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THE PIANO CONCERTOS
OF RAVEL

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By

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PREFACE

Except for a group of three songs, the two piano concertos were the last things Ravel wrote. They have been said to be the culmination of Ravel's style; and, since they were written simultaneously, much attention has been drawn to a comparison of the two, particularly with emphasis on their divergent features. It is the purpose of this paper to show the interesting circumstances under which these concertos came to exist, to acknowledge the differences recognized by authors and critics, and to point out some important ways in which these concertos are similar to each other.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	iv
Chapter	
I. BACKGROUND.	1
II. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CONCERTOS	13
III. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE CONCERTOS	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY	62

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 142 - 143) . .	19
2. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 131 - 132) . .	19
3. Concerto for the left hand (measure 59)	24
4. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 2 - 5). . .	24
5. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 45 - 48) . .	25
6. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 75 - 78) . .	25
7. Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 146 - 149). .	25
8. Concerto for the left hand, intermezzo (measures 83 - 86)	26
9. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 52 - 55) . .	27
10. Concerto for the left hand (measures 23 - 31) . . .	27
11. Concerto in G, third movement (measures 37 - 41) . .	28
12. Concerto for the left hand, cadenza (measures 377 - 382).	29
13. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 135 - 136) . .	30
14. Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 273 - 275).	30
15. Concerto in G, third movement (measures 79 - 81) . .	31
16. Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 217 - 219) .	31
17. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 10 - 11) . .	32
18. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 187 - 188) . .	33
19. Concerto for the left hand (measures 282 - 287) . .	33

Figure	Page
20. Concerto in G, third movement (measures 100 - 102) . . .	34
21. Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 233 - 234) .	35
22. Concerto in G, second movement (measures 1 - 3) . . .	35
23. Concerto for the left hand (measures 83 - 87) . . .	36
24. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 61 - 63) . . .	37
25. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 75 - 81) . . .	37
26. Concerto in G, second movement (measures 2 - 5) . . .	37
27. Concerto for the left hand (measures 36 - 38) . . .	37
28. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 45 - 48) . . .	37
29. Concerto for the left hand (measures 152 - 162) . . .	38
30. Concerto for the left hand (measures 146 - 149) . . .	39
31. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 107 - 108, 123 - 124)	39
32. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 2 - 5) . . .	39
33. Concerto in G, third movement (measures 5 - 9) . . .	39
34. Concerto in G, third movement (measures 37 - 42) . . .	39
35. Ravel's Concerto in G, first movement (measures 1 - 2) .	41
36. Stravinsky's <u>Petrushka</u>	41
37. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 192 - 194) . . .	42
38. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 216 - 217) . . .	42
39. Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 130 - 131) .	43
40. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 52 - 53) . . .	43

Figure	Page
41. Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 177 - 179) .	44
42. Concerto for the left hand, introduction (measures 8 - 9) .	44
43. Concerto for the left hand, introduction (measures 23 - 24)	45
44. Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 214 - 216) .	46
45. Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 236 - 238) .	46
46. Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 236 - 238) .	47
47. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 123 - 124) . .	48
48. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 131 - 132) . .	48
49. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 139 - 140) . .	49
50. Concerto in G, second movement (measures 96 - 97) . .	50
51. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 78 - 79) . .	50
52. Concerto for the left hand (measure 101)	51
53. Concerto in G, first movement (measure 245). . . .	51
54. Concerto for the left hand (measures 113 - 114). . . .	52
55. Chopin Etude, Op. 25, no. 12 (measure 1)	52
56. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 255 - 256) . .	52
57. Concerto for the left hand (measure 33)	53
58. Concerto in G, first movement (measure 171)	53
59. Concerto for the left hand, opening cadenza (measure 57) .	53
60. Concerto in G, last movement (measures 116 - 117). . .	54
61. Concerto for the left hand (measures 331 - 332) . . .	54

Figure	Page
62. Concerto in G, first movement (measure 275)	55
63. Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 139 - 141) .	55
64. Concerto in G, third movement (measures 37 - 39) . . .	56
65. Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 121 - 122) .	56
66. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 321 - 323) . .	57
67. Concerto for the left hand (measures 429 - 430) . . .	57
68. Concerto in G, first movement (measure 230) . . .	58
69. Concerto in G, first movement (measures 4 - 5) . . .	59
70. Concerto for the left hand (measures 147 - 148) . . .	59
71. Concerto in G, third movement (measures 95 - 96) . . .	60
72. Concerto for the left hand (measures 168 - 171)	60

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

Maurice Ravel was a natural composer for the piano. Although probably no one would number him among the truly great performers of this century, his piano music shows the mark of a composer who knows the medium well. Ravel was also a master orchestrator, as his tour de force Boléro reveals. Therefore, since Ravel was a master of both piano and orchestra, one could wonder why he waited until after his fiftieth year to begin seriously composing a work that combines the piano and orchestra.

One must not forget that at the beginning of the [twentieth] century, the public of Paris scorned the concerto, and had taken the habit in symphonic concerts of receiving without discrimination the most illustrious virtuosos by resounding hisses. Several loathesome concertos had sufficed to render plausible this anathema. . . . They wanted classical symphonies, but even more, they wanted Wagner or Berlioz. It was that, then, which connoisseurs called pure music. Of this so-called pure music, the concerto became one of the three or four prototypes. . . . Ravel's curious and malicious genius knew how to accommodate itself happily with the docilities of snobbism, and did not fear to amuse itself.¹

This remark of Gil-Marchex probably refers to such notable concertos as those of Rubinstein and the last two of Tchaikowsky, among others.

¹Henri Gil-Marchex, "Les Concertos de Ravel," La Revue Musicale, XIX (December, 1938), 275-276. Translated by Cary Lewis.

These concertos can be cited for their lack of effective melodic content and for their exhibitionistic, pyrotechnical demands. Another contemporary remark further clarifies the attitude of the public toward virtuosos.

The attraction of the virtuoso for the public is very like that of the circus for the crowd. There is always a hope that something dangerous may happen: Mr. X may play the violin with Mr. Y on his shoulders; or Mr. Z may conclude his piece by lifting the piano with his teeth.²

By the middle of the second decade of the century, Stravinsky and Prokofiev had made contributions to the concerto repertory, and the concerto style seemed to be coming back. Ravel thought about composing one for the tour of America he was to make in 1928. Long before, in 1914, he had begun to write not a concerto, but a Basque rhapsody for piano solo in several movements. But before giving himself whole-heartedly to this new work, he wanted to finish his Sonata for Violin and Piano. He also had an obligation to finish L'Enfant et les sortilèges by a certain date, and was therefore momentarily forced to abandon the Basque rhapsody.

This set the pattern for years to come. First one thing, then another, forced him to put off this project until 1929. Ravel had just completed a triumphant tour of some thirty concerts in the United States, although a trip through Spain earned mixed success. Now he was

²Claude Debussy, Monsieur Croche, the Dilettante Hater, translated by Marie O'Brien (London, 1927), p. 44.

ready to settle down in Montfort-l'Amaury, "one of those little towns that still does not have a railroad station and has less than two thousand inhabitants. It is beyond Versailles on the road to Brittany, about twenty-five miles out of Paris."³ He locked himself into his home, Le Belvédère, with the intention of completing his piano concerto. He had been spurred on by a commission from the Boston Symphony Orchestra to write and play a concerto for the observance of that organization's fiftieth anniversary.⁴ Gustave Samazeuilh, one of the few friends of Ravel who was acquainted with Zaspiak-Bat--the Basque rhapsody which he had abandoned at the outbreak of World War I--has revealed that Ravel used most of its material in the first and third movements of the Concerto in G. Of course, the unmistakable jazz references were due to influences of a more recent date. He was still under the spell of some of the music that had captivated him when he visited the night clubs in Harlem and Greenwich Village.

To prepare himself for performing the concerto, Ravel began practicing Chopin and Liszt etudes, as well as the fugue from his own Le Tombeau de Couperin, which he said was excellent practice for developing independence in the fingers. He was beginning to make real progress when he had to stop work in order to attend the Ravel Festivals.

³Victor Illyitch Seroff, Maurice Ravel (New York, 1953), p. 222.

⁴Charles Burr, Columbia Record No. MS6043. Commentary on record jacket.

These took place in September of 1929, the entire Basque coast feting its favorite son with festivals and symphony concerts with Ravel conducting. Festivals were held in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Biarritz, and Ciboure. His attitude at this point is expressed by excerpts from a letter to his friends in Saint-Jean-de-Luz:

Now, please, consider my situation, please be patient with me. In the midst of my pregnancy with the concerto (I am at the stage of throwing up) I am suddenly called to Biarritz. You must have seen the billboards designed by [the famous Japanese painter] Fugita announcing 'Le grand festival de Maurice Ravel.' Two hundred francs for a ticket! It's lucky that I can get in 'on the house.'⁵

Within ten days he was back at work in Le Belvédère on his concerto.

He also had other major projects in mind. He had spoken to Ida Rubinstein of a ballet he intended to compose for her, "to turn L'Histoire d'Ali Baba: Morgiane (from the Thousand and One Nights) into a drama--a rich and terrible drama 'full of blood and fire.'⁶ He also had in mind a "grand opera in the genre of Meyerbeer,"⁷ which he estimated would take ten years to finish. Above all, he was planning to write an opera-oratorio using his own libretto on the subject of Joan of Arc. With all these projects milling around in his head, Ravel became like a gambler, drunk with power, taking on more and more projects. While he was still at work on his piano concerto, he

⁵Seroff, op. cit., p. 255.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 256.

was approached by the manager of Paul Wittgenstein with a proposal for a piano concerto for the left hand alone.

Paul Wittgenstein was a unique figure in musical history. Born in Vienna, he was just beginning a promising career as a concert pianist when, at the age of twenty, he was called into the Austrian Army as a reserve officer. He was wounded during the first months of the war, and his right arm had to be amputated. Starting with the winter season of 1916 and 1917, he began a concert career in which he became world-famous as a left-handed pianist. Having both talent and considerable wealth, he got the idea of commissioning works by the great composers of his time. Such composers as Richard Strauss, Franz Schmidt, Erik Korngold, Benjamin Britten, Sergei Prokofiev, and Paul Hindemith have contributed concertos, quartets, and quintets to his repertory.

Ravel enthusiastically accepted his commission, and the fee of approximately six thousand dollars was only an added stimulus. He was moved by the appeal and yielded to his inborn love of experimentation and the unusual. He was enormously intrigued by this technical test; and, arming himself with Saint-Saens' Les Six Etudes pour la main gauche and Leopold Godowski's Transcriptions for the Left Hand Alone of the Chopin Etudes as models for his new composition, he began immediately to work. He considered this no excuse for delay in the previously planned concerto for two hands, and, therefore, worked on them both simultaneously.

Ravel spoke of this double project in an interview with his friend M. D. Calvocoressi, a correspondent of the Daily Telegraph.

It was an interesting experience to conceive and realize the two concertos at the same time. The first, which I propose to play myself, is a concerto in the strict sense, written in the spirit of Mozart and Saint-Saëns. I believe that a concerto can be both gay and brilliant without necessarily being profound or aiming at dramatic effect. It has been said that the concertos of some great classical composers, far from being written for the piano, have been written against it. And I think that this criticism is quite justified.

At the beginning I meant to call my work a divertissement but afterward considered that this was unnecessary, as the name Concerto adequately describes the kind of music it contains. In some ways my Concerto is not unlike my Violin Sonata; it uses certain effects borrowed from jazz, but only in moderation.

The Concerto for the left hand alone is quite different, and has only one movement with many jazz effects; the writing is not so simple. In a work of this sort, it is essential to avoid the impression of insufficient weight in the sound-texture, as compared to a solo part for two hands. So I have used a style which is much more in keeping with the consciously imposing style of the traditional concerto.

After an introductory section pervaded by this feeling, there comes an episode like an improvisation which is followed by a jazz section. Only afterward is one aware that the jazz episode is actually built up from the themes of the first section.⁸

Ravel worked constantly. He slept four hours a night, or with the help of drugs, five and a half. He completed the Concerto for the left hand a year later in August of 1930, but there was still much to be done on the Concerto in G.

