



# Maurice RAVEL

## *Valses nobles et sentimentales*

**Joseph Maurice Ravel** (7 March 1875 – 28 December 1937) was a French composer, pianist, and conductor whose innovative works have made a profound impact on 20th-century music. Although often associated with Impressionism alongside Claude Debussy, Ravel himself resisted this label, preferring to be seen as a pioneer of musical clarity and form. His education at the Paris Conservatoire was marked by tensions with its conservative establishment, which failed to appreciate his unique approach. Undeterred, Ravel developed a distinctive style that drew on modernism, baroque traditions, neoclassicism, and, in his later works, jazz influences. Ravel's work includes influential compositions across various genres, though he never wrote symphonies or church music. His works include two notable piano concertos, ballets like *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912), and the iconic *Boléro* (1928), which is celebrated for its innovative use of repetition. Renowned for his orchestration skills, he also created celebrated arrangements such as his 1922 version of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Despite being a meticulous and slow worker, Ravel's output is distinguished by its technical complexity and expressive depth. His compositions for piano, such as *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908), are notoriously challenging, and his orchestral works demand exceptional interpretative skill.

Ravel's musical education began early. At the age of seven, he started piano lessons with Henri Ghys, a friend of Emmanuel Chabrier. By 1887, he was studying harmony, counterpoint, and composition with Charles-René, a pupil of Léo Delibes. Though he was not a child prodigy, Ravel demonstrated a natural musical aptitude, and his early compositions, including variations on a chorale by Schumann and a theme by Grieg, were indicative of his emerging talent.

In 1888, Ravel met pianist Ricardo Viñes, who would become a lifelong friend and a key interpreter of his works. This relationship also bridged Ravel to Spanish music, enhancing his diverse musical influences. The Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889 exposed him to new Russian works conducted by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and the exotic sounds of Javanese gamelan, which left a lasting impression on both Ravel and his contemporary Claude Debussy. In the same year, Ravel began studying with Émile Decombes, and at fourteen, he made his public performance debut at the Salle Érard alongside other notable young musicians like Reynaldo Hahn and Alfred Cortot. In addition to his compositional achievements, Ravel was one of the early adopters of recording technology, recognizing its potential to extend the reach of his music. He actively participated in recording sessions and supervised the production of several of his works, contributing to the enduring legacy of his music.

**"Valses nobles et sentimentales,"** composed by Maurice Ravel in 1911, is a suite of waltzes for solo piano that showcases the composer's sophisticated approach to the dance form. Commissioned by the Parisian publisher Jacques Durand, the work reflects Ravel's fascination with the waltz, an inherently nostalgic and elegant dance. Although it was intended as a homage to the 19th-century Viennese waltz tradition, Ravel infused it with modernist touches and his characteristic flair for orchestration and color. The suite consists of nine waltzes, each embodying a distinct mood and character. Ravel employs a range of harmonic innovations and rhythmic complexities, demonstrating his mastery of musical form and his ability to blend traditional waltz elements with contemporary sensibilities. The music navigates from the lyrical and introspective to the lively and exuberant, highlighting Ravel's versatility and creativity.

The premiere of "Valses nobles et sentimentales" was met with critical acclaim, and it has since become a staple of the piano repertoire. Its orchestrated version, completed in 1912, further cemented the work's status, revealing Ravel's exceptional skill in orchestration. Through this suite, Ravel not only pays tribute to the dance genre but also redefines it, bridging the gap between classical traditions and modernist innovations.