Orientalism in Maurice Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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In this dissertation, I study the Eastern influences on the music of the French composer Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), in particular, the composer’s masterpiece, *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908). This piano composition consists of three movements, “Ondine,” “Le Gibet,” and “Scarbo,” each based on poetry by Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841). Ravel intended the work to be more difficult than a composition by the Russian composer Mily Balakirev (1837-1910) called *Islamey: Oriental Fantasy* (1869). This latter work was written after the composer visited the Caucasus. In it, he demonstrates Eastern influence through the use of Tatar melodies and Middle Eastern rhythmic patterns. Considered to be one of the most technically demanding pieces in the piano literature, this work inspired Ravel to create a composition that required even greater virtuosity from the performer.

The study of such material poses particular challenges. For one thing, the Eastern elements are presented in a complex web of pianistic virtuosity and personal interpretation.
Furthermore, the Eastern or non-Western components are not always easy to pinpoint or identify. The material appropriated may be impressionistic or stylized rather than literal or explicit. In the case of musical Impressionism, the influence of Indonesian gamelan music has been identified in the musical works of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, particularly in his *Ma mère l'oye* (*Mother Goose*). Meanwhile, numerous composers have derived folk elements from Spain, Eastern Europe, Russia, Africa, and jazz.

In my study, I pursue yet another connection, namely the influence of the Caucasus and Central Asia upon Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit*. In this case, I give particular attention to the traditional performance style of the *santur* (Iranian hammer dulcimer) and to related stylistic features, in such areas as texture, modality, and rhythm, as well as to stylistic intricacies characteristic of Ravel’s music. As a pianist, myself, I examine such features as fingering, hand distribution, dynamics, pedaling, and touch adjustments employed in piano playing. I also look into rhythmic motifs that can be related to a variety of Middle Eastern origins. By conducting this research, I hope to shed further light on the links between Western art music and world music and to gain a better understanding of the creative aspects of music making in general.
The dissertation of Sanaz Rezai is approved.

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2013
To my loving family
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I am thankful to the Carlton Lake Collection of Manuscripts at the Ransom Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, for giving me the opportunity to view the score of Gaspard de la nuit in its entirety. We in the music world are grateful for the work they do to preserve the gems of music literature. I am also grateful to the Mahoor Institute of Culture and Art Publishing Company for allowing me to use the santur musical examples of Abolhassan Saba edited by Farâmarz Pâyvar. The addition of the score greatly strengthened my dissertation.

I was fortunate to receive the assistance of Annick de Beistegui who allowed me to visit Ravel’s house “Le Belvédère” in Montfort l'Amaury, France. Thank you for giving me permission to play Ravel’s Erard piano and to take photographs of his home. It was probably the most fascinating moment of my research and a day of my life that I will never forget.

I could not have completed my studies and dissertation without the financial assistance and Teaching Assistantships from the German and Music Departments. I am especially grateful
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At the end, we are the products of our earliest mentors. In my formative years I was fortunate to study with Mrs. Jane Bastien and Mr. George Katz. Their contagious enthusiasm and devotion to piano and music in general were the inspiration that led me to be a musician.
Preface

Growing up as an Iranian in Austria, I noticed early in my childhood the distinguishing differences between Western music and the Persian classical music I was listening to at home with my family. These differences became more apparent as I began my piano studies. In my early music studies, I discovered that the style of singing typical of important Persian musicians, such as Parisa and Shajarian, differed greatly from the operatic styles of Western singers, such as Maria Callas and Luciano Pavarotti. The Persian dastgāh (melodic mode) and use of microtones were quite distinctive from the major and minor modes I learned about as I was studying works of Bach, Beethoven, and Chopin, for example.

When my father began his santur studies as an adult, I discovered the similarities between the Persian instrument and the piano. Both are hammered dulcimers that are percussive in nature, have their strings placed against a soundboard, display highly virtuosic technique, and create a similar resonance. Instead of my father’s use of the mallets against the strings to produce sound, I was using my fingers against the piano keys that struck the strings. Even the technical approaches of the santur reminded me of the Lisztian virtuosity required, for example, in playing La campanella.

As I continued my musical training at the university level, I became fascinated by the Exposition Universelle (World’s Fair) of 1889, and the exhibition’s huge impact on my favorite French composers such as Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. My interest grew stronger when I studied the topics of French Orientalism in works of Eugène Delacroix and Nasreddine Dinet, for example. Their paintings left a vivid impression on me that resonated with my own heritage.

I began to observe certain features of Orientalism when I visited museums, read novels, such as Gaston Leroux’s The Phantom of the Opera, watched movies like the Disney film
Aladdin, heard Jay-Z’s “Big Pimpin’” on the radio, and in my own piano repertoire. Even the last Franz Schubert Piano Sonata in B-flat major, D. 960, evokes some Middle Eastern traits.¹

During my undergraduate studies in piano performance, I encountered Maurice Ravel’s piano piece *Gaspard de la nuit* emanating from the practice rooms. At this moment I knew that I must play this piece one day. However, the immense difficulties of this work were immediately apparent when the practice room floors would shake as my classmate would practice this piece, especially in measure 66 of “Ondine.” I realized that I would have to wait a few more years to play this masterpiece. So instead of rushing into *Gaspard de la nuit*, I prepared myself by learning Ravel’s *Sonatine*, *Jeux d’eau*, *Ma mère l’oye*, *Le tombeau de Couperin*, and even began studying arts songs such as the *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques* and *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*. I became captivated by Ravel’s music, and that initiated my later research on the subject.

The opportunity to work on a topic of my own choice and devote several years to one of my favorite piano pieces was an unforgettable life experience. After having the chance to practice and eventually perform *Gaspard de la nuit* throughout my doctoral studies at UCLA, I also travelled to the Ransom Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin where the Carlton Lake Collection of Manuscripts at the research center permitted me to view the manuscript in its entirety. The original manuscript revealed Ravel’s beautiful handwriting, his thorough markings of articulations and dynamics, and therefore, gave me a deeper understanding of Ravel’s intricate style of compositional writing. Not only was he very clear with the utmost details of his score, but he also used a variety of colors for dynamic and articulation markings.

¹ This is evident in the first movement of the last Schubert Sonata in mm. 63, 187-191, 193-197, and 199-202.
I was also fortunate enough to visit Ravel’s home called “Le Belvédère” in Montfort l’Amaury, about 30 kilometers from Paris. Ravel lived in this home from 1921-1937. His beautiful home, in the design of a ship, has various small rooms that reflect his interest in literature, art, the Orient, and of course, music.

Throughout his home, are items from all over the world, specifically, Japan, China, Turkey, and Russia. His piano is an Erard with two pedals. I had the rare opportunity to play Gaspard de la nuit on his Erard and noticed its light and bright touch. The piano is in great condition and one can only imagine its original tone quality and touch in the 1920s.

We focus so heavily on the transcendental difficulties of Gaspard de la nuit that we forget the underlying theme—that is, the musical connection between the Occident and the Orient. I hope to deal with issues of performance practice, taking a critical look at musical editions and historical recordings, in an effort to point out these elements of musical Orientalism, and to highlight the cross-cultural links that may be of prime interest to performers, musicologists, and ethnomusicologists.
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CHAPTER I

Maurice Ravel: A Brief Biography

Maurice Ravel, also known as “Rara” to his most intimate friends, was born into a Swiss and Spanish family. His Swiss father, Joseph Ravel, an innovator in the field of engineering, invented a steam generator that was used for locomotion and a two-stroke super-charged engine. He was also an employee of Gustave Eiffel, with whom he participated in the building of the railway from Madrid to Irun. Joseph’s brother, Edouard, was a successful painter whose works were exhibited in galleries in Switzerland and France. Little is known about Ravel’s Basque mother, Marie Delouart, before her marriage to Joseph in 1874. After a year of marriage, Ravel was born on March 7, 1875 in Ciboure, a fishing village on the Spanish border of France.

