

RAVEL'S *DAPHNIS ET CHLOÉ*:

A Miracle in the Making



“E la mattina compirono l’usata offerta pastorale al Dio Pane” Available from:
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Considered Maurice Ravel's longest and most expansive work, the music of *Daphnis et Chloé* has long been heralded as a masterpiece, both within the composer's personal *oeuvre* and among the vast repertoire of concert-hall literature. That this lush and passionate ballet even made it onto the stage and into history is a true miracle, however – not to mention a testament to the determination of both the composer and choreographer – as evidence of early collaborative frustrations and interpretive disagreements abound, tainting an otherwise unearthly and beautiful artistic experience. It is perhaps for this reason that Ravel's score alone, and not the entire ballet, is most often performed in present-day circles.

Maurice Ravel was born 7 March 1875 to Pierre-Joseph Ravel of Swiss decent and Marie De-louart of Basque decent, in the French commune of Ciboure; three months later the family moved to Paris. “[D]espite a Parisian upbringing, Ravel always felt close to his Basque heritage, and by extension, to Spain”¹, as can be evidenced in some of his later works such as *Habanera* (later incorporated into his *Rapsodie Espagnole*), *L'Heure Espagnole*, and *Boléro*. At age seven Maurice began studying the piano with Henri Ghys, and five years later attempted his first compositions. In 1889, at age fourteen, he began attending piano lessons and classes at the Conservatoire de Paris, and in 1895 he began to devote himself entirely to composition, enrolling in a composition class under Gabriel Fauré and studying counterpoint with André Gédalge in 1897.

A statement made once by composer Jules Massenet during a lecture on composition – “in order to know your own technique, you must learn the technique of other people”² – greatly inspired Ravel, and he quoted it frequently;³ when speaking of teaching, for example, Ravel has said that “by studying the masters, he [the student] must learn not to ape them, but to study himself, as they have done.”⁴ Indeed, one can see the influence this had on his own compositional style, for he was not “an iconoclast, but

¹ Barbara L. Kelly, “Ravel, (Joseph) Maurice”, (Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy [Accessed 21 April 2007]), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>, 1. 1875–1905.

² Rollo H. Myers, *Ravel: Life and Works* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd., 1960), 20.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Calvocoressi, "Maurice Ravel" (*The Musical Times*, 54, no. 850 [1 Dec. 1913]), 787.

rather an emancipator...He did not seek to disrupt either the grammar or syntax of music, but was content to work in classical forms and on the basis of the generally accepted harmonic system of his day...[even so], he created a language of his own...so very personal and individual was his adaptation and manipulation of the traditional nineteenth-century musical idiom...”⁵ One major influence on his manipulation of traditional harmonies can be found in a similar experience shared also by Claude Debussy, namely, the famous Great Paris Exhibition of 1889. Though only a boy of fourteen, he “too was struck by the Javanese gamelan and the performances of Russian music given by Rimsky-Korsakov”.⁶ Yet, apart from the “gapped” scale, of which Ravel was especially fond, “the direct influence of this exotic music...is on the whole less discernable in [his] music than in that of Debussy”; Ravel’s music tends to be more modal and takes its color more from European sources than Asian.⁷

Ravel was “growing up at a time when new ideas were in the air and music...was waking to new life and preparing to break down the barriers imposed upon it by stuffy nineteenth-century conventions.”⁸ By age twenty, he had finished composing *Habanera*, a work that “is a striking example of his extraordinary technical accomplishment...In this he was exceptional among composers, for his first published compositions [including *Habanera*, *Menuet Antique*, and the Overture to *Schéhérazade*] were astonishingly mature...at an age when most students are only feeling their way.”⁹ By 1905, he had become a “fully fledged composer and author of at least two masterpieces”, and, after four previous and unsuccessful attempts, he entered and attempted again to win the Prix de Rome, having finally reached the age limit of the competition. But, “by now, because of the *Quartet*, *Schéhérazade*, and *Jeux d’Eau*, [he was] looked upon as suspect and a dangerous revolutionary by the more bigoted members of the Institute, one of whom went so far as to declare: ‘M. Ravel may look upon us as old fogeys if he pleases, but he will not with impunity make fools of us.’...This time he was not even admitted to sit for the preliminary examina-

⁵ Ibid., 95.

⁶ Kelly, “Ravel, (Joseph) Maurice”, 1. 1875–1905.

⁷ Myers, *Life and Works*, 15.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 21.

tion...There were violent protests in the national Press...and musicians of all shades of opinion were shocked by what had now become 'l'affaire Ravel' [the Ravel affair]. The thing had become a public scandal...Meanwhile, whatever Ravel's feelings may have been, he said nothing, took no action and remained aloof from the controversy that raged round him."¹⁰ Interestingly, although Ravel upheld and honored the techniques of the masters of the past, many performances of his works brought hissing and booing from the crowd as French society was not quite ready to accept his unique sound, and yet he would remain consistently aloof to criticism. It was not that he was of a cold or arrogant demeanor (as some have suggested), but rather very shy, and he had many friends who nonetheless admired his works and supported his efforts.

One close friend, Greek music critic Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi, later wrote "of notes I took during a talk we had (probably in 1905 or thereabouts) on the subject of his musical neologisms. Many of these, he said, could be traced back to the practice, not only of Liszt, Chabrier,...Satie, Mussorgsky, and Borodin, but also of Chopin...and Bruneau in *Le Rêve*, which contained, he said, 'significant examples of chords that were pure resonances, laid out without any regard to part-writing'"¹¹ Calvocoressi also notes that Ravel "considers the affectation of modernism as unwholesome as the academical tendencies to which many contemporary composers remain subject"¹² On Ravel's aesthetic outlook, Myers points out, "The poetry and drama of machinery impress him more than the beauties of nature...the natural bent of his mind towards mechanical toys, automata of all kinds, puppets and everything artificial..."¹³

One can see Ravel's fascination with mechanics and technique come to the fore in the meticulous precision of his methods, for, "With him orchestration is the last consideration, a delightful game, delightful because of the conscious mastery with which it is played – a game in comparison with the greater se-

¹⁰ Ibid., 25-27.

