

RAVEL

BOLERO

for Orchestra

拉威尔

波莱罗

为乐队而作







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MAURICE RAVEL

BOLERO

for Orchestra Edited by/Herausgegeben von/Publié par Arbie Orenstein

拉威尔 波莱罗

为乐队而作

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PREFACE

Ravel's Bolero (1928)1 was commissioned by the dancer and patroness, Ida Rubinstein. She had originally requested a ballet for her troupe based upon an orchestral transcription of six piano pieces from Isaac Albéniz's suite Iberia. The project was under way when, much to his annoyance, Ravel was informed that the Spanish conductor, Enrique Arbós, had already orchestrated the pieces and copyright laws forbade anyone else from transcribing them. Upon learning of Ravel's predicament, Arbós graciously offered to renounce his exclusive copyright, and it appeared that all would end well. But now Ravel changed his mind and decided that it would be more expeditious to orchestrate one of his own compositions. It turned out, finally, that he would compose an original work. During a brief vacation at Saint-Jean-de-Luz, just before going for a morning swim with his close friend, Gustave Samazeuilh, Ravel went to the piano and picked out a melody with one finger. 'Don't you think this theme has an insistent quality?', he asked. 'I'm going to try to repeat it a number of times without any development, gradually increasing the orchestra as best I can.'2 Returning to his home at Montfort l'Amaury, some 50 kilometres (30 miles) west of Paris, Ravel began work on this fresh project, which was initially called Fandango. The title was soon changed to Bolero, and the ballet was completed in about five months. The new work was introduced at the Paris Opéra by Madame Rubinstein and her troupe on 22 November 1928, conducted by Walther Straram, with scenery and costumes by Alexandre Benois, and choreography by Bronislava Nijinska. The programme also included Les Noces de Psyché et de l'Amour (music of Bach transcribed by Arthur Honegger) and La Bien-Aimée (works by Schubert and Liszt orchestrated by Darius Milhaud). Although favourably received by the Paris critics, Bolero soon became extraordinarily popular, much to the surprise of its composer who predicted that the leading symphony orchestras would refuse to include it in their programmes. Not only was Bolero frequently performed in the concert hall, but it rapidly became an international best-seller. In his review entitled 'Toscanini causes furor with Bolero', Olin Downes described the American première on 14 November 1929:

audience and delayed the performance by the prolonged applause. [. . .] When the orchestra stopped at last, the excitement which had gathered in the listeners as well as the music vented itself as described. And this effect, so well carried out by the conductor, was the device of a composer of 53 years, a man of

Bolero [. . .] brought shouts and cheers from the

minute stature and of no physical force, but, technically speaking, one of the most finished and subtle masters of the craft of composition and orchestration in the world of today. [. . .] The piece is in itself a school of orchestration. It is not great music but the craft, the virtuosity [. . .] are really thrilling.3

In January 1930 Ravel recorded Bolero with the Lamoureux Orchestra,4 and thereafter he frequently conducted it in a strict, moderate tempo. On 4 May Toscanini led the New York Philharmonic in a performance of the work at the Paris Opéra. An uproar occurred when Ravel did not acknowledge Toscanini's gesture to his box and, in a heated discussion backstage, he told the maestro that his tempo was ridiculously fast.5 Toscanini observed that a bolero is not a funeral march and that his interpretation had been awarded a standing ovation by the capacity audience. Although the two men eventually shook hands, Bolero had now become a cause célèbre. In addition to many performances on the radio and an unprecedented number of recordings and transcriptions,6 Paramount, in 1934, released a film entitled Bolero, starring George Raft (who dances to the music) and Carole Lombard. In the Japanese film Rashomon (1950), whose westernstyle music was composed by Takashi Matsuyama, Bolero is imitated: in one extended scene, the same Cmajor tonality, harmony, and Bolero rhythm in the drum accompany a pseudo-Bolero melody. At the World Ice Dancing Championship held in 1984 in Ottawa, Canada, the first-prize winners skated to Bolero. Transmitted live by satellite and later rebroadcast by national television networks, the work

