

= Maurice Ravel =

Joseph Maurice Ravel ( French : [ ʒozɛf mawʁis ʁavɛl ] ; 7 March 1875 – 28 December 1937 ) was a French composer , pianist and conductor . He is often associated with impressionism along with his elder contemporary Claude Debussy , although both composers rejected the term . In the 1920s and 1930s Ravel was internationally regarded as France 's greatest living composer .

Born to a music @-@ loving family , Ravel attended France 's premier music college , the Paris Conservatoire ; he was not well regarded by its conservative establishment , whose biased treatment of him caused a scandal . After leaving the conservatoire Ravel found his own way as a composer , developing a style of great clarity , incorporating elements of baroque , neoclassicism and , in his later works , jazz . He liked to experiment with musical form , as in his best @-@ known work , Boléro ( 1928 ) , in which repetition takes the place of development . He made some orchestral arrangements of other composers ' music , of which his 1922 version of Mussorgsky 's Pictures at an Exhibition is the best known .

As a slow and painstaking worker , Ravel composed fewer pieces than many of his contemporaries . Among his works to enter the repertoire are pieces for piano , chamber music , two piano concertos , ballet music , two operas , and eight song cycles ; he wrote no symphonies or religious works . Many of his works exist in two versions : a first , piano score and a later orchestration . Some of his piano music , such as Gaspard de la nuit ( 1908 ) , is exceptionally difficult to play , and his complex orchestral works such as Daphnis et Chloé ( 1912 ) require skilful balance in performance .

Ravel was among the first composers to recognise the potential of recording to bring their music to a wider public . From the 1920s , despite limited technique as a pianist or conductor , he took part in recordings of several of his works ; others were made under his supervision .

= = Life and career = =

= = = Early years = = =

Ravel was born in the Basque town of Ciboure , France , near Biarritz , 18 kilometres ( 11 mi ) from the Spanish border . His father , Pierre @-@ Joseph Ravel , was an educated and successful engineer , inventor and manufacturer , born in Versoix near the Franco @-@ Swiss border . His mother , Marie , née Delouart , was Basque but had grown up in Madrid . In 19th @-@ century terms , Joseph had married beneath his status ? Marie was illegitimate and barely literate ? but the marriage was a happy one . Some of Joseph 's inventions were successful , including an early internal combustion engine and a notorious circus machine , the " Whirlwind of Death " , an automotive loop @-@ the @-@ loop that was a big draw until a fatal accident at Barnum and Bailey 's Circus in 1903 .

Both Ravel 's parents were Roman Catholics ; Marie was also something of a free @-@ thinker , a trait inherited by her elder son , who was always politically and socially progressive in outlook in adult life . He was baptised in the Ciboure parish church six days after he was born . The family moved to Paris three months later , and there a younger son , Édouard , was born . He was close to his father , whom he eventually followed into the engineering profession . Maurice was particularly devoted to their mother ; her Basque @-@ Spanish heritage was a strong influence on his life and music . Among his earliest memories were folk songs she sang to him . The household was not rich , but the family was comfortable , and the two boys had happy childhoods .

Ravel senior delighted in taking his sons to factories to see the latest mechanical devices , but he also had a keen interest in music and culture in general . In later life , Ravel recalled , " Throughout my childhood I was sensitive to music . My father , much better educated in this art than most amateurs are , knew how to develop my taste and to stimulate my enthusiasm at an early age . " There is no record that Ravel received any formal general schooling in his early years ; his biographer Roger Nichols suggests that the boy may have been chiefly educated by his father .

When he was seven Ravel started piano lessons with Henry Ghys , a friend of Emmanuel Chabrier ; five years later , in 1887 , he began studying harmony , counterpoint and composition with Charles @-@ René , a pupil of Léo Delibes . Without being anything of a child prodigy , he was a highly musical boy . Charles @-@ René found that Ravel 's conception of music was natural to him " and not , as in the case of so many others , the result of effort " . Ravel 's earliest known compositions date from this period : variations on a chorale by Schumann , variations on a theme by Grieg and a single movement of a piano sonata . They survive only in fragmentary form .

In 1888 Ravel met the young pianist Ricardo Viñes , who became not only a lifelong friend , but also one of the foremost interpreters of his works , and an important link between Ravel and Spanish music . The two shared an appreciation of Wagner , Russian music , and the writings of Poe , Baudelaire , and Mallarmé . At the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889 , Ravel was much struck by the new Russian works conducted by Nikolai Rimsky @-@ Korsakov . This music had a lasting effect on both Ravel and his older contemporary Claude Debussy , as did the exotic sound of the Javanese gamelan , also heard during the Exposition .

Émile Decombes took over as Ravel 's piano teacher in 1889 ; in the same year Ravel gave his earliest public performance . Aged fourteen , he took part in a concert at the Salle Érard along with other pupils of Decombes , including Reynaldo Hahn and Alfred Cortot .

= = = Paris Conservatoire = = =

With the encouragement of his parents , Ravel applied for entry to France 's most important musical college , the Conservatoire de Paris . In November 1889 , playing music by Chopin , he passed the examination for admission to the preparatory piano class run by Eugène Anthiôme . Ravel won the first prize in the Conservatoire 's piano competition in 1891 , but otherwise he did not stand out as a student . Nevertheless , these years were a time of considerable advance in his development as a composer . The musicologist Arbie Orenstein writes that for Ravel the 1890s were a period " of immense growth ... from adolescence to maturity . "

In 1891 Ravel progressed to the classes of Charles @-@ Wilfrid de Bériot , for piano , and Émile Pessard , for harmony . He made solid , unspectacular progress , with particular encouragement from Bériot but , in the words of the musical scholar Barbara L. Kelly , he " was only teachable on his own terms " . His later teacher Gabriel Fauré understood this , but it was not generally acceptable to the conservative faculty of the Conservatoire of the 1890s . Ravel was expelled in 1895 , having won no more prizes . His earliest works to survive in full are from these student days : *Sérénade grotesque* , for piano , and " *Ballade de la Reine morte d 'aimer* " , a *mélodie* setting a poem by Rolande de Marès ( both 1893 ) .

