Maurice RAVEL
the complete works for piano

le TOMBEAU
de COUPERIN

Suite pour le Piano

Piano Practical Editions
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Ravel writes a dance suite and the title refers to a tomb... so does this mean we are dancing on Couperin's grave? In a sense, we are. Headstones and epitaphs tend to give rise to mournful thoughts but here, as the composer stated: “The dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence.” The six movements are therefore quite the opposite, reflecting the charm and originality which we have come to expect of Ravel's piano music. The prelude, fugue and toccata owe more to Bach and Scarlatti than to Couperin, but we then discover three antique dances* inspired by the golden age of French harpsichordists. Cortot describes the work aptly when he writes: “No glorious monument could honour the memory of the French better than do these luminous melodies, these rhythms which are at the same time distinct and flexible – a perfect expression of our culture and of our tradition”.

This highly personal work was created at a turning point in Ravel's life — during the First World War — with profound and tragic sentiment concealed beneath these superficially accomplished and scintillating neoclassical dances; an emotional reaction to the hideous bloodshed and to the recent loss of his beloved mother.

Ravel had tried to enlist but although in good health his frail constitution and above all his small stature and light weight exempted him from military service. In 1914, now that others were giving their lives, he could not bear the thought of doing nothing; he expressed the desire to become an aviator but had to accept driving lorries. By 1917 he could no longer endure the exhaustion of military labour and while convalescing recommenced work in earnest on the Tombeau**, which he had probably sketched at the outset of the war. Each movement is dedicated to the memory of a special friend of the composer (in one case, two brothers) who had died on the battlefield.

This is the last work Ravel wrote for solo piano and is typically Ravelian in style; it should be played with more than a hint of harpsichord-like clarity, and the instruction regarding performance of grace notes is from the composer.

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*In addition to these 3 dances and the ballet, Daphnis et Chloé, Ravel also composed a bolero, la valse, minuets, pavane pour une infante défunte, valses nobles et sentimentales and a habanera.

**In musical terms a "tombeau" was a piece written as a memorial; a poetic or musical dedication, with no funereal reference.
As an interpreter-performer I often have to ask myself why a composer has presented his music as we see it today — why choose a particular time or key signature, and so many other questions regarding layout — and sometimes the answers are not at all obvious. Now that we have the tools with which to “re-arrange” the music otherwise, my work as an editor becomes much more interesting. When these pieces were first written I like to think that the composer did not necessarily consider all the options, (at the time they had so much else to think about) and I doubt whether a colleague, editor or proofreader would have had the temerity to question a composer's wishes. However, in retrospect I like to think that these now aged composers are approvingly viewing my modifications from above and giving the nod to my humble efforts.

Piano Practical Editions has therefore evolved into a creative and critical working publication; in addition to a few suggestions of fingering, sostenuto pedal and hand disposition, you will find significant modifications to the general layout of these masterworks.

I  PRÉLUDE  page 5  duration : 3’10

To the memory of Lieutenant Jacques Charlot who served as a lieutenant in the French army. According to Vlado Perlemuter, who studied with the composer, the opening should be extremely precise and lively but, as always with Ravel, without rushing. Very little pedalling is called for and an oboe-like timbre is required for the melodic line. I have suggested a slightly slower metronome speed to allow enough time for the semiquavers to speak.

- 63-67 Presented in A♭
- 93-94 Pedal confirmed by Perlemuter and the composer
- 68-72 Presented in E
II FUGUE  page 13  duration : 3’

To the memory of Second-lieutenant Jean Cruppi. It has been written that the subject “has a doleful air, as tears which seek solace”; however, the syncopation can make it feel quite “cool”. Ravel had written a number of fugues in preparation for the Prix de Rome, no doubt enjoying the challenge of such mind games. The accents should just emerge as an expressive weight and which vary in proportion to the intensity of the phrase. According to Perlemuter, it should be played with simplicity but not scholastically, and with inner depth.

- 39 the crescendo is missing in the original edition

III FORLANE*  page 18  duration : 5’30

To the memory of Lieutenant Gabriel Deluc — a Basque painter. Perlemuter identifies this dance “as the movement that most faithfully affirms its allegiance to the past through the effect of its cadences, influenced by antiquity”.

