

Ravel and Neoclassicism:
Dialogues with the Past in Modernist Contexts

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Abstract

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Maurice Ravel's connection to Impressionism frequently eclipses the intricacy and diversity of his compositional style. This dissertation examines Ravel's relationship with Neoclassicism, highlighting his fusion of classical forms and innovative harmonic creativity. The first chapter explores Ravel's formative years with Les Apaches, a collective of artists who influenced his artistic trajectory. The second chapter investigates Ravel's wartime experiences and the role of Neoclassicism during the interwar period in the Franco-German musical context. The final chapter analyzes *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, illustrating Ravel's use of Neoclassical elements to address personal and national themes in the post-World War I era. This dissertation contends that Ravel's Neoclassicism was not merely a stylistic adoption but a deeply personal and philosophical stance. His music reveals an unwavering commitment to artistic integrity, striking a balance between reverence for tradition and forward-thinking innovation.

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Introduction

Whenever Maurice Ravel is referenced, individuals invariably associate him with the impressionist movement, showcasing his adeptness in utilizing intricate harmonies and composing with the precision reminiscent of a “Swiss watchmaker.” Throughout the extensive examination of Ravel’s composition over the years, I have come to discern that his true identity, beyond the labels, remains obscured by an aura of mystery and elusiveness, further compounded by certain persistent factors and misconceptions. Conversely, as the ability of interpretation and experience accumulates, the admiration extends music beyond the exquisite timbre and remarkable techniques evident in Ravel’s compositions. I find myself increasingly drawn to the simplicity and coherence of Ravel’s antithetical musical structures, along with the clarity that supports the graceful elegance of the melodic lines.

Should one wish to categorize Ravel’s various compositional periods and classify his compositions, akin to the methodologies employed in historical texts, it becomes evident that Ravel’s oeuvre encompasses a wide array of genres. Ravel’s works exhibit a profound interplay of diverse influences and styles. In “*Shéhérazade*,” one can observe the significant impact of Russian nuances and Rimsky-Korsakov.¹ The delicate arabesque style and bold impressionistic elements in *Jeux d’eau* further showcase his range. Meanwhile, *Miroirs* introduces exotic tone painting with hints of symbolism. The remarkable virtuosity and poetry found in *Gaspard de la Nuit* stand in stark contrast to the controversial waltz style and jewel-like perfection of *Valse nobles et sentimentales*. Additionally, *Le Tombeau de Couperin* embodies a fragile beauty shaped by the

¹ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1895-1901.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968), 35.

ravages of war. Each composition communicates its own complexity, making it unrealistic to categorize Ravel's career solely by time or style. Instead, every piece appears as a unique exploration, influenced by contemporary artistic movements—whether in poetry, painting, or innovative compositional techniques—while authentically reflecting Ravel's emotions at that moment.

Nevertheless, a distinct preference, and indeed a notable dependence on classical or Baroque forms, remains apparent in Ravel's compositions. *Sonatina* and *Jeux d'eau* conform to the classical sonata form, whereas *Valse nobles et sentimentales*, a work inspired by Schubert, along with *La Valse*, ultimately demonstrated the extremes of waltz composition. *Le Tombeau de Couperin* serves as a celebration of the Baroque dance suite style within the French tradition. This characteristic has elicited numerous critiques. On the one hand, one might argue that a positive aspect is his dedication to blending classicism with his innovative style and creativity;² on the other hand, an opposing viewpoint may label him as regressive, unpatriotic, or even accuse him of plagiarism. Regardless, this characteristic has prompted critics and analysts to link Ravel with Neoclassicism in both a favorable and unfavorable light.

Initially, I perceived Neoclassicism as a term analogous to Impressionism, signifying a distinct musical style associated with a specific era in Ravel's compositional career. As research advances, it becomes evident that Neoclassicism represents merely a minor aspect of musical evolution in the 20th century. More significantly, it influenced the musical landscape of the early 20th century, shaped by the capricious nature of political dynamics. Furthermore, during actual historical events, Ravel was indeed engaged in the war, whether he participated directly in combat with firearms on behalf of his nation without reservation or found himself unwittingly entangled in the geopolitical

² Peter Kaminsky, "Ravel's Approach to Formal Process: Comparisons and Contexts." in *Unmasking Ravel, New perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer; University of Rochester Press), 86.

movement of xenophobia within the French music community. At one point, the youthful Ravel ardently aspired to embrace the concept of “art for art’s sake.”³ His selection of form underscores this notion; irrespective of whether it originates from Germany, Russia, or his native land, all choices serve merely to facilitate artistic exploration.

Fortunately, Ravel has consistently upheld this principle and his original intention, whether addressing the five failures encountered at the Prix de Rome awards⁴ or the battle with Society in promoting equitable performance and fostering a fair public perception for contemporary, innovative young composers. Moreover, the highly controversial composition *Le Tombeau*, together with its post-war contextualization, has even been referred to as “the tomb” of Ravel’s career.⁵

The primary objective of this dissertation is to examine the relationship between Ravel and neoclassicism. This investigation highlights the confluence of innovative (Neo) and classical (classicism) elements during the early twentieth century, culminating in the 1920s, a period characterized as the post-war era following World War I. The discussion is divided into three main chapters: the Apaches’ period, the interwar and post-war period, and the analytical part related to *Le Tombeau de Couperin*.

The initial chapter will concentrate on the period spanning approximately from 1903 to 1914, during which Ravel and the “Apaches” engaged in their most vigorous interactions. The formation and activities of the “Apaches” gatherings serve as a vivid testament to the diverse influences and steadfast support extended to Ravel. Notable figures from various disciplines, including Paul

³ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1895-1901.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968), 45.

⁴ Arbie Orenstein, “MUSIC: Maurice Ravel.” *The American Scholar*, Winter 1995, Vol.64, No.1 (The Phi Beta Kappa Society), 93-94.

⁵ Scott Messing, “Polemic as History: The Case of Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991), 488-489.

Sordes—the original host; Fargue—the symbolic poet; Calvocoressi and Vuillermoz—two commendatory critics, alongside Richardo Viñes—the virtuosic pianist and esteemed friend—constitute significant individuals who shaped Ravel’s compositions and influenced his future artistic trajectory. In return, Ravel composed the *Miroirs* as tributes to six members of the Apaches, relating each movement to specific subjects or images, and hinting at the influence of symbolism and Impressionism. In the same historical context, Claude Debussy, recognized as a pioneer who “established Impressionism,” serves as a model admired by Maurice Ravel, and a “competitor” accused of imitating, has a story to tell.⁶ As the initial idol of the Apaches, Debussy had a significant impact on both Ravel and the Apaches, the impact of which is undeniable. The story includes a comparative analysis of Ravel and Debussy’s compositional styles and techniques alongside the notable Lalo affair. Finally, Stravinsky, recognized as the “first person” of neoclassicism in both ancient and modern times, intersected with the Apaches from 1910 to 1914, highlighting his influence on Ravel’s later years and their differences as individuals connected to the neoclassical movement.

The second chapter unfolds continuously with the beginning of World War I, followed by the details of Ravel’s enlistment in the army, which serves as the background to interwar Neoclassicism. The central topic of Chapter Two revolves around neoclassicism, discussing and analyzing the origin, references, and meanings of the term. It relates to the intense German-French political situation and Wagnerian influence, with neoclassicism carrying pejorative implications during the interwar period. “Anti-German” and “root-seeking of the French” are the two essential components related to Neoclassicism during the interwar period. Meanwhile, Ravel received an invitation to participate in the organization “Ligue pour la défense de la musique française;”

⁶ Paul Roberts, “Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs*.” *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 48-49.

however, he chose to adhere to his convictions. Furthermore, as the war concluded and the premiere of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* approached, the significance and function of neoclassicism had subtly transformed, and Ravel had embraced a new wave of critical storms. Through a series of discussions and controlled analysis, Ravel preserved his individualism, steadfastly adhered to French traditions, and demonstrated a genuine openness and support for all artistic forms, including those from Austria, which defines Ravel's true Neoclassicism.

We shall now proceed to the third chapter. Utilizing *Le Tombeau de Couperin* as our musical case study, we will systematically analyze Ravel's neoclassical characteristics, as previously identified in the second chapter. Commencing with an illustration of the "homage" from the *Tombeau*, the analysis will be delineated into sections addressing the aspects of "form and structure," "harmony and modality," "chromaticism and semitone," and "clarity and simplicity" (in melody).

Throughout his career, critics and contemporaries occasionally lauded Maurice Ravel as a promising young talent; conversely, at times, they collectively opposed his recognition as a favored figure in the musical landscape. Ravel rarely responds to contrasting sounds and often values periods of reflection. Throughout this exploration, my understanding of Ravel's neoclassicism encompasses not only his compositional style, which preserves the innovative essence and roots in French traditions, but also his artistic ethos, which adheres to the original intent and principles, subsequently embracing all manifestations of pure art.

Chapter 1. Early Impact: Apaches, Debussy, Stravinsky, and Ravel

“This part of Paris was ‘exciting, fraternal, not expensive, not nasty, not political, and one where you could get a pat on the back at any time.’ Here also, ‘it seemed that everything was still to be done, to be invented, and everyone knew that, and that was in the air.’”⁷

---- Fargue

Part 1 Les Apaches

The scene Stuckenschmidt depicted in his chapter resembles a cinematic moment of the birth of Les Apaches: On another concert night, a group of youthful and artistic men with “intellectual gypsies looking,” sauntered down the rue de Rome. “Beware the Apaches!”⁸ shouted a news vendor upon encountering their eccentric appearance. The tag “Apaches,” much like a gift, uplifted and united the spirits of the young artists, extending their musical revelries at Paul Sordes’ well into the night.

Debussy’s opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* fueled their mutual admiration and spurred innovation, leading to the formation of the Apaches to “further the success of such works.”⁹ During their weekly meetings, they began sharing and reading their latest creative pieces with one another in

⁷ Jann Pasler, “Stravinsky and the Apaches,” *The Musical Times* 123, no. 1672 (1982), 403.

⁸ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1901-1905.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968). 55.

⁹ Victor Seroff, *Ravel* (New York, 1953), 169.

what Fargue and Viñes called “the friendliest atmosphere that can be imagined.”¹⁰ Paul Sordes, a painter who was enthusiastic about music, lived in a studio on the fourth floor of the house at 39 rue Dulong. As the host of the famous Apaches’ gathering, he welcomed friends every Saturday at midnight or even later, and it lasted until morning. Considering the constant difficulties in Sordes’ apartment/studio, the gathering moved to a garden cottage, an isolated house in Auteuil that Maurice Delage rented.¹¹ From that point onward, the Apaches would hold their meetings in that location, often staying there through the night.

Key Members of the Apaches

Léon-Paul Fargue, a pensive newspaper columnist, drew inspiration from the lyrics and pulse in the works of Symbolist poets Verlaine and Mallarmé. Paul Robert suggests that Fargue’s early poetry serves as a bridge between the nineteenth century and modernism, linking Symbolism with the Surrealist movement.¹² Fargue had a remarkable talent for capturing subtle tragedies and more prominent comedies that emerged in the hidden corners of cities, weaving together exquisite small narratives about them. In 1902, at Sordes’ studio, he met Ravel, recalling, “*We would gather there once or twice a week, and each of us would read or play what we had just written or composed, in the friendliest atmosphere you could imagine.*”¹³ Emile Vuillermoz noted the “imaginative influence exerted on Ravel,” highlighting the significant impact Fargue had on Ravel’s early creative development in music composition.

¹⁰ Jann Pasler, “Stravinsky and the Apaches,” *The Musical Times* 123, no. 1672 (1982), 403.

¹¹ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1901-1905.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968). 56.

¹² Paul Roberts, *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 49.

¹³ *Ibid*, 48.

Maurice Delage's journey began in 1903. As one of the early members of the musical community, he was a remarkably talented composer and writer who later became a close friend of Ravel. Born in Paris just four years after Ravel, he was among Ravel's few primary students, although Ravel imparted limited teachings to him. Delage cultivated a deep friendship with Stravinsky during the pre-war period, bonded by their shared fascination with exotic themes.¹⁴ His compositions often reflect East-Asiatic exoticism, a trend that captivated many French artists of his time. Notable works like "Quatre poèmes hindous" and "Sept Hai-Kais" showcase a vibrant mix of Indian and Japanese inspirations.¹⁵ Furthermore, Delage created an orchestral piece that drew influence from Indian themes as well.

Two young critics, who serve as both witnesses and advocates of Ravel's musical development, merit acknowledgment as well. Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi, who was of Greek descent and wrote in French, astutely identified the flaws in the critics' arguments and resolutely backed Ravel in his responses to Lalo concerning the allegations of "Plagiarism of Debussy." According to Calvocoressi, he and Ravel shared an enthusiasm for Russian work studies during their time at the Paris Conservatoire.¹⁶ Calvocoressi was also the one who first brought Ravel to the gathering. Another notable figure among the committed avant-gardists was Émile Vuillermoz, a versatile musician and musicologist with an extensive education. Born in Lyons in 1878, he studied under Fauré at the Conservatory but eventually focused solely on music criticism and writing. He once strongly defended Ravel's *Histoires Naturelles* regarding the words "Café music plus ninths" spread by Schola Cantorum.¹⁷ Vuillermoz highlighted the modern trends that Ravel

¹⁴ Jann Pasler, "Stravinsky and the Apaches." *The Musical Times* 123, no. 1672 (1982), 405.

¹⁵ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, "1901-1905." *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968). 49.

¹⁶ M. D. Calvocoressi and Maurice Ravel, "Ravel's Letters to Calvocoressi: With Notes and Comments," *The Musical Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1941), 1-2.

¹⁷ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, "1905-1908." *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968). 95.

simplified his language based on Verlaine's intention, avoiding ornate diction, and the songs reflect the dynamic aesthetics of motion pictures. One could argue whether this relates to the concept of "Symbolism." Although Ravel has claimed that he does not intend to convey symbolism, we can at least consider that this music is, to a significant degree, subject to interpretation.¹⁸ Additionally, Vuillermoz wrote biographies about notable composers such as Mendelssohn, Debussy, and Fauré, as well as a book that delves into Frédéric Chopin's romantic life during his later career.

Ricardo Viñes, a talented pianist, was another critical figure among the early Apaches whom Ravel recognized for his virtuosity. In 1889, Ravel embarked on his educational journey at the Paris Conservatory. The remarkable journal of his friend Ricardo Viñes provides the best insight into Ravel's private life during his student years. They were both involved in piano classes at the Paris Conservatory. Viñes was advanced, but Ravel preferred unexplored music over performance interpretation. Later, in 1897, Ravel achieved his goal by enrolling in André Gedalge's and Faure's advanced composition classes.¹⁹ In his autobiographical sketches, Ravel confirmed that the "most valuable elements of his handiwork" were greatly influenced by the counterpoint and fugue class taught by André Gedalge.²⁰ In the same class, Ravel became acquainted with other notable future composers and friends, including Florent Schmitt and Charles Koechlin, the latter of whom became associated with the "Apaches." Although Ravel and Viñes pursued different paths and focused on distinct fields, they explored a wide range of four-hand piano music—original compositions and transcriptions. "Experimenting with new chords,"²¹ according to Orenstein's

¹⁸ Deborah Mawer, "Musical Objects and Machines," *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49.

¹⁹ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, "1895-1901." *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968). 34.

²⁰ Stephen Zank, "Opposed Sound: Ravel and Counterpoint." *Irony and Sound, the Music of Maurice Ravel* (Boydell & Brewer; University of Rochester Press), 86-88.

²¹ Arbie Orenstein, "MUSIC: Maurice Ravel," *The American Scholar* 64, no. 1 (1995), 91-102.

depiction, the young pianists immersed themselves in the piano all day, refining the two-piano adaptation of “Habanera.” Similarly, Calvocoressi reminisced about “the reading of scores”²² conducted by Ravel and Viñes during their gatherings. Furthermore, Viñes premiered many works from both Ravel’s and Debussy’s piano repertoires.

