THE PIANO STYLE OF MAURICE RAVEL

THESIS

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MASTER OF ARTS

by

Jack Lundy Roberts, B. M.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS** ................................................................. iv

**Chapter**

I. **THE DEVELOPMENT OF PIANO STYLE** ........................................ 1

II. **RAVEL'S MUSICAL STYLE** ....................................................... 7

   - Melody
   - Harmony
   - Rhythm

III. **INFLUENCES ON RAVEL'S PIANO WORKS** .................................. 67

**APPENDIX** ................................................................................. 83

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** ........................................................................... 85
# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><em>Jeux d'Eau</em>, mm. 1-3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td><em>Le Paon (Histoires Naturelles)</em>, mm. 1-3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td><em>Le Paon (Histoires Naturelles)</em>, mm. 31</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td><em>Ondine (Gaspard de la Nuit)</em>, m. 1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td><em>Ondine (Gaspard de la Nuit)</em>, m. 90</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td><em>Sonatine</em>, first movement, mm. 1-3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td><em>Sonatine</em>, second movement, mm. 45-52</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td><em>Sonatine</em>, third movement, mm. 37-38</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td><em>Sainte</em>, mm. 23-25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td><em>Concerto in G</em>, second movement, mm. 2-8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td><em>Asie (Shéhérazade)</em>, mm. 6-7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td><em>Menuet (Le Tombeau de Couperin)</em>, mm. 13-16</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td><em>Asie (Shéhérazade)</em>, mm. 18-22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td><em>Alborada del Gracioso (Miroirs)</em>, mm. 43-44</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td><em>Concerto for the Left Hand</em>, mm. 523-530</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td><em>Nahandove (Chansons Madécasses)</em>, mm. 1-5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td><em>Sonatine</em>, first movement, mm. 1-3</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes (Ma Mère l'Oie), mm. 9-11</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Sainte, mm. 4-6</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Ondine (Gaspard de la Nuit), m. 67</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Valses Nobles et Sentimentales, number one, mm. 57-59</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Concerto in G, second movement, mm. 74-75</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Jeux d'Eau, m. 38</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Ondine (Gaspard de la Nuit), mm. 73-75</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Alborada del Gracioso (Miroirs), mm. 174-176</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Concerto in G, first movement, mm. 2-5</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Example of the diminished seventh chord with unresolved appoggiatura</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Alborada del Gracioso (Miroirs), mm. 1-2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Examples of dominant seventh chords with unresolved appoggiaturas</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Scarbo (Gaspard de la Nuit), mm. 130-131</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Examples of secondary seventh and ninth chords</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Jeux d'Eau, m. 1</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>L'Indifférent (Shéhérazade), mm. 9-10</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Toccata (Le Tombeau de Couperin), mm. 9-10</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Le Grillon (Histoires Naturelles), mm. 48-47</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Menuet sur le Nom d'Haydn, m. 48</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. La Vallée des Cloches (Miroirs), mm. 25-26</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Le Gibet (Gaspard de la Nuit), mm. 3-4</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. L'Enfant et les Sortilèges, page 51 in the score, mm. 1-3</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. L'Enfant et les Sortilèges, page 1 in the score, mm. 1-5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. L'Heure Espagnole, page 24 in the score, m. 1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Menuet (Le Tombeau de Couperin), mm. 57-60</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Scarbo (Gaspard de la Nuit), mm. 461-462</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Valses Nobles et Sentimentales, number three, mm. 33-35</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Jeux d'Eau, m. 31</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. L'Heure Espagnole, page 14 in the score, m. 8</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. Valses Nobles et Sentimentales, Epilogue, mm. 31-32</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. Les Grands Vents Venus d'Outre-Mer, mm. 22-23</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. Concerto in G, first movement, mm. 1-2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. L'Heure Espagnole, page 3 in the score, m. 33</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51. Sonatine, second movement, mm. 69-70</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. Menuet sur le Nom d'Haydn, m. 2</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53. Menuet sur le Nom d'Haydn, mm. 39-42</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54. Scarbo (Gaspard de la Nuit), mm. 36-37</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55. <strong>Valses Nobles et Sentimentales</strong>, number one, mm. 1-4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56. <strong>Forlane</strong> (Le Tombeau de Couperin), mm. 13-14</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57. <strong>Le Gibet</strong> (Gaspard de la Nuit), mm. 1-2</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58. <strong>Sonatine</strong>, first movement, mm. 43-45</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59. <strong>Sonatine</strong>, third movement, mm. 18-19</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60. <strong>Oiseaux Tristes</strong> (Miroirs), mm. 10-11</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61. <strong>Une Barque sur l'Océan</strong> (Miroirs), mm. 29-30</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62. <strong>Concerto in G</strong>, second movement, mm. 69-70</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63. <strong>Concerto in G</strong>, first movement, mm. 230-231</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64. <strong>Trio for Piano and Strings</strong>, first movement, mm. 1-2</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65. <strong>Trio for Piano and Strings</strong>, second movement, mm. 125-126</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66. <strong>Noctuelles</strong> (Miroirs), mm. 1-2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67. <strong>Sonatine</strong>, second movement, mm. 1-4</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68. <strong>Concerto in G</strong>, first movement, mm. 75-78</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69. Example of the rhythm of the Malagueña, the Habanera, and the Jota</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PIANO STYLE

The influence of the piano on musical style has been treated in some detail elsewhere,\(^1\) but since the subject bears directly on the piano style of Maurice Ravel, it is briefly restated here.

Although the piano was known as early as 1726,\(^2\) it did not actually achieve an important musical position until Mozart's period (1756-1791). However, Mozart made few changes in the established clavier style, which was still basically that of the harpsichord.\(^3\)

It remained for Ludwig van Beethoven to alter radically the fundamental character of clavier style. Beethoven's conception of the piano became, in his later sonatas, symphonic, a conception which led to the eventual expansion of

\(^1\)Alexander Boggs Ryan, The Piano Style of Claude Debussy, Chapter I. (Thesis for partial fulfillment of Master's degree requirements, North Texas State College).

\(^2\)Gottfried Silbermann (1683-1753) constructed two pianofortes in 1726.

\(^3\)Harpsichord style, in comparison with the true pianoforte style of the future, is characterized by a smaller keyboard compass, smaller range of dynamics, as well as a more transparent texture of tone combinations. Also, only terrace dynamics, e. g., alternate forte and piano were obtainable on the harpsichord, while crescendo and decrescendo were possible on the pianoforte.
the entire range of the piano. During the time Beethoven composed the thirty-two piano sonatas, the range of the piano grew from its original five octaves to six.\(^4\) Beethoven often employed wide spacing between the hands and delighted in writing heavy, thick chords in the lower register.

The Irish pianist, John Field (1782-1837), possibly stimulated by the Beethoven Bagatelles, wrote an entirely original type of composition called the Nocturne, later developed by Chopin.

Liszt was very fond of the Field Nocturnes and played them as a boy. In his preface to the Nocturnes, Liszt expresses his admiration for these compositions:

To analyze the charm of their spontaneity would be a vain task. They emanate solely from a temperament like that of Field. For him, invention and facility were one, diversity of form a necessity, as is usually the case with an emotion. Therefore, despite this elegance, which varied so greatly with his moods, there was no trace of affectation in his talent; far from this, his exquisiteness had all the simplicity of instinct, which delights in endless modulation of the simple and happy chord of the sentiment with which the heart is filled.\(^5\)

The Nocturne, as well as the Mazurka and Polonaise, became a favorite form of Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849). The chief characteristics of Chopin's style are as follows:

1. Preference for the homophonic style of composition to the polyphonic.

\(^4\)I. e., from G-f\(^3\) to contra D-c\(^4\).

\(^5\)Franz Liszt, preface to the John Field Eighteen Nocturnes, p. i.
2. "Rhetorical" style of composition, characterized by a virtuosic display of both piano and pianist.

3. The "stretto" effect, which is a hastening of the tempo, usually accompanied by a crescendo of both dynamics and technical difficulties.6

4. "Thick technique," which is passage work employing more than one note at a time, e. g., double thirds, sixths, and octaves.

5. Important use of the una corda pedal. Light, rapid passages in the music of Chopin and Field are termed "filigree passages" by G. Abraham.7

Franz Liszt (1811-1886) outlived Chopin by thirty-five years and was therefore fortunate in having a more resonant and modern piano at his disposal.

