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## Ravel's Piano Music – A New Edition

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## Gaspard de la nuit

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# RAVEL'S PIANO MUSIC – A NEW EDITION

## Editorial Method and Sources

There is no denying the excitement of holding in one's hand the autograph manuscript of a musical masterpiece; and where the autograph is itself a work of art, as many of Ravel's are, then aesthetic considerations also come into play to compound the excitement. But there is equally no denying that composers are, like all mortals, fallible, and that however beautiful and exciting an autograph is, it may nonetheless contain mistakes. The apparently laudable desire to go back to what the composer originally wrote needs therefore to be tempered with a certain amount of common sense.

With stage works, it is true, pressures of time, space, money and personalities often lead to deformations which the composer does not in any sense welcome but has to accept if the performance is to go ahead, and which may then find their way into the printed score. But in the case of piano works, the pressures on the composer in preparing an edition are much slighter, exerted for the most part by the printer in his desire for conformity with house style, so that changes introduced between manuscript and edition have a somewhat greater chance of representing decisions freely taken by the composer. Certainly, in the process of publication mistakes may be introduced as well as rectified and, when musicality and common sense indicate that this may have happened, the autograph can indeed sometimes provide vital evidence. But in the course of conversations with a number of composers of our own time, I am given overwhelmingly to understand that they would actually be angry if future editors ignored their carefully prepared printed scores and went back automatically to their original autographs for a so-called true reading.

In the case of Ravel's piano music, such a critical view of autograph evidence is more than ever justified, since the Music Department of the Bibliothèque nationale de France holds a bound volume containing Ravel's own printed copies, with autograph corrections, of the bulk of the first editions of his solo piano music.<sup>1</sup> To judge from the contents, the volume would appear to have been made up between 1911 and 1913. The works missing from this collection are *Sérénade grotesque*, *Sites auriculaires*, *Ma mère l'Oye*, *Prélude*, *A la manière de...*, *Le tombeau de Couperin* and *Frontispice*. Printed copies with autograph corrections of *Ma mère l'Oye* and *A la manière de...* are held separately in the same institution,<sup>2</sup> while Ravel's own printed copy of *Le tombeau de Couperin*, with autograph fingerings and one autograph correction, is on display in the Musée Ravel at Montfort l'Amaury. For *Sérénade grotesque* and *Sites auriculaires* the autographs may be said to assume paramount importance since these pieces were not published in the composer's lifetime. The autograph of *Frontispice* is also significant because Ravel's own printed copy has not been found. Unfortunately, for *Prélude* neither the autograph nor the composer's printed copy is extant.

No proofs are known to survive of the first editions of any of Ravel's piano works, apart from a set of first proofs of *Le tombeau de Couperin* in the Durand archives, marked up by the Durand editor with a request for second proofs (I am grateful to Roy Howat for providing me with a copy of this material). This set contains no autograph markings. All the editorial annotations found their way into the first edition except for the form of some of the multiple appoggiaturas in 'Prélude' and 'Forlane' of *Le tombeau de Couperin*, over which Ravel would seem to have changed his mind.

### Primary Sources

Where Ravel's own corrected edition is available, I have taken it as my main primary source; discrepancies between this corrected edition (CE), the first printed edition (E) and the autograph are duly noted. The autograph of *Valses nobles* (nine pages in the Taverne collection) has not itself been made available for study, but a microfilm (AM) is held in the Music Department of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Vm. micr. 876).

### Secondary Sources

The secondary sources fall into four groups:

(a) Printed copies with corrections by musicians close to Ravel

(i) Copies of Ravel's piano music belonging to Robert Casadesus (CasCE), now also housed in the Music Department of the BnF; his copy of *Valses nobles* is shelved as Vm. Casadesus 940. It contains no markings in the composer's hand.

(ii) Some copies, including that of *Valses nobles*, belonging to Vlado Perlemuter (PerCE), also now housed in the BnF, but awaiting cataloguing.

