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AN INTERPRETATION OF THE SOLO VERSION OF MAURICE RAVEL'S
LA VALSE: INSIGHTS FROM GEORGE BALANCHINE'S CHOREOGRAPHY

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A DOCUMENT APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the interrelationship between Ravel's music and Balanchine's choreography of *La Valse* in search of insights into the interpretation of the solo piano version. Ravel's musical aesthetics are discussed by referencing his biography, musical characteristics, and pianistic style. Historical aspects of *La Valse*, including the compositional background and cultural and artistic context of the piece, are provided for further insights into the piece. The discussion of five historical choreographies—two Bronislava Nijinska productions during Ravel's lifetime, the Paris premier (1929) and her revised production (1931), and then three posthumous productions by Léonide Massine (1950), George Balanchine (1951), and Frederick Ashton (1958)—reveals choreographers' different approaches to the interrelationship of music and dance in their choreographies of *La Valse*. Balanchine's choreography is examined specifically in terms of the structure of the piece and interpretative insights into effective performance. Performance considerations, including phrasing, touches, tempo flexibility, dynamics, incorporating material in the optional staves, and solutions to technical problems, are discussed in detail.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Multiple studies on Ravel's life and his musical contribution have already confirmed his status as a significant early twentieth-century composer. His innovative compositional styles have led music scholars to study most of his major solo piano works, such as *Jeux d'eau*, *Miroirs*, *Gaspard de la nuit*, *Valse nobles et sentimentales*, and *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. *La Valse*, one of his most famous, is subtitled as a "choreographic poem." It was completed in three versions: for solo piano, for two pianos (both in December-February, 1920), and a few months later for orchestra with ballet (April, 1920). Among the three, the orchestral version is the most frequently performed. The solo version is less often performed because it requires extreme dexterity due to its multi-instrumental aspects. The solo version, although underappreciated, is one of Ravel's most brilliant compositions, especially as it distills his colorful orchestral characteristics and conveys his fascination with dance.

In *La Valse*, Ravel tried to unify dance and music. In his artistic aesthetics, the integration of the arts is not only natural, but also purposeful: "For me, there are not several arts, but only one: music, painting, dance and literature differ only in their means of expression. Thus, there aren't different kinds of artists, but simply different kinds of specialists."¹ The solo version of *La Valse* is a condensed form of the orchestral version, yet it still reflects the instrumentation and range of colors of the

¹ An article by Maurice Ravel, "Memories of a Lazy Child" (1931), is found in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, rev. ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 393.

whole orchestra, while the idea of ballet choreography, dance movements interwoven with the music, adds further complexity to this version.

The choreographies of Frederick Ashton (1904-1988) and George Balanchine (1904-1983), two of the most historically important choreographers, adhere to Ravel's original vision for dance and music in *La Valse*. This is particularly true of Balanchine, who maximized the destructive musical images by plotting a leading ballerina's death in his choreography. This choreography, in terms of musical interpretation, introduces a new approach for pianists to understand the solo version and suggests new ideas for understanding its structure. The interrelationship between music and dance in Balanchine's choreography helps pianists interpret the solo version and provides insights into Ravel's orchestral style in his solo piano works.

Need for the Study

The piano solo version of *La Valse* is regarded as one of the most challenging virtuoso works in keyboard literature. Its many technical challenges are perhaps greater than those in any of Ravel's other piano works. Pianists may focus so intently on solving the technical challenges that they may not consider other aspects of interpretation, especially the qualities of the dance. The choreographic aspect of the dance can be a rich interpretative resource for the solo performer.

There are two relevant studies on *La Valse*, but neither of them specifically discusses the interrelationship between the choreography and the solo piano version.

Mawer's *Ballets of Maurice Ravel* (2006)² examines *La Valse* as a ballet work, including insights into its various choreographies and Ravel's use of the orchestra. In *Maurice Ravel's La Valse: Historical Context, Structure, Harmony, and Challenges for Interpretation in the Solo Piano Version* (2005),³ Maneva examines theoretical aspects of the solo version such as themes, harmonies, and rhythms, resulting in some performance suggestions for the solo version. Neither source discusses directly the implications of ballet choreography on the solo version.

Purpose and Procedures of the Study

This study focuses primarily on the interrelationship between music and choreography in the solo piano version of *La Valse* in search of insights into the pianistic interpretation of the work. Ravel's musical aesthetics will also be examined by referencing his biography, musical characteristics, orchestration, and pianistic style.

Deborah Mawer proposes that among the many choreographies of *La Valse*, "The main elements of music and dance are so well matched that Balanchine's interpretation can be claimed as one where the synthesized whole is indeed greater than the sum of its components."⁴ Balanchine's choreography is specifically studied in the present document for interpretative insights into the solo performance. Through

² Deborah Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 2.

³ Jeni M. Maneva, "Maurice Ravel's *La Valse*: Historical Context, Structure, Harmony, and Challenges for Interpretation in the Solo Piano Version" (DMA diss., West Virginia University, 2005).

⁴ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 181.

the examination of the interrelationship of the music and his choreography, this study intends to make *La Valse* easier to approach and more fully appreciated by pianists.

In order to view the video recordings of Balanchine's choreography of *La Valse*, the author went to the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Recordings of Balanchine's productions are available at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division for research purposes only. Under the protection of the George Balanchine Foundation and the George Balanchine Trust, a total of twenty-one recordings of New York City Ballet productions of Balanchine's *La Valse* are held at the time of this research, including the historical excerpt recording of the premier year production (1951), although it is in black and white.

Since the premier, Balanchine kept his choreography for all of his later productions of *La Valse*. Therefore, all the recorded productions with the New York City Ballet present the same choreography, only with different dancers. For this study, among the twenty-one recorded productions, the 1973 version (MGZIDVD 5-923 and 5-945) is specifically examined because this version presents well-constructed close and wide shots in one recording, as it was specially filmed for a German television program. As a result of observation of this recording with the solo piano score, various interpretative ideas are suggested here. Choreographic details, including dancers' stage entrances and exits, movement changes, costume, and light effects are examined in order to develop the interpretative insights for the solo performance.

Limitations of the Study

This study focuses solely on what a pianist can gain from a familiarity with Balanchine's choreography of *La Valse*. There is no attempt to analyze his choreography from the technical perspective of a dancer or choreographer. Although there is a significant number of studies and resources in the French language, these are not considered.

Organization of the Study

This document includes five chapters. The present chapter contains the introduction, need for the study, purpose and procedures of the study, limitations of the study, organization of the study, and the review of related literature: books, dissertations, and articles on Ravel and *La Valse*.

Chapter two discusses Ravel's contribution to music history, the general characteristics of his music with a focus on his orchestration and transcriptions, and the styles of his piano works.

Chapter three outlines the historical background of *La Valse*. First, this includes the cultural and artistic context of *La Valse*, which offers further insight into Ravel's interest in dance, especially his attraction to Russian music. Also, his original idea of the choreographic poem is discussed. Second, this chapter provides information on five historical ballet productions of *La Valse*: two Bronislava Nijinska productions during Ravel's lifetime—the Paris premier (1929) and her revised

production (1931)—and then three posthumous productions by Léonide Massine (1950), George Balanchine (1951), and Frederick Ashton (1958).

Chapter four examines the interrelationship of the music and Balanchine's choreography of *La Valse*. Based on two scholars' (Arbie Orenstein and Deborah Mawer) studies on the formal structure of *La Valse*, this document seeks a new sectional analysis of the piece, which is suggested by Balanchine's choreography. For reference, a chart of the full description of his choreography together with musical sections is found in appendix D. Since his is regarded as one of the most authentic and successful choreographies of *La Valse*,⁵ it is also used for the detailed interpretative insights for solo performance.

Finally, chapter five summarizes the interpretative conclusion of the study and makes recommendation for further study. Appendices include a list of choreographers who have staged *La Valse*, a list of Balanchine's choreographies of other works by Ravel, a list of performances of Balanchine's choreography of *La Valse*, and a chart of the full description of Balanchine's *La Valse* with musical sections.

⁵ Deborah Mawer, "Balanchine's *La Valse*: Meanings and Implications for Ravel Studies," *Opera Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2006), 90.

Related Literature

Selected Books

Biographical information on Maurice Ravel is available in several major sources, including *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*⁶ and *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*.⁷ In addition to these citations, several books have been written about his life and music. These include the first biography, *Maurice Ravel*, published in French in 1938 a year after Ravel's death by one of his closest friends, Alexis Roland-Manuel (English version published in 1947).⁸ Other authoritative biographies include *Ravel: Life & Works* by Rollo H. Myers,⁹ *Maurice Ravel: Variations on His Life and Work* by H. H. Stuckenschmidt,¹⁰ *Ravel* by Norman Demuth¹¹ and *Maurice Ravel* by Gerald Larner.¹²

Along with these general biographies, two informative research books by Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* and *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews* are major sources for this study. *Ravel: Man and Musician*¹³ was

⁶ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Maurice Ravel," by Barbara L. Kelly.

⁷ *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, s.v. "Maurice Ravel."

⁸ Alexis Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1947).

⁹ Rollo H. Myers, *Ravel: Life & Works* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960).

¹⁰ Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, *Maurice Ravel: Variations on His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Chilton Book, 1968).

¹¹ Norman Demuth, *Ravel* (Westport: Hyperion, 1979).

¹² Gerald Larner, *Maurice Ravel* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996).

¹³ Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

first published in 1968, and a second edition came out in 1975. The book is divided into two parts. In part one, Orenstein presents Ravel's biography and cultural background. Part two discusses Ravel's musical language and aesthetics, including a clear and concise analysis of each of Ravel's pieces in chronological order. Along with these analyses, a detailed catalogue of Ravel's works and a review of historical performances are included as an appendix. This book is a well-organized, detailed, and helpful resource for general readers.

His other book, *Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*¹⁴ is a natural outgrowth of his first book. Orenstein published this extended study in 1991 through Columbia University Press, and it was reprinted by Dover Publications in 2003. It is similar to his first book, although it includes more extended and updated research on the composer. Orenstein believes the most perceptive comments about Ravel's life and art were those made by the composer himself. Therefore, *Ravel Reader* includes three important documents from Ravel: "Autobiographical Sketch," "Some Reflections on Music," and "Contemporary Music."

The first document, "Autobiographical Sketch," is an interview with Ravel by Roland-Manuel, the first biographer of Ravel. In the interview, Ravel explained his music and his musical aesthetics. After the interview, Ravel sent Roland-Manuel a paragraph-long statement about his musical aesthetics, which was published as "Some Reflections on Music." These two documents are the only statements from the composer about his musical aesthetics. "Contemporary Music" is a lecture given by Ravel at Rice Institute (now Rice University) on April 6 and 7, 1928 while he was on

¹⁴ Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, rev. ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003).

tour in the United States. Ravel lectured about contemporary music and shared his fascination and curiosity about American jazz and blues. By compiling these three documents together for the first time, Orenstein has provided the most crucial and dependable resources for understanding Ravel's thoughts and musical style.

According to Zank, Orenstein's *Ravel Reader* is "indispensable."¹⁵

*Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research*¹⁶ by Stephen Zank is another crucial reference resource for this study. He wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on Ravel's music,¹⁷ and after he graduated he continued research on Ravel. With his teacher Orenstein's guidance, he developed *Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research*, which contains the most recent and reliable research on Ravel. Besides a detailed biographical essay, the "Historical Chronology"¹⁸ is particularly useful as a resource for understanding the connection between Ravel and other composers, since it provides information on important events in music history within Ravel's lifetime. His book covers extensive reference lists on Ravel studies, including dissertations, articles, and books on specially focused subjects.

The examination of Ravel's musical aesthetics is the primary focus of many books. *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*,¹⁹ edited by Deborah Mawer, presents commentaries on Ravel's style and musical aesthetics, as well as performance reviews

¹⁵ Stephen Zank, *Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research* (New York: Routledge 2005), 59.

¹⁶ Zank, *Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research*.

¹⁷ Stephen Zank, "L'Arrère Pensée in Music of Maurice Ravel: Sound, Style, and Virtuosity" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1996).

¹⁸ Zank, *Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research*, 21-36.

¹⁹ Deborah Mawer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

by knowledgeable scholars. A total of eleven essays with a detailed and well-organized chronology of Ravel's life and career are presented in this book. Among the eleven essays, Roy Howat's "Ravel and Piano"²⁰ is particularly helpful for this study in understanding the relationship between Ravel, the instrument, and his piano works. Another essay, Deborah Mawer's "Ballet and the Apotheosis of the Dance,"²¹ is also crucial for this study, since she discusses the important influence of dance on Ravel.

In 2006, expanding on her essay in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, Mawer published *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*,²² the first book on Ravel's ballet music. She discusses the choreography and orchestration of *La Valse* in terms of historical ballet productions. Indeed, her work inspired the author for this study: the consideration of choreography for the solo version of *La Valse*. Based on Mawer's research on choreography and orchestration, a comprehensive understanding of the solo piano version is possible in this study.

*Ravel: Orchestral Music*²³ by Laurence Davies is part of a series of BBC music guides. Davies surveys Ravel's major orchestra works, including ballet music and concertos. He offers compelling views on characteristics of Ravel's orchestration through *La Valse* and includes a brief analysis of the orchestral version.

²⁰ Mawer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, 71-96.

²¹ Ibid., 140-161.

²² Deborah Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006).

²³ Laurence Davies, *Ravel: Orchestral Music* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971).

Piano-literature books that discuss Ravel and his works are Stewart Gordon's *A History of Keyboard Literature: Music for the Piano and Its Forerunners*²⁴; F. E. Kirby's *Music for Piano: A Short History*²⁵; and David Burge's *Twentieth-Century Piano Music*.²⁶ Among the three, Burge presents the most concise and well-organized summary of Ravel's piano music styles, providing thorough examinations of three major works: *Jeux d'eau*, *Gaspard de la nuit*, and *Miroirs*. However, none of these books provides useful information related to the balletic and orchestral aspects of Ravel's solo piano works.

For more thorough understanding of Ravel's piano styles and originality, Vlado Perlemuter and H el ene Jourdan-Morhange's *Ravel According to Ravel*²⁷ is recommended. Perlemuter (1904-2002) was a pianist who took piano lessons from Ravel in the late 1920s. The book is a collection of Perlemuter's interviews with Radio Fran aise while he performed the complete solo piano works of Ravel as a radio broadcast series. This interview collection includes full of the composer's thoughts about his own piano music and it is a vital resource for pianistic interpretation for *La Valse*.

²⁴ Stewart Gordon, *A History of Keyboard Literature: Music for the Piano and Its Forerunners* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996).

²⁵ F. E. Kirby, *Music for Piano: A Short History* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1995).

²⁶ David Burge, *Twentieth-Century Piano Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990).

²⁷ Vlado Perlemuter and H el ene Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel*, trans. Frances Tanner, ed. Harold Taylor, (White Plains, NY: Pro-Am Resources, 1988).

Selected Dissertations

As part of the upswing in Ravel studies, dissertations on Ravel's piano music have multiplied, and several studies have been useful models for this study. Influential dissertations in this study include the first Ph.D. dissertation on Ravel in the United States, *The Piano Music of Ravel: an analysis of the technical and interpretive problems inherent in the pianistic style of Maurice Ravel* by Stelio Dubbiosi (1967).²⁸

Dubbiosi analyzes most of Ravel's major solo piano works individually from three different aspects: traditional harmony, the Schenkerian system as modified and explained by Adele T. Katz and Felix Salzer, and the thematic or motivic structure by Rudolph Reti.²⁹ Although *La Valse* is not discussed, the dissertation is still helpful in understanding Ravel's musical style in his solo piano works.

Brandwein's *Divisi Fingering in Selected Passages from Ravel's Solo Piano Works* (1981)³⁰ applies "divisi fingering" (how to divide hands for technical sections) to Ravel's piano works. The introductory part one provides general information about Maurice Ravel as a composer and pianist, and his compositional style and artistry. The parts two and three introduce the concept of divisi fingering and suggest performance ideas for some of Ravel's solo compositions: *Pavane pour une infante*

²⁸ Stelio Dubbiosi, "The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel: An Analysis of the Technical and Interpretive Problems Inherent in the Pianistic Style of Maurice Ravel" (PhD diss., New York University, 1967).

²⁹ Dubbiosi, "The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel: An Analysis of the Technical and Interpretive Problems Inherent in the Pianistic Style of Maurice Ravel," 11-14.

³⁰ Dorothy Woster Brandwein, "Divisi Fingering in Selected Passages from Ravel's Solo Piano Works" (DMA diss., University of Missouri - Kansas City, 1981).

defunte, Jeux d'eau, Sonatine, Miroirs, Gaspard de la nuit, Valses nobles et sentimentales, and Le Tombeau de Couperin. Brandwein asserts that divisi fingering makes the notes easier to play so that the pianist can better integrate the musical and technical demands to make a convincing performance. From her perspective, *La Valse* is not considered an original solo piano composition and therefore is not discussed. However, her idea of using divisi fingering will be considered for pianistic interpretation in chapter four of this document.

Phrase Rhythm in the Piano Works of Maurice Ravel by Herklots-Jeaningros examines most of Ravel's solo piano works according to William Rothstein's approach called "Phrase-Rhythm Analysis."³¹ The integral idea of this dissertation is that phrase-rhythm analysis can help in performing a passage, choosing a tempo and solving technical problems.

Maurice Ravel's La Valse: Historical Context, Structure, Harmony, and Challenges for Interpretation in the Solo Piano Version, a D.M.A. dissertation by Jeni M. Maneva at West Virginia University,³² is the most relevant study to this research. Unlike the dissertations discussed earlier, her dissertation includes the solo version of *La Valse*. However, her approach is broad in scope. She analyzes *La Valse* in terms of musical form, thematic material, harmonic framework, rhythm, meter, and tempo. Also, she examines *La Valse* and *Bolero* as major representative works of "Western

³¹ Herklots-Jeaningros Laurence, "Phrase Rhythm in the Piano Works of Maurice Ravel" (DM diss., Northwestern University, 2004).