Nicolo Paganini (1782-1840), the great violin virtuoso, was undoubtedly the inspiration for Liszt's ferociously difficult piano works. Sacherevell Sitwell remarks that Liszt was influenced by the great violinist from 1830 onwards.8

Liszt was a brilliant performer and did a great deal to exploit the resources of the piano in his concerts. Although Liszt continued to compose mainly in the style of Chopin, many of the good features introduced by Chopin were greatly

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6This device was suggested by the fugal stretto, which is a hastening of the voice entrances.

7Gerald Abraham, Chopin's Musical Style, p. 17.

8Sacherevell Sitwell, Liszt, p. 125.
overworked and consequently cheapened. The *Trois Études de Concert* and the *Études d'Execution Transcendante*, requiring a maximum of piano technique, are typical examples of Liszt's style of piano composition.

Even more has been said of Liszt's innovations in piano technique than of Chopin's; in fact, certain authorities have erroneously declared that the Chopin *Études* reveal the influence of Liszt. James Huneker attacks such a conclusion with the following evidence:

Lina Ramann, in her exhaustive biography of Franz Liszt, openly declares numbers 9 and 12 of Chopin *Études* opus 10 and numbers 11 and 12 of opus 25 reveal the influence of the Hungarian virtuoso. Figures prove the fallacy of her assertion. When Chopin arrived in Paris [1832], . . . he was the creator of a new piano technique.9

Perhaps the reason that Liszt is given greater credit than Chopin in pianistic innovation is that Liszt enjoyed a wider success as virtuoso and teacher than did Chopin and possessed a more brilliant personality.

Chronologically, the next important composer of piano music in France was Claude Debussy (1862-1918), a pianistic descendant of Chopin and Liszt, although he was strongly influenced in pianistic conception by Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), after the appearance of the latter's *Jeux d'Eau* in 1901.10

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10Nicolas Slonimsky in *Music Since 1900*, p. 58, includes the following entry for February 5, 1906: "Maurice Ravel
A similarity between Debussy and Chopin exists in their choice of titles such as Ballade (1890), Mazurka (1890), Nocturne (1890), the Préludes (1910-1913), and the Etudes (1915). These titles were all used by Chopin, and Debussy received early piano instruction from a Chopin pupil, Madame Mauté de Fleurville.11

Debussy's favorite form for the piano was the short program piece, and he preferred to write atmospheric music that only suggests what he had in his mind.12

According to E. Robert Schmitz, the outstanding characteristics of Debussy's piano style are:

(a) a total exploitation of the resources of the piano and use of orchestral effects, which are called into play by the various techniques of composition employed by Debussy.

(b) dynamic compass ranging from pppp to FFF.

(c) employment of various touches from staccato, to portamento, to legato; used singly and in combination.

(d) a subtle use of all three pedals, separate and

affirms his priority in evolving a new piano technique in the following letter, addressed to Pierre Lalo, music editor of Le Temps: 'You have commented at great length upon a rather special method of writing for piano, the invention of which you attribute to Debussy. I wish to point out that my Jeux d'Eau appeared early in 1902, when there were no other piano works by Debussy than his three pieces Pour le Piano, which I admire very much, but which contain nothing new from the pianistic point of view.'


12Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy, p. 135.
together, essential to the projection of the contrapuntal levels and atmospheric colors.

(e) imitation of certain orchestral instruments, such as harp, guitar, bells.

(f) new fingering problems caused by use of exotic scales and new chords and chord progressions.\footnote{Schmitz, op. cit., pp. 35-36.}

Debussy despised mere virtuosic display, as the following characteristic quotation indicates:

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.\footnote{Claude Debussy, \textit{Monsieur Croche, the Dilettante Hater}, p. 54.}
CHAPTER II

RAVEL'S MUSICAL STYLE

The name Impressionism was first used derisively in 1874, when a group of young painters, among them Renoir, Cézanne, Degas, and Manet, organized a stock company and exhibited their works in Paris. The exhibition was received with shrieks of laughter, and a newspaperman, taking his cue from the title of one of Manet's canvases, Sunrise, an Impression, labeled the entire group as impressionists. But as the movement gained popularity, the once-derisive term became the descriptive name for all painters who sought to record sensations of light and color.¹

Although Impressionism as a movement began in the latter half of the nineteenth century, its beginnings appear in the paintings of Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863). Delacroix believed that art is not a mere imitation of nature, but the product of genius seeking to fathom inner causes. To him, art in the final analysis was a product of the imagination, the total of the artist's experiences and emotions. In discussing the paintings of Antoine Jean Gros (1771-1835) and Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Delacroix writes:

¹Thomas Craven, The Story of Painting, p. 196.
The impressions produced by the arts on sensitive organisms are a curious mystery: confused impressions, if one tries to describe them, clear-cut and full of strength if one feels them again, and if only through memory! I strongly believe that we always mix in something of ourselves with feelings which seem to come from the objects that strike us. It is probable that the only reason why these works please me so much is that they respond to feelings which are my own; and since they give me the same degree of pleasure, different as they are, it must be that I find in myself the source of the effect which they produce.2

In the paintings of Delacroix one finds no definite lines and surfaces, nor rhythm except in the innumerable color particles. In Delacroix's pictures, rhythm is not separate from content and form, but merges itself in the relationship of theme, form, and color.3

Like most early impressionists, Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) was not concerned with giving his subject a soul, but with seeking to paint his object as it appeared to the eye for one transitory instant. His colleague, François Millet (1853-1910) strove for approximately the same effect.4

Although these painters were able to paint forcible portraits, they narrowed the subject down to its optical value and made no attempt at an interpretation of their subject. Light and color were the two important elements, whereas the subject itself became arbitrary.5


3Paul Henry Lang, Music in Western Civilization, p. 1015.

4Ibid., p. 1015.

5Ibid., p. 1016.
Impressionism in literature is represented chiefly by the poets Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), who sought to portray the dominant element of the subject in vague, unrelated word groups, which combine to produce the impression of the whole. Literature could not compete with painting, because of the definite meaning and association of the words. Yet, as poetic Impressionism developed into Symbolism, represented by Verlaine and especially by Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), the poetry became almost musical, for the words were arranged to produce definite sensations in the mind of the reader. Of the beginnings of Symbolism, Foster Erwin Guyer comments:

In the last two decades of the century, Mallarme and Verlaine created Symbolism and renewed poetic technique by destroying the sharp outlines that made Parnassian poetry resemble sculpture, substituting a vague contour, a misty indistinctness, a dreamlike inexactness, and a sensuous melody that allied poetry rather to music. They wished to stir the imagination of the reader, to suggest rather than fully state ideas, to create a series of images and rich harmonies, to allow words to show all their color, to reflect their tones upon one another, and to enter into striking combinations that transform them into new and pleasing blends of sound and meaning. In this poetry, the symbolic replaces the real.7

"Soleils Couchants" by Verlaine is an excellent example of poetic Symbolism:

6A school of poetry which arose in the second half of the nineteenth century as a reaction to the exuberance of form and content in the Romantic poetry. It is characterized by technical perfection of rhythm and rime, combined with impersonality and objectivity of thought and style. (Foster Erwin Guyer, The Main Stream of French Literature, p. 265).

7Ibid., p. 269.
Une aube affaiblie
Verse par les champs
La mélancolie
Des soleils couchants.
La mélancolie
Berce de doux chants
Mon coeur qui s'oublie
Aux soleils couchants.
Et d'étranges rêves,
Comme des soleils
Couchants sur les grèves
Fantômes vermeils,
Défilent sans trêves
Défilent, pareils
A des grands soleils
Couchants sur les grèves.

The Impressionistic movement in music was motivated by the antagonism of Claude Debussy (1862-1918) toward the strong German romantic influence of French music. The Germans had come into musical power in the late eighteenth century with Haydn and Mozart and held their dominant position through Schumann, Brahms, and Wagner. The first successful attempt to cast off this Teutonic domination was made when Debussy launched his attack against Romanticism, attempting to regain in his music the essence of French spirit lost with Couperin and Rameau. However, as early as 1871, Camille Saint-Saëns and Romain Bussini, a teacher of singing at the Paris Conservatoire, founded the Société Nationale de Musique Française for the promotion of Gallic art. Saint-Saëns later became editor-in-chief of the complete edition.

8"A weakened dawn pours out across the fields the melancholy of the setting suns. The melancholy lulls with sweet songs my heart which forgets itself in the setting suns. And strange dreams, as suns setting over the strands, rosy phantoms, march by without respite, like unto great suns setting over the strands." Paul Verlaine, "Paysages Tristes," (Poèmes Saturniens).
of the works of Rameau. Debussy, who also worked as an editor on the Rameau edition, writes in Le Figaro concerning a performance of Rameau's Hippolyte et Aricie:

Why should we not regret this charming manner of writing music that we have lost, just as it is impossible to discover the traces of Couperin? It avoided all redundance and was possessed of humor. We scarcely dare nowadays to own a sense of humor for fear of being lacking in grandeur, to which we breathlessly aspire without attaining it very often.

