Maurice RAVEL
the complete works for piano

MIROIRS

I  NOCTUELLES
II  OISEAUX TRISTES
III  UNE BARQUE SUR L’OCEAN
IV  ALBORADA DEL GRACIOSO
V  LA VALLEE DES CLOCHES
1905 was a very productive year for Ravel. At the age of 30, after composing the *Sonatine*, he began writing in a more complex harmonic style, and this cycle proved to be a decisive point in the composer’s development. According to an autobiographical sketch, *Miroirs* astounded even those musicians who were familiar with his music.

Each of the five pieces was dedicated to a member of the band of *Apaches* and conformed to the romantic tradition of writing programme music for the piano, much in the same genre as the six *Images* of Debussy written at just about the same time. The title of the suite and of the individual pieces are impressionistic “reflections” of musical pictures, even though both Debussy and Ravel resisted calling their art ‘impressionist’.

Ravel wrote: …“the word ‘mirror’ should not lead one to assume that I want to affirm a subjectivist theory of art. A quotation from Shakespeare helped me to formulate a completely opposite position”:

*(Julius Caesar, Act I, Scene 2)*

*Cassius*: I’ll tell you, good *Brutus*. And since you know you can see yourself best by reflection, I’ll be your mirror and show you, without exaggeration, things inside you that you can’t see.

Thus we have a pictorial description rather than a subjective expression of feeling.

*formed in c1900, the *Apaches* were enthusiastic devotees of the arts, supporting in particular Ravel and Debussy. They included — de Falla, Stravinsky, Ricardo Viñes and Calvocoressi.*
The present performing edition
represents thoughts in formation over
a number of years. It is only when you
actually try to write down music
reasonably accurately that you realise
what a complicated matter it really is,
and how easy it is to print mistakes
and inconsistencies. In reviewing this
pianistic masterpiece I have been
tempted to cast an objective eye at
some fundamental principles of music
editing, and have been somewhat
audacious in changing key and time
signatures in addition to rectifying
real and imagined misprints.

Alterations of key-signatures have
been made to eliminate accidentals
and alternative time-signatures to
help memorising or to clarify metre.
All these are noted copiously in the
appendices, and I have only indulged
in important changes and notation
and spelling to remove ambiguities,
always keeping rigorously into the
spirit of the composer’s original
intentions. I have suggested some
fingering and I also tried to make
some passages easier to perform or
more persuasive by altering the
distribution of hands.
Les Noctuelles des hangars partent, d’un vol gauche, cravater d’autres poutres — Barn moths fly clumsily to cloak themselves around other beams — Léon Paul Fargue

I started working on Noctuelles at about the same time as I became interested in birds and flying insects, and was delighted to discover that this is in essence a pianistic study in erratic flight, a strategy which many flying insects adopt to evade predatory birds and bats.

Ravel transposes this so-called “clumsy” way of flying with superficially uncoordinated riffs.

Transcribing this music down in traditional metre is a real challenge as it deliberately changes direction and tonality to reflect the insects’ unpredictability. I have tried to re-write much of it with greater clarity, to make more sense of its design.

Noctuidae are commonly known as owlet moths, but I suspect Ravel named the piece for its poetic nocturnal connotations rather than for a precise programme inspired by papillons de nuit. Indeed any species of flying insect would have been equally appropriate, the title papillons or butterflies having already been adopted by other composers.

To my mind, the contrasting central section resembles one of those abandoned temples so beloved of the French “impressionists”, where the insects might roost. During a hot summer night a few flutter about, appearing in disturbing shadows to haunt us, sometimes interrupting the sombre and solemn chordal melody. The syncopated F pedal point imitates a bell — rather like Le Gibet which would be written some four years later.

As in the Sonatine and Jeux d’eau, Ravel was much inspired and influenced by Liszt and especially Feux Follets. Perlemuter relates that the composer insisted upon dramatic crescendos in bars 23 & 102, features which would later be employed in Scarbo. Compare too the remarkable similarity of their concluding bars.
1 NOCTUELLES
à Léon Paul FARGUE

Très léger  \( \frac{5}{4} = 120 \)

\( \text{PP} \)

\( \text{PP} \)

\( \text{lp} \)

\( \text{mf} \)

\( \text{PP} \)

\( \text{p} \)

\( \text{m.s.} \)

\( \text{m.s.} \)

\( \text{m.d.} \)

\( \text{m.s.} \)

\( \text{m.s.} \)

\( \text{m.s.} \)

\( \text{PPP} \)
pas trop lent
(\( j = 80 \) environ)
sombre et expressif

\( m.f \)

\( m.d. \)

\( p \)

\( m.p \)

\( m.s. \)

\( p.p \)

\( P \) expressif

rit.
PP léger
très expressif

revenez au premier mouvement
1er mouvement

PPP
Appendix — Comments, afterthoughts & vocabulary

As an interpreter-performer I often have to ask myself why a composer has chosen a particular time or key signature and sometimes the answer is 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.