¹¹ Calvocoressi, "Ravel's Letters to Calvocoressi: With Notes and Comments" (*The Musical Quarterly*, 27 no. 1 [Jan. 1941]), 18.

¹² Calvocoressi, "Maurice Ravel", 787.

¹³ Myers, *Life and Works*, 28.

riousness of other matters of form and construction which have been worked out previously".¹⁴ And, "Ravel's sketches bear witness to his relentless drive towards technical perfection. He was astonishingly meticulous, and rather than correct some minuscule details in a score, he would frequently copy over the entire autograph...Ravel continued to make corrections in his scores even after the works had been published"¹⁵ When describing his own process of composing in *Contemporary Music* from *The Rice Institute Pamphlet* (April 1928, p. 141), Ravel himself has said, "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. I may thus be occupied for years without writing a single note of the work after which the writing goes relatively rapidly; but there is still much time to be spent in eliminating everything that might be regarded as superfluous, in order to realize as completely as possible the longed-for final clarity. Then comes the time when new conceptions have to be formulated for further composition, but these cannot be forced artificially, for they come only of their own free will, and often originate in some very remote perception, without manifesting themselves until long years after."¹⁶

Among the new ideas floating in the Parisian air were those that would seek a change in the art of ballet. In the nineteenth century, France had been the center for Romantic ballet, but by the 1840s, "the heyday was already over and a slow decline ensued...As France's balletic fortunes were waning, those of Russia were in the ascendant."¹⁷ Meanwhile, as Russia was "briefly culturally and sympathetically distant from [the] European unrest" of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, many French dancers chose to develop their careers there; "[a]nd so Russia, having benefited from French expertise, definitely had the edge."¹⁸

¹⁴ Scott Goddard, "Maurice Ravel: Some Notes on His Orchestral Method" (*Music & Letters*, 6 no. 4 [Oct. 1925]), 291.

¹⁵ Arbie Orenstein, "Maurice Ravel's Creative Process." (*The Musical Quarterly*, 53 no. 4 [Oct. 1967]), 468.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Deborah Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 5-6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

Nonetheless, while musical quality improved, the dancing and plots of Russian ballet left much “scope for increased expression and imagination”, and as a group of “dynamic Russian émigrés...sought the artistic freedom, opportunities and cultural cache of Paris” at the turn of the century, “Franco-Russian cross-fertilization worked in reverse”.¹⁹

Between 1897 and 1906 Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev “organized a series of major art exhibitions [in Paris], showing...the best in European and Russian contemporary art”²⁰ and “[h]is career as a musical courier between Russia and the West began in 1907 with five concerts at the Paris Opéra.”²¹ In 1909, Diaghilev formed the famous dance troupe the *Ballets Russes*, or the Russian Ballet. “[T]hanks to Diaghilev’s genius for detecting talent and his extraordinary ability to sense in what direction artistic trends of the day were moving, the Russian Ballet became the focal point of all the arts and attracted...the leading *avant-garde* musicians and painters of the day.”²² Nonetheless, their first season was a financial disaster, “but that did not deter Diaghilev from planning another at the Opéra for the following year and, in an effort to improve the quality of the music in the repertoire, seeking to commission new scores from French composers.”²³

Among the talent recruited in 1909 was Russian dancer and choreographer Michel Fokine, who felt that the “days of stereotypical formulae were over; music and dance must coexist as equal partners within a supportive complex, an idea with which Ravel firmly concurred.”²⁴ He sought uninterrupted flow of artistic unity within a ballet: “The ballet must no longer be made up of ‘numbers’, or ‘entries’ and so forth. It must show artistic unity of conception...the ballet must have complete unity of expression, a

¹⁹ Ibid., 7.

²⁰ Wachtel, Andrew. "Sergei Diaghilev." *Early Twentieth-Century Russian Drama*. (Available from <http://max.mmlc.northwestern.edu/~mdenner/drama/directors/diaghilev.html>. Internet; accessed 23 April 2007.)

²¹ Paul Griffiths. “Diaghilev, Sergey Pavlovich”, Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 23 April 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.

²² Myers, *Life and Works*, 200.

²³ Gerald Lerner, *Maurice Ravel* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), 114.

²⁴ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 87.

unity which is made up of a harmonious blending of the three elements – music, painting, and plastic art...”²⁵He had previously presented his reformist ideas to the Imperial Theater School in St. Petersburg, with whom he had been a dancer since 1898, but did not win their support. Thus, in the Russian Ballet he found an outlet for his novel ideas that would usher in the necessary, life-giving change of twentieth-century ballet.

In 1905, set and costume designer Leon Bakst collaborated with Fokine at the Imperial Theater and “attempted a hybrid of traditional ballet style with Greek movement”; “[e]arly in his career, Bakst was already considered an expert on the ancient world...[and in 1907, after spending the summer in Greece, he] returned to Russia anxious to incorporate his vivid impressions into a Greek production. He urged Diaghilev to produce a ballet that would allow him the opportunity to express his knowledge of ancient Hellas and his personal interpretation of Greek culture.”²⁶Unfortunately, Diaghilev was busy with his own plans for organizing the first season of the Russian Ballet in Paris, and “Bakst was forced to resign himself to an indefinite wait before this dream could be realized”.²⁷ That dream would come in 1909 with plans for the ballet, *Daphnis et Chloé*.