3 New York Times, 15 November 1929

⁴ An eyewitness account of the recording session reads in part:

The Lamoureux Orchestra was assembled [. . .] on stage, under the watchful eye of Albert Wolff [. . .] the orchestra plays, stops, Wolff rushes to the recording booth [. . .] Maurice Ravel is there, conscientious and precise, listening: 'Not enough in the trumpets, too much celesta'; Wolff returns to the podium and gives the order. The horns are moved, a space is cleared in front of the oboes, and they begin again. After each attempt, the composer returns from the recording booth [. . .] he shakes his head, approving or disapproving [. After a number of attempts, the exact expression is achieved. Wolff gives his baton to Ravel. It is the composer indeed who is going to preside over the recording of this disc. Ravel gives the downbeat. With rigid gestures, his wrist traces the three beats which, in a mechanical way, govern this melody in C.

Quoted in A. Orenstein, A Ravel Reader (Columbia University Press, New York, 1990), p. 535.

6 In the 1930s Bolero was recorded no less than 25 times, including recorded transcriptions for piano solo, two pianos, organ, organ and

orchestra, harmonica and orchestra, and two accordions.

cale (December 1938), p. 201

⁵ Ravel's personal score of Bolero, now in the Music Division of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, contains one annotation: the tempo indication, = 76 (observed by Toscanini in his recording with the NBC Symphony Orchestra), is crossed out and replaced by J = 66 (observed by Ravel in his recording with the Lamoureux Orchestra). Later printings of Bolero. however, indicate J = 72. Ravel's strict interpretation (15'50") is indeed quite different from Toscanini's impassioned version (13'25"). Two extreme tempos are heard in the recordings of Ravel's colleagues Paul Paray (13'00") and Pedro de Freitas-Branco (18'25"

¹ Bolero is spelt thus (not Boléro) in the surviving holographs, the first printed edition, and in Ravel's autograph letters; it is therefore clear that he preferred the Spanish form of the word for his title.

Gustave Samazeuilh, 'Maurice Ravel en pays basque', La Revue Musi-

was thus heard by hundreds of millions of television viewers around the world. Today, *Bolero* remains one of the most widely performed and recorded works in the classical literature. It is still rarely performed, however, as Ravel originally envisioned it – as a ballet.

In an interview with José André, which appeared in the Argentinian newspaper *La Nación* on 15 March 1930, Ravel made the following comments:

As far as Bolero is concerned, if it interests you, I would like to say, to avoid any misunderstanding, that in reality there is no such bolero, that is, I have not given this piece the typical nature of this Spanish dance, intentionally so. Its theme and rhythm are repeated to the point of obsession without any picturesque intention, in a moderato assai tempo. This theme, introduced by the flute, accompanied by the constant rhythm of the drum, flows successively through the different instrumental groups in a continuous crescendo, and after being repeated, always in C major, breaks out towards the end in E major. Both theme and accompaniment were deliberately given a Spanish character. I have always had a predilection for Spanish things. You see, I was born near the Spanish border, and there is also another reason: my parents met in Madrid [. . .].

Another statement by the composer was reported by M. D. Calvocoressi in *The Daily Telegraph* on 11 July 1931:

I asked Ravel whether he had any particular remarks to offer on his Bolero, which had been made the subject of heated discussions in England as elsewhere. His reply was: 'Indeed, I have. I am particularly desirous that there should be no misunderstanding about this work. It constitutes an experiment in a very special and limited direction, and should not be suspected of aiming at achieving anything different from, or anything more than, it actually does achieve. Before its first performance, I issued a warning to the effect that what I had written was a piece lasting seventeen minutes and consisting wholly of "orchestral tissue without music" - of one long, very gradual crescendo. There are no contrasts, and there is practically no invention except the plan and the manner of the execution.