At about this time, the citizens of his home town, Ciboure, decided to honor Ravel by putting a plaque on the old house where he was born and renaming a quay after him. All sorts of festivities were

⁸Seroff, op. cit., p. 258.

arranged to celebrate Journée Ravel, from a game of pelote, national Basque dances, and fandangos in the streets, to a concert in Biarritz featuring Madeleine Grey, Jacques Thibaud, and Robert and Gaby Casadesus. Although he was obviously pleased, Ravel complained, "Those darn Cibourians . . . they are making me lose another week."⁹ He enjoyed the game of pelote played by national champions. But when the simple people of Ciboure, who knew neither him nor his music, crowded in the square to hear the dignitaries of the town, who were dressed in their official regalia, extolling the virtues of their favorite son, Ravel became embarrassed and hid in a small cafe with Casadesus and his wife. From behind a hedge of small trees, he heard the band playing in his honor. He felt much better that evening when, back at the Casino in Biarritz, he played a duet with Casadesus, accompanied Madeleine Grey in some of his songs, and also played his Sonata for Violin and Piano with Jacques Thibaud. Even so, Ravel was very proud of his home town's tribute, and often remarked that he had a quay named for him.

Back at Le Belvédère two months later, Ravel wrote a friend:

The time is flying . . . I have just finished correcting the orchestration for the Concerto for the left hand. Thus I have only two months and a half left to finish the other--it's terrifying to think about it. I don't sleep more than six hours, usually less. My only distraction is walking between seven and eight before dinner. Now I am going to lose another two days on

⁹Seroff, op. cit., p. 259.

account of a concert at the Conservatory, where I have to conduct Boléro and accompany Les Madécasses.¹⁰

Four months later, when the Concerto in G was still unfinished, Ravel wrote on March 19, 1931:

I am not dead, although in the last four months I wish I were. I had to stop all my work completely. I had hoped that fifteen days of rest would be enough. Now I have hardly begun working on the Concerto again, but this time I have to be careful.¹¹

There had to be a postponement of a performance of it in Brussels, and a cancellation in Monte Carlo.

As a matter of fact, at one time I felt so badly that I was given l'extract de taureau, de phosphore, etc., and was going to be sent down to the Riviera to rest, when suddenly I began to sleep without a stop--days and nights. I am sure this saved me. Now, I am going to lock myself in, I will not answer any one, and I will take the telephone off the hook.¹²

Finally, because of his ill health and his lack of time to practice, Ravel had to admit to himself that he would not be able to perform the work himself. He approached Marguerite Long and asked her if she would like to play his concerto, which he promised would end in trills and in pianissimo. Six months later he handed her the final score which ended with broken chords and fortissimo. This was November 11, 1931.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 260.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

In the meantime, during the summer of 1931, Ravel had taken a trip to England to receive an honorary degree at Oxford.¹³ Although the University had announced its intention of conferring this honor in October of 1928, Ravel had not previously felt he had enough time to make the trip. But now his friends had been urging him to take a vacation and relax a bit, and he felt that this would be a good opportunity to go to England. And, indeed, it was a happy time. On earlier trips to England, Ravel had aroused attention because of his taste in clothes. This trip was no different. He appeared in a morning coat set off by a vest "of such unconventional design that even the politest dons blinked a little."¹⁴ Ravel wore the traditional scarlet and white satin academic gown for the ceremonies, but the smallest one available was much too big for him and had to be pinned up. On stage, in the middle of the Sheldonian Theater, he made his acceptance speech, partly in broken English and partly in Latin memorized for the occasion. No doubt, he was amused at being addressed as follows by the Public Orator:

"Itaque missis ambagibus praesento vobis musarum interpretem
modorum daedalum Mauricium Ravel, ut admittatur ad gradum doctoris

¹³Some authors believe Ravel went to England in 1928. Norman Demuth, Ravel (London, 1947), p. 189, and "Ravel," Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, revised by Nicolas Slonimsky (New York, 1958).

¹⁴Seroff, op. cit., p. 261.

in arte musica honoris causa."¹⁵

Fun and festivities over, he returned to France and finally completed his Concerto in G on November 11, 1931. He gave the score to Madame Marguerite Long, to whom he dedicated the piece. Sixteen days later in Vienna, Paul Wittgenstein gave the Concerto for the left hand its first performance. On January 14, 1932, Madame Long premiered the Concerto in G at the Salle Pleyel in Paris with Ravel leading the orchestra, "and that certainly was a pleasure much greater to him than to his listeners."¹⁶ However, the concerto was a tremendous success. Ravel was excited about his success and told Calvocoressi about his "projected world tour with the concerto through Europe, North and South America, Japan, and perhaps Java, if an orchestra could be recruited there."¹⁷ Immediately after the Paris performance, a much shorter tour actually did take place through Warsaw, Vienna, Berlin, Prague, Budapest, Bucharest, and London.

The Concerto for the left hand had also been well received, but Wittgenstein had made some changes in Ravel's score, adapting about

¹⁵"And so, without circumlocution I present to you one who interprets music in an artful manner, Maurice Ravel, in order that he may be admitted to the grade of doctor in musical art, a position of honor." In France the title "doctor" is reserved for medical doctors, and it amused Ravel no end to be addressed by this title. Rollo H. Myers, Ravel, Life and Works (London, 1960), p. 84. Translated by Cary Lewis.

¹⁶Gil-Marchex, op. cit., p. 277.

¹⁷Seroff, op. cit., p. 262.

two pages in the middle part from orchestra to piano solo for heightened dramatic effect. Ravel first heard about this at a dinner party given by Wittgenstein at his home in Vienna in honor of Madame Long and Ravel. To Ravel, who was particularly meticulous concerning every tempo and dynamic marking, this deliberate change was a major calamity; and it took all of the tact and diplomacy that Madame Long had to avert an open break between Ravel and Wittgenstein. Although Wittgenstein later admitted that Ravel had been right, this argument started rumors that caused Wittgenstein to suffer. Indeed, Ravel immediately began coaching a French pianist, Jacques Février, to play the work; and in the eyes of many, he became the accredited interpreter.¹⁸

The controversy with Wittgenstein was the only thing that marred Ravel's triumphant tour. When he returned to Montfort-l'Amaury, he found more mail, more contracts, more invitations, and more announcements of "Le Grand Festival de Maurice Ravel" waiting for him. He made a trip to Spain for a festival in his honor. Shortly after his return to Paris, he was involved in a traffic accident. He apparently had only a minor head injury, but it was this injury that began the long decline of his health and led to a brain operation from which he never

¹⁸There is some discrepancy concerning early performances of this work. Most authors agree on the premier date of November 27, 1931. Rollo Myers, *op. cit.*, p. 85, states that the first Paris performance of the Concerto for the left hand was in March, 1937, by Février. Seroff, *op. cit.*, p. 263, gives January 1932 as the first performance with the Paris premier being January 17, 1933, by Wittgenstein.

recovered. He died December 28, 1937.

But this is not the end of the story for the Concerto for the left hand. In 1939, Alfred Cortot published an edition which arranged the notes on two staves for both hands. His intention was to make the concerto more playable in order that it would be performed more often. He pointed out that in a radio performance, only those in the studio would know how many hands the pianist was using; and, after all, what pianist would want to do with one hand that which he could do better with two? Purists raised a clamor, insisting that if Ravel wrote the concerto for one hand, it should be played with one hand only or not at all. A raging controversy began and continues still, concerning this point. Some writers think it would be better to forget the designation "for the left hand" and just call it Concerto in D. Other writers point out how excellently the material is handled in the left hand, and that it is actually more difficult to get the proper sound with both hands.¹⁹

¹⁹Norman Demuth, Ravel (London, 1947), pp. 87-92.

CHAPTER II

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CONCERTOS

Since these concertos were both written at the same time, critics and commentators have amused themselves with comparisons of the two. The general opinion of all can be fairly well summarized by Roland-Manuel: "Nothing shows Ravel's supreme technical mastery better than the complete dissimilarity of these two works conceived and written at the same time."¹

Ravel was not one to talk very much about his manner of composing, not even to his closest friends. The rough drafts have remained lost. Therefore, it is impossible to know just at what point the two concertos crystallized in his mind.

Although the manuscript papers for both concertos lay side by side on the writing desk, the works are quite different. In complete independence, each goes its own way. The first hurries along in the playful, careless sphere of Mozart and Saint-Saëns; the other wrestles itself in an energetic and heroic manner out of the darkness of personal experience to a heroic affirmation.²

Ravel's own comments concerning the works (see page six) reveal nothing that could not be discovered simply by reading through the scores. When he spoke of his own music, Ravel liked to assume a certain

¹Claude Roland-Manuel, Maurice Ravel (London, 1947), p. 103.

²Willy Tappolet, Maurice Ravel, Leben und Werk (1950), p. 154.
Translated by Cary Lewis.

quasi-official, detached air.

In reference to Ravel's method of composing, Gil-Marchex tells that Ravel first drew out the plan of the work, fixing the modulations and the harmonic system. Then only did he invent the themes.³ This was agonizing work for Ravel. When Madame Long praised the free development of the leisurely melody of the slow movement of the Concerto in G which sounds as though it were composed all at once, Ravel confessed to her that it was written two bars at a time, with frequent recourse to Mozart's Clarinet Quintet.⁴

The putting down of his mental work is always so clearly intelligible that it dazzles the technicians, composers, and interpreters. It has so long dazzled them that they have become blinded by it. It has only been a short time that professional musicians have begun to perceive all the humanity effused into the work of Ravel.⁵

It is important to bear in mind this rather florid, but seemingly innocuous statement when one reads some of the comparisons. For one of the most important contrasts often pointed out is the apparent superficiality of the Concerto in G when it is compared to the more personally expressive Concerto for the left hand. And indeed the former concerto does have a certain air of triviality at its beginning that contrasts quite sharply with the ominous, portentous opening of the latter.

³Gil-Marchex, op. cit., p. 278.

⁴Rollo H. Myers, Ravel, Life and Works (London, 1960), p. 174.

⁵Gil-Marchex, op. cit., p. 279.

The Concerto in G sets a joyous, carefree mood from the start with a crack of a whip and high, glistening arpeggios against a piccolo melody. On the other hand, from the very first ominous grumblings of the contrabassoon, the listener has the feeling that in his Concerto in D, Ravel was trying to write something important--something with real depth and meaning. It begins in the lower depths of the orchestra in a confused jumble of fourths in sextuplets above which a melody of martial character (despite the slow triple meter) slowly rises. This feeling of preparation or introduction, which ends with the solo left hand lining up "a set of chords which compose a gateway to the Concerto, a kind of monumental colonnade,"⁶ is in direct contrast to the Concerto in G which has no introduction at all.

The flight of the Concerto in G slows down and turns nonchalantly between major and minor thirds, while the heroic sarabande of the Concerto for the left hand is made more tense and more declaimed, with the modal base softening.⁷

The Concerto in G is in the traditional three movements--fast-slow-fast; the other concerto is compressed into one movement which falls into easily recognizable sections--slow-scherzo-slow.

The Andante of the Concerto for the left hand is in a very compact form--a mere intermezzo in the one-movement piece. It does not

⁶Vladimir Jankelevitch, Ravel, translated by Margaret Crosland (New York, 1959), p. 57.

⁷Frederic Goldbeck, "Sur Ravel et ses Concertos," La Revue Musicale, XIV (March, 1933), 194-195. Translated by Cary Lewis.

succeed in expressing itself as broadly as the slow movement of the Concerto in G. It is interesting to note in passing that several critics have mentioned that this beautiful movement is almost too simple to be in a concerto.⁸ They overlook completely the fact that it is far more difficult to play a long, perfectly controlled melodic line than it is to play a virtuoso passage.

Another important contrast can be ascribed to the two different purposes Ravel had in writing his concertos. The Concerto in G was, as Ravel himself stated, in the style of a divertimento of Mozart. Often the piano is not treated as a solo instrument, but as another member of the orchestra--"concert virtuosity blended with the spirit of chamber music."⁹ It is brilliant, clear, and light, with sharp contrasts.

On the other hand, the Concerto for the left hand demands "the great palette of pianistic resonance and orchestral response."¹⁰ It is definitely a concerto for a solo instrument--dramatic, multi-colored, and even spiteful in the nature of the scherzo. The composer was not content simply to make the adjustment necessary for a left-hand work. By a remarkable inversion of values he contrasted the unconstrained nimbleness of the Concerto in G with the tragic vehemence of the Concerto for the left hand.

⁸Demuth, op. cit., p. 180.

⁹Gil-Marchex, op. cit., p. 279.

¹⁰Ibid.

