



Department of Music
University of Alberta

STÉPHANE LEMELIN
pianist

*The Complete Solo Piano Works of
Maurice Ravel, Part II.*

**Friday, November 29, 1991
at 8 pm**

Convocation Hall, Arts Building

Program



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MAURICE RAVEL

(1875-1937)

Prélude (1913)

A la manière de ... Chabrier (1913)

A la manière de ... Borodine (1913)

Miroirs (1905)

Noctuelles

Oiseaux tristes

Une barque sur l'océan

Alborada del gracioso

La Vallée des cloches

INTERMISSION

Jeux d'eau (1901)

Le Tombeau de Couperin (1914-17)

Prélude

Fugue

Forlane

Rigaudon

Menuet

Toccata

PROGRAM NOTES

Although his main compositional efforts of 1913 were devoted to the Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé for voice and ensemble, the Parisian composer Maurice Ravel did manage to complete three solo piano works. The first, Prélude, was designed as a sightreading examination piece for students at the Conservatoire. Its twenty-seven measures contain many accidentals and one passage in octaves, but it is relatively easy to sightread.

The next two works pay tribute to two very strong influences in his own compositional beginnings: Borodin of the Russian nationalistic school and Chabrier. Caricaturing of an author's style was popular in France, both in literature and music, and in December 1913, the Italian composer Alfredo Casella (1883-1947), who had composed and successfully performed pastiches of Wagner, Brahms, Debussy, Ravel, and d'Indy, premiered Ravel's two works. A la manière de...Chabrier (in the manner of...) is a pastiche of a pastiche, i.e. Ravel's interpretation of how Chabrier would have paraphrased the "Flower Song" from Gounod's Faust. A la manière de...Borodine is a little waltz in the nationalistic Russian style, with flattened sixths and sevenths and mediant pedals.

Miroirs (1904-05) is a set of five pieces, each inspired by some external image or impression 'mirrored' in sound, in which Ravel seems to 'paint' rather than 'express emotion'. Each piece is dedicated to a member of the "Apaches", a group of outspoken Avant Garde musicians and poets--of which Ravel was a member--who actively supported and defended new works. This new work included new developments in compositional techniques: range of modulation is extended, rhythmical solidity is broken up, and the harmony is especially enriched. "The Miroirs," said Ravel, "are a collection of piano pieces that mark a change in my harmonic development that is so profound that they have put many musicians out of

Program Notes (continued)

countenance."

1. 'Noctuelles' (a kind of moth). Suggested by the phrase, "The owlet-moths fly clumsily out of the old barn to drape themselves round other beams," this piece is characterized by clashing harmonies and syncopated pedal.
2. 'Oiseaux Tristes' was suggested by the phrase, "Birds lost in the mazes of an extremely dark forest during the hottest hours of the Summer." It is built around a persistently repeated note interspersed with trills and, at the beginning and end, a plaintive descending major third.
3. 'Une barque sur l'océan' is an image of the sun-lit Mediterranean in the afternoon, with a breeze rippling the water and a craft riding before the wind, characterized by arpeggios that cover the whole keyboard.
4. 'Alborada del gracioso' (Morning Song of the Jester) pictures twanging guitars and clicking castinets through the use of brittle percussive effects.
5. 'La Vallée des Cloches' (The Valley of the Bells). Ravel exploits sonorities and single tones, rather than clashes or clusters.

The score of Jeux d'eau (1901) is headed by a motto quoted from Henri de Régnier--"The river god laughing at the water that tickles him," and is dedicated to his composition teacher, Gabriel Fauré. Ravel provided his

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own description: "This piece, inspired by the noise of water, and the musical sounds which fountains of water, cascades and streams make, is founded on two themes, in first-movement (sonata) form, always without subjecting itself to a classical tonal scheme." The first theme is more 'effect' than 'theme', while the second one is distinctly thematic. At the premiere performance in 1902 by Ricard Viñes (a fellow Apache), critics viewed the work as cacophonous and overly complicated. Today it is viewed as an important landmark in the literature of the piano, in which Ravel combines sweeping virtuosity with the refined tinting of impressionism, and a blend of structural clarity with subtle chords of sevenths and ninths.

Le Tombeau de Couperin (1914-17) is a suite of six dances in Baroque and Classic style, an act of homage to Couperin and the whole school of 17th- and 18th-century French clavecinists. Deeply concerned by the outbreak of war, Ravel enlisted in the military in 1915 as a truck driver (known as 'driver Ravel'). His health eventually broke due to dysentery, followed by the death of his mother in 1917, and he was given a temporary discharge. He completed Tombeau while recuperating at a retreat northwest of Paris, dedicating each of the six movements to the memory of a friend killed in the war.

The Prélude is characterized by sparse texture, rapid ornaments, and perpetual motion, recalling the harpsichord works of Rameau and Couperin.

Before writing the Fugue, which is the only example of this form in all of Ravel's published works, he engaged in extensive study of fugues, including those of J. S. Bach. This fugue is of closely-knit texture with many instances of stretto and inversion.

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The Forlane is akin to Couperin in texture, rhythm, ornamentation, and structure, but Ravelian in melody and harmony.

The Rigaudon contrasts an exuberant opening and relatively literal reprise with a slower pastoral-like middle section.

The Menuet has broad similarities with Ravel's Menuet Antique and the second movement of the Sonatine in structure, procedure, modal harmony, and balanced phrases.

The Toccata, while technically very difficult, always maintains a clear melodic thread.

Notes by Tom Holm

Tonight's recital is being recorded by CBC for future broadcast on *Arts National*, with host Terry Campbell, heard weeknights on CBC Stereo 90.9 at 8 pm



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