Because Ravel’s parents were Catholic, Maurice Ravel was baptized as an infant. But the composer did not practice Catholicism as an adult, choosing instead to be agnostic and, in the words of Orenstein, “relying upon his inner conscience and moral sensitivity.”

In Ravel’s childhood, his mother sang Spanish songs to him at bedtime, which drew on a variety of Spanish styles, including boleros, sevillanos, guajiras, and habaneras. Ravel’s relationship with his mother was possibly his closest attachment to any other person; thus her death in 1917 understandably devastated Ravel.

Ravel was also very attached to his brother Edouard, who was born in 1878. Unlike Maurice, Edouard followed in his father’s footsteps and pursued engineering. Ravel was lucky to have experienced a loving home and, most importantly, to have had

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2 Arbie Orenstein, A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews, 17.
the support of his family to pursue music. His father would sometimes even bribe him to practice piano!

In 1875 the family moved to Paris where Ravel began his formal musical studies in piano and harmony, first with Henri Ghys at the age of seven and later, at the age of eleven, with Charles-René. Ravel composed piano pieces at an early age and, in 1889, at the age of fourteen, he began his studies at the Paris Conservatoire. He entered the piano class of Eugène Anthiome where he met the Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes (1875-1943).

Viñes was one of the most important and earliest interpreters of Ravel’s music. When they were teenagers, Viñes would come over to Ravel’s house and they would play duets together. Ravel’s mother would speak Spanish to Viñes. Despite his Spanish heritage and lack of French language skills, Viñes immersed himself in French literature; it was he who introduced Ravel to the poems of Aloysius Bertrand, which inspired Ravel’s piano piece *Gaspard de la nuit*.

The pianist and teacher Beveridge Webster (1908-1999) described Ravel as “a tiny man with an enormous head, a huge nose and an enormous intellect.” Moreover, he was often late to class and, with regard to fashion, he had very particular taste:

Indeed, Ravel’s dandyism included being up-to-date with the latest fashions in clothing. He was among the first to wear pastel-colored shirts in France, and on one occasion a young composer who came for advice was surprised to find him dressed in a white sweater, white pants, white stockings, and white shoes.

Also, Ravel’s “unusually” curved thumb might have given him more ease in the technically difficult passages in his piano writing that require an immense loose thumb technique, specifically in *Gaspard de la nuit*.

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Ibid., 13

Ibid.
Ravel mentioned often that his favorite year was 1820 (a time when the poet of *Gaspard de la nuit*, Bertrand, was still alive; also, the same year of Ravel’s Erard piano). Ravel adored his Siamese cats, which was something that he had in common with Debussy. In his later years he primarily spent time at home in “Le Belvédère,” where he displayed items he had collected from all over the world (a hobby that emerged out of his fascination of the Exposition Universelle of 1889). He was an excellent swimmer. Besides his good habits, however, he also had some bad ones. Ravel was addicted to cigarettes, in particular a strong type of tobacco called “caporal” tobacco. His addiction was such that he would leave during parts of a concert’s program just for a smoke.

Ravel’s decision to never get married is to this day a major cause of speculation about his sexuality. His anti-marriage opinions are quite obvious in this letter written to Madame Alfredo Casella in January 1919: “Morality … this is what I practice, and what I am determined to continue. Artists are not made for marriage. We are rarely normal, and our lives are even less so.” He further explains to Manuel Rosenthal:

> You see, an artist must be very careful when he wishes to marry someone, because an artist never knows to what extent he may render his companion unhappy. He is obsessed by his creative work and by the problems which it poses. He lives a little like an awakened dreamer, and that’s not amusing for a woman who lives with him. One must always consider that when one wishes to marry.

Once, at a party at Madame de Saint-Marceaux’s home, he even went so far as to say, “I prefer a lovely locomotive to a lovely woman! In fact, my only mistress is music.”

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5 Ibid., 16-17.  
6 Ibid., 17.  
so, there were rumors that he might have proposed to Hélène Jourdan-Morhange or that she might have wanted to marry him.

Besides his distant travels to America, where he gave a speech at the Rice Institute (now known as Rice University), he finally achieved his lifelong yearning to travel to his beloved Spain and also to experience his long-imagined Orient. His friend Ida Rubinstein supported his travels financially during a time when Ravel was quite ill. In March 1935, accompanied by his friend Léon Leyritz, he visited cities such as Madrid, Algeciras, Tangiers, and Marrakech.

There, he was

...enchanted by the Oriental atmosphere: the sights and sounds and vivid colours; the camels and the snake-charmers; the bright costumes and exotic fruits piled high in the bazaars; the scenery, and types who seemed to have stepped straight out of the pages of *The Arabian Nights*. He was very 'eastern-minded' at the time, and in spite of his illness was still dreaming of the ballet-opera he wanted to write—*Morgiane*, the story of Ali Baba.

Ravel’s favorite compositions were *Chansons madécasses* and *Boléro*. In an interview with Nino Frank, Ravel says,

Of everything I have composed until now, the work which satisfies me the most is probably my *Chansons madécasses*. Let me add that only once did I completely succeed in realizing my ideas: in the *Boléro*, but it is an overly facile genre…. For the most part, you see, I have still not succeeded in finding what I want: but I still have time ahead of me.

He was always a bit insecure and never fully trusted his full potential. Ravel once said,

“It’s lucky I’ve managed to write music, because I know perfectly well I should never

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8 Hélène Jourdan-Morhange (1888-1961) was a violinist and among one of Ravel’s closest friends.
9 Léon Leyritz (1888-1976) was a sculptor and interior designer who had made marble portraits of Ravel’s bust.
11 Nino Frank (1904-1988) was a writer and French film critic.
12 Orenstein, 497.
have been able to do anything else …”

This accomplished composer even felt unsatisfied about the quantity of his compositional output. Ravel told Claude Delvincourt:  

I have failed in my life … I am not one of the great composers. All the great (composers) have produced enormously. There is everything in their work: the best and the worst, but there is quantity. But I have written relatively very little … and at that, I did it with a great deal of difficulty. I did my work slowly, drop by drop. I have torn all of it out of me by pieces … and now I cannot do any more and it does not give me any pleasure.

And close to his death Ravel even told his dear friend Jourdan-Morhange, that he still had so much more to write musically but felt he had not done anything.

An unfortunate event was the taxi car accident which initiated the deterioration of his health as well as the end of his musical output. After four years of suffering, he underwent a brain operation on December 19, 1937. Alexis Roland-Manuel, an intimate friend, recalls the last days of the great composer:

I can still see Ravel, heroic to the bitter end, with a turban of white bandages, on the evening before the operation, laughing at the unsuspected likeness we thought he showed to Lawrence of Arabia. The operation left him in a state of semi-consciousness which lasted a whole week. On Monday the 27th his life drew quietly to its end and he died without suffering in the small hours of the 28th December.

Ravel’s last words were “Ah! Yes indeed!” when he was asked if he wanted to see his brother. The well-attended funeral on December 30, 1937 included important figures in Ravel’s life such as Robert Casadesus, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, and Igor Stravinsky.

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14 Claude Delvincourt (1888-1954) was a French pianist and composer.
16 Frank Onnen, *Maurice Ravel*, 52.
17 Alexis Ronald-Manuel (1891-1966) was a composer and critic. He became one of Ravel’s most important biographers.
18 Roland-Manuel, 107.
CHAPTER II
Defining Orientalism

“For the dream is more beautiful than the reality,
For the most beautiful countries are those one does not know,
And the most beautiful voyage is that made in dream.”

Tristan Klingsor

General Meaning

The term “Orientalism” is almost as broad as the term “science,” since
Orientalism encompasses a variety of nations and religions. Its definition has undergone
dramatic changes throughout its lifetime. In its most general definition, an Orientalist can
be understood as someone who studies the Orient, especially Oriental language and
writing. The people of the Orient are often referred to as the Others.

Here are selections of definitions from different sources and authors in various
academic fields. In 1900, the Larousse Dictionary defined the term Orientalism in the
following ways: “orient: Asia, seen in relation to Europe, as in voyage en orient’;
orientalism: the body of knowledge which concerns oriental peoples, their languages,
their history, their customs’; ‘orientalist: a scholar who studies oriental languages’.”