(iii) Some copies with corrections by Lucien Garban. Garban worked for the Durand publishing house and was a close friend of the composer. The exact status of these corrections is impossible to determine but, given the links between the two men, it is feasible that at least some of the changes were dictated by Ravel. These copies are now in the library of Bakersfield College, California. Garban also made piano duet transcriptions of *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and *Le tombeau de Couperin*. These are published by Durand.

(iv) Copies not consulted include those belonging to Jacques Février, whose niece and pupil Mme Aboulker-Rosenfeld has assured me that they contain no markings beyond his fingerings; and those of Henriette Faure, which cannot be located.

(b) Ravel's own orchestrations of a number of his piano pieces (RO). In chronological order of original composition (dates of orchestration in brackets), these are: *Menuet antique* (1929), 'Habanera' from *Sites auriculaires* (1908), *Pavane pour une Infante défunte* (1910), 'Une barque sur l'océan' and 'Alborada del gracioso' from *Miroirs* (1906 and 1923), *Ma mère l'Oye* (1911), *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1912), 'Prélude', 'Forlane', 'Menuet' and 'Rigaudon' from *Le tombeau de Couperin* (1919).

(c) Recordings

(i) Piano rolls made by Ravel in 1913 for Welte-Mignon (*Sonatine*, movements I and II, C2887; *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, C2888), and in 1922 for Duo-Art (*Pavane pour une Infante défunte*, 084; 'Oiseaux tristes' from *Miroirs*, 082). It was claimed that at this second session Ravel also recorded 'Le gibet' from *Gaspard de la nuit* and the 'Toccata' from *Le tombeau de Couperin*, but these were in fact recorded by Robert Casadesus. It remains uncertain which of the two recorded 'La vallée des cloches' from *Miroirs* in 1929 for Duo-Art (72750), though I am almost certain it was Ravel. All these recordings have been transferred a number of times to LP, but unfortunately the piano roll equipment has not always been properly regulated.

(ii) Recordings made on disc by three pianists, all of whom had the benefit of the composer's detailed advice: Robert Casadesus (1955, CBS 13062–4<sup>3</sup>); Jacques Février (1972, ADES 7041–4); Vlado Perlemuter (1961, VOX VBX 410 1–3<sup>4</sup>; 1977, NIMBUS 2101–3, reissued CD NI 5005, 5011). Marcelle Meyer, although known to Ravel (together they gave the private two-piano performance of *La valse* which failed to impress Diaghilev), never studied his piano music with him, as her daughter, Marie Bertin, was good enough to inform me. I have therefore taken no account of Mme Meyer's Ravel recordings reissued by EMI on the Référence label.

(d) Souvenirs of Ravel as a coach of his piano music

(i) from Vlado Perlemuter in his interviews with Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, published as *Ravel d'après Ravel* (Lausanne, 1953) and in an English translation by F. Tanner as *Ravel according to Ravel* (New York/London, 1988; 2/1991).<sup>5</sup>

(ii) from Vlado Perlemuter in conversation with the editor of the present edition.

(iii) from Henriette Faure in *Mon maître Maurice Ravel* (Paris, 1978) (FauS). Mlle Faure, the sister of the politician Edgar Faure, was coached by Ravel for her recital of his music – in all probability the first ever

# Gaspard de la nuit

## I: Ondine

à Harold Bauer

Maurice Ravel  
(1875–1937)

Lent ♩ = 58 (60)

First system of the musical score for Ondine. The right hand features a complex, rapid arpeggiated pattern. The left hand is marked *ppp* and contains a whole rest, with the instruction *2 Red.* below it.

Second system of the musical score. The right hand continues the arpeggiated pattern. The left hand begins a melodic line, marked *très doux et très expressif*.

Third system of the musical score. The right hand continues the arpeggiated pattern. The left hand continues the melodic line. The system concludes with a 3/4 time signature change.