'The themes are altogether impersonal – folk tunes of the usual Spanish-Arabian kind. And (whatever may have been said to the contrary) the orchestral writing is simple and straightforward throughout, without the slightest attempt at virtuosity. In this respect no greater contrast could be imagined than that between the *Bolero* and *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, in which I freely resort to all manners of orchestral virtuosity.

'It is perhaps because of these peculiarities that no single composer likes the *Bolero* – and from their point of view they are quite right. I have carried out exactly what I intended, and it is for listeners to take it or leave it.'

Bolero reaffirms Ravel's longstanding interest in the dance, and his continuing preoccupation with Spanish music and orchestral colour. Furthermore, the obsessive repetition which appears throughout the 52 bars of 'Le Gibet' (Gaspard de la nuit, 1908) is carried even further in Bolero, as the snare drum ceaselessly repeats a simple two-bar rhythmic pattern for 338 bars (stopping just two bars before the end), and the harmonic underpinning of tonic to dominant is heard for no less than 326 bars. As in Chopin's Berceuse, where a tonic pedal point of 68 bars is followed by a strikingly fresh V7–I final cadence, so in Bolero, after so much tonic-dominant in the bass, the final subdominant cadence comes as something of a shock.

The theme may be divided into two symmetrical parts: A (bars 5-21), which is diatonic, and B (bars 41-57), which is more chromatic. With ever-increasing instrumentation, the theme is heard nine times, as an AABB pattern is presented four times, and then abridged to AB (two bars after Figure 16), leading to the modulation to E major and the rousing conclusion in C. Thus, the overall form - which is quite unusual is that of a theme with repetition, the element of variation being limited to the harmony and the orchestration. In the second part of the theme, the many B flats (a flat seventh over C) superimpose an element of jazz on the Spanish setting, as do the three saxophones and the sliding trombones.8 Presented first in a simple manner, the theme is later harmonized with chords, mostly in parallel 5-3 and 6-3 motion. One presentation of the theme is bitonal (two bars after Figure 9, the melody in C major and the oboe d'amore in G), and another is tritonal (two bars after Figure 8) - a unique occurrence in Ravel's works. This passage merits close attention. The rhythmic pattern is heard in the snare drum, a flute and a horn. The balance of contrasting instrumental families should be noted, as well as the paradoxical aspect of having a flute and a horn performing a role traditionally given to the percussion family; the horns together with the woodwinds and strings - frequently double the rhythmic pattern in the snare drum. The melody is played in C major by the celesta and a horn (a somewhat unexpected coupling), in E major by one piccolo, and in G major by the other piccolo. Thus, the famous modulation to E major has been prepared in a sense by a presentation of the melody in that key.

Madame Rubinstein's interpretation of *Bolero* was set in a dimly lit Spanish café. A young woman begins to dance a languid bolero on a table top as the other

8 Beginning with L'Enfant et les sortilèges (1920–1925), which is a pot-pourri of contrasting styles, some of Ravel's later works juxtapose disparate elements. Indeed, one MS of the Piano Concerto for the Left Hand contains the composer's remark, 'musae mixtatiae' (mixed muses).

^{7.} Ravel's orchestral technique was the fruit of long years of study, incessant questioning of performers, much experimentation, and innumerable rehearsals. He was intrigued by the seemingly limitless resources of the modern orchestra, and his scores indicate a natural extension of each instrument's technical resources and range, careful attention to the linear quality of each part, and the seeking out of fresh combinations of timbre. It would appear that within the limits of human capability and efficacy of writing, any instrument may assume any role, and here the Ravelian elements of surprise and even paradox come to the fore. To cite but a few examples, in the daybreak episode from Daphnis et Chloé, the woodwinds and strings perform extended and agile harp-like passages, while in the Chansons madécasses, the flute evokes a trumpet, and the piano a gong.