More members of the Apache circle, such as Vlado Perlemuter and H el ene Jourdan-Morhange, are music analysts who detailed their interpretations of Ravel’s compositions in their writings. *Jeux d’eau* (1901) is one of the examples that garnered immense admiration from the Sordes group. Despite highlighting Ravel’s goal for *Jeux d’eau* to avoid sentimentality and rushing through melodies, notably, the composer’s innovative rendition is related to the pedal markings, which suggest functions as precise as the dynamics. Viñes provides more detailed instructions, stating that pedaling is connected to the upper voice, which produces a vibrating effect in the air rather than focusing solely on the notes’ clarity.²³

Such detailed records vividly illustrate the passionate discussions and bursts of inspiration shared among a diverse group of talented young individuals in Sordes’ studio or the latter garden cottage. With a sense of friendly camaraderie prevailing, everyone shared a typical enthusiasm for innovative, challenging, and often unconventional creative endeavors. On the other hand, combining such records with Ravel’s sketches illustrates his early compositional style, which begins with the classical sonata form but is not limited to traditional tonal frameworks. Furthermore, he incorporates innovative pedaling techniques to explore imaginative effects, which are reminiscent of those found in “Impressionist” paintings. Consequently, Ravel quickly emerged as a key figure within this close-knit group. By that time, as Stuckenschmidt pictures, he had

²² Paul Roberts, “Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs*.” *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 60.

²³ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1901-1905.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968). 51.

moved beyond the label of a talented novice, a status he had initially acquired in “*the drawing room of Madame de Saint-Marceaux*.”²⁴

The artists, analysts, and critics mentioned above are only a small part of the “Apaches” members. Countless artists sought the group out or belonged to it. Among them were Manuel de Falla, Igor Stravinsky, Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht, Tristan Klingsor, the poet Lucien Garban, who later became Ravel’s publisher at Durand, and the young Abbé Léonce Petit, whose friendship with Ravel did not hinder the composer from remaining a freethinker all his life.

Part 2: *Miroirs* and the Apaches

The primary reason for referencing *Miroirs* is not for analytical purposes, but rather to explore the influence of Apache members and “Symbolist” aspects within Ravel’s early Apache period. While it might be simpler to associate this with the “Impressionist” period, it’s critical to note that Ravel’s work continues evolving. Meanwhile, examining the early connections between (neo)classicism and the “Apaches” forms the basis of this exploration.

*“Ravel arrives one evening with a thin roll of paper, somewhat crumpled from his walk. He carefully unfolds it, smoothing the creases carefully with a gentle hand, and plays, in the calm of the night, ‘Oiseaux tristes.’” Maurice Delage remembered, “It is the first of the five piano pieces which will become *Miroirs*, and which he will*

²⁴ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1901-1905.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968), 50.

continue to bring us slowly, one by one, at intervals directly in proportion to their number of pages.”²⁵

***Miroirs*’ Composition Background**

The aforementioned paragraph, similar to Viñes’ diary, documents the event as having transpired on Tuesday evening, October 11, 1904, detailing the moment when the Apaches observed the unfolding of *Miroirs* with great interest. In fact, the *Miroirs* is composed of members of the Apaches. The movement of “Noctuelles” is dedicated to Fargue, who remained one of Ravel’s closest friends throughout his life and was considered by Vuillermoz to “*have his place in Ravel’s early compositional development.*”²⁶ Though there is no solid proof, Paul Roberts proposed the reference to Vuillermoz, stating, “*Not only was ‘Noctuelles’ dedicated to Fargue, but it also appears to have been inspired by the memory of one of his poems.*”²⁷ The poem that Vuillermoz refers to could be “Nocturnes” (dedicated to Florent Schmitt), as noted on the scrap paper containing early drafts dedicated to the Apaches, which were included by Ravel. The same applies to the remaining movements. The illustration vividly demonstrates Ravel and Fargue’s profound impact and admiration for each other’s artistry. The “Oiseaux Tristes” is deliberately dedicated to Richardo Viñes, as Ravel suggested to Calvocorassi, “*It was fun to inscribe to a pianist a piece that was not all ‘pianistic.’*”²⁸ Additionally, “Une barque sur l’océan” is dedicated to Paul Sordes, “Alborada del gracioso” to Calvocorassi, and “La vallée des cloches” to Maurice Delage.

²⁵ Paul Roberts, “Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs*.” *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 43.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 48.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 49-50.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 60.

In reflecting on the completion of *Jeux d'eau*, Ravel recognized an intrinsic desire to progress in his compositional endeavors. This aspiration aligns with Peter Kaminsky's concept of "compositional promise,"²⁹ which addresses the specific challenges encountered in the exploration and resolution of diverse compositional processes.³⁰ In Kaminsky's analysis, it is posited that the prevailing consensus among the majority—that Ravel employed traditional forms exclusively as a means to explore innovative harmonies or melodies (from Rosen's understanding)³¹—does not fully encapsulate the complexity of his approach. The form itself plays a significant role in innovation and experimental endeavors. Ravel serves as an architect of the musical framework (rule-maker), consciously selecting forms, styles, harmonies, or melodic lines that he seeks to interrogate, subsequently embarking on the creation of works that align with these chosen parameters. It is within this framework that Ravel embarked on his advanced journey of composing *Miroirs*, an ambitious assemblage of five pieces designed to investigate a broader spectrum of pianistic possibilities while simultaneously laying the groundwork for a novel harmonic language. Significantly, as Ravel articulates in his autobiography, each movement draws inspiration from a particular image or musical scene. "*The first written and, in my view, the most typical in the collection, is the second piece in the album, 'Oiseaux Tristes.' These are birds lost in the mazes of an extremely dark forest during the hottest hours of summer.*"³² Even a literal interpretation of the title for each movement reveals that they pertain to specific subjects. The titles of each movement within *Miroirs* are linked to specific descriptions, which Stuchenschmidt characterizes as

²⁹ Peter Kaminsky, "Composer's Words, Theorists' Analyses, Ravel's Music." College Music Symposium, 2003, Vol. 43(College Music Society), 161.

³⁰ Peter Kaminsky, "Ravel's Approach to Formal Process: Comparisons and Contexts," in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, New Perspectives on the Music (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 85.

³¹ *Ibid*, 85-86.

³² H.H. Stuchenschmidt, "1905-1908." *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968). 82.

“program music.”³³ This bears a resemblance to programmatic music from the Romantic era, which is predominantly associated with composers such as Schumann and Liszt.

In “An Autobiographical Sketch,” it is highlighted that the *Miroirs* held a unique and meaningful role for Ravel. Mawer suggested that the title itself implies a connection to Symbolist themes, suggesting an interplay between sound and visual elements, a relationship between perceived reality and its reflection, and the distinction between the external world and internal experiences.³⁴

With respect to symbolism, while it may not constitute the primary focus of our discourse, Ravel asserted that he adopted a path contrary to Debussy’s quest for symbolism³⁵, both of whom expressed disdain for such terminology.³⁶ Nevertheless, Ravel also emphasized in his writing that a musician’s role is “to thrill at the linking of two chords, just as one would at the linking of two colors. In all the arts, the subject is of primary importance, for everything flows from it.”³⁷ Therefore, it remains worthwhile to chart his exploration of musical objects that carry associated, possibly symbolic, meanings.

Influence in the aspect of Symbolism

During the period known as “la Belle Époque” (1885-1914), artists began to investigate new ways of understanding space and time, particularly the concept of simultaneity. Symbolist poetry

³³ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1901-1905.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968), 82.

³⁴ Deborah Mawer, “Musical Objects and Machines,” *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 50.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 49.

³⁶ Paul Roberts, “Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs*.” *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 44.

³⁷ Deborah Mawer, “Musical Objects and Machines,” *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49.

flourished by incorporating diverse imagery and ambiguities, highlighting the sound of words in addition to their meanings.³⁸

The early twentieth century stands out as a remarkable era, boasting an array of literary figures that extends beyond Baudelaire to include Mallarmé, Verlaine, Proust, and Apollinaire. In the realm of visual arts, notable painters such as Sonia Delaunay, Picasso, and Braque emerged. However, the most significant influence on Ravel came from the mid-nineteenth-century American author Edgar Allan Poe. In a lecture later in the United States in 1928,³⁹ “*The aesthetic of Edgar Allan Poe, your great American,*” Ravel said, “*has been of singular importance to me.*” He was particularly struck by an essay by Poe titled “Philosophy of Composition,” published in 1845 and later translated into French by the poet Baudelaire, who was another significant influence and embodied the quintessential French dandy. In this essay, Poe details the methods he used to create his most famous poem, *The Raven*, and how the emotional effect must be achieved by meticulous planning:

*“No one point in its composition is referable either to accident or to intuition ... the work proceeded step by step, to its completion, with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.”*⁴⁰

Despite the notable figures mentioned, even among the Apaches closest to Ravel, Fargue stands out as a quintessential symbolic poet. Additionally, their gatherings bring together

³⁸ Deborah Mawer, “Musical Objects and Machines,” *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 50.

³⁹ Robert Philip, “Maurice Ravel: (1875–1937),” in *The Classical Music Lover’s Companion to Orchestral Music* (Yale University Press, 2018), 614.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 614.

contemporary artists from diverse fields, enabling them to share their diverse works. The inspiration or influence drawn from the artwork of Impressionism, Symbolism, or even Cubism potentially produces a chemical reaction in Ravel's composition.

Influence of the “Cubism” aspect

As Mawer concludes, “Cubism” defines engaging with fragmented time and space to form a deceptive solid object. Mawer utilized the movement of “La Vallée des cloches,” nuance repeats at different speeds, reminiscent of bells;⁴¹ simultaneously, the structure emphasizes geometric planes. The components of “reminiscent of bells” and repetition in time and space strongly resonate with another well-known movement, “Le Gibet” from *Gaspard de la Nuit* (see compared musical excerpts). In the same manner that Ravel respects and aligns with Poe's creative principles and processes, Ravel's approach was characterized by meticulous attention to detail, rather than a primary focus on establishing a new faction or musical genre, but rather on establishing a connection between sound and image or poem— “an allusion to the raw material of the external world that informs creative art.”⁴²

⁴¹ Deborah Mawer, “Musical Objects and Machines,” *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 50-51.

⁴² Paul Roberts, “Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs*.” *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 44.

Music Excerpt: *Miroirs*, "La Vallée des cloches" (measure 1-7)

5. La Vallée des cloches

Tres lent. $\text{♩} = 50^{\wedge}$ *très doux et sans accentuation*

m.d. *pp*

m.g. *pp*

p un peu marqué

mf

pp

39078

Music Excerpts: *Gaspard de la Nuit*, “Le Gibet” (measure 28-33)

The image displays two systems of a musical score for the piece "Le Gibet" from Maurice Ravel's "Gaspard de la Nuit". The first system, starting at measure 22, features a treble clef with a melodic line and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The tempo and dynamics are marked as *pp un peu en dehors, mais sans expression*. A *m. d.* (mezzo-dolce) marking is present in the piano part. The second system, starting at measure 31, continues the melodic and piano parts, with a *m. g.* (mezzo-giove) marking in the piano part. The score is written in 4/4 time and includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

As we delve into the discussion of Symbolism, Cubism, and Impressionism, Barbara’s viewpoint suggests that Roland-Manuel firmly positions *Miroirs* within the domains of both styles. However, he also emphasizes that Ravel’s changing musical approach goes beyond the traditional boundaries of Symbolism in terms of harmony, counterpoint, and form.⁴³

Roland-Manuel, a student of Ravel, was still considered to be on the outskirts of Les Apaches when he started writing Ravel’s biography in 1913. However, Haine has pointed out that he was apparently a latecomer to Ravel’s inner artistic circle.⁴⁴ The crucial element of the teacher-student relationship suggests that many of Roland-Manuel’s memorable quotes, often linked with Ravel,

⁴³ Barbara L. Kelly, “Re-Presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture,” in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, *New Perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 42.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 42.

appear to capture the assurance of a student recalling the wise guidance of their teacher. Roland-Manuel's impact on Ravel's legacy is substantial and deserves attention. It underscores the crucial role of criticism and biography in shaping composers' perceptions and connections to their art. The next section of "Debussy and Ravel" will explore further details.

Among Ravel's various remarks about "Impressionism" and "Symbolism" (and possibly "Cubism"), his stance seems to be one of reluctance:

*"The title Miroirs, five piano pieces composed in 1905, has authorized my critics to consider this collection as being among those works that belong to the Impressionist movement. I do not contradict this at all, if one understands the terms by analogy. A rather fleeting analogy, moreover, since Impressionism does not seem to have any precise meaning outside the domain of painting. In any case, the word Mirror should not lead one to assume that I wish to affirm a subjectivist theory of art."*⁴⁵

It appears that Ravel acknowledged, albeit somewhat reluctantly, that *Miroirs* is classified as an Impressionist work (or even under the category of Symbolistic works), while also noting that Impressionism is merely a professional designation employed within the realm of painting. Bluntly, Roberts then added that Impressionism has a clear meaning in the field of music: "denoting pieces that set out to convey an impression of a given image signaled in a title or in a tag of poetry."⁴⁶ This inevitably prompts a reflection: Is it possible that Ravel is unaware of the meaning of

⁴⁵ Paul Roberts, "Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs*." *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 43.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 43-44.

impressionism within the realm of music? More importantly, Ravel appears to desire to underscore his position of not affirming a subjectivist theory of art.

Ravel is not the only composer who rejected the label “Impressionist.” Similarly, Debussy disliked the term, calling it “*Impressionism, symbolism ... useful terms of abuse.*”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, critics and the musical community sought to categorize them with these terms. Unlike language, which has stable references, music operates with precise functionality but lacks a fixed meaning.⁴⁸ Similarly, the linkage between Ravel and the Symbolism/Cubism that emerges is shaped by cultural and temporal contexts, leading to varied interpretations based on the experiences of the composer, performer, and listener. Notably, the quote from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* is frequently highlighted in relation to Ravel: “*The eye sees not itself / But by reflection, by some other things.*”⁴⁹ Upon examining Ravel’s “Autobiographic Sketches” of “Oiseaux Tristes,” one may interpret this work as an elevated form of programmed music. It encompasses not merely the creation of a composition that aligns with a specific style or scene corresponding to the title but also endeavors to elicit emotions and reactions that remain imperceptible to the naked eye. In order to interpret or comprehend such music or processes, it is essential to consider the diverse impacts and musical instruments involved, or alternatively, to intuitively experience the flow and motifs from a profound emotional perspective. Ravel was notably impervious to public opinion; instead, he concentrated on preserving our original aspirations while exploring additional possibilities, all the while adapting to contemporary trends.

⁴⁷ Paul Roberts, “Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs.*” *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 44.

⁴⁸ Deborah Mawer, “Musical Objects and Machines,” *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49-50.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 50.

Part 3: Debussy and Ravel

Ravel and his group, the Apaches, were passionate supporters of Debussy, who was a significant figure in the avant-garde music scene by 1902. During the premiere of Debussy's opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the Apaches attended every performance of its twenty-nine-show run.⁵⁰ The name "Apaches" was coined during one of these nights. Ravel and Debussy likely crossed paths in the close-knit musical community of the Conservatoire and local venues. During the late 1890s, Maurice Ravel showed a keen interest in Claude Debussy's compositions. In collaboration with the pianist Ricardo Viñes, it is conceivable that the pianists engaged in fervent sight-reading of both the original and revised piano works from Debussy amidst a gathering of fellow artists, poets, and critics associated with the group.⁵¹ It is worth mentioning that Ricardo Viñes, in the following decade, was set to give the first performances of nearly all the new piano works from both composers, serving as the conduit through which they engaged in artistic rivalry.

It is indisputable that at the dawn of the century, Debussy encountered a pivotal moment in his creative endeavors, becoming increasingly drawn to the compositions and artistic styles emerging from the new generation of composers. Debussy once asked to borrow the music score of Ravel's two-piano work "Sites auriculaires" in 1898; later in the following year, Ravel was occasionally invited to Debussy's place to hear the unperformed *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Then, in 1901, Debussy offered permission for Ravel to rearrange Debussy's orchestral work, *Nocturnes*, for two pianos; and in 1902, Debussy additionally gifted a copy of *Pour le piano*, with the gracious

⁵⁰ Paul Roberts, "Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs*." *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 37.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 38.

inscription, “*To Maurice Ravel, in friendship, and in homage to ‘Jeux d’eau.’*”⁵² From the few surviving letters between the two, we can get a glimpse of their relatively close and harmonious personal relationship in the early days. To date, Debussy and Ravel appear to possess a comparable background and aesthetic preferences in conjunction with the Apaches. As noted by Fargue, “*The list of Ravel’s tastes, and those of his fellow Apaches, read like a list of Debussy’s from his great formative decade of the 1890s.*”⁵³ Regrettably, the period of prosperity was not sustained. Historical circumstances inadvertently positioned the two entities in a contentious competitive dynamic. Critics have gone so far as to accuse Ravel of “plagiarism” in relation to Debussy. In response, Ravel identified himself as an “anti-Debussyist”⁵⁴ while acknowledging Debussy’s significant impact on contemporary French music.

