

# Abstracts

Michael J. Puri: Closure and Openness: Ravel on a Möbius Strip

One of the most persistent attitudes toward Ravel's music over the past hundred years is that it is closed: to the present and future through its neo-classicism, to interpretive freedom through its formal perfection, to bonafide emotion and expression through its irony and objectivity, and to the cultural Other through its irrefutable Frenchness. While these claims are not unreasonable, they have suppressed a significant openness in this music that, once identified, will help to increase our understanding of its ability to influence and be influenced. In this essay, I adduce and critique central contributions to this discourse of closure before proposing an alternative vision of openness.

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Christoph Flamm: »One of the darkest nights in all history of music«: *Le Gibet*

*Le Gibet*, the second piece from the piano cycle *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908), is one of the most enigmatic and eccentric of Ravel's compositions. Whether and how the poetic model by Aloysius Bertrand is related to the music has been looked at in controversial but as yet hardly systematical ways. The present essay attempts a short analysis of the work's basic musical elements and parameters before analysing its poetic context. In doing so, it pays attention to the fusion of auditory and optical sensations, looks for historical precursors, elaborates what is exceptional about the piece and positions it in its historical context.

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Volker Helbing: Compositional Counterplea. Ravel's Duo Sonata (2<sup>nd</sup> Movement) as a Determination of his Position in the Early 1920s

In a situation where Ravel is perceived as a leading, indeed ›classical‹ French composer while conversely seen by the »Six« as an exponent of an antediluvian style coming across as overly refined and opulent, the *Sonate pour Violon et Violoncelle* with its limited instrumentation is above all a pointed comment to the history of composition. Without denying the proximity to the musical language of his pre-war works, Ravel here presents himself at the height of his compositional development. At the same time he asserts – even by that very continuity with his work to date – that much of what the Six claim as being new (polytonality, *style dépouillé*, *clarté*, linearity) is already present in his work as a possibility. Ravel's *dépouillement* is a sharpening of his musical script by stressing its ›modern‹ features, and it does not at all exclude virtuosity and complexity – even and especially under the strained conditions of an instrumen-

tation which relinquishes pianistical or orchestral sonority. His striving for exploiting the available resources most fully in many places leads to harmonic solutions which would hardly have been thinkable under less strained conditions. – Following an outline of Ravel's aesthetic or compositional-historic position around 1920, the contribution focusses on analyzing the second movement.

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Benedikt Leßmann: Overcoming and Apotheosis of Symbolism? A Discussion of Ravel's Lieder Through 1913

Symbolism is commonly regarded as one of the major influences on Ravel's aesthetics. Yet his first songs barely react to the »symbolist« *mélodie* moulded by Debussy and others. His later songs, however, can be interpreted as different ways of reacting to the paradigms of French song in all of which Ravel attempts to transpose literature into music. *Shéhérazade* clearly is a reception of Debussy's vocal style, whereas the *Histoires naturelles* represent a dialectic form of breaking with symbolism and with traditional means of French prosody. Surprisingly enough, Ravel later on emphatically returns to symbolism in setting three poems by Mallarmé.

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Ulrich Krämer: The Scorpion in the Ring of Fire. La Valse as Reflected by Baudelaire's Critique of Progress

The strand of argumentation proceeds from the temporal determination »around 1855« within the choreographic argument of Ravel's *Poème choréographique*, by which a connection with the Paris Universal Exhibition of the same year is established. The art exhibit that formed part of the World Fair was covered journalistically by Charles Baudelaire who wrote three feuilletons on this occasion. In one of them, Baudelaire developed his criticism of the ideology of eternal progress prevalent in mid-nineteenth-century civil society. In this perspective, *La Valse* appears as a conscious translation of Baudelaire's criticism into the language of music on grounds of its dynamic formal concept. This notion, which is substantiated analytically, is based on the observation that in the same way as the waltz can be interpreted as a musical paradigm for the ideological basis of the progress-oriented bourgeoisie, its destruction from within, which forms the essence of the formal concept of *La Valse*, may serve as a musical metaphor for the destructive forces that in Baudelaire's view are intrinsic to the ideology of progress.

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## Peter Jost: On the Transmission of Ravel's Works

The widespread notion that Ravel had conceived of his work in his head for a long time before wrote them down in one go, leaving scarce evidence of the creative process, is based, on the one hand, on descriptions launched by himself as well as his disciples and his confidantes, and on the other hand on the fact that large parts of his estate remained in private hands. Although this idea changed considerably when parts of this estate were collected and published, because of a lack of fundamental research (complete correspondence, thematic-bibliographic catalogue of his work) the gaps in his preserved œuvre – as demonstrated by some examples from *Jeux d'eau*, *Gaspard de la nuit* and the piano trio – are so large that in many details, Ravel's works are received on an inadequate or faulty philological basis.