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RAVEL

BOLERO

for Orchestra

Eulenburg

MAURICE RAVEL

BOLERO

for Orchestra

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CONTENTS/INHALT/CONTENU

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PREFACE

Ravel's *Bolero* (1928)[1] was commissioned by the dancer and patroness, Ida Rubinstein. She had originally requested a ballet for her troupe based upon an orchestral transcription of six piano pieces from Isaac Albéniz's suite *Iberia*. The project was under way when, much to his annoyance, Ravel was informed that the Spanish conductor, Enrique Arbós, had already orchestrated the pieces and copyright laws forbade anyone else from transcribing them. Upon learning of Ravel's predicament, Arbós graciously offered to renounce his exclusive copyright, and it appeared that all would end well. But now Ravel changed his mind and decided that it would be more expeditious to orchestrate one of his own compositions. It turned out, finally, that he would compose an original work. During a brief vacation at Saint-Jean-de-Luz, just before going for a morning swim with his close friend, Gustave Samazeuilh, Ravel went to the piano and picked out a melody with one finger. 'Don't you think this theme has an insistent quality?', he asked. 'I'm going to try to repeat it a number of times without any development, gradually increasing the orchestra as best I can.'[2] Returning to his home at Montfort l'Amaury, some 50 kilometres (30 miles) west of Paris, Ravel began work on this fresh project, which was initially called *Fandango*. The title was soon changed to *Bolero*, and the ballet was completed in about five months. The new work was introduced at the Paris Opéra by Madame Rubinstein and her troupe on 22 November 1928, conducted by Walther Straram, with scenery and costumes by Alexandre Benois, and choreography by Bronislava Nijinska. The programme also included *Les Noces de Psyché et de l'Amour* (music of Bach transcribed by Arthur Honegger) and *La Bien-Aimée* (works by Schubert and Liszt orchestrated by Darius Milhaud). Although favourably received by the Paris critics, *Bolero* soon became extraordinarily popular, much to the surprise of its composer who predicted that the leading symphony orchestras would refuse to include it in their programmes. Not only was *Bolero* frequently performed in the concert hall, but it rapidly became an international best-seller. In his review entitled 'Toscanini causes furor with *Bolero*', Olin Downes described the American première on 14 November 1929:

> Bolero [. . .] brought shouts and cheers from the audience and delayed the performance by the prolonged applause. [. . .] When the orchestra stopped at last, the excitement which had gathered in the listeners as well as the music vented itself as described. And this effect, so well carried out by the conductor, was the device of a composer of 53 years, a man of minute stature and of no physical force, but, technically speaking, one of the most finished and subtle masters of the craft of composition and orchestration in the world of today. [. . .] The piece is in itself a school of orchestration. It is not great music but the craft, the virtuosity [. . .] are really thrilling.[3]

In January 1930 Ravel recorded *Bolero* with the Lamoureux Orchestra,[4] and thereafter he frequently conducted it in a strict, moderate tempo. On 4 May Toscanini led the New York Philharmonic in a performance of the work at the Paris Opéra. An uproar occurred when Ravel did not acknowledge Toscanini's gesture to his box and, in a heated discussion backstage, he told the maestro that his tempo was ridiculously fast.[5] Toscanini observed that a bolero is not a funeral march and that his interpretation had been awarded a standing ovation by the capacity audience. Although the two men eventually shook hands, *Bolero* had now become a *cause célèbre*. In addition to many performances on the radio and an unprecedented number of recordings and transcriptions,[6] Paramount, in 1934, released a film entitled *Bolero*, starring George Raft (who dances to the music) and Carole Lombard. In the Japanese film *Rashomon* (1950), whose western-style music was composed by Takashi Matsuyama, *Bolero* is imitated: in one extended scene, the same C-major tonality, harmony, and *Bolero* rhythm in the drum accompany a pseudo-*Bolero* melody. At the World Ice Dancing Championship held in 1984 in Ottawa, Canada, the first-prize winners skated to *Bolero*. Transmitted live by satellite and later rebroadcast by national television networks, the work

[1] *Bolero* is spelt thus (not *Boléro*) in the surviving holographs, the first printed edition, and in Ravel's autograph letters; it is therefore clear that he preferred the Spanish form of the word for his title.