“When...Serge Diaghilev asked me whether I had any libretto for a ballet which could be staged the following season, I told him the story of *Daphnis et Chloé*. He, and especially Léon Bakst, were pleased with the libretto.”²⁸This intimate story of innocence and romance originates from a second century novel by the same name, written by Greek romancer Longus on the isle of Lesbos. Set on this island, the story revolves around two children, both abandoned at birth, one suckled by a sheep and the other by a goat, and adopted by separate families of sheep and goat herders. Named Daphnis and Chloe, the two grow up together, unaware of their noble heritage, and unaware that these feelings developing for each

²⁵ Cyril W. Beaumont, *Michel Fokine and His Ballets* (London: Dance Books, 1996; orig. pub. London: C.W. Beaumont, 1935), 24.

²⁶ Charles S. Mayer, "The Influence of Leon Bakst on Choreography." (*Dance Chronicle*, 1 no. 2 [1977-78]), 127-8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁸ *Quote by Michel Fokine.* Roger Nichols, *Ravel Remembered* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 41.

other throughout the course of the story is called love, nor what they are to do to satisfy these urgings. The plot develops with few incidents as this simple passion – the experimentation of romance, the twisted plots of others desiring them, and the realization of love – forms the core of the story. At one point, Daphnis is abducted by pirates and must be rescued by Chloe, and at another point, Chloe is carried off by the army of a general who is waging war on the village with ten ships. In despair, Daphnis accuses the Nymphs for this horror, but they reveal to him in a dream that they are watching over Chloe and will enlist the help of the god Pan. Pan threatens the general with destruction unless Chloe is brought back safe, so, frightened, the general obeys and immediately returns home with his ships. Toward the end of the story, it is revealed that both Daphnis and Chloe are of noble birth, and they are joyfully reunited with their birth families. Upon discovering that they are both now wealthy and of high standing, they are finally granted permission to marry, and their love is at last fulfilled.

A French translation of the original novel arose in the sixteenth century by Jacques Amyot, bishop of Auxerre, which, according to Mawer, Ravel loved reading for its idiosyncrasies.²⁹ Additionally, a revised 1559 edition by Paul-Louis Courier had illustrations added to it in 1902, illustrations by Pierre Bonnard, an acquaintance of Ravel's. Even so, as Goddard points out, "In its original plan the tale is too long and complicated to form a reasonable ballet. It is overloaded with too much petty detail to hold the attention of the audience if set out in full. In reality it is not a suitable subject for treatment as a ballet. The tale is not sufficiently arresting. The events are neither deeply tragic nor even bizarre or impossible. There is no climax. All is charming and yet monotonous. It is the charm and monotony of the fields and the seasons. There is none of the glitter of life which appears so well on the ballet stage. But given the initial idea of its having been chosen for such a purpose, something had to be done to bring the tale within possible bounds of length and narrative scope."³⁰

²⁹ Mawer, *The Ballet of Maurice Ravel*, 85.

³⁰ Scott Goddard, "Some Notes on Maurice Ravel's Ballet 'Daphnis et Chloe'. I." (*Music & Letters*, 7 no. 3 [July 1926]), 210.

Some of those changes in Fokine's adaptation of the original story included eliminating the beginning and ending of the tale – that is, the history of Daphnis and Chloe's abandonment, and the future discovery of their noble heritage and also, therefore, their marriage – eliminating the numerous smaller events during the seasons, and reducing the abduction scenes to one – namely, Daphnis's abduction by pirates, though in Fokine's adaptation it is now Chloe who is abducted. Fokine first brought a two-act version of his scenario to the Imperial Theater in St. Petersburg around 1907. But two years later, when Diaghilev commissioned Ravel to compose the music and Fokine instead brought his libretto into the collaboration of Ravel, Bakst, and Diaghilev, there would be more subtle and, perhaps, undermining changes to occur to his original vision than he could have anticipated, for both Ravel and Bakst claimed some amount of ownership to the libretto, as can be seen in the words of their letters: "We spent (I say *we*, because I worked on it also) many nightly hours writing the libretto, which I later retouched,"³¹ and, "Because of Diaghilev I can be sure of not sitting on a sand dune...and with Fokine and Ravel we have put together an interesting libretto."³²

Fokine's personal recollections of their meetings are delightfully revealing:

"The rather youthful Ravel...was not yet the famous master, the leader of the modern French composers, which he was destined to become later. He invited me to his house to get acquainted with his music....I was delighted that a musician of such talent was going to write music for my *Daphnis* ballet, and I felt that the music would be unusual, colourful and, most important, what I sincerely wished – totally unlike any other ballet music.

"I brought Bakst along to our next meeting to act as my interpreter, as my French at that time was not very fluent. I related to Ravel the libretto of *Daphnis et Chloé* and told him how I saw the action and visualized the music. I expressed my belief in the necessity of uninterrupted movement and the unity of the performance as a whole, and spoke of my wish to avoid separate

³¹ Quote by Ravel. Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 84.

³² Quote by Léon Bakst. *Ibid.*

numbers; also the desirability – even in part – of communicating that character of the music of antiquity, and so forth.

“At one time I had dreamed of hearing in *Daphnis*, for the very first time in the modern theater, the resurrected music of ancient Greece. But in the course of my conversations with Ravel I realized that information on the music of the ancient world is very scarce, and that no resurrection is possible. By that time I had begun to think that it was not even necessary...and limited myself with the desire that there should be no obvious contradictions or noticeable disagreements with the character of the Graeco-Roman art. Of course, it was unnecessary for me to ask Ravel to refrain from the traditional forms of the old ballet music, as I had had to do in the case of my first music collaborator...To begin with, Ravel was not involved with the old tradition of ballet. And, in the second place, having seen a series of my productions he was already very well aware that [dances of the old ballet traditions] were completely out of place in the new. That is why he agreed to compose music for this one.

