



87979



BOULEZ
CONDUCTS
RAVEL
LA VAISE
MENUET ANTIQUE
MA MÈRE LOYE
(MOTHER GOOSE)
— COMPLETE BALLET
NEW YORK
PHILHARMONIC

clive conrad

MAURICE RAVEL

(1875-1937)

LA VALSE

MA MÈRE L'OYE

MENUET ANTIQUE

PIERRE BOULEZ

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

1 LA VALSE 13'01

MA MÈRE L'OYE (Complete Ballet)

2 PRÉLUDE 3'36

3 DANSE DU ROUET ET SCÈNE 3'36

4 PAVANE DE LA BELLE AU BOIS DORMANT 2'32

5 LES ENTRETIENS DE LA BELLE ET DE LA BÊTE 4'55

6 PETIT POUCKET 4'37

7 LAIDERONNETTE, IMPÉRATRICE DES PAGODES 4'42

8 LE JARDIN FÉRIQUE 3'20

9 MENUET ANTIQUE 7'08

Total Time: 47'40

BOULEZ CONDUCTS RAVEL

The 100th birthday of Maurice Ravel is upon us; he was born on March 7, 1875 in Ciboure near Saint-Jean-de-Luz in the Basses-Pyrénées, France.

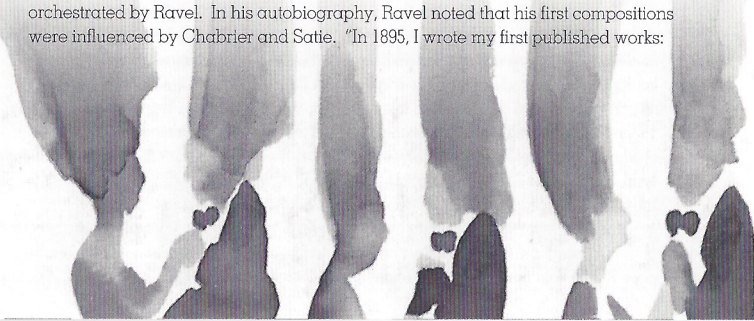
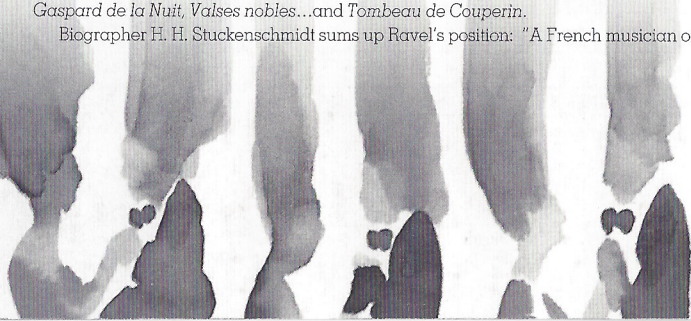
Ravel, of course, was no mere follower of French impressionism or of that great seminal figure Debussy, but an individual spirit coolly reflecting the many musical currents that swept around him at the turn of the century and after, until his death in 1937—such influences as Gabriel Fauré (with whom he studied composition at the Paris Conservatory), Debussy, Satie, Chabrier, the Russians, Viennese waltzes, baroque forms, American jazz, *chinoiserie*. All these left their mark on Ravel, who incorporated many of them into his highly individual, piquant style made up of almost equal parts of fastidious craftsmanship, classic predilection, sophistication and general artistic sensitivity.

Ravel's strong piano training while at the Conservatory led to the composition of many keyboard works that he would later refashion into larger forms. Both *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and *Ma Mère l'Oye* were first conceived for the keyboard—one as a solo, the other as duet—and later orchestrated for ballets. Such orchestral works as *Menuet antique*, *Pavane pour une infant défunte*, *Alborada del gracioso* and *Le Tombeau de Couperin* were originally piano solos, later orchestrated; while some of Ravel's most impressive music remains such piano works as the *Sonatine*, *Miroirs*, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, *Valses nobles*...and *Tombeau de Couperin*.

Biographer H. H. Stuckenschmidt sums up Ravel's position: "A French musician of

purest strain.... If it were possible to name the most conspicuous qualities of his many-sided output, the two words 'polish' and 'preciseness' would be the most appropriate. In his very beginnings, Ravel felt the stimulus that ordinarily comes from the possibilities of conflict between these two concepts, for every refinement contains within itself the urge toward complexity and, also, toward clarification. On the other hand, the desire for clarification of the complex strives toward the ideal of simplicity. To reconcile these two tendencies, or, in certain cases, to limit their differences, is the innermost effort of all Ravel's music."

The attractive simplicity of the piano is apparent in Ravel's first published work, *Menuet antique*, dated 1895—the same year he met Satie and began his studies of counterpoint and fugue with André Gédalge; it was printed three years later by Enoch in Paris. The music has a pseudo-antique character without pretending to be an imitation of Greek models in polyphony and harmony. The slow tempo is marked *majestueusement*, and the impression is one of borrowing from the world of old church modes with dissonant half-tone combinations. (As Stuckenschmidt points out, the name is an anachronism, since there were no minuets before the 16th century.) The work was dedicated to Ravel's pianist friend of Conservatory days, Ricardo Viñez, who would later make many of the composer's works known; the *Minuet antique* was later orchestrated by Ravel. In his autobiography, Ravel noted that his first compositions were influenced by Chabrier and Satie. "In 1895, I wrote my first published works:





the *Menuet antique* and *Habañera* for piano. I consider that this work contains, in the bud, several elements that would govern my later compositions."