The Music Environment at the Turn of the Century

In discussing the achievements and influence of Debussy and Ravel, one must trace back to the period between approximately 1890 and 1902, during which Ravel was engaged in his musical education, while Debussy had already established his dominance in the realm of “Impressionism.” During that period, Wagner reached the height of his fame, commanding a significant part of the global music scene with his authoritative approach. Casella characterizes this situation as a “profound and lamentable crisis,”⁵⁵ highlighting Wagner’s indelible influence within the theatrical domain. Furthermore, the Wagner phenomenon fosters more radical breakthroughs and mutations concerning the misuse of harmony and chords, in contrast to the liberty of counterpoint,

⁵² Paul Roberts, “Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs.*” *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 38-39.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁴ Barbara L. Kelly and Deborah Mawer, “History and Homage,” *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14.

⁵⁵ Alfredo Casella, “Ravel’s Harmony,” *The Musical Times* 67, no. 996 (1926), 124.

culminating in the result of Schonberg's "atonality." Both Debussy and Ravel distanced themselves from the influences of Wagnerian music. According to the painter, Jacques Emile Blanche's record, Ravel accepted her invitation to make music but with one condition: "should play no Beethoven, no Schumann, no Wagner, or any other Romantic music."⁵⁶ This clearly illustrates Ravel's resolve to withstand any external influences on his artistic preferences. As trained musicians at the Conservatoire, they drew inspiration from a rich musical heritage that spanned a millennium. Furthermore, they were in favor of a more Latin-inspired approach: their stance was firmly against the post-Wagnerian-Franckist movement, which they viewed as fundamentally at odds with their aspirations, given its Germanic and Flemish roots.⁵⁷ In contrast, they embraced a distinctly French clarity in their work. Nonetheless, as Casella recounts, "*no European musician, throughout the period extending from 1880 to 1920, has succeeded in escaping from the great 'harmonic nightmare.'*"⁵⁸ Indeed, the primary objective of composers is to innovate the conventional tonal language while deliberately avoiding the influence of Wagner.

The Influential Relationship between Ravel and Debussy

Let us redirect our attention to the composers Debussy and Ravel. They shared a profound admiration for Mozart and Chopin, actively supported Russian music, and fostered a loyal friendship with Chabrier. Their perspectives regarding Beethoven, Wagner, and d'Indy were remarkably similar.⁵⁹ They had mutual friendships with Falla, Satie, and Stravinsky and felt a strong attraction to the works of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Poe. Still, though Debussy and Ravel

⁵⁶ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, "1895-1901." *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968). 47.

⁵⁷ Alfredo Casella, "Ravel's Harmony," *The Musical Times* 67, no. 996 (1926), 124-125.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 124.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 125.

undoubtedly share the same ancestral spirituality, we must maintain sight of the immediate influences that significantly shaped the ultimate formation of their personalities. Debussy is regarded as having “founded” musical Impressionism and, at the same time, exhausted it.⁶⁰ Ravel is seldom impressionist; Ravel asserted that he pursued a path “opposite to that of Debussy’s ‘symbolism’ and, influenced by Poe, decided to abandon the vagueness and formlessness of the early French impressionists in favor of a return to classic standards.”⁶¹ Ravel argued that he inherited the essence of Saint-Saëns and Fauré, staying true to Classical form while revitalizing and refreshing their ideas. The gap that separates these two composers is remarkably thought-provoking.⁶²

Morris highlighted that while Debussy became lost in the haze of Impressionism—fully engaging whole-tone scales or ninth and eleventh chords—Ravel was spared from this fate due to his intellect, which prioritized the sense of “formality and well-defined melodic lines.”⁶³ Morris cites *Miroirs* as an exemplar of “frankly Impressionism.” Furthermore, in *Jeux d’eau*, Ravel sustains a distinct vision of his approach to “Impressionism” through unique structural patterns—“eddy in strict obedience to the laws of the sonata.”⁶⁴ Undoubtedly, the classical form holds a significant and priority position in Ravel’s compositional process. A quote from Jankélévitch encapsulates the notion of the “aesthetic of challenge.”⁶⁵ This implies that Ravel’s compositions present self-imposed challenges by complicating the rules of his artistic framework, paralleling Nietzsche’s idea of “dancing in chains.” From a formal standpoint, one could interpret this as Rosen does: Ravel responds to traditional tonal, baroque, and classical forms to establish the

⁶⁰ Alfredo Casella, “Ravel’s Harmony,” *The Musical Times* 67, no. 996 (1926), 125.

⁶¹ Arbie Orenstein, “MUSIC: Maurice Ravel,” *The American Scholar* 64, no. 1 (1995), 100-101.

⁶² Alfredo Casella, “Ravel’s Harmony,” *The Musical Times* 67, no. 996 (1926), 125.

⁶³ R. O. Morris, “Maurice Ravel,” *Music & Letters* 2, no. 3 (1921), 275.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 276.

⁶⁵ Peter Kaminsky, “Ravel’s Approach to Formal Process: Comparisons and Contexts.” *Unmasking Ravel* (Boydell & Kaminsky), 86.

essential foundations for his distinctive contributions to harmony, orchestration, and other musical elements.

Orenstein posited that both composers exerted an influence upon one another to a certain extent. Nevertheless, Debussy and Ravel are the artists who have already cultivated their unique identities; external influences assume diminished significance. In this context, the term “influence” does not refer to the effects of further development on specific components or a direct progression along a path. Instead, it pertains more to the impact of musical and artistic emotions and aesthetics, gaining inspiration. Despite this, the music produced is notably different from Debussy’s style. Orenstein observed that Ravel’s early compositions, such as *Shéhérazade* and the *Miroirs*, embody the essence of Debussy. Conversely, Debussy’s later piano work, *Estampes*, suggests the influence of Ravel. Orenstein proposed that Ravel’s impact shaped the more apparent outlines and structures in Debussy’s later pieces. Additionally, Debussy’s advocacy for a thinner, less cluttered approach to art was embraced by Ravel and many in the postwar generation.⁶⁶

Different Harmonic Languages Apply in Debussy and Ravel

In discussing the influence of Debussy on Ravel, the utilization of harmonic language emerges as another central question among critics and analysts. The major ninth, a chord at a specific degree, distinguished Romanticism from the 18th century in terms of innovations in harmonic language. It was considered, to some extent, to have reached its zenith in the development of Debussy’s works. The 19th century witnessed the expansion of the major ninth in the works of Wagner and Debussy, as well as the early exploration of the eleventh harmonic, which can be traced back to Mozart and is rooted in natural resonance. In comparison, the use of the eleventh new chord is

⁶⁶ Arbie Orenstein, “MUSIC: Maurice Ravel.” *The American Scholar* 64, no. 1 (1995), 101.

more prevalent in the works of Ravel, particularly in compositions such as the *String Quartet*, while it is not prominently featured in the works of Debussy.⁶⁷ Additionally, Ravel's use of appoggiatura and its resolution are significant. In early critics, Ravel's music was disparagingly called "the worship of the note." Ravel, eager to break free from Wagner's influence and develop a unique musical language, felt compelled to adopt and consistently use harmonic combinations that his predecessors had rarely ventured into. Such radical chords' experiment often leads to the issue of unresolved appoggiaturas in relation to Ravel, which Casella exemplified that the unsolved appoggiatura in most cases is resolved upon other appoggiatura. The appoggiatura chord (G Sharp – B – D - G natural) that Ravel often used and varied – in *Daphnis* may date back to the 18th century. Another chord (G–C–E flat–F sharp–A flat) in, which Casella notes Ravel had a particular fondness for, is clearly borrowed from Chopin.⁶⁸

Amongst other of Ravel's harmonic artifices, we are constantly finding that the incorporation of Greek scales like Dorian and Phrygian, as Casella discussed, approaches Debussy. However, Ravel's essential difference from Debussy's modality is that Ravel merely applied the Hexatonic scale (whole-tone scale) in his own writing. Furthermore, Ravel innovatively employs various modal scales as thematic elements and utilizes them in a contrapuntal fugue context in the "Menuet" of *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. Casella examines the compositions from *Jeux d'eau* (1901) to *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1917), noting a tendency towards less overburdened harmony that combines more simplified melodic lines.⁶⁹ Ultimately, Ravel's dissonance invariably constitutes a signature characteristic of his compositions. It goes beyond simply combining sounds lacking harmonic ties; instead, it involves the careful chromatic alteration of one or more notes within a

⁶⁷ Alfredo Casella, "Ravel's Harmony." *The Musical Times* 67, no. 996 (1926), 125.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 126.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 127.

related chord (sharing common notes) or the substitution of adjacent notes. Ravel's harmonic style exemplifies a lush and decorative variation of esteemed traditions, showcasing his exceptional and independent artistry.

Distinguished Personality in Debussy and Ravel

Furthermore, despite discussing the compositional style and characteristics, the personalities and habits of the two composers are also readily distinguishable. Ernest Ansermet, a conductor, reminisced about a meeting with Debussy related to the *Nocturnes*. He expressed his uncertainties regarding the precision of various corrections and sought to verify these matters directly with Debussy. "I am no longer sure." Debussy replied, "They are all possibilities good. Take this score and use those which seem good to you."⁷⁰ It is evident that Debussy afforded artists considerable freedom and latitude to interpret his compositions, in contrast to Ravel's meticulously constructed scores, which required the interpreter to reproduce the composer's intentions with complete fidelity. In a broader context, the creative dispositions of Debussy and Ravel exhibited significant divergence. Debussy's prolific output was marked by an exuberant and unrestrained essence, paving new paths in musical exploration. On the other hand, Ravel's more concise oeuvre revealed a deep emotional restraint grounded in tradition yet showcased an unparalleled technical mastery of his artistry.

"Plagiarism" Affairs

Despite the limited discussion and analysis, it is now apparent that the personalities and compositional approaches of both musicians are fundamentally divergent and as distinct as those

⁷⁰ Arbie Orenstein, "MUSIC: Maurice Ravel." *The American Scholar* 64, no. 1 (1995), 101.

of Schumann and Mendelssohn. However, public critics consistently strive to frame the two in opposing and competitive contexts. The most prominent example of this is the Lalo affair.

After the premiere of *Miroirs*, the critic Pierre Lalo wrote in *Le Temps* in January 1906: “Today one hardly hears any pieces which do not contain the arabesques, passagework and arpeggios discovered by M. Debussy.”⁷¹

*His music bears a strange resemblance to Debussy’s; a resemblance so striking that often, while listening to a piece of his, one feels as if one were hearing a page from ‘Pelleas et Melisande’. Debussy created a new style of writing for the piano, a special style entirely his own [Lalo proceeds to describe this style]. Forthwith all the young composers started imitating this style in their piano music.*⁷²

Apparently, Ravel was stung and replied:

*You dwell upon the fact that Debussy invented a rather special kind of pianistic writing. Now, *Jeux d’eau* was published at the beginning of 1902, when nothing more than Debussy’s three pieces, *Pour le Piano*, were extant. I don’t have to tell you of my deep admiration for these pieces, but from a purely pianistic point of view, they contained nothing new.*⁷³

⁷¹ Paul Roberts, “Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs*.” *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 46.

⁷² M. D. Calvocoressi and Maurice Ravel, “Ravel’s Letters to Calvocoressi: With Notes and Comments,” *The Musical Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1941), 3.

⁷³ Paul Roberts, “Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs*.” *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 46.

Between the lines, one may discern that Ravel maintained profound respect for Debussy and his compositions. What considerably perturbed Ravel was the refusal of several critics, such as Lalo, to acknowledge the existence of his independent musical style and compositional approach autonomously. To refute Lalo or to highlight a clear issue related to format, Ravel emphasized solely the pianistic aspect to reinforce his argument. It is a matter of record that, although Debussy composed a few piano pieces during the 1890s, his complete creative focus on the piano as a solo instrument did not emerge until the descriptively crafted *Estampes* in 1903, succeeded promptly by *Images, Book I* (1903-1905). He was already in his forties by then. As Ravel recognized, *Estampes* was the new start, if any, for Debussy's late work, the magnificent *Pour le Piano* from 1901 is hardly an exception. Paul Roberts articulates a significant interpretation of this matter in Ravel's response to Lalo: In delineating the "new style," Ravel aimed only to assert his autonomy from Debussy, without intending to imply any influence he may have exerted on the senior composer.⁷⁴

Regardless of whether Lalo or comparable critics are instigating controversy to establish a rival trend or to resist an emerging trend in music,⁷⁵ from our historical perspective, the accusation leveled against Ravel that he was merely a "follower of Debussy" is readily refutable. Many years later, in 1931, Ravel maintained a composed and confident stance in repudiating this assertion. '*I was influenced by Debussy, but voluntarily so, I never accepted Debussyan principles; I believe this to be so obvious that no one can doubt it.*'⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Paul Roberts, "Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs*." *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 47.

⁷⁵ M. D. Calvocoressi and Maurice Ravel, "Ravel's Letters to Calvocoressi: With Notes and Comments," *The Musical Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1941), 3-4.

⁷⁶ Paul Roberts, "Reflections: Ravel, Debussy, Leon-Paul Fargue – *Miroirs*." *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 47.

Conclusion

In a revealing recollection of this period, the singer Jane Bathori, another great early interpreter of Ravel, wrote: *“I met Ravel in 1898. He was then a pupil in Fauré’s class, and before speaking to me of what he was writing himself, he talked about Claude Debussy, for whom he professed a deep admiration.”*⁷⁷ Esteemed historical pioneers in the realm of music, such as Claude Debussy and later Maurice Ravel, exhibit both mutual appreciation and areas of contention in their artistic endeavors. Despite external influences, Debussy’s contributions as a predecessor have undeniably inspired and enlightened Ravel’s artistic development.

Part 4: “Apaches” and Stravinsky

*‘Maurice’... and these four words, ‘3 rue de Civry’ - I don't even know how to tell you how dear they are to me! Oh how I feel like coming to see you and spending several autumn days again with you in that little house that silently contains memories of our harmonious life of a year ago. Far from the brouhaha of the ‘Great Season of the Ballets Russes,’ one is calm and intimate there in that little house with its little rooms that I have the greatest desire to see again. Old man! We absolutely must get together! It is impossible not to hear what you have done and how you have been during our separation of around five months.*⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Roger Nichols, “Boyhood and Student Years.” In *Ravel Remembered* (New York & London: W. W. Norton Company, 1987), 11.

⁷⁸ Jann Pasler, “Stravinsky and the Apaches.” *The Musical Times* 123, no. 1672 (1982), 403.

Before World War I, Stravinsky was part of two avant-garde groups in Paris, including the Ballets Russes. Stravinsky's compositions from 1910 to 1914, notably *Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*, have had a significant and lasting impact on contemporary music and dance. These remarkable works contributed to his rise to prominence in France.

*'There are two Paris's, one that gives me fame and money and whose temptations eat away at my vitals almost without my being aware of it. The other is Maurice – '3 rue de Civry' - who, without realizing it, scrapes away all the dirty business of the 'Great Season of the Ballets Russes.'*⁷⁹

Russian Music Influence and the Apaches

In a letter dated October 14, 1912, Stravinsky refers to the Apaches as a little-known “underground” group of French acquaintances. Stravinsky's association with the Apaches makes sense, as this group had a long-standing fascination with Russian music. As mentioned in the previous section, “Apaches and Ravel,” sight-reading Russian music was one of their favorite activities. Ravel gathered as many scores as he could from publisher Belaieff, “Borodin, Musorgsky, Rimsky filled us with enthusiasm,” wrote Klingsor.⁸⁰ The informal performances documented in Viñes' journal had significant implications.⁸¹ Influenced by Balakirev, Ravel composed *Jeux d'eau* and, inspired by Russian folk songs, set Klingsor's cycle of poems to music. The theme from Borodin's Second Symphony became a signal for the group after concerts.⁸²

⁷⁹ Jann Pasler. “Stravinsky and the Apaches.” *The Musical Times* 123, no. 1672 (1982), 403.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 403.

⁸¹ Roger Nichols, “Boyhood and Student Years.” in *Ravel Remembered*, (New York & London: W. W. Norton Company, 1987), 6-7.

⁸² Jann Pasler, “Stravinsky and the Apaches.” *The Musical Times*, 123, no. 1672 (1982), 403-404.

