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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.¹ 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,² 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 13062–4³); Jacques Février (1972, ADES 7041–4); Vlado Perlemuter (1961, VOX VBX 410 1–3⁴; 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-

Valses nobles et sentimentales

Adélaïde

«...le plaisir délicieux et toujours nouveau d'une occupation inutile.»

(Henri de Régnier)

Maurice Ravel
(1875–1937)

I

Modéré – très franc ♩ = 176

The musical score is written for piano and consists of 15 measures. It is in 3/4 time and the key of D major (indicated by two sharps). The tempo is marked 'Modéré – très franc' with a quarter note equal to 176 beats per minute. The score begins with a piano introduction marked 'f' (forte). The first system contains measures 1 through 4. The second system, starting at measure 5, includes a 'm.g.' (moderato giusto) marking. The third system contains measures 10 through 14. The final system, starting at measure 15, is marked 'ff' (fortissimo) and 'Sans ralentir' (without slowing down). The score features a variety of musical notations, including chords, arpeggios, and melodic lines in both the treble and bass staves.

21

ff f mf

Measures 21-25: Treble and bass staves. Treble staff has a series of chords and a melodic line. Bass staff has a bass line with some chords. Dynamics: *ff* at measure 21, *f* at measure 23, *mf* at measure 25. A large watermark 'BIBLIOTHECA' is visible across the page.

26

Measures 26-30: Treble and bass staves. Treble staff has a series of chords and a melodic line. Bass staff has a bass line with some chords. Dynamics: *mf* at measure 26, *f* at measure 28, *mf* at measure 30.

31

Measures 31-35: Treble and bass staves. Treble staff has a series of chords and a melodic line. Bass staff has a bass line with some chords. Dynamics: *p* at measure 31, *f* at measure 33, *mf* at measure 35.

36

Measures 36-40: Treble and bass staves. Treble staff has a series of chords and a melodic line. Bass staff has a bass line with some chords. Dynamics: *pp* at measure 36, *f* at measure 38, *mf* at measure 40.

41

Measures 41-45: Treble and bass staves. Treble staff has a series of chords and a melodic line. Bass staff has a bass line with some chords. Dynamics: *f* at measure 41, *mf* at measure 43, *f* at measure 45.

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

AM contains no metronome markings. All metronome markings taken from **E**

I

Bars 1–4. According to Perlemuter, Ravel insisted that here and in parallel passages sustaining pedal should be depressed on quaver 1 and released on quaver 4 (information from Roy Howat). But **PerR** indicates rather pedal release on beat 3

Bars 15–18, 75–78. **RR** pedals from bar 15, beat 1 to bar 17, beat 1; then from bar 17, beat 2 to bar 18, beat 3; similarly in bars 75–78. **CasR**: bars 17–18, 77–78 without pedal. **FévR**: pedalling irregular. **PerR**: pedal on individual crotchets

Bars 33, 35. **PerS** 43/45: “Here, he [Ravel] wanted the emphasis on the second beat in the left hand to be well marked.” (“Ici, il voulait l’appui bien marqué du second temps de la main gauche.”)

Bars 45–60. **CasR** uses barely any sustaining pedal. **FévR** uses light pedal, increasing through bars 57–60 to support crescendo. **PerR** uses pedal to link individual crotchets

Bars 67–70. **PerS** 43/45: “Here, the singing left hand accentuates its binary rhythm. Ravel was very keen on this, which allows the pianist to bring it out.” (“Ici, la main gauche chantante accentue son rythme binaire. Ravel y tenait beaucoup et cela permet de la mettre en dehors.”)

Bars 73–77. Fingering on **AM**

II

Bars 1–2. **AM**: crescendo hairpin from bar 1, beat 1 to bar 2, beat 2, then diminuendo (as in bars 3–4)

Bars 9–14. **GarCP**: sustaining pedal marked through single bars in bars 9, 10, then ‘simile’; observed, more or less, in **RR**. Also by **CasR**, **FévR**, **PerR**

Bars 15–16. **GarCP**: sustaining pedal marked through this pair of bars; observed in **RR**, **CasR**, **FévR**, **PerR**

Bar 19. **RO**: *p*

Bar 21. **RO**: *mf*

Bar 32. Pedal release indicated editorially. Not in any printed keyboard source

Bar 35. **RO**: *p*

Bar 36. **RO**: *f*. Crescendo hairpin shortened editorially to climax on beat 3

Bar 51. **RO**: *mf*

Bar 52. Diminuendo hairpin delayed editorially

Bar 53. **RO**: *mf*

Bars 63–64. **RO**, **RR**: diminuendo. Also **CasR**, **FévR**, **PerR**. **RO**: bar 63, beat 2, violins 2, added minim dyad a^\sharp/d' , a^\sharp

resolving up to b in bar 64, with d' tied over; followed in **GarT**

Bar 64. Pedal release indicated editorially. Not in any keyboard source.

III

No metronome marking in any source. **CasR**: dotted minim=70; **FévR**: dotted minim=46; **PerRI**: dotted minim=65; **PerRII**: dotted minim=52. Although evidence from rolls as to absolute tempi is in general unreliable, **RR** would seem to lie towards faster end of this range

Bars 1–4. **AM**: here and in parallel passages, phrasing over all three RH crotchets. **PerS** 44/46: “The difficulty in this Valse is to isolate the third beat enough, which produces a hesitation before playing the first beat [of the next bar].” (“La difficulté de cette Valse est de bien isoler le troisième temps, cela donne une hésitation avant d’aborder le premier temps.”)

Bars 1–4, 7–12, 14–16. **RR** meticulously observes LH crotchet rest, as well as syncopated phrasing in bars 5–6, 13–14

Bars 5–6. **RO**: crescendo and diminuendo

Bars 13–14. **RO**: crescendo and diminuendo

Bar 17. **RO**: *p*

Bars 17–23. **RR**: this passage more heavily pedalled. Also **CasR**, **FévR**, **PerR**. **PerS** 45/47: “After the double bar, the second episode must be played in a very singing style and Ravel insisted on the brief diminuendo that introduces the repetition of the phrase.” (“Après la double barre, le second épisode doit être joué très chantant et Ravel tenait essentiellement au court diminuendo qui amène la répétition de la phrase.”) ‘Diminuendo’ must refer to hairpin in bar 20. Re punctuation between bars 20 and 21, “Ravel said to me: ‘like a curtsey’. The echo of this phrase is as if cut off. Ravel was so insistent on all this punctuation.” (“Ravel m’avait dit: ‘comme une révérence’. L’écho de cette phrase est comme brisé. Ravel insistait tellement sur toute cette punctuation!”) “Comme une révérence” in margin on **PerCE** in Perlemuter’s hand

Bars 25–31. **RR** brings out syncopations. Also **CasR**, **FévR**, **PerR**

Bars 45, 47–48. Slurs added by analogy with surrounding bars

Bar 50. **AM**, **E**: RH, tie between d' ’s omitted. Inserted by Ravel on **CE**

Bar 57. **RO**: ‘au Mouvt. (à peine plus lent)’. **RR** observes no change of tempo

Bars 57–60. **AM**: original phrasing throughout each bar corrected to present phrasing

Bars 62–63. **RO**: adds ‘très peu’ to ‘Cédez’

Bar 67. **RO**: *mf*. No change of dynamics in **RR**