



Maurice RAVEL

Piano Concerto in G Major

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*, 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, concerti, ballet music, two operas, and eight song cycles. Many of his works exist in two versions; first, a piano score and later an orchestration. His piano music is known for its exceptional virtuosity, and his complex orchestral works such as *Daphnis et Chloé* require skillful balance in performance.

Piano Concerto in G major was composed between 1929 and 1931. The concerto was deeply infused with jazz idioms and harmonies, which, at the time, were highly popular in Paris as well as the United States, where Ravel was traveling on a piano tour. Ravel remarked that "The most captivating part of jazz is its rich and diverting rhythm. ... Jazz is a very rich and vital source of inspiration for modern composers and I am astonished that so few Americans are influenced by it." After his well-received tour, Ravel wanted to give the first public performance of this new work himself. However, health issues precluded this possibility, with his preparatory practice of Liszt's and Chopin's études leading to fatigue. He then planned a premiere for March 9, 1931, in Amsterdam, but these plans were also canceled due to his work on the Concerto for the Left Hand, his many public appearances, and his performances of his other works.

The first movement opens with a single whip-crack, and what follows can be described as a blend of the Basque and Spanish sounds of Ravel's youth and the newer jazz styles he had become so fond of. Like many other concerti, the opening movement is written in the standard sonata-allegro form, but with considerably more emphasis placed on the exposition.

In stark contrast to the preceding movement, the second movement is a tranquil subject of Mozartian serenity written in ternary form. When critics praised the natural flow of the lengthy, seemingly effortless opening melody, Ravel responded: "That flowing phrase! How I worked over it bar by bar! It nearly killed me!"

The third movement recalls the intensity of the first with its quick melodies and difficult passage-work. The piano introduces the first subject, a rapid chordal figure, with dissonant interjections from the winds and brass. The subject continues with such interjections from all and progresses through a multitude of modes before finally coming to its conclusion. Here, the movement ends with the same four chords with which it began.

