Maurice RAVEL
the complete works for piano

LA VALSE
Poème choréographique pour Orchestre
a modified version of the composer’s piano transcription

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An imperial court around 1855.

Waltzing couples are glimpsed through rifts of swirling storm clouds. Little by little the dancers disperse and an enormous ballroom is filled with a throng of whirling people.

The stage gradually becomes brighter. Light from the chandeliers explodes at the first ff.

Written between around 1920, conceived as a ballet and in tribute to the waltz, La Valse was first performed on 12 December in Paris. While the work may have been intended as a metaphor for the predicament of European civilisation in the aftermath of the Great War, the composer stated:

While some discover an attempt at parody, indeed caricature, others categorically see a tragic allusion in it – the end of the Second Empire, the situation in Vienna after the war, etc... This dance may seem tragic, like any other emotion... pushed to the extreme. But one should only see in it what the music expresses: an ascending progression of
sonority, to which the stage comes along to add light and movement.

In 1922 He also commented "It doesn't have anything to do with the situation in Vienna, and it also doesn't have any hidden agenda. In the course of La Valse, I did not envision a dance of death or a struggle between life and death. The year of the choreographic setting, 1855, repudiates such an assumption."

The final bars remind me of Chopin’s Waltz in A flat Op 42.

A musicologist described La Valse as the most unexpected of Ravel’s compositions, revealing to us heretofore unexpected depths of Romanticism, power, vigour, and rapture in this musician whose expression is usually limited to the manifestations of an essentially classical genius.

La Valse was created in 1906 with Austria’s waltzing capital as its first title: Vienne and later, Wien. Ravel described how he felt about its essence:

You know my intense attraction to these wonderful rhythms and that I value the joie de vivre expressed in the dance much more deeply than Franckist puritanism.

The production of the ballet caused a serious rift between the composer and Diaghilev, and although it is more often performed as a concert work, over the years many ballet companies have since taken up the challenge.

In 1911 another waltz-inspired ballet Adélaïde or "Le langage des fleurs" was commissioned by the Russian ballerina Natasha Trouhanova, for which Ravel made an orchestral transcription of Valses Nobles et Sentimentales. It was first performed in April 1912 at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris.

This revision is based upon Ravel’s original published solo version which was presumably prepared for a rehearsal pianist, including optional, extra scoring. I have tried to combine these into a playable and integrated virtuoso recital piece, although, given the nature of orchestral works transcribed for piano, I am sure the reader will take the initiative and add, adjust or omit.

To help studying this great work, I have marked phrase lengths, corrected misprints and added some fingering and sostenuto pedal suggestions.
LA VALSE

Mouvement de Valse Viennoise

\* Indicating 4- (or 2-) bar phrases unless otherwise marked.
expressif
un peu en dehors
f
mf
un peu plus modéré

mf très expressif

Sost. Ped.
Sost. Ped.

revenez au mouvement

1er mouvement