Ma Mère l'Oye is in the magical line of "innocent" music that Ravel captured in such creations as the one-act opera *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* and the song cycle *Histoires naturelles*, music in which he combined reality with fantasy, sophistication with naïveté. In 1908, he wrote a suite of pieces for piano four-hands for the children of his friends the Godebskis, inspired by the fairy tales of Charles Perrault (1628–1703), Mme d'Aulnoy (1650–1705) and Mme Leprince de Beaumont (18th century). Later, Ravel noted, "My intention of awaking the poetry of childhood in these pieces naturally led me to simplify my style and think out my writing. I made a ballet of this work, which was performed at the Théâtre des Arts. I wrote the work...for my young friends Mimie and Jean Godebski." The latter played the premiere of the five-movement piano set in Paris in 1910 at a concert given by the *Société Musicale Indépendante*. The pieces were *Pavane de la belle au bois dormant* ("Pavane of the Sleeping Princess") a sad, stately dance; *Petit Poucet* ("Hop o' My Thumb"), the tale of the boy who spread bread crumbs to mark his way but found they were eaten by birds; *Laideronnette, impératrice des pagodes* ("Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas"), the story of the daughter of a king, cursed with ugliness, whose beauty is restored by the love of a prince; *Les Entretiens de la belle et de la bête* ("Conversations of Beauty and the Beast"), a waltz with an alternating brusque theme; and *Le Jardin féerique* ("The Fairy Garden"), an enchanting summation. Ravel orchestrated the pieces for a ballet to his own scenario in January 1912, adding a *Prélude* and a *Danse de rouet* ("Dance of the Spinning Wheel"), enlarging the interludes, and slightly altering the sequence. In this complete orchestral form, some of the childlike simplicity and linear directness is replaced by Ravel's subtly masterful, atmospheric orchestration with emphasis on strings and winds.

Still another potent influence on Ravel were the Viennese waltzes of Schubert and of the Strauss family—something he exploited in the *Valses nobles...* (1911). In the post-World War I years at Cévennes he was at work on *La Vaise*, which had its concert



premier by the Lamoureux Orchestra in Paris on December 12, 1920. His idea for glorifying the Viennese waltz, however, had originated much earlier, in 1907, when he had entitled the projected work *Vienna*. Then, in 1919, at the bidding of impresario Serge Diaghilev (who had commissioned Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* in 1909), he turned back to these materials. Although he sought to apotheosize the Viennese waltz, the circumstances of the time led to a tragic comment ("the impression of a fantastic whirl of destiny") on Vienna and the whole Austro-Hungarian Empire, which fell with World War I. He is said to have envisioned *La Vaise*—with all its colors, lights, rhythms, polish and formality—as "a fantastic and fatefully inescapable whirlpool," set in an Imperial Court, about 1855. At that time, Vienna was the social and political center of Europe, a perfect setting for dancing on a volcano.

La Vaise is developed from a single rhythmic nucleus, beginning *pianissimo* and crescendoing, with seven basic motives, to a macabre climax. The score carries with it a scenic directive: "Clouds whirl about. Occasionally, they part to allow a glimpse of waltzing couples. As they gradually lift, one can discern a gigantic hall, filled by a crowd of dancers in motion. The stage gradually brightens. The glow of the chandeliers breaks out *fortissimo*."

Diaghilev was openly disappointed in Ravel's "choreographic poem," and the work remained in the concert hall until 1928 when, at the Paris Opéra, Bronislava Nijinska choreographed it.

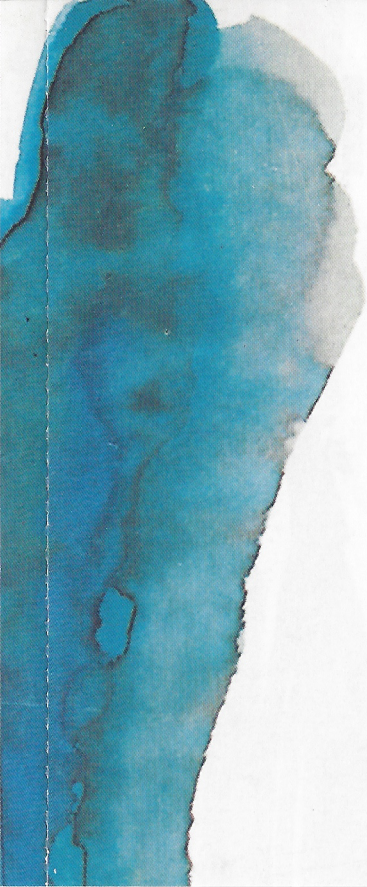
—ROBERT JACOBSON

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