In his youth Debussy frequently visited the salon of Stéphane Mallarmé. The poets of the Symbolist movement met there, and through their influence, a new type of music suggested itself to Debussy, wherein he would attempt to translate into music the aesthetics of this new poetry, in which the requirements of syntax were ignored in order to give the words a sensuous, musical, and plastic function.

Willi Apel, in the Harvard Dictionary, summarizes Debussy's style of composition:

The paintings of the French impressionists Monet, Manet, Renoir, and the refined poetry of Verlaine, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, suggested to him a new type of music, eminently French in character, a music which seems to hint rather than to state; in which successions of colors take the place of dynamic development, and 'atmospheric' sensations supersede heroic pathos; a music which is vague and intangible as the changing lights of the sun, the subtle noises of the wind and the rain. The realization of these

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9 Edward B. Hill, Modern French Music, pp. 8-11.
11 Lang, op. cit., p. 1023.
ideas led to a complete abandonment of such typically "German" achievements as sonata, symphony, thematic material, development technique, and resulted in the introduction of various novel devices which are antithetic to the principle features of classical and romantic harmony. Prominent terms of the impressionistic vocabulary are: unresolved dissonances, mostly triads with added seconds, fourths, sixths, sevenths; the use of chords, consonant as well as dissonant, in parallel motion: parallel chords or gliding chords; the whole-tone scale in melodic as well as chordal combinations; frequent use of the tritone; modality, particularly avoidance of the leading tone; avoidance of 'direction' in the melodic contour (preference of vague 'zigzag' design); irregular and fragmentary construction of phrases.12

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) is often called the greatest of the Impressionists with the exception of Debussy. To call Ravel an Impressionist is not strictly correct, for one finds in the music of Ravel a clarity, a rhythmic verve, and a taste for form that are not compatible with the spirit of Impressionism. Ravel did adapt some of the technical features of Debussy's style, but fitted them to his individual needs, causing the end result to be quite different in essence.

He [Ravel] is the enfant terrible of French music. His music puts everything on trial, asks indiscreet questions, manifests irreverent curiosities. It defies hierarchies and is concerned with nothing beyond being sincerely itself. Everything in it conspires to provoke the longed-for emotions that are communicated by the spirit of finesse. This musical material, which is delightfully personal, regulates itself in an atmosphere wherein curiosity, irony, tenderness, sweetness, and even preciosity are always at home, and describe, without a false step, their spiritual arabesques.13

13M. G. Jean-Aubry, French Music of Today, p. 140.
Henry Prunieres sees in Ravel a more serious nature than the facetious irony stressed in the passage quoted from Aubry. Prunieres finds Ravel "witty, fine, ashamed of his emotional agitation, [Ravel] attempts to clothe his deep sentiment in an ironic smile.--Ravel is a typical French musician; he has proceeded from the same foundation as Couperin and Rameau, and like these he masterfully conceals his art through art itself."14

Ravel has been accused of imitating Debussy; in fact, Pierre Lalo, while he was music critic of Le Temps, declared bluntly that Maurice Ravel was "a well-endowed plagiarist," and nothing more.15 Moreover, Lalo asserted that he constantly heard "the unmistakable echo of Debussy's music"16 in Ravel's Histoires Naturelles.

These remarks gave rise to a venomous debate among the journalists, with G. Jean-Aubry, Louis Laloy, Jean Marnold, and M. D. Calvocoressi wielding the bludgeon for Ravel.17 Calvocoressi wrote an article, "Les Histoires Naturelles et l'Imitation Debussyste," which appeared in La Grande Revue, May 10, 1907, soon after the first performance of the songs:


16Quoted in Claude Roland-Manuel, Maurice Ravel, p. 46.

17Ibid., p. 47.
Examination reveals at once that no analogy as to treatment of form exists between the two musicians. M. Debussy possesses the secret of those mysterious and unanalyzable yet very definite constructions of which the Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun offers a finished model. M. Ravel has never followed this example, although it is most seductive, and the structure of his works, which is more obvious, shows a rigorous conformance to traditional principles. Above all, M. Debussy develops by means of varied repetition, a procedure dear to the Russian masters who sometimes abuse it. But with him it is a virtue on account of the naturalness and skill with which he employs it, because one feels that it is deliberate and not the result of weakness.... In Ravel, the whole-tone scale with the augmented chords involved, which is an important element of Debussy's system, hardly appears at all. One finds rarely in his music the ninth chords with which Debussy has attained such admirable effects. Besides, in the harmonic standpoint Ravel proceeds very directly from Chabrier. One might add in a few words that M. Ravel's rhythmic invention is of unusual richness, and that in contrast to M. Debussy, the former composer entrusts an important role to his rhythms. The outline of his melodies, always characteristic, is easily recognizable, and finally in his lyric declamation of which the Histoires Naturelles offer a polished instance, one may observe a number of innovations, notably in the treatment of silent e, in the respective place of each accent, principal or secondary, which is minutely adjusted to meter and expression.18

Ravel is best classified as a composer who extended the principles and means of Impressionism. Where Debussy, true to the actual spirit of Impressionism, is content to paint a vague image, giving it no definite shape, merely suggesting the spirit, Ravel attempts to give his models a truer reproduction with definite lines.19 Ravel's music is more


19"It is worth remembering Ravel's descriptive aim. It is an intention which will appear on every page of a collection whose very title is significant [Miroirs, 1905] and a
descriptive, as in *Jeux d'Eau* (1901). One can actually visualize a fountain, for Ravel suggests the rippling of the water in his use of groups of sixteenth notes followed by thirty-seconds, played in the upper register of the piano:

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Fig. 1.} & \quad \text{Jeux d'Eau, mm. 1-3.} \\
\end{align*} \]

remarkable illustration of Ernest Hello's admirable aphorism: 'The characteristic of art is to suggest an as yet uncreated harmony by showing an image of it in a mirror.' Roland-Manuel, op. cit., pp. 41-42.
A continuity of quick note-values is maintained throughout the composition, depicting the rapid and constant motion of the water. *Jeux d'Eau*, although utilizing impressionistic harmonic devices, at the same time employs sonata form, which, combined with realistic description, makes the work utterly foreign to the spirit of Impressionism.

In the *Histoires Naturelles* (1906) musical description has practically reached the point of realism. The pomposity of *Le Paon* (*The Peacock*), as revealed in the text by the words: "he goes confidently to marry today--Glorious, he promenades with an allure like that of an Indian prince," is portrayed in the introduction:

![Musical notation](image)

Fig. 2.--*Le Paon* (*Histoires Naturelles*), mm 1-3.
Even the cry of the peacock to his fiancee is imitated:

Fig. 3.—Le Paon (Histoires Naturelles), m. 31.

Virtuosity, deplored by Debussy, was another element which Ravel incorporated into his style. In Gaspard de la Nuit (1908) Ravel intended "to write piano pieces of transcendental virtuosity which are even more complicated than Islamey." Ravel combines his virtuosic aims in this suite with an interpretation, for piano alone, of three poems of

\[ \text{Schmitz, op. cit., p. 54.} \]

\[ \text{Roland-Manuel, op. cit., p. 54. Islamey, by Mili Balakirev (1837-1910) is a piano fantasy which has long been recognized as one of the most difficult pieces in piano literature.} \]
Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841). Here again is musical description, but not so much as in *Histoires Naturelles*.

In the first of these poems, *Ondine*, the water is static, contrasted with the perpetual motion of *Jeux d'Eau*.

Fig. 4. -- *Ondine* (*Gaspard de la Nuit*), m. 1.

Ravel's treatment of the last phrase of the poem is again programmatical: "... [Ondine] burst into laughter and vanished in the spray which played upon my window panes of blue." 22

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22 Aloysius Bertrand, "Ondine" (*Gaspard de la Nuit*), stanza five.
Fig. 5. — Ondine (Gaspard de la Nuit), m. 90.

But Ravel was far too eclectic to let a single idiom, even Impressionism, dominate his entire system of art, and Gaspard de la Nuit marks the end of Ravel's Impressionism in the piano works. The next work, Valses Nobles et Sentimentales (1911), strongly leans toward Neo-Classicism. "The title, Valses Nobles et Sentimentales," said Ravel, "sufficiently indicates that I was intent on writing a set of Schubertian waltzes. The virtuosity which formed the chief part of Gaspard de la Nuit has been replaced by writing of
obviously greater clarity which has strengthened the harmony and sharpened the contrasts. . . ."\textsuperscript{23} Ravel expresses his inspiration for the work in the aphorism borrowed from Henri de Régnier used as the sub-title for the \textit{Valses}:

\begin{quote}
\textit{... le plaisir délicieux et toujours nouveau d'une occupation inutile...} \textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

The motive for these pieces, then, is not a descriptive one, but "the delicious and ever new pleasure of a useless occupation."

