Maurice RAVEL
the complete works for piano

VALSES NOBLES & SENTIMENTALES

à Louis AUBERT
At the height of its popularity, the waltz in Vienna drew vast crowds and was so popular that huge dance halls were opened to provide space for thousands of dancers. The Strauss family to a great extent contributed the music.

Ravel wrote: “The title was chosen to indicate my intention of writing a series of waltzes in imitation of Schubert”. During this same period his grand orchestral work La Valse was conceived as a symphonic poem “Wien” (Vienna) and there is evidence that the genre was already very much in the composer’s mind as early as 1906.

In the next quotation, although Ravel is writing about the genesis of La Valse, it is equally applicable to Valses Nobles et Sentimentales composed in 1911: “at present I am working on a grand waltz, a tribute to the memory of the great Strauss. You know of my profound affinity with these admirable rhythms, and that I value “la joie de vivre” expressed by the dance much more deeply than Franckist* puritanism.

I love their distinctive Viennese lilt combined with French impressionist flair, rubato, chromaticism, suspensions, and unexpected harmonic subtleties (predating Gershwin) in these wonderful miniatures. Sometimes mildly sarcastic, sometimes delicate, there is little evidence of Schubertian Vienna — perhaps Ravel was merely inspired by the poetic title. Les Valses are sophisticated, spirited and sensuous, and the epilogue, where fragments of each waltz drift in and out of a surreal dream, must be one of Ravel’s finest creations — Debussy said they were the work of “the subtlest ear that ever existed.”

Ravel made an orchestral transcription
for a ballet first performed in April 1912 at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, writing his own scenario and conducting the Lamoureux Orchestra. Many ideas in this edition have been inspired by this adaptation. Adélaïde or “le langage des fleurs” was commissioned by the Russian ballerina Natasha Trouhanova.

Although it is unlikely that knowledge of the plot will help students make additional sense of the music, here it is:

The scene takes place in Paris, about 1820, chez Adélaïde, a courtesan, in a salon furnished in period style. Rival suitors express emotions of love, hope, and rejection, symbolised by an exchange of flowers.

On 9th May 1911, the Société Musicale Indépendente presented an unusual recital, in which the audience had to guess the identity of the composers — rather like a blind wine tasting. The work was performed by the dedicatee, Louis Aubert, and generally condemned by a public affronted by “dissonances and wrong notes”. When the results were known, it became clear that many “avant-garde” listeners were unable to correctly guess the composer, quoting among others, Satie or Kodály. Artur Rubinstein played them in Spain, and a traditional public feeling cheated of ‘tuneful’ music, rebelled, particularly after Rubinstein repeated them as an encore!

In addition to some suggested fingerings, the appendix contains durations, comments, afterthoughts and a vocabulary. Redistribution between the hands comes under close scrutiny to make certain passages easier or more persuasive. Ravel uses the pedal sign sparingly preferring extended ties or long bass notes, impossible to hold otherwise. Combined with the sustaining pedal, it is possible, even desirable, to use the sostenuto pedal effectively throughout these waltzes, although this is entirely editorial.

*Franckists or the Franck gang... a group of composers who followed César Franck*
Assez lent \( \frac{\text{J}}{\text{N}} \)
avec une expression intense

en dehors

sopra

rit.

a tempo
doux et expressif

au mouvement
(un peu plus lent et rubato)
cédez très peu

au mouvement

au mouvement

cédez

au mouvement

au mouvement

(à peine plus lent)

au mouvement
Presque lent - dans un sentiment intime \( \frac{d}{\text{tempo}} = 96 \)

**Simple**

le chant très en dehors

V

\[ \text{pp} \]

263

\[ \frac{d}{6-2} \]

267

\[ \text{p} \]

271

\[ \text{mp} \]