Fourth system of the musical score. The right hand continues the arpeggiated pattern. The left hand continues the melodic line. The system concludes with a 4/4 time signature change.

Fifth system of the musical score. The right hand continues the arpeggiated pattern. The left hand continues the melodic line. The system concludes with a 3/4 time signature change.

10

*toujours pp*

12

14

16

*ppp*

18

*pp*

# Le gibet

Que vois-je remuer autour de ce Gibet?

FAUST

Ah! ce que j'entends, serait-ce la bise nocturne qui glapit,  
ou le pendu qui pousse un soupir sur la fourche patibulaire?

Serait-ce quelque grillon qui chante tapi dans la  
mousse et le lierre sterile dont par pitié se chausse le bois?

Serait-ce quelque mouche en chasse sonnant du cor autour  
de ces oreilles sourdes à la fanfare des hallali?

Serait-ce quelque escarbot qui cueille en son vol  
inegal un cheveu sanglant à son crâne chauve?

Ou bien serait-ce quelque araignee qui brode une demi-  
aune de mousseline pour cravate à ce col étranglé?

C'est la cloche qui tinte aux murs d'une ville, sous  
l'horizon, et la carcasse d'un pendu que rougit le soleil  
couchant.

*Aloysius Bertrand*

What is it I see stirring around that Gibbet?

FAUST

Ah! What do I hear? Is it the night wind howling, or  
the hanged man sighing on the gibbet?

Might it be a cricket singing, hidden in the moss and  
the sterile ivy with which the wood covers itself out of pity?

Might it be a fly hunting and sounding its horn around  
those ears that are deaf to the slaughterer's triumph?

Might it be a cockchafer plucking, in its halting  
flight, a bloody hair from its bald pate?

Or might it be a spider, weaving a length of muslin as  
a scarf for that strangled neck?

It is the bell that sounds from the walls of a town  
beyond the horizon, and the corpse of a hanged man that  
glows red in the setting sun.

*Translation: R. Nichols*

Was weben die dort um den Rabenstein?

FAUST

Ach, was höre ich? Sollte es der nächtliche Nordwind  
sein, der da heult, oder der Gehängte, der am Galgen einen  
Seufzer ausstößt?

Sollte es eine Grille sein, die da zirpt, während sie in  
Moos und fruchtlosem Efeu kauert, mit denen das Gebälk  
aus Mitleid seinen Fuß bedeckt?

Sollte es eine Fliege auf der Jagd sein, die hier ihr Horn  
bläst, wo der Fanfarenruf der Halalis auf taube Ohren stößt?

Sollte es ein Käfer sein, der auf seinem holprigen Flug  
ein blutiges Haar vom kahlen Schädel zupft?

Oder sollte es gar eine Spinne sein, die eine halbe Elle  
feinsten Gewebes als Tuch um diesen abgeschnürten Hals legt?

Es ist die Glocke, die an den Mauern einer Stadt jenseits  
des Horizonts läutet, und der tote Körper eines Gehängten,  
den die untergehende Sonne in ein leuchtendes Rot taucht.

*Übersetzung: A. Muus*

## CRITICAL COMMENTARY

**Sources:** **A** – autograph dated “Mai-Septem 1908”, originally held in the archives of MM Durand, now held in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in the University of Texas at Austin  
**E** – first edition published by Durand, deposited at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, on 8 January 1909

For details of all other sources see ‘Editorial Method and Sources’, p. 3. A table of Source abbreviations appears on p. 4