This deliberately “clumsy” piece moves between key and time-signatures as often as a noctuid moth pounces upon a flower to pollinate. In spite of about 15 changes of key, Ravel preferred to write entirely with a key-signature of 5 flats, which results in a raft of (dare I say “clumsy”) accidentals. I have also dramatically re-cast some time-signatures and bar lines.

Duration: 5’25

- The metronome speed given in the first edition (Max Eschig) is approximately 128
- 4-5 presented in A
- 7 The major second — G♯ A♭ — was originally written out as separate notes. However, this transformation is perhaps more pianistic.
- 14-17 presented in F
- 17-19 modification of time-signature and bar lines
- 18-20 presented in G
- 21-30 presented in A flat
- 29-30 modification of time-signature and bar lines
• 31-32 presented in B
• 33-34 modification of time-signature and bar lines
• 39 modification of time-signature and bar lines
• 55 3rd beat double third added to complete the tenor voice
• 62-67 modification of bar lines
• 69-75 modification of bar lines
• 71 RH 3rd beat final note G — probably a misprint (see 65 & 69)
• 84-85 presented in A
• 92-93 modification of bar lines
• 94-97 presented in E flat
• 97-99 modification of time-signature and bar lines
• 98-100 presented in C
• 109-110 modification of time-signature and bar lines
• 111-112 presented in E
• 113-114 modification of time-signature and bar lines
• 120-126 modification of time-signature and bar lines

très léger  very light
pas trop lent  not too slow
sombre et expressif  dark and expressive
revenez au premier mouvement  back to the opening tempo
en dehors  in relief
presque lent  almost slow
lointain  distant
“Birds lost in the torpor of a dark forest during the hottest summer hours.” — Maurice Ravel

Dedicated to Ricardo Viñes, the Catalanian pianist who first performed the Miroirs in January 1906, the composer might have been inspired by Debussy’s plan to write a piece in free form, sounding like an improvisation.

He was staying in Fontainebleau and one morning heard a blackbird singing. Enchanted by its elegant, melancholy arabesque, he had merely to transcribe it, to produce the limpid and poetic opening phrase in bar 2. Many birds sing repeated note themes as in bar 1 and the lethargic mood could be attributed to the deep and languid cuckoo motif as in bar 4.

Although the forest might have been French, I prefer to imagine an Asiatic rainforest, such as those conceived by Le Douanier Rousseau, these sorrowful birds squawking in a more jungle-like environment. In bar 16 an unexpected shriek, with typical responding echo, causes a raucous response.

According to Perlemuter, Ravel wanted the characteristic motif in bar 2 to be played a little quicker than written and not metronomically. He also said that the slow pace at bar 25 (lent ad libitum) should not be taken too literally.

“Sad Birds” was the first of the set to be composed and it apparently baffled its first audience, the Apaches*.

*a band of enthusiastic devotees of the arts and especially Debussy and Ravel
Très lent $\frac{3}{8} = 36$

II OISEAUX TRISTES

à Ricardo VIÑES

Espress.

$P$
Appendix — Comments, afterthoughts & vocabulary

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I have occasionally re-cast some key and time-signatures.

Duration: 3’45

- The metronome speed given in the first edition is $\frac{\text{bpm}}{\text{dotted note}} = 60$
- 4-6 modification of time-signature and bar lines
- 7 presented in B minor; 4th beat — 2 added ties
- 12-15 editorial pedal suggestion
- 19-20 modification of time-signature and bar lines
- 24-25 modification of time-signature and bar lines
- 25 the 3rd beat arpeggiated chords are an editorial suggestion
- 25-26 presented with a blank key-signature
- 26 editorial pedal off suggestion
- 30 editorial sostenuto pedal suggestion

très doux very gentle
lointain from afar
pressez push forward
revenez au mouvement back to tempo
presque ad lib almost in free tempo
pressez légèrement accelerate a little
encore plus lent even slower tempo
sombre et lointain dark and distant
Dedicated to an artist — Paul Sordes — surely because of its strong visual impression. An inspired musical picture of a solitary boat, sometimes becalmed and sometimes tossed about by oversized waves — as if the entire ocean had flooded the mind of the composer.

These transcendental arpeggios have to be shrouded within a continuous haze of pedals — a masterpiece which makes the difficult demand of a virtuoso who must play with no perceptible signs of virtuosity. Ravel also wanted the piece to be played not too quickly.

The musicologist and critic Calvocoressi attended the first performance of the Miroirs on 6 January 1906 as part of a recital of the Société Nationale by Ricardo Viñes and wrote a favourable review in Le Courrier Musical: une Barque sur l’Océan is a true symphonic poem, intense and beautiful.