³² Jeni M. Maneva, "Maurice Ravel's *La Valse*: Historical Context, Structure, Harmony, and Challenges for Interpretation in the Solo Piano Version" (DMA diss., West Virginia University, 2005).

and non-Western dance,”³³ without providing a comparison of *La Valse* and Ravel’s other dance works, especially other waltzes such as *Valse nobles et sentimentales*. In her chapter five, she includes overall performance challenges and suggestions for *La Valse*.

Since Ravel claimed *La Valse* as an “apotheosis of Viennese waltz,”³⁴ comparison between *La Valse* and other waltzes is important in order to understand Ravel’s musical development of waltz and to determine unique characteristics of *La Valse* as a piano work. Steele’s dissertation, *The Valses nobles et sentimentales and La Valse: A comparison*,³⁵ compares the two most representative Ravel waltzes. In her chapter two she includes the historical context of these two works, such as the background of the compositions, the composer’s intentions, and the premier performances and their reviews. Chapter three is a description of the two works in terms of melody, rhythm, harmony, and tonality. Along with these descriptions, she includes a detailed formal analysis chart as an appendix.

Selected Articles

In “Maurice Ravel: Some Notes on His Orchestral Method,”³⁶ Scott Goddard discusses Ravel’s philosophy of orchestration. Goddard considers Ravel’s

³³ Maneva, “Maurice Ravel’s *La Valse*: Historical Context, Structure, Harmony, and Challenges for Interpretation in the Solo Piano Version,” 24-25.

³⁴ Maurice Ravel, “An Autobiographical Sketch,” found in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, rev. ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 32.

³⁵ Susan Helen Steele, “The *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and *La Valse*” (MM diss., University of Western Ontario, Canada, 1976).

³⁶ Scott Goddard, “Maurice Ravel: Some notes on His Orchestral Method,” *Music & Letters*, 6, no. 4 (October 1925), 291-303.

orchestration technique to be one of his most prominent features because of its meticulousness. He views Ravel's orchestration as contextual, quoting Roland-Manuel: "In reality, he [Ravel] is, with Stravinsky, the one man in the world who best knows the weight of a trombone-note, the harmonies of a cello or a *pianissimo* tam-tam in the relationships of one orchestral group to another."³⁷ Also, he asserts that when Ravel orchestrated a piano work, he built up a version in which the original colors were made more brilliant and the light and shade more contrasted. Even though Ravel intended *La Valse* for ballet like *Daphnis et Chloe*, Goddard views *La Valse* as one of his three original orchestral works.³⁸

In "Maurice Ravel's Creative Process,"³⁹ Orenstein emphasizes Ravel's technical perfection. He also points out the importance of the piano in the process of orchestration of both his own works and those of others. He believes Ravel's sketches proceeded from simple to more complex and, in a sense, this process parallels his art. Thus, his longer and more complex works were accretions of a few basic themes or motifs.⁴⁰

Many musical aspects of *La Valse*, such as texture and harmonic progression, are indeed sophisticated and complex. However, most of its waltz melodies are developed from one basic waltz germ, and they are similar to one another. Even though the final result of the composition is complicated, Ravel shaped this outcome

³⁷ Goddard, "Maurice Ravel: Some notes on His Orchestral Method," 292.

³⁸ The other two are *Rapsodie Espagnole* and *Tzigane*.

³⁹ Arbie Orenstein, "Maurice Ravel's Creative Process," *Musical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (October 1967), 467-81.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 474.

from quite simple material.

In “Last Dance,”⁴¹ George Benjamin analyzes *La Valse* mainly in terms of phrase structure, melodic structure, and harmony. He views *La Valse* as a life cycle, “one-movement design plots the birth, decay, and destruction of a musical genre: the waltz,”⁴² which is also somewhat related to Ravel’s destructive image in *La Valse*.⁴³ Benjamin also examines Ravel’s use of hemiola and 5- and 6-note chord structures in depth.

The most influential article for this study in terms of choreography is “Balanchine’s *La Valse*: Meanings and Implications for Ravel Studies” by Deborah Mawer in 2006.⁴⁴ She examines George Balanchine’s choreography, one of the most famous choreographies of Ravel’s *La Valse*. She comprehensively discusses musical and extra-musical aspects of *La Valse*, as she wrote,

The interpretation of Ravel’s *La Valse* by George Balanchine (1904-1983) opens up new avenues of study for Ravel scholars by inviting enquiry into a complex web of relationships among music, choreography, literature, and historical context. Specifically the choreographer’s superb visualization of *La Valse* (1951) yields additional meanings and implications for Ravel’s music.⁴⁵

Despite the rich resources on Ravel, Balanchine and *La Valse*, none discusses directly the implications of ballet choreography on the solo version.

⁴¹ George Benjamin, “Last Dance,” *Musical Times* 135, no. 1817 (July 1994), 432-35.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 432.

⁴³ “I had intended this as a kind of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz, in my mind, with the impression of *un tournoiement fantastique et fatal* (‘fantastic and fatal whirling’). Maurice Ravel, “An Autobiographical Sketch” in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, rev. ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 32.

⁴⁴ Deborah Mawer, “Balanchine’s *La Valse*: Meanings and Implications for Ravel Studies,” *Opera Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2006), 90-116.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

CHAPTER TWO

Ravel's Life and Musical Style

Biography

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) is regarded as one of the most representative musicians in the early twentieth century. He was the first child of Pierre Joseph Ravel and Marie Delouart. His father, an engineer and amateur pianist, supported his son's early musical education, and his mother's Basque and Spanish cultural identity affected Ravel's musical characteristics throughout his life. His life can be divided into three periods:⁴⁶ 1) his establishment as a composer (1875-1905); 2) his highest productivity (1905-1918); and 3) his maturity as a composer (1918-1937).

Ravel was educated by distinguished musicians from his early childhood. At the Paris Conservatoire, he developed his own musical identity while studying the music of great composers from the past. Among his teachers, Gabriel Fauré and André Gédalge became crucial influences on his technique and musicianship, the former in composition and the latter in counterpoint and orchestration.⁴⁷

One of the most important experiences Ravel had during his first period was the Paris World Exhibition of 1889 where he was exposed to new kinds of music,

⁴⁶ Barbara L. Kelly, "Ravel, Maurice." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52145> (accessed November 12, 2007).

⁴⁷ Stephen Zank, *Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 5.

notably Javanese music and Russian music performed by Rimsky-Korsakov.⁴⁸ Russian music in particular became a source of continuous inspiration for Ravel and was reflected in various works, including ballet pieces. It led Ravel to develop a relationship with the great impresario, Sergei Diaghilev. Later Ravel composed *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912) and *La Valse* (1920) for Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes*.

Ravel's friendship with Ricardo Viñes (1875-1943) also influenced his entire life. Ravel and Viñes were introduced to each other in 1888 by their mothers, and both passed the Conservatoire's entrance examination in the same year, 1889.⁴⁹ While Ravel built his career as a composer, Viñes became a star pupil in the piano class of Charles de Bériot in the Conservatoire and later established his career as a leading pianist. He was particularly known for premiering the piano works of many of his contemporaries, including Ravel and Debussy.

While Ravel was attending the Conservatoire, he entered the composition competition, Prix de Rome, five times between 1900 and 1905 for further recognition development as a composer, but his attempts were not successful. In his first attempt (1900), he was eliminated in the preliminary round. In his second attempt (1901), he won third prize, but in 1902 and 1903 he failed to satisfy the juries and therefore could not get into the first round. He did not compete in 1904 and because of an age restriction, the year of 1905 marked his final unsuccessful attempt. Ravel was

⁴⁸ Kelly, "Ravel, Maurice." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

⁴⁹ Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 16.

eliminated in the first round due to his use of a parallel fifth and a major seventh in the last chord of his fugue.⁵⁰

In spite of his multiple failures at the Prix de Rome, Ravel was gaining fame as a composer. By the year 1904 he had already won a reputation as a composer at the Société Nationale de Musique with his sensational compositions such as *Jeux d'eau* (1901) for piano and the *String Quartet in F major* (1903).⁵¹ Due to his national recognition and popularity, the public disagreed with the judges' elimination of Ravel in the 1905 Prix de Rome, despite the fact that Ravel infringed on traditional compositional rules. Furthermore, it turned out that all the other finalists of that year were students of Lenepveu, one of the judges. As a result, the Prix de Rome in 1905 ended in scandal.⁵²

The years between Ravel's final attempt for the Prix de Rome and World War I (1914-1918) were his most fruitful years as a composer.⁵³ During this second period, he composed the opera *L'Heure espagnole* (1909), the ballet *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912) and most of his important piano works such as *Miroirs* (1904-1905), *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908), *Valse nobles et sentimentales* (1911), and *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1914-1917).

In 1909, Ravel took a prominent role in founding the Société Musicale Indépendante (S. M. I.), which marked a distinct turning point in his career. The

⁵⁰ Kelly, "Ravel, Maurice." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Gerald Larner, *Maurice Ravel* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 80.

society aimed to perform French and foreign works regardless of genre or style, and it was a healthy competitor of the Société Nationale for some three decades.⁵⁴ The S. M. I. became a place for many musicians to introduce their music. Most of Ravel's major works such as *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, (premiered in 1911), *Mallarmé songs* (premiered in 1914), *Trio* (premiered in 1915), and *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (premiered in 1919) were premiered at concerts of the S. M. I.. *Daphnis et Chloé* was the only exception, which was premiered at the Châtelet theater in 1912 by the *Ballet Russes*.

Ravel gained acquaintance with Igor Stravinsky, the celebrated Russian composer, who had come to Paris for the performance of his ballet *Firebird* in 1910.⁵⁵ Stravinsky learned of Ravel's love for Russian music, and by the year 1913 the two had become close colleagues. In 1913, when Diaghilev asked Stravinsky for a new piece for his *Ballet Russes*, Stravinsky requested collaboration with Ravel. As a result, that spring in Switzerland they orchestrated Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina* together for Diaghilev.⁵⁶ Later that year, Stravinsky shared with Ravel some of his recent compositional sketches and scores such as *The Rite of Spring* and *The Three Japanese Lyrics*, the last movement of which is dedicated to Ravel.

In 1914, the outbreak of World War I shocked Ravel deeply. He attempted to join the Air Force but was unsuccessful because of his small physical stature. After several attempts to serve his country, he finally joined the Artillery Regiment from

⁵⁴ Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, 62.

⁵⁵ Rollo H. Myers, *Ravel: Life & Works* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), 46.

⁵⁶ Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, 134.

March 1915 to November 1916.⁵⁷ He served as only a truck driver, but it did not seem to dampen his patriotism. However, during the war he worried about his elderly mother and being away from music. A letter to his friend, Roland-Manuel, in 1916 reveals his concerns:

I truly suffer from one thing, not being able to embrace my poor mother... Yes... there is something else: music. I thought I had forgotten it. Several days ago it returned, tyrannical. I think of nothing else. I am sure I would have been in a period of full creativity.⁵⁸

In January of 1917, Ravel's beloved mother passed away at age 75. His mother's death affected him more than the death of his father in 1908. His relationship with his mother was the closest emotional attachment he ever had in his lifetime. He was shattered by this loss and grieved over it through the remainder of his life. Ravel's letter to Manuel de Falla in 1918, when de Falla lost his mother, and Ravel's autobiographical sketch show his level of despair:

It is a terrible thing that has happened to us... from that moment life is transformed. You can still feel joys, emotions, but not in the same way any more; it is a bit like when you haven't slept or when you have a fever... I haven't been able to get back to work... try to be stronger than me, my dear friend.⁵⁹

I think of those former times at the charming apartment on avenue Carnot, where I was so happy. I think that it will soon be three years that she had died, and my despair increases from day to day. Since I have begun working again, I am thinking about it more—I no longer have this dear silent presence enveloping me with her infinite tenderness, which was, I see it more than ever, my only reason for living.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, rev. ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 7.

⁵⁸ Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 71.

⁵⁹ Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, rev. ed., 178.

⁶⁰ Maurice Ravel, "An Autobiographical Sketch," found in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, rev. ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 32.

Two years after his mother's death, Ravel's official activities resumed with the recital of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* in 1919 at S. M. I., which marked his first public appearance after the war. The completion of *La Valse* in 1920 showed Ravel's recovery from his most traumatic experiences: World War I and the loss of his mother. His grief, infused with his most skillful ability as a composer, resulted in one of the finest compositions among his legacy: *La Valse*. It was premiered in Paris, by the Lamoureux Orchestra, led by Camille Chevillard in 1920, the same year it was completed, and was well received by the public and critics, with reviews extolling its "inexhaustible verve" and "dazzling orchestration."⁶¹

Later in the 1920s, Parisian avant-garde composers such as the group *Les Six* (Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Francis Polenc, and Germaine Tailleferre), viewed Ravel's music, like Debussy's, as overly refined and outdated.⁶² With an archaic reputation, Ravel wanted a certain distance from Paris, so he moved to a Basque village, Montfort l'Amaury, approximately thirty miles from Paris. He toured more frequently in this last period, giving performances in Europe, North and South America, and Indonesia. He toured the United States in 1928, at the age of fifty-two, for four months. While there, he was welcomed with standing ovations and deep, affectionate respect. He toured some twenty-five cities from New York and Boston to San Francisco and Vancouver, performing and conducting his own works and lecturing on his musical aesthetics. His lectures at the Rice Institute in Texas (now Rice University) subsequently became some of the most important

⁶¹ Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 76-80.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 80.

documents left by the composer. He lectured about contemporary music, including his interest in jazz and blues. This fascination is evident in his compositions, such as “Noctuelles” and “Oiseaux tristes” from *Miroirs*, *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*, and in the second movement of the Piano Concerto in G major. By this time, Ravel’s genius was recognized worldwide, with his honorary doctorate from Oxford University in 1928 and various diplomas from Spain, Belgium, Italy, and Scandinavia.⁶³

Characteristics of Ravel’s Music

Ravel’s legacy includes approximately sixty compositions during a creative period of four decades, from the early 1890s to the early 1930s. Although he is not considered to be one of the most prolific composers, his works have a wide range of styles and characteristics, and his musical influence is widespread. Two of Ravel’s biographers, Rollo H. Myers and Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, described the qualities of Ravel’s music in various ways. Myers reviewed his music as full of “wit and grace and elegance; clarity, flexibility and firmness; probity, fantasy and irony; humor, and even tenderness.”⁶⁴ Stuckenschmidt called him “the elegant one, the master of irony, the twister of paradox,” and “a composer of polish and preciseness.”⁶⁵

Among these various musical qualities this study focuses most on Ravel’s creative innovation and perfectionism. His creative innovation originated from his

⁶³ Stephen Zank, *Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 16.

⁶⁴ Myers, *Ravel: Life & Works*, 115.

⁶⁵ Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, *Maurice Ravel: Variations on His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Chilton Book, 1968), 170.

“concept of beauty,”⁶⁶ apparent not only in his compositional technique, but also in his orchestration and transcription techniques. Perfectionism showed itself not only in his music but also in his personal life.

Also, Ravel’s music is often compared to Debussy’s, another twentieth century French music composer, because they had compositional similarities. A comparison of the two composers follows in this study after a discussion of Ravel’s two important musical characteristics in order to define the distinction between Ravel’s and Debussy’s music.

Creative Innovation in Orchestration, Transcription, and Piano Music

Orchestration

Ravel believed musical beauty does not always develop through a logical progression in which every single note or chord can be explained according to the rules of music theory. In his music, he used a specific note or chord just because it sounded pleasing and not because it was part of a logical harmonic chain of functions leading to the establishment of a certain tonality. This developed especially through his orchestration.

Ravel believed that each instrument in the orchestra should be played for its own sonority and color. In order to explore the individual characteristic of each instrument, he studied different instruments for years and had broad knowledge of the possibilities, ranges, and technical problems of each. He possessed an infallible ear

⁶⁶ Jeni M. Maneva, “Maurice Ravel’s *La Valse*: Historical Context, Structure, Harmony, and Challenges for Interpretation in the Solo Piano Version” (DMA diss., West Virginia University, 2005), 27.

for the precise and accurate expression of instrumental sonorities, delicate adjustments of tone-color, and balance of opposing timbres. His sensitivity allowed him to make unique use of particular instruments, sometimes requiring them to play in an odd register.

Just as he used a specific note or chord for his “concept of beauty,” he used a specific instrument for the color of his orchestral music. For example, in *La Valse*, he used triple rather than double woodwind instruments for stronger, more varied orchestral force. He used several uncommon woodwind instruments as well, such as a flute in G and a clarinet in E^b for their dark and low sonorities. Also, various percussion instruments, including three timpani, castanets, a tam-tam, and crotales are used in *La Valse*.

He also was fond of grouping different instruments or pairing them within the entire orchestra. For example, in *Boléro*, while the traditional *Boléro* dance rhythmic pattern is repeated throughout the entire work, Ravel changed the grouping of instruments in the orchestra over a gradual *crescendo* building up throughout the piece. The repetitive *Boléro* rhythmic pattern unified the work, while the use of different groups of instruments colored the music.

Transcription

Ravel was not only a great orchestrator, but also a gifted transcriber. He transcribed a great deal of both his and other composers' works; a large portion of his works exists in two or three different versions. However, during his lifetime, the musical community ascribed a lower place to transcriptions than original

compositions, reflecting the view that a transcription was less significant. Thus, transcriptions were under-appreciated and less likely to be performed.

Yet, Ravel established a new standard for transcriptions. His are not mere expansions of piano originals into different orchestral instruments, but with them he clarified shapes and added stunning sound effects, energies, and weights in a way not possible with the piano alone.⁶⁷ He provided a large-scale differentiation of the work which was previously left entirely to the pianist. The orchestral transcription became an equal or more explicit realization of the original and enabled the use of greater performing resources to reveal what was only latent in the piano version.

Ravel also transcribed other composers' works, which were commissioned mostly by Diaghilev or Koussevitzky.⁶⁸ Among these is Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, described by Barbara Kelly as "a dazzling arrangement of instrument color."⁶⁹ Stephen Zank wrote that "Ravel irrefutably re-established his reputation of orchestration technique with *La Valse* (1920) and two years later, in 1922, he culminated his transcription technique with *Pictures at an Exhibition*."⁷⁰ With his in-depth knowledge of orchestral instrumentation and creative innovation in transcription, Ravel orchestrated *Pictures at an Exhibition* as successfully as his own work.

⁶⁷ Deborah Mawer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 134.