performers gradually take notice. The dancers become increasingly obsessed by the bolero rhythm, ending in an apotheosis. The critic André Suarès called *Bolero* 'a sort of *Danse macabre*', and Piero Coppola, who conducted the first recording of the piece (under the composer's supervision), stated that the effect Ravel 'desired above all was precisely this almost hallucinatory insistence of an immutable tempo'. *Bolero* is thus spiritually akin to Ravel's 'choreographic poem' *La Valse* (1920): both pieces begin quietly and elegantly, but ultimately build to overpowering and tormented conclusions. Although 'an experiment in a very special and limited direction', as Ravel acknowledged, *Bolero* is nevertheless a brilliant *tour de force*, whose subtleties invite repeated study.

The following observations indicate the important discrepancies between the holograph of *Bolero* and the first edition (IE) of the printed score (Durand, Paris,

1929).10

- 1. Instrumentation: the E flat clarinet and B flat soprano saxophone were apparently added later to the orchestra. Conversely, the triangle and castanets were at first included but later rejected (see Facsimile 1). Ravel, who appreciated paradoxes of all sorts, must have particularly enjoyed removing the castanets from this Spanish dance! (The orchestral instruments are listed in French in the holograph and 1E but appear in Italian in the present edition.)
- 2. Notes and note values: at Figure 9 Piccolo 2, the final note of the theme, G, is missing in IE. It does appear, however, in the holograph (and in this present edition) thus:



In the penultimate bar, an incorrect D flat in Flute 1 has been corrected to D natural (Ravel made this barely visible correction in the holograph; see Facsimile 2). The flutes and piccolo thus double the trumpets and the violins.

In the holograph, at bar 272, beat 3, Violin II, divisi 1,

Ravel mistakenly wrote , which is found in IE.

9 In 1932, Ravel told a British reporter: 'I love going over factories and seeing vast machinery at work. It is awe-inspiring and great. It was a factory which inspired my Bolero. I would like it always to be played with a vast factory in the background.' (Orenstein, A Ravel Reader, p. 490.) The first such production was presented at the Paris Opéra on 29 December 1941 (four years after Ravel's death), with choreography by Serge Lifar, scenery and costumes by Léon Leyritz, conducted by Louis Fourestier.

10 As a gesture of friendship Ravel gave the holograph to his close friend, Lucien Garban, the music director of Durand et Cie. It was later sold by Madame Lucien Garban and is now in the Robert Owen Lehman Collection, on deposit in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. Notated in ink, with a dedication 'à Ida Rubinstein', the holograph contains 37 pages (plus one page, 18 bis, consisting of two bars), and is signed and dated 'Juillet-Octobre 1928' (see Facsimiles 1 and 2). An earlier orchestral version of Bolero was sold at the Hötel Drouot in Paris on 8 April 1992 and is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale. The unsigned manuscript, which is complete, is notated in pencil and contains 31 pages.

He later crossed out the low G in the holograph, and this correction appears in the present edition.

In the holograph, a number of staccato crotchets (quarter notes) appear in the score as quavers (eighth notes) with quaver rests (e.g., eight bars after Figure 15, bass clarinet, bassoons, and contrabassoon).

The triplets in the trombones and saxophones ($(\underbrace{\text{pr}}_{3})$) were first notated as two grace notes slurred to a crotchet ($\underbrace{\text{pr}}_{3}$), see Facsimile 2, bars 5 and 6 from the end).

In the holograph, the final note of the theme often appears as (e.g., Flute 1 at Figure 1), or as (e.g., E flat clarinet at Figure 4, Oboe d'amore at Figure 5). These note values were later shortened to in 1E.