### Ondine

- A:** no dedication  
**PerCE:** ♩ = 58(60) in Ravel’s hand  
**A:** metre **C**,  $\frac{4}{4}$  in all other sources
- Bars 4–7.** **A, E:** the pattern established in first  $3\frac{1}{2}$  bars is altered from second beat of bar 4 onwards, from xyxyxy to xyxyxy.  
**CE, PerCE, GarCE:** same pattern maintained throughout and in bar 4, RH beat 1,  $c''\sharp$ s of **A** and **E** deleted
- Bars 8, 9.** **A, E:** RH, final quaver,  $d''\sharp$ . **CE, PerCE:**  $d''\sharp$  deleted
- Bar 12.** It might seem logical to tie final RH  $d''\flat/f''\sharp$  over to beginning of bar 13, by analogy with bars 11–12, but this is not supported by any source. **CasR, FévR, PerR** all repeat the dyad
- Bar 22.** **CE:** triplet marking over RH. Does not appear in **A** or **E**. The marking “2 *Ped.*” means that Ravel, as often, has forgotten to indicate where the initial *una corda* should be released. There are no indications in any source
- Bar 24.** **A, E:** RH, final quaver,  $a''\sharp$ . **CE:**  $a''\flat$
- Bar 27.** All sources: RH, initial chord notated as crotchet. *Laisser vibrer* ties added editorially  
**A:** this bar designated as in  $\frac{3}{4}$  LH chord has remained as dotted minim in all sources. Corrected editorially to semibreve  
**A, E:** beat 4, pattern of chords RLLRLLR. **CE, GarCE:** pattern LRRLRLR maintained
- Bar 29.** **A:** “Un peu retenu” spaced out over whole bar. Reproduced here as printed in **E**  
**A, E:** RH beat 3,  $g'\sharp$  quaver. **CE:** crotchet
- Bar 38.** **A, E:** LH demisemiquaver 8,  $g'\sharp$ . **CE:**  $f'\sharp$
- Bars 38, 40.** **CE:** parenthesis added to RH demisemiquaver 9,  $g'$
- Bar 40.** **A:** metre **C**,  $\frac{4}{4}$  in all other sources
- Bar 41.** **A, E:** beat 3,  $f''\times$ , LH quaver. **CE:** RH demisemiquaver
- Bars 44, 49.** **A:** “*très doux*” marking above RH figuration. **E, CE:** marked between staves. Here Ravel’s indication was probably normalised by the engraver
- Bar 46.** **A:** RH, final  $a''\flat$ , octave higher. All other sources as printed here
- Bars 47, 48.** **A:** RH, final  $d''\flat$ s of each of first three beats, octave higher. All other sources as printed here  
 All sources: RH beat 4, notes printed as demisemiquavers. Corrected editorially to hemidemisemiquavers
- Bar 52.** According to Ravel’s instructions, the *una corda* introduced at bar 22 is still in force. Again, it is up to the player to decide when to release it
- Bars 53, 54.** **CE:** “*augmentez . . .*”. Does not appear in any other source
- Bars 57, 58.** All sources: LH beat 2,  $g\flat/e\flat$  notated as crotchet. Because of held  $C\sharp$  and crescendo through phrase, this dyad must inevitably sound as a minim; amended editorially. Similarly, bar 60, LH beat 2,  $f'\flat/c'\flat$
- Bar 60.** All sources: LH beat 4, it is unclear whether the accent refers to the whole triad or just to  $c'\sharp$ . Applied to  $c'\sharp$  editorially  
**CE:** diminuendo through final crotchet. Does not appear in any other source
- Bar 65.** **A:** RH, final quaver,  $b''\flat$ .  $c''\sharp$  in all other sources
- Bar 71.** **GarCE:** RH,  $\flat$ s to  $d''$ s and  $d'''$ s throughout. The mistake stems from **A**, where Ravel wrote a repeat mark (↯) in bar 71 instead of the RH figuration, forgetting that  $\flat$ s to  $D$ s were

supplied by the unpeated grace notes in bar 70. No  $\flat$ s in **E** or **CE**

**Bar 72.** All sources: “*glissando*” aligned with **C**. Repositioned editorially

**Bar 73.** **A, E:** RH octava missing. Supplied in **CE**

**GarCE:** LH, final 2 notes, *octava bassa*. This avoids the slightly awkward double back; on the other hand it interrupts the contrary motion which is the essence of bars 73–74. **CasR** plays *octava bassa*; **FévR, PerR** do not