[2] Gustave Samazeuilh, 'Maurice Ravel en pays basque', *La Revue Musicale* (December 1938), p. 201

[3] *New York Times*, 15 November 1929

[4] An eyewitness account of the recording session reads in part:

> The Lamoureux Orchestra was assembled [. . .] on stage, under the watchful eye of Albert Wolff [. . .] the orchestra plays, stops, Wolff rushes to the recording booth [. . .] Maurice Ravel is there, conscientious and precise, listening: 'Not enough in the trumpets, too much celesta'; Wolff returns to the podium and gives the order. The horns are moved, a space is cleared in front of the oboes, and they begin again. After each attempt, the composer returns from the recording booth [. . .] he shakes his head, approving or disapproving [. . .]. After a number of attempts, the exact expression is achieved. Wolff gives his baton to Ravel. It is the composer indeed who is going to preside over the recording of this disc. Ravel gives the downbeat. With rigid gestures, his wrist traces the three beats which, in a mechanical way, govern this melody in C.

Quoted in A. Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1990), p. 535.

[5] Ravel's personal score of *Bolero*, now in the Music Division of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, contains one annotation: the tempo indication, ♩= 76 (observed by Toscanini in his recording with the NBC Symphony Orchestra), is crossed out and replaced by ♩= 66 (observed by Ravel in his recording with the Lamoureux Orchestra). Later printings of *Bolero*, however, indicate ♩= 72. Ravel's strict interpretation (15′50″) is indeed quite different from Toscanini's impassioned version (13′25″). Two extreme tempos are heard in the recordings of Ravel's colleagues Paul Paray (13′00″) and Pedro de Freitas-Branco (18′25″).

[6] In the 1930s *Bolero* was recorded no less than 25 times, including recorded transcriptions for piano solo, two pianos, organ, organ and orchestra, harmonica and orchestra, and two accordions.

was thus heard by hundreds of millions of television viewers around the world. Today, *Bolero* remains one of the most widely performed and recorded works in the classical literature. It is still rarely performed, however, as Ravel originally envisioned it – as a ballet.

In an interview with José André, which appeared in the Argentinian newspaper *La Nación* on 15 March 1930, Ravel made the following comments:

> As far as *Bolero* is concerned, if it interests you, I would like to say, to avoid any misunderstanding, that in reality there is no such bolero, that is, I have not given this piece the typical nature of this Spanish dance, intentionally so. Its theme and rhythm are repeated to the point of obsession without any picturesque intention, in a *moderato assai* tempo. This theme, introduced by the flute, accompanied by the constant rhythm of the drum, flows successively through the different instrumental groups in a continuous crescendo, and after being repeated, always in C major, breaks out towards the end in E major. Both theme and accompaniment were deliberately given a Spanish character. I have always had a predilection for Spanish things. You see, I was born near the Spanish border, and there is also another reason: my parents met in Madrid [. . .].

Another statement by the composer was reported by M. D. Calvocoressi in *The Daily Telegraph* on 11 July 1931:

> I asked Ravel whether he had any particular remarks to offer on his *Bolero*, which had been made the subject of heated discussions in England as elsewhere. His reply was: 'Indeed, I have. I am particularly desirous that there should be no misunderstanding about this work. It constitutes an experiment in a very special and limited direction, and should not be suspected of aiming at achieving anything different from, or anything more than, it actually does achieve. Before its first performance, I issued a warning to the effect that what I had written was a piece lasting seventeen minutes and consisting wholly of "orchestral tissue without music" – of one long, very gradual crescendo. There are no contrasts, and there is practically no invention except the plan and the manner of the execution.
>
> 'The themes are altogether impersonal – folk tunes of the usual Spanish-Arabian kind. And (whatever may have been said to the contrary) the orchestral writing is simple and straightforward throughout, without the slightest attempt at virtuosity. In this respect no greater contrast could be imagined than that between the *Bolero* and *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, in which I freely resort to all manners of orchestral virtuosity.
>
> 'It is perhaps because of these peculiarities that no single composer likes the *Bolero* – and from their point of view they are quite right. I have carried out exactly what I intended, and it is for listeners to take it or leave it.'