⁶⁸ Kelly, "Ravel, Maurice." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Stephen Zank, *Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 13.

Piano Music

Piano was the easiest and most effective instrument to explore his compositional experiments and the first instrument he chose for their expression. The most common example of Ravel's compositional experiments with piano is the extremely wide use of the keyboard such as three- or four-octave scales, arpeggios, sweeping *glissandi*, and rapid repeated notes and thick chords with light touch. The use of the whole keyboard was necessary to satisfy his exuberant imagination and creative impulses. His experimental compositional techniques appeared from his early piano compositions such as "Habanera" from *Sites auriculaires* (1895-1897) and *Jeux d'eau* (1901). In his later compositions, such as *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908), *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1914-1917) and *La Valse* (1920), his experimental compositional techniques maximized his aim of creating a piano work with a large orchestral sound. The styles of his piano music will be discussed further below.

Perfectionism

Ravel strove for great perfection. As Myers wrote, "Perfection rather than innovation was his aim."⁷¹ Ravel knew that he was never able to attain perfection, but he tried to get closer to it all the time.⁷² To that end, his scores were marked in a way that left no question about his intentions. He tried to write his musical details as perfectly and precisely as possible. Myers wrote, "The dosage is as precise as in a

⁷¹ Myers, *Ravel: Life & Works*, 10.

⁷² Arbie Orenstein, "Maurice Ravel's Creative Process," *Musical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (October 1967), 468.

doctor's prescription,"⁷³ and one of Ravel's contemporaries remarked, "There are several ways of playing Debussy but only one way to play Ravel."⁷⁴ Several unpublished letters proved that Ravel continued to make corrections in his scores even after the works had been published.⁷⁵ According to Orenstein, rather than correcting some minuscule details in a score, Ravel would copy over the entire autograph.⁷⁶

Ravel took quite a long time to complete his works, and this lengthy process resulted in refined and polished compositions. In the lecture at Rice Institute (now Rice University) in April 1928, Ravel described his compositional progress this way, "In my own work of composition I find a long period of conscious gestation, in general, necessary. During this interval, I come gradually to see, and with growing precision, the form and evolution which the subsequent work should have as a whole."⁷⁷

Ravel's perfectionism is closely related to creative innovation, particularly in the solo piano works and their orchestral versions. First, he composed a solo piano work with musical and technical perfection. Even after he completed a solo piano work, he continued to hear new sounds, which often resulted in a new orchestral work. The solo piano version was often not the end of his creativity, but rather, he further pursued his ideal through an orchestral version with richer sound images. Through

⁷³ Myers, *Ravel: Life & Works*, 113.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷⁵ Information of unpublished letters can be found in Arbie Orenstein, "Maurice Ravel's Creative Process," *Musical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (October 1967).

⁷⁶ Arbie Orenstein, "Maurice Ravel's Creative Process," *Musical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (October 1967), 468.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 468.

orchestration Ravel could view his piano works in a new context. As a result, most of his solo piano works are transcribed as orchestral works, with the exceptions of *Serenade Grottesque*, *Jeux d'eau*, *Sonatine*, and *Gaspard de la nuit*. Orchestrating fulfilled Ravel's drive toward perfectionism and creativity.

Ravel and Debussy

Ravel and Debussy are the two of the most preeminent representatives of twentieth-century French music. Comparison of the two composers is helpful in understanding Ravel's musical aesthetics. Ravel was fourteen years younger than Debussy, and in his earlier years he was called "the follower of Debussy."⁷⁸ He respected Debussy as a composer. For example, Ravel always thought Debussy's orchestral piece, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun, 1876), was the most perfect work in all of its musical aspects: its melody, harmony, rhythm, and orchestration. He even wanted it to be played at his funeral because it was the only work ever written that was absolutely perfect.⁷⁹ In 1910, when Ravel arranged *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* for one piano four hands, he described it as an "homage to a man of genius."⁸⁰

These two composers shared many compositional traits, both using medieval and exotic scales (octatonic scales), ethnic dance rhythms, particularly from Spain, an expanded concept of the traditional key relationships, and pictorial or poetic titles.

⁷⁸ Kelly, "Ravel, Maurice." In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

⁷⁹ Mawer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, 14.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

Both were influenced by French harpsichordists (Ravel: Couperin and Debussy: Rameau) and inspired by symbolist poets.

Ravel admired Debussy, but at the same time needed some independence from him. He refused to be regarded simply as a follower and imitator of Debussy.⁸¹ In an interview for *The Morning Post* in 1922, Ravel declared himself an “anti-Debussyist,” while placing Debussy as “the great creative influence in modern French music.”⁸² Instead of the ambiguity of French Impressionism that Debussy favored, Ravel preferred a clarified traditional classical standard. One good example of this is Ravel’s use of formal structure, particularly in his employment of classical forms in pieces like *Sonatine* and *Le Tombeau de Couperin*.

Through the long period of gestation, Ravel created music which was as perfect, as polished, and as precise as he could make it. He was critical of those who wrote imperfect works but claimed that their music was “sincere.” For him, sincerity without a thorough mastery of one’s craft was a shame.⁸³ However, Ravel never felt the need to formulate the principles of his aesthetic, either for the benefit of others or for himself.⁸⁴ Therefore, the best information for recreating his music is in his scores. Each score indicates his original thoughts. The careful study of his music, in

⁸¹ Kelly, “Ravel, Maurice.” In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

⁸² “Ravel and Modern Music.” *The Morning Post*, July 10, 1922 Quoted in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 421.

⁸³ Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, 19.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

emulation of his own dedicated compositional process, will lead performers to understand Ravel's music as he intended it.

Styles of Ravel's Piano Music

The piano was the core instrument Ravel used to express his musical genius. He initially applied most of his innovative compositional techniques in his piano works. For example, *Jeux d'eau* (1901) was considered his first successful attempt in creating his own musical language for the keyboard. With similarities in subject, Liszt's *Jeux d'eau à la ville d'Este* inspired Ravel to write his *Jeux d'eau*. Ravel took Liszt's sweeping virtuosity as an inspiration, while he added a touch of impressionism. As a result, *Jeux d'eau* is considered the landmark piece which established Ravel's pianistic style.

From a young age, Ravel was interested in all sorts of music. His curiosity about diverse music led later to influences from different countries. As a French composer, he continued in the French tradition with influences from past French harpsichordists like Couperin to his contemporaries Chabrier, Fauré, and Debussy. His foreign influences start with the Basque-Spanish heritage of his mother and include the clarity and elegance of Scarlatti and the simplicity of Mozart. Liszt affected Ravel in regard to the new pianistic color and virtuosity. As Orenstein commented, "*La Valse* is unified by means of thematic transformation, which largely bespeaks the spiritual influence of Liszt."⁸⁵ Among the many unique aspects of

⁸⁵ Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 135.

Ravel's piano music, four are of particular importance in *La Valse*: 1) various sonorities, 2) polyphonic technique, 3) use of introduction, and 4) precise indications of interpretation.

Various Sonorities

Ravel created orchestral sonorities in his solo piano music, resulting in a large number of orchestral versions, which stem from solo piano works. As the Table 1 indicates, only the two-piano version of *Boléro* was composed after the orchestral version. Otherwise, where both solo piano and orchestral versions exist, the solo piano version is the original. Even for a composition which exists only for solo piano such as *Gaspard de la nuit*, it is obvious that Ravel advocates the full range of orchestral sonorities. As he explained "Scarbo" from *Gaspard de la nuit* to pianist Vlado Perlemuter, "I wanted to make an orchestral transcription for the piano."⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Vlado Perlemuter and H el ene Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel*, trans. Frances Tanner, ed. Harold Taylor, (White Plains, NY: Pro-Am Resources, 1988), 37.

Table 1: Catalog of Ravel's Piano Composition and Orchestral Transcription.⁸⁷

Solo Piano and Two Piano Compositions		Orchestral Transcriptions	
Year	Title	Year	Changes from Solo Piano
c. 1893	<i>Serenade Grottesque</i>		
1895	<i>Menuet Antique</i>	1929	
1895-97	<i>Sites auriculaires</i> (2 pianos)	1907-08	“Habanera” as 3 rd mvmt. of <i>Rapsodie espagnole</i>
1899	<i>Pavane pour une infante defunte</i>	1910	
1901	<i>Jeux d'eau</i>		
1903-05	<i>Sonatine</i>		
1904-05	<i>Miroirs</i>	1906 1918	“Une Barque sur l’océan” “Alborada del gracioso”
1908	<i>Gaspard de la nuit</i>		
1907-08	<i>Rapsodie espagnole</i> (1 piano, 4 hands)	1907-08	
1908-10	<i>Ma mere l'oye</i> (1 piano, 4 hands)	1911	
1909	<i>Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn</i>		
1911	<i>Valses nobles et sentimentales</i>	1912	<i>Adélaïde, ou le langage des fleurs</i> (Different title for ballet)
1913	<i>A la manière de ... Borodine</i> <i>A la manière de ... Chabrier</i>		
1913	<i>Prélude</i>		
1914-17	<i>Le tombeau de Couperin</i>	1919	“Prelude,” “Menuet,” “Forlane,” “Rigaudon”
1918	<i>Frontispice</i> (2 pianos, 5 hands)		
1919-20	<i>La Valse</i> (Solo piano, 2 pianos)	1920	
1929*	<i>Bolero</i> (2 pianos)	1928	

Ravel encouraged his students to imagine various instrumental sounds in his piano works and to infuse instrumental characteristics into their performance. In order to achieve certain instrumental sounds, Ravel often verbally indicated a specific instrument during the lessons. The way he imagined instruments for his piano works

⁸⁷ Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, Appendix A

is well documented.⁸⁸ For example, Ravel specified “un-pedaled sound, the woodwinds of the orchestra” at the beginning of “Prelude” from *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. From the same set, in “Rigaudon” for the right-hand melody starting at measure 37, he wanted “oboe, a penetrating sound.” He described “a double bassoon” for the first three notes of “Scarbo” and “a side drum” for the succeeding repeated notes. Likewise, in the solo piano version of *La Valse*, anticipating the later orchestral version, Ravel wrote specific instruments on the score for pianists to imitate.

Ravel’s piano music describes images from nature or literature, which create various sonorities and atmospheres. For instance, *Jeux d’eau* is a fine example of how to describe water. In order to create sparkling and glittering water imagery, he exploited the high register of the piano with successive seventh and ninth chords within widely spread, rhythmically precise arpeggios. David Burge commented that, “*Jeux d’eau* is the real starting point of Ravel’s pianistic novelties.”⁸⁹

Ravel also borrowed images from literature. For instance, he composed *Gaspard de la nuit* after poems by Aloysius Bertrand, and each movement carries literal images from the poem. The second movement, “Le Gibet,” is an extremely macabre description of a dying man swinging on the gallows. From the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century in Europe, it was customary to kill a convict not by an abrupt breaking of the neck, but by hanging him from the neck until death occurred. In “Le Gibet,” Ravel expressed the atmosphere of the execution by imitating a tolling bell, the only accompaniment to the convict’s last sunset as his life slowly fades away. In order to create the dark and gruesome image of the bell, Ravel used only one sound, a

⁸⁸ Perlemuter and H el ene Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel*, 17-65.

⁸⁹ David Burge, *Twentieth-Century Piano Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), 46.

B^b octave in the middle register of the keyboard, repeating it throughout the piece in its own meter that does not coincide with the rest of the music.

In Ravel, all indications in the score are to be taken with attention and great seriousness. “Le Gibet” is not an exception: the atmosphere, the projection of the tolling bell, is possible only if the performer faithfully follows the composer’s indication of the articulation. “Le Gibet” is one of the most musically difficult pieces to play because there are more meaningful sonorities than the bell sound alone. Many different images occur with the bell sound, and pianists must produce all these different sonorities. Creating different sounds with one hand requires a complete control of the keyboard. For the best interpretation of Ravel’s piece, a keen ear for the wide array of sonorities is a must.

Ravel used the entire range of the piano, particularly the lowest register of the keyboard. Most of his solo piano works contain the lowest register, including the lowest note of the keyboard. Obvious examples are the lowest three-note tone cluster (A, B^b, C[#]) before the octave chromatic scale in *La Valse* and the lowest A in *Jeux d’eau* and the opening motive of “Scarbo” from *Gaspard de la nuit*. Ravel even wrote the nonexistent lowest G[#] in “Une barque sur l’océan” from *Miroirs* (see Examples 1-4). When Ravel composed, he knew that his lowest G[#] was not playable on normal pianos in his time. Nevertheless, he imagined the lowest register sonority by using the G[#] in order to capture the atmosphere of the piece.

Example 1: *La Valse*, lowest register, mm. 645-647.

Musical score for Example 1, *La Valse*, lowest register, mm. 645-647. The score is for a Quatuor and includes the instruction "Mouvt du début". The music is marked *fff*. A blue arrow points to the lowest register of the piano part, which is marked "8^a bassa!". The score shows a complex texture with multiple staves, including a Quatuor staff and piano staves. A blue arrow points to the lowest register of the piano part, which is marked "8^a bassa!".

Example 2: *Jeux d'eau*, lowest register, mm. 49-50.

Musical score for Example 2, *Jeux d'eau*, lowest register, mm. 49-50. The score is for a piano and includes the instruction "Mouvt du début". The music is marked *fff*. A blue arrow points to the lowest register of the piano part, which is marked "8^a bassa!". The score shows a complex texture with multiple staves, including a Quatuor staff and piano staves. A blue arrow points to the lowest register of the piano part, which is marked "8^a bassa!".

Example 3: "Scarbo" from *Gaspard de la nuit*, lowest register, mm. 11-16.

Musical score for Example 3, "Scarbo" from *Gaspard de la nuit*, lowest register, mm. 11-16. The score is for a piano and includes the instruction "Mouvt du début". The music is marked *fff*. A blue arrow points to the lowest register of the piano part, which is marked "8^a bassa!". The score shows a complex texture with multiple staves, including a Quatuor staff and piano staves. A blue arrow points to the lowest register of the piano part, which is marked "8^a bassa!".

Example 4: "Une barque sur l'océan" from *Miroirs*, nonexistent G[#], mm. 43-44.

Musical score for Example 4, "Une barque sur l'océan" from *Miroirs*, nonexistent G[#], mm. 43-44. The score is for a piano and includes the instruction "Mouvt du début". The music is marked *mf* and *glissando*. A blue arrow points to the lowest register of the piano part, which is marked "8^a bassa!". The score shows a complex texture with multiple staves, including a Quatuor staff and piano staves. A blue arrow points to the lowest register of the piano part, which is marked "8^a bassa!".

Ravel frequently used the major seventh (diminished octave) and minor second in his piano music. Almost three-quarters of all his solo piano pieces either begin or end (or both) with a major seventh or minor second: *Sérénade grotesque* (ending); *Menuet Antique*; *Jeux d'eau*; *Sonatine* (ending); “Noctuelles,” “Oiseaux tristes,” and “Alborada del gracioso” from *Miroirs*; “Ondine” and “Scarbo” from *Gaspard de la nuit*; *Menuet sur le nom d’Haydn*; each movement of the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*; and five of the six movements of *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. *La Valse* also starts with a minor second sonority. The opening two notes are in minor second (E and F) followed by A^b. Here, the use of the lowest register of the keyboard and combination of minor second along with the simple ostinato accompaniment pattern creates the dark and mysterious opening sonority of *La Valse* (see Example 5).

Example 5: *La Valse*, minor second and diminished fourth, mm. 1-4.



Polyphonic Technique

In his piano music Ravel used textures with multiple layers. For example, in “Le Gibet,” the right hand plays a continuous B^b octave to imitate a tolling bell, and at the same time the right hand plays more notes that are parts of the dark, gruesome, and disturbing chords. Perlemuter called this layering of multiple sonorities “polyphonic technique.”⁹⁰ Most of Ravel’s piano works, not only technically demanding pieces

⁹⁰ Perlemuter and H el ene Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel*, 34.

like *Jeux d'eau*, *Miroirs*, *Gaspard de la nuit*, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, and *La Valse*, but also smaller pieces such as *Pavane pour une infante defunte*, *Sonatine*, and *Minuet Antique* contain this polyphonic technique. Not only does this polyphonic technique express various sonorities in his piano scores, it becomes a fundamental element for orchestration later.

One of Ravel's early compositions, *Sonatine* (1905), shows one of the earliest examples of this polyphonic technique. At the beginning of the first movement, four-part polyphonic technique is used: the outer parts (soprano and bass) double the melody, while both hands share the inner thirty second-note accompaniment (see Example 6).

Example 6: *Sonatine* 1st movement, polyphonic technique, mm. 1-5.

In order to distinguish the melody and accompaniment, these thirty second-notes have to be independent, presented in a different touch and tone quality. This passage is particularly challenging because the thirty second-note accompaniment is shared by both hands, although the sound of the entire accompaniment should be projected as smoothly as one hand playing. The thumbs on both hands play the inner

parts, even though they are the most challenging digits with which to project the right sound.

The opening of the second movement is also in four parts, although the polyphonic technique seems easier because, with the exception of the top melodic part, the remaining parts move together as a chordal accompaniment in the same eighth-note rhythm.

Example 7: *Sonatine* 2nd movement, polyphonic technique, mm.1-5.



The image shows a musical score for the first five measures of the second movement of the Sonatine. The title is "Mouv^t de Menuet". The score is written for piano and consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and the time signature is 3/8. The first measure is marked with a box containing the number "1". The score features a polyphonic texture with four parts: a top melodic line in the right hand, and three parts in the left hand. Red arrows and brackets are used to highlight specific notes and dynamics across the staves. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is present in the first measure of the left hand.

However, as indicated in Example 7, different dynamics shape each part. The top soprano part requires its own distinguishable dynamic within the fluency of the melody. By contrast, two notes on right hand in the alto part require different dynamic expressions even though they are in the same rhythmic notation. The most intricate and sophisticated pianistic skill is necessary in order to bring out all the differences and nuance between each layer of this polyphonic passage.

In the same movement in measures 27 to 38, a melody repeats a total of three times with register changes, rising gradually from a single note to octave double notes creating a *crescendo* within the polyphonic technique (see Example 8).

Example 8: *Sonatine* 2nd movement, polyphonic technique, mm. 26-38.