The Friendship and Appreciation between Apaches and Stravinsky

Among the Apaches members, critic Calvocoressi significantly fostered Russian musical interest, corresponding with Balakirev, lecturing, and organizing concerts in Paris. His connection with the Russians was vital for the group. When Diaghilev visited Paris in 1907 for Russian music concerts, Calvocoressi introduced him to friends who advocated for producing Boris Godunov. Diaghilev later commissioned Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* in 1909, encouraging the group to attend Ballets Russes rehearsals. "Come quickly. I am waiting for you to return to the 'Firebird.' And what an orchestra ...!" Ravel expressed high admiration for the *Firebird* in his letter to Delage.⁸³ *Firebird* quickly captured the hearts of the Paris audience, and Stravinsky, as a matter of fact, became the last member of the Apache. This is probably one of the most memorable historical moments for the Apaches, as quoted from Seroff's letter:

*"To the Apaches, Stravinsky first represented a symbol of the new original; he epitomized the contemporary trend in Russian music. His art continued that of the Mighty Five and particularly of Musorgsky. Musorgsky had taken Wagner's place in the eyes of the French, and Stravinsky's attitude towards Wagner was in perfect harmony with that of the Apaches."*⁸⁴

Stravinsky's *Autobiography* highlights the significant role the Apaches played in his life. The atmosphere at 3 rue de Civry greatly influenced his compositions. He notes that after encountering

⁸³ Victor Seroff, *Ravel* (New York, 1953), 161.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 163.

prominent composers such as Debussy and Ravel during the *Firebird* era, the warm reception from the artistic community, particularly from younger artists, motivated him in his future endeavors.⁸⁵

The enthusiasm and backing from the group persisted during Stravinsky's work on *The Rite of Spring* from 1911 to 1913. Letters reveal a deep connection between Stravinsky and his fellow Apaches, with references to informal performances of the piece. Florent Schmitt notably shared an account of a performance for his friends, lauding the composition as a revolutionary reflection of Stravinsky's brilliance, highlighting its freedom, innovation, and energy.⁸⁶

Additionally, correspondence between Stravinsky and Maurice Delage showcases their strong friendship and professional relationship. Stravinsky reminisced fondly about his time with the Apaches and expressed a keen interest in collaborating. Delage was probably the most important of the group in this respect. He was eager to hear about Delage's recent musical projects and, despite his hectic schedule, looked forward to visiting each other to relax and revive their connection. Delage "would seem to have been Stravinsky's closest French friend,"⁸⁷ as Robert Craft suggests. In his *Autobiography*, Stravinsky points out that, during the long weeks of his illness after the première of the Rite:

*Maurice Delage was with me constantly... I was greatly attracted by his buoyant disposition, and I much appreciated the delicacy and penetration of his musical feeling, to which his compositions - alas! far too few in number - bear witness. He was also gifted in many other ways, so that he was very good company.*⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Igor Stravinsky, *Autobiography* (New York, 1936), 30-31.

⁸⁶ Jann Pasler, "Stravinsky and the Apaches." *The Musical Times* 123, no. 1672 (1982), 404.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 405.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 405.

Beyond the ongoing support and the familiar, friendly presence of the Apaches, the group offers Stravinsky an opportunity to engage directly with the contemporary traditions of the French avant-garde. He conveyed his dissatisfaction with the lack of success in his own country and the misunderstandings from other critics. Stravinsky wrote to Schmitt on July 20, 1911: “*I am only playing French music - yours, Debussy, Ravel. It is good for me - you know - a great consolation in our Russian desert.*”⁸⁹ Such startling statements reveal how quickly Stravinsky became involved with the French avant-garde.

Three Japanese Lyrics for the “Apaches”

One notable work that emerged from Stravinsky’s direct connection with the Apaches is the *Three Japanese Lyrics*. In reference to two fundamental concerns of the Apache that underpin this work, his son, Theodore Stravinsky, observes: “A common taste for Japanese art and the similarity of their research into aesthetics at that time formed the substance of the friendship between Ravel and Stravinsky.”⁹⁰ *Three Japanese Lyrics* was dedicated to three composers—Delage, Schmitt, and Ravel—who shared a mutual interest in East-Asian music and the potential of a small chamber ensemble at that moment. The piece premiered on January 14, 1914, alongside Delage’s *Four Hindu Poems* and Ravel’s *Three Mallarmé Poems*, which utilized nearly identical instrumentation and were composed around the same time. Stravinsky submitted his composition to the Société Musicale Indépendente, as mentioned in a letter to Schmitt from the previous year. He actively participated in the premiere concert, volunteering to play the piano and requesting Delage to find a singer for the performance.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Jann Pasler, “Stravinsky and the Apaches.” *The Musical Times* 123, no. 1672 (1982), 406.

⁹⁰ Theodore Stravinsky, *Catherine & Igor Stravinsky: A Family Album* (London, 1973), 4.

⁹¹ Jann Pasler, “Stravinsky and the Apaches.” *The Musical Times* 123, no. 1672 (1982), 407.

Stravinsky, the Representative of Neoclassicism

The narrative does not always lead to a joyful conclusion. The war resulted in the disbandment of the Apaches' gathering. In the 1920s, a growing aesthetic divide emerged, as Ravel and Delage expressed their distaste for Stravinsky's *Mavra*.⁹² In fact, in 1913, Ravel particularly balanced his exploration of the Stravinsky and Schoenberg fields while refining his own compositional style simultaneously. Observations by Nichols suggest that Ravel's preoccupation with his health, along with anxieties about preserving the quality of his works, led to a heightened focus on advancing to the next stage of his creative development.⁹³

On the other hand, Boris de Schloezer was the first to describe Stravinsky as neoclassical, and he did so without any irony or derogatory intent. He asserts that Neoclassicism was one of the prevailing forces of the time, and that the "rigorous form," "simple melody," and "naive style" were what uniquely aligned Stravinsky with the 18th-century master's style.⁹⁴ Taruskin notably highlighted that as early as 1913, Rivière misinterpreted Stravinsky as "a classicist and positivist."⁹⁵ In his review, Taruskin describes Stravinsky as a "byproduct of its literary politicking," noting that he gained interpretation, backing, and insightful admiration from *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, a fiercely nationalistic literary forum established in 1909. This forum not only captivated Stravinsky but also had a profound impact on his work. Rivière, the astute editor of NRF, elevated the composer from being just a musician to a model artist for France.

⁹² Jann Pasler, "Stravinsky and the Apaches." *The Musical Times* 123, no. 1672 (1982), 407.

⁹³ Roger Nichols, "1911–1914: Noble and Sentiment." *Ravel* (Yale University Press), 160.

⁹⁴ Scott Messing, "Polemic as History: The Case of Neoclassicism," *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991), 490.

⁹⁵ Richard Taruskin, "Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology," ed. Scott Messing et al., *19th-Century Music* 16, no. 3 (1993), 292.

One is shaped not only by anxiety but also by admiration, especially when that admiration is both astute and exaggerated. Stravinsky took a retrospective approach to ensure that the accolades continued to flow.

Conclusion

Throughout their years of collaborative effort with similarly minded individuals, a mutual aversion to the Romantic ideals of inspiration and grandiose sentiment emerged. Instead, their focus on craftsmanship and deliberate expression occupies a central position within Stravinsky's aesthetic writings of the 1930s and 1940s. Having had the opportunity to discuss not only Japanese art and the implications of *Pelléas*, but also symbolist poetry and the relationship between poetry and music, gave Stravinsky a wealth of knowledge and understanding about the changes at the time in all the arts. His association with the Apaches laid the foundation for later alliances with other French poets, artists, and musicians.

Chapter 2. French Interwar/Postwar Classics

“For a whole week I have been driving day and night - without lights - on unbelievable roads, often with a load double what my truck should carry. And even so I had to hurry because all this was within range of the guns. Adélaïde and I- Adélaïde is my truck - escaped the shrapnel, but the poor dear couldn't keep going and after losing her number plate in a danger zone where parking was forbidden, in despair she shed a wheel in a forest, where I did a Robinson Crusoe for ten days until someone came to rescue me.”⁹⁶

----Ravel

Part 1: 1914-1917 Wartime

Ravel Joins the Army

The description above is derived from Ravel’s handwritten letter. It is easy to envision the life-or-death circumstances he faced. Furthermore, Ravel’s deep sense of patriotism is strikingly conveyed through his writing, reflecting his active involvement rather than merely delivering grand speeches from a rocking chair. As Stravinsky mentioned in his conversation with Robert Craft: “I admire for it because with his name he could have had an easier place – or done nothing.”⁹⁷ Ravel eagerly enlisted in the army when the war broke out, wishing to contribute to

⁹⁶ Roger Nichols, “1914–1920: Patriotism and Loss,” in *Ravel* (Yale University Press, 2011), 183.

⁹⁷ Roger Nichols, “Fellow Artists.” in *Ravel Remembered* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 113.

the front lines. Unfortunately, his health and physical condition did not meet the necessary standards, which resulted in an 18-month delay before he could finally head to the front. During this waiting period, he penned many letters to friends, conveying his longing to serve and his desire to compose.

*“2 kilos too light. I now have hopes of the general examination of refused applicants, and if that doesn’t succeed, I’ll try and wangle something when I get back to Paris. Surely, they’ll finish up being seduced by the grace of my anatomy. This hope encourages me to go back to the grindstone. I’m going to start on a suite of piano pieces...” (letter of September 26 to Roland-Manuel)*⁹⁸

Finally, on March 14, 1916, he was sent as a lorry driver to support the troops at Verdun, where the Germans had launched a heavy attack on February 21. From this time until his temporary discharge in June 1917, the silence is broken, and his numerous letters give a graphic picture of Ravel, the soldier, from curious to exhausted.⁹⁹

French Musical Society during the Interwar period

On January 8, 1915, a remarkable SMI concert featured five significant contemporary French composers: Ravel, Debussy, Dukas, Fauré, and Saint-Saëns. However, the SMI entered a two-year period of silence due to the war.¹⁰⁰ The Opéra remained closed until December 9, and the Société Nationale did not organize another concert until November 10, 1917.

⁹⁸ Roger Nichols, “1914–1920: Patriotism and Loss,” in *Ravel* (Yale University Press, 2011), 177.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 183-184.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 180.

It is essential to provide background information on the various organizations within the French music industry. At the turn of the twentieth century, French musical life was vibrant, featuring two main schools of composition: the traditionalists led by Vincent d'Indy, and the progressives represented by Claude Debussy.¹⁰¹ Notable figures included Gabriel Fauré in characteristic of subtle elegance, Camille Saint-Saëns in neoclassic, and Erik Satie, each contributing their unique styles. Maurice Ravel was inevitably regarded as a follower of Debussy. This era was marked by intense criticism and audience reactions during performances.

The Schola Cantorum, directed by Vincent d'Indy, encompassed an extensive collection of Gregorian chants alongside music from the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Concurrently, the Société Nationale de Musique (SN), established in 1871 and affiliated with the Schola Cantorum, showcased a diverse range of contemporary French compositions. Furthermore, the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, founded in 1828, generally performed works from Bach through Wagner.¹⁰²

However, the SMI, formally known as the Société Musicale Indépendante, was founded by Ravel in response to the aspiration of departing from the Société Nationale. Amidst a tumultuous reception and severe criticism subsequent to his performances in SN, Ravel was compelled by a yearning for independence from the restrictive and antiquated authority of the Schola. The central aim of the new society was to “make known, through performance, French or foreign modern music, published or unpublished, without exceptions of genre or style.”¹⁰³ Ravel established a

¹⁰¹ Arbie Orenstein, “MUSIC: Maurice Ravel.” *The American Scholar* 64, no. 1 (1995), 93.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 93.

¹⁰³ Barbara L. Kelly and Deborah Mawer, “History and Homage,” *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8-9.

performance venue that espoused the principles of freedom, openness to diversity, and a resolute rejection of dogma.¹⁰⁴

Therefore, during the years of war, the SMI served as a more definitive platform for importing and promoting exotic contemporary musicians, including those from Germany and Austria.¹⁰⁵ Given the complex historical relationship and the challenging perceptions of German composers during wartime, the decline in the situation surrounding SMI concerts is understandable.

Ligue nationale pour la defense de la musique française

Meanwhile, in 1916, a remarkable movement emerged within the French music scene. Charles Tenroc (critic), Saint-Saëns, d'Indy, and eighty other composers founded a *Ligue nationale pour la défense de la musique française*. The literal interpretation of the league's name—National League for the Defense of French Music—clearly indicates its mission to protect French national (classical) musical culture and safeguard it against foreign influence. “Expel the enemy” is what they used in clarifying the aim of the league, and the “Enemy” specifically indicates “contemporary Austro-German works that have not entered the public domain, including films, gramophone records, and Viennese operetta.”¹⁰⁶ Ravel was requested to collaborate, and he responded decisively:

“It would indeed be dangerous for French composers systematically to ignore the output of their foreign colleagues, and so form a sort of national coterie: our music,

¹⁰⁴ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1905-1908.” *Maurice Ravel: Variations on His Life and Work*. (Chilton Book Company), 94.

¹⁰⁵ John Check, “Perfection of the Life and the Work: The Case of Maurice Ravel.” *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 124, No.1 (The John Hopkins University Press), 76

¹⁰⁶ Roger Nichols, “1914–1920: Patriotism and Loss,” in *Ravel* (Yale University Press, 2011), 184.

currently so rich, would soon degenerate and contract into stereotypical formulae."¹⁰⁷

It is evident that the defensive league perceived Ravel's perspective, which advocated for the respect of Schoenberg and other German-Austrian artists, as unsatisfactory. Consequently, he was not extended invitations to several prominent French music festivals in the years that followed. In the interim, Fauré and d'Indy sought to amalgamate the Société Musicale Indépendante (SMI) with the Société Nationale but faced opposition from Ravel, Koechlin, Grovlez, and Casadesus, who cited their commitment to a distinctive "aesthetic."¹⁰⁸

Amidst the ongoing turmoil, two central themes have emerged in the French music scene: opposition to Germany and a revival of French classics. The forthcoming study will explore the origins of anti-German sentiment and the regression of French classical literature.

Part 2 Inter-war Neoclassicism

The primary national conflict during this period centered on the escalating political tensions between France and Germany, largely shaped by the aftermath of World War I. Scott Messing describes a "*potent combination of stimuli*," highlighting the rise of "*Gallic nationalism*" alongside a growing discontent with the "*pessimism and decadence of the fin-de-siècle era*."¹⁰⁹ These factors fueled each other and provided a rationale for the prevailing sentiments. The perception of the

¹⁰⁷ Roger Nichols, "1914–1920: Patriotism and Loss," in *Ravel* (Yale University Press, 2011), 184.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 187.

¹⁰⁹ Scott Messing, "Polemic as History: The Case of Neoclassicism," *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991), 482.

nineteenth century as a corrupt artistic era is often linked to the detrimental influence of the Northern spirit. French composers regarded this period as a deviation from their musical tradition, having been eclipsed by Germanic ideals. The conservative climate in French public life, coupled with the ascent of cultural nationalism, cultivated an anti-German sentiment, thereby giving rise to the term “Neoclassicism.”¹¹⁰

Neoclassicism Came into Being

A term such as Impressionism or Romanticism typically involves imbuing artistic works with crystallized concepts that hold historical importance or represent a dominant style. Fulcher provided an excellent interpretation of its historical significance: “Neoclassicism in wartime and the twenties was no ‘Zeitgeist.’ It was the ‘national style,’ synonymous with patriotism, which made it a matrix for political dissension”.¹¹¹

According to Messing’s research, “Neoclassicism” was frequently referenced in the analysis of twentieth-century music, though its meaning is often unclear and misapplied. Taruskin asserted that many music historians and theorists are critical of Neoclassicism, viewing it as a “retrogression into the traditional.” By reviewing the research on “Neoclassicism,” the term first appeared around 1900, and the limited references available during the early 1900s define it as related to nineteenth-century composers. Messing explains in more detail that these composers maintained the popular instrumental forms in the eighteenth century, yet they often “sacrificed originality and musical depth for mere imitation of structure.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Scott Messing, “Polemic as History: The Case of Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991), 482-483.

¹¹¹ Jane F. Fulcher, “The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 2 (1999), 198.

¹¹² Richard Taruskin, “Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology,” ed. Scott Messing et al., *19th-Century Music* 16, no. 3 (1993), 287.

