



Ravel

Boléro

Daphnis et Chloé

Ma Mère l'Oye

La Valse

alto

London Symphony Orchestra
LOUIS FRÉMAUX

Maurice Ravel

[1]	<i>Daphnis et Chloé, Suite No. 2, M. 57b</i>	17:11
[2]	<i>La Valse, M. 72</i>	12:37
	<i>Ma mère l'Oye, M. 60a</i>	
[3]	I. Prélude	3:39
[4]	II. Tableau. Danse du rouet et scène	3:46
[5]	III. Tableau. Pavane de la belle au bois dormant	2:25
[6]	IV. Tableau. Les entretiens de la belle et de la bête	4:58
[7]	V. Tableau. Petit poucet	4:57
[8]	VI. Tableau. Laideronnette, impératrice des pagodes	5:30
[9]	VII. Apothéose. Le jardin féerique	3:44
[10]	<i>Boléro, M. 81</i>	15:47

London Symphony Orchestra Louis Frémaux, *conductor*

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Maurice Ravel began work on the ballet *Daphnis et Chloé* in the summer of 1909, having met the impresario Sergei Diaghilev through his friend Misia Godebska, whose two husbands had both been influential newspaper editors. Ravel continued working on the ballet throughout 1910 apparently without much effort although it was by far the largest orchestral piece he was to compose. The 1st Suite was premiered in concert at the Concerts Colonne on 2 April 1911 with Pierné conducting.

The creators of the ballet – Ravel, Fokine, Bakst, Benois, Diaghilev and Calvocoressi – had decided upon an atmospheric scenario based upon Longus' Greek tale. Ravel was familiar both with a translation by Amyot and 18th century paintings of ancient Greece which informed his conceit of the story. However conflict between the collaborators arose as it soon became apparent that Fokine and Ravel were working toward different ends: whilst Fokine wanted to recreate the stylised dances as seen on Greek vases, Ravel wished to represent the ancient Greece of his own imagination, 'filtered through with illustrations of the late 18th century'.

Ravel scored his piece very slowly and kept the team waiting for almost a year for the final *Danse générale*. The piano rehearsals, during which Nijinsky (Daphnis) constantly quarrelled with Fokine, were so dire that Diaghilev wanted to pull the project and only relented in the expectation that Ravel's orchestration would vastly improve the whole. Whilst rehearsing the finale the dancers were unable to count five in a bar and only solved that problem by saying 'Ser-gei-Dia-ghi-lev' in time to the music! Nijinsky's erotic *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* preceded the premiere of *Daphnis et Chloé* by a few days and this event rather overshadowed everything in its wake that season.

Daphnis et Chloé is a ballet in three parts and is set on the island of Lesbos. The first part tells how the shepherd Daphnis won a kiss from Chloé before the island is invaded by pirates and she is kidnapped. Daphnis in despair finds one of her sandals. Some nymph statues come to life and bring him to the god Pan. In darkness one can hear a choir singing and the scene changes to the pirate's camp where Chloé's capture is celebrated and she is made to dance for the chief. Chloé's attempt to escape is foiled and she is carried off. Pan appears and the pirates flee in terror. The third part is in effect *Suite No. 2*. At dawn

Daphnis is found by the same shepherds who with Pan's help have rescued Chloé. The two lovers recreate in dance the story of Pan and Syrinx. Everyone joins in the wild celebrations.

Although outwardly something of a dandy (he was meticulous in his appearance and kept abreast of the latest male fashions), there was a child lurking within Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). *Ma Mère l'Oye* (Mother Goose) was originally composed in 1908 for Mimi and Jean Godebski, the young children of close friends and was inspired by five children's tales by Charles Perrault: *Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant* (Sleeping Beauty); *Petit Poucet* (Tom Thumb); *Laideronnette*, *Impératrice des Pagodes* (Empress of the Pagodas); *Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête* (Beauty and the Beast); and *Le jardin féerique* (The Fairy Garden). *Ma mère l'Oye* was first performed in April 1910. Ravel's aim of 'evoking in these pieces the poetry of childhood' forced him to simplify his style and, as he commented, 'strip down the texture of my writing to the bare essentials'. This is particularly evident in the orchestrated version begun in 1911 and completed the following year as a ballet commissioned by Jacques Rouché, the future director of the Opéra who was at that time Director of the Théâtre des Arts. As ever, Ravel's scoring demonstrates immense delicacy and luminosity, and among the most notable effects are the shrieking piccolos in the *Petit Poucet* episode as the birds hungrily eat the breadcrumbs; the gamelan-like sounds in the oriental episode; and the gruffness of the contra bassoon as the Beast. To the five tales, Ravel added a Prelude and the Spinning-wheel dance (*Danse du rouet*).

La valse, initially titled *Wien*, was started in 1919 and completed in 1920, although the idea had formed much earlier in 1906 when Ravel wrote to a friend of his 'intense feeling for the marvellous (waltz) rhythms'. Diaghilev heard the piano sketch in February 1920, a year in which Ravel was offered, but refused, the *Légion d'honneur*. Having hoped to premiere the work alongside Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* Diaghilev rejected the piece out of hand (he can have gained little positive impression from the work in its two-piano format) and Ravel had to be content with hearing the work premiered in concert on 12 December 1920. The work's belated staging (by Ida Rubinstein rather than Diaghilev) occurred in 1929. Ravel's scenario was 'a sort of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz which I saw combined with an impression of a fantastic, fatal whirling motion. The scene is set in an Imperial palace c1855...Dancing couples can be glimpsed momentarily through the

swirling clouds. As they slowly clear, we see a huge ballroom filled by a circling crowd. At the fortissimo (letter B in the score) the light of the chandeliers blazes out'. In 1922 Ravel wrote to Maurice Emmanuel mentioning that audiences read into the tragic and somewhat savage second half of the work the end of the second Empire and the state of Vienna after the Great War. Divided into two sections, the first half seems to be a celebration of Viennese schmaltz, whereas the second (which starts with a return to the same atmosphere of cloudiness which opens the work) shows the waltz corrupted from voluptuousness into something more desperate.

Boléro, described by the composer as a 'piece for orchestra without music', has jokingly been referred to as the triumph of technique over everything else. It was composed in 1928, a year which had seen Ravel conduct an exhausting three-month tour of North America during which time he cemented a friendship with Gershwin and listened to jazz whenever possible. As with *Pavane* Ravel was amazed at *Boléro*'s popularity. On the face of it, the work is simplicity itself: two melodies, each of the same length repeated AABB several times over a long crescendo. Each time the pattern is repeated a different combination of instruments takes over the reins so that the constant repetition of the melodies never palls. Shortly before the close the pattern changes slightly over a change of key. In view of Ravel's fascination with mechanical objects it is hardly surprising that he had hoped to see *Boléro* staged as a ballet set in a factory but this did not happen during his lifetime. The initial staging of the ballet, as seen at the Opéra on 22 November 1928, was set in a decadent Barcelona club. The dance gained an even larger audience in the 1934 Paramount film *Boléro* as performed by George Raft and the notorious fan dancer Sally Rand. It became familiar to a later generation when famously used by the ice dancers Torvill and Dean.

NOTES ON THE ARTISTS

The distinguished French conductor **Louis Frémaux** was born in 1921. For ten years from 1956 he was chief conductor of the Monte Carlo National Opera Orchestra before briefly taking up a post in Lyons. As Music Director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra between 1969- 78 Frémaux heightened the profile of this now world-famous orchestra, recording prolifically. After leaving Birmingham he took over the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

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