“Total freedom in creation – freedom in choice of musical form, measure, and rhythms, and in the length of the individual parts – gave him a joyful opportunity...I tried to collaborate with Ravel the minutest detail in conveying the various moments of action. It was essential for me to have him feel exactly as I did at each moment of this romance...After holding several conferences and, as I recollect it, reaching an accord with me, Ravel began to compose. Only at one point did we have different views. I planned to make an elaborate dramatic sequence out of the attack of the pirates. I felt that the slaying of the shepherds, the abduction of the women, the plunder of the cattle, would all contribute to the unfolding of interesting action. Ravel, however, wanted to produce a lightning attack [a sudden and very brief attack]. I yielded, realizing that this was the way he felt at that moment, and that, probably due to my limitations in the French language, I was unable to inspire him to create musically that violent, gruesome picture which was so vivid in my imagination. I later came to reproach myself for not having insisted on this point. I

had displayed an unusual timidity in an artistic matter, and have since become convinced that such an attitude is a liability, It is far better to be a stubborn, uncooperative character; it is even better to have a quarrel...than to depart from one's convictions if one believes them to be the truth."³³

Ravel, too, has recalled memories of these meetings: "I have to tell you that I've just had a mad week...preparation of the libretto for a ballet to be performed by the Russians next season, work[ing] every night until three in the morning. Things are even more complicated because Fokin[e] doesn't know a word of French and all I know of Russian is how to swear in it...You can imagine the atmosphere of these meetings."³⁴

Creating music for the ballet was a stretch for Ravel; he had never done something quite like it before, nor would he attempt it again. Though Calvocoressi felt it was a "straightforward commission, entailing no special condition or problem"³⁵ he nonetheless had to aid Ravel in contractual matters of which he had no prior experience. In 1910, Ravel wrote him saying: "[I]f you can spare a little time, could you outline for me an agreement concerning Fokine's performing rights...I hold that it would be most unfair for me to receive only one-third. I think you will agree...The agreement will have to be more complicated, since it must stipulate that the composer will in no case receive less than fifty percent of the fees. Please make this clear to Fokine and to the others..."³⁶ Mawer reiterates, when Ravel uncompromisingly states, "...under no circumstances would I allow my work to be performed on those terms [composer re-

³³ Mikhail Fokine, from *Memoirs of a Ballet Master* (London, 1961), tr. V. Fokine, pp. 195-6, 199. Excerpt taken from Roger Nichols, *Ravel Remembered*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 41-3.

³⁴ Excerpt from a letter to Mme Saint-Marceaux in June 1909. Gerald Lerner, *Maurice Ravel* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), 114.

³⁵ M. D. Calvocoressi, "When Ravel Composed to Order" (*Music & Letters*, 22 no. 1 [Jan. 1941]), 55.

³⁶ M. D. Calvocoressi, "Ravel's Letters to Calvocoressi: With Notes and Comments." (*The Musical Quarterly*, 27 no. 1 [Jan. 1941]), 7-8.

ceiving a third of the monies, standard at the time]”, he not only reveals his inexperience with delivering a large-scale commission, but he again claims absolute ownership of the work.³⁷

Beyond mere business issues, however, it seems that “Ravel’s input...reduced physicality – dramatic violence and overt sexuality – while increasing the child-like, idyllic innocence” of the story.³⁸ According to Lerner, this deliberate tempering of Fokine’s original vision lies within the observation that “[o]vert sexual passion...was basically alien to his art [and touched on only briefly and discreetly]. Faced with a concept that did not suit him [for which the idea he did not originate] he had had to persist with adapting Fokine’s archaeological image of second-century Lesbos until it became compatible, as he said, with ‘the Greece of my dreams, which is not unlike that imagined and depicted by French artists at the end of the eighteenth century’”, and, “It was surely Ravel [not, of course, Fokine] who could not face the frank sexuality of Daphnis and Chloe, and Ravel who...reduced them to something not far short of the conventional rococo shepherd and shepherdess.”³⁹ This is made to appear all the more likely with the fact that, aside from his frequent gatherings and careful dandified appearance, Ravel led a hermit’s life, never marrying and living with his parents until they both passed away, at which time, after spending a time staying in friends’ homes and hotels, he finally purchased his first home in 1921 and moved into *Le Belvédère* in Montfort l’Amaury outside of Paris. Additionally, it has been suggested that Ravel’s agnosticism may have made it difficult for him to relate to the worship of a god such as Pan or his Nymphs, and that Ravel had to reflect upon works such as *Le Jardin Féérique* from *Ma Mère l’Oye* to gain insight into such emotion.⁴⁰

“[I]n preparation for his first ballet he needed to extend his expressive range. He also needed time to recover his creative energy - which is why, instead of applying himself immediately to the most impor-

³⁷ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 82.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁹ Lerner, *Maurice Ravel*, 115-7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

tant commission he had ever received, [beginning three months after he received Diaghilev's commission] he devoted himself to a variety of undemanding projects on a considerably smaller scale.”⁴¹ Realizing that *Daphnis et Chloé* would not be ready in time for the 1910 season, “by November 1909, Diaghilev had asked Igor Stravinsky to provide the score for the ballet which was to replace it in the Russian repertoire at the Paris Opéra seven months later...it can only have been an emergency measure.”⁴² Interestingly, according to Charles Mayer, “Diaghilev, realizing that *Daphnis et Chloé* would never be completed in time, commissioned composer Nicholas Tcherepnin to begin work on...*Narcisse*,”⁴³ a ballet of Bakst's vision which debuted in 1911. In other words, two new ballets had to be debuted while waiting for Ravel to complete the score to *Daphnis et Chloé*.