According to Zachary Lockman, Orientalism is “the scholarly study of the Orient and
Islam.” Some definitions also specified regions associated with the Orient.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the word orientalism was, according to
the Oxford English Dictionary (1971), generally used to refer to the work of the
orientalist, a scholar versed in the languages and literatures of the orient (Turkey,
Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Arabia, later also India, China and Japan, and

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19 Timothy Taylor, Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World, 94.
20 Tristan Klingsor (1874-1966) was a French poet who collaborated with Ravel and wrote the text for
Ravel’s song cycle Shéhérazade (1903).
21 Hélène Gill, The Language of French Orientalist Painting, 4.
even the whole of Asia); and in the world of the arts to identify a character, style or quality, commonly associated with the Eastern nations.23

Furthermore, other scholars emphasize the exact locations within the Middle East, as Bellman writes:

The ‘Middle East’ (or, as it is called in Europe, the ‘Near East’ or even sometimes just ‘the East’ or ‘the Orient’) can be understood narrowly, as consisting only of Turkey, Egypt, and the Arabian Peninsula (including Palestine/Israel); or broadly, as extending both westward to include the rest of Islamic North Africa (long known to Arabs as the Maghreb and to Westerners in previous centuries as the Barbary Coast) and eastward to Persia (Iran).”24

Indeed, the Orient encompasses a vast area, making Orientalism a colossal study to undertake.

It is crucial to examine the early stages and forerunners of Orientalism. Oriental studies began in 1312 in Vienna when the Church Council wanted to establish language departments for Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac in Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon, and Salamanca. Some notable Orientalist scholars were André Du Ryer (c.1580-1672), who made the first translation of the Koran; Pierre Vattier (1623-1667), who was a professor of Arabic at the College de France; and Barthélemy D’Herbelot (1625-1695), who wrote Bibliotheque orientale. Most of the writings about Orientalism were in Latin. Later in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, different organizations were established to study the languages and cultures of India, China, and Japan. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the study of Orientalism was established and became an international science. With the continuous discoveries of Oriental literature, Europeans began reading important writings of Sadi, Pilpay and Confucius, the Koran, and some Chinese philosophy books.

23 Alexander Lyon Macfie, Orientalism: A Reader, 1.
There were powerful events that contributed to Europe’s assimilation of many aspects of Oriental cultures, starting as far back as the numerous crusades initiated by the Catholic Church against Muslim territories, which had the unexpected outcome of leaving Muslim imprints on the invaders. In addition, the Moor occupation on the Iberian territory for more than seven centuries influenced profoundly the identity of that part of Europe. Other important developments furthered interest in the study of the Orient. For example, in the late eighteenth century, as mentioned earlier, Persian classical literature began to be translated. In their expeditions to Egypt, Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832) and his assistant Ippolito Rosellini (1800-1843) began to figure out a deciphering method of Egyptian hieroglyphs.25 The revelations extracted from these symbols produced great curiosity throughout the world but particularly in Paris, where some of the Egyptian relics were brought (some say looted) by Champollion and others, presently exhibited at the Louvre. Other ancient artifacts were later appropriated by museums in Florence and Berlin.

Discovery of Oriental material opened the door to Westerners who were able to borrow material or find inspiration in the writings of the East to incorporate in their own works. The borrowing from the East became an important part of scholarly work and contributed to major literary works.

However, the term changed after the Second World War (1939-1945). According to some scholars, the interest in historical background and language of the Orient gradually turned into a political means to gain power over the Orient. Alexander Macfie explains:

25 Lockman, 67.
Then, in a little more than twenty years, it came to mean not only the work of the orientalist and a character, style or quality associated with the Eastern nations, but also a corporate institution, designed for dealing with the orient, a partial view of Islam, an instrument of Western imperialism, a style of thought, based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between orient and occident, and even an ideology, justifying and accounting for the subjugation of blacks, Palestinian Arabs, women and many other supposedly deprived groups and peoples.26

This complication of the term has instigated great debates that have led to controversial political writings by leading scholars.

Edward Said (1935-2003) is one of the most important modern scholars of Orientalism. As quoted in Derek Scott’s *From the Erotic to the Demonic: On Critical Musicology*, Said believed that Paris was the capital of the study of Orientalism, certainly in the first half of the nineteenth century.27 Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) focuses primarily on the Middle East whereas many other scholars extend the Oriental studies to other regions of Eurasia, the Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Palestinian Territories, Cyprus and parts of southern Turkey) and Asia. Furthermore, Said explains that the now politically-incorrect term Oriental was developed due to the increased amount of immigration of Chinese people to Western nations. Said advanced a more political definition of the term and felt that the concepts of Orientalism was a means for the West to control, recreate, and have power over the Other. Indeed, many writers feel that Westerners altered Orientalism or displayed it in a misleading manner, using these misrepresentations to fuel their imagination and artistic output, and exploiting the Orient as “merely a pattern book from which strands can be taken to fashion whatever suits the temper of the times in the West.”28

26 Macfie, 2.
27 Derek B. Scott, *From the Erotic to the Demonic: On Critical Musicology*, 168.
Said elaborates on this notion of control, describing the West as a “‘corporate institution’ responsible for dealing with the Orient: describing it, containing it, controlling it, teaching and learning about it, making statements about it, authorizing views of it and ruling over it by these and other means.”

Similarly, Sardar defines Orientalism as a means by which Europe invented the Orient and that the Orientalists try to use this study as a means of “control and subjugation in colonialism.”

Studies of Orientalism primarily viewed the Orient as a backwards society. These studies went into deep research of the Orient’s linguistics aspect within the Islamic countries and other Asian civilizations. However, an underlying criticism is evident in Orientalism’s representation of the Orient. As Sardar explains:

It found Islamic, Chinese and Indian sciences, for example, to be not science and perpetuated the fiction that true science was created by and belonged to the West. Similarly, Islamic law was not law in any real sense; neither was Chinese medicine worthy of being referred to as medicine; and the Indian civilization had no notion of rationality—genuine reason was the sole privilege of Western civilization. On the ladder of evolution, the Orient was consistently way behind the West. Scholarly Orientalism became a highly fortified institution with its own apparatus—methods of teaching, communication network and a system for passing the ‘torch’ from teacher to student. It acquired its own style of thought and mode of analysis based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between the West and the Orient. It became a self-perpetuating and closed tradition which aggressively resisted all internal and external criticism; an authoritarian system that is flourishing as much today as it ever did in colonial times.

Through a variety of imaginary means, Oriental topics have entered Western society, where the presenters—writers, painters, and composers—exert complete control over the representation of this Oriental material. The Orient is to be found “to the east of

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29 Ibid., 68.
30 Ibid., 69.
31 Ibid., 5.
“the West,” invented through “storytelling as fact, fiction and fable.” The Orientalist has the power to choose the material that he/she wants to present even if it is out of context or even incorrect. The material is used to benefit the Orientalist whether it is to exaggerate an image in paintings, music, or literature: “Orientalism is composed of what the West wishes to know, not of what can be known. Once created the Orientalist image grew more and more entrenched as Islam continued to expand.”

Said argues that the Orientalists “create” the Orient and present its counterpart “the West,” or the “self,” as a rational, developed, humane, superior, authentic, active, creative and masculine, while the orient (the East, the ‘other’) (a sort of surrogate, underground version of the West of the ‘self’) is seen as being irrational, aberrant, backward, crude, despotic, inferior, inauthentic, passive, feminine and sexually corrupt. Other ‘orientalist’ fantasies invented by the orientalist include the concept of an ‘Arab mind’, an ‘oriental psyche’ and an ‘Islamic Society’. Together they contribute to the construction of a ‘saturating hegemonic system’, designed, consciously or unconsciously, to dominate, restructure and have authority over the orient—designed, that is to say, to promote European imperialism and colonialism.