The two concertos, although contemporary, are very different in character, and yet the Concerto in G, in spite of appearances, is not more Ravelian than the Concerto in D; the truth is that the latter, through the paradoxical limitations that it imposes, was intended to give more value to a demonstration of power, and this is the reason for its decorative, almost grandiose character which is different in every way from the exuberant jubilation of the Concerto in G.¹¹

Of course, this work was not intended to be a stunt. As H. G. Sear says, "It was not Ravel's purpose to show what the left hand can do so much as to prove what can be done for the left hand."¹² A concerto of this type brought special weight problems; only one hand was competing against an entire orchestra. He had to hide this limitation, avoiding the feeling that more could be accomplished if there were two hands available.

Frederic Goldbeck points out the differences between the two concertos from another angle--he speaks of the concertos as being in the styles of Mozart and Liszt. Of the Concerto in G he says:

To the Mozart style of piano Ravel adds several octaves, scintillating in the right hand, humming in the left; to the orchestra, several instruments a la mode . . . It is Mozartean both by the continuity of the lines, and by the breaks that keep it from being rolled out mechanically. It is Mozartean by the incisive gracefulness of the motives, and by the dynamic and instrumental values.¹³

¹¹Jankelevitch, op. cit., p. 57.

¹²H. G. Sear, London Record No. LL797. Commentary on record jacket.

¹³Goldbeck, op. cit., p. 196.

Concerning the Concerto for the left hand he says:

The concerto "according to Liszt" is, above all else, a marvel of virtuoso appropriationIn function of this left hand robustness, the instruments (which in the concerto "after Mozart" begin in the fairy-like registers) advance here in the glowing manner of Liszt, from the pedal drubbing on the empty chords of the bass to the very top, Lisztian and Magyar from top to bottom, from claw to coxcomb.¹⁴

Admittedly, Ravel was influenced by the styles of the past. Willy Tappolet even finds references to Bach in the Concerto for the left hand.

In this healthy, robust musicmaking lives something of the style and manner of the Brandenburg Concertos--particularly the fifth . . . ; changed, indeed, by a refined, but still primitive jazz element and the many-colored effects of a modern orchestra.¹⁵

There are also some important differences in piano style between the two concertos. Actually, the most important difference is due to the obvious fact that one work uses one hand only while the other uses both. The Concerto in G makes prominent use of a close coordination of the two hands, particularly in the first and last movements. Naturally, this style does not appear in the Concerto for the left hand. "Here, Ravel uses gymnastic independence of the arms, which had been since Liszt rather as current as the independence of fingers."¹⁶ (See Figure 1, page 19.)

¹⁴Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁵Tappolet, op. cit., p. 159.

¹⁶Gil-Marchex, op. cit., p. 90.

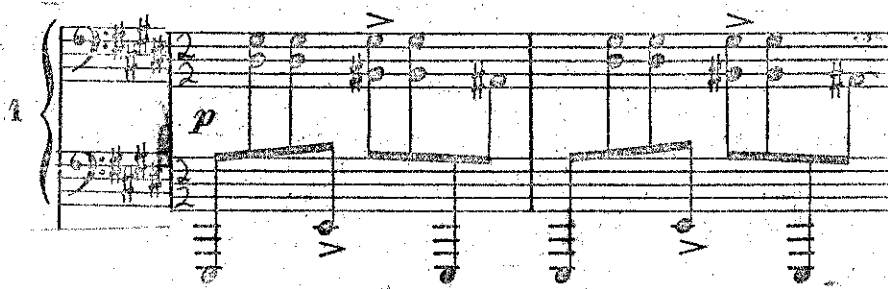


Fig. 1 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 142 - 143)

Sometimes, as in Figure 2, the interplay of the hands is so close that the hands alternate on the same notes.

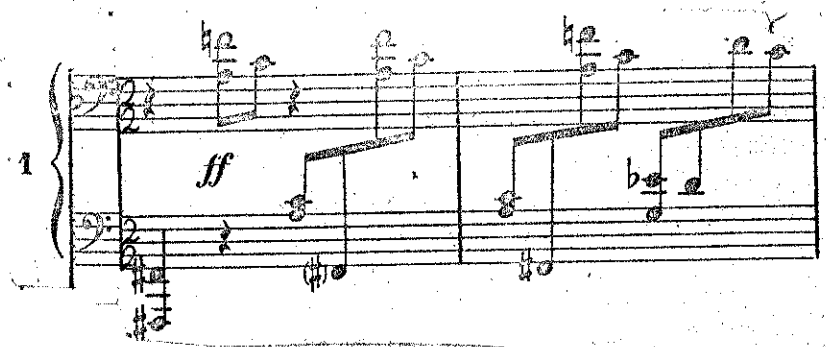


Fig. 2 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 131 - 132)

Another difference in piano styles between the two concertos is that there is nothing in the Concerto for the left hand that compares with the wandering, ornamental scales in the piano over the melody in the orchestra in the second movement of the Concerto in G.

In summing up the contrasts between the two concertos, no one could **speak** more eloquently than Norman Demuth.

It would be hard to find two such divergent works of the same kind in any composer's output. The concerto for two hands is light, breezy and in the style of a divertimento; that for the left hand is full of dignity, color, and opulence, with no concessions to the listener's repose of mind. The first is frothy, the second very much in the grand manner--not, be it noted, the grand manner of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, or Richard Strauss, but in a manner grand in conception, style and theme. It interested Ravel to be so occupied, and the moving spirits behind the works gave him the necessary urge--Marguerite Long, a Frenchwoman of grace and charm; Paul Wittgenstein, an Austrian maimed in the 1914-19 war, serious-minded and brave in the overcoming of a disability. Finger dexterity as opposed to strength; feminine music against masculine; ebullience of spirits alongside dignity. It is impossible to say that one is more successful than the other. Each in its way is complete.¹⁷

¹⁷Demuth, op. cit., p. 84.

CHAPTER III

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE CONCERTOS

While it is true that all the differences emphasized in the last chapter exist, it is also true that there are many similarities. Of course, quite a few of these are due to the fact that they were both written by Ravel; the characteristics of his writing that had always been evident showed through once more, and made these works unmistakably Ravelian. Another reason for their similarity is due to the fact that Ravel exploited jazz effects in both concertos. And, finally, the piano styles--the melodies, harmonies, cadences, special effects, and techniques--are markedly alike.

Influence of Spanish Music

It is well known that Ravel had an affinity for a taste of Spain in many of his works--the Iberian influence, as Myers calls it.¹ He also had a predilection for dance rhythms of many kinds and nationalities. Therefore, it is not surprising to find traces of Spanish music and dances in these concertos. In commenting on the authenticity of Ravel's Spanish music, Manuel de Falla wrote of

¹Myers, op. cit., p. 112.

. . . the free use of rhythms, modal melodies and all the ornamental embellishments of our popular song; elements which did not alter the individual style of the composer, even though it was applied to a melodic language as distinct from that which he used in the Sonatina. . . .

But how can we explain the subtly authentic Hispanicism of our musician, knowing, on his own admission, that he had only geographical relations with our country, being born so near our frontier?

I can solve the problem quickly: the Spain of Ravel was a Spain inherited as an ideal from his mother, whose exquisite conversation, always in excellent Spanish, ravished me when she reminded me of her youth, spent in Madrid. Mme. Ravel spoke of an epoch certainly before my time, but whose manners and customs had left memories which were familiar. I understood then what fascination these ever-present nostalgic memories had exercised on her son during his childhood, enhanced, doubtless, by this power which kept alive the theme of song and dance which were inseparable. And that explains the attraction Ravel felt from his earliest days for a country of which he had often dreamed.²

Myers continues to say that it is curious that Ravel's music shows no traces of Basque influences. He points out that when Ravel is deliberately evoking Spain, "it is from flamenco³ and Andalucian sources, in rhythm, accent, and color, that he clearly derives his inspiration."⁴

One particular Spanish influence notable in these concertos is Ravel's use of modality--particularly the Dorian and Phrygian modes.

²Demuth, op. cit., p. 49.

³Flamenco--The "gypsy" style of Spanish dance and music. It is this style, characterized by fanciful and colored costumes, alluring and pointedly erotic movements, stamping of the feet and clapping of the hands, which is commonly thought to be "typically Spanish". Willi Apel, "Flamenco", Harvard Dictionary of Music (Cambridge, 1944).

⁴Myers, op. cit., p. 112.

In apparent disagreement with Myers, Roland-Manuel points out that the Dorian mode is "characteristic of Basque music, a peculiarity which distinguishes it from the rest of Spanish music."⁵ He also shows that the Phrygian mode is essentially characteristic of the Spanish provincial songs, and particularly of the Andalusian cante flamenco.

"From the moment his muse travels 'tras los montes,' Ravel's music instinctively adopts this mode."⁶ More will be said about the modality of Ravel's melodies in the section comparing the melodies specifically. Let it suffice at this point merely to recognize this point of uniformity.

In reference to the Concerto for the left hand, Demuth remarks that

The general spirit of the work is the stateliness of a saraband of large proportions, and Ravel would seem to have finished his career with a final demonstration of his inherent Spanishness. It breathes the atmosphere of a Spanish court richly dressed and ranged in front of opulent tapestries. The courtly grandees of the days of Ferdinand and Isabella prepare to receive their sovereigns and dance a ceremonial saraband--not that the rhythm of this dance is preserved at all in the concerto. . . . This is magnificent music, square and precise; we can see the mantillas and cloaks swaying to and fro.⁷ (See Figure 3, page 24.)

⁵Roland-Manuel, op. cit., p. 112ff.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Demuth, op. cit., p. 88ff.



Fig. 3 -- Concerto for the left hand (measure 59)

In the meantime, Gil-Marchex points out that the opening theme of the Concerto in G is in "a lively, alert rhythm of the 'bransle gay'⁸ in a duple meter, such as Queen Margot of the court of Navarra liked to dance."⁹ (See Figure 4.)

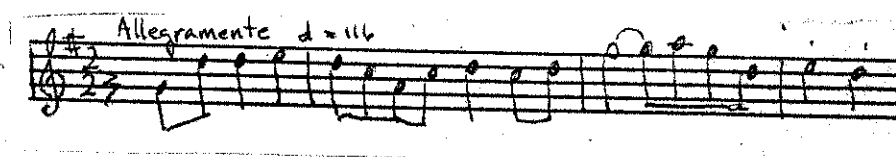


Fig. 4 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 2 - 5)

The slower second theme he calls melancholy, with an air of Creole

⁸Bransle gay is defined as "a very popular group dance of the sixteenth century." The bransle gay was usually in triple meter; the bransle simple was in duple meter. Willi Apel, "Bransle," Harvard Dictionary of Music (Cambridge, 1944).

⁹Gil-Marchex, op. cit., p. 280.

indolence, having an ill-humored twist of Spanish pride. (See Figure 5.)



Fig. 5 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 45 - 48)

Other Influences

Spanish music is not the only influence evident in these concertos. Figures 6, 7, and 8 exhibit Ravel's affinity for exotic scales--especially the oriental pentatonic scale.

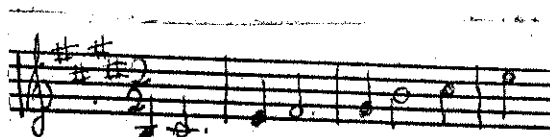


Fig. 6 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 75 - 78)



Fig. 7 -- Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 146 - 149)

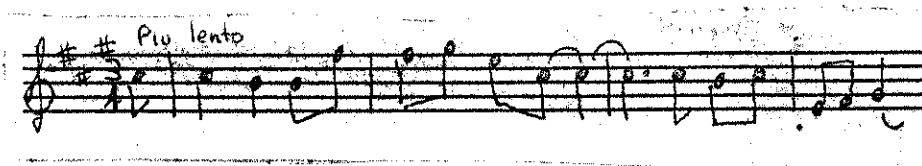


Fig. 8 -- Concerto for the left hand, intermezzo (measures 83 - 86)

The influence of Liszt has already been mentioned and will be studied in more depth in a later section comparing piano styles.

Another similarity between the two concertos is due to the fact that (with the possible exception of Tzigane, the piano accompaniment of which was later orchestrated) these are the only two works Ravel wrote for a solo instrument and orchestra. Also, "it is notable that only in the chamber music (and the piano Sonatina) does Ravel eschew a pictorial background until the last two big works, the two piano Concertos."¹⁰ In other words, the concertos are alike in that they are not pictorial or programmatic.

