant
Episode	m20-21	
Exposition 3.	m22-26	inversion begins d minor, ends a minor
Exposition 4.	m35-37	tonic, <u>Canon A Two</u> subject and counter-subject made into one subject
Episode	m38-39	
Exposition 5.	m39-42	<u>Canon A Two Inversion</u>
Episode	m42-43	canons, counter-subject and inversions
Exposition 6.	m44-47	a minor, <u>Canon A Two</u> , subject and inversion
Exposition 7.	m48+	<u>Canon A Two in Tonic</u>
	m50-53	Stretto, base on subject including a minor, f, c
	m54-58	Stretto, base on counter-subject, including e minor, g, c, f
Exposition 8.	m58-61	tonic, <u>Canon A Three</u> , subject and counter-subject stay in original form

Figure 15. Chart of Expositions Usage in *Fugue*

An innovation is found as Ravel's *Fugue* unfolds; the subject and countersubject fuse to form a simple subject (see m35-40). The Subject and the countersubject become one. This is like the fugal writing of Beethoven (such as piano sonata op. 110), where variation techniques invade the very subject itself.

Ravel introduces a lengthy stretto to close this fugue. The stretto is then transformed three times (see Figure 16). The first part is based on the head of the subject and its inversion (m50) which is later transformed to a derivation of the counter-subject and its inversion (m54). Then the third transformation (m56) is found in the last part of the stretto and is intensified through a compact distribution of notes. Finally, this intensification is resolved by recalling the subject and counter-subject in pianissimo, concluding the *Fugue* with simplicity.

Measure 50-61(end):

Figure 16. Stretto Usage in *Fugue*

Ingeniously, Ravel crafted the last four bars as if they were a Coda (Meno allegro, Ral. Lent Ral.); yet, at the same time, we find the strictest canonic writing (canon a 3). Again, these last four bars contains richness of many meanings.

Forlane (Forlana)

A *Forlane* is defined as a lively Italian folkdance, particularly associated with Venice. It became a French court dance circa 1697-1750. Carlo de Blasis, author of *The Code of Terpsichord* (1825), described the

forlane as “a dance of flirtation but with gracefulness.”⁹ Meredith E. Little also explained:

One or more couples would dance simultaneously moving toward and then away from each other, touching hands or feet, turning, and beating the air with their arms. ...Its music was played by mandolins, castanets and drums. ...It became popular among Venetian gondoliers and street people in the eighteenth century.¹⁰

The forlane is characterized by its compound duple meter (6/8 or 6/4), dotted rhythm, and repeated motifs. Composers usually included a forlane as a part of a suite. Stylized forlanes can be found in François Couperin's *Concerts royaux* chamber music written in 1722, the piece of music which inspired Ravel to compose his forlane as the third movement of *Le Tombeau*.¹¹

Ravel's *Forlane* is in rondo form, ABACADAE with a coda. Section A, the refrain, takes the first eight measures and is a four-bar phrase with its echo. Section B, from m9 to m24, is a ten-bar (4+6) phrase that contains developmental materials. Immediately following section B is a repeat of the refrain (section A, m25) followed by a new section, designated C. Section C lasts for 24 measures(m29-52) before the refrain is recited again. The D

⁹ Meredith Ellis Little, “Forlana” *The New Grove Dictionary: Music and Musicians* Vol. 6 (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited 1980), 708.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ William Mitchell and Felix Salzer, Editor, *The Music Forum*, vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 330-331.

section, which begins in m61, changes style and is written as a chorale. The refrain appears again from m93 through m120; this time as a recapitulation. Finally, the E section proceeds with a change of key (tonic major) from m121 to m137 which leads to the concluding coda.

The rondo form of the *Forlane* is complex, since the first A-B-A is repeated, with the second A only 4 bars in length (m25-8) (117-120). In sections C and D, we find an internal A-B-A. However, section D is not followed by A, but by the coda, a whole new section.

In each case, Ravel creates some puzzling of the forms. One would have to say, that like all the great composers who used old forms, they adapt them. Also, Ravel inserts tonal ambiguities into this *Forlane*, such as those passages that hint at two tonalities, deceptive cadences, unexpected modulations, and rare tonal relationships. Even when the form is clear, the tonality is very surprising. Ambiguity of tonality, melody, and harmony are often found in this *Forlane*.