Before further explanation of Oriental studies in various contexts, it is imperative to understand the term “exoticism” which is closely associated with Orientalism. The major difference is that exoticism encompasses a wide variety of cultures—such as Native Americans, for example—thus making it a broader term that features more regions of the world. Both terms borrow material that encapsulates an image of the Other. According to Bellman, both take musical material, for example, and use “compositional craft” to create a unique product. An exact depiction is not crucial in either Orientalism

32 Ibid., 1.
33 Ibid., 19.
34 Macfie, 4.
35 Bellman, ix.
or exoticism. It is the mere flavors that invite the imagination to envision distant lands. In these fields, there is always a balance between the known and unknown.\footnote{Ibid., xii-xiii.}

**Orientalism in the Context of Music**

Félicien David’s symphonic work *Le désert* (1844) created an enormous fan base that included even composers such as Berlioz. The traits presented in this work were the basis of many Oriental compositions that followed it. This work incorporated melodic augmented seconds, rediscovered modes and Glinka’s new whole-tone scale within his pot-pourri of melodrama, pedal points, arabesques, conventional chromatic harmony and bombastic choruses in praise of Allah, all the clichés of nineteenth-century musical exoticism would have been present.\footnote{Deborah Mawer, *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, 27.}

All these Oriental musical elements create a cliché of the Orient that is more of an exaggeration of what the East sounds like than a pure representation of the East.

Using Oriental elements in music allowed composers to extend their musical language by adding new harmonies, unique melodies, and complicated rhythmic patterns. This was a means for composers to step out of the traditional German style and especially the style of Richard Wagner (1813-1883), who dominated the nineteenth-century scene. Oriental influences helped composers come out of the monotony of the traditions established in Europe. Looking back at early Orientalism, “composers made virtually no musical distinctions among inhabitants of quite separate Eastern cultures: Turkish, Arab, Persian, Tatar, even Indian and Chinese. The eighteenth-century term *Türkenoper*—opera on any Oriental subject—is a problematic legacy of this indifference.”\footnote{Bellman, 4.} The importance
of the musical elements was to evoke something different rather than to suggest an authentic musical element from the Orient.

In Jonathan Bellman’s *The Exotic in Western Music*, Ralph P. Locke lists the criteria for labeling a work Oriental:

1) To what extent do the works reflect, or even claim to reflect, the lived reality of the Middle East? 2) Conversely, to what extent do the works construct a fantasy Middle East upon which Westerners can project their own desires and anxieties? 3) How are these various ‘reflections’ and ‘fantasy constructions’ carried out: primarily through extramusical devices (titles, programs, costumes, sets) or specifically musical ones? 4) If Oriental musical devices are present, how do these devices resemble (and differ from) those of other dialects of western musical exoticism, such as Hungarian Gypsy, Tyrolean, Native American? 5) Looping back to the first of these questions, but more concretely now: In what ways might these Oriental devices derive from (and perhaps also misrepresent) stylistic features of one or another (actual) Middle Eastern musical tradition? 39

These crucial questions will be addressed when the Oriental elements of Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit*’s are studied in greater detail in chapter six.

Other important and more specific musical devices for Orientalists included whole tones that Debussy and many other composers used frequently; varieties of modes such as Aeolian, Dorian and, in particular, Phrygian; melismas—which became the defining character of Spanish music; meters with odd numbers—as opposed to the regularity of four or eight in Western music; the repetitive rhythms as found in works such as Ravel’s *Boléro*; the exoticism of intricate irregular rhythms; bizarre harmonies and chords; finally, the use of instruments depicting unfamiliar sounds, such as the twisting, winding down sounds of the English horn, the saxophone in Ravel’s orchestration of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, or the various percussion

39 Ibid., 105.
instruments suggesting distant cultures. All these traits contributed to a feel that reflected the Western conception of distant lands. Whether it was a few of these elements or an abundant use, the piece would have an Oriental feel that had no specific nationality but rather exotic characteristics not from the West.

Early Oriental music began with the Turkish style initially heard in Vienna during the siege in 1683. According to Scott’s From the Erotic to the Demonic: On Critical Musicology, the Viennese possibly did not even remember the specifics of what they heard but what became the Turkish style was the “European imagination” and that made them feel as if they exerted power over the Turks. The power came from the Westerner’s use of the elements from the Turkish style which Scott defined as “a 2/4 march with a bass of reiterated quavers (often asserting a tonic pedal); a melody that is decorated with grace notes (often dissonant) and insists on the notes of the tonic triad but with an occasional raised fourth; and ‘crude’ harmony, such as root position triads and octave doubling of melody.”

In order to satisfy the Oriental frenzy, composers and publishers created pieces to appeal to amateur performers that were at intermediate levels. Bellman lists many of these pieces, some of which include: Félicien David’s Mélodies orientales (1836), Leopold de Meyer’s Marche marocaine (1845), Franz Huetten’s Fantaisie arabe, and Emmanuel Chabrier’s Mauresque (Moorish) (1880). Also, Bellman lists arts songs and specifically Schubert songs that contained elements that engaged the Oriental craze:

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40 Scott, 158.
41 Ibid., 158.
42 Bellman, 117.
“Geheimes,” the “Suleika” songs, “Mahomets Gesang” (1821), and “Der Gott und die Bajadere” (1815). 43

According to Bellman, some characteristics for Arab music include:

…elaborate, flexible, highly decorated instrumental and vocal improvisation upon one of dozens of maqāmāt (roughly: scale patterns, many using intervals finer or broader than those in the Western scales) and accompanied by a vast and subtle variety of accompanying rhythms … The use of simple materials was conditioned by many factors: the limitations of Western notation and Western instruments and performance traditions (both of which allowed no room for microtonal scales); the limitations of Western hearing and of the Western conception of the musical ‘work’ (e.g. improvisational layering); and, always, the underlying assumption that easily reduced to a few concrete images (the harem, impoverished Nile boatmen) and musical devices (frank repeated rhythms, a florid oboe solo, melodies stuck in a single modal rut or hovering around a single pitch). 44

Here, MacKenzie characterizes the Turkish style evident in an abundance of Occidental compositions:

Although C Major was regarded as the standard Ottoman key, ‘Turkish’ music was often represented through rapid shifts between major and minor, rapidly descending minor scales, and repeatedly reiterated patterns, both rhythmic and melodic. Thus accentuated and near-hypnotic rhythms were combined with repeated leaping thirds, plangent appoggiatura (grace-notes), and a startling chromaticism… 45

Moreover, MacKenzie states that the Ottoman musicians played in the courts of Venice (as seen in paintings) and performed as street performers and that this Islamic influence can be heard in the voice trills of Claudio Monteverdi’s (1567-1643) Vespers (1610). Even Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757), a court composer in Portugal and Spain, utilizes dance-like rhythms in his keyboard sonatas that resemble Moorish music related to the guitar and flamenco.

43 Ibid., 117.
44 Ibid., 116-117.
Without a doubt musical Orientalism had its height in France due to its geographical position and its political involvement with North Africa. Composers influenced by contact with Oriental themes were inspired to use unique instruments, melodies, harmonies, and rhythms. Also, the presence of the Orient in the national consciousness allowed them to draw on a wider range of material when creating an opera or ballet. Even the use of words invoke an Oriental setting, such as in Ravel’s *L’enfant et les sortilèges* (1925), which uses gibberish to represent the Chinese language and allows for unique timbres in the composition.

Spain is of particular interest here, not only because of Ravel’s heritage, but also because the Spanish introduced many of the Oriental instruments and musical characteristics learned from the long Moor occupation.

**Ravel’s Definition of Orientalism**

Evident in the Oriental elements presented in *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* (1925) with the exotic costumes and “Chinese” sing-song sections, one cannot escape Ravel’s vivid imagination and thirst for the exotic representation, despite the lack of authenticity. The theatrical productions provide a stronger case for his obsession with the Orient. This fixation is evident in the obsessive repetition, ostinato patterns, as well as unique modes that are meant to transport the European performer and listener to distant lands. Such techniques are abundant in *Gaspard de la nuit* and will be analyzed in greater detail in chapter six.
**Literature and Orientalism**

During the eighteenth century in Europe, a large amount of literature based on Orientalism surfaced in the public scene. Antoine Galland’s (1646-1715) *Thousand And One Nights* (1704-1717) was an important book that helped shape Europeans’ view on the Orient. A translation of it existed in 1704 in France and became immediately successful. This formed the image of the Muslim world for many Europeans.