Ravel was never so assiduous a student of the piano as his colleagues such as Viñes and Cortot were . It was plain that as a pianist he would never match them , and his overriding ambition was to be a composer . From this point he concentrated on composition . His works from the period include the songs " *Un grand sommeil noir* " and " *D 'Anne jouant de l 'espinette* " to words by Paul Verlaine and Clément Marot , and the piano pieces *Menuet antique* and *Habanera* , the latter eventually incorporated into the *Rapsodie espagnole* . At around this time , Joseph Ravel introduced his son to Erik Satie , who was earning a living as a *café* pianist . Ravel was one of the first musicians ? Debussy was another ? who recognised Satie 's originality and talent . Satie 's constant experiments in musical form were an inspiration to Ravel , who counted them " of inestimable value " .

In 1897 Ravel was readmitted to the Conservatoire , studying composition with Fauré , and taking private lessons in counterpoint with André Gedalge . Both these teachers , particularly Fauré , regarded him highly and were key influences on his development as a composer . As Ravel 's course progressed , Fauré reported " a distinct gain in maturity ... engaging wealth of imagination " . Ravel 's standing at the Conservatoire was nevertheless undermined by the hostility of the Director , Théodore Dubois , who deplored the young man 's musically and politically progressive outlook . Consequently , according to a fellow @-@ student , Michel @-@ Dimitri Calvocoressi , he was " a marked man , against whom all weapons were good " . He wrote some substantial works while studying with Fauré , including the overture *Shéhérazade* and a violin sonata , but he won no prizes

, and therefore was expelled again in 1900 . As a former student he was allowed to attend Fauré 's classes as a non @-@ participating " auditeur " until finally abandoning the Conservatoire in 1903 .

In 1899 Ravel composed his first piece to become widely known , though it made little impact initially : Pavane pour une infante défunte ( " Pavane for a dead princess " ) . It was originally a solo piano work , commissioned by the Princesse de Polignac . In the same year he conducted the first performance of the Shéhérazade overture , which had a mixed reception , with boos mingling with applause from the audience , and unflattering reviews from the critics . One described the piece as " a jolting debut : a clumsy plagiarism of the Russian School " and called Ravel a " mediocrally gifted debutant ... who will perhaps become something if not someone in about ten years , if he works hard . " Another critic , Pierre Lalo , thought that Ravel showed talent , but was too indebted to Debussy and should instead emulate Beethoven . Over the succeeding decades Lalo became Ravel 's most implacable critic .

From the start of his career , Ravel appeared calmly indifferent to blame or praise . Those who knew him well believed that this was no pose but wholly genuine . The only opinion of his music that he truly valued was his own , perfectionist and severely self @-@ critical . At twenty years of age he was , in the words of the biographer Burnett James , " self @-@ possessed , a little aloof , intellectually biased , given to mild banter . " He dressed like a dandy and was meticulous about his appearance and demeanour . Orenstein comments that , short in stature , light in frame , and bony in features , Ravel had the " appearance of a well @-@ dressed jockey " , whose large head seemed suitably matched to his formidable intellect . During the late 1890s and into the early years of the next century , Ravel was bearded in the fashion of the day ; from his mid @-@ thirties he was clean @-@ shaven .

= = = Les Apaches and Debussy = = =

Around 1900 Ravel and a number of innovative young artists , poets , critics , and musicians joined together in an informal group ; they came to be known as Les Apaches ( " The Hooligans " ) , a name coined by Viñes to represent their status as " artistic outcasts " . They met regularly until the beginning of the First World War , and members stimulated one another with intellectual argument and performances of their works . The membership of the group was fluid , and at various times included Igor Stravinsky and Manuel de Falla as well as their French friends .

Among the enthusiasms of the Apaches was the music of Debussy . Ravel , twelve years his junior , had known Debussy slightly since the 1890s , and their friendship , though never close , continued for more than ten years . In 1902 André Messager conducted the premiere of Debussy 's opera Pelléas et Mélisande at the Opéra @-@ Comique . It divided musical opinion . Dubois unavailingly forbade Conservatoire students to attend , and the conductor 's friend and former teacher Camille Saint @-@ Saëns was prominent among those who detested the piece . The Apaches were loud in their support . The first run of the opera consisted of fourteen performances : Ravel attended all of them .

Debussy was widely held to be an impressionist composer ? a label he intensely disliked . Many music lovers began to apply the same term to Ravel , and the works of the two composers were frequently taken as part of a single genre . Ravel thought that Debussy was indeed an impressionist but that he himself was not . Orenstein comments that Debussy was more spontaneous and casual in his composing while Ravel was more attentive to form and craftsmanship . Ravel wrote that Debussy 's " genius was obviously one of great individuality , creating its own laws , constantly in evolution , expressing itself freely , yet always faithful to French tradition . For Debussy , the musician and the man , I have had profound admiration , but by nature I am different from Debussy ... I think I have always personally followed a direction opposed to that of [ his ] symbolism " . During the first years of the new century Ravel 's new works included the piano piece Jeux d'eau ( 1901 ) , the String Quartet and the orchestral song cycle Shéhérazade ( both 1903 ) . Commentators have noted some Debussian touches in some parts of these works . Nichols calls the quartet " at once homage to and exorcism of Debussy 's influence " .