By 1911, Ravel had finished the first two scenes, with which he was “happy enough...He was not at all happy, on the other hand, with the end of the last scene, which he had written in a hurry”⁴⁴ and of which he had handed Diaghilev a piano score. In fact, at one point “Ravel told [Louis Aubert] that he had had enough of *Daphnis et Chloé* and asked him, in all seriousness, if he would rewrite the finale for him. Aubert, although he too had studied composition with Fauré at the Conservatoire, very wisely declined the offer...Ravel solved the problem not by a stroke of inspiration but by his usual process of attrition, remorselessly working at it over and over again for as long as it took to get it right.”⁴⁵

This striking and triumphant bacchanal of the “Danse générale” – the grand finale of the ballet – as revised in the 1912 version, remains one of the most exciting moments in orchestral history. It is two times longer than the first 1910 version, and is “‘immeasurably more dangerous’ [quote taken from Lerner, *Maurice Ravel*, 132], in its celebration of fast 5/4 metre, arranged as 3+2, amid disorienting chromaticism...[also,] [f]orward propulsion, almost a tripping sensation, is embedded in the musical fabric

⁴¹ Ibid., 117-8.

⁴² Ibid., 119-20.

⁴³ Mayer, “The Influence of Leon Bakst”, 128.

⁴⁴ Lerner, *Maurice Ravel*, 122.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 125.

rather than being superimposed by tempo changes as in the original. This principle is intensified near the close by reducing the beats in the bar from five to three, and finally to two, for progressively shorter time spans”⁴⁶ While steadily creating this built-in accelerando of sorts, Ravel also steadily builds the orchestral and choral layers, crossing between triple and duple patterns in instrumental families as he does, until every instrument and voice has joined in the tumult at the end. Emulating this compositional device, Fokine devised “what he claimed was a one-off incremental staging method...whereby he sent two bacchantes dashing across the stage singly, then as groups of two, three and so on until he had constructed ‘an entire group with interwoven arms reminiscent of Greek bas-reliefs...This bacchanal aroused the enthusiasm of the audience’”.⁴⁷ Fokine was especially proud of his “whirlpool of a general dance”⁴⁸; especially as “the time-scale for this intense and highly physical work was almost impossibly short, which compounded the challenge...to choreograph a risk-taking conclusion in 5/4 metre.”⁴⁹ Tamara Karsavina, Russian dancer loved and admired by all, who danced the role of Chloé, recalls the pressure of rehearsing the finale: “Fokine was too maddened working against time, to give me much attention; on the morning of the performance the last [scene] was not yet brought to an end’ [Fokine describes in his memoirs needing to choreograph twenty pages in three days]...In attempting to master the primitivist 5/4 rhythms, Karsavina explains how she and Ravel initially counted their way through the passage at the back of the stage”, and, when counting failed, the dancers found that a helpful chanting of “Ser-gei Dia-ghi-lev” would suffice.⁵⁰ Indeed, Fokine “claimed not to resent Ravel’s awkward 5/4 and 7/4 metres, regarding them as naturally conceived expressions that served the joint work.”⁵¹ Incidentally, “Ravel admitted that part of the [finale’s] creation – presumably the dotted fourth motive combined with chromaticism – was that of

⁴⁶ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 90.

⁴⁷ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 92.

⁴⁸ *Quote by Fokine. Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Rimsky-Korsakov: ‘I was in a bad mood over it, so much so that I put Rimsky’s Scheherazade on the piano and tried, very humbly, to write something like it.’ But, since this was a Ballet Russes commission, following *Schéhérazade* in the same programme, such intertextuality was hardly inappropriate.”⁵²

Besides compositional delays, numerous *faux pas* arose on all sides of the collaboration. During 1911, for example, Ravel, apparently unable to resist the opportunity to have his music performed by one of the strongest Parisian symphony orchestras – the Orchestre Colonne – allowed what would come to be known as the First Suite from *Daphnis et Chloé* (which included music from “Nocturne”, “Interlude”, and “Danse guerrière”) to be performed well in advance of the balletic premiere in the same venue.⁵³ Diaghilev was irritated, to say the least, to hear that “a very considerable fragment of my ballet”⁵⁴ was revealed to the audience before the official premiere. However, Diaghilev, too, allowed Bakst’s sets for *Daphnis* to be used in the ballet *Narcisse*, and, “[t]o avoid repeating himself, Bakst was then forced to ignore some of Fokine’s stage directions for *Daphnis*”.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Fokine, with good reason, began to feel that “he was being compromised because of Diaghilev’s increasing obsession with [protégé and lover] [Vaslav] Nijinsky”, who was not only choreographing the lead role in *L’Après-midi d’un Faune*, but was also simultaneously preparing to dance the lead role of Daphnis.⁵⁶ To make matters worse, because of the demands of *L’Après-midi*, and because of Nijinsky’s two upcoming roles, “Fokine was denied sufficient rehearsal time because of the demands of *L’Après-midi*”⁵⁷ and, worrying that the score to *Daphnis et Chloé* was more symphonic than choreographic, he announced to publisher Durand that he was considering canceling the whole project. “According to the publisher’s memoirs, it was only his diplomacy that persuaded the impresario to go through with it...in spite of assurances that Ravel’s orches-

⁵² Ibid., 90.