This central work is the longest of the set and one of two that Ravel later orchestrated.

A poetic extract from the work of Lamartine might profitably pass through the mind of a sensitive artist:

Viens, à ma barque fugitive
Viens donner le baiser d’adieux;
Roule autour une voix plaintive,
Et de l’écume de ta rive
Mouille encore mon front et mes yeux.

Come to my fugitive boat
Come give the kiss of farewell;
Whirl around a plaintive voice,
And let the foam of your shore
Moisten still my forehead and my eyes.
D'un rythme souple - *Très enveloppé de pédales* \[ \textbf{\textit{j} = c.50} \]
2 pédales
très expressif
le trémolo très fondu
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Duration: 7’45

- No metronome speed is given in the first edition
- 28-34 editorial sostenuto pedal suggestion
- 28-37 presented with a blank key-signature
- 42 bass G# only possible with a Bosendorfer
- 38-58 presented in G# minor. Ravel suggested that there should be a small hiatus between each surge of the waves. The pedalling is editorial.
- 59-65 presented in E
- 68-71 editorial pedal suggestion
- 78-83 editorial pedal suggestion
- 86-89 editorial pedal suggestion
- 92-95 editorial pedal suggestion
- 96-97 presented in G minor
- 98-108 presented in F minor
- 98-100 In the 4th beat of each of these bars, an extra demi-semiquaver A¹ has been added, probably in error.
- 100 RH final chord a major third lower — a probable misprint
- 109-113 presented in A minor
- 130-138 editorial pedal suggestion

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{d’un rythme souple} & \quad \text{not in strict time} \\
\text{très enveloppé de pédales} & \quad \text{in a swathe of pedals} \\
\text{en dehors} & \quad \text{in relief} \\
\text{un peu} & \quad \text{a little} \\
\text{sans nuances} & \quad \text{without expression} \\
\text{augmentez peu à peu} & \quad \text{louder little by little} \\
\text{le trémolo très fondu} & \quad \text{a well smothered tremolo}
\end{align*}
\]
“Is it possible to translate the title? That is precisely why I decided not to translate it. The gracioso of Spanish comedy is a rather special character and one which, so far as I know, is not found in any other theatrical tradition. We do have an equivalent, though, in the French theatre: Beaumarchais’ Figaro. But he is more philosophical, less well-meaning than his Spanish ancestor. The simplest thing, I think, is to follow the title with the rough translation ‘Morning Song of the Clown’. That will be enough to explain its humouristic style” — Maurice Ravel

So we learn that this is a morning ballad* parodying a courting knight. With exaggeration and satire, Ravel conjures a truly original masterpiece of programme music fit for a flourishing virtuoso. After the war, some 13 years after its composition the composer made a virtuoso orchestration, underlining these eccentric and ironic characteristics with even more emphasis.

This fiery Andalusian music represents a complete contrast to the other impressionist pieces of the set: rhythmic, virtuoso, dancing and colourfully harmonised guitar playing, with a passionate song** as its central subject."

Ravel’s biographer Roland-Manuel characterised the piece as one “in which the dry and biting Spanish virtuosity is contrasted with the swooning flow of the lovelorn melodic line which interrupts the angry buzzing of guitars.”

The dedicatee described the piece after the first performance of Miroirs by Viñes in a review, which appeared in Le Courrier Musical: Alborada is an extensive independent scherzo in the manner of Chopin and Balakirev”.

Ravel took great care in his choice of titles — Alborada and Gracioso are unusual and poetic words which work beautifully together. The composer valued his Basque and Spanish heritage from his mother, calling Spain his ‘second musical homeland’. He grew up listening to Spanish songs and was able to assimilate their rhythms and essence to his own works in a very personal way.

*The English have no word to convey the reality of a serenade and even less an “Alborada”… the idea of singing to a loved one early in the morning is hard to imagine in St. Albans.

**cante jondo, a typically deep and serious type of flamenco
IV ALBORADA DEL GRACIOSO

à Michel D. CALVOCORESSI

Assez vif \( \frac{\text{b} \text{b} \text{b}}{\text{g} \text{g} \text{g}} \) \( \text{= 88} \)

\( \text{mf sec — les arpèges très serrés} \)

subito

IV = 88

ALBORADA DEL GRACIOSO

À Michel D. Calvocoressi

Assez vif \( \frac{\text{b} \text{b} \text{b}}{\text{g} \text{g} \text{g}} \) \( \text{= 88} \)

\( \text{mf sec — les arpèges très serrés} \)

subito

IV = 88

ALBORADA DEL GRACIOSO

À Michel D. Calvocoressi
cédez très peu
revenez au mouvement
Tempo primo

Sost. Ped

p subito

..*..
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Duration : 7’