The two composers ceased to be on friendly terms in the middle of the 1900s , for musical and

possibly personal reasons . Their admirers began to form factions , with adherents of one composer denigrating the other . Disputes arose about the chronology of the composers ' works and who influenced whom . Prominent in the anti @-@ Ravel camp was Lalo , who wrote , " Where M. Debussy is all sensitivity , M. Ravel is all insensitivity , borrowing without hesitation not only technique but the sensitivity of other people . " The public tension led to personal estrangement . Ravel said , " It 's probably better for us , after all , to be on frigid terms for illogical reasons . " Nichols suggests an additional reason for the rift . In 1904 Debussy left his wife and went to live with the singer Emma Bardac . Ravel , together with his close friend and confidante Misia Edwards and the opera star Lucienne Bréval , contributed to a modest regular income for the deserted Lilly Debussy , a fact that Nichols suggests may have rankled with her husband .

= = = Scandal and success = = =

During the first years of the new century Ravel made five attempts to win France 's most prestigious prize for young composers , the Prix de Rome , past winners of which included Berlioz , Gounod , Bizet , Massenet and Debussy . In 1900 Ravel was eliminated in the first round ; in 1901 he won the second prize for the competition . In 1902 and 1903 he won nothing : according to the musicologist Paul Landormy , the judges suspected Ravel of making fun of them by submitting cantatas so academic as to seem like parodies . In 1905 Ravel , by now thirty , competed for the last time , inadvertently causing a furore . He was eliminated in the first round , which even critics unsympathetic to his music , including Lalo , denounced as unjustifiable . The press 's indignation grew when it emerged that the senior professor at the Conservatoire , Charles Lenepveu , was on the jury , and only his students were selected for the final round ; his insistence that this was pure coincidence was not well received . L 'affaire Ravel became a national scandal , leading to the early retirement of Dubois and his replacement by Fauré , appointed by the government to carry out a radical reorganisation of the Conservatoire .

Among those taking a close interest in the controversy was Alfred Edwards , owner and editor of *Le Matin* , for which Lalo wrote . Edwards was married to Ravel 's friend Misia ; the couple took Ravel on a seven @-@ week Rhine cruise on their yacht in June and July 1905 , the first time he had travelled abroad .

By the latter part of the 1900s Ravel had established a pattern of writing works for piano and subsequently arranging them for full orchestra . He was in general a slow and painstaking worker , and reworking his earlier piano compositions enabled him to increase the number of pieces published and performed . There appears to have been no mercenary motive for this ; Ravel was known for his indifference to financial matters . The pieces that began as piano compositions and were then given orchestral dress were *Pavane pour une infante défunte* ( orchestrated 1910 ) , *Une barque sur l 'océan* ( 1906 , from the 1905 piano suite *Miroirs* ) , the *Habanera* section of *Rapsodie espagnole* ( 1907 ? 08 ) , *Ma mère l 'Oye* ( 1908 ? 10 , orchestrated 1911 ) , *Valses nobles et sentimentales* ( 1911 , orchestrated 1912 ) , *Alborada del gracioso* ( from *Miroirs* , orchestrated 1918 ) and *Le tombeau de Couperin* ( 1914 ? 17 , orchestrated 1919 ) .

Ravel was not by inclination a teacher , but he gave lessons to a few young musicians he felt could benefit from them . Manuel Rosenthal was one , and records that Ravel was a very demanding teacher when he thought his pupil had talent . Like his own teacher , Fauré , he was concerned that his pupils should find their own individual voices and not be excessively influenced by established masters . He warned Rosenthal that it was impossible to learn from studying Debussy 's music : " Only Debussy could have written it and made it sound like only Debussy can sound . " When George Gershwin asked him for lessons in the 1920s , Ravel , after serious consideration , refused , on the grounds that they " would probably cause him to write bad Ravel and lose his great gift of melody and spontaneity " . The best known composer who studied with Ravel was probably Ralph Vaughan Williams , who was his pupil for three months in 1907 ? 08 . Vaughan Williams recalled that Ravel helped him escape from " the heavy contrapuntal Teutonic manner ... Complexe mais pas compliqué was his motto . "

Vaughan Williams 's recollections throw some light on Ravel 's private life , about which the latter 's

reserved and secretive personality has led to much speculation . Vaughan Williams , Rosenthal and Marguerite Long have all recorded that Ravel frequented brothels . Long attributed this to his self @-@ consciousness about his diminutive stature , and consequent lack of confidence with women . By other accounts , none of them first hand , Ravel was in love with Misia Edwards , or wanted to marry the violinist Hélène Jourdan @-@ Morhange . Rosenthal records and discounts contemporary speculation that Ravel , a lifelong bachelor , may have been homosexual . Such speculation recurred in a 2000 life of Ravel by Benjamin Ivry ; subsequent studies have concluded that Ravel 's sexuality and personal life remain a mystery .

Ravel 's first concert outside France was in 1909 . As the guest of the Vaughan Williamses , he visited London , where he played for the Société des Concerts Français , gaining favourable reviews and enhancing his growing international reputation .

= = = 1910 to First World War = = =

The Société Nationale de Musique , founded in 1871 to promote the music of rising French composers , had been dominated since the mid @-@ 1880s by a conservative faction led by Vincent d 'Indy . Ravel , together with several other former pupils of Fauré , set up a new , modernist organisation , the Société Musicale Indépendente , with Fauré as its president . The new society 's inaugural concert took place on 20 April 1910 ; the seven items on the programme included premieres of Fauré 's song cycle *La chanson d 'Ève* , Debussy 's piano suite *D 'un cahier d 'esquisses* , Zoltán Kodály 's *Six pièces pour piano* , and the original piano duet version of Ravel 's *Ma mère l 'Oye* . The performers included Fauré , Florent Schmitt , Ernest Bloch , Pierre Monteux and , in the Debussy work , Ravel . Kelly considers it a sign of Ravel 's new influence that the society featured Satie 's music in a concert in January 1911 .