In 1829, Victor Hugo (1802-1885) wrote *Les Orientales*, a set of poems based on the Greek War of Independence. In these writings, one can see how Orientalists viewed the Orient and, in this case, their depiction of the Turks was in a negative manner.

Another notable book with an Oriental element is Gaston Leroux’s *The Phantom of the Opera* (1909-1910) which features a character called “the Persian” who is an acquaintance of Erik, the phantom. “The Persian” is characterized as having a hat that is not even a typical hat worn by Iranians. Basically, Leroux uses one of his characters to Orientalize the story by suggesting a distant land with the use of this foreigner called “the Persian.”

**Orientalism in Artwork**

In 1873, the International Congress of Orientalists in France provided funds for artists to have the opportunity to travel to and study the Orient. The Oriental elements inspired the artworks of many painters especially in the field of Impressionism. Claude Monet (1840-1926) spent seventeen months in Chasseur’s d’Afrique in Algeria for military service. He described this artistically rewarding experience in 1900:

Nothing had attracted me so much as the endless cavalcades under the burning sun, the razzias (raids), the crackling of gunpowder, the saber thrusts, the nights in
the desert under a tent ... I succeeded, by personal insistence, in being drafted into an African regiment ... In Algeria I spent two really charming years ... In my moments of leisure I attempted to render what I saw. You cannot imagine ... how much my vision gained thereby ... The Impressions of light and color that I received there were not to classify themselves until later, but they contained the germ of my future researches.  

Other examples of painters that were influenced by Orientalism are Henri-Émile-Benoît Matisse (1869-1954) as well as Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919). They created artworks that had embellished patterns influenced by Islamic art forms that can be seen in clothing and furniture but without a focus on the location. Nasreddine Dinet (born as Alphonse-Étienne Dinet, 1861-1929) chose a more conservative route by painting his models and later, after his conversion to Islam, would often paint Arabs in prayer. Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) was influenced and inspired in such a way by the Exposition Universelle in Paris that he left his home to live in a Polynesian village. Many other artists also focused on the unique Oriental narratives and settings.

In regards to exploitation of the models used in the paintings, many artists of the French Orientalism movement used models that were either models or prostitutes or both. Since there was little employment for women of the time, it was common to be of both professions.

Some artists, such as Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863), studied poems of Lord Byron who in his *Turkish Tales* (1813) wrote about “the gratuitous violence, irrational vengeance, and cold-hearted barbarity of Turks.” These writings influenced Delacroix’s painting *La Mort de Sardanapale* (1827). Sardar describes the painting as

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47 Gill, 6-7.
48 Sardar, 46.
an Oriental despot leaning back on his lavish bed watching, rather apathetically, the destruction of his earthly possessions. All around him, his naked concubines are being stabbed and killed by three dark villains while his horse is being dragged away. The chaos and violence of the narrative is coupled with eroticism: the concubines are dying in a state of sexual ecstasy, their death is represented as an exotic spectacle, observed voyeuristically both by Sardanapalus and us.\textsuperscript{49}

It is a stereotype that focuses on a backwards society with a dictatorship, mercilessness, idleness, desire, and corruption. John MacKenzie describes the horrid aspect of the Delacroix paintings and mentions some other works that have a similar misrepresentation of Oriental life, culture, and people:

Delacroix’s \textit{Death of Sardanapalus} becomes both an indicator of the monumental indifference to human life which is the supposed characteristic of the East and an indication of the artist’s psycho-sexual neuroses in relation to contemporary attitudes to women. Gérôme’s \textit{Snake Charmer} hints at mysterious deviance. Regnault’s \textit{Summary Execution under the Moorish Kings of Granada} reflects the western construction of the irrational violence of the East.\textsuperscript{50}

Artists of the time had full control over the distortion of the Orient with these explicit paintings that shaped the views of the Westerners towards the Others.

Prior to the 1920s, most of the artwork did not go against the colonial order and the political activities of the time. Mohammed Racim’s (1896-1975) artwork, however, revealed a subtle anti-colonialism in his paintings, depicting the people of Algeria in a prosperous manner and focusing on landscapes prior to French modernization.\textsuperscript{51}

To summarize Orientalism in the art medium, the Orient gives artists inspiration to evoke Eastern and Middle Eastern distant lands, and also allows power to the artists to represent these regions in their own style based on travel, literature, and imagination.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} MacKenzie, 46.
\textsuperscript{51} Benjamin, 79.
Although Orientalism themes were at their height in the late nineteenth century to early twentieth century, they are still evident in the art and music of today.

**Travels**

Traveling was an important factor in the development of an “understanding” or even the development of stereotypes of the Orient. Often times, travelers would publish accounts of their journeys for European audiences:

Many of these accounts were highly fanciful and emphasized what their authors (very few of whom actually knew the language of the people among whom they traveled) depicted as the strange and bizarre customs and beliefs of Muslims. Other travelers were so preoccupied with their own narrow interests, for example visiting the places in Palestine where the events described in the Christian Gospels were believed to have taken place almost two thousand years earlier, that they paid very little attention to the people who were currently living in those places, or perceived them only as part of the picturesque background.\(^52\)

One particularly important travelogue is that of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), the wife of Britain’s ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. She studied Turkish, developed friendships with men and women of the Ottoman Empire, and later published her observations.\(^53\) Her letters offered her positive interactions and hopefully, to some extent, helped improve the relationship between the Occident and the Orient of the time.

**The Exotic Woman: Stereotypes and “Ondine”**

Since “Ondine” deals with a woman who is rejected by a mortal man, several female opera characters come to mind. Two operatic examples illustrate the Orient with

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\(^{52}\) Lockman, 64.

\(^{53}\) Ibid.
its staging, clothing, text, and, most importantly, musical material. *Carmen* (1875) by George Bizet (1838-1875) demonstrates an exotic subject matter, Carmen, a seductive woman whose mysterious characteristics are emphasized and exaggerated with the use of Oriental musical elements.\(^{54}\) In *Madame Butterfly* (1904) by Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924), the subservient Madame Butterfly is tamed by her husband. Carmen is murdered whereas Madame Butterfly stabs herself to death. In *Carmen*, exotic extravagance is exaggerated; in *Madame Butterfly*, it is submissiveness. They are both depicted as wild in their passions which leads them both to death. Many feminist critics have drawn attention to the stereotypes of women in society through the works of composers:

Catherine Clément and Susan McClary point out, many of the greatest operatic heroines remain foreign objects of sexual magnetism whose very Otherness and capacity to inspire obsessive love leads to tragedy and death. And as any modern moviegoer knows, the tonal languages of exoticism and magnetic femininity are strikingly similar, relying on chromatic harmony, pulsating and often syncopated rhythms, irregular metrical accents, a deemphasis of the violin family, and sometimes scales or melodic patterns blatantly borrowed from specific foreign cultures...\(^{55}\)

In “Ondine,” it is interesting to hear how the repeated figure and the melodic line in the upper register possibly represent the singing voice of the mermaid. The irregular rhythmic patterns can suggest a typical stereotype of the female gender—instability. Also, the shrieking, falling thirds in the upper register symbolize Ondine’s agony and neurosis, which Freud diagnosed often in his female patients. The curvature of her body type is clearly seen visually in the score and also heard. These arabesque figures symbolize Ondine’s sensuality and her seductive character. All these clichés of a woman, or in this case, mermaid, depict the paradigm of the female Oriental traits.

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\(^{54}\) Susan McClary, *George Bizet: Carmen*, 18.