This is a musically complex passage. First, as indicated in the Example 8, the third-measure descent of each melody (m. 29, 32) creates a natural *diminuendo*, but Ravel writes a continuous *crescendo*. Second, because of the more than an octave range of each melody, producing a continuous *crescendo* with *legato* becomes a technical task. Finally, the pianist needs to be careful to voice for the other parts appropriately along with this melodic line.

The beginning of the third movement is a simpler example of polyphonic technique, here with rhythmic integration: both hands share the arpeggio to create the main sonority, but this arpeggio also includes the accented melody (see Example 9).

Example 9: *Sonatine* 3rd movement, polyphonic technique, mm. 1-3.

Use of Introduction

Ravel often sets the mood of a piece by using a simple motive or accompaniment pattern as an introduction. Examples include *Jeux d'eau*, all three movements from *Gaspard de la nuit*, “La Vallée des Cloches” and “Oiseaux tristes” from *Mirrors*, and *La Valse*. For instance, during the initial thirty measures of “Scarbo” the pianist plays a motive with three ascending notes in the low register followed by a repeated D[#] with an extended eleventh chord (see Example 10).

Example 10: “Scarbo” from *Gaspard de la nuit*, introductory motive, mm. 1-4.

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of "Scarbo" from *Gaspard de la nuit*. The score is in 3/8 time and D major. It begins with a first ending bracket over measures 1-4. The tempo is marked "Modéré". The first measure (m. 1) features a piano (pp) dynamic and a "sourdine" (mute) effect. The bass line consists of three ascending notes: D2, E2, and F#2. The right hand has a whole rest. The second measure (m. 2) features a "très fondu, en trémolo" (very soft, tremolo) effect and a "ped." (pedal) marking. The bass line continues with a repeated D#2 note. The right hand has a whole rest. The third and fourth measures (m. 3 and m. 4) continue the repeated D#2 note in the bass line, with the right hand still having whole rests.

This motive is not part of the principal melody, although later repetition of this introductory motive serves to create the wily and frantic image of the dwarf in “Scarbo.” While the introductory motive repeats for thirty measures, Ravel builds up the musical expectation for the main melody.

Similarly, in *La Valse*, Ravel starts with an introduction that lasts for the sixty-five measures, although here, unlike “Scarbo,” some of the main waltz melodies are used in the introduction. Nevertheless, the introduction still builds anticipation for the main waltz sections. In both pieces, Ravel uses an introduction for the same musical purposes: to set a particular mood and to build the musical expectation for the main sections.

Precise Indications of Interpretation

The perfectionist nature of Ravel's personality is reflected in the precise indications found in his piano music. His scores are marked in a way that leaves no room for doubt about his intentions. Myers described Ravel's musical preciseness this way, "The dosage is as precise as in a doctor's prescription."⁹¹ Examples of this precision in his piano music are particularly found in exact tempo indications and planned *accelerando* and *rallentando*.

Ravel was very particular about his tempos. In *Ravel according to Ravel*, Perlemuter frequently emphasized Ravel's comments on tempo from his lessons. For example, in "Le Gibet" from *Gaspard de la nuit*, he insisted on an absolutely strict tempo on the repeated octave B^b, imitating the haunting bell sound, in order to establish the gloomy atmosphere.⁹²

In the second movement of *Sonatine*, Ravel wanted the tempo "slow but moving, with great exactitude of rhythm."⁹³ The most challenging aspect of performing this movement is keeping a slow, steady tempo with the flexibility of the melody, even though the melody tends to drag the tempo. Perlemuter emphasized the importance of steady tempo in Ravel's music through his comments on this movement: "Slowing down is anti-Ravelian! Not slowing down doesn't mean playing inflexibly."⁹⁴

⁹¹ Myers, *Ravel: Life & Works*, 113.

⁹² Perlemuter and H el ene Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel*, 33.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

Ravel wrote carefully planned and rhythmically precise *rallentando* (including *rubato*) and *accelerando*. The impression of a *rallentando* is created in the context of the composition. It is created by the detailed rhythmic notation, as Perlemuter mentioned, “*rallentando* by augmentation and on the contrary, an acceleration by a diminution of the note values.”⁹⁵ For example, the ending of “Une Barque sur l’Océan” from *Miroirs* is particularly interesting. Without any *rallentando* marking, Ravel gradually decreases the musical pace with notation, using meter changes, so it is not necessary to slow down in performance (see Example 11).

Example 11: “Une Barque sur l’Océan” from *Miroirs*, *rallentando*, mm. 115-122.

The musical score for "Une Barque sur l'Océan" from *Miroirs* (measures 115-122) is presented in four systems. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is for piano, with dynamics ranging from *ppp* to *mp*. The notation includes various rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A section of the score is marked "8 basso" (8va). The score concludes with a *ritardando* marking and a final chord.

⁹⁵ Perlemuter and H el ene Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel*, 24.

Ravel also created *accelerando* and *rallentando* with musical expressions as seen in the first eight measures of Waltz no. 6 in *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (see Example 12). Until measure 6, the musical tension builds up and feels like an *accelerando* with its ascending contour melodic line, but in measures 7-8, the tension is released with its descending contour of the melody, which can be considered as a written out *rallentando*. In these two measures, Ravel wrote *Cédez à peine* (barely audible slowing down) and *très doux et un peu languissant* (very sweet and rather languid).⁹⁶ His notes emphasized no noticeable tempo change, but by creating an echo effect, the pianist may perform with a hint of *rallentando*.

Example 12: *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, Waltz no. 6, *accelerando/rallentando* by musical expression, mm. 1-10.

The image shows a musical score for the first ten measures of Waltz no. 6. The score is in 3/4 time with a tempo marking of 'Vif' and a quarter note equal to 100 (♩ = 100). It is marked 'PIANO' and 'pp'. Measures 1-6 show an ascending melodic line. Measures 7-8 are marked 'Cédez à peine' and 'très doux et un peu languissant'. Measures 9-10 are marked 'au Mouv!' and 'pp'. Red brackets highlight the melodic contours in measures 7 and 8.

⁹⁶ Perlemuter and H el ene Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel*, 52.

An *accelerando* within the rhythmic notation and also musical expression can be found in “Scarbo” from *Gaspard de la nuit* in measures 15-29. Here Ravel makes a tempo change from *Modéré* to *Vif* with his note, *En accélérant* as he also compresses the note values (see Example 13).

Example 13: “Scarbo” from *Gaspard de la nuit*, *accelerando* with rhythmic notation and musical expression, mm. 11-31.

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Scarbo" from Maurice Ravel's "Gaspard de la nuit". It consists of three systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The first system, starting at measure 11, shows the piano accompaniment with a blue arrow pointing to a note in the bass clef labeled "8^{va} bassa". The second system, starting at measure 17, features the vocal line with the lyrics "En ac - cé - lé - rant" and the piano accompaniment. The third system, starting at measure 23, is marked "Vif" and includes dynamic markings "pp subito" and "ff". The piano accompaniment in this system features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes and rests.

CHAPTER THREE

Historical Aspects of *La Valse*

Historical Context

The completion of *La Valse* in 1920 marked a victorious renewal in Ravel's career. He was deeply affected by the horror of World War I (1914-1918) and the loss of his beloved mother in January, 1917. He did not complete any new compositions until *Le Tombeau de Couperin* in November after his mother's death although most of it had actually been written in 1914.⁹⁷ Thus *La Valse* can be considered the first major work he wrote after his difficult experiences.

La Valse was the result of fourteen years of gestation. In 1919, while Ravel grieved, a commission from Diaghilev for *Ballet Russes* allowed him to begin working again as a composer. An inspiration also came from his fourteen-year-long desire to compose a piece based on waltz rhythm. The original conception of *La Valse* came earlier in 1906 with a different title, *Wien* (Vienna): "I had intended this as a kind of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz, in my mind, with the impression of *un tournoiement fantastique et fatal* (fantastic and fatal whirling)."⁹⁸ He intended his Viennese waltz "to be a kind of homage to the memory of the great Strauss, not Richard, the other—

⁹⁷ Gerald Lerner, *Maurice Ravel* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), 161.

⁹⁸ Maurice Ravel, "An Autobiographical Sketch," found in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, rev. ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 32.

Johann.”⁹⁹ He called the piece either *Wien* or *La Valse* from time to time until 1919.¹⁰⁰

Within three months, from the winter of 1919 to the spring of 1920, Ravel completed three versions of *La Valse*: the first for solo piano, then for two pianos, and finally for orchestra.¹⁰¹ Several performances of the two-piano version are evident from Ravel’s correspondence, including a preliminary hearing at the home of the dedicatee Misia Sert, with impresario Serge Diaghilev, choreographer Léonide Massine, and composers Igor Stravinsky and Francis Poulenc in attendance.¹⁰² There Ravel played the two-piano version with French pianist Marcelle Meyer (1897-1958). After the performance, according to Poulenc, Diaghilev called it a masterpiece but said, “It is not a ballet. It is a portrait of ballet... a painting of a ballet.” Stravinsky remained silent, and Ravel calmly walked out of the room. Because of this incident Ravel never worked for Diaghilev again.¹⁰³

Diaghilev’s rejection of *La Valse* was based on his opinion that “The music was self-sufficient and therefore could not work with dance: there was no space or need for dance.”¹⁰⁴ Ravel’s final version of *La Valse* was intended for ballet, although as Diaghilev judged, its stand-alone nature delayed the first performance until 1929.

⁹⁹ Lerner, *Maurice Ravel*, 169.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁰¹ Deborah Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 150.

¹⁰² Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 77.

¹⁰³ Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 78.

¹⁰⁴ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 152.

The first public performance of the two-piano version took place in Vienna with Ravel and Alfredo Casella in October 1920.¹⁰⁵ The orchestral version premiered on December 12, 1920 in Paris with the Lamoureux Orchestra, conducted by Camille Chevillard with great success. After several attempts, it was finally produced as a ballet in Paris in 1929 by Ida Rubinstein's troupe with Bronislava Nijinska's choreography.¹⁰⁶ There seems to be no documentation on the premier of the solo-piano version.

Cultural and Artistic Context

Dance and Ravel

Ravel carried his fondness for dance music throughout his life and career. At the premier of his first complete ballet *Ma Mère l'Oye* (Mother Goose, 1912), he remarked that, "I wanted everything to be danced as much as possible. Dance is a wonderful art, and I have never been more keenly aware of it than through observing [how] Madame Hugard arranged the choreography."¹⁰⁷ Ravel's fascination with dance led to a focus on ballet. Ballet offered him a multi-dimensional projection of dance, a visual spectacle of exquisite elegance and beauty, and a vehicle for fantasy.¹⁰⁸ His major ballet works, spanning 1912-1928, are *Ma Mère l'Oye*, *Daphnis et Chloé*,

¹⁰⁵ Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 76, 235.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁰⁷ Deborah Mawer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 142.

¹⁰⁸ Mawer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, 143.

Valse nobles et sentimental (re-titled *Adélaïde, ou Le Langage des fleurs*), *La Valse*, and *Boléro*. Among them, only *Daphnis et Chloé* and *Boléro* are considered pure orchestral works, as the others were originally piano works.

The Russian Ballet in the 1920s in Paris

The *Ballet Russes*, the Russian ballet company led by Sergei Diaghilev (1872-1929), made history in France during the period 1909-1929. The Parisian ballet had lost its former popularity, and the French were looking for new sensations. Russian ballet satisfied the audience with its brilliant technical skills. After the first astounding success of the *Ballet Russes* in 1909 with Borodin's *Prince Igor* and Tcherepnin's *Le Pavillon d'Armide*, Diaghilev set up a permanent company in Paris and produced Stravinsky's *Firebird* and *Petrushka*, and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Shéhérazade* in the 1910-1911 season.¹⁰⁹ Ravel completed *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912) and *La Valse* (1920) for the *Ballet Russes*. However, *La Valse* was never produced by the *Ballet Russes*.

Diaghilev's success encouraged many leading French composers, including Ravel, to compose ballet works with Russian musical influences. The emphasis on woodwinds and percussion in *La Valse* is a common characteristic of Russian orchestral music. Also the musical description of darkness and destruction in *La Valse* achieved by the use of the low register, dissonances, and chromaticism reveals the influence of Russian ballet, particularly Stravinsky's ballet music.

¹⁰⁹ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 141.

Ravel and Stravinsky

Ravel had been interested in Russian music ever since he experienced it at the 1889 Paris Exhibition. Stravinsky became one of the largest influences on Ravel, not only for his Russian nationality, but also for his great contribution to ballet music. He worked for Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* and therefore, his new ballet music exerted a powerful influence upon Ravel. Stravinsky and Ravel first met in 1910 when Stravinsky came to Paris for a performance of his *Firebird*. After that, through their cooperative work for Diaghilev, they had become close colleagues by 1913.¹¹⁰ Their surviving letters to each other have an intimate and jocular tone, which marks Stravinsky as one of the closest and most relaxed of Ravel's musical friends. However, they developed different musical tastes and judgments, remaining close friends only until the outbreak of World War I. For instance, Ravel could not understand Stravinsky's respect for Tchaikovsky or his repudiation of Rimsky-Korsakov.¹¹¹

Despite their different musical tastes, Ravel's awareness of Stravinsky's work is evident. Ravel completed *La Valse* in 1920, but it is well known that he had already conceived of it in 1906. Meanwhile, Stravinsky's three famous ballet works, *Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring* came out between 1909 and 1913. From its first appearance Ravel was one of the most ardent and perceptive admirers of *The Rite of Spring*. As he mentioned, "The novelty of *The Rite of Spring* consisted, not in the

¹¹⁰ Myers, *Ravel: Life & Works*, 46.

¹¹¹ Mawer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, 25.

writing, not in the orchestration, not in the technical apparatus of the work, but in the musical entity.”¹¹²

The close completion dates of these two composers’ famous ballet works also show Stravinsky’s influence on Ravel. While Stravinsky completed his three ballet works during 1909-1913, Ravel also orchestrated *Ma mere l’Oye* for ballet (1911) and completed a ballet piece, *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912). Myers claims that the year 1912 could be called the “ballet year”¹¹³ of Ravel, since that year *Daphnis et Chloé* was commissioned and successfully staged with Diaghilev’s *Ballet Russes*. *La Valse* was completed eight years later in 1920, but Stravinsky’s influence was still apparent in its emphasis of percussion and woodwind in the orchestral instrumentation. Therefore, several music scholars compare *La Valse* to Stravinsky’s ballet works. For example, Ravel biographer Larner views “the ending of *La Valse* as more violent than *The Rite of Spring*.”¹¹⁴ Also, Zank points out that “*Daphnis et Chloé* (1912) was somewhat eclipsed by both *Petrushka* (1911) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913).”¹¹⁵

Stravinsky and Ravel both considered piano as the core instrument in their compositions, even though Stravinsky developed numerous un-pianistic configurations related to orchestral flavor in his piano compositions. Therefore, his piano works often read as orchestral reductions rather than idiomatically designed

¹¹² Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of music, in the form of six lessons* trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), 9-10.

¹¹³ Myers, *Ravel: Life & Works*, 42.

¹¹⁴ Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, 173.

¹¹⁵ Stephen Zank, *Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 10.

keyboard pieces.¹¹⁶ Likewise, in the solo version of *La Valse*, its orchestral qualities overshadow its musical and technical characteristics as a solo piano work. The emphasis on the orchestral aspects of *La Valse* generated much more attention for the orchestral version, relegating the solo piano version to secondary status.

Ravel and Russian Music

Ravel did not have a personal connection to Russia, but he was attracted to its contrasts with French culture in general. Russian music contains various characteristics of “otherness” to French composers.¹¹⁷ Its straightforward spontaneity, colorful orchestration, and exotic melody became of particular interest to Ravel. For example, his *Shéhérazade* contains whole-tone scales, Lydian fourths, and flatted sevenths drawn from Rimsky-Korsakov’s influence.¹¹⁸

Russian music was also important to Ravel as an “alternative”¹¹⁹ to Wagnerian music. He did not believe in the necessity of expansive motivic development as in the music of Beethoven, Berlioz, Brahms, Wagner, Franck, and d’Indy. He viewed Wagner’s influence as disastrous and destructive but admired Liszt, who had a crucial influence on Wagner.¹²⁰ Ravel respected Liszt’s pianistic and harmonic innovations and perhaps tried to emulate them. For example, his notoriously challenging

¹¹⁶ Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky and the Piano* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, c1983), xvi.

¹¹⁷ Barbara L. Kelly, “Ravel, Maurice.” In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52145> (accessed January 28, 2008).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, rev. ed., 20.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 20.

virtuosity of “Scarbo” from *Gaspard de la nuit* and the exuberant orchestral textures of *Rapsodie espagnole*, *La valse*, and the *Concerto for the Left Hand* are often believed to have been written with Liszt’s works in mind.

Along with Liszt’s pianistic innovations, the “otherness” of Russian music—exotic melody, rich harmony and irregular rhythm—signed Ravel’s musical curiosity and became a part of his musical vocabulary. In 1922, pursuing his fascination with Russian music, Ravel orchestrated a famous Russian composer’s piano solo work, *Pictures at an Exhibition* by Modest Mussorgsky.

The Waltz

Among the many different dances of the nineteenth century, the waltz is featured as the most significant dance and therefore had the greatest impact on music history and instrumental literature. Mahler used a waltz in his fifth symphony and Brahms wrote a set of waltzes for piano duet. Russians showed an even greater interest in waltz. For example, Tchaikovsky used the waltz throughout his works, not only in his ballets and operas but also in purely symphonic works such as *The Seasons* (1876), *Serenade for Strings* (1880), and the *Symphony No. 5* (1888).¹²¹

Of the many composers in France, Ravel used the waltz the most effectively.¹²² *Valses nobles et Sentimentales* (1911) looked back to the waltzes of Schubert. *La Valse* captured an imperial court waltz of 1855, the golden age of the waltz, juxtaposed against the violence of World War I. According to Larner, *La Valse* could

¹²¹ Andrew Lamb, “Waltz (i).” In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/29881> (accessed January 23, 2008).

¹²² Ibid.

not have been completed before World War I because of its extremeness and violence. He described *La Valse* as “the most frightening work of World War I.”¹²³ The war combined with the impact of Ravel’s mother’s death created the dark and tragic tone of this work.