- $\frac{3}{4}$=92 is given in the first edition — Max Eschig
- 36 3rd beat 2nd semiquaver RH top F missing — probably an error
- 39-41 presented in D flat
- 42 presented in C# minor
- 71 & 75 editorial metronome speeds
- 111-114 RH tied B from the orchestral score
- 125 editorial pedal suggestion to 128
- 133 time signature missing
- 156-158 editorial pedal suggestion
- 166-169 presented in E flat
- 204 editorial sostenuto pedal suggestion
- 206 last quaver chord D missing in the bass — probably an error
- 216-217 octave G added to the bass for greater accuracy and tone
- 224 & 228 editorial pedal suggestion

- assez vif
- sec — les arpèges très serres
- expressif en récit
- très mésuré
- le chant très expressif
- très rythmé
- même mouvement
- garder la pédale jusqu’à
- cédez légèrement
- très sec et bien rythmé
- cédez très peu
- revenez au mouvement
- très marqué
- sans ralentir

- quite lively
- crisp — the arpeggiated chords strummed
- the aubade is to be sung expressively
- in strict tempo
- the song with much expression
- very rhythmic
- the same tempo
- hold the pedal until bar 136
- slightly yield
- very crisp with strong rhythm
- slow down very little
- gradually back to the original tempo
- well marked
- without slowing down
In France bells are a way of life, inescapable in a Catholic country with many churches — especially on a Sunday; their bells and steeples are quite wonderful and a perfect subject for the piano which can recreate tolling by generously using the pedals and striking the keys as one would a bell.

Ravel had already written resonant music for an earlier two-piano piece — Entre cloches and would return to the theme in La Cloche Engloutie (an unfinished opera), L’heure Espagnole and Le Gibet from Gaspard de la Nuit.

Dedicated to Maurice Delage, a composer and very close friend, its inspiration was apparently Parisian Church bells tolling at noon. The chimes are sometimes near and sometimes far in distance and time, ringing through the silence, which Ravel fashions into a musical impressionist picture. The central subject is a typically broad and extended cantabile theme of great beauty and mystery, an intimate and expressive song. The ending is veiled in almost total silence, as night descends on the valley and the bells, one by one, drift off to sleep.

Although Ravel often used complex textures consisting of multi-layered ideas, La Vallée des Cloches is the only piece in the set written on three staves. Later Debussy would also write on three staves in the second book of Images (1907). Although Debussy had been incorporating bells for a number of years, his first bell title was Cloches à travers les feuilles from Images II written a few years after this work and again later still — La Cathédral Engloutie.

Quoting Cortot: “…filled with the silver tones of cattle bells, the rusting of faraway carillons, the crepuscular voice of steeple bells, the confused noise softly muted by slow sonorities of which the waves fade away in the serenity of the contemplative evening. The central lyrical episode is the only fragment of Miroirs in which Ravel seems to abandon the expression of subjective sentiment, to the confidence of a personal emotion.”

And here is another poetic extract by Lamartine: from La Cloche du village —

Oh ! quand cette humble cloche à la lente volée
Épand comme un soupir sa voix sur la vallée...

Oh! when this humble, slow-flying bell
Spreads its voice over the valley as a sigh...
v LA VALLÉE DES CLOCHES

à Maurice DELAGE

Très lent \( \frac{d}{\text{par}} = 50 \)

très doux et sans accentuation

p un peu marqué
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None of the sostenuto pedal* suggestions are attributed to Ravel. However, With practice it is possible to combine the sostenuto and soft pedals with the left foot, and together with the sustaining pedal, one can achieve a beautiful impressionist sound with orchestral and pianistic effect.

Duration: 5’30 minutes

• 16-19 presented in F
• 28-30 the bass acciaccaturas are editorial
• 37 1st beat — some editions give a B in the treble — probably an error
• 44 bass C# is a semibreve, but compare with 14. In his recording, Ravel himself changes the pedal as indicated in this edition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>très doux et sans accentuation</td>
<td>very gentle and without accentuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un peu marqué</td>
<td>a little marked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>très calme</td>
<td>very calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>largement chanté</td>
<td>broad and cantabile</td>
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* The sostenuto pedal was first shown in Paris at the Industrial Exposition of 1844. The idea was not immediately taken up by piano builders, but in 1874, is was perfected and patented by Steinway, soon to be fitted on all their grands and better uprights. One obvious commercial reason for not including the sostenuto pedal in musical scores must have been the thought of excluding buyers whose pianos didn’t have it. Debussy and Ravel certainly played such Steinways in the Paris salons. Apparently, in 1900 the composer René de Castéra bought a 3-pedal Steinway on the advice of Albeniz. One could say that it took over 100 years for it to become established.