- 10 The bass is written as a dotted minim in the original - probably a misprint (see 102)
- 37-45 Presented in F#

IV RIGAUDON*  page 27  duration : 3’10

To the memory of Pierre and Pascal Gaudin. As in the orchestrated version, the opening should have a trumpeted sound, and the slower central section’s aeolian melody played like an oboe. The metronome speed is editorial.

- 67-77 Presented in B
- 82-89 Presented in E minor
- 84-85 in the treble at the 2nd beat, I have changed the lower note of the octave from a quaver to a crotchet

V MENUET  page 34  duration : 4’25

To the memory of Jean Dreyfus. According to Perlemuter, the composer suggested a ‘forward-going’ tempo’ (allegro moderato), so perhaps 108 is a more realistic metronome speed; the musette***, in G minor dorian, and coda should be played at the same speed. Towards the end, the three chords (118 - 120) should be played in time, and the trill (tremolo) should die naturally within the pedal. The composer clearly intended the change of pedal in the penultimate bar (sans faire vibrer) to ‘clean up’ the final harmony. I particularly love the way the minuet and musette are superimposed at 73.

- 81-96 Presented in F#
- 115, 120-123 pedalling suggestions by the editor
- 127 sans faire vibrer = depress keys silently
To the memory of Captain Joseph de Marliave, musicologist. Ravel indicates a fast tempo for this virtuoso tour de force, but always with complete clarity of accentuation. Perhaps 132 (or even less) is therefore a more realistic metronome speed to allow time for the two elements to be stated — the semiquavers and the expressive central melody (e.g. 130 - 170). Ravel slowed down for ‘un peu moins vif’ (57 - 60) and also the equivalent final repetition of this section (219 - 222). I also pull back the speed for the [soutenu] at 223-230. I feel that clarity of expression is more important than the excessive speed demanded by the composer, who also plays this movement with moderate pedal.

- 29-34 Presented in F
- 35-42 Presented with a blank key-signature
- 43-79 Presented in B minor
- 57-60 Presented in triple time
- 103 a probable misprint in Durand which gives RH as 104
- 119 final quaver beat slightly “rearranged” in both hands
- 120-127 Presented with a blank key-signature
- 158-165 Presented in B minor
- 166-169 Presented in D minor
- 169 The last two semiquavers read middle E and A♯ in the original. However, I believe that this might be a misprint and have substituted the reverse to match the preceding 3 bars.
- 191 sourdine suggested by the composer (via Perlemuter) to prepare the following crescendo
- 203 The final semiquaver F♯ may be a misprint for E
- 219 Ravel suggested that the opening chords of this reprise be played a little slower so that it should not sound like a ‘sprint’
- 219-222 Presented in triple time
- 227 RH added octaves at the final semiquaver of each beat (see 228)
- 230-239 Presented in F
- 240 The first semiquaver has an added LH triad for greater power

**total duration : 24′15**

* The origin of the forlana is from forlana or furlana, a lively folk dance from northern Italy.

** In the 17th and 18th centuries the rigaudon could be found in both folk and court dances, and was popular in France and England; usually in duple time. it featured regular four-bar phrases and repeated sections.

*** In the 18th century, a musette was a dance to the accompaniment of droned bagpipes.
PRÉLUDE
à la mémoire du lieutenant Jacques Charlot

Vif  \( \frac{q}{4} = 92 \)  \( \frac{q}{4} = 84 \)

* Small ornamental notes should be played on the beat.
Allegro moderato  \( \frac{3}{4} \)  \( m.d. \)  \( \frac{7}{8} \)  \( m.s. \)
FORLANE

à la mémoire du lieutenant Gabriel Deluc

Allegretto  \( \frac{\text{b}}{\text{e}} = 96 \)  \( \text{[} \frac{\text{b}}{\text{e}} = 88 \text{]} \)
* Small ornamental notes should be played on the beat.
RIGAUDON
à la mémoire de Pierre et Pascal Gaudin
Moins vif

* Small ornamental notes should be played on the beat.
Allegro moderato \( \frac{q}{= \, 92} \) \[ \frac{q}{= \, 108} \]
TOCCATA

à la mémoire du capitaine Joseph de Marliave

Vif $\frac{\text{d} = 144}{\text{d} = 132}$

$\text{pp staccato}$
un peu moins vif
soutenu

pp sempre cresc.

revenez au premier mouvement

f

ff
[ un peu moins vif ]
Juillet 1914 - Juin, Novembre 1917
Le Tombeau de Couperin