Symphonic Poem versus Choreographic Poem

Ravel referred to *La Valse* as a “choreographic poem.” However, when he first thought about the piece in 1906, he intended the work as a “symphonic poem,” a genre of the Romantic period in which a poem or programmatic scenario provides a narrative or illustrative basis for a one-movement orchestral work.¹²⁴ This genre can be traced back to Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony* or Berlioz’s *Symphonic Fantastique*, though the most prolific composer in this genre was Franz Liszt.¹²⁵ Liszt foreshadowed his own adoption of the symphonic poem in a number of piano works in the *Années de pèlerinage* (1855-1883), in particular *La Chapelle de Guillaume Tell* and *Après une lecture de Dante*. He later composed more than ten symphonic poems for orchestra.

Meanwhile, Ravel was one of the pioneers of the choreographic poem. Choreographic poem refers to a piece of music originally designed as a ballet, but which can also stand as an orchestral work in its own right. Famous examples include

¹²³ Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, 174.

¹²⁴ Hugh Macdonald, “Symphonic poem.” In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/27250> (accessed February 16, 2008).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

Debussy's *Prélude à 'L'Après-midi d'un faune'* and Ravel's *Boléro* and *La Valse*.¹²⁶

The musical difference between symphonic poem and choreographic poem is not well understood. For example, Hugh Macdonald considers *La Valse* as "one of the most significant examples of the symphonic poem."¹²⁷ However, it was Ravel who changed the work from symphonic poem to choreographic poem, and certainly he was aware of the difference between them. The difference lies in the existence of more direct and detailed links between music and the ballet movements in a choreographic poem than there are between literature and its musical description in a symphonic poem.

Ravel wrote his own scenario for *La Valse*. According to Mawer, he produced a detailed scenario with his score, although the manuscript has long been lost.¹²⁸

However, a short version of the scenario was published with the orchestral score:

Through breaks in the swirling clouds, waltzing couples may be glimpsed. Little by little they disperse: an immense hall filled with a whirling crowd can be made out [Letter A, measure 66].
The stage is illuminated gradually. The light of the chandeliers peaks at the *fortissimo* [Letter B, measure 138].
An Imperial Court, about 1855.¹²⁹

The short scenario does not address specific details for the choreography but still shows the connection between the music and the scenes. With Ravel's short version scenario, many choreographers automatically created an imperial court ballroom stage

¹²⁶ Jane Bellingham, "Choreographic poem." In *The Oxford Companion to Music*, edited by Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114> (accessed February 9, 2008).

¹²⁷ Hugh Macdonald, "Symphonic poem." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/27250> (accessed February 16, 2008).

¹²⁸ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 154-155.

¹²⁹ Maurice Ravel, *La Valse: Poème chorégraphique pour orchestre* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997), 92.

setting. Also considering its dark tone and loud dynamic indication from the scenario (“the swirling clouds, the light of the chandeliers peaks at the *fortissimo*”), choreographers tried to associate *La Valse* with macabre literature like Mikhail Lermontov’s “Maskarad”¹³⁰ and Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Masque of the Red Death.”¹³¹ George Balanchine created his own ballerina’s death plot in his choreography.

Particularly in Balanchine’s *La Valse*, Ravel’s specific words in the scenario such as “swirling clouds” and “the light of the chandeliers peaks at the *fortissimo*” are well described through dance movements. As Mawer wrote, “The main elements of music and dance are so well matched that Balanchine’s interpretation can be claimed as one where the synthesized whole is indeed greater than the sum of its components,”¹³² his work is regarded as the most successful choreography of *La Valse*.

La Valse holds a place of special significance in the entirety of Ravel’s compositions. First, it demonstrates his stated opinion of the waltz as the apotheosis of Western dance. Second, among all his compositions it may reflect some of Ravel’s most personal and internal musical thoughts, created as it was through the most difficult period of his life. Furthermore, because he intended *La Valse* for ballet, his intricate musical thoughts become visualized. In his compositions, internal and personal musical expressiveness is rare. *La Valse* may therefore be considered an

¹³⁰ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 172.

¹³¹ According to Deborah Mawer in “Balanchine’s *La Valse*: Meanings and Implications for Ravel Studies,” *Opera Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2006), 90-116, Richard Buckle is the first notable scholar to associate *La Valse* and Poe’s “The Masque of the Red Death.”

¹³² Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 181.

exception, as one of his greatest examples of masterful combination of two contrasting perspectives in one work: his most intrinsic, internal musical thoughts and his most extroverted and grand musical rhythm, the waltz.

Productions of *La Valse*

Even with their different interpretations choreographers reveal the close relationship of music and dance in *La Valse*. This chapter will introduce the two historical Bronislava Nijinska productions, which were staged during Ravel's lifetime (the 1929 Paris premier and the 1931 revised production) to verify their historical values. Then the three posthumous choreographies by Léonide Massine (1950), George Balanchine (1951), and Frederick Ashton (1958) will be discussed for their different approaches to the interrelationship of music and dance. For further reference, a complete list of choreographers who have staged Ravel's *La Valse* is found in appendix A.

Bronislava Nijinska Productions, 1929 and 1931

At the first hearing of the two-piano version in 1920, Diaghilev refused to stage *La Valse* because he thought its music was self-sufficient and therefore could not be effective for ballet. Subsequently, the ballet premier in Paris was delayed until Bronislava Nijinska's choreography with the Ida Rubinstein ballet troupe in May, 1929. This followed a practice performance in Monte Carlo staged in January, 1929. Most scholars, including Orenstein, consider the 1929 Paris premier the first official production, although according to Mawer there was an experimental production by the

Royal Flemish Opera Ballet in Antwerp in October, 1926. Indeed, the 1929 Paris premier became better known than the Flemish production. In the Paris premier Ravel collaborated with many famous artists such as décor and costume designer, Alexandre Benois, set designer Monsieur O. Alleri, and Maison Mirande who created a special costume for Rubinstein.¹³³

This production, however, received negative reviews from critics who contended that the choreographer Nijinska did not respect Ravel's compositional intentions. During the 1920s, Nijinska choreographed primarily abstract ballets conceived without librettos or scenarios. In her first production of *La Valse*, she attempted to make distinctions between music and dance, making dance to a more self-sufficient discipline. The critics argued that she disregarded Ravel's intention that the music should be expressed through dance. Her choreography was so abstract that one dancer in the premier performance, Nina Tikanova, recalled in her memoirs that "Even the most impassioned admirers of Nijinska could not accept her choreography of *La Valse*, it was counted as a 'very grave error.'"¹³⁴

Nijinska and Benois staged a revised production two years later in 1931, which received positive reviews. Finally, *La Valse* was realized as a "three-dimensional moving image."¹³⁵ This production was exported to England in the same year, becoming one of the most successful of Ravel's stage works. The warm reception by the English is well represented in a review by William McNaught:

¹³³ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 157-160.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

There was an artistic parallel between the sumptuous treatment of the waltz on the stage and Ravel's well-known orchestral elaboration, and the result was of a unified creation, single and complete, and too strong in its impersonal quality to be affected by what any individual dancer did, or wore, as a unit in the ensemble... It is the best of the ballets, although the simplest in form.¹³⁶

The revised production closely followed Ravel's compositional intentions. As Ravel expressed in a letter to his brother, Maurice Emmanuel, "One should see in it only what the music expresses: an ascending progression of sonority, to which the stage will add those of light and movement."¹³⁷ This shows Ravel's focus on the interrelationship of the music and the choreography.

Léonide Massine Production, 1950

Léonide Massine (1896-1979) choreographed *La Valse* with the "macabre approach" for the first time.¹³⁸ He had attended the first hearing of *La Valse* at Misia Sert's house in 1920. He perceived it as a violent and macabre work, as Ravel intended "*un tournoiement fantastique et fatal* (fantastic and fatal whirling)."¹³⁹

Thirty years later, Massine finally choreographed *La Valse* using Mikhail Lermontov's short story "Maskarad," about a love triangle and a death set at a masked ball. This production was staged at the Opéra-Comique in Paris in 1950 with Massine dancing the main role. He was enthusiastic while preparing his production, but after

¹³⁶ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 164-65.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹³⁹ Maurice Ravel, "An Autobiographical Sketch," found in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, rev. ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 32.

the performance he criticized the music of *La Valse* as being too “monophonic,” “defeating” his choreography.¹⁴⁰

George Balanchine Production, 1951

A year later, influenced by Massine, George Balanchine (1904-1983) produced *La Valse* for his New York City Ballet with a somber and menacing tone (1951).¹⁴¹ This was the first successful macabre approach to *La Valse*. Even though Ravel imagined violent destruction in the music, his destructive images were not as extreme as Balanchine’s, who intensified the musical extremity by creating a death plot for the lead ballerina. In order to focus on the interrelationship of music and dance, he uses the minimal stage set in his production.

Balanchine was one of the most famous choreographers in modern ballet history. A son of a composer, he started piano lessons at the age of five. After his graduation in 1921 from the Imperial Ballet School (the St. Petersburg Academy where he had started his dance studies at the age of nine), he attended the Petrograd Conservatory of Music for three years of musical training, which included piano, composition, harmony, and counterpoint. Thus he was trained not only as a professional dancer but also as a musician. This intensive musical training gave Balanchine the ability to reduce orchestral scores on the piano, an invaluable aid in translating music into dance.¹⁴² With his musical and choreographic talents, which far

¹⁴⁰ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 172.

¹⁴¹ Because of the short length of *La Valse*, Balanchine programmed it with another Ravel waltz, *Valse nobles et sentimentales*, as the first half in all of his productions.

¹⁴² The George Balanchine Foundation, <http://www.balanchine.org/balanchine/01/index.html>.

exceed that of most of his peers, his choreographies show the intricate relationship of music and dance as expressed in his words, “Choreography can only be the result of music,”¹⁴³ and “Time—music and silences—makes gesture mean something. It is dancing *presented* in a certain way. To make every step look different by the way it is presented. A writer chooses a word. I choose a gesture.”¹⁴⁴

Balanchine developed his early career successfully with Diaghilev’s *Ballet Russes*. In 1948 he established the New York City Ballet and served as its ballet master and principal choreographer until his death in 1983.

Balanchine’s respect for Ravel is evident through his eleven choreographies based on Ravel’s music.¹⁴⁵ With his New York City Ballet, he created the *Homage à Ravel* festival in 1975, which celebrated the centennial of Ravel’s birth for two weeks.¹⁴⁶ For the festival, in addition to *La Valse*, Balanchine choreographed Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit*, *Rapsodie Espagnole*, *Sonatine*, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, and *Tzigane*. As a result of this festival, the French Government proclaimed Balanchine a member of the Legion of Honor.¹⁴⁷

La Valse is one of the most outstanding Balanchine choreographies of Ravel’s music. During Ravel’s lifetime Balanchine choreographed *Waltz* (one waltz from *Valse nobles et sentimentales*) in 1923 and *L’Enfant et les Sortilèges* in 1925. These

¹⁴³ The New York City Ballet, http://www.nycballet.com/researchers/discography.html?TierSlicer1TSMMenuTargetID=190&TierSlicer1_TSMMenuTargetType=4&TierSlicer1_TSMMenuID=29.

¹⁴⁴ George Balanchine, *Balanchine’s New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, ed. Francis Mason (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), ix.

¹⁴⁵ A complete list of Balanchine’s choreographies with Ravel’s music is found in appendix B.

¹⁴⁶ Herbert Kupferberg, “Balanchine Announces Ravel Festival ABT’s Next N.Y. Season,” *Dance News*, (April 1975).

¹⁴⁷ The American Ballet Theatre, http://www.abt.org/education/archive/choreographers/balanchine_g.html.

collaborations established a relationship in which he was able to capture the meanings within Ravel's music. Even though *La Valse* was choreographed after Ravel's death, Balanchine's interpretation was based on a well established understanding of Ravel's music.¹⁴⁸

Balanchine's *La Valse* received high acclaim, and critics praised its unification of music and dance. The critic Jacques Bourgeois wrote, "The choreographer knew perfectly how to recreate visually the fantastic climate of this music."¹⁴⁹ Another critic Olivier Marlin pointed out the close relationship between the music and the dance: "Balanchine [is] this man who hears the dance while seeing the music."¹⁵⁰

Deborah Mawer writes,

Balanchine has helped the listener to recognize Ravel's well-developed and distinctive sonic image of the waltz: dotted rhythms, use of hemiola, emphasis on the second beat, half-bar divisions and hairpin dynamics. Balanchine's version offers an exceptionally strong vision of the unease-through-to-destruction that is the essence of Ravel's score. The main elements of music and dance are so well matched that Balanchine's interpretation can be claimed as one where the synthesized whole is indeed greater than the sum of its components.¹⁵¹

Continuous performances of Balanchine's choreography of *La Valse* by many ballet companies give further credibility to the idea that Balanchine matched Ravel's intentions for *La Valse*. After the first performance in 1951, his *La Valse* remained in the New York City Ballet repertoire for five years and was broadcast as one of the first

¹⁴⁸ Deborah Mawer, "Balanchine's *La Valse*: Meanings and Implications for Ravel Studies," *Opera Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2006), 91-92.

¹⁴⁹ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 180.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

programs CBS used for color television.¹⁵² However, in 1956 because of the prima ballerina's sickness (Tanquil LeClercq suffered a devastating bout of polio), the production was canceled and could not be remounted until 1962 with a new prima ballerina (Patricia McBride).¹⁵³ *La Valse* was performed for the company's Berlin tour in 1973 and from then, it has remained part of the permanent repertoire of the New York City Ballet. The most recent performance of Balanchine's *La Valse* was scheduled for the Miami City Ballet's Manhattan debut, in January 21-25, 2009, at the New York City Center.¹⁵⁴

Frederick Ashton Production, 1958

Frederick Ashton (1904-1988), regarding himself to be a classical choreographer, studied with Léonide Massine in England.¹⁵⁵ Later he became the founder of the Royal Ballet and worked as a director of the company from 1963 to 1970.

In 1958, Ashton choreographed *La Valse* in a more classical style than Balanchine.¹⁵⁶ Following Ravel's original stage scenario, "An imperial court, about

¹⁵² Mawer, "Balanchine's *La Valse*: Meanings and Implications for Ravel Studies," 93-94.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 94.

¹⁵⁴ The Miami City Ballet, <http://www.miamicityballet.org/news.php?NewsID=25>. *La Valse* is a part of the Program I, "An Evening of Balanchine and Tharp Classics." Besides *La Valse* the program includes Balanchine's 1972 *Symphony in Three Movements*, with music by Stravinsky and Twyla Tharp's *In The Upper Room*.

¹⁵⁵ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 166.

¹⁵⁶ This is the only choreography commercially available to date as a video recording of *La Valse*: Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev, *An evening with the Royal Ballet*, DVD. (London: British Home Entertainment, c. 1963).

1855,¹⁵⁷ he created an aristocratic set design with poles and chandeliers on each side. He placed four male figures at the back of the stage holding candelabras standing on the top of a small platform covered with red carpet. The figures do not show any single movement during the entire production and act like statues, implying a majestic image of the imperial court. The columns and hanging chandeliers are placed symmetrically, emphasizing a stable, powerful feeling for the peak period of the Viennese imperial court. The dancers' costumes also reflect the Viennese style: female dancers' full skirts and male dancers' traditional tuxedos, typical of aristocrats of the time.

Ashton's choreography is perhaps more faithful to Ravel's music than Balanchine's but lacks choreographic drama. It is clear to see how the music is described by dance movements. He responds primarily to the melodic sweep rather than to precise rhythmic details.¹⁵⁸ For example, woodwinds playing ascending and descending chromatic figures in a high register are represented by female dancers' lifting movements. During the march-like, chordal section at Ravel's letter B (m. 138), the male dancers use strong gestures such as wide jumps crossing the stage. When the music changes to a chamber music style, only three couples are dancing. This section (mm. 147-178) consists of eight-measure phrases repeated four times. The dance movements correspond to the phrase repetitions: for each eight-measure phrase only one of three couples takes its turn to dance. Toward the end of the ballet, the music also reaches its climax. The dynamic grows bigger and Ravel uses more chromatic

¹⁵⁷ Maurice Ravel, *La Valse: Poème chorégraphique pour orchestre* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997), 92.

¹⁵⁸ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 168.

and dissonance harmonies. Here, Ashton brings all of the dancers on stage. Their dance movements are big with outstretched arms, using the entire upper body. Toward the end, the couples separate and each dance individually, alternating males and females on the entire stage. The stage becomes full with dancers, corresponding to the orchestral tutti. One critic viewed this intricate music-and-dance relationship portrayed in Ashton's choreography as "a listening eye for one to see the music."¹⁵⁹

Ashton's interweaving of the music and dance together as one provides a unique insight into *La Valse*. However, the destruction and violence of *La Valse* is less apparent in his choreography. Balanchine's plot involving the death of the prima ballerina pushes the dramatic aspects much further, which reflects the closest approach to Ravel's intention for *La Valse*. These are two different choreographies, but both aimed for a realization of Ravel's intention in creating *La Valse*: a unification of music and dance.

¹⁵⁹ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 168.

CHAPTER FOUR

Interpretative Study of Balanchine's *La Valse*

The Form of *La Valse*: Orenstein, Mawer, Balanchine

“For me, there are not several arts, but only one: music, painting, dance and literature differ only in their means of expression. Thus, there aren't different kinds of artists, but simply different kinds of specialists.”¹⁶⁰ To Ravel, the integration of more than two arts is quite natural in his artistic view. *La Valse*, as subtitled “choreographic poem,” is the best example of this artistic philosophy.

Originally intended for ballet performance, *La Valse* is different from Ravel's other non-ballet works in that the music must conform to dancers' actions such as their entrances, exits, changes of dance directions, and detailed movements. The music has to be fluid if the dance connections between the sections and phrases are to be smooth. This musical fluidity results in a unique development of various transitional character motives.