Notice that each section takes up n measures, where n is a multiple of eight, which indicates that the structure of *Forlane* is based on eight-bar phrases sub-divided into four bars. Thus, the unit of structure is the four-bar phrase on which the entire movement is built.

Ravel's *Forlane* contains surprising harmonies which were considered radical during his time. What made Ravel's harmony so radical is

his use of polychords, whole-tone scale, the Neapolitan Sixth, and modal scales (specifically Lydian). This is opposed to the simple harmonic progression of the original forlane dance.

Ravel's many use of polychords is apparent in the opening of *Forlane*. The first chord of the piece is a polychord (Augmented V with tonic). A disguised polychord appears on the first beat of the second measure. It is an augmented G# chord built on an A chord.

Figure 17. Polychord Usage in *Forlane*

In addition, a new polychord is added to this in the second measure: iv/G#major-minor.

Figure 18. Polychord Usage in *Forlane*

Further, the first two measures contain three augmented chords in succession. An outline of the melody from measure one to five, includes six notes of the whole-tone scale (see Figure 19).

Figure 19. Whole-Tone Scale Usage in *Forlane*

All this is a good indication of what is to come.

An obvious polychord is found in m131 where a C# major chord is built on a D minor chord (see Figure 20). Ravel also uses broken polychords in m20 which contain an E major chord built over a C major chord (see Figure 21). A similar situation appears in m23 where the chord is a combination of D and Bb major. These frequent appearances of polychords add to the beauty of the dance.

Measure 131:

Figure 20. Polychord Usage in *Forlane*

Measure 20-23:

Figure 21. Polychord Usage in *Forlane*

Ravel embellishes his *Forlane* by building chords on the whole-tone scale. Examples can be found in measures 21, 24, 135 and 154. Each of the whole-tone chords in the listed occurrences do not carry specific functions (i.e. do not replace secondary dominant, etc.); they only serve to enrich the texture.

Other noteworthy harmonic devices prevalent in Ravel's *Forlane* include the Neapolitan chord occurring at the end of the chorale section (m76) and in the Coda (m155). The Lydian 4th occurs regularly: in theme A, for example, and in the Coda (m145+.)

The last section, which sounds like a music box, starts in m137. The first four-bar phrase with trill (from m137-140) is similar to the second four-bar phrase; the third four-bar phrase (m145-149) is similar to the fourth four-bar phrase. Ravel shapes the harmonies differently through each of

these phrases. By applying the usage of polychords (i.e., m137, f/F Major7, m138, d#/e°), the clouding of tonality, and the increasing of dissonances, Ravel creates the air of a dreamdance. Through these novelities, the neoclassic style blends with the impressionistic style to create a unique sound.

Ravel sometimes allows himself to be ironic, for example in the *Forlane*, the ending becomes less and less traditional. Its end is almost atonal! However, these qualities remain and certainly define his personal style.

The dance rhythm which links the piece from the beginning to the end reappears in the last seven measures (see Figure 22). Ravel altered the chords in m154 and m155 with G and G#. These plagal cadences in the end produce an ancient feeling. Finally, *Forlane* concludes in the key of tonic. Paul Valery, a poet, sent Ravel a verse describing these last eight bars as a gift from heaven in their beauty and simplicity.¹²

Last Seven Measures m153-159:

¹² Maurice Delarge, from a program note of Walter Gieseking (Angel 35272).

Figure 22. Plagal Cadences Usage in *Forlane*

The difficulty for the pianist in playing this *Forlane* is caused by the modern harmonies. The score looks easy but sounds radical because it contains polychords, whole-tone chords and Ravel's daring use of modulations. It is not unusual that Ravel uses the traditional Rondo form and authentic cadence here, mixing modern harmonies and modulations. In learning this piece, it is suggested that the pianist study the modern harmonies, modes and modulations first.

Rigaudon (Rigodon)

Rigaudon is defined as a cheerful Baroque dance closely related to southern French folk dances. It was quickly adopted in Germany and England as a popular social dance. The rigaudon is often in duple meter, similar to the *bourrée* from which it is sometimes indistinguishable. The

similar to the *bourrée* from which it is sometimes indistinguishable. The rigoudon is characterized by its syncopation, its upbeat four-measure phrase in cut time, and its binary form. Couperin, Telemann, and Muffat wrote music for instrumental ensemble or harpsichord in this style of dance. Compared to other dance styles such as the minuet, allemande, courante and forlane, the rigoudon retained its simple rhythm, phrasing, and harmonic texture.¹³

The *Rigoudon* of *Le Tombeau* is not syncopated, on the contrary, it arrives with a “triumphal announcement” at the beginning of this movement.¹⁴ The form is ABA, in which the cheerful A section is a contrast to the mysterious middle section. The key begins in C major, changes to C minor in the middle section, and returns to the home key at the end. This key arrangement is similar to *Forlane* which begins in E minor, change to E major and returns to E minor at the end. Within its simplicities, many subtleties of tonalities appear.