The first of Ravel 's two operas , the one @-@ act comedy *L 'heure espagnole* was premiered in 1911 . The work had been completed in 1907 , but the manager of the Opéra @-@ Comique , Albert Carré , repeatedly deferred its presentation . He was concerned that its plot ? a bedroom farce ? would be badly received by the ultra @-@ respectable mothers and daughters who were an important part of the Opéra @-@ Comique 's audience . The piece was only modestly successful at its first production , and it was not until the 1920s that it became popular .

In 1912 Ravel had three ballets premiered . The first , to the orchestrated and expanded version of *Ma mère l 'Oye* , opened at the Théâtre des Arts in January . The reviews were excellent : the *Mercure de France* called the score " absolutely ravishing , a masterwork in miniature " . The music rapidly entered the concert repertoire ; it was played at the Queen 's Hall , London , within weeks of the Paris premiere , and was repeated at the Proms later in the same year . The *Times* praised " the enchantment of the work ... the effect of mirage , by which something quite real seems to float on nothing . " New York audiences heard the work in the same year . Ravel 's second ballet of 1912 was *Adélaïde ou le langage des fleurs* , danced to the score of *Valses nobles et sentimentales* , which opened at the Châtelet in April . *Daphnis et Chloé* opened at the same theatre in June . This was his largest @-@ scale orchestral work , and took him immense trouble and several years to complete .

*Daphnis et Chloé* was commissioned in or about 1909 by the impresario Sergei Diaghilev for his company , the Ballets Russes . Ravel began work with Diaghilev 's choreographer , Michel Fokine , and designer , Léon Bakst . Fokine had a reputation for his modern approach to dance , with individual numbers replaced by continuous music . This appealed to Ravel , and after discussing the action in great detail with Fokine , Ravel began composing the music . There were frequent disagreements between the collaborators , and the premiere was under @-@ rehearsed because of the late completion of the work . It had an unenthusiastic reception and was quickly withdrawn , although it was revived successfully a year later in Monte Carlo and London . The effort to complete the ballet took its toll on Ravel 's health ; neurasthenia obliged him to rest for several months after the premiere .

Ravel composed little during 1913 . He collaborated with Stravinsky on a performing version of Mussorgsky 's unfinished opera *Khovanshchina* , and his own works were the *Trois poèmes de*

Mallarmé for soprano and chamber ensemble , and two short piano pieces , À la manière de Borodine and À la manière de Chabrier . In 1913 , together with Debussy , Ravel was among the musicians present at the dress rehearsal of The Rite of Spring . Stravinsky later said that Ravel was the only person who immediately understood the music . Ravel predicted that the premiere of the Rite would be seen as an event of historic importance equal to that of Pelléas et Mélisande .

= = = War = = =

When Germany invaded France in 1914 Ravel tried to join the French Air Force . He considered his small stature and light weight ideal for an aviator , but was rejected because of his age and a minor heart complaint . After several unsuccessful attempts to enlist , Ravel finally joined the Thirteenth Artillery Regiment as a lorry driver in March 1915 , when he was forty . Stravinsky expressed admiration for his friend 's courage : " at his age and with his name he could have had an easier place , or done nothing " . Some of Ravel 's duties put him in mortal danger , driving munitions at night under heavy German bombardment . At the same time his peace of mind was undermined by his mother 's failing health . His own health also deteriorated ; he suffered from insomnia and digestive problems , underwent a bowel operation following amoebic dysentery in September 1916 , and had frostbite in his feet the following winter .

During the war , the Ligue Nationale pour la Defense de la Musique Française was formed by Saint @-@ Saëns , Dubois , d 'Indy and others , campaigning for a ban on the performance of contemporary German music . Ravel declined to join , telling the committee of the league in 1916 , " It would be dangerous for French composers to ignore systematically the productions of their foreign colleagues , and thus form themselves into a sort of national coterie : our musical art , which is so rich at the present time , would soon degenerate , becoming isolated in banal formulas . " The league responded by banning Ravel 's music from its concerts .

Ravel 's mother died in January 1917 , and he fell into a " horrible despair " , compounding the distress he felt at the suffering endured by the people of his country during the war . He composed few works in the war years . The Piano Trio was almost complete when the conflict began , and the most substantial of his wartime works is Le tombeau de Couperin , composed between 1914 and 1917 . The suite celebrates the tradition of François Couperin , the 18th @-@ century French composer ; each movement is dedicated to a friend of Ravel 's who died in the war .

= = = 1920s = = =

After the war those close to Ravel recognised that he had lost much of his physical and mental stamina . As the musicologist Stephen Zank puts it , " Ravel 's emotional equilibrium , so hard won in the previous decade , had been seriously compromised " . His output , never large , became smaller . Nonetheless , after the death of Debussy in 1918 , he was generally seen , in France and abroad , as the leading French composer of the era . Fauré wrote to him , " I am happier than you can imagine about the solid position which you occupy and which you have acquired so brilliantly and so rapidly . It is a source of joy and pride for your old professor . " Ravel was offered the Legion of Honour in 1920 , and though he declined the decoration he was viewed by the new generation of composers typified by Satie 's protégés Les Six as an establishment figure . Satie had turned against him , and commented , " Ravel refuses the Légion d 'honneur , but all his music accepts it . " Despite this attack , Ravel continued to admire Satie 's early music , and always acknowledged the older man 's influence on his own development . Ravel took a benign view of Les Six , promoting their music , and defending it against journalistic attacks . He regarded their reaction against his works as natural , and preferable to their copying his style . Through the Société Musicale Indépendante , he was able to encourage them and composers from other countries . The Société presented concerts of recent works by American composers including Aaron Copland , Virgil Thomson and George Antheil and by Vaughan Williams and his English colleagues Arnold Bax and Cyril Scott .