Influence of Jazz

At this time, the exotic rhythms of New Orleans jazz were proving irresistible to the more sophisticated Continental composers. Ravel had experimented with jazz even before his American tour. His Sonata for Violin and Piano had a second movement in blues style which astonished the American public. Ravel was just as astonished to find that,

¹⁰Demuth, op. cit., p. 124.

with the exception of George Gershwin, American composers had failed to draw more freely on this native idiom, although they welcomed and assimilated the characteristic features of many other countries. In his own analysis of the concertos (see page six), Ravel mentioned the use of jazz effects. Jankelevitch notes that the scherzo in the Concerto for the left hand and the Concerto in G both seem to have been influenced a little by Gershwin.¹¹ Both concertos use closely-related jazz melodies that are rather trite now, but which were at that time quite novel and different. These melodies used a major scale with frequent use of a lowered third and seventh against the major tonic triad. (See Figures 9 and 10.) Figure 9, despite its key signature, is at this point in the key of F sharp major.

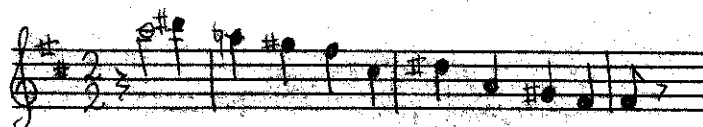


Fig. 9 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 52 - 55)

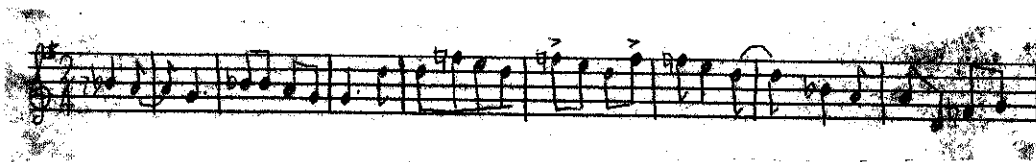


Fig. 10 -- Concerto for the left hand (measures 23 - 31)

¹¹Jankelevitch, op. cit., p. 95.

The melody in the Concerto for the left hand is first presented in a slow mournful "blues" style. Later it returns in the scherzo at a faster tempo and conveys the same light, carefree feeling as the melody from the Concerto in G.

It is interesting to notice how the mournful wailing of the example from the Concerto for the left hand is transformed into a lively dance in the last movement of the Concerto in G. (See Figure 11.)



Fig. 11 -- Concerto in G, third movement (measures 37 - 41)

These respective melodic formulas are recurrent in each of the concertos, undergoing many transformations. Sometimes they appear only in the orchestra, sometimes only in the piano, and sometimes together. Probably the most interesting transformation of the melody from the Concerto for the left hand is in the final cadenza. (See Figure 12, page 29.) Notice also the similar use of the diminished octave in the treatment of these ideas. (Compare Figures 13 and 14, page 30.)

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a left-hand concerto cadenza, measures 377-382. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The first system shows a complex rhythmic pattern in the bass clef, with a treble clef staff above it. The second system features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a rhythmic accompaniment. The third system shows a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a rhythmic accompaniment. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Fig. 12 -- Concerto for the left hand, cadenza (measures 377 - 382)

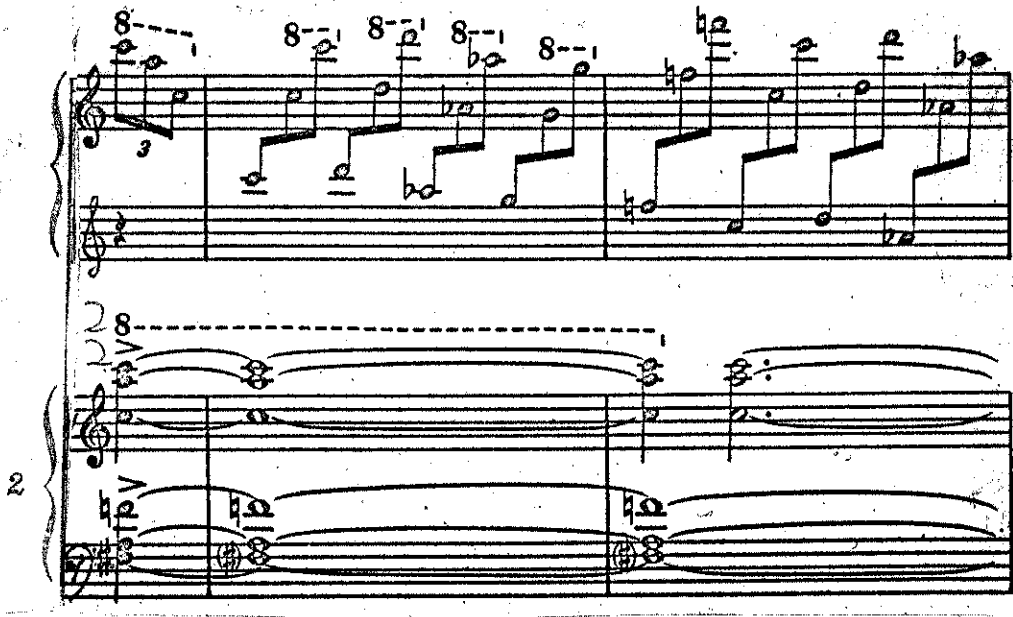


Fig. 13 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 135 - 136.)

Fig. 14 -- Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 273 - 275)

Of course, jazz owes its character not primarily to melodic devices, but to a set of rhythmic patterns. Jazz of Ravel's era was based on a percussive element which assumed two basic functions--

the first was to keep a steady beat going, an unshakable meter; the second was to punctuate the meter with loud, syncopated explosions creating tension with the steady beat. Ravel used both of these devices in his concertos, usually with chord clusters. (See Figures 15 and 16.)

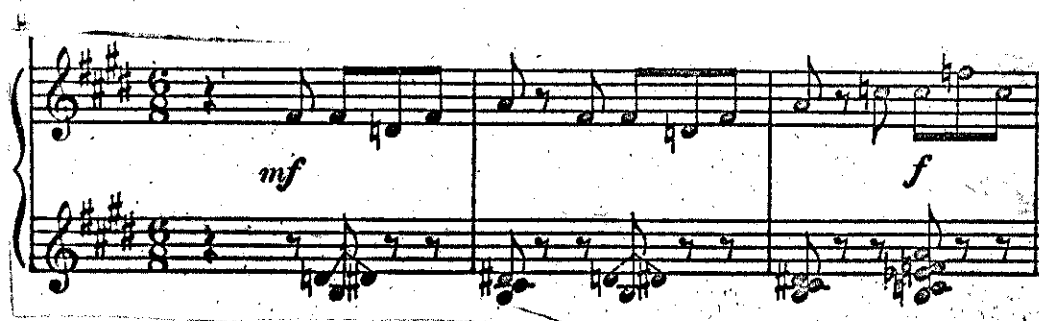


Fig. 15 -- Concerto in G, third movement (measures 79 - 81)



Fig. 16 -- Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 217 - 219)

Here is an example of the syncopated clusters.

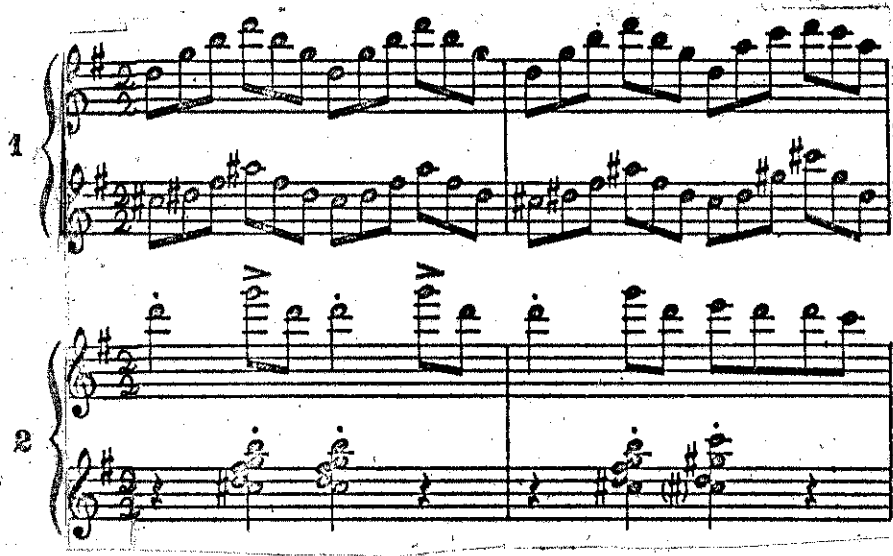


Fig. 17 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 10 - 11)

A refinement of this second basic function of the percussive element was the dislocation of the down beat--rhythms superimposed upon others as in Figure 18, page 33. This superimposition often happened, as in the case of Figure 19, page 33, in conjunction with one of the jazz melodies.

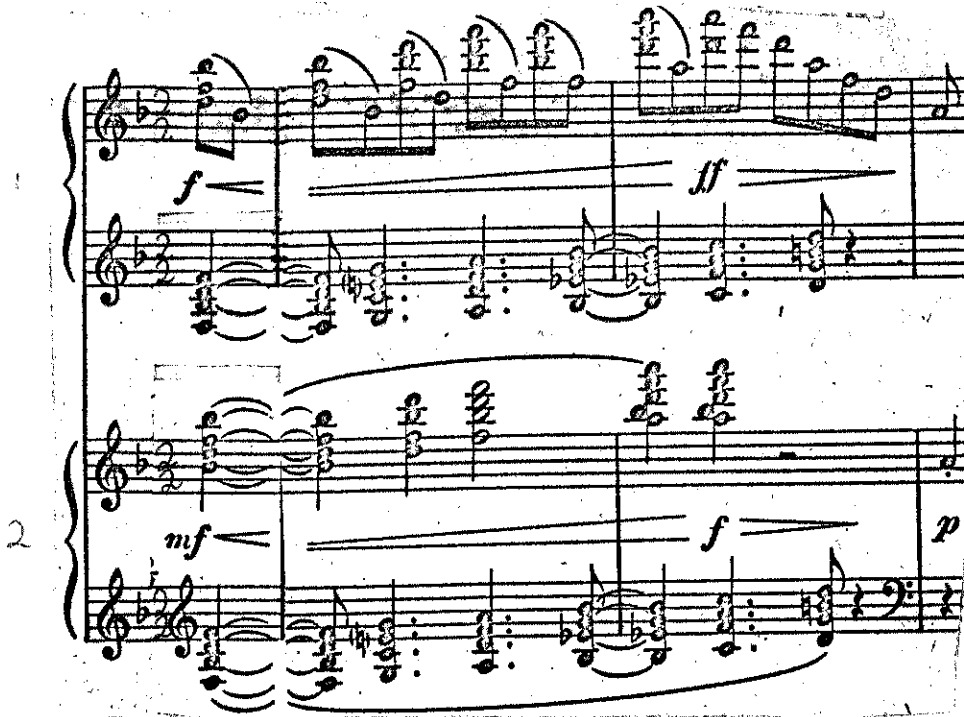


Fig. 18 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 187 - 188)

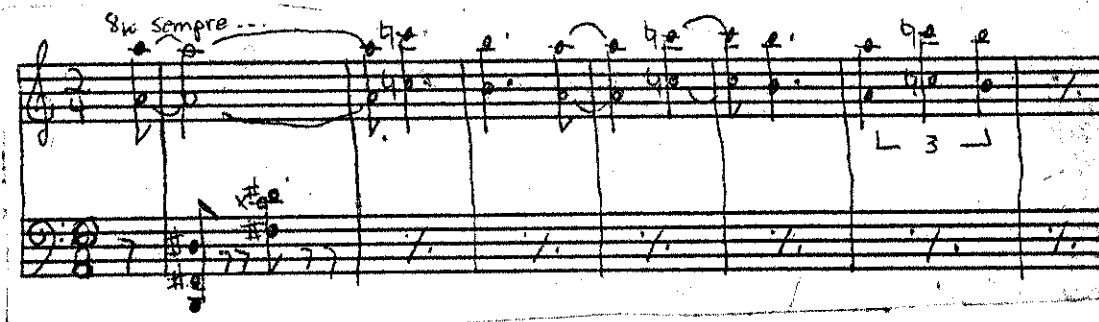


Fig. 19 -- Concerto for the left hand (measures 282 - 287)

Other Rhythmic Similarities

Both works have an unflagging rhythmic drive. This is not to say that the rhythms are not complex. In both concertos Ravel showed a tendency to superimpose 2/4 and 6/8; this resulted in many two-

against-three and three-against-four patterns. He also alternated between these two meter signatures freely (see Figures 20 and 21), but a feeling of rhythmic propulsion is present throughout both concertos to a degree which sets them apart from most other works of Ravel.