The set consists of seven waltzes, each with its distinguishing theme. In the concluding epilogue, rhythmical traces of the preceding themes are woven together in a homogeneous whole.

Harmonically, the \textit{Valses} show a greater use of unprepared dissonance, and the texture of the chords becomes thinner to emphasize that dissonance. Not only does Ravel eliminate the superfluous, but often seems to actually reject the strong intervals of the chord.\textsuperscript{25}

In Ravel's later works, he gave way more and more to his natural taste for musical form, seen in such early works as \textit{Jeux d'Eau} (1901), the \textit{String Quartet} (1902-3), and the \textit{Sonatine} (1905). Guido Pannain, in discussing Ravel's application of musical form, declares that the \textit{Sonatine} is

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 58.

\textsuperscript{24}Preface to the \textit{Rencontres de Monsieur de Bréot} (1904).

\textsuperscript{25}Roland-Manuel, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 61.
Ravel's definitive work, representing an ideal balance of form and free melodic expression; a perfection of "that harmony between the part and the whole which is at once the cross and the reward of all artistic creation." Ravel perhaps achieves this unity by a recurrence of the "falling fourth" motif in all three movements. In the first movement a descending fourth begins the statement of the main theme:

Fig. 6.—Sonatine, first movement, mm. 1-3.

Guido Pannain, Modern Composers, p. 153.
Ravel uses the same motif for purposes of transition in the second movement:

Fig. 7.—Sonatine, second movement, mm. 45-52.

The entire main theme of the first movement is stated, in altered rhythmic and harmonic form, as the secondary theme of the last movement. This theme is also extended as the basis for the development section of this movement and recurs again later in the piece.
Fig. 8.—Sonatine, third movement, mm. 37-38.

Pannain does not speak so kindly of the Trio (1914) for piano, violin, and violoncello. He denounces Ravel for an over-abundance of formal excursion, saying of the finale to this work:

Already in Gaspard de la Nuit we have seen the pianistic pedagogue. In this heavy finale [from the Trio] we meet the pedant of pure form, a new Ravel, who comes to us dressed in rusty academic black. The fine musician that we know looks in vain to his palette for subtler colours; the colour-spectrum is dulled and his fancy is clouded over. There is no doubt that if Ravel had always written music of this kind he would have easily won the dubious distinction of the Prix de Rome.27

27Ibid., pp. 154-155.
In the **Concerto in G** (1931) Ravel frees himself from Impressionism once and for all. The work is not concerned with description, but is music for music's sake, in perfect compatibility with the classical tradition. Ravel called it "a concerto in the strict sense, written in the spirit of Mozart and Saint-Saëns." Salazar considers this concerto the culmination of Ravel as an exponent of the classical tradition.

**Melody**

Simplicity is the chief characteristic of Ravel's melody. Ravel is fond of hovering around a melodic center, moving away from it step-wise or by simple leap and repeating a note as the harmony changes, as his setting of Mallarme's *Sainte* (1896) shows:

\[\text{[Music notation]}\]

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Simplicity is prevalent even in as late a work as the Concerto in G (1931):

Fig. 9. — Sainte, mm. 23-25.

Fig. 10. — Concerto in G, second movement, mm. 2-8.
It is unusual to find a flowing melody in the vocal works of Ravel. He prefers the declamatory style, as in the *Histoires Naturelles* (1908) or *Shéhérazade* (1903):

Fig. 11.—Asie (*Shéhérazade*), mm. 6-7.

Ravel has a marked fondness for medieval modes, especially the Dorian. The following example from the *Menuet*
from *Le Tombeau de Couperin* serves as an illustration of Ravel's use of the Dorian mode, taking a as the final:

![Musical notation](image)

*Fig. 12.--Menuet (Le Tombeau de Couperin), mm. 13-16.*

A somewhat more modern harmonization of this mode is in *Asie (Shéhérazade)*:
Fig. 13.—Asie (Shéhérazade), mm. 18-22.

The Phrygian mode is not only typical of medieval music, but is often present in Andalusian folk song. The following example from Alborada del Gracioso (Miroirs) indicates Ravel's use of this mode to create a Spanish effect:

Fig. 14.—Alborada del Gracioso (Miroirs), mm. 43-44.

Ravel did not always use the Phrygian mode to produce Spanish color, however, as the Concerto for Left Hand (1931) proves:

An interesting example of bi-modality is exemplified in Nahandove from Chansons Madécasses (1925-6). The accompaniment is clearly in the Dorian mode, although the vocal line apparently falls into the Phrygian mode:
Fig. 16.—Nahandove (Chansons Madécasses), mm. 1-5.

The main theme of the *Sonatine* (1905), first movement, is in the Hypo-aolian mode:
A clear example of Ravel's use of the pentatonic scale is seen in Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes, from Mère L'Oye (1908):

Fig. 18.--Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes (Mère L'Oye), mm. 9-11, first piano.
In this case, the pentatonic scale is used for Oriental color, as the title implies; yet the scale is employed in Sainte (1896), presumably without this purpose in mind.

![Musical notation]

Fig. 19.—Sainte, mm. 4-6.

Ravel, unlike Debussy, makes sparing use of the whole-tone scale, although incomplete whole-tone scales are found in Ravel's earlier compositions, as in *Ondine*:

![Musical notation]

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31 Frank Shera, Debussy and Ravel, p. 11.
Occasionally, as in the *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (1911), Ravel employs a chromatic scale for melodic purposes:

The larger part of Ravel's ornamentation technique is based on various scale combinations, i.e., major, minor, chromatic, and glissandi. Examples of the ornamental use of both major and minor scales are in the slow movement from the *Concerto in G*:
Fig. 22.—Concerto in G, second movement, mm. 74-75.

A chromatic scale is used in Jeux d'Eau for ornamental purposes.
The glissando is a favorite device of Ravel. Ondine offers examples of both black and white note glissandi.

Fig. 23.—Jeux d'Eau, m. 38.
Fig. 24.—Ordine (Gaspard de la Nuit), mm. 73-75.

Alborada del Gracioso contains glissandi of both parallel fourths and thirds:
There are nineteen glissandi in the piano works of Ravel. They are of various kinds, e. g., black and white keys, ascending and descending, and are of diversified textures.

The earliest piano composition to employ a glissando is *Jeux d'Eau* (1901). It contains a single descending glissando on the black keys.

*Mére L'Oye*, for piano, four-hands, employs both black and white note glissandi. In *Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes*, where the prevailing scale is the pentatonic, there are two ascending black key glissandi, both in the first piano part. *Les Entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête*, again in the first piano part, embodies an ascending white key glissando, and in the final movement of the suite, *Le Jardin Féerique*, there is a long five-measure white key glissando, alternating between left and right hands, ascending and descending, in the first piano part.
In the composition *Une Barque sur l'Océan* (Miroirs) there is one glissando on the black keys, ascending and descending. *Alborada del Gracioso* from the same suite uses four glissandi. They are all on the white keys and are both ascending and descending. Three of these glissandi are in thirds, while the fourth one is in fourths.

In *Ondine* (Gaspard de la Nuit) there are two glissandi, one white key and one black key, both ascending.

The Concerto for Left Hand contains five glissandi of uniform construction. They are all played on the white keys, ascending.

Although the Concerto in G employs only two glissandi, the first of these two is nine measures long. It alternates in ascending and descending motion between the left and right hands on the white keys, ending with an ascending double glissandi in parallel octaves. The cadenza in the first movement also contains a descending glissando on the white keys.

Occasionally Ravel employs a folk-like melody, as in the opening theme assigned to the piccolo in the Concerto in G:

![Musical notation]

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Occasionally Ravel employs a folk-like melody, as in the opening theme assigned to the piccolo in the Concerto in G:
H. Gil-Marchex says that this theme is characterized by a "rustic sportiveness; of a quick and alert rhythm such as is found in the bransle gay, in duple time, as Queen Margot of the court of Navarre liked to dance it." 33

Harmony

According to Alfredo Casella, the chord of the diminished seventh with an unresolved appoggiatura at the seventh is a favorite harmonic device of Ravel. 34

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33 "Le premier mouvement du Concerto en sol débute allegretto con un theme confié au piccolo, d'un enjouement tout rustique: c'est un rythme vif et alerte de «bransle gay» a deux temps, comme aimait le danser la reine Margot a la cour de Navarre." Henri Gil-Marchex, "Les Concertos de Ravel," La Revue Musicale, Decembre, 1938, p. 280.