From measure 9, the key area moves from C to Ab, Db to C# and F# (the tritone key). Measures 25 to 32 feature a long bass line which outlines the whole G major scale, the home dominant (see Figure 23). The middle section (m37) moves magically between C minor, with hints of Ab (m50), Eb

¹³ Bruce Gustafson, “*Rigaudon*,” *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (USA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 708.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

It is characteristic of Ravel to distill these complexities to apparent simplicity.

Measure 25-32:

Figure 23. Bass Line of G Major Scale Usage in Rigouden

A melancholy melody carried by the right hand in octave form appears before the return of section A (m85-92). This passage contains a consistent bass rhythm which requires a technique of playing notes with the hands over each other. The wrist of the right hand is raised as high as

possible, allowing the left hand to play under it. This simple tune is haunting, and holds the tonality of the suite (e minor) in veiled remembrance. Ravel utilizes both the melodic and natural minor scales of ancient heritage. This phrase, plus the mysterious middle section, give this unassuming movement a surprising expression and depth.

Measure 85-92:

Figure 24. The Octave Melancholy Melody Usage in Rigouden

One of the difficulties of playing *Rigouden* is the continuous rhythmic pattern played by the left hand beginning in m3. The notes in the bass line need to be played with care as the thumb can sometimes accent the

bass line need to be played with care as the thumb can sometimes accent the weak beat as the left hand crosses over the right. In order to keep the tone of the staccato bass line quiet, the left hand must maintain its balance while trying to make a gradual crescendo.

Another difficulty for the left hand is contained in the middle section. This section is characterized by its thin and mysterious sonority. The left hand should be kept as quiet as possible while balancing the leaping chord and keeping the rhythm steady so this section sounds like an oboe as Ravel intended.¹⁵

Without the differences in m122+, the final A section (m93) would be exactly the same as the beginning A section. In this passage, Ravel makes an interesting modulation by adding the Bb, and concluding the *Rigoudon* with a traditional, authentic cadence. This authentic cadence also concludes the *Forlane*.

Menuet (Minuet)

It is obvious that Ravel was aware of the ancient history and practice of minuets, through his treatment of materials, moderate tempo, length of

¹⁵ Perlemuter, *Ravel According to Ravel*, 74.

the movement (old menuet were 100+ bars), aristocratic processional, and the large danced “Z” pattern.¹⁶

“The minuet is an elegant dance movement in triple meter first created in seventeenth century France.”¹⁷ The minuet is usually in binary form featuring a regular four-measure phrase which begins on the beat followed by a cadence on the strong beat. “The melodic line is usually simple and straightforward usually without elaborate ornamentation. It is common to have a hemiola melodic pattern with an accented second beat.”¹⁸

The form of the Baroque minuet (ABA with the middle section trio) changed during the eighteenth-century Classical period. Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, in his early works, usually wrote the minuet in this traditional style. Later, Beethoven expanded the form making it a standard movement in symphonies, piano sonatas, and string quartets among others. Through these composers, the short binary form of the minuet evolved to a rounded binary; the meter became faster, while the phrasing and texture became more complex. The “scherzo” eventually replaced the minuet as a symphonic movement during the classical period. Since then, composers rarely use the name minuet except as a neoclassical gesture. Some of the few composers

¹⁶ Meredith Ellis Little, “Minuet,” *The New Grove Dictionary: Music and Musicians* Vol. 12 (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited 1980), Minuet 357.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Bruce Gustafson, “Minuet,” *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (USA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 497.

who used the minuet movement were Brahms, Ravel and Schoenberg (op.24 and op. 25).¹⁹

Ravel's first minuet was his *Menuet Antique* (1895), which was inspired by the *Menuet Pompeux* of Chabrier. His second minuet, *Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn* (1909), was based on the five letters of Haydn's name. Ravel's third minuet was the second movement of *Sonatine* (1903-05). His last was the minuet from *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. However, this minuet is less elaborate than the one in *Sonatine*, and is enriched by the middle section, *Musette*, written in a different key (a key between G minor and C).