Orenstein and Zank both comment that , although Ravel 's post @-@ war output was small ,

averaging only one composition a year , it included some of his finest works . In 1920 he completed *La valse* , in response to a commission from Diaghilev . He had worked on it intermittently for some years , planning a concert piece , " a sort of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz , mingled with , in my mind , the impression of a fantastic , fatal whirling " . It was rejected by Diaghilev , who said , " It 's a masterpiece , but it 's not a ballet . It 's the portrait of a ballet " . Ravel heard Diaghilev 's verdict without protest or argument , left , and had no further dealings with him . Nichols comments that Ravel had the satisfaction of seeing the ballet staged twice by other managements before Diaghilev died . A ballet danced to the orchestral version of *Le tombeau de Couperin* was given at the Théâtre des Champs @-@ Elysées in November 1920 , and the premiere of *La valse* followed in December . The following year *Daphnis et Chloé* and *L 'heure espagnole* were successfully revived at the Paris Opéra .

In the post @-@ war era there was a reaction against the large @-@ scale music of composers such as Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss . Stravinsky , whose *Rite of Spring* was written for a huge orchestra , began to work on a much smaller scale . His 1923 ballet score *Les noces* is composed for voices and twenty @-@ one instruments . Ravel did not like the work ( his opinion caused a cooling in Stravinsky 's friendship with him ) but he was in sympathy with the fashion for " *dépouillement* " ? the " stripping away " of pre @-@ war extravagance to reveal the essentials . Many of his works from the 1920s are noticeably sparer in texture than earlier pieces . Other influences on him in this period were jazz and atonality . Jazz was popular in Parisian cafés , and French composers such as Darius Milhaud incorporated elements of it in their work . Ravel commented that he preferred jazz to grand opera , and its influence is heard in his later music . Arnold Schönberg 's abandonment of conventional tonality also had echoes in some of Ravel 's music such as the *Chansons madécasses* ( 1926 ) , which Ravel doubted he could have written without the example of *Pierrot Lunaire* . His other major works from the 1920s include the orchestral arrangement of Mussorgsky 's piano suite *Pictures at an Exhibition* ( 1922 ) , the opera *L 'enfant et les sortilèges* to a libretto by Colette ( 1926 ) , *Tzigane* ( 1924 ) and the *Violin Sonata* ( 1927 ) .

Finding city life fatiguing , Ravel moved to the country . In May 1921 he took up residence at *Le Belvédère* , a small house on the fringe of Montfort @-@ l 'Amaury , 88 kilometres ( 55 mi ) west of Paris , in the Yvelines département . Looked after by a devoted housekeeper , Mme Revelot , he lived there for the rest of his life . At *Le Belvédère* Ravel composed and gardened , when not performing in Paris or abroad . His touring schedule increased considerably in the 1920s , with concerts in Britain , Italy , Sweden , Denmark , the US , Canada , Spain and Austria .

After two months of planning Ravel made a four @-@ month tour of North America in 1928 , playing and conducting . His fee was a guaranteed minimum of \$ 10 @, @ 000 and a constant supply of Gauloises cigarettes . He appeared with most of the leading orchestras in Canada and the US and visited twenty @-@ five cities . Audiences were enthusiastic and the critics were complimentary . At an all @-@ Ravel programme conducted by Serge Koussevitzky in New York the entire audience stood up and applauded as the composer took his seat . Ravel was touched by this spontaneous gesture and observed , " You know , this doesn 't happen to me in Paris . " Orenstein , commenting that this tour marked the zenith of Ravel 's international reputation , lists its non @-@ musical highlights as a visit to Poe 's house in New York , and excursions to Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon . Ravel was unmoved by his new international celebrity . He commented that the critics ' recent enthusiasm was of no more importance than their earlier judgment , when they called him " the most perfect example of insensitivity and lack of emotion " .

The last work Ravel completed in the 1920s became his most famous : *Boléro* . He was commissioned to provide a score for Ida Rubinstein 's ballet company , and having been unable to secure the rights to orchestrate Albéniz 's *Iberia* he decided on " an experiment in a very special and limited direction ... a piece lasting seventeen minutes and consisting wholly of orchestral tissue without music . " Ravel continued that the work was " one long , very gradual crescendo . There are no contrasts , and there is practically no invention except the plan and the manner of the execution . The themes are altogether impersonal " . He was astonished , and not wholly pleased , that it became a mass success . When one elderly member of the audience at the Opéra shouted " Rubbish ! " at the premiere he remarked , " That old lady got the message ! " The work was

popularised by the conductor Arturo Toscanini , and has been recorded several hundred times . Ravel commented to Arthur Honegger , one of Les Six , " I 've written only one masterpiece ? Boléro . Unfortunately there 's no music in it . "

= = = Last years = = =

At the beginning of the 1930s Ravel was working on two piano concertos . He completed the Piano Concerto in D major for the Left Hand first . It was commissioned by the Austrian pianist Paul Wittgenstein , who had lost his right arm during the war . Ravel was stimulated by the technical challenges of the project : " In a work of this kind , it is essential to give the impression of a texture no thinner than that of a part written for both hands . " Ravel , not proficient enough to perform the work with only his left hand , demonstrated it with both hands . Wittgenstein was initially disappointed by the piece , but after long study he became fascinated by it and ranked it as a great work . In January 1932 he premiered it in Vienna to instant acclaim , and performed it in Paris with Ravel conducting the following year . The critic Henry Prunières wrote , " From the opening measures , we are plunged into a world in which Ravel has but rarely introduced us . "

The Piano Concerto in G major was completed a year later . After the premiere in January 1932 there was high praise for the soloist , Marguerite Long , and for Ravel 's score , though not for his conducting . Long , the dedicatee , played the concerto in more than twenty European cities , with the composer conducting ; they planned to record it together , but at the sessions Ravel confined himself to supervising proceedings and Pedro de Freitas Branco conducted .