Bolero reaffirms Ravel's longstanding interest in the dance, and his continuing preoccupation with Spanish music and orchestral colour.[7] Furthermore, the obsessive repetition which appears throughout the 52 bars of 'Le Gibet' (*Gaspard de la nuit*, 1908) is carried even further in *Bolero*, as the snare drum ceaselessly repeats a simple two-bar rhythmic pattern for 338 bars (stopping just two bars before the end), and the harmonic underpinning of tonic to dominant is heard for no less than 326 bars. As in Chopin's *Berceuse*, where a tonic pedal point of 68 bars is followed by a strikingly fresh V^7–I final cadence, so in *Bolero*, after so much tonic-dominant in the bass, the final subdominant cadence comes as something of a shock.

The theme may be divided into two symmetrical parts: A (bars 5–21), which is diatonic, and B (bars 41–57), which is more chromatic. With ever-increasing instrumentation, the theme is heard nine times, as an AABB pattern is presented four times, and then abridged to AB (two bars after Figure 16), leading to the modulation to E major and the rousing conclusion in C. Thus, the overall form – which is quite unusual – is that of a theme with repetition, the element of variation being limited to the harmony and the orchestration. In the second part of the theme, the many B flats (a flat seventh over C) superimpose an element of jazz on the Spanish setting, as do the three saxophones and the sliding trombones.[8] Presented first in a simple manner, the theme is later harmonized with chords, mostly in parallel 5–3 and 6–3 motion. One presentation of the theme is bitonal (two bars after Figure 9, the melody in C major and the oboe d'amore in G), and another is tritonal (two bars after Figure 8) – a unique occurrence in Ravel's works. This passage merits close attention. The rhythmic pattern is heard in the snare drum, a flute and a horn. The balance of contrasting instrumental families should be noted, as well as the paradoxical aspect of having a flute and a horn performing a role traditionally given to the percussion family; the horns – together with the woodwinds and strings – frequently double the rhythmic pattern in the snare drum. The melody is played in C major by the celesta and a horn (a somewhat unexpected coupling), in E major by one piccolo, and in G major by the other piccolo. Thus, the famous modulation to E major has been prepared in a sense by a presentation of the melody in that key.

Madame Rubinstein's interpretation of *Bolero* was set in a dimly lit Spanish café. A young woman begins to dance a languid bolero on a table top as the other

[7] Ravel's orchestral technique was the fruit of long years of study, incessant questioning of performers, much experimentation, and innumerable rehearsals. He was intrigued by the seemingly limitless resources of the modern orchestra, and his scores indicate a natural extension of each instrument's technical resources and range, careful attention to the linear quality of each part, and the seeking out of fresh combinations of timbre. It would appear that within the limits of human capability and efficacy of writing, any instrument may assume any role, and here the Ravelian elements of surprise and even paradox come to the fore. To cite but a few examples, in the daybreak episode from *Daphnis et Chloé*, the woodwinds and strings perform extended and agile harp-like passages, while in the *Chansons madécasses*, the flute evokes a trumpet, and the piano a gong.