Ravel's *Menuet* is characterized by its form, use of pentatonic scale, deceptive cadences, parallel triads, borrowed chords, altered chords and the Lydian mode. The form is ABA' and Coda, in which *Musette* (B section) contains a series of triads with pedal points of G and D in octave form. These series of triads are transformed into the bass line when the theme of *Menuet* joins the theme of *Musette* at the beginning of the returning A' section (m73). This is an example of Ravel's use of unexpected counterpoint.

A half cadence (E minor chord to B major chord) is found in m7-8. The cadence itself contains a veiled cadence in E minor (i to V). See figure 26. If we take a close look at m7 and m8, it reveals a parallel motion, F#-G-A-B in ascending steps. A borrowed chord is found in m25 (D79) while

¹⁹ Ibid., 498.

altered chords are found in m50 and m51 in the *Musette* section. See figure 27. In fact, along with the characteristic drones in the *Musette* section, it reprises the ancient form of early dance. The inspiration of the *Musette* was the bagpipe of the 17th-18th centuries, with its numbers of drones bellows.

Measure 1-3:

Figure 25. Pentatonic Scale Usage in Menuet

Measure 7-8:

Figure 26. Parallel Motion of Triads Usage in Menuet

Measure 25 and 50-51:

Figure 27. Borrowed and Altered Chords Usage in Menuet

Ravel utilized the half-step relationship to match the principle of the neapolitan chord (see Figure 28). In large-scale, he modulates key areas from C minor to Cb major; while in small-scale, the use of the half-step relationship is apparent in a series of chords. In measure 57 and 62, a neapolitan chord (Db major) appears with the bass G pedal point (a dominant pedal point, implying the key of C). In addition, the measures 62 to 64 (still with G dominant pedal-point) contain chords of Db-Fb, Eb-Db, C-Cb which reflect the half-step relationship between Fb to Eb, Eb to Db and C to Cb. Also note that the Cb chord in m64 is written differently from the previous B chord in m58 although in actuality it is enharmonically the same. In Figure 28, one can see how the harmonies become progressively more strange and mysterious.

Measure 57- 58 and 62-64:

The image shows a handwritten musical score for two systems of measures. The first system contains measures 57 and 58, and the second system contains measures 62 and 64. The notation is in piano (p) and bass staves. Measure 57 features a neapolitan chord (Db major) with a bass G pedal point. Measure 58 continues this harmonic structure. Measure 62 shows a progression of chords: Db-Fb, Eb-Db, and C-Cb. Measure 64 features a Cb chord, which is enharmonically equivalent to the B chord in measure 58. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *sf*, *poco dim.*, *mf sostenuto*, and *pp*. Handwritten annotations include "C minor" with an arrow pointing to a chord in measure 58, and "Bourdine" written below the bass staff in measure 64. The measures are circled and numbered in the original image.

Figure 28. Neapolitan Principle Usage in Menuet

From m81+, the key areas move to d# minor (m81) and F# major (m89) (see Figure 29). This contrasts the mellow home key G major. A close look at the melodic line, C#, D#, E, F#, G#, A#, B, and C# (from m86 to m89), forms a minor scale with a lowered 7th. In addition, the Lydian mode is found in the Coda with raised-4th (C#) in m107 (see Figure 30). The usage of modal scales creates the air of ancient in this *Menuet*.

Measure 81-89:

Figure 29. Minor Scale with a Lower Seventh Usage in *Menuet*

Measure 104 (coda)-107:

Figure 30. Lydian Mode Usage in *Menuet*

A consistent rhythmic motif emanates throughout the *Menuet*. It should be played at a “walking” pace, but not too slowly as to become too heavy. The pianist should vary the color in the different phrases. The *Menuet* should be played with a consistent speed, following the markings as precisely as possible. The mood should be peaceful instead of lively. The texture is simple and transparent, so the pianist should play this *Menuet* with a calm mind and a peaceful heart, allowing the essence of the music to flow naturally.