In October 1932 Ravel suffered a blow to the head in a taxi accident . The injury was not thought serious at the time , but in a study for the British Medical Journal in 1988 the neurologist R. A. Henson concludes that it may have exacerbated an existing cerebral condition . As early as 1927 close friends had been concerned at Ravel 's growing absent @-@ mindedness , and within a year of the accident he started to experience symptoms suggesting aphasia . Before the accident he had begun work on music for a film , Don Quixote ( 1933 ) , but he was unable to meet the production schedule , and Jacques Ibert wrote most of the score . Ravel completed three songs for baritone and orchestra intended for the film ; they were published as Don Quichotte à Dulcinée . The manuscript orchestral score is in Ravel 's hand , but Lucien Garban and Manuel Rosenthal helped in transcription . Ravel composed no more after this . The exact nature of his illness is unknown . Experts have ruled out the possibility of a tumour , and have variously suggested frontotemporal dementia , Alzheimer 's disease and Creutzfeldt @-@ Jakob disease . Though no longer able to write music or perform , Ravel remained physically and socially active until his last months . Henson notes that Ravel preserved most or all his auditory imagery and could still hear music in his head .

In 1937 Ravel began to suffer pain from his condition , and was examined by Clovis Vincent , a well @-@ known Paris neurosurgeon . Vincent advised surgical treatment . He thought a tumour unlikely , and expected to find ventricular dilatation that surgery might prevent from progressing . Ravel 's brother Edouard accepted this advice ; as Henson comments , the patient was in no state to express a considered view . After the operation there seemed to be an improvement in his condition , but it was short @-@ lived , and he soon lapsed into a coma . He died on 28 December , at the age of 62 .

On 30 December 1937 Ravel was buried next to his parents in a granite tomb at the cemetery at Levallois @-@ Perret , a suburb of northwest Paris . Ravel was an atheist and there was no religious ceremony .

= = Music = =

Marcel Marnat 's catalogue of Ravel 's complete works lists eighty @-@ five works , including many incomplete or abandoned . Though that total is small in comparison with the output of his major contemporaries , it is nevertheless inflated by Ravel 's frequent practice of writing works for piano and later rewriting them as independent pieces for orchestra . The performable body of works numbers about sixty ; slightly more than half are instrumental . Ravel 's music includes pieces for



piano , chamber music , two piano concerti , ballet music , opera , and song cycles . He wrote no symphonies or religious works .

Ravel drew on many generations of French composers from Couperin and Rameau to Fauré and the more recent innovations of Satie and Debussy . Foreign influences include Mozart , Schubert , Liszt and Chopin . He considered himself in many ways a classicist , often using traditional structures and forms , such as the ternary , to present his new melodic and rhythmic content and innovative harmonies . The influence of jazz on his later music is heard within conventional classical structures in the Piano Concerto and the Violin Sonata .

Ravel placed high importance on melody , telling Vaughan Williams that there is " an implied melodic outline in all vital music " . His themes are frequently modal instead of using the familiar major or minor scales . As a result , there are few leading notes in his output . Chords of the ninth and eleventh and unresolved appoggiaturas , such as those in the Valses nobles et sentimentales , are characteristic of Ravel 's harmonic language .

Dance forms appealed to Ravel , most famously the bolero and pavane , but also the minuet , forlane , rigaudon , waltz , czardas , habanera and passacaglia . National and regional consciousness was important to him , and although a planned concerto on Basque themes never materialised , his works include allusions to Hebraic , Greek , Hungarian and gypsy themes . He wrote several short pieces paying tribute to composers he admired ? Borodin , Chabrier , Fauré and Haydn , interpreting their characteristics in a Ravellian style . Another important influence was literary rather than musical : Ravel said that he learnt from Poe that " true art is a perfect balance between pure intellect and emotion " , with the corollary that a piece of music should be a perfectly balanced entity with no irrelevant material allowed to intrude .

= = = Operas = = =

Ravel completed two operas , and worked on three others . The unrealised three were Olympia , La cloche engloutie and Jeanne d 'Arc . Olympia was to be based on Hoffmann 's The Sandman ; he made sketches for it in 1898 ? 99 , but did not progress far . La cloche engloutie after Hauptmann 's The Sunken Bell occupied him intermittently from 1906 to 1912 , Ravel destroyed the sketches for both these works , except for a " Symphonie horlogère " which he incorporated into the opening of L 'heure espagnole . The third unrealised project was an operatic version of Joseph Delteil 's 1925 novel about Joan of Arc . It was to be a large @-@ scale , full @-@ length work for the Paris Opéra , but Ravel 's final illness prevented him from writing it .

Ravel 's first completed opera was L 'heure espagnole ( premiered in 1911 ) , described as a " comédie musicale " . It is among the works set in or illustrating Spain that Ravel wrote throughout his career . Nichols comments that the essential Spanish colouring gave Ravel a reason for virtuoso use of the modern orchestra , which the composer considered " perfectly designed for underlining and exaggerating comic effects " . Edward Burlingame Hill found Ravel 's vocal writing particularly skilful in the work , " giving the singers something besides recitative without hampering the action " , and " commenting orchestrally upon the dramatic situations and the sentiments of the actors without diverting attention from the stage . " Some find the characters artificial and the piece lacking in humanity . The critic David Murray writes that the score " glows with the famous Ravel tendresse " .

The second opera , also in one act , is L 'enfant et les sortilèges ( 1926 ) , a " fantaisie lyrique " to a libretto by Colette . She and Ravel had planned the story as a ballet , but at the composer 's suggestion Colette turned it into an opera libretto . It is more uncompromisingly modern in its musical style than L 'heure espagnole , and the jazz elements and bitonality of much of the work upset many Parisian opera @-@ goers . Ravel was once again accused of artificiality and lack of human emotion , but Nichols finds " profoundly serious feeling at the heart of this vivid and entertaining work " . The score presents an impression of simplicity , disguising intricate links between themes , with , in Murray 's phrase , " extraordinary and bewitching sounds from the orchestra pit throughout " .