**Bar 74.** **A:** RH,  $\sharp$ s to  $e'$  and  $e''$  not in Ravel’s hand. **CE:**  $\sharp$  to  $e'$  only

**Bar 76.** RH, *laisser vibrer* tie added editorially to  $f''\flat$

**Bars 76–78.** **PerS(HJM)** 32/31: Ravel wanted the theme in longer notes in RH to be brought out

**Bar 77.** **A, E:** RH beat 2, demisemiquavers 6 and 12,  $e'\sharp$ . **CE, PerCE:**  $f'\sharp$ , as on beat 1

RH, *laisser vibrer* tie added editorially to  $f''\sharp$

**Bar 78.** All sources: RH beat 3,  $a''\sharp$  quaver. Corrected editorially

**Bar 79.** All sources: RH phrase mark is extended to cover final grace notes, even though harmonically they belong with what follows. Amended editorially to conform with bars 56, 59, where grace notes placed before the barline are slurred separately

**CE:** LH beat 3,  $G\sharp$  grace note tied to semibreve in bar 80. No tie in any other source

**Bar 83.** **PerS(HJM)** 32/32: Ravel wanted no rallentando and only a short pause on the rest. (Was this why he marked the pause on LH only?)

**Bars 84–87.** No pedal indication in any source. **CasR** and **PerRI** clear sound of bar 83 by end of bar, **FévR** and **PerRII** on initial  $a'\flat$  of bar 84

**Bar 88.** **PerS(HJM)** 32/32: LH, Ravel wanted  $E'\flat$  and  $E\flat$  to be played at full speed and not with undue deliberation  
 System 2, LH quavers 9 and 10, demisemiquaver beams deleted editorially

**PerS(conv):** end of system 2, system 3, Ravel suggested using LH thumb on  $f'\sharp$  quavers (finally crotchet), as well as on  $c\sharp$  and  $d\sharp$  quavers. All sources notate the  $g\sharp-f\sharp-c\sharp-d\sharp$  melody line and the bass  $D\sharp$ s in half of true durations; corrected editorially

**Bars 88–89.** **A:** LH fingerings 5–3–2 only ones in this source for this movement

**Bars 89–91.** **PerS(conv):** Ravel suggested that these final bars should be played as though nothing had happened (“comme si rien ne s’était passé”)

### Le gibet

**A:** no dedication

**PerCE:** ♩ = 69 (♩ = 72) not in Ravel’s hand. Perlemuter recalls ♩ = 69 as being the tempo Ravel asked for (and this is indeed the basic tempo of **PerR**); he does not now recall whether Ravel authorised the variant ♩ = 72 or not

**A:** metre **C**; ♩ = , tempo not indicated. All other sources:  $\frac{4}{4}$

**Bar 4.** **CE:** RH,  $e'\flat$ s tied. No tie in other sources

**Bar 7.** **CE:** RH,  $b\flat$  tied over to bar 8. No tie in other sources

**Bar 9.** All sources: RH dyad  $f'\flat/b\flat$  notated as minim. Since there seems no reason to distinguish this bar from bar 5, minim altered editorially to semibreve

**CE:** RH and LH, both pairs of octave  $B\flat$ s, lower notes tied. No ties in other sources

**Bar 12.** **A:** climax of crescendo quite clearly over final semiquaver. Placing in **E** over dotted quaver probably another case of engraver normalising. Uncorrected in **CE**

**Bar 17.** All sources: *mf* placed between top two staves after first quaver. Since it clearly applies to new phrase and not to repeated  $B\flat$ s, it has been aligned editorially with minim chords  
**A:** climax of crescendo as in bar 12. Again, uncorrected in **CE**