Toccata

Toccata comes from the Italian verb *toccare* which means to touch. It is a composition for keyboard or string instruments featuring brilliant passages which often commence with a quasi-improvisatory section and

concludes with a fugal section. "Elements such as disjunct harmonies, broken-chords, sweeping scales and roulades demonstrate the pianist's virtuosity."²⁰

"*Toccata* is considered one of the oldest examples of keyboard pieces."²¹ Originally, it was a short piece characterized by its interpretation of rapidity and delicacy. But it varied considerably in content and design for different composers, for example, "Merulo's toccatas contained brilliant runs and ornamentation while Frescobaldi's toccatas were reserved and mystical."²²

The toccata became neglected during the classical period. After J. S. Bach, it seemed that it lost its attraction for composers. It was not until Muzio Clementi included a toccata into his op.11(1781), that the toccata reemerged. Later, Schumann, wrote a toccata which was based on Clementi's earlier example.²³ When compared to Clementi's *Toccata*, Schumann's *Toccata in C major*, is much more virtuosic. Indeed, Schumann's toccata lead many twentieth-century composers to write compositions in toccata form, among them Sergey Prokofiev (*Toccata in d*,1912), George Antheil (*2 Toccatas*, 1948) and of course, Maurice Ravel.

²⁰ Arthur J Ness, "Toccata," *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (USA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 859.

²¹ Michael Kennedy, "Toccata" *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 659.

²² Stolba, *The Development of Western Music*, 351.

²³ Leon Plantinga, *Clementi: His Life and Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 64.

Ravel's *Toccata of Le Tombeau* is distinguished by a technical demand far exceeding that of any of the other movements. It is a virtuosic piece without great thematic significance (like the opening prelude) and contains brittle and percussive effects throughout.²⁴ In spite of the complexities which appear on the surface, it requires “tidy” playing and impeccable control.²⁵

Ravel's *Toccata* is written in sonata form in which the exposition contains an *a* theme and a *b* theme (starting in m57). The development (m81) manipulates previous materials and introduces a new theme (m94+) (see Figure 31). The recapitulation starts (m145) in E minor and concludes in E major.

Measure 94+:

The musical score shows measures 94+ to 100. Measure 94+ is a short phrase in the right hand, marked 'pp' and 'New theme'. The following measures (95-100) are a longer phrase in the left hand, marked 'pp expressif' and 'New in ch'. The score includes handwritten annotations: '(94)' above measure 94+, 'New theme' above measure 94+, 'D7' below measure 94+, '95' above measure 95, 'pp expressif' below measures 95-100, 'New in ch' below measures 95-100, and '100' above measure 100.

²⁴ Norman Demuth, *Ravel* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1947), 81.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

Figure 31. A New Theme in Half Note Usage in Toccata

Ravel features modes, whole-tone scales, and polychords in this Toccata. For example, the use of the Lydian mode is evident in m23 where the C# is applied in the key of G major (see Figure 32). Phrygian mode (transformed B phrygian) is presented in the development section (m86) where the bass outlines the tritone (B and F natural) accompaniment. See figure 33. Other bass outlines the tritone (G to C#) are evident in m90-93. In addition, a whole tone chord appears in m168 where it hints at the whole tone scale of E-(F#)-A#-(B#)-C-D-E (see Figure 34). Also notice that polychords are used to color the effect. They appear in m48 (e chord over b chord) and m207 (C chord over e chord) (see Figure 35).

Measure 23:

Figure 32. Lydian Mode Usage in Toccata

Measure 86-93:

Handwritten annotations: (86), (90), *pp sempre staccato*, T.T., (G T.T. C#)

The musical score shows measures 86 through 93. The notation is in G major (one sharp). The left hand plays a series of chords, with the right hand playing a melodic line. The texture is *pp sempre staccato*. Handwritten notes indicate tritone outlines (T.T.) in measures 86 and 90, specifically mentioning the G-T.T.-C# progression.

Figure 33. Tritone Outline Usage in *Toccata*

Measure 168:

Handwritten annotations: (168), *soutenu*, *p*, W.T.

The musical score shows measure 168. The notation is in G major. The left hand plays a series of chords, with the right hand playing a melodic line. The texture is *p* and *soutenu*. Handwritten notes indicate whole-tone chords (W.T.) in measure 168.