The instances of critiques by French musicians regarding Brahms, Mahler, and other late Romantic German composers (indeed the whole “nineteenth-century German lineage,” Taruskin) reveal a sense of contempt for their “neoclassic” approach, aggravated by nationalist feelings, contributing to the negative connotation associated with the term “Neoclassicism.”¹¹³

The reopened post-war Opera performance in 1915 had a historically significant cultural and political brainwashing attribute. Jacque Rouché directed and showcased the “birth and growth of opera in France” by recalling the glory days of Louis XIV. Fulcher emphasized the clever design of the scene, where the 1915 audience in the theater “witnessed its past on stage and connected with the historical audience,” thereby fostering a sense of “unity and continuity” that would become part of the heritage for generations to come.¹¹⁴ Undoubtedly, the sensitive political climate following the war meant that the Opéra would become a space for “national memory and myth,”¹¹⁵ aimed at establishing a unified wartime identity in a politically and culturally divided France.¹¹⁶ Fulcher summarized that the notion of “myth” referred to French classicism, which suggested that France was culturally “Latin” and inherently classic. However, this perspective was limited and deeply influenced by the ideology of the monarchist Right. The French monarchist Right, associated with the “*Ligue de l’Action Française*,” dominated and reestablished authentic French culture’s narrative as “classic,” linked to the “defense” of French culture. This perspective prevailed during wartime and was enforced across France.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Scott Messing, “Polemic as History: The Case of Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991), 482-483.

¹¹⁴ Jane F. Fulcher, “The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 2 (1999), 197.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 198.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 199-200.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 199-200.

Here, “Latin,” by which the French defined themselves in contrast to the decadently “psychological” German, indicated characteristics of purity, proportion, and order, emphasizing “Balance.”¹¹⁸

“Ligue pour la défense de la musique française” is the historical product of the French musicians’ response to the “defense” and “root-seeking” of French “Classic” music. The league’s formation led to joint efforts between the contentious d’Indy and Saint-Saëns. Franck (d’Indy) and Saint-Saëns are framed and consecrated as part of France’s “Latin” and collective culture.¹¹⁹ This effort effectively demonstrates how the pressures of wartime pushed the musical world to conform to traditional orthodoxy. The association’s objective, previously mentioned, is to firmly ban the performance of any contemporary German or Austrian music that they believe could “pollute” French music.¹²⁰

It should be noted that this was not the initial instance of French root-seeking classics. The French’s first significant wave of seeking classical heritage occurred following the Franco-Prussian War, driven by the Société Nationale de Musique. However, according to Taruskin, this historical movement was significantly influenced by Germanic and Wagnerian elements, which he describes as “Teutonizing Neoclassicism.” He draws on the research of Carolyn Abbate and Messing, highlighting the prominent echoes of Wagner and the themes from “Tristanisms.”¹²¹ Casella indicates that Wagner, who, at the peak of his influence, significantly contributed to a “crisis” in the arts, marked by overuse of harmony that led to a lack of tonality, setting the stage for Schonberg. While some musicians in France and Italy avoided extreme Viennese practices,

¹¹⁸ Richard Taruskin, “Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology,” ed. Scott Messing et al., *19th-Century Music* 16, no. 3 (1993), 290.

¹¹⁹ Jane F. Fulcher, “The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 2 (1999), 203-204.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 201.

¹²¹ Richard Taruskin, “Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology,” ed. Scott Messing et al., *19th-Century Music* 16, no. 3 (1993), 289-290.

none from 1880 to 1920 escaped the pervasive “harmonic nightmare,” focusing instead on excessive harmonic embellishment.¹²² Under such circumstances, the league’s nationalistic and political significance and objective were to protect the “patrimoine artistique nationale” and promote its growth and dissemination without under any influence of certain ‘school.’¹²³ The primary objective, however, was to systematically undermine the cultural foundations of the German adversary and subsequently avert any potential reemergence of what is deemed detrimental infiltration of the French style.

Monarchist Right and Classicism

French musicians, being integral members of the intellectual community, were inevitably influenced by the prevailing political currents within the realm of music. Unlike artists and writers who vocalized their support or dissent through words and imagery, musicians opted to convey their endorsement or critique in a more nuanced manner by embodying their “classical” values through their compositional style. It is conceivable that, in the present tense situation, artists have become increasingly cautious in their expressions and actions; conversely, it appears that the majority of critics have responded favorably to d’Indy and the Schola. They asserted that the “true classicism had passed from France to Austria and Germany during the French Revolution but was subsequently betrayed by the Prussians and was now to be reclaimed by France.” Mainly owing to the influence of d’Indy, Viennese classicism, though filled with French material, best embodied the classical ideal of regulated moral and aesthetic order.¹²⁴

¹²² Alfredo Casella, “Ravel’s Harmony.” *The Musical Times* 67, no. 996 (1926), 124.

¹²³ Jane F. Fulcher, “The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 2 (1999), 203.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 205.

With the rise of more pronounced political opposition, the orthodox perspective closely linked to the principles of the Action Française was most clearly expressed in Pierre Lasserre's "Philosophie du goût musicale," published in 1922. In this work, Lasserre, a key figure of the "classic Right," once again characterized the concept of 'classical' in music as a state of perfect balance and moderation in the employed techniques. His reference point remained, implicitly, that of d'Indy and the Schola, reflecting both the Viennese classical style and French classicism from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.¹²⁵ Lasserre firmly asserted that these historical periods are classics in their own right, and these esteemed eras had a profound influence on personal inspiration, which is fundamental to the development of a remarkable culture. In other words, personal inspiration and innovations of their respective times ought to conform to collective cultural norms, particularly the anti-individualistic French classic epitomized by the monarchist right. Just as d'Indy, the representative of the monarchist Right in French musical society, was still rooted in teaching the works of "good" German composers, such as Beethoven, and emphasizing "firmly defined form," "clear tonality," and more. D'Indy denounced that the contemporary young generation of composers, as "Les Six," lacked these qualities.¹²⁶

Conversely, conservative critics did not solely associate their concepts with d'Indy and Schola; consequently, they pursued a wider array of influential figures and their respective works for identification and engagement response. The majority of conservative critics, including Jean Danaudet, asserted that "true classicism emphasized the 'collective'" and pertained to Debussy's later works, interpreting them as his "return to tradition."¹²⁷ It is essential to acknowledge the contemporary interpreters and critics who consistently examined and debated political "messages"

¹²⁵ Jane F. Fulcher, "The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neoclassicism," *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 2 (1999), 212-213.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 213.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 206.

by situating their interpretations of classical ideas (regardless of accuracy) within the framework of contemporary concepts and meanings. Although Debussy did not overtly contest these interpretations during the war, it is important to highlight that many of his works from that period stand in opposition to this perspective. Unlike d'Indy, Debussy addressed important issues of musical form, advocating for the preservation of forms rooted in French traditions rather than the symphonic structure supported by d'Indy and Schola. Debussy embraced the traditional “sonata” form, using French thematic material and stylistically adapting popular classical models.

Satie, in a less subtle way, implicitly ridicules the dominant “myth” associated with classical hierarchy, proportions,¹²⁸ and the “order”—as Fulcher exemplified through Satie’s “Parade,” which featured “no real thematic development,” challenging the traditional principles of “balance.” In the Spring of 1917, the orthodox of “Classic right” sparked controversy over *Parade* due to Satie’s “impieties, attacked as ‘Boche’ - Germanic, modernist, and unpatriotic.”¹²⁹ Current trends position the older generation of French composers as key figures representing traditional French Classicism in music. In contrast, the younger composers are often regarded as “dangerous modernists,” seen as unclassical and “un-French.”¹³⁰

Ravel and Leftist Classicism

The war ended, unlike the “Rightest bellicosity and xenophobia,”¹³¹ the Left favored pacifism and embraced any efforts to prevent more war, including Franco-German cultural exchanges. The Left contends that “national intelligence” ought not to be constrained by racial and national

¹²⁸ Jane F. Fulcher, “The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 2 (1999), 207.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 207.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 209.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 210.

ideologies, advocating for a “universalist” perspective in contrast to what it described as “nationalist brainwashing,”¹³² as articulated in the influential manifesto published in L’Humanité on June 26, 1919, titled “Déclaration de l’indépendance de l’esprit.” Jacques Rivière revived *La Nouvelle revue française* in opposition to the Action Française and its interpretation of classical works. He claimed that the essence of the classic was grounded in independence and critical thought.¹³³

Fulcher imported Rivière’s view of foreseeing a “classical renaissance,” later called “revolutionary classicism” – “not retrogressive, literal, or purely imitative,” as now in the *Revue critique*. Fulcher highlighted that Rivière’s essence of His “renaissance” is grounded in the “aesthetic demands of intelligence” and the genuine “classic spirit,” which holds enduring universal aspirations. It claimed that it did not advocate a specific “model” but pursued “universal” values, “a spirit of critique, and independence.”¹³⁴ The term “model” did not refer to a specific style, musical genre, or historical period but instead was related to the French orthodoxy previously mentioned, which is associated with the “Monarchist right” represented by d’Indy.¹³⁵

As noted earlier, Ravel declined to align himself with d’Indy’s league and to engage in political activities. The following quote sentences are part of the Letter that Ravel replies to the League:

“It would be dangerous for composers systematically to ignore the productions of their foreign colleagues and thus to form a sort of national coterie: our musical art,

¹³² Jane F. Fulcher, “The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 2 (1999), 211

¹³³ *Ibid*, 211.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 212.

¹³⁵ Deborah Mawer, “Musical Objects and Machines.” *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 55.

so rich in the present epoch, would not delay to become enclosed in its [own] clichés.... I hope, nevertheless, to act as a Frenchman and count myself among those who want to serve."¹³⁶

Given the heightened political climate and national sentiment during the interwar period, this decision can be seen as a “courageous” and “individual” stance. Fulcher intriguingly proposes that it was the dual influence of his war experience and the invitation to join the “*Ligue pour la défense de la musique française*” that led Ravel to understand that his sense of patriotism resonated more with the broader ideals of the Left.¹³⁷ Ravel officially positioned himself and his music on the opposite side of the league and was considered a symbolic artist in both political and aesthetic aspects. It is essential to reiterate that Ravel did not explicitly articulate his Leftist tendencies or any political inclinations in any public forum. Thus, Ravel’s wartime compositions delicately modified the considered official “patriotic classics dogma”: as he said of his “French suite” (*Le Tombeau de Couperin*), “no, the *Marseillaise* does not figure into it...”¹³⁸ While the entire suite was designed to pay homage to 18th-century French traditional music, it did not embody any militaristic connotations or political viewpoints. As France’s national anthem lately, the *Marseillaise* symbolized themes of valor, warfare, and triumph. In this context, Ravel categorically refuted the notion of including the *Marseillaise*, seemingly indicating his intention to refrain from engaging with musical themes associated with war and politics, irrespective of notions of victory or defeat.

¹³⁶ Jane F. Fulcher, “The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 2 (1999), 214.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 214.

In addition, Fulcher referenced the idea of “recalling Scarlatti,” incorporating rhythmic patterns in “Forlane” that echo Scarlatti’s style and utilize dissonance as a form of “color.”¹³⁹ In this instance, *Le Tombeau*, while serving as a memorial suite to French music of the eighteenth century, exemplified Ravel’s collaboration with diverse cultures. Though the perspective of “recalling Scarlatti” may be considered speculative and requires further verification, there is unmistakable evidence of Ravel preserving a welcome acceptance of German and Austrian composers and their respective music. In a period marked by heightened emotions and tensions, Ravel maintained correspondence with musicians from competing nations, undeterred by the risks associated with contravening established norms. He conveyed his admiration for Mahler and exhibited considerable appreciation for Schoenberg’s emerging talent. Moreover, in 1927, Ravel extended an invitation to Schoenberg to visit Paris and provided his support in organizing two concerts featuring Schoenberg’s compositions for the Société Musicale Indépendante. Until then, the Société Nationale de Musique had restricted the performance of foreign composers solely to those from previously “allied or neutral nations.”¹⁴⁰

Rejection of the Légion d’Honneur

One notable event in the post-war period is Ravel’s rejection of the Légion d’Honneur. More than just his objections to the honor itself, Ravel deliberately distanced himself from any form of recognition or decoration. Ravel ironically commented on the Legion d’Honneur nomination list, likening legionnaires to “morphine addicts,” in his comments to Roland-Manuel.¹⁴¹ Fulcher highlighted another letter addressed to Roland-Manuel, which referenced the term “legionnaire”

¹³⁹ Jane F. Fulcher, “The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 2 (1999), 215.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁴¹ Roger Nichols, “1914–1920: Patriotism and Loss,” in *Ravel* (Yale University Press, 2011), 206-207.

in connection with “Bolshevik,” suggesting a political connotation of the Left. The attitude here might indicate that Ravel hinted at his rejection of “orthodox” postwar patriotism. Ravel declined any honors related to the war (just like not including the *Marseillaise* in *Le Tombeau*), viewing it not so much as a French triumph but rather, like those on the Left, as a tragic and bloody affair.¹⁴²

After the war, Ravel’s experiences influenced his political views, leading him to adopt Socialist ideals and engage with leftist publications and politicians. His sympathy for humanity and opposition to social injustice defined his stance, reflecting a broader reaction against hyper-patriotism and particularism.

Roland Manuel offered significant praise for Ravel and he consistently attributed “French” qualities of precision to him. He asserted that “Maurice Ravel miraculously renews the broken thread of our purest tradition... of Couperin and Rameau.”¹⁴³ However, at that time in France, voices unfavorable to or disagreeing with Ravel were becoming increasingly rampant. The most well-known was Satie’s hostile comment, “Ravel refuses the Legion of Honor, but all his music accepts it.”¹⁴⁴ He appeared to believe that Ravel was merely performing for show by embracing a “figure.” However, in a display of humble integrity, Ravel declined the recognition. Furthermore, Paul Landormy contended that Ravel indeed indicated a departure from Impressionism; and said furthermore that, he could not be regarded as the leader of postwar French music:

“He lacks assurance, vigor, application, the courage to say things, crudely, if necessary, which characterizes the newcomers. M. Ravel is distinguished by

¹⁴² Jane F. Fulcher, “The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 2 (1999), 215-216.

¹⁴³ Barbara L. Kelly, “Re-Presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture,” in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, *New Perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 42.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

elegance, affectionate gentleness and even affectation, a taste that will go out of fashion... It is because he is a product of his time. It was important at least to underline the manner in which he foreshadowed a new era."¹⁴⁵

As previously discussed in "French Latinity," the prevailing orthodoxy during the Inter- and Post-war period (at least until 1923) was characterized as "architectural and balanced in form" and "purity," which sharply conflicted with Ravel's sympathy for "lower class" and willingness to embrace German/Austrian infiltration.¹⁴⁶ Ravel demonstrated his values even more powerfully than in his discussions, showcasing the essence of "revolutionary classicism" through his striking stylistic synthesis and independence. Fulcher imported Roland-Manuel's interpretation, cited from Marnat, that Ravel's classicism was considered in French tradition, due to its "rigorous discipline," as "associated not with formal models but with simplicity, universality, and autonomous, critical intelligence."¹⁴⁷

Involuntarily, Ravel's deviant "classicism" did not stop the critics associated with Action Française from trying to claim his work by imposing its framework on specific compositions. Ironically, in 1923, the *Revue Critique des idées et des livres* complimented Ravel's *L'Heure Espagnole* for its humor and blend of good taste with free tradition, contrasting Ravel's classicism with the excessive style of Jacques Offenbach, claiming Offenbach's work lacked taste and did not fit the French cultural identity. Ravel's postwar style was not to be viewed as representative of

¹⁴⁵ Barbara L. Kelly, "Re-Presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture," in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, *New Perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 43.

¹⁴⁶ Jane F. Fulcher, "The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neoclassicism," *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 2 (1999), 217-218.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 217-218.

interwar Neoclassicism. If there was anything truly “typical” in France during that time, it was Schola’s model.¹⁴⁸

Part 3. Ravel’s (Neo)Classicism in the Compositional style

With respect to the term “New Classicism (Neoclassicism),” even Messing declared that it does “*not necessarily constitute for us an accurate basis for defining artistic style.*” However, he still attributed to it several “comprehensible and valid” aesthetic characteristics: clarity, simplicity, austerity, sobriety, and precision, which somehow match how Roland-Manuel interprets Ravel’s qualities.¹⁴⁹

As discussed in previous sections, Neoclassicism first arose as a term associated with German, Teutonic, and northern sentiments, which gained significant intensity during World War I. As Fulcher highlights, relying solely on geographic or rational traits to define the term does not provide a clear understanding of the term. Composers from different countries and regions may feel that their compositions are politically bound to national tendencies and that their originality has been compromised.¹⁵⁰

During the interwar and post-war periods, originality was a significant focus for artists. This emphasis included not only political and rational themes but also aesthetic and compositional

¹⁴⁸ Jane F. Fulcher, “The Composer as Intellectual: Ideological Inscriptions in French Interwar Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 2 (1999), 218.

¹⁴⁹ Scott Messing, “Polemic as History: The Case of Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991), 483.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 484.

elements. With these key characteristics of Neoclassicism in view, the following discussion will explore and identify aspects of “new” ideas and “Classicism” in Ravel’s compositional style.