The musical score for Figure 20 consists of two staves, labeled 1 and 2. The key signature is G major (three sharps). The time signature alternates between 3/4 and 2/4. The first staff (1) features a melody with dynamic markings *ff*, *p*, and *p*. The second staff (2) features a melody with dynamic markings *f*, *p*, *f*, and *p*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

Fig. 20 -- Concerto in G, third movement (measures 100 - 102)

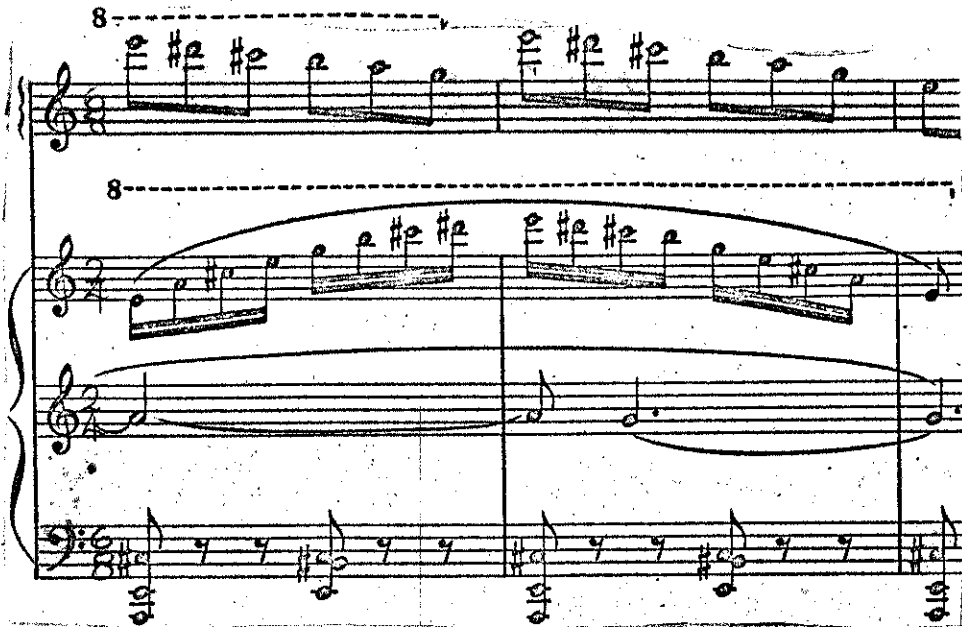


Fig. 21 -- Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 233 - 234)

While on the subject of superimposed rhythms, one must not forget the second movement of the Concerto in G in which the left hand maintains a 6/8 accompaniment pattern against the melody in 3/4. Even though the left hand is beamed as if it were in 3/4, the effect is unavoidably 6/8. (See Figure 22.) This pattern continues throughout the movement.



Fig. 22 -- Concerto in G, second movement (measures 1 - 3)

Modal Melodies

Another characteristic of Ravel was his love for modal melodies. He made a habit of avoiding the raised leading tone as much as possible. Because of this, many of his melodies sound very much alike. Figures 23 - 28 are the slower melodies taken from the two concertos. Notice how these melodies compare with each other. Some are Dorian, some are pentatonic; but they all have a distinctive sound that would allow them to be played end to end effectively. Of course, their similarity in sound and effect is not entirely due to their modality; for they are not all modal, and certainly not all in the same mode. But they all do begin with an interval of a step. And they all have a similar rhythmic pattern--that is, basically, from a short note to a note of longer duration. There is also a certain importance given to the interval of the fifth and its inversion, the fourth. Thus, it is the tendency toward similar opening rhythms and intervals, and the prominence of fourths and fifths that give these melodies their characteristic flavor. They are all somewhat reflective, pensive, peaceful creations--spontaneous and flowing, yet somehow restrained.



Fig. 23 -- Concerto for the left hand (measures 83 - 87)



Fig. 24 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 61 - 63)



Fig. 25 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 75 - 81)



Fig. 26 -- Concerto in G, second movement (measures 2 - 5)

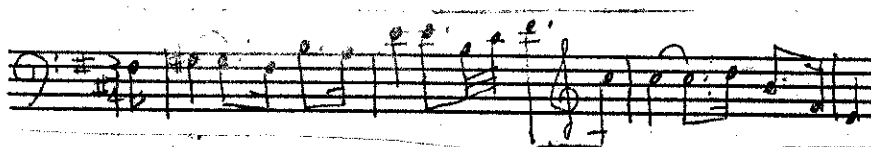


Fig. 27 -- Concerto for the left hand (measures 36 - 38)



Fig. 28 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 45 - 48)

The faster melodies (Figures 29 - 34) are not so easy to classify. It has already been shown how the jazz melodies (see Figures 9 and 10) are similar to each other. For terms of classification, they can also be identified with melodies in Figures 31, 32, and 33 in that they emphasize intervals in the triad, especially do and sol. The other melodies fall into two classifications. The first is Figure 30 and 34; the second is Figure 29, which stands alone. Figures 30 and 34 are quite different in range from each other, but their melodic content is quite similar, having been derived from the jazz formula in the Concerto for the left hand. Figure 29 is worthy of comment in that several writers see in it a grotesque mutation of Figure 27.¹² It begins in the Lydian mode, but suddenly and quite subtly shifts into the Dorian mode.



Fig. 29 -- Concerto for the left hand (measures 152 - 162)

¹²Myers, op. cit., p. 179.



Fig. 30 -- Concerto for the left hand (measures 146 - 149)



Fig. 31 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 107 - 108, 123 - 124)

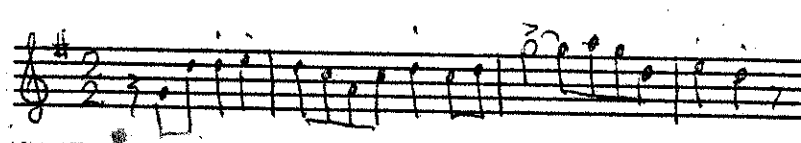


Fig. 32 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 2 - 5)

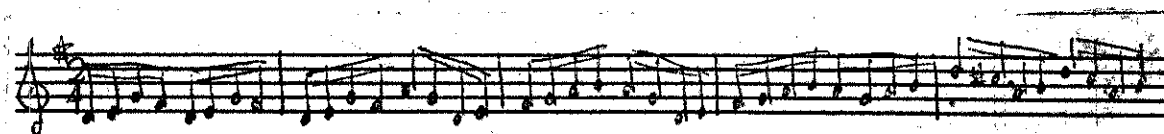


Fig. 33 -- Concerto in G, third movement (measures 5 - 9)



Fig. 34 -- Concerto in G, third movement (measures 37 - 42)

All of the faster tunes are characterized by a light, devil-may-care quality that contrasts nicely with the more thoughtful slow melodies. There is nothing subtle about the rhythms; sometimes they are complicated, but always they are strong and quite contagious.

Polytonality

The harmonic similarities of these concertos are based mostly on their polychordal structure. While Ravel was certainly no stranger to the polytonal technique of writing, there are no other examples in his works in which polytonality is so prominent as in these concertos. The polychordal basis of the Concerto in G is apparent right from the start. Ravel had a "keen hunger for inaudible timbres; it could be called the 'bitonality of resonance,' a bitonality particularly delectable in those parallel melodic passages in which one seems to be the section of the perspective reflection of the other; as in the beginning of the Concerto in G."¹³ In Figure 35 the left hand plays a pentatonic motive which, in effect, is in F sharp major while the right hand plays a G major arpeggio. Myers points out an "unconscious reminiscence" of Stravinsky's Petrushka.¹⁴ (Compare Figures 35 and 36.)

¹³Jankelevitch, op. cit., p. 105.

¹⁴Myers, op. cit., p. 175.

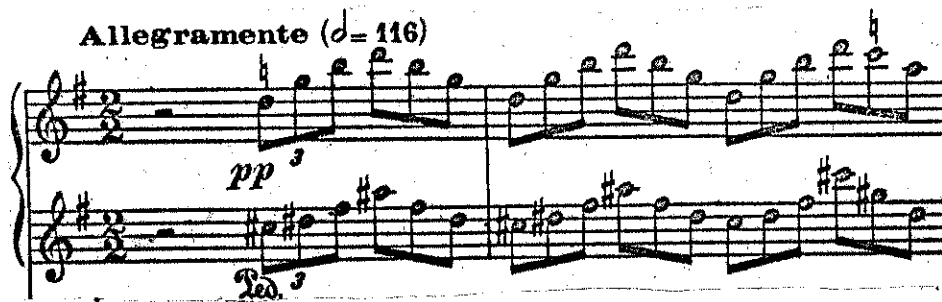


Fig. 35 -- Ravel's Concerto in G, first movement (measures 1 - 2)



Fig. 36 -- Stravinsky's Petrushka

Related to this sort of polytonality are the polychords created when Ravel mixed the modes. For instance, in Figure 37 notice the sound created by the mixture of an A major broken chord in the left hand and a Phrygian melody based on A in the right hand. Ravel made no apologies for the cross-relation created between the C natural and the C sharp; instead, he pitted them directly against each other.

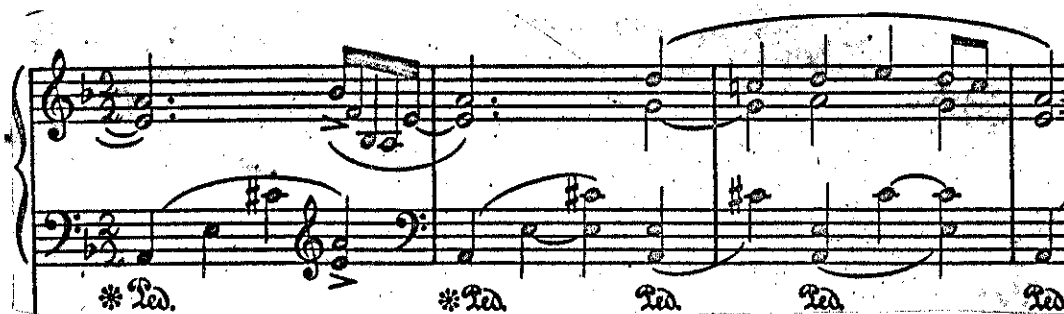


Fig. 37 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 192 - 194)

He used the same technique with stunningly different results just before the cadenza of the first movement. (See Figure 38.)

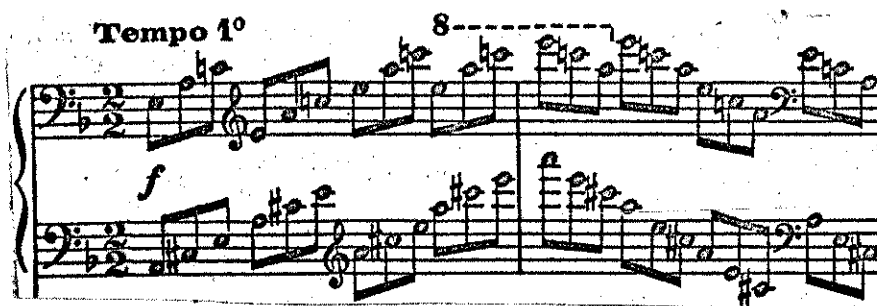


Fig. 38 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 216 - 217)

At the beginning of the scherzo section of the Concerto for the left hand, (See Figure 39) there is a similar passage with the piano in Phrygian mode and the orchestra in E major.

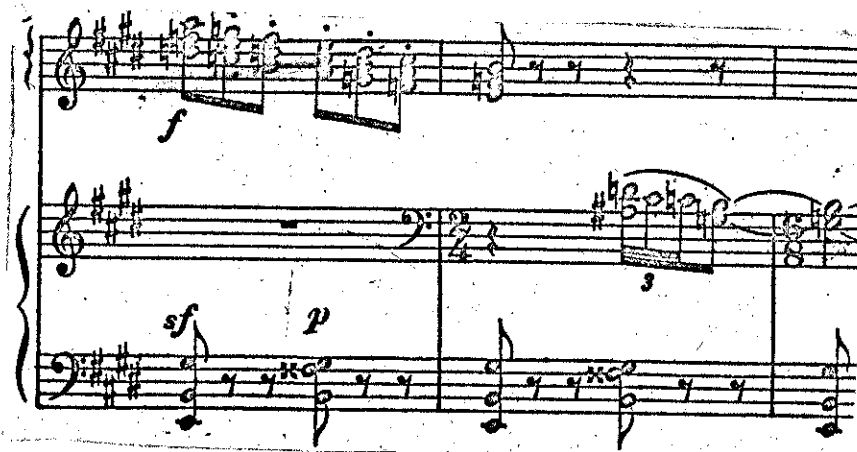


Fig. 39 -- Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 130 - 131)

In the jazzy sections of both concertos, there is a characteristic ambiguity in the use of the third scale step. (Compare Figures 40 and 41).