According to Thoinot Arbeau's Orchesography the gay branle or bransle was usually in triple time (p. 133); however, Gil-Marchex's preceding statement implies that Marguerite of Navarre (1492-1549) preferred to dance it in duple time. Arbeau's book enumerates twenty-six species of the bransle.

34 Alfredo Casella, "L'Harmonie," La Revue Musicale, April, 1925, p. 32.
This chord may be clearly seen in the opening measures of *Alborada del Gracioso*:

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 27.**

This principle of the use of unresolved appoggiaturas produces the following consequent chords, according to Casella:

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 28.** — *Alborada del Gracioso (Miroirs)*, mm. 1-2.

**Fig. 29.**

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These chord formations in slightly altered form are exemplified in *Scarbo* (*Gaspard de la Nuit*):

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 30.**—*Scarbo* (*Gaspard de la Nuit*), mm. 130-131.

Chords of the seventh and ninth other than in their dominant form are characteristic harmonic elements in Ravel's music. The most common are the major seventh and ninth and the secondary seventh and ninth:

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 31.**

The germ motif in *Jeux d'Eau* is made up of major seventh and ninth chords in arpeggiated form. The major seventh is so prominent throughout the composition that the chord may be said to be the pattern upon which the entire piece is constructed.
An example of the minor or secondary seventh chord is contained in _L'Indifférent (Shéhérazade)_: 36

The secondary ninth chord, although most often used in an incomplete state, or with the ninth treated as an incomplete state, or with the ninth treated as an

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36See also _Sonatine_, second movement, m. 4.
appoggiatura, may be seen in its complete form in the Toccata from Le Tombeau de Couperin (1917):

Fig. 34.---Toccata (Le Tombeau de Couperin), mm. 9-10.

Le Grillon (Histoires Naturelles) illustrates Ravel's use of the eleventh chord:

Fig. 35.---Le Grillon (Histoires Naturelles), mm. 46-47.
The Menuet sur le Nom d'Haydn (1909) provides an example of the thirteenth chord. The chord is used here minus its eleventh, as is the case in the earlier Sonatine. In both instances the thirteenth is treated as an appoggiatura:

Fig. 36.—Menuet sur le Nom d'Haydn, m. 48.

A striking example of chords built on superimposed fourths may be seen in La Vallée des Cloches (Miroirs):
Fig. 37.—La Vallée des Cloches (Miroirs), mm. 25-26.

Le Gibet (Gaspard de la Nuit) employs the same kind of structure on fifths. These chords of open fifths produce a somber, hollow effect, quite in keeping with the grisly mood of the piece:

Fig. 38.—Le Gibet (Gaspard de la Nuit), mm. 3-4.
Ravel, like Debussy, often makes use of chords with added second and sixth scale degrees, as for example in *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* (1920-25):

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 39.—** *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, page 51, mm. 1-3.

The impressionistic use of parallel chords, according to Apel, stands in opposition to traditional harmony, not because it violates the rule of parallel fifths, but because it destroys the functional character of the chords by treating each instead as an independent sensuous and sonorous unit. Apel further points that any aesthetic or technical connection of modern parallelism with the parallel fifths of tenth century organum is very slight.³⁷

The opening orchestral music to *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* is composed of parallel fifths and parallel fourths:

An example of parallel major thirds, moving chromatically, is in Scene IV of *L'Heure Espagnole*:

**Fig. 41.** *L'Heure Espagnole*, page 23, m. 1.
Parallel triads are quite frequent in the music of Ravel. The following example from the Menuet from Le Tombeau de Couperin illustrates the use of parallel major and minor triads, respectively.

Fig. 42.--Menuet (Le Tombeau de Couperin), mm. 57-60.

An example of parallel seconds is shown in this famous extract from Scarbo, where the intention is probably virtuosic, rather than musical:

Fig. 43.--Scarbo, mm. 461-462.
The third selection from *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* employs parallel seventh chords:

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 44.--** *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*, number three, mm. 33-35.

The early work, *Jeux d'Eau* (1901) presents an example of consecutive ninths in the following measure:

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 45.--** *Jeux d'Eau*, m. 31.

The impressionistic device of intertonal harmonization is occasionally used by Ravel. According to Slonimsky, this
technique usually employs triads, but no three of which belong to any given tonality. Ravel employs the device in Scene III of *L'Heure Espagnole* (1907):

![Musical notation]

**Fig. 46.** *L'Heure Espagnole*, page 14, m. 8.

The Epilogue from *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* illustrates this technique as applied to seventh chords:

![Musical notation]

**Fig. 47.** *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*, Epilogue, mm. 31-32.

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38 Slonimsky, op. cit., p. xix.
"Escaped" chords, according to Hull, are chords unprepared and unresolved, but which are allowed to "evaporate." Hull further comments:

Some theorists explain these as unresolved passing notes or appoggiaturas; but that there is some more fundamental connection is undeniable, and this may perhaps be discovered on the lines of Polytonality. When the principal chord is sustained, any of the chords built up on one of the other 'planes of fifths' derived either from the sharp or the flat side, may be struck above it and left to evaporate.

Ravel makes effective use of this device in the closing measures from *Les Grands Vents Venus d'Outre-mer* (1906):

Fig. 48.—*Les Grands Vents Venus d'Outre-mer*, mm. 22-23.

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40 Ibid., p. 162.
Traces of polytonality may be observed occasionally in the music of Ravel. Polytonality, according to Apel, is "the simultaneous use of different tonalities (usually two: bitonality) in different parts of the musical fabric, e.g., of B-flat minor in the right hand against F-sharp minor in the right hand of a pianoforte piece." 41

In the opening thirteen bars of the Ravel Piano Concerto in G, the right hand part is clearly in G major, whereas the left hand outlines the pentatonic scale on the black notes:

Fig. 49.--Concerto in G, mm. 1-2.

According to Walter Piston, polytonality is achieved in this case through the consistent use of unresolved appoggiaturas and suspensions. 42

In *L'Heure Espagnole* Ravel arrives at polytonality by the scalewise use of consecutive sevenths in the bass, while the treble moves angularly in parallel octaves with an added fifth:

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 50.--L'Heure Espagnole, page 3, m. 33.**

The role of non-harmonic tones in the music of Ravel is quite an important one. It has been pointed out previously that Ravel loved to establish a mild dissonance through the use of unresolved appoggiaturas. According to McHose, non-harmonic tones are those tones which appear in a vertical sonority but play no part in the theory of inversion of that sonority. The non-harmonic tone does not have the spelling of any of the intervals which make up the implied harmony. The non-harmonic tone is related melodically to one of the members of the chord.43

These tones may be classified in the following categories:

1. Passing tone, 2. Suspension, 3. Neighboring tone,

---

(4) Anticipation, (5) Escape tone, (6) Appoggiatura, (7) Pedal point, (8) Changing tone. In discussing the non-harmonic tones in the music of Ravel, only unconventional treatments will be cited. For this reason the Neighboring tone, Anticipation, and Changing tone will not be discussed here, since their very identity demands conventional treatment.

**Passing Tone.**—In the menuet from the *Sonatine* the d-sharp is an example of an irregular passing tone, because it resolves by leap to f-sharp; whereas the conventional resolution would have been scalewise, either to g-sharp or e.

![Fig. 51. Sonatine, second movement, mm. 69-70.](image)

**Suspension.**—The unprepared suspension abounds in the works of Ravel. In the *Menuet sur le Nom d'Haydn*, the f-sharp enters the chord as an unprepared suspension, although it is resolved in quite a conventional manner:
However, the same piece offers an excellent example of chain suspensions, illustrating how Ravel often resolved his suspensions to other dissonances:

As a matter of interest, this work contains not only the unconventional treatments cited above, but also many prominent conventional treatments of the suspension.
Escape Tone.—An example of irregular treatment of an escape tone is in Scarbo (Gaspard de la Nuit). No attempt to resolve the a-sharp is made at all, but rather it may be said to "escape" quite literally:

![Musical notation](image1)

Fig. 54.—Scarbo (Gaspard de la Nuit), mm. 36-37.

Appoggiatura.—The first few measures of Valses Nobles et Sentimentales afford numerous examples of unresolved appoggiaturas:

![Musical notation](image2)
Fig. 55.—Valses Nobles et Sentimentales, number one, mm. 1-4.