⁵³ Ibid., 82.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 82-3.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 83.

tration and his atmospheric use of wordless chorus would make all the difference, Diaghilev still had less than complete faith in the score.”⁵⁸ He went so far as to deviously instruct Fokine’s wife to try and persuade the choreographer to give up; additionally, “[t]he production was postponed from 5 to 8 June and, as the final blow, Diaghilev apparently sought to stage it merely as a curtain-raiser half-an-hour earlier than the usual performance time to minimize the audience. Since it was put on at the very end of the 1912 season [in favor of *L’Après-midi*], it could have only two performances.”⁵⁹ Nonetheless, despite difficulties, the “relationship [between Fokine and Ravel] seemingly enjoyed some warmth beyond a shared loathing of Diaghilev, and even if Fokine was more forthcoming and positive about it than Ravel [for Fokine is quoted as saying, “With the exception of the [pirate scene], which was even shorter than I expected, I loved the score from the first time I heard it.”⁶⁰], the composer commented a little later that ‘One cannot forget ...*Daphnis et Chloé*, where Michel Fokine organized the tumult and fury of Asiatic dances and brought the frenzies of Greek temples to life marvelously.’”⁶¹

At long last, *Daphnis et Chloé* was premiered at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris on 8 June 1912, conducted by Pierre Monteux. Reviews of the performance were, on the whole, favorable: “...the most accomplished and most poetic work yet produced by...Diaghilev”⁶² and, “...‘firm design, surprising dynamic force and irresistible *élan*’ ...which showed that Ravel was now completely a master of his art. The last part...showed ‘a kind of happy *laisser-aller* and nonchalant mastery which could not fail to delight...’”⁶³. According to Mawer, “The premiere was basically successful, even if the restricted rehearsal time inevitably impacted upon the production’s refinement; the high stature of the music, however, was not in question, whatever the small-minded quibbles of Pierre Lalo or Arthur Pougin [two consistent

⁵⁸ Lerner, *Maurice Ravel*, 125.

⁵⁹ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 83.

⁶⁰ Nichols, *Ravel Remembered*, 43.

⁶¹ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 83.

⁶² Quote by Robert Brussel. Myers, *Life and Works*, 42.

⁶³ Quote by Emile Vuillermoz. Ibid.

enemies of Ravel in the world of criticism].”⁶⁴ Even so, there remained bitter feelings between the collaborators involved, for “Ravel refused to appear on stage at the end”,⁶⁵ and, though Fokine did appear to take a curtain call, Diaghilev had restricted the company of dancers from bestowing the customary bouquet upon Fokine on stage at the end of the premiere.⁶⁶ Needless to say, Fokine quit the *Ballet Russes* immediately after, and, as for Ravel, “*Daphnis* proved to be a long and grueling project, and its eventual completion in 1912 left Ravel in a state of nervous exhaustion. His doctor instructed him to rest, and he went initially to...the house of his friends the Godebskis...It was another seven months before he was actively composing again, with the *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*.”⁶⁷

While presenting a kind of fascinating dichotomy through its three simultaneously opposed interpretations of ancient Greece – by way of Ravel’s music (based on the imaginations of French eighteenth-century artists), Fokine’s choreography, and Bakst’s décor and costumes (steeped in orientalism and inspired by his visit to Greece) – the enormity of Ravel’s composition can nonetheless be overwhelming and all-encompassing in itself. “Ravel had no intention of allowing his music to be subservient to the dancers, but rather the other way about.”⁶⁸ “The work [being a one-act ballet of three parts that are to flow seamlessly from one to the other] is constructed symphonically, according to a strict plan of key sequences, out of a small number of themes, the development of which ensures the work’s homogeneity.”⁶⁹

The instrumentation is vast, consisting of piccolo, 2 flutes, alto flute, 2 oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, tam-tam, triangle, bass drum, field drum, castanets, tambourine, celesta, crotales, glockenspiel, 2 harps, strings (each part divided into two separate parts, no less), and, perhaps most interesting, wind ma-

⁶⁴ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 93.

⁶⁵ Lerner, *Maurice Ravel*, 132.

⁶⁶ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 83.

⁶⁷ John Spiers, "Ravel's Health." *Maurice Ravel Frontispice*. Available from <http://www.maurice-ravel.net/health.htm>. Internet; accessed 21 April 2007.

⁶⁸ Myers, *Life and Works*, 200.

⁶⁹ *Quote by Ravel*. *Ibid.*, 196.

chine and wordless choir. Overall, the score is highly thematic, with memorable melodies recurring throughout the almost hour-long work in varying fashions to represent the arrival of a certain character or scene. For example, Larner points out, “It is significant that none of the most amorous moments in the ballet is more than a few bars long...the same theme is used on each occasion. On the other hand, though basically only two short phrases, that theme is so voluptuously shaped that its symbolic significance is unmistakable: in its tender curve downwards and its yearning upward intervals it is one of Ravel’s greatest melodic inspirations. It is first heard on solo horn just after the curtain rises and, always passionate but more or less agitated depending on the dramatic circumstances, it reappears in an infinite variety of transformations. Its most ingenious variant is the flute melody which...accompanies Lyceion’s unsuccessful effort [of seducing Daphnis]...Its most romantic manifestations are reserved for the three embraces...”⁷⁰ Goddard elaborates on this: “Ravel has built up his work on a number of important themes and the idea of the leitmotif is stronger here than in his opera. But even then the idea is not so definite as to warrant any one theme being given the label of a decisive emotion of a particular person. Only one tune can be taken to portray definition of character.”⁷¹

Other thematic moments of note include the combined musical idea of the three horns, echoed by the chorus, and the flute solo at the beginning (measures six through eleven, for example) – this is representing Pan and the Nymphs, and “these two ideas have as prominent a part in the score as the love theme which is introduced immediately after them [at measure twelve]”⁷². An interesting story concerning the theme of the Nymphs is recounted by Larner, of Ravel’s “friend, critic and fellow-composer, Gustave Samazeuuhl, who had a house on the hill at Bordegain overlooking Ciboure. He was used to hearing Ravel working at the piano [it was typical of Ravel to write his works out on piano score before orchestrating them] as he called on him on the way down to St-Jean-de-Luz but he was surprised on one occasion to

⁷⁰ Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, 130.