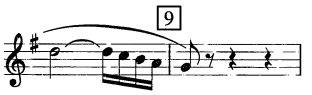
[8] Beginning with *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* (1920–1925), which is a potpourri of contrasting styles, some of Ravel's later works juxtapose disparate elements. Indeed, one MS of the Piano Concerto for the Left Hand contains the composer's remark, 'musae mixtatiae' (mixed muses).

performers gradually take notice. The dancers become increasingly obsessed by the bolero rhythm, ending in an apotheosis.[9] The critic André Suarès called *Bolero* 'a sort of *Danse macabre*', and Piero Coppola, who conducted the first recording of the piece (under the composer's supervision), stated that the effect Ravel 'desired above all was precisely this almost hallucinatory insistence of an immutable tempo'. *Bolero* is thus spiritually akin to Ravel's 'choreographic poem' *La Valse* (1920): both pieces begin quietly and elegantly, but ultimately build to overpowering and tormented conclusions. Although 'an experiment in a very special and limited direction', as Ravel acknowledged, *Bolero* is nevertheless a brilliant *tour de force*, whose subtleties invite repeated study.

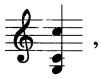
The following observations indicate the important discrepancies between the holograph of *Bolero* and the first edition (1E) of the printed score (Durand, Paris, 1929).[10]

1. Instrumentation: the E flat clarinet and B flat soprano saxophone were apparently added later to the orchestra. Conversely, the triangle and castanets were at first included but later rejected (see Facsimile 1). Ravel, who appreciated paradoxes of all sorts, must have particularly enjoyed removing the castanets from this Spanish dance! (The orchestral instruments are listed in French in the holograph and 1E but appear in Italian in the present edition.)

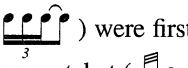
2. Notes and note values: at Figure 9 Piccolo 2, the final note of the theme, G, is missing in 1E. It does appear, however, in the holograph (and in this present edition) thus:

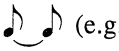


In the penultimate bar, an incorrect D flat in Flute 1 has been corrected to D natural (Ravel made this barely visible correction in the holograph; see Facsimile 2). The flutes and piccolo thus double the trumpets and the violins.

In the holograph, at bar 272, beat 3, Violin II, divisi 1, Ravel mistakenly wrote  , which is found in 1E. He later crossed out the low G in the holograph, and this correction appears in the present edition.

In the holograph, a number of staccato crotchets (quarter notes) appear in the score as quavers (eighth notes) with quaver rests (e.g., eight bars after Figure 15, bass clarinet, bassoons, and contrabassoon).

The triplets in the trombones and saxophones () were first notated as two grace notes slurred to a crotchet ( , see Facsimile 2, bars 5 and 6 from the end).

In the holograph, the final note of the theme often appears as  (e.g., Flute 1 at Figure 1), or as  (e.g., E flat clarinet at Figure 4, Oboe d'amore at Figure 5). These note values were later shortened to  in 1E.

3. Verbal instructions: the words 'portando' (saxophones) and 'vibrato' (trumpets) are present in the holograph (see Facsimile 2) but are omitted in 1E. They have been reinstated in the present edition.

4. Abbreviations: repeat signs (𝄎) appear throughout the holograph – owing to the special nature of the music. One should also note the somewhat hasty 'shorthand' appearance of the repeated notes in the strings (see Facsimile 2, bars 5 and 6 from the end), which occurs elsewhere in the holograph.

5. The snare drum: in the holograph this part is shared by the two players who alternate at each rehearsal number. Ravel's final decision, however, appears in 1E, with the second player joining the first at Figure 16 (a 2).

Arbie Orenstein

[9] In 1932, Ravel told a British reporter: 'I love going over factories and seeing vast machinery at work. It is awe-inspiring and great. It was a factory which inspired my *Bolero*. I would like it always to be played with a vast factory in the background.' (Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, p. 490.) The first such production was presented at the Paris Opéra on 29 December 1941 (four years after Ravel's death), with choreography by Serge Lifar, scenery and costumes by Léon Leyritz, conducted by Louis Fourestier.