275

\[ \text{pp très fluide} \]

la partie supérieure en dehors

279
283 ppp subito

287 sonore

291 ral - len - tir

Vif $ \frac{7}{4} = 144 \quad \frac{3}{4} = 96$

295 pp

297 très doux et un peu languissant
Un peu retenu

au mouvement

Un peu plus animé

très doux, le chant en dehors
1er mouvement
EPILOGUE

\[ \frac{483}{pp} \] expressif

\[ \frac{487}{pp} \] sourdine

\[ \frac{491}{p} \] 3 cordes

\[ \frac{495}{pp} \] mét. très expressif

\[ \frac{499}{p} \] et sourdine

3 cordes
Appendix

Durations, comments, afterthoughts & vocabulary

- Ravel’s metronome speeds do seem generally rather quick and he is reported to have once admitted: “if I put \( q = 92 \) it means not 120 and equally not 72”!
- Ravel used the pedal sign very sparingly, preferring elongated ties and extended notes, impossible to hold otherwise.
- None of the sostenuto pedal suggestions are attributed to Ravel. With practice it is possible to combine the sostenuto and soft pedals with the left foot. However, the result should seldom be “clean”, bearing in mind that the overall goal should be “pianistic” and the impressionist harmonies as within a dreamlike “cloud”.

**Valse I**  Page 1  Duration: 1'25
- Durand metronome speed \( \frac{\text{q}}{\text{Q}} = 176 \)
- 15, 16  Durand: the slur extends to the following bar (1st beat). Compare with bars 75 and 76.
- 19/20, 79/80  Bass octave (in brackets) added for tone
- 22, 24  Alto inspired by the orchestral score

**Valse II**  Page 5  Duration: 2'05
- 81-82  Two slurs in accord with similar phrases

**Valse III**  Page 7  Duration: 1'35
- Durand: no metronome speed
- 160-166  Slurs in the treble from the orchestral score. Durand: each slur extends to the 3rd beat
- 160  Durand: dynamic missing
- 188  Durand: tie missing
- 200  \( \text{à peine plus lent} \) - from the orchestral score
- 211/215  Suggestion for the bass pedal point G (orchestral score)

**Valse IV**  Page 10  Duration: 1'05
- Durand metronome speed \( \frac{\text{q}}{\text{Q}} = 80 \)
- Some respelling to facilitate reading
- 234/235  Tied dotted minim E (soprano) from the orchestral score
- 241, 244  Durand: the last treble quaver is written as D double # — a misprint corrected in the orchestral score.
- 247-250  Ossia - this tenor countersubject figures in the orchestration and was written in Vlado Perlemuter’s score by the composer

**Valse V**  Page 13  Duration: 1'10
- 263  “Simple” written by the composer in Perlemuter’s score
- 277  2nd treble quaver F# in the orchestral score
Valse VI  Page 14  Duration: 0’35

Durand metronome speed $\frac{q}{4} = 100$

Durand: the time signature is 3/4 throughout — the orchestral version alternates between 3/2 and 3/4 as here — perhaps therefore easier to understand the metre.

313-316 Modifications from the orchestral score

Valse VII  Page 17  Duration: 2’15

Durand: no metronome speed

In the central section two changes of key signature have been introduced in the treble to underline bitonality.

376/378 Bass octave (in brackets) added for tone and accuracy

390 It is felt that a slight pause is necessary here before commencing the central section

405 The 3rd alto quaver is a suspected misprint (see bar 409)

423 3rd beat change of note order. Here is the Durand original:

425-434 Pedal point C from the orchestral score

482 A added (in brackets) — from the orchestral score

Valse VIII  Page 24  Duration: 3’45  EPILOGUE

523-528 Durand: 3/4 throughout — changes of time signature to facilitate reading of metre.

527 The sustained bass G is taken from the orchestral score

535-544 Durand: 3/4 — changes of metre to facilitate reading

544 Durand: 3 cordes missing

546 Durand: each pair of quavers is slurred — RH staccato from the orchestral score

Overall duration: 13’30 (from a Ravel piano roll recording) — very fast!

Vlado Perlemuter: 14’ — most recordings are 15’ plus: i.e. Louis Lortie 15’15

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>franc</th>
<th>forthright</th>
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<th>without affectation</th>
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<tr>
<td>sans</td>
<td>without</td>
<td>dans un sentiment intime</td>
<td>with innermost feeling</td>
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<td>heavy</td>
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<td>light</td>
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<td>cédez</td>
<td>slower</td>
<td>3 cordes</td>
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<td>soutenu</td>
<td>sustained</td>
<td>S.Ped</td>
<td>middle sostenuto pedal</td>
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assez animé  sufficiently lively  lointain  distant

à peine  almost  las  weary

presque  slightly  se perdant  dying away