“Imitation,” “Model,” and Originality

“If you have nothing to say, you cannot do better, until you decide to give up composing for good, than say again what has already been well said. If you have something to say, that something will never emerge more distinctly than when you are being unwittingly unfaithful to your model.”¹⁵¹

The quote is the advice that Ravel gave young composers in later years. It offers two main points: “originality” and “imitation of models.”¹⁵²

Artistic modernism was understandably driven by a strong desire for originality, especially as it sought to break free from the influences of Romanticism and Impressionism, all while being shaped by the impacts of World War I. Roland Manuel contends that Ravel was not an unconscious advocate of modernism.¹⁵³ Instead, he focused on the importance of connecting with French tradition and expressing oneself authentically to maintain originality.¹⁵⁴ Ravel stated that his objective as a composer was to seek “technical perfection. I can strive unceasingly to this end since I am certain of never being able to attain it. The important thing is to get nearer to it all the time.”¹⁵⁵ Indeed, Ravel was convinced that composers should refine their techniques rigorously. Despite the

¹⁵¹ Arbie Orenstein, “MUSIC: Maurice Ravel.” *The American Scholar* 64, no. 1 (1995), 99.

¹⁵² Barbara L. Kelly, “Re-Presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture,” in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, *New Perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 46.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 45.

¹⁵⁴ Arbie Orenstein, “MUSIC: Maurice Ravel.” *The American Scholar* 64, no. 1 (1995), 99.

¹⁵⁵ Robert Philip, “Maurice Ravel: (1875–1937).” In *The Classical Music Lover’s Companion to Orchestral Music* (Yale University Press, 2018), 613-614.

academic learning of traditional compositional components and analyzing scores as practice, being open to “copying what has already been well said” - as a “model” - is another crucial part of the practice.¹⁵⁶

Orenstein borrows Jean Cocteau’s words: “An original artist cannot copy. Thus, he has only to copy in order to be original.”¹⁵⁷ Ravel’s originality, as noted by Roland Manuel, is that he reimagined familiar elements and combined them innovatively¹⁵⁸ with ingenious harmonic language, traditional forms, and chromatic minor seconds, all within conventional phrasing structures, which will be examined in the next chapter. In conclusion, it is frequently noted that the initial model Ravel begins with is eventually overshadowed.

Isn’t it intriguing how this “combining in innovative ways” cleverly embodies the concept of “Neoclassicism,” merging the new with the classical?

“Individuality” character 1: Eighteenth-century traditional forms

Ravel’s “Apaches” friend Calvocoressi recalled, “Questions of form seemed to preoccupy him far less. I do not remember his ever praising a work on account of his form. But, on the other hand, he was very sensitive to what he considered to be defective form.”¹⁵⁹ One could assume that the form to Ravel is something familiar enough. The incorporation of traditional French forms stands out as a key characteristic of Ravel’s classical compositional style. Many assert that Ravel represented an “individual” rather than conforming to a particular type. “Like most Frenchmen, for instance,” Morris started his topic, “he is first and foremost a traditionalist, recalling at times

¹⁵⁶ Barbara L. Kelly, “Re-Presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture,” in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, *New Perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 45.

¹⁵⁷ Arbie Orenstein, “MUSIC: Maurice Ravel.” *The American Scholar* 64, no. 1 (1995): 99.

¹⁵⁸ Barbara L. Kelly, “Re-Presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture,” in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, *New Perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 46.

¹⁵⁹ Arbie Orenstein, “MUSIC: Maurice Ravel.” *The American Scholar* 64, no. 1 (1995): 99.

not merely the formalism of Couperin and the clavecinists but that of the earlier Viennese school.”¹⁶⁰

Regarding structure, Ravel’s approach reflected a clear connection to the past. His choice to draw upon this traditional framework was not just a whimsical inclination. Much of what we observe in Ravel’s work can be understood as a response to the heavy romanticism of the nineteenth century and a departure from the styles of his predecessors. From Morris’s perspective, the classicism of the 18th century cannot be characterized as a period marked by ambition or remarkable grandeur; however, it was devoid of any ostentatious and hollow declarations of heroism. Morris illustrates that “Ravel has an instinctive sympathy for such virtues and has found that much of his thought pours easily and naturally into the eighteenth-century mold. He is undeterred by its formalism, quite rightly, for his genius is of the type that expresses itself more readily within the limits of a certain formal restraint.”¹⁶¹ Sympathy, as articulated by Morris, may be derived from the simplicity and universality of Ravel, which corresponds to the fundamental qualities of 18th-century French tradition. Furthermore, the “limits of certain formal restraints” reflect Ravel’s individuality of compositional style characterized by his role as a “game rule-maker,”¹⁶² a concept elaborated upon in chapter one, wherein the form serves as a manifestation of Ravel’s remarkable challenge-solving capabilities.

Following a discussion on the concept of imitation in “craft” and the significance of an artist’s “originality” in knowing what to say, Ravel was convinced that the true goal emerges: “achieving fullness and sincerity of expression.” Calvocoressi remarked that due to a “deliberate, carefully thorough aesthetic choice,” the conciseness of logic typical of French art, known as “Latinity,”

¹⁶⁰ R. O. Morris, “Maurice Ravel,” *Music & Letters* 2, no. 3 (1921): 274-275.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 280-281.

¹⁶² Roger Nichols, “Two Tributes.” in *Ravel Remembered* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 194.

was reflected in Ravel's works, which tended to be lengthwise shorter. It is evident that Ravel's "fullness and sincerity of expression" aligns closely with the French tradition.¹⁶³

"Individuality" characteristic 2: Simplicity in French Tradition

Roland-Manuel identified the quality of simplicité in almost all of Ravel's works, including *Daphnis et Chloé*. He viewed his pursuit of simplicité as a response to the "ridiculous romantic gravity."¹⁶⁴ Orenstein offered multiple examples showing that the piano played a crucial role in Ravel's compositional development,¹⁶⁵ with many of his innovative stylistic trends originating from his piano pieces. In particular, *Le Tombeau* was recognized as a significant work that exemplifies the lighter textures of his postwar period. Moreover, Orenstein concluded that Ravel essentially had the qualities of "clarity and elegance," derived from "Domenico Scarlatti, Couperin and the French clavecinistes, Mozart, Chabrier, and Saint-Saëns as well as the color and virtuosity of Chopin and particularly of Liszt."¹⁶⁶

During the postwar period, a shift toward a more austere harmonic style can also be observed, as seen in works such as *Le Tombeau*. Ravel's inventive harmonic language remained one of his most noteworthy traits, sparking much debate over the years. Casella highlighted this by analyzing the opening chords from *Valse noble et Sentimentale*, which revolve around a tonic chord featuring an 11th and a chromatic progression of seconds.

¹⁶³ Arbie Orenstein, "MUSIC: Maurice Ravel." *The American Scholar* 64, no. 1 (1995), 99.

¹⁶⁴ Barbara L. Kelly, "Re-Presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture," in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, *New Perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 42.

¹⁶⁵ Arbie Orenstein, "MUSIC: Maurice Ravel." *The American Scholar* 64, no. 1 (1995), 100.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 100.

Musical Example: Valse noble et sentimentale, Mvt.1

Modéré-très franc ♩ = 176

PIANO



It could be simplified as follows:



With such a provided musical example, Casella declared in his journal that Ravel's harmony was profoundly "rooted in tradition. It does not aspire after 'atonality,' nor does it attain polytonality."¹⁶⁷ Even during his early years, Ravel, influenced by Debussy and the Impressionist movement, did not often employ Major 9th and Major 11th chords. Instead, he concentrated on unresolved appoggiaturas, a technique rooted in the 18th century.

His harmony, beginning with *Jeux d'eau* (1901), explores the chords of the major seventh, then gradually develops the chords with unresolved appoggiaturas in *Valse nobles et sentimentale* and "Le Gibet," reaching the maximum of elaboration in *Daphnis et Chloé* (1910). In the interwar

¹⁶⁷ Alfredo Casella, "Ravel's Harmony." *The Musical Times* 67, no. 996 (1926), 127.

and postwar periods, Ravel's approach to simplification also transformed his harmonic language, making it less intricate. Casella catches the appearance of change in the *Trio* (1914) and more than ever in the *Tombeau de Couperin* (1916-17).¹⁶⁸

Ravel and Artificial Aesthetics

Despite the discussed compositional tools - harmony, forms, and textures - that Ravel crafted and developed within his artistic aesthetic of originality and individuality firmly rooted in the French tradition, another topic developed by Ravel was his "Artificial Aesthetic," which espoused subtle "analysis and calculation" and eschews "chance."¹⁶⁹

Every composition by Ravel represents in this sense a certain problem to be solved, a game in which the player voluntarily makes the rules of the game more complicated; although nobody makes him do so he places restrictions on himself and learns, as Nietzsche would have said, "to dance in chains."

Jankélévitch insightfully and figuratively described the fundamental characteristics of Ravel's artificial aesthetic. This concept resonates with the emotional restraint in Ravel's compositions, highlighting elegance and subtlety. His music frequently expresses humor and tenderness while maintaining a profoundly sensuous quality.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Alfredo Casella, "Ravel's Harmony." *The Musical Times* 67, no. 996 (1926), 127.

¹⁶⁹ Peter Kaminsky, "Ravel's Approach to Formal Process: Comparisons and Contexts." *Unmasking Ravel* (Boydell & Kaminsky), 86-87.

¹⁷⁰ Barbara L. Kelly, "Re-Presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture," in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, *New Perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 45.

Roland Manuel and Calvocoressi wrote articles illustrating Ravel's artificiality as part of his nature in artistic creation.¹⁷¹ After recognizing the influence of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition," Roland Manuel stressed Ravel's anti-Romantic qualities, grounded in classical traditions, thereby clarifying his role as an inspired artist. Composing a new piece is akin to a tailored project that addresses specific challenges or fascinating topics, grounded in a solid foundation.¹⁷² In this context, the conventional Baroque and Classical forms in French tradition provide the most dependable basis; the "unsolved appoggiatura," "Bitonality," "succession of second," and so on—as innovative harmonic languages or textures—are the variable components.

Roland's analysis effectively communicated his admiration for Ravel's Neoclassicism, highlighting Ravel's "Artificial" concept of combining innovative techniques (Neo) and traditional French foundations (Classicism), which embodied the spirit and character of post-war France, particularly in the years following 1920: "his penchant for traditional 'classical forms,' and his distinctive melody, which was 'toute différente' to Debussyste melody, at once supple but extremely clear."¹⁷³ Furthermore, Roland-Manuel positioned Ravel as a successor to Chabrier ("the precursor of the new French school") and Fauré, reflecting the contemporary interest in Chabrier among young French composers. Roland aimed to demonstrate Ravel's Neoclassical qualities as a vital connection and continuity between pre- and post-war aesthetics for the public, which was still under artistic and political instability. As a result, he considered Ravel an inspirational figure for contemporary younger French musicians.

¹⁷¹ M. D. Calvocoressi. "Maurice Ravel, 1875-1937." *The Musical Times* 79, No.1139 (1938), 22-23.

¹⁷² Barbara L. Kelly, "Re-Presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture," in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, *New Perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 45.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 44.

Ravel's Classicism and Stravinsky's Classicism

The connection between Neoclassicism and Stravinsky was first established in 1923,¹⁷⁴ highlighting Stravinsky's compositional style, which is marked by "constructive, simple, classical lines" reminiscent of the "old masters of the Renaissance and J. S. Bach" in his *Octet*.¹⁷⁵ The Russian Neoclassicism surprised and preoccupied the French, along with the success of the *Octet*.¹⁷⁶ As a result, the term "Neoclassicism" has come to represent innovation and a "future direction".¹⁷⁷ Barbara noted it is evident that, inspired by Stravinsky's new label and approach, Roland-Manuel was reflecting on Stravinsky while also demonstrating Ravel's Neoclassical traits, particularly his anti-Romanticism and emphasis on "originality."

*"After our extreme modernism, a return to classicism was to be expected. After a flood comes the ebb tide, and after a revolution we see the reaction. Stravinsky is often considered the leader of Neoclassicism, but do not forget that my String Quartet was already conceived in terms of four-part counterpoint, whereas Debussy's Quartet is purely harmonic in conception."*¹⁷⁸

In an interview in the *New York Times* (1927), Ravel suggested that the idea of a "return to classicism" should not be attributed first to Stravinsky. What Ravel expressed here of 'delight' in

¹⁷⁴ Barbara L. Kelly, "Re-Presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture," in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, *New Perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 46.

¹⁷⁵ Scott Messing, "Polemic as History: The Case of Neoclassicism," *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991), 490-491.

¹⁷⁶ Barbara L. Kelly, "Re-Presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture," in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, *New Perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 47.

¹⁷⁷ Scott Messing, "Polemic as History: The Case of Neoclassicism," *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991), 490.

¹⁷⁸ Barbara L. Kelly and Deborah Mawer, "History and Homage," *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26.

the return to pure forms should not be considered as an indication that he identified with “*Neoclassicism - call it what you will.*”¹⁷⁹

Ravel was significantly influenced by his immediate predecessors, especially Chabrier, Fauré, and Saint-Saëns. He consistently utilized traditional forms and classical titles regardless of the prevailing political and aesthetic contexts. Deeply rooted in the French musical tradition, Ravel engaged thoughtfully with it. In contrast, Stravinsky intentionally distanced himself from his Russian heritage, borrowing freely to create what T.S. Eliot dubbed “new wholes.”¹⁸⁰ This idea can be understood as combining unrelated musical materials in original ways, often merging past and present elements.

Regarding Neoclassicism, Stravinsky once declared, “Every age is a historical unity. It may never appear as anything but either/or to its Parisian contemporaries, of course, but semblance is gradual, and in time either or comes to be a component of the same thing. For instance, ‘Neo-classic’ now begins to apply to all of the between-the-war composers.”¹⁸¹ The interpretation of Stravinsky’s neoclassical approach is a complex and contentious subject. It is natural for different individuals to have varying insights and emotions regarding it. What matters most is the process of thinking and exploration rather than relying on definitive answers.

¹⁷⁹ Barbara L. Kelly and Deborah Mawer, “History and Homage,” *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26.

¹⁸⁰ Barbara L. Kelly, “Re-Presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture,” in *Unmasking Ravel*, ed. Peter Kaminsky, vol. 84, *New Perspectives on the Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 46.

¹⁸¹ Donald Mitchell, “Stravinsky and Neo-Classicism.” *Tempo*, Spring – Summer, 1962, No.61/62 (Cambridge University Press), 12.

Chapter 3: *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

Ravel was once a dandy,¹⁸² celebrated for his refined taste, elegance, and confidence. However, when the war broke out, he bravely went to the front lines without a second thought. “By the saints,” Ravel erupted at Roland Manuel on October 1, “*I do know, my dear fellows, that I’m working for my country by writing music!*”¹⁸³

Part.1 The Homage of *Le Tombeau*

Le Tombeau de Couperin was developed during a pivotal period in France, spanning the pre-war, wartime, and post-war eras. Although it is presented as a light-hearted French suite, this groundbreaking piece pays tribute to six friends who lost their lives in the war. Inescapably, the attitude and sentiment of such a work comprise subtle “dissonance” that some might deem frivolous in the context of war; however, others may recognize and appreciate its elegance and formality. “*Ist a French Suite - no, not what you’re thinking: the Marseillaise won’t figure in it, and there’ll be a forlane and a gigue; but no tango.*”¹⁸⁴ Ravel underscored that excluding the *Marseillaise* resonates with the subtle dissonance and reflects the original intention of homage to the vital eighteenth-century French tradition.

Stuchenschmidt observed that the term “Le Tombeau”, meaning tomb in French, has been applied in French literature and music to convey the meaning of “Homage to the dead” since the

¹⁸² R. O. Morris, “Maurice Ravel,” *Music & Letters* 2, no. 3 (1921), 275.

¹⁸³ Roger Nichols, “1914–1920: Patriotism and Loss,” in *Ravel* (Yale University Press, 2011), 178.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 178.

seventeenth century.¹⁸⁵ So, the surface layer of interpreting the title of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* is the Homage to Couperin.