Although one @-@ act operas are generally staged less often than full @-@ length ones , Ravel 's are produced regularly in France and abroad . For 2013 ? 15 Operabase records eight productions

around the world of L 'heure espagnole and twenty @-@ four of L 'enfant et les sortilèges .

= = = Other vocal works = = =

A substantial proportion of Ravel 's output was vocal . His early works in that sphere include cantatas written for his unsuccessful attempts at the Prix de Rome . His other vocal music from that period shows Debussy 's influence , in what Kelly describes as " a static , recitative @-@ like vocal style " , prominent piano parts and rhythmic flexibility . By 1906 Ravel was taking even further than Debussy the natural , sometimes colloquial , setting of the French language in Histoires naturelles . The same technique is highlighted in Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé ( 1913 ) ; Debussy set two of the three poems at the same time as Ravel , and the former 's word @-@ setting is noticeably more formal than the latter 's , in which syllables are often elided . In the cycles Shéhérazade and Chansons madécasses Ravel gives vent to his taste for the exotic , even the sensual , in both the vocal line and the accompaniment .

Ravel 's songs often draw on vernacular styles , using elements of many folk traditions in such works as Cinq mélodies populaires grecques , Deux mélodies hébraïques and Chants populaires . Among the poets on whose lyrics he drew were Marot , Léon @-@ Paul Fargue , Leconte de Lisle and Verlaine . For three songs dating from 1914 ? 15 he wrote his own texts .

Although Ravel wrote for mixed choirs and male solo voices , he is chiefly associated , in his songs , with the soprano and mezzo @-@ soprano voices . Even when setting lyrics clearly narrated by a man , he often favoured a female voice , and he seems to have preferred his best @-@ known cycle , Shéhérazade , to be sung by a woman , although a tenor voice is a permitted alternative in the score .

= = = Orchestral works = = =

During his lifetime it was above all as a master of orchestration that Ravel was famous . He minutely studied the ability of each orchestral instrument to determine its potential , putting its individual colour and timbre to maximum use . The critic Alexis Roland @-@ Manuel wrote , " In reality he is , with Stravinsky , the one man in the world who best knows the weight of a trombone @-@ note , the harmonics of a ' cello or a pp tam @-@ tam in the relationships of one orchestral group to another . "

For all Ravel 's orchestral mastery , only four of his works were conceived as concert works for symphony orchestra : Rapsodie espagnole , La valse and the two concertos . All the other orchestral works were written either for the stage , as in Daphnis et Chloé , or as a reworking of piano pieces , Alborada del gracioso and Une barque sur l 'océan , ( Miroirs ) , Valses nobles et sentimentales , Ma mère l 'Oye , Tzigane ( originally for violin and piano ) and Le tombeau de Couperin . In the orchestral versions , the instrumentation generally clarifies the harmonic language of the score and brings sharpness to classical dance rhythms . Occasionally , as in the Alborada del gracioso , critics have found the later orchestral version less persuasive than the sharp @-@ edged piano original .

In some of his scores from the 1920s , including Daphnis et Chloé , Ravel frequently divides his upper strings , having them play in six to eight parts while the woodwind are required to play with extreme agility . His writing for the brass ranges from softly muted to triple @-@ forte outbursts at climactic points . In the 1930s he tended to simplify his orchestral textures . The lighter tone of the G major Piano Concerto follows the models of Mozart and Saint @-@ Saëns , alongside use of jazz @-@ like themes . The critics Edward Sackville @-@ West and Desmond Shawe @-@ Taylor comment that in the slow movement , " one of the most beautiful tunes Ravel ever invented " , the composer " can truly be said to join hands with Mozart " . The most popular of Ravel 's orchestral works , Boléro ( 1928 ) , was conceived several years before its completion ; in 1924 he said that he was contemplating " a symphonic poem without a subject , where the whole interest will be in the rhythm " .

Ravel made orchestral versions of piano works by Schumann , Chabrier , Debussy and Mussorgsky

's piano suite *Pictures at an Exhibition* . Orchestral versions of the last by Mikhail Tushmalov , Sir Henry Wood and Leo Funtek predated Ravel 's 1922 version , and many more have been made since , but Ravel 's remains the best known . Kelly remarks on its " dazzling array of instrumental colour " , and a contemporary reviewer commented on how , in dealing with another composer 's music , Ravel had produced an orchestral sound wholly unlike his own .

= = = Piano music = = =

Although Ravel wrote fewer than thirty works for the piano , they exemplify his range ; Orenstein remarks that the composer keeps his personal touch " from the striking simplicity of *Ma mère l'Oye* to the transcendental virtuosity of *Gaspard de la nuit* . " Ravel 's earliest major work for piano , *Jeux d'eau* ( 1901 ) , is frequently cited as evidence that he evolved his style independently of Debussy , whose major works for piano all came later . When writing for solo piano Ravel rarely aimed at the intimate chamber effect characteristic of Debussy , but sought a Lisztian virtuosity . The authors of *The Record Guide* consider that works such as *Gaspard de la Nuit* and *Miroirs* have a beauty and originality with a deeper inspiration " in the harmonic and melodic genius of Ravel himself . "

Most of Ravel 's piano music is extremely difficult to play , and presents pianists with a balance of technical and artistic challenges . Writing of the piano music the critic Andrew Clark commented in 2013 , " A successful Ravel interpretation is a finely balanced thing . It involves subtle musicianship , a feeling for pianistic colour and the sort of lightly worn virtuosity that masks the advanced technical challenges he makes in *Alborada del gracioso* ... and the two outer movements of *Gaspard de la nuit* . Too much temperament , and the music loses its classical shape ; too little , and it sounds pale . " This balance caused a breach between the composer and Viñes , who said that if he observed the nuances and speeds Ravel stipulated in *Gaspard de la nuit* " *Le gibet* " would " bore the audience to death " . Some pianists continue to attract criticism for over @-@ interpreting Ravel 's piano writing .