- 3. Verbal instructions: the words 'portando' (saxophones) and 'vibrato' (trumpets) are present in the holograph (see Facsimile 2) but are omitted in 1E. They have been reinstated in the present edition.
- 4. Abbreviations: repeat signs (2) appear throughout the holograph owing to the special nature of the music. One should also note the somewhat hasty 'shorthand' appearance of the repeated notes in the strings (see Facsimile 2, bars 5 and 6 from the end), which occurs elsewhere in the holograph.
- 5. The snare drum: in the holograph this part is shared by the two players who alternate at each rehearsal number. Ravel's final decision, however, appears in IE, with the second player joining the first at Figure 16 (a 2).

Arbie Orenstein

拉威尔的《波莱罗》(1928年)①是受舞蹈家兼女赞助人伊达·鲁宾斯 坦之托而创作的。她原本请拉威尔将西班牙作曲家伊萨克·阿尔贝尼斯 的钢琴组曲《伊比利亚》中的六首改编成管弦乐曲,供她的芭蕾舞团使 用。在这个项目进行的过程中,拉威尔恼火地得知西班牙指挥家恩里克· 阿尔弗斯已经将阿尔贝尼斯的这个组曲改编成了管弦乐曲,而版权法又 严格禁止任何其他人再改编它们。阿尔弗斯在得知拉威尔的难处后,大 度地主动提出放弃版权独享权,一切看似皆大欢喜。但是拉威尔此时已 经改变了主意,认为将自己的一首作品改编成管弦乐曲的速度会更快, 而到了最后他又决定创作一首全新的乐曲。拉威尔和密友古斯塔夫·萨 马绪尔去圣让·德吕兹度假,他们有天早晨正要去游泳时,拉威尔却走到 了钢琴旁,用一个手指弹出了一段旋律。"你不觉得这个主题有一种难以 抗拒的特点吗?"他说,"我准备将这个主题反复多遍,不进行任何发展, 但要尽我所能扩大管弦乐的规模。"②拉威尔回到位于巴黎以西约50分 里处蒙弗特·拉莫利的家中后,开始创作这首新作品。这首作品最初的标 题为《凡丹戈舞曲》,但很快就被改为《波莱罗》,而芭蕾舞编排也在大约 五个月里完成。这首新作于1928年11月22日由鲁宾斯坦夫人和她的 芭蕾舞团在巴黎歌剧院介绍给了观众,乐队指挥为瓦尔特·斯塔拉兰姆,

①无论是在拉威尔的手稿、这部作品的初版还是拉威尔的亲笔书信中,《波莱罗》均被拼写成了 Bolero 而不是 Boléro,显然他更愿意使用这个词的西班牙语拼写作为这首作品的标题。——原注

②古斯塔夫·萨马绪尔《拉威尔的巴斯克之旅》,《音乐评论》,1938年12月,第201页。——原注

制景和服装为亚历山大·贝诺伊斯,编舞为布洛尼斯拉娃·尼金斯卡。当晚的演出剧目还包括《普赛克与爱神的婚礼》(阿尔蒂尔·奥涅格根据巴赫作品改编的芭蕾舞曲),以及《心爱的人》(达律斯·米约配器的舒伯特和李斯特作品)。虽然巴黎的评论界肯定了这首作品,但它很快风靡一时,让拉威尔颇感意外,因为他曾预言著名交响乐队肯定不会将它添加到自己的演奏曲目中。《波莱罗》不仅被频繁在音乐厅演奏,而且迅速成了全球最畅销的作品。奥林·道恩斯在他那篇题为《托斯卡尼尼指挥的〈波莱罗〉引起了轰动》的评论中这样描述了1929年11月14日这首作品在美国的首演:

《波莱罗》……引起了观众的欢呼与喝彩,经久不衰的掌声让音乐会无法继续。……当乐队终于停下来时,听众以及音乐本身聚集起来的兴奋如所描述的那样释放了出来。指挥家的演绎带来了惊人的效果,而真正创造出这种效果的却是一位53岁的作曲家,他身材矮小,但从技术的角度来说他却是当今世界上作曲和配器技巧方面最有才华、最精妙的大师之一。……这首作品本身就是出色的配器教材。真正让人激动不已的不是音乐本身,而是创作的手法和精湛技巧。③