Le Tombeau is renowned for its movements, each crafted to honor friends who perished in the war: the deeply mournful “Menuet” is dedicated to Jean Dreyfus, the son of Ravel’s wartime godmother; the “Toccatà” is in memory of Captain Joseph de Marliave, whose wife, the esteemed pianist Marguerite Long, premiered many of Ravel’s piano works; the “Rigaudon” is a tribute to the brothers Pierre and Pascal Gaudin from Saint-Jean-de-Luz, whose sister Marie had been Ravel’s friend since childhood, and so on. Wanda Landowska, the harpsichordist, describes the music:

*“There is a deep, painful, even tragic emotion concealed beneath the bright, playful movement of these dances and their artful imitation of harpsichord speech.”*¹⁸⁶

Undoubtedly, each note nourishes what Ravel felt and expresses grief and yearning for his deceased friend, which connects to the deeper layers of the homage to friends who lost their lives in the war.

Now, stepping back to view the *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, it is presented as a dance suite featuring various dance types, such as “Forlane,” “Menuet,” and “Rigaudon,” in the traditional style of eighteenth-century Baroque France. In contrast, Paul Roberts suggests a differing perspective, proposing that the complete suite functions as an independent art object, embodying the structured forms of an “eighteenth-century harpsichord suite,”¹⁸⁷ which can be seen as a self-

¹⁸⁵ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1914-1917.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968), 172.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 173.

¹⁸⁷ Paul Roberts, *Reflection: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel* (Amadeus Press, 2012), 112.

contained system. Whether viewed as a harpsichord suite or a dance suite, the rich nuances of French tradition present within it led to a deeper understanding of the “homage” to the classic French style of the eighteenth century. Ravel noted that the homage implicit in *Le Tombeau de Couperin* was “in reality less to Couperin alone than to French music of the 18th century.”¹⁸⁸

Part. 2 Analysis: *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

The Cover Page

Ravel created the illustration for the title page of Durand’s edition of *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. It features “an urn-shaped vase with a baroque design, positioned on a raised pedestal adorned with flowing drapery, from which a delicate sprig of laurel trails. Below the words, *Le Tombeau de Couperin* is Ravel’s distinctive monogram, where the block letters *M* and *R* are combined.”¹⁸⁹ The little design by Ravel elicited much criticism when *Le Tombeau* was published and premiered, primarily due to the perceived inappropriateness of the tribute piece. “I amused myself,” Ravel explains in his letter to a friend when he saw the comments, “in drawing these arabesques on the first page of my manuscript without ulterior motive. My publisher amused himself by reproducing this fine drawing, and the engraver added to it skillful alterations which give it an awkward and pretentious allure that I was far from intending.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Scott Messing, “Polemic as History: The Case of Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991): 485.

¹⁸⁹ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1914-1917.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968): 172.

¹⁹⁰ Roger Nichols, “1914–1920: Patriotism and Loss,” in *Ravel* (Yale University Press, 2011), 204.

Form and Structure

To echo “Homage to Couperin,” the movement Forlane stands out as the most representative, emphasizing its connection to the title. It is reminiscent of Couperin, who frequently incorporated this dance form into his chamber music. In a letter to a friend in the spring of 1914, Ravel noted that he was “transcribing a Forlane by François Couperin,”¹⁹¹ taken from the Quatrième concert of the Concerts Royaux. By October of the same year, he had decided to compose a multi-movement French Suite that included the Forlane (See Examples 1a & b).¹⁹²

Example 1a. Maurice Ravel, *Tombeau de Couperin*, Forlane, mm,1-9. Paris: Durand & Cie., 1918. Plate D. & F. 9569.

à la mémoire du lieutenant Gabriel Deluc.

The image displays a musical score for the Forlane movement from Maurice Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin*. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of staves. The first system is marked *PIANO* and *Allegretto*. The music is in 3/8 time and features a delicate, flowing melody in the right hand, often with grace notes, and a more complex, arpeggiated accompaniment in the left hand. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* and *pp*, and articulation like accents and slurs. A small asterisk (*) is placed below the first measure of the first system.

¹⁹¹ Roger Nichols, “1911–1914: Noble and Sentiment.” *Ravel* (Yale University Press), 166.

¹⁹² Scott Messing, “Polemic as History: The Case of Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991), 484.

Example 1b. François Couperin, *Concerts royaux*, Quatrième concert, Forlane.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Forlane" by François Couperin. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of music. The key signature is G major (three sharps) and the time signature is 6/8. The first system is marked "Gaiement" in the treble clef and "Rondeau" in the bass clef. The second system begins with a measure number "5" in the treble clef and ends with a double bar line and the word "Fin". Following the double bar line, there is a section labeled "1er Couplet". The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and ornaments (trills and mordents).

Another analogous example is the “Rigaudon” and the “Première tambourine” from Rameau’s *Troisième concert*. (See musical Example 2a & b.)

Example 2a. Maurice Ravel, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Rigaudon, mm,1-9. Paris: Durand & Cie., 1918. Plate D. & F. 9569.

The image displays a musical score for the Rigaudon from Maurice Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. The score is written for piano and is in 2/4 time. It begins with the tempo marking "Assez vit" and a dynamic of *ff*. The first system shows the right hand playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and the left hand providing a harmonic accompaniment. The second system features a repeat sign and dynamic markings of *ff* and *mf*. The third system continues the piece with various chordal textures. The fourth system includes a dynamic marking of *f* and a *rit f* marking. The fifth system has a dynamic marking of *pp*. The final system shows the piece concluding with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in both hands.

Example 2b. J. P. Rameau, *Troisième concert*, Premier tambourin (edited by Saint-Saëns).

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Troisième concert, Premier tambourin" by Jean-Philippe Rameau, as edited by Camille Saint-Saëns. The score is presented in three systems, each containing two staves. The top staff of each system is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo marking "(Vif)" is placed above the first staff of each system. The music features a rhythmic and melodic pattern in the upper staves, while the lower staves provide harmonic support with chords and bass lines. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings.

Before exploring the musical details, it is important to examine the earliest origins of these specific forms.

The “Forlane” is rooted in the oldest dance forms featured in the suite. Originating from northern Italy, the forlana is akin to the more spirited gigue and the passamezzo. The “Rigaudon” boasts ancient French and Provençal heritage.¹⁹³ Several composers have incorporated the “Rigaudon” into their works, a form that can be traced back to Johann Sebastian Bach. While incorporating older models by following the French classic, Ravel did not merely copy; instead, he transformed the old form and infused it with nuances of Ravel’s individuality, as exemplified by the “Neo” style: similar rhythmic gestures, innovative harmonic language, and simple melody.

Alongside the Forlane and Rigaudon mentioned above, other movement forms have emerged from traditional suites. The Prelude features a subtle blend of E minor and G major, structured in an expanded binary form, with its A section concluding with a typical G major cadence. The Fugue movement, referred to as “a well-constructed fugue,”¹⁹⁴ presents easily identifiable subjects and countersubjects that exemplify textbook contrapuntal writing.

Rhythmic Similarity

Like many of his contemporaries, Ravel’s approach to his chosen model incorporated the “repetition of a rhythmic gesture,” a technique evident in both “Forlane” and “Rigaudon.” (See Examples 2a & c b.)

The “Forlane” is based on a moderately faster pacing in 6/8 time; Ravel followed in the same vein. After separately analyzing the first two 4-bar phrases of Couperin’s Forlane, two rhythmic

¹⁹³ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1914-1917.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968): 174.

¹⁹⁴ Roger Nichols, “1914–1920: Patriotism and Loss,” in *Ravel* (Yale University Press, 2011), 193.

patterns are easy to catch: A quarter note plus an eighth note (more stable rhythmic pulse, see Musical Example 3b.) and a dotted 8th note rhythm (“lightly skipping rhythm”¹⁹⁵ by Stuchenschmidt, see Musical Example 3c.). For per 4-bar phrase, the dotted 8th note rhythm occurs once in the second half of measure one and twice in Measure three, with the quarter note rhythm pattern for the rest of the parts in the phrase—the coherent distribution of both rhythmic patterns throughout the Rondeau section. It is important to note that the dotted eighth-note rhythm is consistently supported by a more stable rhythmic pattern, contributing to a sense of symmetry and coherence in the phrase.

Musical example 3a. Couperin, Forlane. mm. 1-4



Musical Example 3b. A quarter plus eighth notes – stable rhythmical pattern



Musical Example 3c. Dotted eighth notes – “lightly skipping rhythm”



¹⁹⁵ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1914-1917.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968), 176.

Ravel radically embraced both rhythmic patterns, primarily utilizing the “skipping” (unstable) dotted eighth-note patterns and prolonging with the tied quarter note. (See Musical Example 3d)

Musical Example 3d. Maurice Ravel, Tombeau de Couperin, Forlane, mm,1-3.



Stuchenschmidt argues that the “skipping” dotted eighth-note pattern creates a sense of lightness and unrest, qualities that are both intentional and artistic, ultimately obscuring the clarity of the traditional forlana.¹⁹⁶ Stuchenschmidt’s suggestion emphasizes the dotted eighth note that produces lightness and asymmetry; however, my observation leans more towards the arrangement of stable and unstable rhythmic patterns, differentiating the symmetric from the lightness.

A comparable rhythmic pattern is evident in the recurring sequences of descending and ascending neighbor tone sixteenth-note groups, which generate an ongoing rhythmic flow. Rameau’s Tambourin movement functions as a three-part fugue within a four-bar phrase format; the first and second violin parts appear in order, with an additional measure in Violin 1, and are confluent with the keyboard part. Overall, the entire movement adheres to conventional four- or eight-bar phrases. (See Musical Example 4)

¹⁹⁶ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1914-1917.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968), 176-177.

Musical Example 4 J. P. Rameau, *Troisième concert*, Premier tambourin, mm. 10-13.

In contrast, distinguishing phrases and sentences in Ravel's "Rigaudon" leads to a more sophisticated issue. The beginning C-major section conforms to four long phrases: 8+8+8+12. Roy Howat suggests that "multiples of sixteen or twelve" and raises the confusion that the whole section "sounds unpredictably irregular." The "two-bar cadential gesture" is the key that disturbs the regulation.¹⁹⁷ (See Musical Example 5)

Musical Example 5. Maurice Ravel, *Tombeau de Couperin*, Rigaudon, mm,1-2.

By parsing the two measures, the solid beginning rhythmic pattern of measure 1 appears multiple times in the subsequent texture: measures 8, 9, 16, and additionally, measures 23-24 represent the complete "two-bar cadential gesture" in F# major. Most gestures are performed at the end of phrases, leading to a sense of misplacement and unpredictably irregular rhythms. Furthermore, the middle section features lengthy and nearly endless melodic patterns in the right

¹⁹⁷ Roy Howat and Deborah Mawer, "Ravel and the Piano," *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92-93.

hand, organized into a more regular and symmetrical sixteen-bar phrase, although Roy Howat argued that the phrases are structured in 4+4+8, with the antecedent spanning from the fourth to the fifth measure.¹⁹⁸ As creative and surprising as Ravel always is, the grouping of three-beat melodic patterns in measures 50-52 generates a hemiola-like pulse in 3/4 time, accompanied by constant rhythmic beats in the left hand. (See Musical Example 6)

Musical Example 6. Ravel, Tombeau de Couperin, Rigaudon. Mm. 50-52



Now, zoom out of the picture and view the recapitulation of the “Menuet.” As in the Baroque Minuet, the structure is usually A-B-A; the repeated A section—which functions as the recapitulation—largely mirrors the original keys, themes, harmony, and melody. While the thematic elements or motifs of the B section (often referred to as the “trio”) are typically juxtaposed and hinted at in the recapitulation, Ravel uniquely overlaps the primary theme from the A section with the melodic pattern from the “Musette” (the B section) to initiate the unexpected recapitulation in the original G major.

Harmony and Modality

Zank cited André Suares’ proposal of Ravel as a model for others by 1925, emphasizing the composer’s innovative approach to harmony:

¹⁹⁸ Roy Howat and Deborah Mawer, “Ravel and the Piano,” *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92.

*“There is always an agreement between Ravel's chords. He delights in modal indecision: he finds a way to make the dominant falter with the most perverse pleasure.”*¹⁹⁹

A clear example of a “dominant falter” can be seen in the opening sentence of the “Menuet” movement in *Le Tombeau*. The A section begins in G major and ends on the B major triad (III), which is typically expected to be a minor triad on iii. Instead of resolving to the tonic triads (I) or the dominant triads (V), it takes an unexpected turn. One could argue that measure 7 offers a brief flash of E minor, which presents the B major triads as the dominant for a half cadence. Interestingly, following this unexpected turn, the B minor triad is introduced immediately and continues with the B pedal point for a time. Furthermore, throughout the rest of the Menuet section, the modulation appears to sway between E Dorian Mode/E minor and D major (dominant of G major), playing with “F sharp + C sharp” and “F natural + C natural,” particularly the C sharp. In this progression, the A minor triad serves as a bridge, ultimately leading to the G major tonic at the end of the Menuet section.

The next Musette middle section begins with a G minor triad (featuring B flat on top as a melodic line) in the key of D minor, as indicated by the key signature. This creates a strong contrast with the B minor in the previous section. Meanwhile, using a tonic or dominant chord in the middle section aligns more closely with conventional tonal structure. Instead of employing the D major triad, the dominant of G major, Ravel opts for D minor to start the middle section. It almost conveys: “Look, I am adhering to tonality, but with a contemporary approach.” Additionally, from a performer’s perspective, interpreting such subtle and rapid transitions requires careful spacing

¹⁹⁹ Stephen Zank, “Opposed Sound: Ravel and Counterpoint,” in *Irony and Sound*, NED-New edition, The Music of Maurice Ravel (Boydell & Brewer, 2009), 101.

and timing to effectively deliver the “surprise” rather than merely playing a series of dissonant notes.

Moreover, Zank provides an insightful analysis indicating that the Musette section primarily emphasizes the Dorian mode in G, incorporating an F natural, in contrast to the F sharp found in the G major Menuet section. Therefore, the harmonic language of the Musette section is predominantly rooted in the Dorian mode (ex. 7b), highlighting a modal approach over a tonal one. Next, Zank proposes “a novel counterpoint between modality and tonality,”²⁰⁰ suggesting that Ravel harmonizes remarkably distinct materials of the “Menuet” A section in G major (ex. 7a) with those of the middle “Musette” in “a more Phrygian percussion” (ex. 7c). In the previous discussion, this particular recapitulation of the “Menuet” contributes to Ravel’s formally unique moment—his thematic contrapuntal writing, rather than merely recapitulating the main theme; here, the contrapuntal technique is implied within the tonal language as well. Ultimately, Zank concludes that “the chordal migration was Ravel’s surprising and satisfying solution,”²⁰¹ evoking Ravel’s steadfast commitment to French conventions combined with his relentless pursuit of innovative language and ideas (ex. 7c).

Musical Example 7. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. (a) the opening phrase of Menuet, mm.1-6. (b) the opening phrase of the “Musette” middle section, mm.33-40. (c) combination of two themes, mm. 73-78.

7a.

Allegro moderato ♩=92

pp

²⁰⁰ Stephen Zank, “Opposed Sound: Ravel and Counterpoint,” in *Irony and Sound*, NED-New edition, The Music of Maurice Ravel (Boydell & Brewer, 2009), 101

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 101-102.

7b.

Musette

pp

Sourdine

7c.

Chromaticism and Semitone

With the nuances of modality interwoven in the contrapuntal juxtaposition, the gradual decline and blurring of tonality begin to surface. Furthermore, in Casella's discussion of Ravel's harmony, he cites "the charming débüt of the Forlane in the 'Tombeau de Couperin'" as an example of Ravel's distinctive approach to tonality. Casella concludes that the harmonic language in Forlane evolves by synthetically integrating and blending various scales.²⁰²

As one engages with the first phrase of the "Forlane," the impressive array of rich and sophisticated chromatic notes within stands out remarkably. Without the tonic E at the beginning and end, as well as the dominant B natural, I would feel completely lost and might even question if this piece is still in E minor, not to mention the concept of "blending different scales."²⁰³ Alternatively, one might strongly suspect that Ravel is exploring a "12-tone" compositional language. The melodic line in the first phrase (measures 1-4) includes most of the semitones in E

²⁰² Alfredo Casella, "Ravel's Harmony." *The Musical Times* 67, no. 996 (1926): 127.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 127.

minor, alongside the A natural (Subdominant of E Minor), E natural (Tonic of E minor), F sharp (Supertonic of E minor) and B natural (Dominant of E minor), which appear in the left-hand bass chords and pedal points indicating the E minor chord progression. (Ex. 8a)

Musical Example 8a. Maurice Ravel, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Forlane, mm,1-4.