⁷¹ Scott Goddard, *Some Notes on Daphnis et Chloé*, 216.

⁷² Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, 126.

hear from the staircase ‘a theme which was alike as a twin brother, in its melodic line and its harmony, to one of those in a piano piece of mine, *Naiades au soir* (“Evening Naiads”), which Alfred Cortot had played at the Société Nationale...It had become the theme of the nymphs in *Daphnis*.’”⁷³

Found at rehearsal number seventeen, a jumpy 7/4 staccato melody, full of character and youth, signals the arrival of the young women to carry Daphnis away in dance, and, conversely, the lush swell of the strings (also in 7/4) signals the arrival of the young men to carry Chloé away in their own dance (at rehearsal twenty-one). The two themes finally coalesce and mingle within each other at rehearsal twenty-six to form the first “Danse générale”, granting the scene an almost waltz-like quality. One of this author’s (many) favorite moments arises at rehearsals five and six, the “Danse religieuse”. Here, the melody introduced in the strings (which are, again each divided into two separate parts throughout, granting the full lush sound of eight parts; incidentally, to create an even mightier fullness, Ravel on occasion calls for *divisi* within each divided part, as can be seen at rehearsal one-hundred twenty-five) is tender and sweeping, and interestingly, the harmonizing motive (held in this case by the second violins and violas) has already been subtly introduced by several different instruments steadily throughout since it was written in the horn solo at rehearsal three. The “Danse religieuse” at rehearsal six then opens into a delicious treatment of harmony, where seventh and diminished chords color the landscape, as the winds imitate the theme first introduced by the strings.

Another important theme that is introduced is Dorcon’s theme at rehearsal fifty-two; to set the mood for this none-too-graceful character who challenges Daphnis for Chloé’s affections, an oscillating two beat pattern – clumsily accented on the first beat of each group – is introduced. While this first instance of his arrival is brief, it does recur in the finale at rehearsal two-hundred six, when Dorcon makes a final appearance with the growing crowd of dancers; in this treatment, the pattern arises twice in a row. Also occurring just prior to Dorcon’s arrival (one measure after rehearsal two-hundred four) is the same two beat motive used at the end of the waltz-like “Danse générale” previously mentioned (one measure

⁷³ Ibid., 131.

after rehearsal twenty-seven), this time to accompany a dance by Daphnis and Chloé. One key moment is the beginning of part two (rehearsal 83), for which the choir harmonizes hauntingly off-stage (included with the Dover score is an appendix containing the alternate score without choir) – this is very picturesque of the sun rising slowly over the rough coast of the pirates camp – while the orchestra builds around the voices, until all breaks into the War Dance. Here, the driving sixteenth note passages in the strings, alternating with powerful one-beat glissandos (for example, five or so measures after rehearsal ninety-seven, into three and one bars before rehearsal ninety-nine) are indicative of the thrilling finale (starting at rehearsal two-hundred sixteen).

“The dawn beginning [of part three] – the dew running off the rocks in rippling arpeggios on flutes and clarinets, the sun rising melodiously on lower strings and wind, dawn-chorus birdsong on flutes and violins [which utilize a clever rendering of harmonics to achieve the bright “chirpiness”, as seen one measure after rehearsal one-hundred fifty-six], shepherds playing their pipes in the distance – is magically atmospheric. At the same time, as the sun-rise melody is gradually transformed into the love theme to assume its authentic shape just at the moment Chloé is restored to Daphnis [see rehearsal one-hundred sixty-five in the strings], it is both structurally functional and dramatically effective. The Pan and Syrinx episode, where an elaborately eloquent flute plays the part of the frustrated god’s panpipe soliloquy, is an ideally proportioned interlude before the bacchanal. This last episode...remains one of the most exciting passages in the choral and orchestral repertoire.”⁷⁴

It is important to note that “[t]he goatherd and shepherdess who, according to Longus, spend long hours locked in naked frustration in the pastures of Lesbos, attempting to consummate their love for each other but without knowing how, are seen in the ballet to meet in no more than three chaste embraces. Daphnis’s erotic adventure with the farmer’s wife...is reduced...to [a] short episode...Most extraordinary of all, Daphnis and Chloe are denied the amorous *pas de deux*...considered basic to the whole enterprise

⁷⁴ Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, 132.

[of ballet]...”⁷⁵ But then again, while “[i]t has been argued that the eroticism of Longus' original text, and perhaps of Fokine's vision, was alien to Ravel's temperament and experience, and that the ballet is an unconvincingly chaste rendering of an exuberant love story...[a]t the very least, Ravel's portrayal of sexual passion is discreet, and it is for the listener to judge how far his melodies and their orchestration may still fire the imagination.”⁷⁶ Something to be considered, for example, is Ravel's text at the concluding portion of the “Danse générale”, whose instructions leave scope for wild treatment, whatever Ravel's inhibitions may or may not have been.⁷⁷ Larner suggests that “[t]he score was not without its problems either. It offered less opportunity...for set-piece choreography, as Diaghilev was well aware, and yet it was not the ‘choreographic symphony’ the composer claimed it to be. True, it is to a large extent unified by the pervasive presence of two or three main themes but there are several picturesque episodes which, thematically or structurally, are not integrated with the rest”⁷⁸; and Myers adds, “...it felt there was a lack of harmony between the music, the scenery and the choreography which could have been avoided if the composer, the producer and the interpreters had been able to agree on questions of style and presentation...scenically the ballet was felt to be a rather unsatisfactory compromise”.⁷⁹ However, “[w]hat Ravel succeeded above all was in creating what he described as ‘a vast musical fresco’, the like of which he had never achieved before and would not attempt to achieve again.”⁸⁰

Ravel's construction of stirring harmonies has long been a subject of fascination, and his choice of orchestral coloring in *Daphnis et Chloé* is certainly no exception; indeed, “The harmonic palette of *Daphnis*, with added sevenths, ninths, and unresolved appoggiaturas, has been a source of fascination

⁷⁵ Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, 129-30.