The natural musical continuity between the sections and phrases of *La Valse* make its formal structure difficult to define aurally. Arbie Orenstein analyzes *La Valse* as an uninterrupted series of waltzes within two large sections (dividing at measure 440). He sees Section I as “a series of refined and exuberant waltzes” and Section II as “a free restatement, with virtually no new material presented as the ‘fatal whirling’ begins to impose itself upon the elegant waltzes.” Also he believes Ravel's

¹⁶⁰ Maurice Ravel, “Memories of a Lazy Child” (1931), found in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, rev. ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 393.

thorough thematic transformation in *La Valse* is the key element that unifies the whole work.¹⁶¹

Deborah Mawer offers a slightly different analysis: A-B-A' ternary form (see Table 2), indicating the A' section is unusual because of its destructive character toward the end.¹⁶² She describes the B section as “a series of closely related waltzes,” which is similar to Orenstein’s “a series of refined and exuberant waltzes” in Section I. Both scholars agree that the melodies of *La Valse* are shared between sections.

Table 2: Orenstein and Mawer analyses.

Measures	Arbie Orenstein	Deborah Mawer
1-146	I	A
147-440		B
441-755	II	A'

As Table 2 shows, the two scholars analyze *La Valse* similarly, differing mainly in their terminology. In this study, Mawer’s analysis (A-B-A') will be used, since she divides the work in a slightly more detailed and convenient way in terms of choreography.

The A section (mm. 1-146) has introductory characteristics in both music and choreography. Musically, it evolves under a gradual dynamic growth from the opening *pianississimo* to the first *fortissimo* (m. 138) and also introduces the main waltz melody with its characteristic accompaniment pattern. Choreographically, the dancers enter the stage and gradually begin to create the general atmosphere of *La*

¹⁶¹ Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 188.

¹⁶² Deborah Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation* (Aldershot, England Ashgate, 2006), 153.

Valse. Balanchine creates three choreographic scenes in this A section, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Three Choreographic Scenes in A section.¹⁶³

Measure Numbers	Choreographic Scenes
1-65	Introduction: Dancers' entrance into a ballroom
66-105	Greeting: Line up and bow gesture
106-146	Welcoming Dance: All dance in couples with full energy

His scene changes reflect the musical growth particularly in the third scene because the number of dancers is increased and they dance with full energy. This corresponds with Ravel's scenario:

Through breaks in the swirling clouds, waltzing couples may be glimpsed. Little by little they disperse: an immense hall filled with a whirling crowd can be made out. [Letter A, measure 66]
The stage is illuminated gradually. The light of the chandeliers peaks at the *fortissimo*. [Letter B, measure 138]¹⁶⁴

Lighting effects also support this developing choreographic intensity.

Balanchine starts with a completely dark stage. He uses only one or two spotlights for the dancers' entrances. Then the stage is gradually lightened during measures 66-105 and finally reaches full light for the welcoming dance from measure 106. In his choreography, the only stage props, the hanging chandeliers, also help the lighting effect. The chandelier lights are not actually on; instead light is projected gradually from the back of the stage, creating ominous shadows of the chandeliers on the dancers and the floor. This shadowy effect is clearly projected from the A' section at

¹⁶³ The full description of Balanchine's choreography of *La Valse* with measure numbers is found in appendix D, "Description of Balanchine's *La Valse* with musical sections."

¹⁶⁴ Maurice Ravel, *La Valse: Poème chorégraphique pour orchestre* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997), 92.

measure 441, when the main waltz melody returns, anticipating the destructive musical images toward the end. With this minimal stage set and its shadowy lighting effect, Balanchine allows the audience to focus more on the music.

The beginning of the B section (m. 147) is clearly noticeable as the musical texture changes to a more linear and chamber-music style after the previous *fortissimo* chordal passage with full orchestra. Mawer views the B section (mm. 147-440) as a series of closely related waltzes with an “interruptive octave passage” (mm. 291-330).¹⁶⁵ However, this study will analyze her “interruptive octave passage” as a separate waltz (discussed later) because of the dance change and the usage of double bars here, as at the beginning and the end of each waltz in the B section (see Table 4). Musically, the waltzes in the B section are very similar, each one flowing into the next. Therefore, the dancers reflect each new musical section through their stage entrances and exits, changes from male to female and female to male, and their dance direction.

Table 4: Series of Waltzes in B section.

Measure Numbers (Small Changes of Dance)	Waltz Sections and Dance Changes
147-210*	Waltz I
211-242*	Waltz II
243-274*	Waltz III
275-290*	Waltz IV
291-330* (291-306, 307-330)	Waltz V
331-440 (331-370, 371-403, 404-440)	Waltz VI

* Usage of Double Bars.

¹⁶⁵ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 154.

Here it is interesting to notice Ravel’s use of double bars. As Table 4 indicates, Ravel used double bars in the B section to delineate the evolving waltzes, although the end of the B section (m. 440) is not so marked. (His usage of double bars becomes more inconsistent in the A' section.)

In the following A' section (mm. 441-755), Ravel further develops musical intensity by using more dissonance and chromaticism together with the waltz melodies from the A and B sections (see Table 5). The melodic similarity unifies the entire *La Valse* as one-movement work.

Table 5: Melodic Similarity in the A' section.

Measure Numbers	Melodic Similarity
441-479, 480-500*	A section (1-65)
501-520*	B section, Waltz V (291-330)
521-556	B section, Waltz IV (274-290) A section (50-56)
557-578*	B section, Waltz III (243-274)
579-644	B section, Waltz VI (330-370)
645-692*	B section, Waltz VI (371-403)
693-710, 711-712, 713-755	A section (130-137, 138-146) B section, Waltz I (146-154)

*Usage of Double Bars

This section starts with the opening waltz melody and its characteristic accompaniment pattern, reminiscent of the very beginning of the piece. However, except for its opening, this A' section can be viewed as “a process of a dramatic complementation between A and A' sections.”¹⁶⁶ As Mawer explains,

[The A and A' sections are] intricately connected and matching opposites: ego and alter ego. These opposites or dualities might be read as order/chaos; the civilized/the barbaric. Section A' cannot quite be relied upon. ... Its path gradually deviates and goes more and more horribly awry. This is a road of no return. Civilized control becomes lost in a hallucinatory, disoriented whirling,

¹⁶⁶ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 154.

which approaches the barbaric, and the orchestral waltz is robbed of its very identity.¹⁶⁷

Since the melodies in the A' section are derived from the A and B sections, a consideration of the choreographic scene changes suggests a better understanding of the musical formal structure. Balanchine produced three choreographic scenes: 1) the entrance of “Death”¹⁶⁸; 2) the *pas de deux*¹⁶⁹; and 3) the denouement after the ballerina’s death (see Table 6).

Table 6: Description of Balanchine’s Choreography of *La Valse* in the A' Section.

Choreographic Scenes (Measures)	Description of Choreography	
Entrance of Death (441-500)	441-479	Death enters with his assistant, he tries to control the ballerina in white
	480-500	Death grabs her, preparing their <i>pas de deux</i>
<i>Pas de deux</i> (501-644)	501-520	Aggressive and controlling movement by Death
	521-556	Death seduces her with a necklace, showing her a broken mirror
	557-578	Peak moments of seduction: he changes her dress and glove from white to black
	579-644	He dances her to death
Denouement after the ballerina’s death (645-755)	645-692	She is dead, Death disappears and other dancers on the stage awaken, realize the situation
	693-755 (693-710)	The most chaotic moment: individual dancers with big gestures
	(711-712)	The dead ballerina is lifted in the center of the stage
	(713-755)	Groups of dancers encircle her and make swirling movement with musical repetitions

¹⁶⁷ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*, 154.

¹⁶⁸ Nancy Reynolds, *Repertory in Review: 40 Years of the New York City Ballet*, (New York: Dial Press, 1977), 118.

¹⁶⁹ Dance for two: a female and male dancers’ duet in ballet.

The most dramatic moment is the ballerina's death on the stage at measures 644-645. For the development of this choreographic intensity, first, Balanchine introduces a new male dancer dressed in black ("Death") at the beginning of the A' section. His slow walking from the back toward the front of the stage perfectly matches the opening accompaniment pattern in the lowest register. Also, his dark appearance matches the devilish atmosphere further toward the end. After he enters the stage, a violent and controlling *pas de deux* with the ballerina in white follows, which can be considered as the second choreographic scene in the A' section. During their *pas de deux* the rest of the dancers on the stage are paired in couples and stay motionless. Therefore, the couple's *pas de deux* receives all of the musical and choreographic attention. In the final scene, after her death (from measure 645 to the end), dancers on the stage are awakened and shocked. In order to express their chaotic moment, they use big gestures and dance individually and frantically to the end.

Interpretative Insights for Solo Performance from Balanchine's *La Valse*

The interrelationship of Ravel's music and Balanchine's choreography provides an alternative perspective to analyze *La Valse*. Understanding each specific musical section through choreography is very valuable for the solo performer. Choreographic details can suggest ideas for interpretation such as phrase structure and musical direction. The pianist can create longer musical phrase structures through envisioning choreographic movements. Musical direction, created by understanding of the choreography, such as the buildup and release of musical tension, can lead to a

more meaningful performance. Especially pianists with a visual orientation may use this dimension while they prepare the piece, connecting them better to the music.

A Section

The A section (mm. 1-146) is divided into three choreographic scenes in Balanchine's choreography: 1) Introduction, the dancers' entrance into a ballroom; 2) Greeting, dancers' lineup and bow gesture; and 3) Welcoming dance, all dance in couples with full energy. As the Table 7 indicates, within each scene, specific musical elements, such as an accompaniment pattern, fragment of the main waltz melody and its variants, new melody, and transitional passage, which show more detailed interrelated connection between music and choreography, are examined for interpretative insights into solo performance (see Table 7).

Table 7: Interrelated musical elements with choreography in the A section.

Scenes: Measures	Interrelated Musical Elements	Chorographic Descriptions
Introduction (1-65)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left-hand accompaniment (1-11) • Fragment of main waltz melody (12-13) • New melody in hemiola rhythm (44-49) • Transitional passage (61-65) 	Dancers' entrance into a ballroom: Number of dancers increase gradually up to three couples, six individuals
Greeting (66-105)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main waltz melody in rhythmic augmentation (69-72) • Transitional passage (98-105) 	Male and female dancers are lined up and present bow gesture
Welcoming Dance (106-146)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitional passage (132-146) 	All dancers in couples and dancer with full energy

The *pianississimo* accompaniment in the left hand at the beginning of the A section establishes the dark and mysterious mood by using the lowest register of the keyboard (see Example 14).

Example 14: *La Valse*, A section, accompaniment and fragment of main waltz melody, mm. 1-13.

The image shows a musical score for the A section of 'La Valse' by Johann Strauss II. It consists of two systems of music. The first system, labeled '1 Mouvt de Valse viennoise', shows the piano accompaniment in the left hand, marked 'PIANO' and 'ppp'. The right hand is silent. The second system, labeled '7' and '12', shows the accompaniment continuing in the left hand while the right hand enters with a melody. A red arrow points to measure 12 with the text 'p en dehors'. The score is in 3/4 time and includes a dashed line labeled '8^a bassa' indicating the bass register.

In Balanchine's choreography, this dark musical atmosphere is implied by a complete dark stage. The accompaniment pattern lasts until measure 37 (the initial eleven measures are played without melody in the right hand) and the pianist's careful interpretative attention is necessary for an effective performance. For example, envisioning the dark stage will help capture a general idea for the mysterious opening. Restrained playing with limited arm motion is suggested to create the suspenseful atmosphere. A slight *crescendo* effect on each measure starting from measure 9, using the bass *accent* followed by two *staccato* quarter notes that span an increasing interval, creates musical anticipation. The *crescendo* effect develops further throughout the repetition of the accompaniment pattern (mm. 9-37) with the entrance of the fragment of the waltz melody (mm. 12-13, 24-25). This developing musical

anticipation leads a gradual musical growth of the dynamic level and corresponds to the increasing number of dancers on the stage.

In the first fragment of the waltz melody (mm. 12-13), the *crescendo* on the half note is particularly interesting because of its close relationship with the choreography. This *crescendo* indicates a potential musical energy growth. The ascending melodic contour with the lack of a sense of cadence in this melodic fragment is performed by dancers' searching gestures with arms wide open, which shows the potential musical energy. This growing musical energy can be presented by playing with a large swing motion from the eighth note to the *staccato* quarter note (indicated with an arrow in Example 14).

While this melodic waltz fragment appears twice (mm. 12-13, 24-25), the opening accompaniment pattern continues. The number of dancers who enter the stage increases with each of the two melodic fragment entrances: first with one female dancer (mm. 12-13) and then with three female dancers (mm. 24-25), which shows the natural dynamic growth from *pianississimo* (m. 1) to *piano* (m. 39) where the accompaniment changes. The increase in the number of dancers can be reflected in a growing dynamic level with each melody. A carefully planned *crescendo* with the repetition of the accompaniment pattern will be an additional effect, even though playing a range of soft dynamics in the lowest register of the keyboard is technically challenging. This will give the pianist an idea of the musical direction toward the next new melody.

Example 15: *La Valse*, A section, new melody in hemiola rhythm, mm. 39-49.

The image displays a musical score for the A section of 'La Valse' by Maurice Ravel, specifically measures 39 through 49. The score is written for piano and is divided into two systems. The first system contains measures 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, and 44. The second system contains measures 45, 46, 47, 48, and 49. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score features a new melody in hemiola rhythm starting at measure 44, indicated by red arrows pointing to the notes. The piano part consists of broken chords and a melodic line in the right hand, with a long melodic F# in measures 45-46. Measure 48 features triplets in the right hand, which are also indicated by red arrows. The dynamics range from piano (p) to pianissimo (pp).

With this new melody in hemiola rhythm (mm. 44-49), the three female dancers pair up with their partners. The pianist's main focus may be bringing out the duple rhythm melody while controlling the smooth flowing broken chord figurations, which fill out the harmony. The dancers are spinning around with their arms spread, lifted by their partners on the long melodic F[#] (mm. 45-46). Particularly in measure 48, Ravel accelerates the musical excitement with triplets, where Balanchine's dancers have a running movement. A feeling of moving ahead on these triplets will match the ascending melodic contour, the *crescendo*, and the dancers' running movement.

In a transitional passage (mm. 61-65), the musical intensity comes nearly to a halt in the lowest register of the keyboard. Here, Balanchine has the dancers exit (mm. 61-62), leaving an empty stage (mm. 63-65) in preparation for the next scene.

Example 16: *La Valse*, A section, transitional passage, mm. 56-68.

The image shows a musical score for a transitional passage in *La Valse*, measures 56-68. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system covers measures 56 to 61. Measure 56 is marked with a box containing the number 56. Measure 61 is marked with a box containing the number 61 and the word *soutenu*. A red bracket highlights the end of measure 61. The second system covers measures 63 to 66. Measure 63 is marked with a box containing the number 63. Measure 66 is marked with a box containing the letter 'A' and the number 66. A red bracket highlights the end of measure 66. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *pp* and *mf*.

The dancers' disappearance implies the continuous *diminuendo* and Ravel's indication *soutenu* (sustained) in measure 61. The double bar at measure 66 may even imply a slight musical pause to emphasize the emptiness of the stage.

The second scene (Greeting, mm. 66-105) begins with a rhythmic augmentation of the main waltz melody derived from measures 12-13 (see Example 17).

Example 17: *La Valse*, A section, main waltz melody with rhythmic augmentation, mm. 69-80.

The image shows a musical score for the main waltz melody with rhythmic augmentation in *La Valse*, measures 69-80. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system covers measures 69 to 73. Measure 69 is marked with a box containing the number 69. Measure 73 is marked with a box containing the number 73. The second system covers measures 75 to 79. Measure 75 is marked with a box containing the number 75. Measure 79 is marked with a box containing the number 79. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *pp*. A red dashed line is drawn above the notes in measures 69-73 and 75-79, indicating a rhythmic augmentation. The word *en dehors* is written above measure 69, and *simile* is written below measure 73.

This scene consists of three ten-measure phrases and one eight-measure phrase. Each ten-measure phrase can be sub-divided into 4 + 4 + 2 measures (indicated by dashed slurs in Example 17), and is used for dancers' entrances for greeting: the first phrase for females from the back of the stage, the second phrase for males from the front of the stage, and the third phrase for their meeting in the middle of the stage. Dancers' entrances suggest different dynamics on each phrase, even though they are all marked *pianissimo* or *piano*.

In the succeeding eight-measure phrase (mm. 98-105), the dancers' greeting gesture reaches its peak moment, where the male dancers bend their knees in a bowing gesture (see Example 18).

Example 18: *La Valse*, A section, transitional arpeggio to the third scene, mm. 93-109.

Both choreographically and musically, this passage functions as a conclusion and transition to the final scene of the A section (mm. 106-146). At the same time, the repeating left-hand accompaniment pattern (mm. 99-104) matches the female dancers' entrance.

tiptoe movements, which suggests a *leggiere* touch. The continuous dominant pedal point on E and its resolution to A (m. 105) confirms the conclusionary characteristic. Because the dancers finish their bow gesture on the resolution and remain motionless for a split second (m. 105), slightly accenting the right-hand E⁷ chords and the following A octave help underscore this important arrival. A brief musical pause reflecting the dancers' stillness right after the A octave will strengthen this conclusion.

With the arpeggio in measure 105, which is played by the harp in the orchestral version, dancers spread out over the entire stage as the stage light increases to full in order to prepare the last scene of the A section. Ravel's *diminuendo* for this arpeggio, however, probably warns the pianist not to get excited at this point, since there is a long *crescendo* coming (mm. 113-130). It may also suggest taking extra time on this arpeggio to enhance the vibrant mood of the choreography.

Toward the end of the last scene of the A section, the cadential quality is emphasized by the rising chromatic octaves in the bass (mm. 134-137), followed by four measures of dominant harmony (mm. 141-145), and an authentic cadence in D (mm. 145-146) (see Example 19). During the cadence (mm. 145-146), the female dancers remain motionless in the center of the stage while the male dancers exit in preparation for Waltz I of the B section, which will be in a chamber style. This suggests a musical pause right before the melodic A-A[#] (m. 146) that leads to the B section. Emphasizing on the accented notes in measures 145-146 makes this musical pause more effective and helps lead to a lyrical, elegant playing of the A-A[#].

Example 19: *La Valse*, A section, conclusion, mm. 132-146.



B Section

The B section (mm. 147- 440) is a series of six musically uninterrupted waltzes, which are reflected in choreographic changes.