1930年1月,拉威尔指挥拉穆勒乐队录制了《波莱罗》,此后常常严格地以一种中速指挥这首作品。5月4日,托斯卡尼尼率领纽约爱乐乐团在巴黎歌剧院演奏了这首《波莱罗》。当坐在包厢中的拉威尔没有接受托斯卡尼尼对他的敬意时,全场哗然;拉威尔在后台激烈的争论过程中告

③《纽约时报》,1929年11月15日。——原注

诉托斯卡尼尼,他的速度快得可笑[®]。托斯卡尼尼反唇相讥,说波莱罗舞曲不是葬礼进行曲,并且说自己的演绎博得了有音乐修养的听众的起立喝彩。虽然两个人最后握手言和,但《波莱罗》现在已经变成了一个轰动事件。除了广播多次播放,录音版本和改编谱不胜枚举外,派拉蒙电影公司还在1934年推出了一部影片,片名就叫《波莱罗》,主演为乔治·拉夫特(他随着音乐翩翩起舞)和卡罗·隆巴德。在日本影片《罗生门》中,松山鹰志创作的西方风格的音乐就模仿了《波莱罗》;在其中一个长镜头中,同样的 C 大调、和声以及鼓敲击出的"波莱罗"节奏伴随着一段类似"波莱罗"的旋律。1984年,在加拿大渥太华举行的世界冰上舞蹈锦标赛上,冠军得主比赛时所用的曲子就是《波莱罗》。经过卫星直播以及后来许多国家电视网的重播,这首作品就这样被世界各地的上亿电视观众听到。今天,《波莱罗》仍然是古典音乐中演出范围最广、录制次数最多的作品之一,倒是很少以拉威尔最初设想的形式——芭蕾舞——演出。

拉威尔 1930 年 3 月 15 日接受阿根廷《国家报》记者何塞·安德列的 采访时曾说过下面这段话:

说到《波莱罗》,如果你感兴趣的话,为了避免误解,我想说真实世界里并没有这样的波莱罗舞曲,也就是说我并没有刻意给这首作品增添这些黄素。

种西班牙舞曲的典型风格。它的主题与节奏在没有任何诗情画意的企图下以"非常适度的"速度被反复到了难以自拔的地步。这个主题首先由长笛引入,在持续不断的小鼓节奏伴奏下,依次由不同乐器组奏出,而且越来越强。经过多次永远是C大调的反复后,主题终于在结束前以E大调爆发。主题和伴奏都被故意赋予了西班牙特点。我对西班牙的东西一直情有独钟,我出生在法国与西班牙的边境附近,而且还有一个原因:我父母相识在马德里……。

M.D.卡尔沃科雷西在 1931 年 7 月 11 日的《每日电讯报》上报道过拉威尔的另一番话:

我问拉威尔,他的《波莱罗》在英国也像在其他地方一样已经引起了热烈的讨论,对此他有没有什么特别的话要说。他回答道:"我的确有话要说。我特别希望大家对这首作品不会产生误解。它代表着朝一个特殊而有限的方向所进行的一次试验,不应该被怀疑为企图达到有别于它目前实际所取得的效果这一目的。我在这首作品首演前曾发出过警告,我写了一首长达 17 分钟的作品,而且该作品完全由'没有音乐的乐队细胞'所构成——是一个很长的渐强。该作品没有对比,而且除了演奏时的计划和方式外,几乎没有任何创新。

"里面的主题完全不带个人情感——是那种常见的西班牙—阿拉伯式的民间曲子。而且不管人们有过什么样不同的评论,乐队部分其实比较简单,直截了当,没有任何复杂技法。在这一点上,《波莱罗》和《少年与魔法》之间存在着天壤之别,因为我在创作后者时大胆地运用了乐队配器的各种复杂技法。