⁷⁶ John Spiers. "Daphnis and Chloé." *Maurice Ravel Frontispice*. Available from <http://www.maurice-ravel.net/daphnis.htm>. Internet; accessed 21 April 2007.

⁷⁷ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 89.

⁷⁸ Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, 131.

⁷⁹ Myers, *Life and Works*, 197.

⁸⁰ Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, 123.

since the 1920s”⁸¹ Mawer has sought to describe Ravel’s harmonic choices and tonal plan in relation to his perception of ancient Greece, specifically in regard to his use of perfect fifths: “...a powerful sonic image of Greekness is heard in the slow opening mechanism of stacked bare fifths with a derived melodic fifth idea later to become closely associated with Daphnis and Chloé [the ever-present love theme]. While for Ravel the hollow fifth is always invested with antique association, a non-specific symbol of the past, this complex creates the ultimate locus as an awe-inspiring, spacious primordium. The rainbow-like spectrum reproduces *en bas-relief* one of the Greek ecclesiastical modes, A Lydian...A-E-B-F#-C#-G#-D#. In particular, the tritone from bass [the celli and contrabasses] to treble [the solo flute entrance] (A-D#),...is well suited to conveying the supernatural world of Pan and his Nymphs. Further play with the opening perfect fifths includes rotation, inversion about a pivot on G...In and following the Introduction, Ravel’s handling of the Greek subject-matter involves...a notable literalism or close correspondence in projecting the scenario through musical narrative.”⁸²She also points out that the “Danse religieuse” is a “mysterious, serene hymn to the fecundity of nature...his approach to ancient Greekness is to lay bare its scalic ingredients as a kind of ‘back to basics’, uplifted by sumptuous, impressionistic orchestration...This dance utilizes melodic fragments that are focused initially upon the mixolydian mode, B, C#, D#, E, F#, G# (A); the effect of this emphasis upon the supertonic heard over the tonic pedal on A is to highlight the modal legacy and make the music sound ‘older’. In time this A-B-A relationship is projected across the work... Following its initial airing, the melodic fifth idea returns on E-A [in the form of the Daphnis and Chloé love them, at rehearsal ten] to mark Daphnis’s appearance with his sheep at the back of the set. When Chloé joins him, the musical completion is achieved by an immediate transposition down a further fifth – D-G – which is balanced by being heard in a higher register [also the love theme, three bars before rehearsal eleven, though one measure prior appears the “Danse religieuse” theme on D].”⁸³It is important to

⁸¹ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 97.

⁸² Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 94-5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 95.

note “the importance of chord and cadence, especially relating to the modal progression A-B-A, to articulate strategic arrival-points in the score...Such verticality relates nicely to Albright’s theory of focusing on ‘transmediating chords’, essentially concordant here.”⁸⁴

What Mawer is getting at here is the relationship of Ravel’s music as a part of the ballet as a whole – with Bakst’s designs and Fokine’s choreography – implying that there may be more in unison with the artistic ideal of the presentation than it may appear, even after and in spite of all of the real-life drama that has been explored. “Albright proposes re-nuanced theories of consonance and dissonance as a means of redressing the balance, previously tipped towards counterpoint, in favour of vertical inter-arts events – especially dissonant ‘transmediating chords’.”⁸⁵Further, “[a]s a transmediating device, the musical symbol not only aligns scenes and events within the confines of single scores, it also aligns scenes and events within different scores. It operates, in short, to concatenate the ideas and thoughts of composers of disparate times and places. In this regard, it underscores the Symbolist aspiration to create works with potentially unlimited meanings.”⁸⁶Truly, Ravel’s *Daphnis et Chloé* can be considered a timeless experience capable of being understood on multiple levels!

Whether the homogeneity of music to the ballet is apparent or not, whether or not the audience senses a definite connection or more of a “compromised collaboration”, what is plain is that Ravel’s marvelous score remains with us today, always striking interest and standing in its monolithic and unaltered beauty in the halls of both orchestra and theater. “What strikes the spectator is the sheer diversity of choreography and art that Ravel’s *Daphnis* has engendered from the English-accented Greek classicism of Ashton/Craxton production (1951), through the unmistakable painting of Chagall for two choreographic productions (1958-9), to modern, sexually explicit, productions such as that of Graeme Murphy for the Sydney Dance Company (1982) which might have won Fokine’s admiration if not Ravel’s....All this im-

⁸⁴ Ibid., 97.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁸⁶ Simon Morrison, “Russian Opera”, *The University of California Press*. Available from <http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/9385/9385.intro.html>. Internet; accessed 23 April 2007.

plies that beyond its immediate composer relationship the music has universal qualities; that it has the flexibility to reach out to different people; that it has the capacity to accommodate a broader range of artistic meanings than might at first be apparent. Inherent in this music are the elemental, fantastical and the classical. These qualities provide some explanation as to why *Daphnis* has long been regarded as a musical masterpiece.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 112-3.

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