However, multiple cadential points on E minor chords (excluding chromatic half steps within the chords) firmly establish that the “Forlane” is in E minor. In fact, this demonstrates that the issue is not related to tonality but rather to Ravel’s distinctive melodic compositional techniques that integrate carefully designed semitones. In his detailed analysis, Stuchenschmidt proposes three key solutions regarding the chromatic notes: creating a psychological darkening of the tonic chord by avoiding the leading tone and tonic note, rapidly transitioning to unexpected notes in the melodic curve, and exchanging enharmonic equivalent notes.²⁰⁴

To clarify, as I understand it, evading the leading tone signifies the cadential point where the leading tone D sharp of E minor is lowered by a half step to D natural (Ex. 8b, measure 4).

²⁰⁴ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1914-1917.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968), 177-178.

Musical Example 8b. mm.4

A musical score snippet for Musical Example 8b, measures 4. It shows a melodic line on a single staff with a note labeled "D natural" in a box. The note is a half note, and the staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Musical Example 8c. mm.1-3

A musical score snippet for Musical Example 8c, measures 1-3. It is marked "Allegretto" and "p". The score is in 6/8 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Annotations in boxes highlight semitone relationships: "D# - E" in the upper voice, "B# - B natural" in the upper voice, and "A# - B" in the lower voice. The lower voice has a supporting pedal point A-E.

In contrast, D sharp appears at the beginning of the first tonic chord (Ex. 8c mm.1). The D sharp undoubtedly does not function as the leading tone in this context; instead, D sharp, as half step below the tonic E, contributes to the distinct “color” of minor tonic triads, leading to what Stuchenschmidt refers to as “psychological darkening.” Identifying similar semitone relationships is more straightforward when analyzing scale notes. For instance, consider the relationships from A sharp to B dominant tone (Ex. 8c mm.1) and B sharp to B natural (Ex. 8c mm 2) as examples. However, tracing back to the surprising D sharp (Ex. 8c, mm.1) again, which does not seem followed by any in-scale tones, indicates the E tonic tone but in a darker color.

This is evident not only in the melodic line but also in the left-hand chords. If D sharp is a substitution of E, the first chord can be interpreted as the second inversion of the E minor triad. Another controversial semitone is B sharp, which is a half-step higher than the dominant B natural. It was introduced earlier as a chord component in measure one and prolonged to measure two with the supporting pedal point A-E, a subdominant of E minor. Stuchenschmidt suggests that B sharp is the enharmonic equivalent of C natural, thus functioning as the third note of an A minor triad. Similarly, the B sharp in the melodic line (Ex. 8c mm. 2) can also be interpreted as part of the A minor triad.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1914-1917.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968), 175.

From the perspective of consistency, rather than acting as an enharmonic equivalent to C natural, the use of B sharp introduces a mysterious and vibrant semitone that harmonically implies the presence of B natural. Furthermore, after establishing the initial chord with D sharp to signify the presence of B natural. Moreover, after establishing the initial chord with D sharp to signify the tonic E, the second chord consistently utilizes B sharp to denote the dominant B natural. Moreover, the notes in the second chord anticipate the melodic notes found in Measure 2. In other words, the melodic notes correspond with the harmonic chords in the bass harmonic progression. Therefore, when the left-hand chord transitions to A-C sharp-E sharp, and the prolonged chord adds G sharp, the melodic notes in the right hand swiftly revert to B natural, incorporating C sharp. Analyzing and identifying the bass chord progressions reveals clear evidence of enharmonic equivalence, contributing to a rich and unpredictable chromatic quality. In the first phrase, for instance, Ravel creates a unique harmonic texture by alternating between a group of three augmented triads and four minor third intervals; such approaches confirm chromaticism as the essential concept of the *Forlane*. Stuckenschmidt notes that “the first three chords ... no note in common and contain every step in the chromatic scale except D, F sharp, and A sharp.”²⁰⁶ However, the approach goes beyond mere chromaticism; it consistently features a strong and distinct bass pedal point. In addition to the obscured tonic E tone in measure one and the subdominant A-E in measure two, from mm. 3 to 5, the bass line progresses from F sharp to B natural and ultimately resolves to E, following the chord progression ii - V – i.

The analysis above is merely one interpretation. Considering the complexity of such a large semitone group, many other innovative perspectives and interpretations can enhance our understanding of the sentence. It is indisputable that Ravel has always been committed to traditional form and structure while seeking to develop and explore various possibilities to

²⁰⁶ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1914-1917.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968), 176.

innovate his own harmonic language. I find Stuckenschmidt's conclusion of Ravel's tonal language particularly insightful and commendable: "*All of this is, at the same time, both primeval and modern, archaic and most novel; that is, archaic in its insistent adherence to modal forms and modern in pressing together the entire chromatic scale into such a narrow compass.*"²⁰⁷

So far, to prevent confusion over the semitones, we have dedicated several paragraphs to explaining and interpreting Ravel's chromaticism. This establishes a clearer foundation for analyzing the melody line and harmonic framework.

Simplicity and Clarity

In the previous chapter, we explored "Simplicity" and "Clarity," which are essential traits of the French (Latin) tradition and crucial for understanding Ravel's Neoclassicism in that context. Clarifying the intricate nature of semitones is vital for thoroughly analyzing the core melodies and harmonies.

"A new style appears in the Trio (1914) and more than ever in the 'Tombeau de Couperin' (1916-17). In this style, without repudiating the past, Ravel seems bent on simplification; it is then that his harmony becomes less overburdened."

Casella's focus on a "less overburdened" harmony resonates with our previous discussion of Forlane's first phrase.²⁰⁸ The steady pedal point is consistently upheld, effectively outlining the harmonic progression. Additionally, the Musette section of the "Menuet" provides another relevant

²⁰⁷ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, "1914-1917." *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968), 176.

²⁰⁸ Alfredo Casella, "Ravel's Harmony." *The Musical Times* 67, no. 996 (1926), 127.

example, featuring bass root notes (pedal point) primarily consisting of the dominant G and tonic D tones. Despite the dissonant upper chordal phrases, the bass harmony consistently resolves to the dominant G tone, contributing to a lasting pulse.

Musical Example 9a. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. Menuet, mm.33-54.

The musical score for 'Musette' is presented in three systems. The first system shows the right hand with a 'Musette' title and the left hand with a 'Sourdine' instruction. The second system shows the right hand with a melodic line and the left hand with a bass line. The third system shows the right hand with a piano (p) dynamic and the left hand with a bass line, including a '3 Cordes' instruction.

Similarly, the middle section of the “Rigaudon,” in C minor, maintains the same pedal point bass harmony. The left hand follows the pattern (Ex. 9b, i.e., Low-High-High-Low) with repeated C-G intervals, establishing a solid tonic root in the lower position; the pattern’s leaping (higher) intervals or chords form within the same chordal structure that descends in steps. Moreover, after two groups of such descending patterns, the rooted C minor intervals (C-E) switch positions with the descending pattern.

Musical Example 9b. Maurice Ravel, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Rigaudon, mm. 37-50.

The image shows a musical score for Maurice Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, specifically the Rigaudon movement, measures 37-50. The score is in 3/4 time, marked "Moins vif" and "pp". It features a piano with a repeating LH pattern of Low-High-High-Low. Annotations highlight "Higher chords: descending in steps" and "Switch to lower: Descending in steps".

However, in the subsequent part, after a brief moment of dissonant exploration, the tonic C-G root interval returns and continues to progress to subdominant F-C intervals or simply F tones. Thus, the overarching concept of the harmonic journey can be succinctly summarized as a progression through the tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords. What is particularly innovative is that Ravel employs highly chromatic chords and intervals, forming intricate yet consistent patterns rather than adhering to traditional tonal harmonic progressions.

To achieve “Simplicity” in melodic lines, let us examine the first phrase of the “Forlane.” Drawing from our earlier exploration of chromaticism, we can interpret the non-scale notes primarily as enharmonic equivalents or function as scale tones depicted in a darker hue. By navigating through the dissonance, the A sharp likely serves as the passing semitone to the following B; the D sharp, as we discussed previously, indicates the tonic E tone; the B sharp in measure two, stemming from the bass chords, can either substitute for C natural or signal the upcoming return of the dominant B natural; C sharp, G sharp, and the following B sharp in measure

three derive from the bass chord prolonged from the previous measure. The melodic line can be articulated as E-B-D# (E)-B-F#-E, featuring an accent on the D# and tenuto signs on both B and F#. Thus, the essence of the melodic line is the tonic notes combined with a descending dominant B chord in second inversion. (Ex. 10a)

Musical Example 10a. Maurice Ravel, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Forlane, mm,1-4. - With melodic line highlighted.

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of the Forlane from Maurice Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' with a quarter note equal to 96 (♩ = 96). The music is in 3/8 time and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The melodic line in the right hand is highlighted with a thick black line. Above the staff, several chords are annotated in boxes: E, B, D#-E, B, F, and E. The bass line consists of broken chords. The melodic line starts on E, moves to B, then D# (with an accent), then F# (with a tenuto sign), and finally E.

The same type of approach, represented by the melodic line in the broken chord, is also evident in the right-hand melody of the middle section of “Rigaudon.” Both G notes feature a tenuto sign, and the broken C chord (C-E flat-G-B flat) is prominently highlighted as the melody. (Ex. 10b)

Musical Example 10b. Maurice Ravel, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Rigaudon, mm. 37-43.

The image shows a musical score for the middle section of the Rigaudon from Maurice Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. The tempo is marked 'Moins vif'. The music is in 3/8 time and begins with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The melodic line in the right hand is highlighted with a thick black line. Above the staff, several chords are annotated in boxes: G, C, C-E-G, and Bb. The bass line consists of broken chords. The melodic line starts on G (with a tenuto sign), moves to C, then C-E-G, and finally Bb.

The analysis presented above only scratches the surface. Ravel’s innovative harmonic language and sophisticated rhythmic patterns inevitably invite more in-depth exploration and

interpretation. To this point, no one would dispute that the concluding Toccata presents a stunning exhibition of virtuosity, striking a perfect balance between extravagant techniques and delicate tenderness, while wrapping up the entire *Tombeau* in the brilliant key of E major. Such a stark contrast in character shocked critics and contemporaries, prompting protest from Roger-Ducasse, who remarked that the entire memorial suite “had not even had the decency to include a Sarabande.” In this regard, Roy Howat states, “*with the old French tradition that a posthumous tribute had no need to be sombre.*”²⁰⁹

Part.3 Critics and feedback

Ravel finished composing *Le Tombeau* in November 1917, but the circumstances surrounding it are intriguing. Various sources indicate that Ravel did not hasten the premiere of *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. Marguerite Long, the widow of Joseph de Marliave—to whom the last movement, “Toccata,” is dedicated—recalls a letter from Ravel proposing a performance in St-Jean-de-Luz, where she was staying. Mme Long noted from Ravel’s letter, “*but the time was not ripe; during these weeks leading to victory, the sky was covered with the darkest clouds we had seen since the Marne.*”²¹⁰ Between the lines, Ravel prefers the premiere of *Le Tombeau*, which occurred after the war, ideally when France emerged victorious. Another reason Ravel may be postponing *Le Tombeau*’s premiere is concerns about his health. Ravel was suffering from depression and lung

²⁰⁹ Roger Nichols, “1914–1920: Patriotism and Loss,” in *Ravel* (Yale University Press, 2011), 195.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 195.

issues (Ganglion or Granulomas), so he had to cancel academic activities and, presumably, all kinds of social activities in 1918.²¹¹

On April 11, 1919, Marguerite Long debuted the original piano piece, even though many contemporaries and students had already begun to learn it privately. Additionally, Ravel managed to arrive just in time to see the premiere of *Le Tombeau*. The audience responded with great enthusiasm to the concert, as Mme Long recalled:

*“It was the first appearance in public since the war of the man who, since the recent death of Debussy, had become the uncontested and glorious champion of French music. Everyone in the audience encored their favorite movement. Finally I replayed them all.”*²¹²

Critic Louis Vuillemin offers an alternative viewpoint, stating that “Forlane” is the movement that got a replay. Even amidst an enthusiastic atmosphere filled with shouts of “encore,” dissenting voices are inevitable. The opposite sound appears to be “astonishing that this homage to the dead should not have a funeral, or at least a morose quality.” This perspective echoes the previous criticisms we addressed regarding the title page design.²¹³

Additionally, regarding political perspective, there is abundant contemporary criticism that lauds *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, employing the terminology of the new classicism. René Chalupt regarded it as “simplified to the extent that it becomes refined and reties the broken thread to our old clavecinistes, and direct reaction against romanticism,” while Egon Wellesz commented that it exhibited “a wonderful clarity . . . a new classicism, a harmonious balance between form and

²¹¹ Roger Nichols, “1914–1920: Patriotism and Loss,” in *Ravel* (Yale University Press, 2011), 195-196.

²¹² *Ibid*, 201.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 204.

content which can only be formed among Latin peoples, without having the stamp of academicism.”²¹⁴ Yet, on the contrary, the most famous and sharp-tongued of these is Leigh Henry’s squib stating that the “anemic neoclassicism of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* threatens to become the musical tomb of Ravel.” This was by no means an uncommon polemic, although Jean Cocteau was primarily responsible for shifting critical approval away from those composers.

Ravel’s *Le Tombeau* captures his deep emotions, reflecting on his responses to the impacts of war and the grief of losing his mother. This work serves as a farewell as Ravel moves from youth into profound maturity, illustrating this transformation through a striking contrast between hidden depths and a bright, refined exterior. Stuchenschmidt quoted the “tough, stylish motto” Ravel shared with Maurice Delage— “One must have a head and guts, but never a heart,” interpreting it as “feelings are fleeting.”²¹⁵ He suggests that the concept of immortality stems more from the creator’s artistic talent and understanding of the form rather than from the profound emotions conveyed through the stunning costumes. However, the sincere and pure subtle emotions that are at the essence permeate every note and shape the phrases to convey the stories. Moreover, while remaining true to the classics, Ravel did not remain stagnant. As a bold innovator, he courageously pursued advancements in technique and harmony, as well as in classical forms, employing strict logic and craft precision.

²¹⁴ Scott Messing, “Polemic as History: The Case of Neoclassicism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991), 485.

²¹⁵ H.H. Stuckenschmidt, “1914-1917.” *Maurice Ravel; Variations on His Life and Work* (Chilton Book Company, 1968), 173.

Conclusion

Maurice Ravel's engagement with neoclassicism is characterized by its intricacy and nuance, effectively balancing tradition with innovation. Throughout this dissertation, we have examined the evolution of Ravel's compositional style, influences, and role within the broader artistic and political contexts of the early twentieth century. His exceptional ability to blend classical structures with modern harmonies and textures underscores his distinctive voice, thereby challenging conventional boundaries.

Ravel's interactions with the Apaches, his wartime experiences, and his participation in post-war musical discourse exemplify a composer who was both anchored in history and oriented towards the future. His appreciation for the past did not limit him; rather, it served as a foundation for creative reinvention. The impact of Debussy, Stravinsky, and the broader French and Russian musical traditions is discernible in his works. Nonetheless, Ravel consistently upheld his individuality, composing pieces that are distinctly his own.

A critical examination of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* has revealed Ravel's neoclassical tendencies, manifesting in his use of traditional forms, refined harmonic language, and transparent textures. Significantly, the neoclassicism discussed herein is distinct from the tumultuous sociopolitical climate of the early 20th century or the political dynamics associated with French musical society. Ravel's adherence to "Classicism" is manifested in his application of traditional forms, whereas the aspect of "Neo" is illustrated through his innovative, refined harmonic language and transparent textures. However, rather than merely resurrecting antiquated styles, Ravel imbued them with modern sensibilities, demonstrating his commitment to artistic purity and

expressive clarity. His approach to neoclassicism was not one of mere revival but rather of transformation, aligning with his broader ethos of “art for art’s sake.”

Despite criticism—whether accusations of being overly conservative, unpatriotic, or derivative—Ravel’s music has endured, transcending contemporary debates to secure its place in the classical canon. His steadfast refusal to align himself with rigid ideological movements, coupled with his commitment to artistic integrity, defines his legacy. His works continue to captivate performers and audiences alike, offering an intricate interplay of elegance, clarity, and emotional depth.

Ultimately, this dissertation aims to illuminate the complexities of Ravel’s neoclassicism within the broader context of twentieth-century music history. His blend of the past and present, tradition and modernity, stands as a testament to his genius. By resisting easy classification—akin to Ravel’s own reference to Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*: “*The eye sees not itself / But by reflection, by some other things*”—Ravel challenges us to engage with his music on its own terms, offering an enduring invitation to explore the richness and depth of his artistic vision. Artists, performers, or listeners, as observers, must seek understanding through reflection – whether through music, memory, or the gaze of another. The sheet music reflects not merely the superficial self but rather the deep, intricate architecture of the inner world.

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