"或许正是由于这些特点,作曲家当中没有一位喜欢《波莱罗》——从他们的角度来说,他们的观点也没有错。我完全按照我的想法完成了它,听众们得自己决定是否喜欢它。"

《波莱罗》再次巩固了拉威尔长久以来对舞蹈的兴趣,以及他对西班牙音乐和乐队色彩的痴迷。^⑤而且,对《绞架》(《夜之幽灵》,1908年)中在整个52小节里不断反复这种手法的痴迷在《波莱罗》中更是被推向了极致:小鼓在338小节中不停地反复着一个简单的两小节节奏型(只是在全曲结束前两小节才停止),而主调到属调的和声交替至少持续了326小节。在肖邦的《摇篮曲》中,一个主调持续音在保持了68小节后紧接着的便是一个焕然一新的V7-I的收束;同样,在《波莱罗》中,在经历过低音部太多的主-属调交替之后,最后的下属调收束让人顿感震惊。

主题可以被分成两个对称的部分:自然和声的 A(第 5 - 21 小节)和半音和声的 B(第 41 - 57 小节)。随着管弦乐音响的不断增强,这个主题被反复了九遍,先是以 AABB 形式出现了四次,然后被简化成 AB(音型 16 后两小节),转成 E 大调,以及结束处的 C 大调。这样,这个非同寻常的整体结构便是一个不断被反复的主题,变奏仅仅局限于和声与配器。在主题的第二部分中,众多的降 B 音(C 上方的一个减七度),给这种西

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⑤拉威尔的技法是他多年学习、不断征求演奏者意见、大量试验以及无数次排练的结果。现代乐队看似没有局限的表现手段让他着迷,而他的作品常常展现各种乐器的技术和音域的自然拓展、对各个声部旋律线质量的注重以及对新颖音色组合的寻求。看起来像是在人的能力以及写作的功效范围内,任何乐器都刻意扮演任何角色,拉威尔式的惊奇乃至矛盾在这一点上达到了登峰造极的地步。我们在这里可以略举几例。在《达夫尼斯与克洛埃》描写黎明的乐段中,木管和弦乐演奏出灵活的竖琴般的长乐句,而在《马达加斯加歌曲》中,长笛诱发小号,而钢琴又诱发锣。——原注

班牙风格添加了一点爵士乐成分,同样还有三支萨克斯管和滑管长号。这个主题最初只是以简单的方式出现,后来与和弦配成和声,大多为平行 5-3 和 6-3 进行。主题有一次出现时采用二重调性(音型 9 后两小节,旋律为 C 大调,双簧管为 G 大调),另一次出现时是三重调性(音型 8 后两小节)——这在拉威尔的作品中是很独特的现象。乐句同样需要我们仔细分析。节奏型是由小鼓、一支长笛和一支圆号奏出的。需要指出的还有相互对比的不同乐器组之间的平衡,由一支长笛和一支圆号扮演传统上由打击乐器扮演的角色这种反常做法;其他圆号——与木管和弦乐一起——常常加重小鼓的节奏型。旋律由钢片琴和一支圆号(多少有些出人意外的配对)以 C 大调奏出,由一支短笛以 E 大调奏出,再由其他短笛以 G 大调奏出。就这样,著名的 E 大调转调在一定意义上已经由 E 大调奏出的旋律做了铺垫。

鲁宾斯坦夫人对《波莱罗》的演绎为:一个灯光昏暗的西班牙咖啡馆,一位年轻的姑娘开始在一张桌子上跳起慵懒的波莱罗舞,其他演员渐渐注意到她。舞蹈者们越来越沉湎于波莱罗舞的节奏中,最后以高潮结束。评论家安德列·苏阿雷斯称《波莱罗》"类似于《骷髅之舞》",指挥了这首作品第一次录音(在作曲家的指导下)的皮埃罗·科波拉说拉威尔"最希望取得的效果正是一种永恒不变的速度所带来的这种几乎幻觉般的持续"。

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