In the Forlane from *Le Tombeau de Couperin* appoggiaturas are heard simultaneously with their notes of resolution:

Fig. 56.—Forlane (*Le Tombeau de Couperin*), mm. 13-14.

**Pedal Point.**—Ravel's most striking use of the pedal point is without doubt in *Le Gibet* (*Gaspard de la Nuit*). The entire composition is based on the pedal stated in the first two measures of the piece;
These b-flats occur (occasionally as a-sharp) in the same relentless rhythmic pattern throughout the piece, as lower, upper, and inner pedals. It is most likely that these b-flats have a descriptive significance, depicting the village bell referred to in the last stanza of Bertrand's poem. The first stanza of the poem inquires:

"Ah! this that I hear, could it be the swarthy sound of night that screeches, or the hanged one that heaves a sigh over the patibulary?"

And the last stanza resolves the question:

"It is the bell that tolls at the walls of the village, over the horizon, and the carcass of the hanged one, reddened by the setting sun."

The development section of the first movement of the Sonatine contains a triple pedal point in the bass:

45"Ah! ce que j'entends, serait-ce la bise nocturne qui glapit, ou le pendu qui pousse un soupir sur la patibulaire? C'est la cloche qui tinte aux murs d'une village, sous l'horizon, et la carcasse d'un pendu que rougit le soleil couchant." (Aloysius Bertrand, "Le Gibet" from Gaspard de la Nuit, stanzas one and six).
Fig. 58.—Sonatine, first movement, mm. 43-45.

Rhythm

Ravel's rhythm is characterized by a solidity and preciseness, which, according to Salazar, is traceable to the dance. Salazar comments:

The music of Ravel, never sentimental, and less poetic than acoustic, derives its instrumental rhythm from the dance first of all. That exquisite vagueness, 'where the imprecise to the precise is joined' begins to disappear rapidly with his first compositions, giving way entirely to the precise. The dance is always a model of precision and a dance title appears frequently in Ravel, [Pavane, Pièce en forme d'Habenera, Rigaudon, Forlane, etc.] indicating the author's desire to the interpreter with that brief eloquence toward which Ravel constantly aspired.\footnote{Salazar, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 197.}

The following passage from the last movement of the Sonatine shows that Ravel transported this rhythmic preciseness to forms other than those of the dance:
Fig. 59.—Sonatine, third movement, mm. 18-19.

It is true, however, that occasionally Ravel departed from the well-defined beat, as in this quotation from Oiseaux Tristes (Miroirs):

Fig. 60.—Oiseaux Tristes (Miroirs), mm. 10-11.
A rhythmic device which Ravel shared in common with Debussy is the use of "rapid uniform non-symmetric groups of notes, mostly prime numbers 3, 5, 11, 13, 17, in strict time (opposed to Chopin's rubato passages)."  

Une Barque sur l'Océan (Miroirs) provides numerous examples of non-symmetric note groups, of which the following example is typical:

Fig. 61.—Une Barque sur l'Océan (Miroirs), mm. 29-30.

47Slonimsky, op. cit., p. xix.
It is interesting to note that in a later composition such as the Concerto in G, Ravel employed only symmetrical groups of figuration. The ornamental passages in the second movement are all symmetrical, as in the following:

![Fig. 62. --Concerto in G, second movement, mm. 69-70.](image)

Even the cadenza in the first movement of this work employs only symmetrical groups:
The first movement of the Trio (1914), for piano and strings, illustrates Ravel's skill in reversing the accent to produce a kind of rhythmic fraud. Although the time signature is $\frac{8}{8}$, the accents are so arranged that the effect is $3 + 2 + 3$:
The Pantoum (second movement) from the same work illustrates Ravel's simultaneous use of triple and duple meter:

Fig. 65.—Trio, second movement, mm. 125-126.

The Noctuelles (Miroirs) illustrates Ravel's blending of triplets against sixteenth notes, producing in this case a rhythmic vagueness, which, as has been previously pointed out, is not generally characteristic of Ravel's musical style.
Fig. 66.—Noctuelles (Miroirs), mm. 1-2.

An effective use of syncopation is found in the second movement of the Sonatine:

Fig. 67.—Sonatine, second movement, mm. 1-4.

The Concerto in G offers examples of syncopation employed to produce a Jazz effect, of which more will be said in the following chapter:
Fig. 68. — Concerto in G, first movement, mm. 75-78.
CHAPTER III

INFLUENCES ON RAVEL'S PIANO WORKS

Henry Prunières has called Ravel a typical French musician;¹ the essential spirit of French music is neatly summarized by Jean-Aubry:

The features of our music are those of our mind and temperament. To determine these features is not easy, but to know them it suffices to have had a passionate enjoyment from our works of art.

Clarity first. Not the external clarity of works which are devoid of thought, like some Italian compositions, but the clarity of the mind that has reflected, and that puts forth in good order the fruits of its meditation.

In order, clarity; and in expression, precisely that quality which has been described as the fear of emphasis. This we find as much in [Rameau's] Dardanus as in [Debussy's] Pelléas, in [Lully's] Thésée as in [Dukas's] Ariane et Barbe Bleu. We find the opposite in [Schumann's] Manfred, and in [Wagner's] Tristan und Isolde, in association with other qualities which are not ours.

It is not that we do not know how to be lyrical, but with us irony is ever on guard. We are too enamoured of proportion to yield for long to the intention, as the saying is of taking the moon in our teeth.

The avoidance of all that is redundant; knowledge without the desire to display it; a horror of pedantry; a taste for pleasantry and for wit; these are features that may be revealed as clearly and as constantly in the pieces of Couperin, Dandrieu, or Daquin as in those of Ravel, Roussel, or Séverac.

¹Prunières, op. cit., p. 958.

²Since the other works mentioned in this paragraph are operatic, it is assumed that it is Schumann's Manfred, consisting of an overture, entr'acte, melodramas, solos, and choruses that is implicated, rather than Tschaikowsky's entirely symphonic work bearing the same title.
The desire of our present-day musicians is an infinite variety of expression as opposed to a unity of scholastic composition. Their goal is emancipated expression: expressive music, the music of impressions. Couperin, Rameau, neither wished nor accomplished more.  

The basic spirit of Couperin's art, then, is at once the basic spirit of Ravel's art. This kinship is supported by Ravel's Le Tombeau de Couperin, although Ravel said of the work, "In reality it is a tribute not so much to Couperin himself as to eighteenth century music in general."

A parallel exists between Couperin and Ravel in their detailed directions to the performer. Gil-Marchex has said that Ravel left very little to the imagination of the player, but prepared the formulas himself and expected his wishes to be carried out strictly. Couperin directs the performer in very much the same way in his Le Rossignol en Amour, in which he commands, "Lentement, et très tendrement, quoique mesure." A certain trill is to be played "augmentes par gradations imperceptibles."

3Jean-Aubry, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

4Among the seventeenth and eighteenth century French composers the writing of Tombeaux (tombstones, compositions written in memory of a deceased) was a popular practice. Couperin composed a tombeau for Lully as well as for Corelli, and Marin Marais was the first composer to compose a Tombeau de Couperin. (Harvard Dictionary).

5Quoted in Roland-Manuel, op. cit., p. 81.

6Henri Gil-Marchex, "La Technique de Piano," La Revue Musicale, April, 1925, p. 45.

According to Ewen, the influence of Mozart can be heard in many of Ravel's humorous works, especially his opera L'Heure Espagnole (1907):

But, perhaps, the most outstanding of his humorous works is that delicious opera L'Heure espagnole, in which a mischievous book is wedded to an equally impudent musical score. All of the different shades of humor (ranging from broad burlesque and clowning to the most sophisticated wit), all the naivety and impertinence of the comedy are reproduced, with a hand exquisitely poised, in this delicately tinted music. In more respects than one is L'Heure espagnole one of the most Mozartean of Ravel's creations.8

However, according to Ravel's own testimony, this Mozartean spirit was not confined to his works of a humorous nature. When Marguerite Long, who figured as the first executant of the Concerto in G, complimented Ravel on the apparently easy and natural evolution of the melody that begins the second movement, Ravel assured her that, quite to the contrary, he had labored over each measure, with frequent recourse to the Mozart quintet for clarinet.9

The chief elements that Ravel derived from the music of Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894) are a free harmonic viewpoint, a rollicking humor, and suggestions for some of his titles. Chabrier's choice of texts in his Ballade des Gros Dindons and Villanelle des Petits Canards, both for voice and piano, may have suggested the prevalent character of the Histoires Naturelles to Ravel.10

8David Ewen, Twentieth Century Composers, p. 110.
9Roland-Manuel, op. cit., p. 102.
10Hill, op. cit., p. 248.
Ravel discovered the music of Chabrier soon after he entered the Conservatoire in 1889. He was delighted with the originality in these works and persuaded his fellow student, Ricardo Viñes, the Spanish pianist, to whom both Debussy and Ravel later dedicated compositions, to learn the *Trois Valses Romantiques* for two pianos, four hands, with him. The two students later played the piece for Chabrier, who listened carefully to their performance, but made so many interruptions to insert varied and conflicting criticisms of the performance that the two boys were completely confused.\(^{11}\)

Ravel himself asserted that Chabrier was an important factor in his early development, and pointed to evidence of this in the *Pavane pour une Infante Défunte* (1899).\(^{12}\)

An examination of Chabrier's *Bourée Fantasque* (measures 82-89) and Ravel's *Pavane pour une Infante Défunte* (measures 40-48) reveals a similarity in the simple melody accompanied by repeated seconds and thirds in syncopation.