\(^{55}\) Bellman, 26-27.
CHAPTER III
Influences on Ravel’s Music

Two important factors influenced Ravel’s passion for the Orient: location and timing. Based on Ravel’s geographical environment, the composer was in the perfect setting to soak up all the Orientalism offered by his city. Undoubtedly, Paris was the center of Orientalism in Western Europe. The French capital presented opportunities for composers to receive impressions of the Other’s music. The Exposition Universelle of 1889 provided Ravel with the most important opportunity to enrich his musical foreign language, which will be discussed later in my dissertation. The late nineteenth century inspired the changing of interests of French composers. The Parisian musical atmosphere of the time influenced Ravel and his contemporaries to avoid and to fight against the conventional Germanic artistic approaches. French composers revered Wagner but because of his strong nationalistic statements, such as calling German music the only true music, many French composers rebelled and found inspiration in other countries’ music. Ravel and his contemporaries began to enjoy the Other’s musical elements and to use them abundantly. Paris became a melting pot of international music and composers chose various methods to convey these enchanting Oriental musical elements. Myers describes Ravel’s compositional style:

He was, in fact, a great musical traveler and polyglot, equally at home in the East, from Damascus to Pekin (cf. *Asie* in *Shéhérazade*, or the *Chansons Hébraïques*); in the South (*Chansons Madécasses*); in the steppes of Central Europe (*Tzigane*); and in Spain (*Rapsodie Espagnole*, *Pavane*, *Alborada*, *Habanera*, *L’Heure Espagnole*, *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*). But in every case, be it noted, he drew his inspiration from the copy rather than from the original; his Orient is the Orient of the *Arabian Nights*, his Spain the Spain of the nineteenth-century romantics (…); his Madagascar a re-creation of the impression of an eighteenth-century French
Ravel avoids copying folk tunes in his compositions. Unlike Bartók’s and Kodály’s ethnomusicological approaches and quest for originality, Ravel took an impression from an authentic ethnic music and created an atmosphere through his own compositional style.

Ravel was not a folklorist. The ethnological and scholarly sides of music left him utterly cold, although in the province of composition technique he advanced with scholarly exactness. Nor did he ever, like Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, or Leoš Janáček, travel far afield with notebook in hand in order to observe the peasants and get in writing old melodies in their unadulterated form … But he had a sixth sense, a clear, undistorted vision of the character of certain old folk songs and dances. And he sought these out with the equipment of modern knowledge of sound and rhythm, thus bringing folk music closer to its archetypal forms than the most painstaking scholarly reconstruction ever possibly could … It is precisely through this artistically instinctive leaning toward folkloristic forms that the constant attraction of cultures geographically remote became clear to him … Ravel also remained faithful to his basic principle that one should not ‘revise’ folk songs or alter their melodic substance …  

Clearly Ravel followed his musical intuition without placing importance on research of the authentic material. His emphasis in Oriental writing was not clearly abstracted from a specific region in the world but rather focused on a stereotype of Oriental music.

Ravel’s home offers an important insight on his love of artifacts from all over the world. This collection and hobby had its origins in the Exposition Universelle of 1889. His house, called “Le Belvédère” on 5 rue Maurice-Ravel in Montfort l’Amaury, is now a national museum that displays and proves the love he had for other cultures, specifically Oriental ones. In my visit to Ravel’s house, I saw many Japanese prints, handcrafted miniatures from different parts of the world, a coffee set of Arab origin, Chinese vases

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with intricate designs, as well as a Japanese garden.\textsuperscript{58} Even his collection of scores further supports his interest in other cultures: “Despite a large collection of scores from Bach to Schoenberg, there are relatively few books about music. Of particular interest are collections of Basque music, Spanish dances, folk melodies from around the world, Negro spirituals, and French operettas…”\textsuperscript{59} Not only were there authentic items from many different countries, but also replica imitation paintings hung throughout his home. Myers makes an interesting analogy between his love for the music of the Other and his love for fake stuff that included artwork copies: “This passion for the inauthentic found further expression in his collection of ‘fake’ works of art and \textit{objets d’art} with which he surrounded himself in his house and took pleasure in showing to mystified visitors.”\textsuperscript{60}

\textbf{Exposition Universelle of 1889}

The Exposition Universelle of 1889 lasted from May 6 to November 6. At the age of fourteen, Ravel walked for two miles to get to the Fourth Paris International Exhibition, located in colorful pavilions on the Champ de Mars below the Eiffel Tower. He and his friend Viñes were fascinated by the exotic melodies and entertainment offered on the streets of Paris.

The musical offerings came from countries such as America, Spain, Belgium, Norway, Morocco, and Egypt. The sideshows included the Esplanade des Invalides […] from the East, bringing previously unfamiliar offerings and spectacles. There were Balinese \textit{gamelan} orchestras, Anannite dancers, Hungarian Tziganes bands and several others, all of which profoundly influenced and enchanted those who saw and heard them. In addition there was

\textsuperscript{58} See Figures 6-25 in Appendix B.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{60} Myers, 107.
the Russian contingent, at that time hardly more familiar, especially the two Concerts Colonne conducted by Rimsky-Korsakov in programmes of Russian music which proved no less an eye-opener to contemporary French musicians.  

Rimsky-Korsakov conducted his own works. Audiences heard non-Western scales and instrumentations through the gamelan orchestras. Also, groups from Sudan, Serbia, and Romania presented their works. Specifically built for the event, the Eiffel Tower impressed the viewers and also presented a political message: “The exposition meant to show that although Europe was embroiled in an arms race, science was not only for destruction, and war ‘not the highest purpose of human society.’”  

Ravel and his friend Viñes walked down the streets of Paris and saw breathtaking entertainment: “… the Esplanade des Invalides, natives from a so-called Aissaova tribe, entertained passersby by sticking their hands into flames, and piercing their tongues, eyes sockets, and abdomens with spikes.” Also, Ravel and his contemporaries heard “the exoticized Spain of Rimsky-Korsakov and the direct import: Gypsy musicians from Granada performing flamenco music and dance … Even Falla would have to travel to Paris to learn from them how to fashion a musical Spain so deep with memories—so rich in history—before he could return to Spain to figure out how to de-exoticize it.”

For the first time Parisian musicians experienced the unique visuals, sounds, and smells that influenced them deeply. During the cross-cultural event, the unique modes, instruments, and exotic performances attracted Parisian musicians. This event served as a revelation to Parisian musicians and fostered a fascination with the Orient that would last throughout their lives.

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61 Burnett James, *Ravel, His Life and Times*, 16.
62 Ivry, 11.
63 Ibid.
64 Bellman, 172.
Chanson madécasses

Before engaging in a thorough study of Gaspard de la nuit and its Oriental influences, another work of Ravel that was influenced by ethnic fascination will be studied.

Ravel composes his highly politically charged composition, Chanson madécasses, during French and Moroccan political struggles. The work for voice, flute, cello, and piano has verbal statements shouting to beware of “white” people that take back promises and expresses the oppression of the natives. These oppressions expressed in the piece refer to the priests that want to convert the natives and to make them believe in a God unfamiliar to them. The work displays pagan beliefs and the need for freedom. At the premiere, some audience members walked out of the theater, complaining that such music should not be performed when France is involved in a colonial feud in Morocco.

Spanish Orientalism

Ravel’s mother’s heritage inevitably allowed him to work with the Spanish style familiar to him since childhood and therefore, his musical modes display Spanish musical influences. For example, his often-favored Dorian mode is typical of Basque music. In his Rapsodie Espagnole, the Phrygian mode dominates to create the typical Spanish habanera style that is derived from the Andalucía region. “In the ‘Alborada del gracioso’ part of the solo piano suite Miroirs (1905) he made his contribution to the genre of guitar-inspired piano music.”65 Also, Pavane pour une Infante défunte of 1898 is a work evoking the Spanish court of the Golden Age, the Spain of Velazquez and the young princesses who endlessly sat—or rather, stood—for him to paint … The

65 Ibid., 184.
real exoticism here is of time rather than place; the border Ravel is crossing is 1789, not the Pyrenees. The title he dreamed up for the piece speaks of vanished worlds: if the Spanish setting belonged to a part of his family history irrecoverable except through his mother’s lullabies, the specific music that he chose to evoke here belonged to the court life that had vanished from Spain, as from Europe generally. And the Pavane is exotic in sound only insofar as, through its stiff courtly rhythms, it palpably trembles with nostalgia.  