[10] As a gesture of friendship Ravel gave the holograph to his close friend, Lucien Garban, the music director of Durand et Cie. It was later sold by Madame Lucien Garban and is now in the Robert Owen Lehman Collection, on deposit in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. Notated in ink, with a dedication 'à Ida Rubinstein', the holograph contains 37 pages (plus one page, 18 bis, consisting of two bars), and is signed and dated 'Juillet-Octobre 1928' (see Facsimiles 1 and 2). An earlier orchestral version of *Bolero* was sold at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris on 8 April 1992 and is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale. The unsigned manuscript, which is complete, is notated in pencil and contains 31 pages.

VORWORT

Ravels *Bolero* (1928)[1] wurde von der Tänzerin und Gönnerin des Komponisten Ida Rubinstein in Auftrag gegeben. Sie hatte ursprünglich für ihre Truppe um ein Ballett gebeten, das auf der Orchestrierung von sechs Klavierstücken aus Isaac Albéniz Suite *Iberia* basieren sollte. Das Werk war bereits in Vorbereitung, als Ravel zu seinem großen Ärger Kenntnis davon erhielt, daß der spanische Dirigent Enrique Arbós die Stücke schon für Orchester instrumentiert hatte und das Urheberrechtsgesetz jedem anderen eine Transkription verbot. Als Arbós von Ravels mißlicher Lage erfuhr, bot er ihm großzügig an, auf sein alleiniges Urheberrecht zu verzichten, und es hatte den Anschein, als würde alles gut enden. Aber jetzt hatte Ravel sich anders besonnen und entschied, es würde rascher gehen, wenn er eine seiner eigenen Kompositionen orchestrieren würde. Letztlich enstand dabei die Komposition eines Originalwerks. Während eines Ferienaufenthaltes in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, kurz vor dem morgendlichen Schwimmen mit seinem engen Freund Gustave Samazeuilh, ging Ravel zum Klavier und spielte nach Gehör eine Melodie mit einem Finger. „Glaubst Du nicht [auch], daß dieses Thema von eindringlicher Wirkung ist?" fragte er. „Ich werde versuchen, es einige Male ohne jede Entwicklung zu wiederholen und die Orchestrierung nach und nach anwachsen zu lassen, so gut ich kann."[2] Nach der Rückkehr in seinen Heimatort Montfort l'Amaury, etwa 50 Kilometer westlich von Paris, begann Ravel mit der Arbeit an dem neuen Werk, das ursprünglich *Fandango* hieß. Der Titel wurde bald in *Bolero* geändert, und das Ballett wurde innerhalb von etwa 5 Monaten fertiggestellt. Das neue Werk hatte am 22. November 1928 mit der Truppe von Madame Rubinstein an der Pariser Oper Premiere mit Walther Straram als Dirigenten; das Bühnenbild und die Kostüme stammten von Alexandre Benois, die Choreographie von Bronislava Nijinska. Das Programm enthielt auch *Les Noces de Psyché et de l'Amour* (Musik von Bach, von Arthur Honegger transkribiert) und *La Bien-Aimée* (Werke von Schubert und Liszt in der Orchestrierung von Darius Milhaud). Obwohl er schon vielversprechend von der Pariser Kritik aufgenommen worden war, wurde der *Bolero* in außergewöhnlicher Weise populär, sehr zur Überraschung seines Komponisten, der prophezeit hatte, die führenden Sinfonieorchester würden sich weigern, das Werk in ihr Programm aufzunehmen. Der *Bolero* wurde nicht nur häufig im Konzertsaal aufgeführt, er avancierte auch rasch international zum Bestseller. In seinem Bericht *Toscanini causes furor with „Bolero"* beschreibt Olin Downes die amerikanische Premiere am 14. November 1929:

> „Der *Bolero* [. . .] löste Beifall und Hochrufe beim Publikum aus, und das ganze Konzert verzögerte sich durch den ausgiebigen Applaus [. . .]. Als das Orchester geendet hatte, brach die Begeisterung, die sich im Verlauf der Musik bei den Zuhörern aufgestaut hatte, in der geschilderten Weise aus. Und dieses Ergebnis, so hervorragend vom Dirigenten umgesetzt, war die Idee eines 53jährigen Komponisten, eines Mannes von kleinem Wuchs und keiner körperlichen Stärke, der aber genau genommen einer der vollendetsten und subtilsten Meister in der Kunst der Komposition und Orchestrierung auf der Welt von heute ist. [. . .] Das Stück ist in sich eine Schule der Instrumentierung. Es ist keine große Musik, aber die Kunstfertigkeit und Virtuosität [. . .] sind wirklich erregend."[3]