Table 8: Interrelated musical elements with choreography in the B section.

Waltzes	Interrelated Musical Elements	Choreographic Descriptions
Waltz I (146-210)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two staccato notes and <i>tenuto</i> toward the end of each 8-measure phrase (152-153) 	Female dancers' waltz, with more dancers in each 8-measure phrase
Waltz II (211-242)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-measure phrase structure (235-242) 	Concentric circles, then pinwheel movement
Waltz III (243-274)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chromatic scales (243-274) 	A couple's <i>pas de deux</i> , dance movement repeats in two 16-measure phrases
Waltz IV (275-290)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right-hand alternating eighth notes (275-290) 	Female dancers' waltz with <i>en pointe</i> movements
Waltz V (291-330)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4-measure phrase structure (291-306) Chromatic scale (319-330) 	291-306: Chasing movement between male and female groups of dancers, while the ballerina in white enters with partner 307-330: the ballerina is lifted by partner during chromatic scales
Waltz VI (331-440)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staccato quarter notes and octave alternating notes (331-370) Chromatic scales (387-388) 	331-370, 371-403, and 404-440: three different styles <i>pas de deux</i> , including arabesque At the end of B section, all dancers become motionless

Waltz I (mm. 147-210)

Contrasting with the chordal passage at the end of A section, Waltz I (mm. 147-210) is in a lyrical chamber style. It is made up entirely of eight-measure phrases (see Example 20). As presented by the oboe and flute solo melody in the orchestral version, the dynamic level *piano* creates a gentle musical atmosphere.

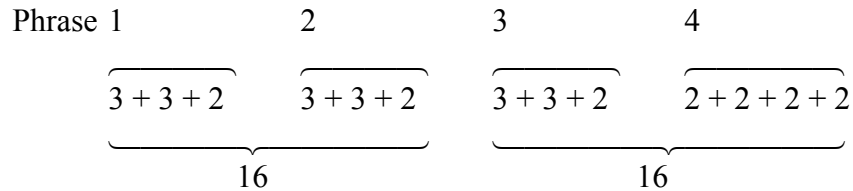
Example 20: *La Valse*, Waltz I, B section, beginning, mm. 147-154.

In order to portray the lyrical elegance of this waltz, Balanchine uses only female dancers. With each of the first three eight-measure phrases, one group of five female dancers enters from each side and finally the back of the stage (mm. 147-178). These phrases are generally marked *piano*, although, considering more dancers enter with each phrase, the pianist may feel a gradual growth in dynamics.

The dancers' delicate movements correspond to the musical notation. Toward the end of each phrase, Ravel's *staccato* quarter notes are echoed by the dancers' elegant lifts using their tiptoes (see Example 20, m. 152). The succeeding *tenuto* half note is matched with an elegant open-arm gesture. In solo performance, the tiptoe movements suggest a lighter, sensitive lifting *staccato* touch, which is followed by a natural *tenuto* touch.

Waltz II (mm. 211-242)

The *fortissimo* chordal texture of Waltz II (mm. 211-242) offers a contrasting atmosphere. A total of thirty-two-measures is subdivided into this structure:



This waltz is particularly impressive in terms of Balanchine’s descriptive choreography and Ravel’s scenario with each phrase:

Phrase 1: Female dancers come toward the center of the stage, make a circle

Phrase 2: Male dancers come toward the center of the stage, make a circle

Phrase 3: All dancers make three concentric circles (from the center: male-female-female in order), turn 90° degrees, then stretch their arms toward the center to form a pinwheel

Phrase 4: All dancers start to spin, making swirling movements like a Maypole dance

Specifically, the dancers’ last swirling movement depicts Ravel’s words in his scenario, “swirling clouds.”¹⁷⁰ This choreographic buildup musically compresses the last eight measures into two-measure sub-phrases (mm. 235-242, see Example 21).

Example 21: *La Valse*, Waltz II, B section, swirling movement, mm. 235-242.



¹⁷⁰ Maurice Ravel, *La Valse: Poème chorégraphique pour orchestre* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997), 92.

Chromatic ascending bass movement (mm. 235-240) builds up a musical tension here, which is released at the succeeding B^b cadence (mm. 241-242). The choreographic details suggest a slight *accelerando* for the chromatic ascending bass and *a tempo* for the following cadence with accents on each note.

Waltz III (mm. 243-274)

Waltz III returns to a chamber music texture featuring undulating chromatic scales first in the cellos, then answered by a clarinet. The first sixteen measures (shown in Example 22) are repeated.

Example 22: *La Valse*, Waltz III, B section, chromatic scale, mm. 243-258.

One couple dances a *pas de deux*¹⁷¹ in the center of the stage while the other dancers watch from the sides of the stage as at a ballroom. The couple dances two large circles (one for each sixteen measures). Their dance movements reflect the waltz melody in the treble register, but the couple's swaying left and right brings out the

¹⁷¹ Dance for two: a female and male dancers' duet in ballet.

chromatic scales with each two-measure rise and fall. Even though musically these chromatic scales are notated as optional in the third staff and only decorate the waltz melody, it is strongly recommended to play them for the flow of the dance.

Since all three parts of the texture are written so close together, these chromatic scales are technically challenging to play. As indicated in Example 22, playing the bass clef (the accompaniment with a few omissions) together with most of chromatic scales with the left hand and the treble melody with the right hand can be one suggestion. However, the highest note of each chromatic scale needs to be played by the right hand because of the more than an octave distance from the bass E. In measures 251-258, the chromatic scale fits comfortably in the right hand while it plays most of the waltz melody as well.

Waltz IV (mm. 275-290)

In this shortest waltz (mm. 275-290) the female dancers' *en pointe*¹⁷² movements bring out the alternating eighth notes in the right hand. With *piano* and *mezzo forte*, their delightful tiptoe movements imply a light touch for these notes—and even more elegant with the two *staccato* quarter notes in the accompaniment (see Example 23).

Example 23: *La Valse*, Waltz IV, B section, *en pointe* movement, mm. 275-278.



The image shows a musical score for measures 275-278 of Waltz IV. The score is in 3/4 time and features a right hand with alternating eighth notes and a left hand with staccato quarter notes. The right hand part is marked 'un peu en dehors' and 'mf un 1'. The left hand part is marked 'mf'. The score is in G major and 3/4 time.

¹⁷² The act of standing on the tips of the toes while performing steps.

Waltz V (mm. 291-330)

The thicker chordal texture with *forte* and *fortissimo*, and the lack of the sense of cadence throughout the Waltz V create a restless atmosphere (see Example 24).

Example 24: *La Valse*, Waltz V, B section, beginning, mm. 288-299.

This waltz is made up of four-measure phrases overall, except the last phrase, which includes an extended chromatic scale notated in an optional staff (starting at m. 319). Each four-measure phrase is used for chasing movements between groups of male and female dancers (mm. 291-306), suggesting a feeling of forward motion in performance. Particularly, the chromatic eighth notes in the bass (mm. 292 and 296-297), the triplets (m. 298), and Ravel's three *crescendo* marks support this restlessness. However, the beginning of each phrase should be played *a tempo*, as the accents on the dotted quarter notes signal the beginning of the dancers' chasing movements.

While dancers are chasing each other, the leading ballerina, dressed in white, enters the stage with her partner. (She dances the main role from here to the end.) After they enter she is lifted by her partner during long chromatic scales in the optional staff. This lift during the longest, widest chromatic scale of the entire work is

one of the most elegant moments in the choreography (mm. 319-330, see Example 25).

Example 25: *La Valse*, Waltz V, B section, chromatic scale, mm. 317-330.

During this lift she remains still, making her movement a single gesture. In order to perform this enchanting, yet important chromatic scale, a few of the left-hand ‘A’s may be omitted (marked with brackets in Example 25). Playing accented notes with enough emphasis in measure 318 allows the pianist to start this chromatic scale with a slightly relaxed tempo, envisioning the ballerina’s elegant, extended lift.

Waltz VI (mm. 331-440)

The principal couple dances three different styles of *pas de deux* in this last waltz of the B section. The three *pas de deux* (mm. 331-370, 371-403, and 404-440) are indicated by double bars. In the first *pas de deux*, the ballerina’s *arabesques*¹⁷³ on

¹⁷³ A position of the body where the dancer stands on one leg, while the other leg is extended behind the body, with both knees straight.

the *staccato* quarter notes (circled in Example 26) emphasize the elegance of the waltz melody.

Example 26: *La Valse*, Waltz VI, B section, *arabesque*, mm. 329-341.

The image shows a musical score for the B section of 'La Valse, Waltz VI' by Johann Strauss II, specifically the 'arabesque' section from measures 329 to 341. The score is written for piano and includes a vocal line at the top. The piano part is divided into right hand (RH) and left hand (LH). The score features several dynamic markings: *p* (piano) at measure 331, *Arabesque* and *poco* at measure 333, *cresc.* (crescendo) at measure 335, and *mf* (mezzo-forte) at measure 337. The tempo is marked *poco*. Red annotations highlight specific notes and an 'omission' in the vocal line. A red circle highlights a note in measure 333. A red line connects a note in measure 331 to a note in measure 333. A blue dashed line connects a note in measure 331 to a note in measure 333. The score is in 3/4 time and the key signature is one sharp (F#).

As the dancer needs a preparation for an *arabesque*, a slight *tenuto* on the preceding half note will lead to a sensitive wrist lifting on each *staccato*.

Fragments of 'A's, the octave *tremolo* in eighth notes, fill in the harmony throughout the first *pas de deux*. Although they are written in a third staff as optional, their continuous use helps the gradual dynamic growth from *piano* (m. 331) to *fortissimo* (m. 362). Therefore, playing at least a part of each *tremolo* figure (first three notes of each measure, indicated in Example 26, m. 331) is recommended. As the dynamic grows, the couple's movements get bigger and their dance pace becomes faster.

In the second and third *pas de deux*, the octave *tremolo* further develops into arpeggios and chromatic scales, which create an exotic mood (see selected measures in

Example 27). At each change, the ballerina is lifted by her partner and carried across the stage.

Example 27: *La Valse*, Waltz VI, B section, arpeggios and chromatic scales, mm. 370-374, 386-392, 411-415.

The image displays three sections of a piano score for Example 27. The first section, labeled 'mm. 370-374' and 'Un peu plus modéré', features a piano part with a forte (*f*) dynamic at the start, transitioning to piano (*p*) and *expressif* markings. It includes arpeggiated chords and a chromatic scale in the bass. The second section, labeled 'mm. 386-392', begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic that changes to *p subito* (piano subito). It features a chromatic scale in the bass and is accompanied by vocal parts for 'Velles' and 'Altos'. The third section, labeled 'mm. 411-415', starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic, moves to forte (*f*), and then to mezzo-piano (*mp*). It contains arpeggiated chords and chromatic scales in both hands.

Since these figures describe her lifts, they need to be played in the solo performance, even though the chromatic scale (mm. 386-392) is written in the third staff as optional. In order to follow Ravel's specific musical expressions, *piano expressif* (mm. 370-371) and *subito piano* (m. 386), support from these arpeggios and chromatic scales is a must (see Example 28).

Example 28: *La Valse*, Waltz VI, B section, optional chromatic scale, mm. 386-392.

The image shows a musical score for measures 386 and 387 of 'La Valse, Waltz VI, B section'. The score is written for piano and includes parts for Violins (Vclles) Right Hand (RH) and Left Hand (LH), and Alto Saxophones (Altos). Measure 386 begins with a tied chord in the piano and a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) that changes to *p subito* (piano subito) in measure 387. The right hand in measure 387 plays a chromatic scale, while the left hand plays a waltz melody. Red brackets in the piano accompaniment indicate 'LH: omission' for certain notes. The Vclles RH part has a red dotted line indicating a specific phrasing, and the Altos part has a blue dotted line.

The tied chord from measure 386 (see Example 28) can be sustained by the damper pedal. The left hand can play the first note of the chromatic scale with the bass A (m. 387) while the right hand plays the rest of the chromatic scale. In this way, the beginning of the chromatic scale is emphasized because of the hand alternation. Then, while the right hand plays the rest of the scale, the left hand plays the waltz melody. As marked in brackets, a few notes in the accompaniment must be omitted. Since a two-octave chromatic scale within two measures is technically demanding, the timing of the scale can be as free and elegant as the dancer's graceful lift.

A' Section

For the A' section (mm. 441-755), Balanchine creates a death plot to maximize the climax of the musical intensity. It is primarily danced by one couple: a new male dancer in black (the "Death"¹⁷⁴) and the ballerina in white from the B section. According to his plot, this section can be divided into three choreographic scenes as shown in Table 9.

¹⁷⁴ Nancy Reynolds, *Repertory in Review: 40 Years of the New York City Ballet*, (New York: Dial Press, 1977), 118.

Table 9: Interrelated musical elements with choreography in the A' section.

Scenes (Measures)		Interrelated Musical Elements	Choreographic Descriptions
Entrance of Death (441-500)	441-479	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening main waltz melody (441-447) 	Death enters and tries to control the ballerina in white
	480-500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chromatic ascending in 8th notes (480-491) 	Death grabs his partner, preparing their <i>pas de deux</i>
<i>Pas de deux</i> (501-644)	501-520	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wide leaps in chordal passage (501-520) 	Aggressive and controlling movement by Death
	521-556	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Fortissimo</i> octave passages (533, 536) Motive repetition in ascending thirds (550-556) 	Death seduces her with a black necklace, showing her a broken mirror
	557-578	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chordal <i>tremolo</i> (557-578) 	Peak moments of seduction: Death changes her dress and gloves from white to black
	579-644	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Descending chromatic scale in 8th notes (579-644) 	He dances her to death
Denouement after the ballerina's death (645-755)	645-692	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Octave chromatic scale (645-647) Interruptive octave passages and bitonal chords (662-685) 	She is dead; Death disappears and other dancers on the stage awaken and realize the situation
	693-755 (693-710)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chromaticism and parallel chords (722-735) 	The most chaotic moment: individual dancers with big gestures
	(711-712)		The dead ballerina is lifted in the center of the stage
(713-755)	Groups of dancers encircle her and make swirling movements with musical repetitions		

The A' section begins with the opening waltz melody and its characteristic accompaniment (from mm. 12-13), here used for the entrance of Death and his assistant (see Example 29). Death's black costume anticipates the grotesque atmosphere. Even his hands are covered with black gloves. Since other dancers on

the stage remained motionless at the end of the B section (m. 440), Death's entrance brings great choreographic attention. His steps on each downbeat bring out the accompaniment pattern in the left hand (m. 441). In order to portray his devilish walking and to create the grotesque atmosphere of his entrance, each accented downbeat of the accompaniment can be emphasized and the eighth notes can be slightly detached and played evenly without a *crescendo*.

Example 29: *La Valse*, A' section, Entrance of Death, beginning, mm. 441-447.

After Death enters the stage, he tries to reach the ballerina in white, finally grabbing her for the first time in measures 480-491 (see Example 30). Her resistance is presented by frantic foot movements, which match the left-hand ascending chromatic alternating eighth notes. This choreographic tension is well matched with Ravel's *crescendos* in each phrase. The gradual three-octave register change also helps the dynamic growth. A slight *accelerando* within each phrase (each phrase is marked with a dashed line in Example 30) will satisfy the choreographic and musical tension, although the beginning of each phrase (mm. 480, 485, 489) needs to be in tempo to emphasize the musical drive even more.

Example 30: *La Valse*, A' section, Entrance of Death, chromatic ascending eighth notes, mm. 478-491.

The second scene, the final *pas de deux* (mm. 501-644), begins with Death's wild and aggressive *cabriole*,¹⁷⁵ which matches the *fortissimo* chordal leaps (mm. 501, 505, 509, 513 in Example 31). This *cabriole*, using Death's full energy, represents his authority over his prey. The pianist may need to use the full upper body on the initial accented dotted-quarter chords in *fortissimo* to represent the dancer's energy.

Example 31: *La Valse*, A' section, *Pas de deux, cabriole*, mm. 499-504.

After his aggressive *cabriole*, he presents the ballerina a black necklace. Here, variants of waltz melodies from the A section (mm. 50-51) and Waltz IV from the B section (mm. 275-290) are used (see Example 32). Since these melodies have been heard earlier and are presented here *piano*, the atmosphere seems peaceful and

¹⁷⁵ A ballet jump, formerly performed only by men, in which the dancer beats the calves of the legs together in the air, with a scissors-like movement.

romantic. However, Ravel forecasts the dark images to come with one-measure interruptive octave figures (mm. 533, 536). In the choreography, this musical fragmentation is projected with a broken mirror. After Death chains the black necklace on his partner, he shows her the mirror. She is horrified as she sees herself in the mirror. For solo performance, the sudden dynamic changes from *piano* to *fortissimo* in these interruptive octave passages should be emphasized to reflect her fright and to heighten Death's carefully planned seduction.

Example 32: *La Valse*, A' section, *Pas de deux*, one-measure interruptive octave figures, mm. 529-540.



Her fright continues with seven repetitions of a one-measure motive in ascending thirds with a continuous *crescendo* (mm. 550-556, in Example 33). During these measures the ballerina tries to run away from Death, but she is not successful. Instead, Death keeps controlling her, which results in their repetitive circling movements.

Example 33: *La Valse*, A' section, *Pas de deux*, one-measure motive repetitions, mm. 547-558.

Therefore, an *accelerando* to measure 557, where the musical intensity reaches its climax, is suggested for the solo performance. Along with the repetitive motives, a waltz melody is written in the third staff as an option, but here it might best be omitted to maximize the growing musical intensity of the repetitions.

In the succeeding measures 557-578, each eight-measure phrase is well described with the choreographic details: 1) Death puts a black glove on her left hand; 2) he puts a glove on her right hand; and finally 3) he wraps her in a black cloak. This entire process is a completion of Death's seduction (see Example 34).

Example 34: *La Valse*, A' section, *Pas de deux*, chordal *tremolo*, mm. 553-565.

The image displays a musical score for Example 34, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line (Fl. H¹) and a piano accompaniment with three staves. The piano part features a prominent chordal tremolo in the right hand, while the left hand plays a waltz melody. Red brackets in the piano part indicate omissions in the bass line. The second system continues the piano accompaniment, with red brackets and the word 'omission' marking specific notes in the bass line. Measure numbers 553, 557, and 559 are clearly visible.