Ravel paid his respects to Chabrier in the piano piece *A la Manière de Chabrier* (1913).

About the same time that Ravel met Chabrier, he became acquainted with Erik Satie (1866-1925) through his father, Joseph Ravel. Satie dazzled his listeners in the Café

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\(^{11}\)Madeleine Goss, *Bolero; the Life of Maurice Ravel*, p. 38.

\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 39.
Nouvelle Athènes and in the Auberge du Clou in Montmartre, and Joseph Ravel, who was interested in novelties of all kinds, was completely intrigued by some of Satie's audacious comments.13

Both Debussy's and Ravel's use of ninth and thirteenth chords may be traced to Satie, who as early as 1887, in the Second Sarabande made free use of ninth chords, and in 1891 used parallel thirteenth in Le Fils des Etoiles.14

Ravel was fifteen or sixteen years old when he met Satie. At the time he was studying counterpoint and harmony in the class of Emile Pessard.15 He was perhaps feeling an inner rebellion, and was quickly fascinated by Satie's gift of irony and wit. According to Salazar, Satie's melody "with its quiet and gently swaying rhythm" is reflected in Ravel's Ma Mère L'Oye of 1908. This set of pieces for piano, four hands, which Ravel later orchestrated, contains the same kind of bare but disarming simplicity so often present in the music of Satie.16

But more than either Chabrier or Satie, it was Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) who exercised the greatest influence on

14Salazar, op. cit., p. 144.
15Emile Pessard (1843-1917) was professor of harmony at the Paris Conservatoire. As a student there in 1866 he won the Prix de Rome with his cantata, Dalila. His Tabarin was performed at the Paris Grand Opera in 1885. (Parkhurst and de Bekker, The Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians).
16Salazar, op. cit., p. 195.
Ravel. Gerald Abraham contends that from Fauré Ravel derived his "clarity of thought, sobriety and purity of form, sincerity and disdain of vulgar effect," giving his music its true French quality. The constant striving for these qualities led the music of both composers to an "ever increasing simplicity and a severe economy of expression."

Ravel found Fauré to be an exacting and often severely critical teacher. In fact, when Ravel took his String Quartet (1902-1903), which he had dedicated to Fauré, to be examined by the older composer, Fauré did not hesitate to point out its faults. He found the fourth movement, in the words of Roland-Manuel, "stunted, badly balanced, in fact, a failure."

Ravel told Roland-Manuel that he owed less to the criticisms of Fauré as a professor than to the stimulus and suggestions of him as a great artist. It is true that Fauré's class was to musicians something of what Mallarmé's salon was to the poets--"a delightful place, conducive to informal conversation, where the secrets of the art of music were suggested, and the laws of sensuous enjoyment pronounced gently into the ear without being dogmatically forced upon the mind."

17 Gerald Abraham, op. cit., p. 286; cf. the quotation from Jean-Aubry ante page.
18 Ibid., p. 287. 19 Roland-Manuel, op. cit., p. 36.
It seems certain that the turning point in Ravel's career was the day when he entered Faure's composition class. Although Ravel had been an excellent student under Pessard and Gédalge, these teachers were at a loss to direct the restless talent of the young student. But Faure knew how to encourage independent thinking, yet all the while directing it into the proper channels. Faure was sympathetic with Ravel's enthusiasm for modern music, and realized that the student must be allowed self-expression and his own unique evolution.

Perhaps the strongest musical influence on Ravel was Debussy. Ravel proclaimed Debussy's L'Après-midi d'un Faune the masterpiece of music and went so far as to arrange the work for two pianos.

Debussy's and Ravel's subject matter is often strikingly similar as in Ravel's Miroirs and Rapsodie Espagnole, and Debussy's Images and Iberia. It is commonly thought that Debussy's subject material suggested similar ideas to Ravel. This contention breaks down, however, when the dates of the Miroirs (1905) to the Images (1905, and 1908) and the Rapsodie Espagnole (1907) with Iberia (1908) are compared.

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21 André Gédalge (1856-1926) composed symphonies, suites, concertos, chamber music, songs, and stage works. He is most important for his theoretical work, the Traité de la Fugue. (Thompson, International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians).


23 Salazar, op. cit., p. 196.
Debussy and Ravel were friends until so much was made of certain similarities between the two, notably in Debussy's *Soirée dans Grenade* (1903) and Ravel's *Habanera* (1895). When Ravel incorporated the *Habanera* into his *Rapsodie Espagnole* of 1907, he was careful to date it 1895 to avoid the charge of plagiarism.

Frank Shera gives the following summary of the notable similarities and differences between Debussy and Ravel:

Their intentions are always perspicuous; but whereas Debussy's preference runs toward a mysterious cloudiness in effect, Ravel rejoices in the highlights and sharp contours. Exceptions are to be found in the works of both: few things are more full of sunlight than Debussy's *Poissons d'Or* or *Les Collines d'Anacapri*; while the *Prelude à la Nuit* of Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole* (for orchestra) is as impressionistic as any Whistler Nocturne. But in the main, Debussy's temperament is negative, Ravel's positive.

Both are writers of programme-music; in other words, both delight in choosing subjects from the external world—Spain they both love (Debussy's *Iberia*, and Ravel's *Alborada del gracioso*)—Paris, again shows its appeal in Debussy's *Jardins sous la Pluie* and in Ravel's *Jeux d'Eau.*

Shera further comments that

In outlook, however, the difference between them is marked. In a word, it is not hard to feel that Debussy is often possessed by a brooding, almost Virgilian, sadness for the "lacrimae rerum." To Ravel such an attitude means little or nothing. But where Debussy turns to mysticism and views the world from some remote seclusion, Ravel seems to come close to it, open-eyed and unafraid. Mysticism does not attract him. Debussy's conceptions are dramatic, Ravel's static. This fact may find some explanation in their attitude to the forms of classical music. Ravel

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24 Oscar Thompson, *Debussy, Man and Artist*, p. 145.

welcomes them, and in at least one instance (Jeux d'Eau) uses a classical form for which the subject makes little demand. \(^{26}\) Debussy, as the String Quartet shows, finds classical form a nuisance, and prefers to spin his stories each in its own pattern. Debussy's repetitions are determined on principles of his own, and wholly satisfying results he obtains show him a master of construction. Ravel seems to look to the form first, the idea second; and the natural effect which he rarely fails to achieve shows mastery from his own standpoint. \(\ldots\) Neither works on a large canvas; both are essentially miniaturists. \(^{27}\)

The greatest similarity between the two composers is found in their technique of composition. Both men love the medieval modes as well as the pentatonic scale. \(^{28}\)

The whole tone scale was much more important to Debussy than to Ravel, although the latter did employ it occasionally. \(^{29}\) Parallel triads, sevenths, and ninths are common to both Debussy and Ravel, as well as intertonal harmonization.

As regards rhythm, the two composers are radically different: Debussy's rhythm is subtle, whereas Ravel loved a well-defined beat, so much that Gaston Carraud, in *La Liberté*, declared that the rhythmic element was "extremely feeble in M. Ravel's poetic and picturesque score *Daphnis*"


\(^{27}\) Ibid., p. 6.

\(^{28}\) Cf. Debussy's *Arabesque* No. 1 with Ravel's *Sonatine*, first movement, and Debussy's *Pagodes* with Ravel's *Jeux d'Eau*.