Im Januar 1930 nahm Ravel den *Bolero* mit dem Orchestre Lamoureux auf,[4] und danach dirigierte er ihn häufig in einem strengen moderaten Tempo. Am 4. Mai leitete Toscanini die New Yorker Philharmoniker in einer Aufführung des Werks an der Pariser Oper. Ein Tumult entstand, als Ravel Toscaninis Geste zu seiner Loge hinauf nicht erwiderte. In einer erhitzten Diskussion sagte Ravel dem Maestro hinter der Bühne, sein Tempo sei unsinnig schnell gewesen.[5] Toscanini bemerkte, ein Bolero sei kein Trauermarsch, und ein volles Haus habe seine Interpretation mit stehenden Ovationen gewürdigt. Obwohl die beiden Männer sich schließlich die Hand reichten, war der *Bolero* nun zu einer *cause célèbre* geworden. Zusätzlich zu vielen Rundfunkaufführungen und einer beispiellosen

[1] *Bolero* wird in den erhaltenen autographen Quellen und im Erstdruck ohne Akzent geschrieben; es kann deshalb angenommen werden, daß Ravel bewußt die spanische Wortform für seinen Titel wählte.

[2] Gustave Samazeuilh, *Maurice Ravel en pays basque*, *La Revue Musicale* (Dezember 1938), S. 201

[3] *New York Times*, 15. November 1929

[4] Ein Augenzeugenbericht der Schallplatteneinspielung lautet in Auszügen: „Das Orchestre Lamoureux saß versammelt [. . .] auf der Bühne, unter dem wachsamen Auge von Albert Wolff [. . .] das Orchester spielt, bricht ab, Wolff stürmt zur Aufnahmenkabine [. . .] Maurice Ravel befindet sich dort, gewissenhaft und genau zuhörend: „Nicht genug Trompeten, zuviel Celesta"; Wolff kehrt zum Podium zurück und gibt die Anweisung. Die Hornisten verändern ihren Platz, vor den Oboen wird Raum geschaffen, und sie beginnen erneut. Nach jedem Versuch kommt der Komponist von der Aufnahmekabine zurück [. . .] zustimmend oder mißbilligend den Kopf schüttelnd [. . .]. Nach einer Reihe von Anläufen ist der richtige Ausdruck erreicht. Wolff übergibt Ravel den Taktstock. Es ist also tatsächlich der Komponist selbst, der die Schallplattenaufnahme leitet. Ravel gibt den Einsatz. Mit unerbittlichen Gesten zeichnet sein Handgelenk die drei Schläge, die in einer mechanischen Weise die Melodie in C leiten." (Zitiert nach Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, New York 1990, S. 535.)

[5] Ravels Handexemplar der Partitur des *Bolero*, die sich heute in der Musikabteilung der Bibliothèque Nationale Paris befindet, enthält folgende Eintragung: Die Tempo-Angabe ♩ = 76 (eingehalten von Toscanini in seiner Aufnahme mit dem NBC Symphony Orchestra) wurde durchgestrichen und durch ♩ = 66 (Ravels Tempo in seiner Aufnahme mit dem Orchestre Lamoureux) ersetzt. Spätere Ausgaben geben indes ♩ = 72 an. Ravels strikte Interpretation (15′50″) unterscheidet sich in der Tat sehr von Toscaninis leidenschaftlicher Version (13′25″). Zwei extreme Tempi kann man auch in den Aufnahmen von Ravels Kollegen Paul Paray (13′00″) und Pedro de Freitas-Branco (18′25″) hören.