



Maurice RAVEL

Boléro

Joseph Maurice Ravel (7 March 1875 – 28 December 1937) was a French composer, pianist and conductor. He is often associated with impressionism along with his elder contemporary Claude Debussy, although both composers rejected the term. In the 1920s and 1930s Ravel was internationally regarded as France's greatest living composer. Born to a music-loving family, Ravel attended France's premier music college, the Paris Conservatoire; he was not well regarded by its conservative establishment, whose biased treatment of him caused a scandal. After leaving the conservatoire Ravel found his own way as a composer, developing a style of great clarity, incorporating elements of baroque, neoclassicism and, in his later works, jazz. He liked to experiment with musical form, as in his best-known work, *Boléro* (1928), in which repetition takes the place of development. He made some orchestral arrangements of other composers' music, of which his 1922 version of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* is the best known. As a slow and painstaking worker, Ravel composed fewer pieces than many of his contemporaries. Among his works to enter the repertoire are pieces for piano, chamber music, two piano concertos, ballet music, two operas, and eight song cycles; he wrote no symphonies or religious works. Many of his works exist in two versions: a first, piano score and a later orchestration. Some of his piano music, such as *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908), is exceptionally difficult to play, and his complex orchestral works such as *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912) require skilful balance in performance. Ravel was among the first composers to recognise the potential of recording to bring their music to a wider public. From the 1920s, despite limited technique as a pianist or conductor, he took part in recordings of several of his works; others were made under his supervision.

Boléro is a one-movement orchestral piece. Originally composed as a ballet commissioned by Russian actress and dancer Ida Rubinstein, the piece, which premiered in 1928, is Ravel's most famous musical composition. Before *Boléro*, Ravel had composed large scale ballets (such as *Daphnis et Chloé*, composed for the Ballets Russes 1909–1912), suites for the ballet (such as his second orchestral version of *Ma mère l'oye*, 1912), and one-movement dance pieces (such as *La valse*, 1906–1920). Apart from such compositions intended for a staged dance performance, Ravel had demonstrated an interest in composing re-styled dances, from his earliest successes – the 1895 *Menuet* and the 1899 *Pavane* – to his more mature works like *Le tombeau de Couperin*, which takes the format of a dance suite. *Boléro* epitomises Ravel's preoccupation with restyling and reinventing dance movements. It was also one of the last pieces he composed before illness forced him into retirement. The two piano concertos and the *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* song cycle were the only compositions that followed *Boléro*.