Throughout this passage, a chordal *tremolo* in the third staff establishes the threatening atmosphere. It is nearly impossible to play all of the notes in this chordal *tremolo*, although playing at least the outer notes the right hand is suggested. The left hand will play all of the waltz melody with just a few omissions in the bass as marked in the Example 34.

The final *pas de deux* (mm. 579-644) before the ballerina's death begins with the melody from the Waltz VI (mm. 331-370) from the B section (see Example 35). The musical push toward measure 645 is shaped by several elements: 1) the ascending contour of the melody by phrases, 2) the gradual speeding up with Ravel's indications *Un peu plus vif et en accélérant* (a little more lively and becoming faster, m. 579) and *Accélérez* (becoming faster, m. 625), 3) constant descending eighth-note chromatic

scales in every measure, and 4) the continuously increasing dynamic from *pianissimo* (m. 579) to *fortissimo* (m. 641).

Example 35: *La Valse*, A' section, *Pas de deux*, descending chromatic scales in eighth notes, mm. 579-599.

The image displays a musical score for Example 35, consisting of three systems of staves. The top system (measures 579-599) features a C.B. staff with a descending chromatic scale in eighth notes, labeled '8^a bassa'. Below it is a piano part with a waltz melody, marked 'pp' and 'p'. The middle system (measures 586-592) includes a bass part with a descending chromatic scale, marked 'LH' and 'RH', and a piano part with a waltz melody, marked 'Arabesque' and 'poco cresc.'. The bottom system (measures 593-599) continues the bass part and piano part, marked 'velles' and 'poco cresc.'. Annotations include 'Un peu plus vif et en accélérant', 'pp', 'p', 'Arabesque', 'poco cresc.', 'omission', 'velles', and fingerings like 'LH 1 2 1 2 3 4' and 'RH 2 1 2 3 4'.

The dance movement changes from small and slow to big and fast in this *pas de deux*. The constant chromatic scales notated in the optional staff particularly help this musical and choreographic acceleration. Beginning in measure 586, the left hand can play the bass A together with the scale, while the right hand plays the waltz melody together with the second beat of the accompaniment of each measure (shown in Example 35). The last note of each measure in the bass (shown with brackets in m.

586) must be omitted in order to complete the chromatic scale. When the distance between the first note of the scale and bass becomes more than an octave (shown in m. 593), the right hand must also play the first note of each scale together with the melody. From measure 611, the left-hand bass changes to octaves, at which point the pianist must abandon the scales (see Example 36).

Example 36: *La Valse*, A' section, *Pas de deux*, octave bass with descending chromatic scales in eighth notes, mm. 607-613.

Toward to the end of this final *pas de deux*, the constant use of the descending chromatic scale is emphasized with the same scale repetitions for four measures (mm. 641-644) *fortissimo* following *crescendo* (see Example 37). The left hand plays ascending chromatic octaves (mm. 637-644) to intensify the musical and choreographic climax at measure 645. This extreme musical buildup is presented by the ballerina's frantic turns with her back violently arched, creating the appearance of a rag-doll.

Example 37: *La Valse*, A' section, *Pas de deux*, last four measures of descending chromatic scales in eighth notes, mm. 639-644.

Death grips her waist, inducing the frighteningly brutal turns. Since he is holding her waist, they stand in the closest position, reflecting a threatening intimacy. Her repetitive turning movement represents the musical repetition. The pianist can bring out the ascending bass chromatic octaves (mm. 637-644) with an *accelerando* to intensify the mood. At the end of measure 644, a sudden musical break will emphasize her sudden death.

Right on the lowest tone cluster in measure 645 (A-B^b-C[#]), Death drops his hands from the ballerina's waist. She falls to the floor dead (m. 645), and Death walks away, exiting the stage (mm. 648-649). An emphasis on the tone cluster is required to convey her death. It also gives more time to the pianist for the succeeding octave chromatic scale (see Example 38).

Example 38: *La Valse*, A' section, Denouement after the ballerina's death, lowest tone cluster (A-B^b-C[#]), mm. 645-655

The image displays a musical score for Example 38, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system, labeled 'Mouvt du début', begins at measure 645. It features a 'Quatuor' part at the top and a piano accompaniment below. The piano part starts with a lowest tone cluster (A-B^b-C[#]) in measure 645, which is highlighted with a red bracket and labeled 'omission' in purple. The dynamic is marked 'fff'. The second system, labeled 'Alt. velles', begins at measure 650. It features 'Alt. velles' and 'velles' parts at the top and a piano accompaniment below. The piano part continues with the lowest tone cluster in measure 650, also highlighted with a red bracket and labeled 'omission' in purple. The dynamic is marked 'ff'. The score includes various performance instructions such as 'gliss.' and 'expressif'.

After Death exits, all of the other dancers, who had remained motionless for the entire A' section, awaken (mm. 650-653). They are shocked by her death and portray a chaotic moment by running toward the dead ballerina (mm. 654-657). This choreographic intensity is supported by the octave chromatic scale in the optional staff (mm. 645-647) that is virtually impossible to play in tempo with just the right hand. Therefore, it can be substituted with a four-octave single-note or octave *glissando* while the left hand plays the waltz melody in the treble.

During the Denouement after the ballerina's death (mm. 645-755), fragments of dance rhythm are repeatedly interrupted by passages of octaves and bitonal chords over the entire range of the keyboard (indicated with brackets in Example 39). The dancers are separated from their partners and dance individually filling the stage. These octave and bitonal passages illustrate the dancers' realization of the death tragedy as they run back and forth on the stage. When interpreting these passages, the pianist may focus more on the dynamic increase which corresponds with the ascending melodic contour for tragic atmosphere rather than playing all the notes.

Example 39: *La Valse*, A' section, Denouement after the ballerina's death, interruptive passages, mm. 662-685.

The image displays a musical score for the A' section of 'La Valse', specifically the denouement after the ballerina's death. The score is written for piano and is marked 'Assez animé'. It consists of four systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system starts at measure 662 and ends at 667. The second system starts at 668 and ends at 673. The third system starts at 674 and ends at 679. The fourth system starts at 680 and ends at 685. The score features complex chromaticism and parallel chords, with dynamics ranging from *f* to *ff*. Red brackets highlight specific interruptive passages in the first, second, and fourth systems. Measure numbers 662, 668, 671, 674, 678, 680, and 681 are clearly marked. The tempo marking 'Assez animé' is positioned above the first system.

While the dead ballerina is lifted in the center of the stage and groups of dancers encircle her and make swirling movements, the chromaticism with parallel chords reaches its peak (m. 724, 727, 732, and 735). This tragic end is emphasized even more by the loudest dynamics of the entire piece, *fortissimo* and *fortississimo* (see Example 40).

Example 40: *La Valse*, A' section, Denouement after the ballerina's death, chromaticism with parallel chords, mm. 722-737.

The image displays a musical score for the A' section of *La Valse*, specifically the denouement following the ballerina's death. It consists of three staves of piano accompaniment and two staves of woodwinds (Tromp. and Cors, Clar.). The piano part features parallel chromatic chords in both hands, with dynamic markings ranging from *fff* to *mf*. Red arrows point to specific chord changes in measures 724, 727, 732, and 735. The woodwind parts provide harmonic support with similar chromatic patterns.

These ascending or descending (as in optional staff) parallel chromatic chords support the choreographic drive to the end in spite of the technical difficulties. Probably, substituting a single note or thirds of the ascending chromatic chords with a dramatic *crescendo* will satisfy the choreographic and musical drive. Since the ascending chords are more important to the melodic line, the author suggests to omit the descending chords in the third staff.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion and Recommendation for Further Study

Conclusion

As an extraordinarily talented professional choreographer and musician, Balanchine wanted to interrelate his choreography with the music. As he said, “Choreography can only be the result of music,”¹⁷⁶ and “Time—music and silences—makes gesture mean something. It is dancing *presented* in a certain way. To make every step look different by the way it is presented. A writer chooses a word. I choose a gesture.”¹⁷⁷ His philosophy on the interrelationship between music and choreography matches Ravel’s integrated musical aesthetics: “For me, there are not several arts, but only one: music, painting, dance and literature differ only in their means of expression. Thus, there aren’t different kinds of artists, but simply different kinds of specialists.”¹⁷⁸

The solo version of *La Valse* is a condensed form of the orchestral version, yet it still reflects the instrumentation and range of colors of the whole orchestra, while the idea of ballet choreography, dance movements interwoven with the music, adds

¹⁷⁶ The New York City Ballet, http://www.nycballet.com/researchers/discography.html?TierSlicer1TSMMenuTargetID=190&TierSlicer1_TSMMenuTargetType=4&TierSlicer1_TSMMenuID=29.

¹⁷⁷ George Balanchine, *Balanchine’s New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, ed. Francis Mason (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), ix.

¹⁷⁸ An article by Maurice Ravel, “Memories of a Lazy Child” (1931), is found in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, rev. ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), 393.

further richness to this version. This study focuses primarily on the interrelationship between Ravel’s music and Balanchine’s choreography of *La Valse* in search of insights into the pianistic interpretation of the work.

Balanchine visualizes Ravel’s music very successfully in his choreography of *La Valse*. It can inspire a more meaningful and vivid performance, even of the solo piano version. Visualizing his choreography, one can see that *La Valse* falls into three sections:

Table 10: Formal structure of *La Valse* with choreographic descriptions.

Sections	Descriptions
A	Introduction: Dancers’ entrance into a ballroom Greeting: Line up and bow gesture Welcoming Dance: Couples dance with full energy
B	Six uninterrupted waltzes
A'	The entrance of “Death” The pas de deux The denouement after the ballerina’s death

Understanding *La Valse* with this sense of formal structure can help the pianist hold the piece together as a one-movement work.

Specific dance movements in Balanchine’s *La Valse*, such as the female dancers’ elegant *en pointe*, *arabesque*, and Death’s aggressive *cabriole*, can suggest pianistic touches to the performer. The pianist needs sensitive *staccato*, *legato*, and *tenuto* touches to match these dance movements.

The way Balanchine uses the stage, such as lighting effects (complete dark at the opening and ominous shadows from the chandeliers at Death’s entrance) and the way the dancers are presented can give ideas for the musical atmosphere.

The choreographic movements (swirling, chasing) and the way the dancers interact with each other bring the music to life. They can suggest musical expressions (*accelerando*, *crescendo*, pauses) and a feeling for the lengths of phrases. Balanchine creates drama with the choreography. For example, the opening accompaniment pattern (at the beginning of the A and A' sections) is used the second time for Death's entrance; thus the pianist may make it drier and more grotesque in preparation for the gruesome climax.

In many places in *La Valse*, Ravel notates some of the musical material from his orchestration (chromatic scales, alternating eighth notes, chordal *tremolos*, and waves of chromatic scales, even in octaves) in a third, optional staff, because of the extreme difficulty of incorporating them into the main piano part. Nevertheless, Balanchine's choreography (for example, Death's violent treatment leading to the ballerina's death and the chaotic movement of the other dancers) makes clear that at least some of the material in the optional staves needs to be incorporated into the solo performance. Suggestions are given for accommodating the optional staves via redistribution between the hands and the omission of some less important notes.

Recommendation for Further Study

Besides *La Valse*, Balanchine choreographed eleven other works of Ravel, including four solo piano works: *Sonatine*, *Gaspard de la nuit*, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, and *Valse nobles et sentimentales*.¹⁷⁹ The interrelationship between music

¹⁷⁹ Performance recordings of Balanchine's choreographies of other Ravel works are available for research purposes at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division at the New York Public Library.

and dance in these choreographies may not be as strong as in *La Valse*, but the pianist can still seek new interpretative inspiration from them.

Particularly, a study similar to this is suggested for *Valse nobles et sentimentales*. When Balanchine produced *La Valse*, he programmed *Valse nobles et sentimentales* for the first half and *La Valse* for the second.¹⁸⁰ Mawer examines the musical similarities and Balanchine's choreographic connections between these two works,¹⁸¹ but a pianistic-interpretative study has not been done.

¹⁸⁰ Balanchine's choreography of *La Valse* including *Valse nobles et sentimentales* are held at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division at the New York Public Library. For this study, the 1973 version (MGZIDVD 5-923 and 5-945) is specifically examined.

¹⁸¹ Deborah Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006),

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Choreographers of Ravel's *La Valse*

Year	Choreographer	Dance Company
1929	Bronislava Nijinska	Ida Rubinstein Ballet
1950	Léonide Massine	Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo
1951	George Balanchine	New York City Ballet
1958	Frederick Ashton	Royal Ballet (Royal Opera House, Covent Garden)
1995	Pascal Rioult	Pascal Rioult Dance Theatre
1998	Joan Myers Brown	Philadanco, The Philadelphia Dance Company

Appendix B. Balanchine's Choreographies with Ravel's Music

Production Year	Title of Choreography, Ravel's Music
1923	<i>Waltz</i> (one of the waltzes from <i>Valses nobles et sentimentales</i>)
1925	<i>L'Enfant et les Sortilèges</i>
1946	<i>The Spellbound Child</i> (<i>L'Enfant et les Sortilèges</i>)
1951	<i>La Valse</i> (including the <i>Valses nobles et sentimentales</i>)
1975	<i>Sonatine</i>
1975	<i>L'Enfant et les Sortilèges</i>
1975	<i>Shéhérazade</i>
1975	<i>Le Tombeau de Couperin</i>
1975	<i>Pavane</i>
1975	<i>Tzigane</i>
1975	<i>Gaspard de la nuit</i>
1975	<i>Rapsodie Espagnole</i>

Appendix C. Performances of Balanchine's Choreography of *La Valse**

- 1965 Stuttgart Ballet
(Ballett der Wurttembergischen Staatsoper—Stuttgart, West Germany)
- 1966 Royal Swedish Ballet
- 1967 Ballett der Hamburgischen Staatsoper (Hamburg, Germany)
- 1967 Dutch National Ballet
- 1969 English National Ballet (London Festival)
- 1969 Geneva Ballet
- 1971 Dutch National Ballet
- 1975 Paris Opera Ballet (Garnier)
- 1976 Stuttgart Ballet
(Ballett der Wurttembergischen Staatsoper—Stuttgart, West Germany)
- 1977 Ballett der Stadtischen Buhnen (Frankfurt, Germany)
- 1977 Ballett der Deutschen Oper (West Berlin)
- 1978 Ballett der Wiener Staatsoper (Vienna, Austria)
- 1978 Zurich Ballet (Ballett des Opernhauses Zurich)
- 1980 Pacific Northwest Ballet
- 1981 Dutch National Ballet
- 1982 Ballett der Bayerischen Staatsoper (Munich)
- 1985 Dutch National Ballet
- 1987 Central Ballet
- 1987 Louisville Ballet
- 1988 Houston Ballet
- 1990 Ballett der Deutschen Staatsoper (Berlin)
- 1992 Ballett der Deutschen Oper (Berlin)
- 1993 Pacific Northwest Ballet
- 1994 Dutch National Ballet
- 1994 Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo
- 1995 Ballett der Bayerischen Staatsoper (Munich)
- 1996 Houston Ballet
- 1996 Pacific Northwest Ballet
- 1996 Texas Ballet (formerly Fort Worth Dallas Ballet)
- 1997 Ballett der Wiener Staatsoper (Vienna, Austria)
- 1999 Israel Ballet
- 2000 Pacific Northwest Ballet
- 2003 Teatro alla Scala (Milan, Italy)
- 2003 Teatro Nacional de San Carlo
- 2004 Croatian National Ballet
- 2004 Dutch National Ballet
- 2004 Houston Ballet
- 2004 Kirov Ballet
- 2005 Miami City Ballet
- 2005 Suzanne Farrell Ballet
- 2006 Pacific Northwest Ballet
- 2007 Boston Ballet
- 2007 Shanghai Ballet
- 2009 Miami City Ballet

*Performances by NYCB are excluded, from The George Balanchine Foundation, www.balanchine.org

Appendix D. Description of Balanchine's *La Valse* with musical sections

Measure Numbers		Sections	Choreographic Description	
A section	1-65	Introduction	Dancers' entrance into a ballroom: Number of dancers increase gradually up to three couples, six individuals	
	66-105	Greeting	Male and female dancers are lining up and presenting bow gesture	
	106-146	Welcoming Dance	All dancers in couples and dance with full energy	
B section	146-210	Waltz I	Female dancers' waltz with increasing number of the dancers in each 8-measure phrase	
	211-242	Waltz II	Concentric circles then pinwheel movement (mm. 235-242), reminiscent of Ravel's scenario A, "swirling cloud"	
	243-274	Waltz III	A couple's <i>pas de deux</i> : dance movement repeats in two 16-measure phrases Other couples rest on side of stage, motionless	
	275-290	Waltz IV	Female dancer oriented waltz with <i>en pointe</i> movements, 4-measure phrase	
	291-330	Waltz V	291-306,	Chasing movement between group of male and female groups of dancers in 4-measure phrase
			307-330	Entrance of the ballerina in white with partner Ballerina is lifted by partner during chromatic scales
331-440	Waltz VI	331-370, 371-403, 404-440	<i>Pas de deux</i> I <i>Pas de deux</i> II The other dancers stay motionless on side of stage <i>Pas de deux</i> III, including <i>arabesque</i> and <i>en point</i> Toward the end of this section, all dancers become motionless	

A' section	441-500	Entrance of Death	441-479	Death enters with his assistant, he tries to control the ballerina in white	
			480-500	Death grabs his partner, preparing their <i>pas de deux</i>	
	501-644	<i>Pas de deux</i>	501-520	Aggressive and controlling movement by Death	
			521-556	Death seduces her with a necklace, showing her a broken mirror	
			557-578	Peak moments of seduction: changes her dress and glove from white to black	
			579-644	He dances her to death	
	645-755	Denouement after the ballerina's death	645-692	She is dead, Death disappears and other dancers on the stage are awoken, realize the situation	
			693-755	693-710	The most chaotic moment: individual dancers with big gestures
				711-712	The dead ballerina is lifted in the center of the stage
				713-755	Groups of dancers encircle her and make swirling movement with musical repetitions