Ravel’s Spanish exoticism continues even to his last work. The three songs *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* (1933) use rhythms of Spanish folksong genre: the ‘Chanson Romanesque’ has the alternating 6/8 and 3/4 of the *guajira*, the ‘Chanson épicque’ the 5/4 of the Basque *zortzico*, and the ‘Chanson à boire’ the cross-rhythm of the *jota*.  

An abundance of correspondence supports Ravel’s Spanish influence.  

In an article from *L’Intransigeant*, written on May 17, 1911, he says:  

You should also understand that I did my utmost to make my work express Spain, and that the numerous rhythms of the jota, habanera, and the malagueña will underpin my musical phrases. Moreover, I have the greatest admiration for Spanish music, and was cradled in my youth by habaneras which I have never forgotten. The very meticulous décor presents a clockmaker’s shop in Toledo, and the costumes are copies of models by Goya.  

On a trip to Spain, Ravel comments on his family’s ethnic influence. This article comes from *ABC de Madrid*, on May 1, 1924:  

… this is my first time in Spain. In fact, I’m being rather ungrateful, since without Madrid I probably wouldn’t exist. My parents met in Madrid. My father was a railroad engineer of French nationality, and my mother was a Basque from Saint-Jean-de-Luz, but probably of Spanish origin … Perhaps it’s because of this link that I feel so attracted to Spain and its music.  

Also, Viñes had an incredible influence on Ravel’s connection to Spain, particularly his desire for Spanish writing. Their mothers would speak Spanish to one
another. Viñes even introduced him to Manuel de Falla in 1907 and read through a great deal of piano duo literature that included music from Spain to Russia.

**Russian Orientalism**

The Exposition Universelle offered Ravel an overview of the Russian repertoire that eventually became dear to him and influenced his writing. At the Exposition Universelle, he heard the music from the “mighty handful,” which were Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov. Not only did Rimsky-Korsakov conduct his own works, but also performances at the Trocadéro in June offered works of Glinka, Glazunov and Tchaikovsky. This involved both orchestral and piano works. At the Trocadéro, the programs included the overture to Glinka’s *Ruslan and Ludmilla* (1842) as well as *Lyadov Novelette* (1889). On June 22, Rimsky’s symphony *Antar* (1861; revised 1875, 1891) was also performed. Viñes and Ravel heard this repertoire, played piano duet versions of these works, and would comment that the pieces were “superbly Oriental” and “a marvel of colors,” according to Viñes.70 These beloved works that we admire today had a rather indifferent reception by the audiences and critics of the time. “The critics’ response to the Russian concerts was, at best, lukewarm.”71

This Russian melancholic character conveyed through Slavic melodies, modes, rhythms, and harmonies gave Ravel tools to construct an impression of Russian music. Russian composers had further influence from their neighboring countries. With this stimulus of other countries’ style of music, Russian composers filtered it into their own

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71 Ibid.
musical language. Ravel further took their exotic elements and incorporated them in his compositions.

Richard Taruskin makes an interesting statement about what Russian music really is. Because of Russia’s location, many surrounding nations influence Russian music. Taruskin explains the difficulty of deciphering the Russian music from the surrounding Oriental countries. Russian music produces a fusion of the West and the East.

...there is an ultimate confusion as to what is self and what is other, since Russia, posed between the unambiguously Western and the unambiguously Eastern, viewing both, and viewed by both, as other, could never locate or define its self unambiguously with respect to either. …What is ‘authentic’ and what is ‘representative,’ in a fashion paralleling the patriotic and the nationalistic, do not necessarily converge. What is ‘Russian’—hence, too, what is ‘Western’ and what is ‘Eastern’—can be more reliably gauged on the basis of reception than on the basis of provenance or original intent. 72

Russian music served as a means to avoid the influence of nationalistic German composers like Wagner, who in the late nineteenth century “reigned” as the superior of all composers. It was a powerful alternative for the French composers’ society who felt disrespected by Wagner’s strong remarks about his own superiority in the field of music.

It would be difficult to exaggerate [Ravel’s] admiration for the Russian school, particularly for Borodin, Mussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov; while fully aware of the deficiencies found in some of their music, their straightforward spontaneity, orchestral color, exoticism, and modality were seen as a fresh direction worthy of imitation, particularly as it offered a strong antidote to Wagnerian influence. 73

This powerful “antidote” produced unique harmonies, melodies, and rhythms that were unknown to French audiences. To our present ears, the sounds of the Orient are no longer foreign. To the audiences of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was a new timbre that was immediately classified as exotic compared to their musical knowledge.

72 Richard Taruskin, Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays, 105.
73 Orenstein, 20.
Ravel wrote two works with the title *Shéhérazade*. In old Persian the title means “a female name meaning of noble lineage,” while in modern Persian it means “born in the city.” Both works are inspired by the protagonist of *One Thousand and One Nights*. The initial piece titled *Shéhérazade, ouverture de féerie* (1898) was never published or completed. It was intended as an orchestral piece and the overture to an opera. The libretto for the opera had sketches based on Galland’s translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*. The other *Shéhérazade* (1903) is a song cycle for either a soprano or tenor accompanied by orchestra. There are three poems by Tristan Klingsor: *Asie, La flûte enchantée*, and *L’indifférent*. Klingsor’s influence comes from the translations of *A Thousand and One Nights* by J.C. Mardrus (1868-1949). Without a doubt, Ravel’s *Shéhérazade* was deeply influenced by Russian compositional writing. He clearly states: “My unfinished, unpublished opera *Shéhérazade* dates from this period; it was rather strongly influenced by Russian music.”

Ravel also continues and remarks that the power of his influence extended from his childhood: “*Shéhérazade*, in which Debussy’s influence, at least spiritual, is rather evident, dates from 1903. Once again, I succumbed to the profound fascination which the Orient has exerted upon me since childhood.” The musical elements used in the work to evoke the Orient are augmented seconds and the use of the oboe, “an instrument that composers could use to approximate the sound of a sunray (or zurna), a double-reed instrument of western and central Asia, uses a symmetrical hexatonic scale.” One should reflect back to Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Shéhérazade* when studying Ravel’s work. Many of his musical gestures are derived from

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74 Ibid., 30.
75 Ibid.
this Russian influence. “The cadences in the Prelude to Night and the weeping strokes on the harp in the Feria from the *Rhapsodie espagnole* are certainly linked to Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Shéhérazade* and it is hard to say why, from the very beginning of *Asie*, the melody for the right hand makes one think irresistibly of Antar and its fragile ‘Arab melody.’”

However, the critics were just as lukewarm about Ravel’s “Russian” music as they were about the authentic Russian music performed at the Exposition Universelle. In a *Le Temps* article, after hearing the overture of *Shéhérazade* at a performance at a Société Nationale concert, on May 27, 1899, the critic Pierre Lalo, commented on the “‘incoherence in the general plan and in the tonal relationships carried in excess,’ and compared ‘the structural approach’ to that of Grieg or Rimsky-Korsakov. With this verdict Ravel himself concurred in after years, adding that the Overture was so full of whole-tone scales that he had had ‘enough of them for a lifetime.’”

Ravel’s orchestration reflects his yearning for exotic timbres. He followed orchestration books of Berlioz and Rimsky-Korsakov, whose treatises helped him create the Oriental effects he wanted. For example, certain instruments would give him the effect he needed to evoke an atmosphere of the Orient. “The E-flat saxophone will somehow conjure up an old castle in Ravel’s orchestration of Mussorgsky’s *Picture at an Exhibition*, while in *Ma mère l’oye*, a melodic passage is given to the weak bass register of the celesta … while in the *Chansons madécasses*, the flute evokes a trumpet, and the

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77 Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Ravel*, 16-17.
78 Myers, 22-23.
piano a gong.” Through his orchestration, one can hear the mastery of Ravel’s accurate usage of instruments to convey the effect that recreates the Orient.