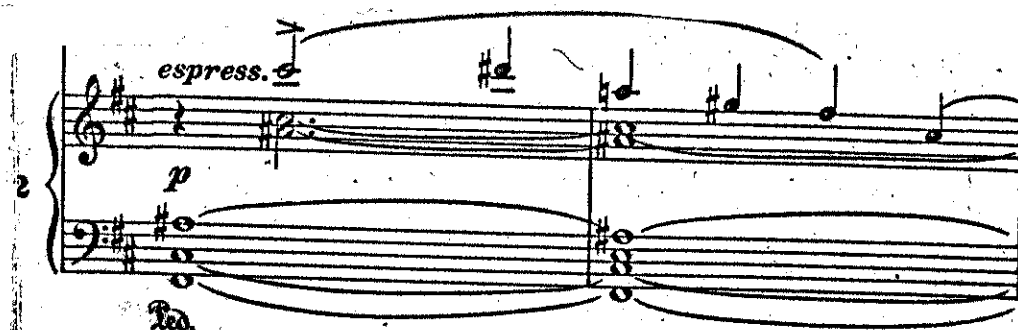


Fig. 40 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 52 - 53)



Fig. 41 -- Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 177 - 179)

The jazz theme in the Concerto for the left hand can be noted for its stubborn resistance to the key changes around it. Even in the orchestral introduction, in which this melody is based on G, it appears in context with dominant seventh harmonies based first on C and later on A.

(See Figures 42 and 43.)

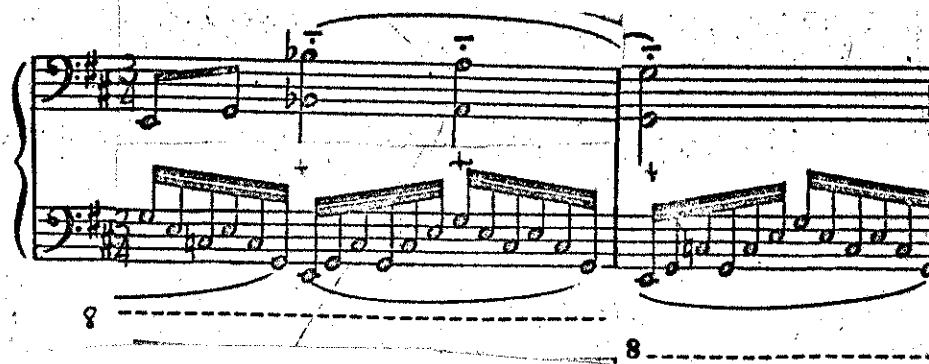


Fig. 42 -- Concerto for the left hand, introduction (measures 8 - 9)

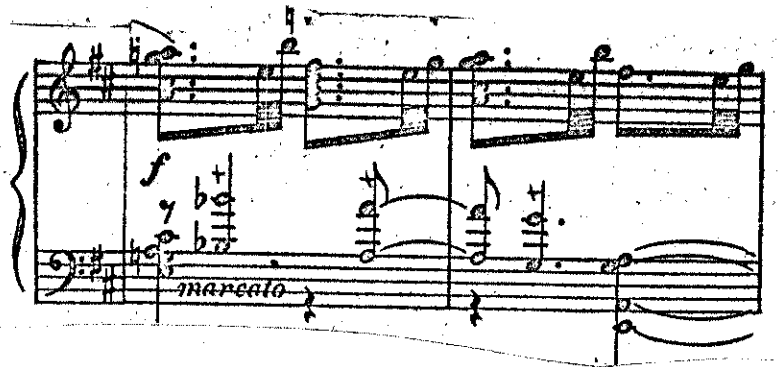


Fig. 43 -- Concerto for the left hand, introduction (measures 23 - 24)

When the jazz theme reappears in the scherzo section, it is in conjunction with a device similar to one used in the Concerto in G-- that is, it maintains the original key as a pedal chord while the harmonies shift by minor thirds (down in the Concerto for the left hand, and up in the Concerto in G). To clarify this, look at the following examples.

In the Concerto for the left hand, the jazz theme in the orchestra remains based on C; the accompanying harmonies shift downward by minor thirds. For thirty-nine measures there is the simple major-minor ambiguity that has already been mentioned. But then the jazz theme remains on C while the harmonic scheme shifts down a minor third and is based on A major for twenty-one measures. (See Figure 44.)



Fig. 44 -- Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 214 - 216)

Then, with the jazz theme still on C, the harmony drops another minor third to a dominant built on F sharp for ten measures. (See Figure 45). Notice Ravel's fondness for the dominant sound, which he does not always bother to resolve. Often there are various dissonant notes, but these do not detract from the effect of dominant harmony.

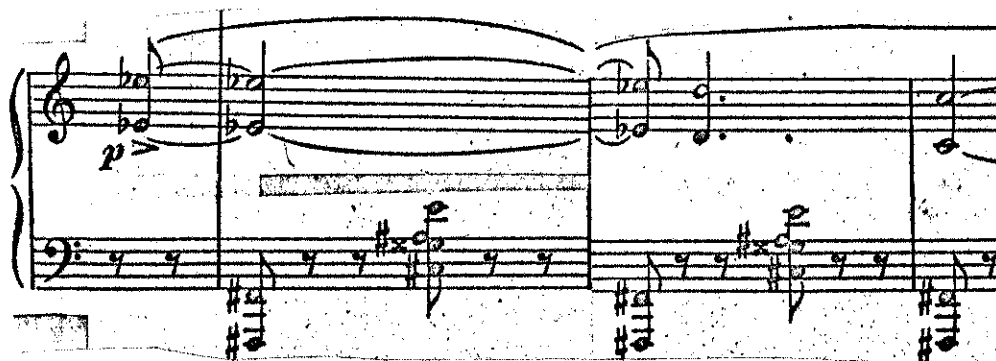


Fig. 45 -- Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 236 - 238)

This F sharp dominant harmony carries only through the first part of the jazz theme. The second part is harmonized with an E flat dominant

seventh for eleven more measures. (See Figure 46.)



Fig. 46 -- Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 236 - 238)

Finally the harmony returns to C major for nine measures, and to A for seven more. This time the A harmony functions properly as a dominant and moves the entire structure, theme and all, to a base of D. Then the same kind of development follows--the root movements being a third downward as before.

On the other hand, in the somewhat similar passage in the first movement of the Concerto in G, the stationary portion of the harmony, instead of being a whole complex of notes, is merely a single F sharp pedal tone. And the root movements, instead of going down by thirds,

go up by thirds. The F sharp first appears inside the harmony of a D major chord. (See Figure 47).

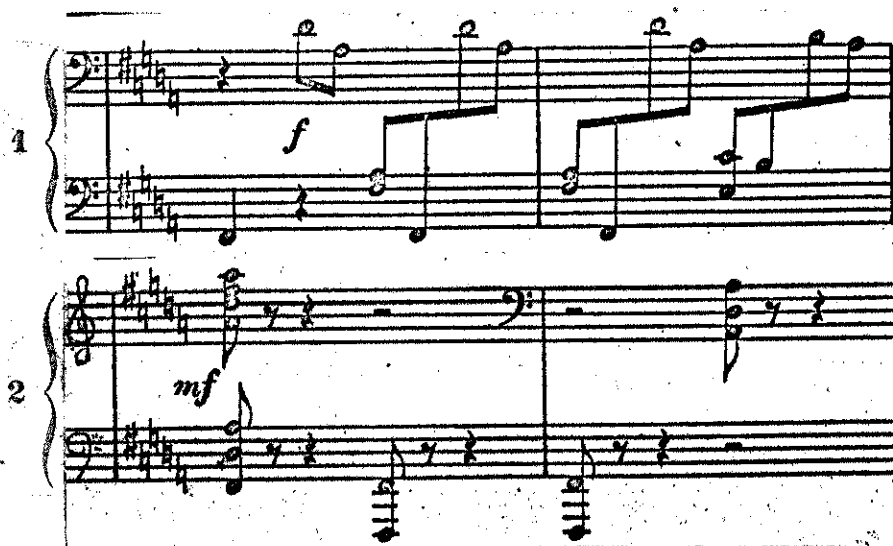


Fig. 47 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 123 - 124)

Eight measures later this same pedal F sharp appears against a harmony of F (natural) major. The harmonic movement is up a minor third.



Fig. 48 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 131 - 132)

Another eight measures later the harmony goes up another minor third to G sharp major against the same F sharp pedal. (See Figure 49.)

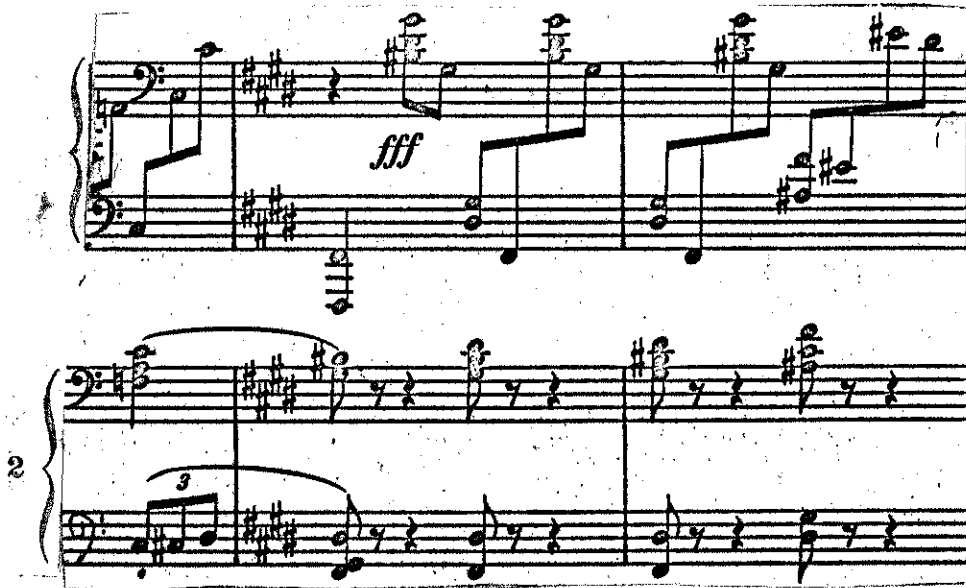


Fig. 49 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 139 - 140)

In the last movement of the Concerto in G appears a passage in which the orchestra maintains a constant key signature of G major while the key signature of the piano wanders from F sharp to E flat major.

Besides these many instances of polytonality, the harmonies of the two concertos can be compared on the basis of the notable number of "surprise" cadences. Several times in both concertos Ravel approached cadences in an ordinary manner, but he introduced some unexpected element--perhaps a polytonal element, or a completely unexpected chord. Figure 50 is one of the most beautiful examples of surprise harmony.

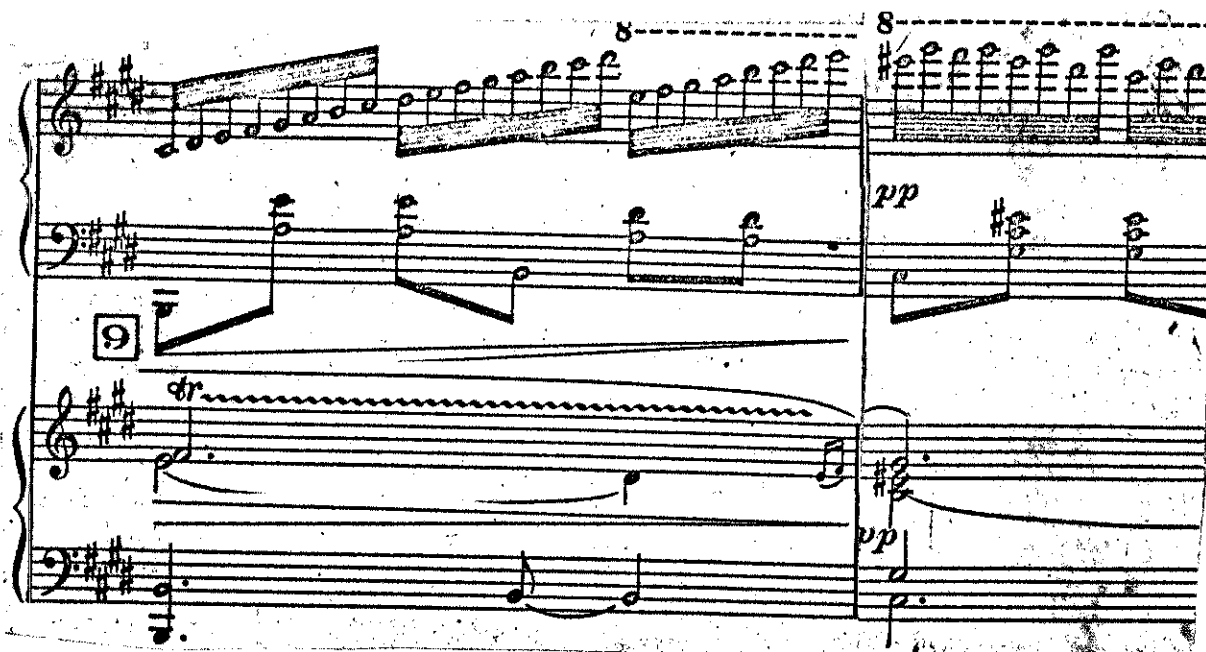


Fig. 50 -- Concerto in G, second movement (measures 96 - 97)

Figures 51 and 52 are somewhat parallel passages from both of the concertos. Notice the polytonal element in each of these final chords.