Ravel 's regard for his predecessors is heard in several of his piano works ; *Menuet sur le nom de Haydn* ( 1909 ) , *À la manière de Borodine* ( 1912 ) , *À la manière de Chabrier* ( 1913 ) and *Le tombeau de Couperin* all incorporate elements of the named composers interpreted in a characteristically Ravellian manner . Clark comments that those piano works which Ravel later orchestrated are overshadowed by the revised versions : " Listen to *Le tombeau de Couperin* and the complete ballet music for *Ma mère l'Oye* in the classic recordings conducted by André Cluytens , and the piano versions never sound quite the same again . "

= = = Chamber music = = =

Apart from a one @-@ movement sonata for violin and piano dating from 1899 , unpublished in the composer 's lifetime , Ravel wrote seven chamber works . The earliest is the *String Quartet* ( 1902 ? 03 ) , dedicated to Fauré , and showing the influence of Debussy 's quartet of ten years earlier . Like the Debussy it differs from the more monumental quartets of the established French school of Franck and his followers , with more succinct melodies , fluently interchanged , in flexible tempos and varieties of instrumental colour . The *Introduction and Allegro* for harp , flute , clarinet , and string quartet ( 1905 ) was composed very quickly by Ravel 's standards . It is an ethereal piece in the vein of the *Pavane pour une infante défunte* . Ravel also worked at unusual speed on the *Piano Trio* ( 1914 ) to complete it before joining the French army . It contains Basque , Baroque and far Eastern influences , and shows Ravel 's growing technical skill , dealing with the difficulties of balancing the percussive piano with the sustained sound of the violin and cello , " blending the two disparate elements in a musical language that is unmistakably his own , " in the words of the commentator Keith Anderson .

Ravel 's four chamber works composed after the First World War are the *Sonata for Violin and Cello* ( 1920 ? 22 ) , the " *Berceuse sur le nom de Gabriel Fauré* " for violin and piano ( 1922 ) , the chamber original of *Tzigane* for violin and piano ( 1924 ) and finally the *Violin Sonata* ( 1923 ? 27 ) . The two middle works are respectively an affectionate tribute to Ravel 's teacher , and a virtuoso

display piece for the violinist Jelly d 'Arányi . The Violin and Cello Sonata is a departure from the rich textures and harmonies of the pre-war Piano Trio : the composer said that it marked a turning point in his career , with thinness of texture pushed to the extreme and harmonic charm renounced in favour of pure melody . His last chamber work , the Violin Sonata ( sometimes called the Second after the posthumous publication of his student sonata ) , is a frequently dissonant work . Ravel said that the violin and piano are " essentially incompatible " instruments , and that his Sonata reveals their incompatibility . Sackville-West and Shawe-Taylor consider the post-war sonatas " rather laboured and unsatisfactory " , and neither work has matched the popularity of Ravel 's pre-war chamber works .

== Recordings ==

Ravel 's interpretations of some of his piano works were captured on piano roll between 1914 and 1928 , although some rolls supposedly played by him may have been made under his supervision by Robert Casadesus , a better pianist . Transfers of the rolls have been released on compact disc . In 1913 there was a gramophone recording of *Jeux d 'eau* played by Mark Hambourg , and by the early 1920s there were discs featuring the *Pavane pour une infante défunte* and *Ondine* , and movements from the String Quartet , *Le tombeau de Couperin* and *Ma mère l 'Oye* . Ravel was among the first composers who recognised the potential of recording to bring their music to a wider public , and throughout the 1920s there was a steady stream of recordings of his works , some of which featured the composer as pianist or conductor . A 1932 recording of the G major Piano Concerto was advertised as " Conducted by the composer " , although he had in fact supervised the sessions while a more proficient conductor took the baton . Recordings for which Ravel actually was the conductor included a *Boléro* in 1930 , and a sound film of a 1933 performance of the D major concerto with Wittgenstein as soloist .

== Honours and legacy ==

Ravel declined not only the Légion d 'honneur but all state honours from France , refusing to let his name go forward for election to the Institut de France . He accepted foreign awards , including honorary membership of the Royal Philharmonic Society in 1921 , the Belgian Ordre de Léopold in 1926 , and an honorary doctorate from the University of Oxford in 1928 .

After Ravel 's death his brother and legatee , Edouard , turned the composer 's house at Montfort-l'Amaury into a museum , leaving it substantially as Ravel had known it . As of 2016 the maison-musée de Maurice Ravel remains open for guided tours .

In his later years Edouard Ravel declared his intention to leave the bulk of the composer 's estate to the city of Paris for the endowment of a Nobel Prize in music , but evidently changed his mind . After his death in 1960 the estate passed through several hands . Despite the substantial royalties paid for performing Ravel 's music , the news magazine *Le Point* reported in 2000 that it was unclear who the beneficiaries were . The British newspaper *The Guardian* reported in 2001 that no money from royalties had been forthcoming for the maintenance of the Ravel museum at Montfort-l'Amaury , which was in a poor state of repair .

== Free scores ==

Free scores by Maurice Ravel at the International Music Score Library Project  
Free scores by Maurice Ravel in the Choral Public Domain Library ( ChoralWiki )

== Miscellaneous ==

Maurice Ravel Frontispice

Ravel material in the BBC Radio 3 archives

Works by or about Maurice Ravel in libraries ( WorldCat catalog )

= = = Recordings = = =

Piano Rolls ( The Reproducing Piano Roll Foundation )

= = = Institutions = = =

International Academy of Music from Saint @-@ Jean @-@ de @-@ Luz : Académie internationale  
de Musique Maurice Ravel de Saint @-@ Jean @-@ de @-@ Luz  
Maurice Ravel 's Friends Society : Les Amis de Maurice Ravel