\(^{29}\) See Fig. 21, p. 33.
and Chloé, and, as the development always relies on repetition, it gives an impression of marking time, instead of true movement. . . ."30

It is only natural that Ravel should have been influenced by the music of Spain, since he was born only a few miles from the Spanish border, in the French-Basque town of Ciboure. Ravel's parents had both lived in Spain, and his mother frequently sang Spanish songs to him.31

Neither Debussy nor Ravel evoked the Spanish atmosphere through a virtuosic handling of Spanish folk themes, but translated the Spanish essence into their own musical language. Some of the characteristics of Spanish music, such as the survival of medieval modes, irregular melody, shifting rhythms, unorthodox harmonization with frequent use of consecutive fourths and fifths, were already present to an extent in the musical technique of both Debussy and Ravel, and the superimposition of the Spanish idiom was an easy and natural accomplishment.32

Many works of Ravel exploit the Spanish idiom. The early Habanera for two pianos (1895) was incorporated into the Rapsodie Espagnole for orchestra in 1907. This suite also includes the Prélude à la Nuit, Malagueña, and Feria. With the exception of the jota that appears in Feria, no

31Chase, op. cit., p. 300. 32Ibid., pp. 299-300.
actual folk themes are utilized in this composition which acquires its Spanish color through a free employment of the characteristic rhythms, modes, and ornamentation of Spanish folk music. The following example illustrates the rhythm of the malagueña, habanera, and the jota, respectively:

\[ \begin{align*}
(\text{a}) & \quad \text{moderate to quick} \\
(\text{b}) & \quad \text{slow to moderate} \\
(\text{c}) & \quad \text{rap id} \\
\end{align*} \]

Fig. 69.

Other evocations of Hispanic culture are the Vocalise en Forme d'Habanera (1907) and Ravel's last composition, Don Quichotte à Dulcinée for baritone and small orchestra, written in 1934, shortly before he was stricken with the brain disease which caused his death in 1937.

André's Suarès saw in Ravel the embodiment of many Spanish traits, personal as well as artistic:

Parisian to his finger tips, he is even so the most Spanish of artists. He answers better than another to one's idea of a great musician in the Spanish cast; he has something of Goya and the picaresque. . . . And let no one think that it was by chance that he made his entrance into music by way of Spain. . . . I recognize Spain in every part of Ravel. . . . in what he is and in what he does. This little man is so dry, so sensitive, at once frail and resistant, caressing and inflexible, supple as tempered steel; his large nose and
hollow cheeks, his angular and lean figure; his air at once a little distant and yet always courteous... these traits are reminiscent of Spain. And his art, still more decidedly, is of the French tongue touched with a Spanish accent.33

During Ravel's first year at the Conservatory (1889) the French government sponsored a Universal Exposition in Paris, where Ravel heard, for the first time, the works of Rimsky-Korsakov, who conducted two concerts of his own works.34 Russian music was not well known in France at that time, and it was not until some years later that Ravel became acquainted with more of it. His admiration for the Russians became a bond of friendship with the astute critic and writer, M. D. Calvocoressi, who has written a great deal about Russian music;35

On Russian music, he [Ravel] and I were in almost complete agreement. We gave pride of place to Musorgsky, Borodin, and Balakiref. We loved Rimsky-Korsakov's music, especially his tone-poems and some of his early operas. We were not interested in Tschaikowsky, and we belonged to the number of the few who held Glazunof's early works in high esteem—especially his tone-poems The Forest, Stenka Razin, the Oriental Rhapsody, and the second and third symphonies.36

It is certain that Ravel owes much of his orchestral color to Rimsky-Korsakov, and Salazar finds a suggestion of

33Quoted in Chase, op. cit., p. 301.
34Joss, op. cit., p. 36.

35M. D. Calvocoressi, Musorgsky, the Russian Musical Nationalist; A Survey of Russian Music, etc.

36M. D. Calvocoressi, Music and Ballet, p. 53-54.
Borodin's melody in Ravel's "fondness for a singing line, eloquent in its restraint." 37 Ravel pays tribute to Borodin in his piano composition _A la Manière de Borodine_ (1913).

Jazz, although Ravel believed it was legitimate material for serious composition, can not be said to have been a deep-rooted influence in Ravel's music. The influence of the eighteenth century composers, or the music of Spain are products of cultures that are in close kinship with the personality of Ravel, whereas jazz, which Ravel asserted was the product of an underlying pathos (of the Negro slaves, and an elusive yearning of the American people) and an arrogance of an ambitious new country, 38 does not find such an easy parallel in the spirit of Ravel.

Nevertheless, it is a style which Ravel employed with success in some of his later compositions such as the _Sonata_ for violin and piano (1927) and the _Concerto in G_ for piano and orchestra (1931). 39

Contrary to popular belief, Ravel did not begin to employ his jazz effects as a result of his American tour. His violin _Sonata_, whose second movement is in "blues" style, was written in 1927, although Ravel did not arrive

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37 Salazar, _op. cit._, p. 196.


39 A fox-trot is in _L'Enfant et les Sortilèges_ (1920-25).
in the United States until January 4, 1928. Ravel first heard jazz in the Parisian botte de nuit, the Boeuf sur le Toit and the Grand Ecart being his favorites.40

Ravel thought that jazz was the most important contribution of modern civilization to music, holding as legitimate a place as Hungarian rhapsodies or Russian folk-songs. He traced its beginnings back to old Scottish tunes, and even went so far as to say that some eighteenth-century French and Italian folk melodies anticipate modern jazz.41

According to Gil-Marchex, Ravel's piano technique is founded chiefly on Domenico Scarlatti and Franz Liszt. Passages requiring an extremely agile thumb, often combined with repeated notes, as in the piano accompaniment to Tzigane (1924) for violin and piano, are reminiscent of Scarlatti's demands upon finger technique.42

Ravel often studied and analyzed the Liszt Etudes,43 and their influence may be seen in Ravel's frequent virtuosic exploitation of the resources of the piano. The double note passages in the right hand in Ondine (measures 58-62) are quite similar to those found in Liszt's Feux Follets (measures 49-52). Although Ravel is indebted to

40Ibid., p. 240.  41Ibid., p. 225.
Liszt in matters of piano technique, it is doubtful that Liszt exerted any genuine musical influence on Ravel, although Ravel admired the music of Liszt, according to his own statement:

It is to Liszt's defects that Wagner owes his turgescense, Strauss his churlish enthusiasms, Franck his ponderous ideality, the Russians the tinsel which occasionally mars their picturesqueness. But it is also to him that all these dissimilar composers owe the best of their qualities.44

It is a popular practice to parallel the piano technique of Ravel with that of Liszt, and Debussy's with that of Chopin, as if the opposite were not also true. While Ravel's treatment of the piano is in most instances more obviously virtuosic than Debussy's, the latter's L'Isle Joyeuse and Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest are cases in which the fallacy of such a parallel is uncovered. Moreover, the extreme subtleties of tone, touch and pedaling required to play the music of Ravel are traceable to Chopin.45

In conclusion it may be said that a close study of the music of Ravel reveals a majority of French influences: from Couperin and Rameau, grace, charm, and restraint; from Chabrier, a sense of harmonic freedom; from Satie, love of wit and irony, as well as a bare simplicity; from Fauré,

44Calvocoressi, Music and Ballet, p. 54.
clarity in form and disdain for vulgar effect; from Debussy, new harmonic and melodic devices and a new concept of musical expression.

In spite of Russian and Spanish influences, then, Ravel remains true to his inherent French spirit, and his music retains those qualities dear to the French: clarity, expression, preciosity, all combined in music "for which a smile is constantly a screen for the ardour of the heart." 46

46 Jean-Aubry, op. cit., p. 150.
APPENDIX

Chronological List of the Piano Works
of Maurice Ravel

Serenade Grotesque, 1893
Menuet Antique, 1895
Sites Articulaires, 1895-1896
    Habanera, 1895
    Entre Cloches, 1896
Pavane pour une Infante Défunte, 1899
Jeux d'Eau, 1901
Sonatine, 1905
Miroirs, 1905
    Noctuelles
    Oiseaux Tristes
    Une Barque sur l'Océan
    Alborada del Gracioso
    La Vallée des Cloches
Ma Mère L'Oye, piano four hands, 1908
    Pavane de la Belle au Bois Dormant
    Petit Poucet
    Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes
    Les Entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête
    Le Jardin Féerique
Gaspard de la Nuit, 1908
    Ondine
    Le Gibet
    Scarbo
Menuet sur le Nom d'Haydn, 1909
Valsee Nobles et Sentimentales, 1911
Prélude, 1913
A la Manière de Borodine, 1913
A la Manière de Chabrier, 1913
Le Tombeau de Couperin, 1917
Prelude
Fugue
Forlane
Rigaudon
Menuet
Toccata

Frontispiece, piano four hands, 1918

Concerto pour la Main Gauche, 1931

Concerto in G Major, 1931

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