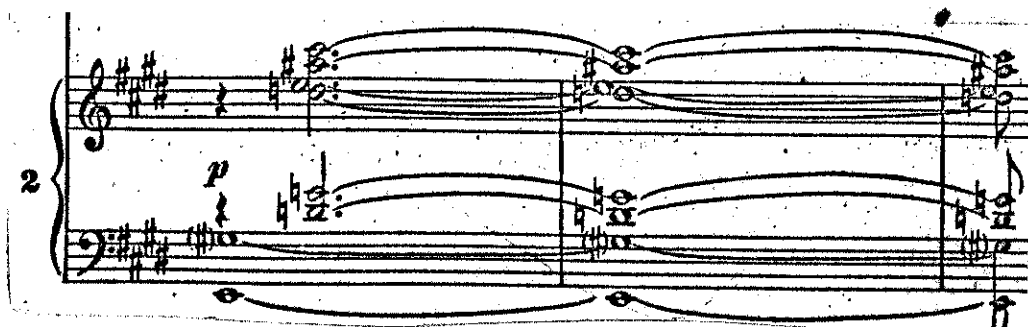


Fig. 51 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 78 - 79)

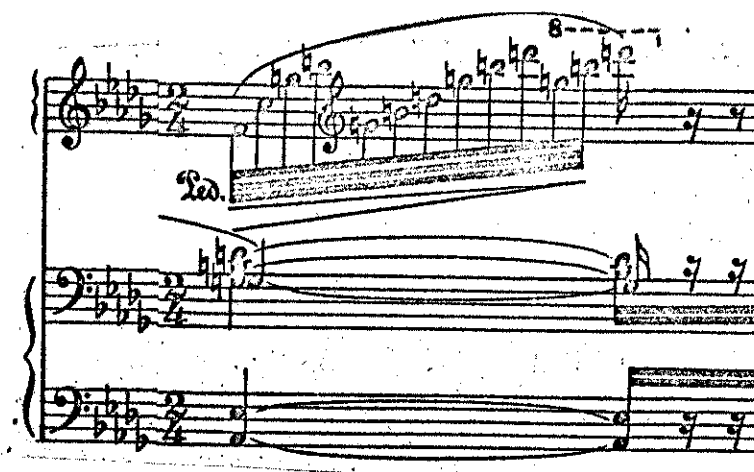


Fig. 52 -- Concerto for the left hand (measure 101)

Piano Style

The piano styles of the two concertos are markedly close in many respects. Figures 53 and 54 are reminiscent not only of Liszt, but also of the Chopin Etude, Op. 25, no. 12. (See Figure 55.)

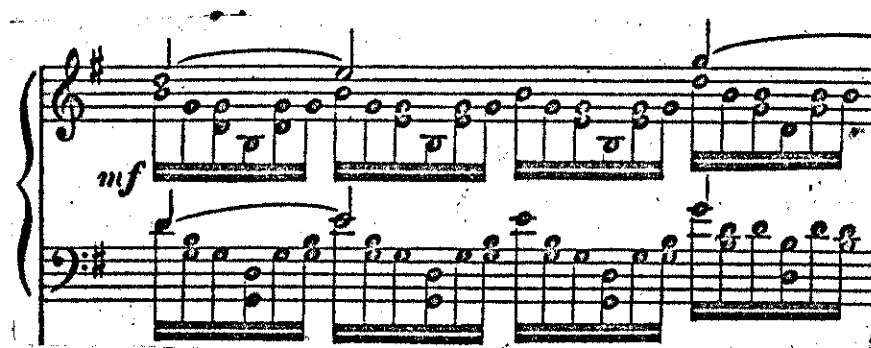


Fig. 53 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measure 245)

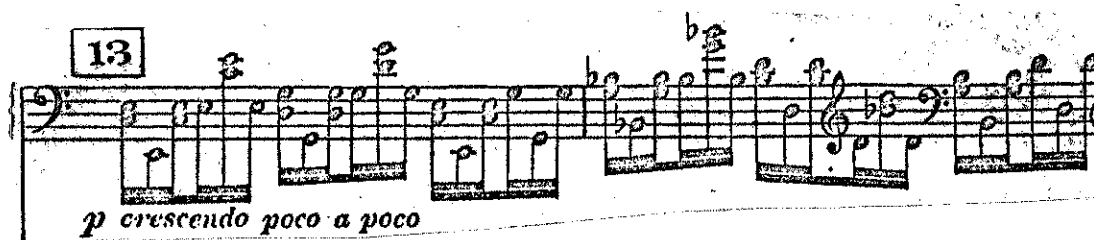


Fig. 54 -- Concerto for the left hand (measures 113 - 114)

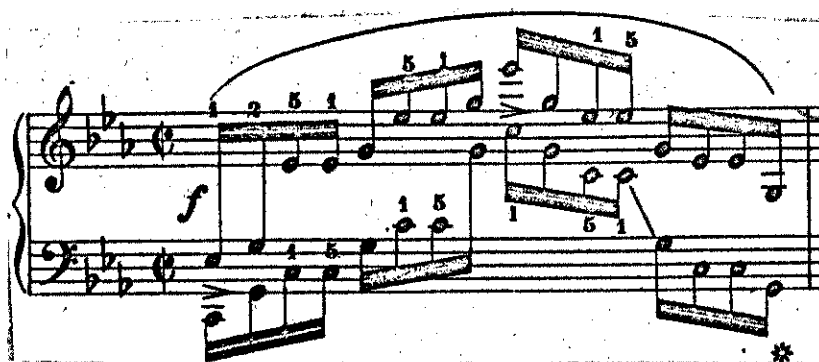


Fig. 55 -- Chopin Etude, Op. 25, no. 12 (measure 1)

Notice also this similarity in approaching particularly important climaxes. (Compare Figures 56 and 57.).

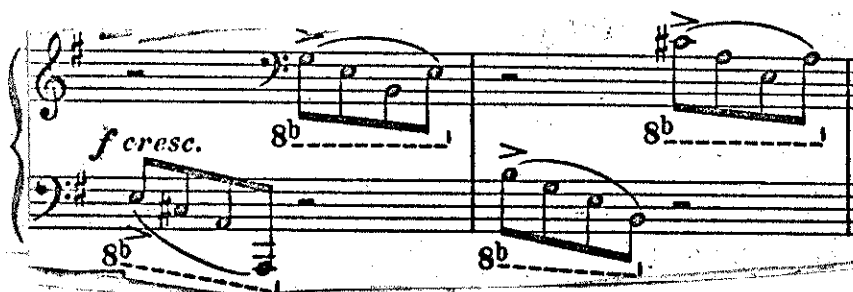


Fig. 56 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 255 - 256)



Fig. 57 -- Concerto for the left hand (measure 33)

Both concertos have short unmeasured passages. This is an interesting similarity; for although one ascends and the other descends, they both imply somewhat polytonal harmonies using the black-key pentatonic scale. (Compare Figures 58 and 59.)

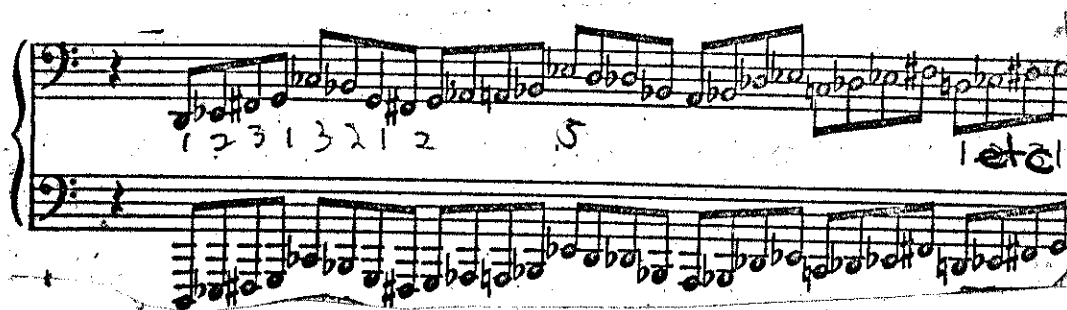


Fig. 58 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measure 171)

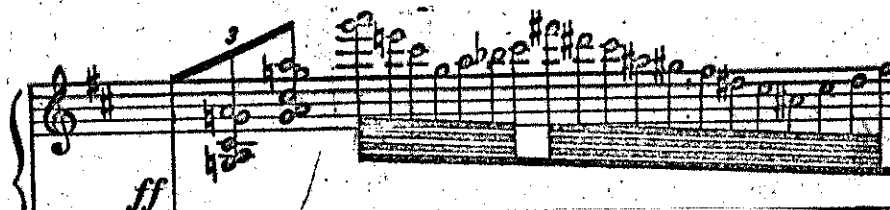


Fig. 59 -- Concerto for the left hand, opening cadenza (measure 57)

Both concertos also make prominent use of the glissando, particularly to begin or end sections.

Ravel used the chromatic scale very seldom throughout his other works. However, it appears in both concertos. (See Figure 60 and 61.)



Fig. 60 -- Concerto in G, last movement (measures 116 - 117)

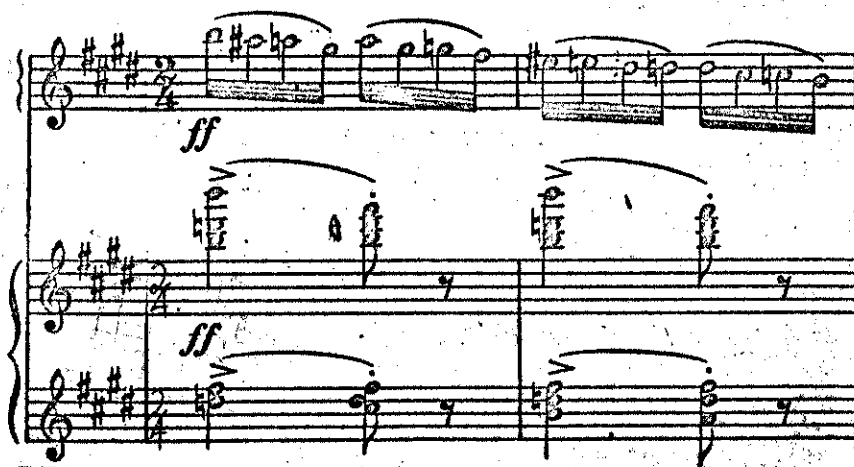


Fig. 61 -- Concerto for the left hand (measures 331 - 332)

Figures 62 and 63 illustrate another jazz device used in both concertos.



Fig. 62 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measure 275)

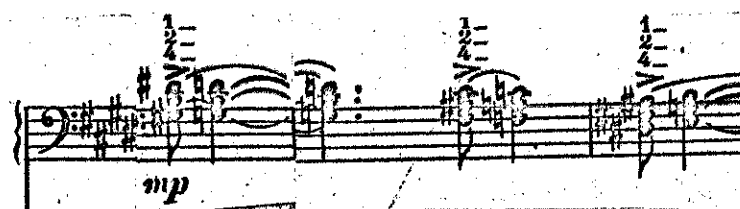


Fig. 63 -- Concerto for the left hand, scherzo (measures 139 - 141)

There are also several sections that emphasize parallel triad movement-- sometimes in the piano, (see Figure 64), sometimes in the orchestra (see Figure 65). Notice how their use quite often creates a modal effect.