Figure 34. Whole-Tone Chord Usage in *Toccata*

Measure 48:

Measure 207:

Figure 35. Polychord Usage in *Toccata*

As a whole, this motoric *Toccata* is proof again that Ravel was foremost a composer for the piano. He was highly skilled in using the complete range of the instrument. As Norman Demus said: "...he brought modernity to the natural pianistic aptitude of Liszt."²⁶

²⁶ Ibid.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Emile Vuillermoz, in the program notes of *The Solo Piano Works of Ravel*, said:

Ravel's pianistic art played an important role in twentieth-century piano literature. His individual style had a marked taste for sportive performances, tests of dexterity, and acrobatics of his craft. ... Ravel favored that which was rare.¹

This passion for the exceptional is evident in many of his works which illustrate his experiments with tone and color. Therefore, the modern piano is a perfect instrument to match his varieties of tones. In addition, Ravel's exclusively harmonic system also proclaimed clearly that his was a very personal contribution to modern music.

Another of Ravel's characteristics in his piano works is his inclination towards pianistic virtuosity. His ability to combine Liszt's remarkable pianism and Chopin's lyricism is evident in many of his works. Ravel was familiar with Lisztian pianistic technique and had studied Chopin's harmonic language. He tended to pursue virtuosity in his works for piano, which was very different from Debussy.

¹ Emile Vuillermoz, from the program notes of record *The Solo Piano works of Ravel* (Angel 35272).

Debussy, as an elder contemporary of Ravel, had established his musical position in France long before Ravel. For this reason many people mistreated the compositions of the young Ravel, and accused him of being another follower of Debussy. However, Debussy and Ravel differ from each other at a fundamental level; the former was looking for elaborate works which would illustrate free improvisation, while the latter was pursuing the architectural forms of classical design in his musical structure. As Vuillermoz said about the two composers, "...Debussy took pleasure in the more harmonious curves; Ravel did not fear the dry, the angular and the abrupt, from which he elicits marvelous effects."²

Ravel's repeated failure in his youth to win the Prix de Rome made it difficult for his music to be heard. The official juries did their best to discourage this young pupil at the conservatory. When Ravel was attempting to introduce his music to the public, France was overwhelmed by "Debussyism." Thus, Ravel, with his very personal aesthetic style, found himself in a difficult environment in which to make his music heard or accepted.

Ravel, like many other twentieth-century composers, inherited the traditional trends of old masters such as Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin and Liszt. By studying the past, Ravel developed his own style within a

² Ibid.

traditional framework. His treatment of form is strict, imposed, and often classical with an emphasis on exact execution. Although many of his works were reflections of impressionism, under the inner structure, the spirit is neo-classic.

Ravel never ceased being an impressionist. Even in his neoclassic works, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, we find qualities of virtuosity, restraint, freedom, and improvisation. Certainly, color is an important feature of Impressionism; Ravel realized this and somehow applied the value of the “color” into many of his works. His music is really an outgrowth of both Impressionism and Neoclassicism. If we call Ravel an impressionist, he has already veins of neoclassicism. If we call him a neo-classicist, he nevertheless retains the essential qualities of an impressionist. In the end, it is, perhaps, best to call him Maurice Ravel.

The development of Neoclassicism can be traced back to Mendelssohn, Brahms and Schumann. It became a popular movement during Ravel’s time, and lasted through Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Hindemith, Copland and many others. The influence of neoclassicism still has power today, continuing to influence twentieth-century composers toward an affection for the past, in many innumerable ways.

Le Tombeau de Couperin illustrates Ravel’s neoclassic inclination towards the seventeenth and eighteenth-century French clavecinists. The

titles, the forms, and the inner design of each movement proclaim the love of the “old.” Thus, the mixture of old and new are knitted together throughout the entire suite.

The appreciation of this suite comes after repeated hearings for its beauty is hidden beneath the surface. Ravel’s musical impact certainly differs from Chopin’s in terms of emotional level. One might burst into tears after hearing Chopin’s beautiful melody, while when listening to Ravel’s *Le Tombeau*, one may reflect in silence and be touched wordlessly. One of Ravel’s artistic values is that one needs to spend time discovering its essence for his style is very individual and very French. Ravel’s manipulation of musical engineering, attention to detail and inclination to traditional forms made this suite a masterpiece, for all time.

Le Tombeau de Couperin is a successful piano work which has become a milestone from which to evaluate pianistic technique. Its value is based not only by its pianistic virtuosity, but also its beauty beneath the surface. The more one hears it, the more one loves it; the more one plays it, the more one reveres Ravel’s skilled craftsmanship.

Ravel was unique. His music remains unique---an art for centuries to come---incomparable, beautiful, universal and immortal.

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