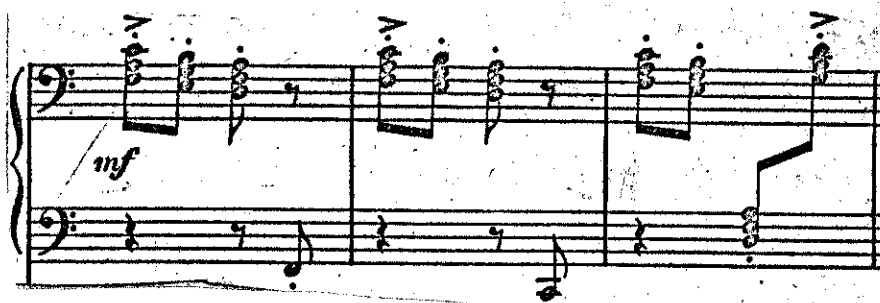


Fig. 64 -- Concerto in G, third movement (measures 37 - 39)

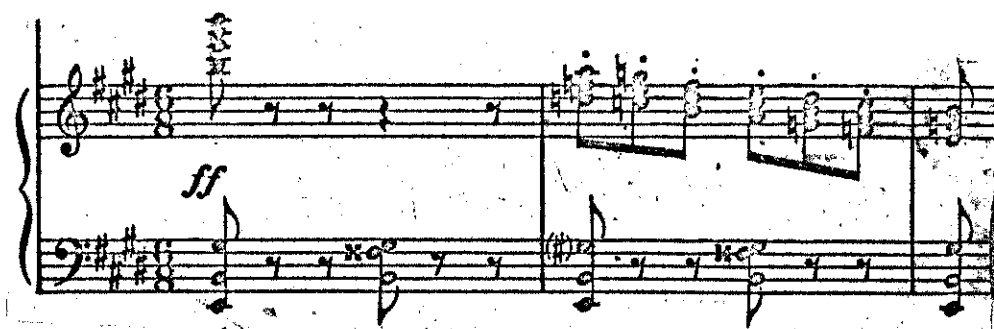


Fig. 65 -- Concerto for the left hand, scherzo, (measures 121 - 122)

The example above from the Concerto for the left hand is used quite often in the scherzo section, and is rather important. Notice how it compares with the closing of the first movement of the Concerto in G. Also compare the end of the Concerto for the left hand. They both end in the Phrygian mode of the cante flamenco. (Compare Figures 66 and 67.)



Fig. 66 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 321 - 323)



Fig. 67 -- Concerto for the left hand (measures 429 - 430)

The most important piano style common to both concertos occurs in Ravel's treatment of the cadenzas. In both he used the thumb-melody technique which can be traced to the first Liszt Paganini Etude. One can also find the same sort of thing in the familiar Liebestraum. Hidden among cascades of notes is a melody played by the thumb. Notice also the rhythmic symmetry in all the multitude of notes, as distinguished from earlier Ravel, such as Jeux d'Eau, in which an uneven number of

notes is forced into a beat. (Compare Figures 68 and 12.)

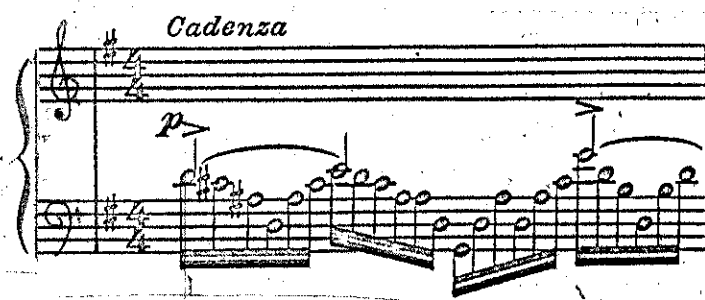


Fig. 68 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measure 230)

And finally, there are two pairs of sections from each concerto that are so similar that if they were in the same key, it would be quite possible to lead from a section of one concerto into the corresponding section of the other without causing so much as a raised eyebrow. The first pair includes the very opening of the Concerto in G and the secondary theme of the scherzo of the Concerto for the left hand. Both have rippling arpeggios in the piano over a sprightly melody played in the former by the piccolo and in the latter by the flute. (Compare Figures 69 and 70.)

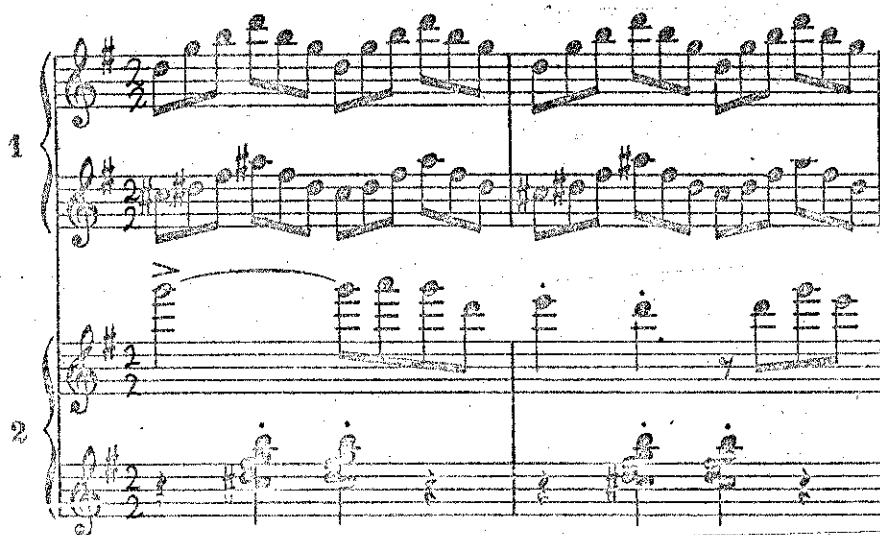


Fig. 69 -- Concerto in G, first movement (measures 4 - 5)

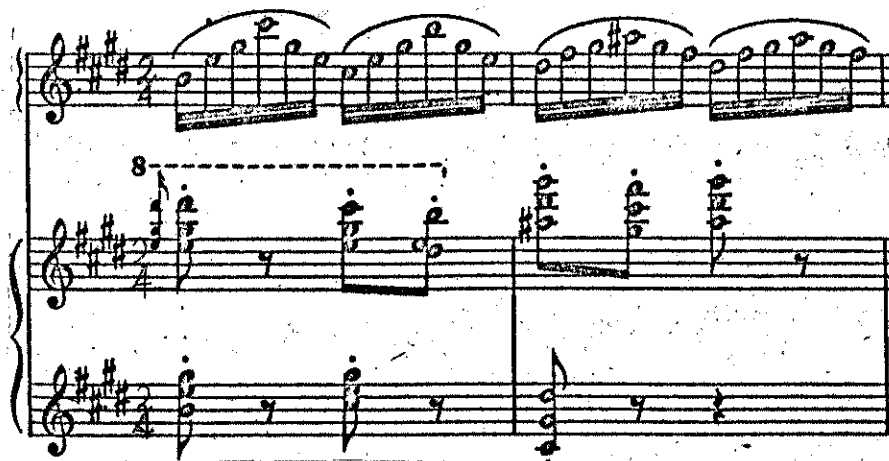


Fig. 70 -- Concerto for the left hand (measures 147 - 148)

The most striking example of all can be seen by comparing the last movement of the Concerto in G with the scherzo section of the Concerto for the left hand. They both use the same meter and the same rhythmic pattern. Even the accompaniment patterns are similar.

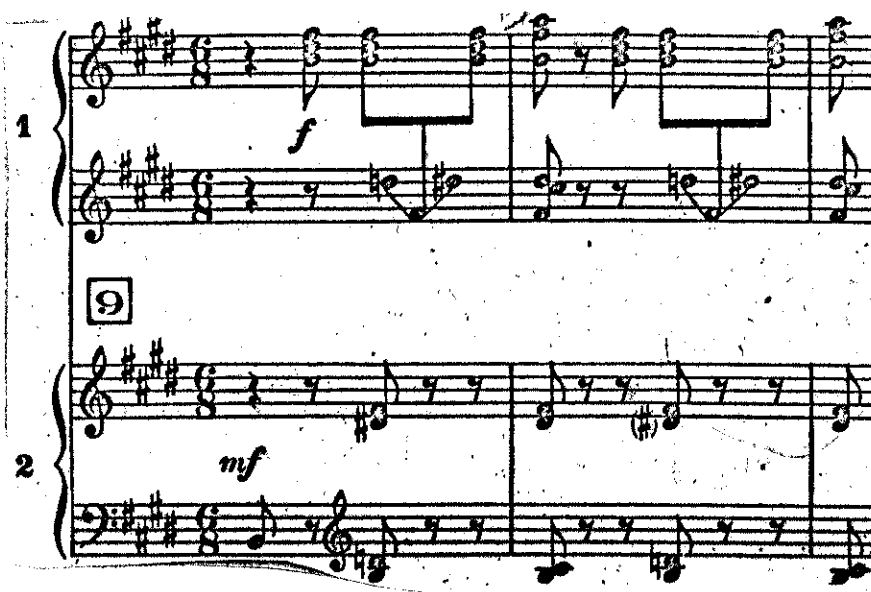


Fig. 71 -- Concerto in G, third movement (measures 95 - 96)

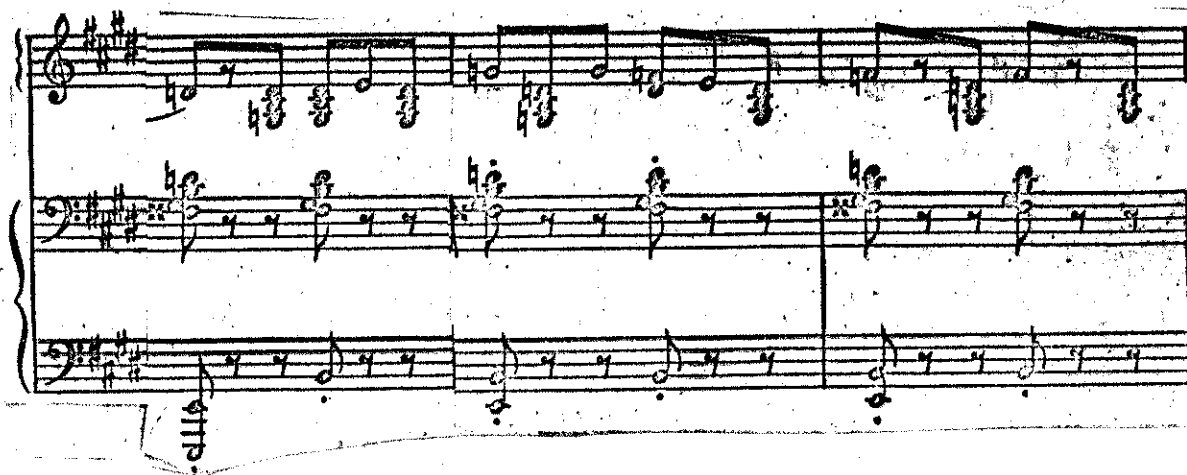


Fig. 72 -- Concerto for the left hand (measures 168 - 171)

One is forced to admit that the similarities pointed out here are important and, for the most part, fairly obvious, although many writers have chosen to ignore them. The concertos are not as vastly different as many believe them to be; there are many ways in which they resemble

each other.

Although Ravel certainly did not intend these concertos to be considered a culmination of his work, they were the last important works he wrote. With this in mind, it is important to note the musical value of his work at this, the climax of his career. The following appropriate remarks by two of his biographers will serve this purpose:

It was certainly difficult for the composer to subject himself to such a double project at the same time, but more important than this experiment is the musical worth of these works. And the worth of these works is so great that the pair of concertos is among the best we have of Ravel.¹⁵

These concertos have weaknesses as well as good points. It is easy to observe the frivolity and superficiality of the first and last movements of the two-handed piano Concerto (although he wrote thus advisedly) and overlook the tenderness of the slow movement. It is equally easy to note the commonplace jazz effects in the left-hand Concerto, and pass by the dignity, opulence, breadth and nobility of the principal subject. Ravel more than any composer offers loopholes, but his vulnerability is resilient. Every hole can be justified. Each one is Ravel himself, a genius, an artist of the first water, a mind refined and polished to its highest degree. The music illustrates the man. Surrounded by knick-knacks, both genuine and spurious, dressed faultlessly, brisk and energetic, Ravel lived; he did not merely exist.¹⁶

¹⁵Tappolet, op. cit., p. 155.

¹⁶Demuth, op. cit., p. 180.

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