**Asian Orientalism**

Without a doubt, Ravel stated boldly his respect and admiration for the music of Indonesia and the highly influential Javanese gamelan. This is a trait both Debussy and Ravel shared. The four-hand piano piece *Ma mère l’oye* (1910) that he wrote right after *Gaspard de la nuit*, contains some of these elements. He might possibly have heard such musical elements at the Paris Conservatoire in 1887 when Indonesian musicians brought a set of Javanese gamelans, but a definite exposure was at the Exposition Universelle. There are two modes of the Indonesian music: *slendro* and *pelog*. Each set of gamelan instruments has a different temperament based on the region. The tuning varies from each set and because there are two of each instrument tuned in either *pelog* or *slendro*, the performer can switch into the two different modes. Considering the intricate details to the tuning system, one cannot imagine the same possibilities on a modern-day piano.

Therefore, composers such as Ravel and Debussy took an impression of the Indonesian timbres of the gamelan and applied it to their compositions. Ravel spoke of his Indonesian music influence: “I consider Javanese music the most sophisticated music of the Far East, and I frequently derive themes from it: ‘Laideronnette’ from *Ma Mère L’Oye*, with the tolling of its temple bells, was derived from Java both harmonically and

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The author Stephen Zank emphasizes the artificiality of the Indonesian gamelan replica on the piano:

The bizarre tolling of temple bells in the middle section of ‘Lai deronnette’ provided a modicum of vertical orientation for the works’ modest melodic strata, as the ‘longitude’ of the musically ‘Bizarre,’ anchored in fin de siècle interpretations of the Orient, was extended artificially—in the constructive, French understanding of artificial—to (in this case) an imagined South Pacific. Likely purloined from the pavilions of the great Paris World Exhibitions, Ravel’s treatments are gracefully plundered reverberations of the ubiquitous, Oriental soundscapes and aural arabesques of his times.

Ravel was never a South Pacific composer. Moreover, again, he was not interested in replicating with authenticity. His roots come from France but his visions extended beyond his native land to countries he had never visited but only imagined.

**Ravel and Islamey**

In order to understand *Gaspard de la nuit*, we must first understand the important Oriental influence of a piece by the Russian composer Mily Balakirev (1837-1910) called *Islamey: Oriental Fantasy* (1869). My goal here is to show the connection between the two works. *Islamey* influenced not only Ravel’s technique but also the Oriental content of his music.

*Islamey* is also considered to be one of the most technically demanding pieces in the piano literature. From Ravel’s own words we know that he was influenced by Balakirev’s Oriental fantasy *Islamey* “which was generally thought to be the ultimate in keyboard virtuosity. Nevertheless, he informed Maurice Delage that *Gaspard de la nuit*
would be even more difficult to play, which in fact it is.\textsuperscript{83} Ravel’s intention was to make \textit{Gaspard de la nuit} demand even greater transcendental difficulty from the performer. Both \textit{Gaspard de la nuit} and \textit{Islamey} are often related to the difficulty of Liszt’s piano music, and both pieces extend the pianist’s technical abilities.

Another similarity between the pieces is the fact that there are three sections to both \textit{Islamey} and \textit{Gaspard de la nuit}: fast, then slow, and ending with a very fast tempo. \textit{Islamey}’s tempo markings are \textit{Allegro agitato}, \textit{Tranquillo – Andantino espressivo}, and \textit{Allegro vivo – Presto furioso}.

While Balakirev’s Oriental impression is taken directly from Oriental sources, Ravel takes a pure impression of the Orient without any specifics of sources. In contrast, Balakirev quotes a folk tune. \textit{Islamey} was written after Balakirev’s travels to the Caucasus. He demonstrates Eastern influence with the use of Tatar melodies and Middle Eastern rhythmical patterns. During his visit in the Caucasus, he met a Circassian prince, who played the folk tune called “Islamey” on an instrument similar to a violin. The dance-tune influenced Balakirev to write the piece for the piano. The second theme of the work comes from a well-known Crimean Tatar tune introduced to him by an Armenian actor.

To be even more specific about Balakirev’s use of Oriental elements, there is a direct quotation taken from the music of the Orient. Taruskin describes the relationship:

‘Georgian song’ ... It has Eastern export written all over it. The melody is full of close little ornaments and melismas with telltale augmented seconds ... It is easy to find authentic recorded prototypes for this setting, much as we can imagine Balakirev, who spent a good deal of time in the Caucasus, encountering them in situ. Folkways FE 4545 (‘Folk Music of the USSR’ compiled by Henry Cowell)

\textsuperscript{83} Orenstein, 347.
has two conveniently consecutive cuts, the first of which exemplifies the melodic style, the second the oriental orchestra with its characteristic drum patterns.\footnote{Taruskin, 156.}

Even though they are labeled as Georgian songs, Taruskin makes an important point that the origins differ. “The interesting thing is that these ‘prototypes’ are Armenian, with strong Turkish and Persian influences, not Georgian. Georgian folk music does not sound anything like them, or like Balakirev’s ‘Georgian Song,’ and obviously Balakirev knew that perfectly well.”\footnote{Ibid., 156, 158.}

*Islamey* influenced and fascinated not just Ravel but also some of Ravel’s favorite composers. For example, both Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Shéhérazade* and Borodin’s *Prince Igor* have material quoted from *Islamey*.

**Ravel’s Travels**

Ravel’s love of traveling and specifically his need to see the Orient partly explains the Orientalism of his compositions. It had been a dream of his to see Spain and Morocco since the Exposition Universelle he attended as a child. In February 1935, Leyritz and Ravel began their journey through Spain and North Africa. Throughout the trip, Ravel attended many ceremonies honoring him. Leyritz wrote a letter to Madame Maurice Delage on March 6, 1935 from Morocco describing the atmosphere of these ceremonies:

> We drove four hours high up in the mountains (2,000-2,400 meters) to find a young and charming prince in an enchanting palace, who displayed all of the pageantry at his command and presented a magnificent spectacle of dance and music which fascinated Maître Ravel—thirty tambourines with their deep, vibrant
sound, accompanying one hundred female dancers dressed in festive costumes laden with jewels and embroidery—it was very beautiful.  

This trip gave Ravel the opportunity to become familiar with Arab music, hearing microtonal intervals, local scales, and ethnic instruments. Ravel hoped to include it in his own music, but unfortunately, due to his declining health, he was unable to fulfill these aspirations. He had wished to write a ballet-opera called *Morgiane* that involved the character Ali Baba. His illness never allowed him to have a full-blown Oriental work in his repertoire.

**Arab Influence**

As with his other foreign influences, rather than taking original Arab themes, Ravel chose to use an impression of the exotic. He even commented on his own lack of authenticity after being surrounded by Arab music during his travels to Morocco: “If I do anything Arabian, it will be much more Arabian than all that …”  

This quotation suggests both that he was impressed by Arab music and that he wanted his compositions to integrate “Arab” themes in a more well-defined manner. His exaggeration of such themes allowed him to project the exoticism more strongly to his audience. If one cannot travel to these distant lands, one must recreate these images in an even more magnified manner.

Even Ravel admits the ambiguity of the Oriental sources he incorporated in his large-scale works such as *Boléro*:

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

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86 Orenstein, 323.
87 Norman Demuth, *Ravel*, 44.
tissue without music’—of one long, very gradual crescendo. There are no contrasts, and there is practically no invention except in the plan and the manner of execution. The themes are altogether impersonal … folk tunes of the usual Spanish-Arabian kind.\(^88\)

Zank speaks of a “willful innocence” that even “Ravel’s world” followed.\(^89\) This innocence has to do with the ignorance of the authentic depiction of the Orient. Klingsor speaks about his own “willful innocence”:

> While the Symbolists sought to achieve a transformation of their sentiments under the guise of ancient legends, I strove to affect mine by placing them behind a veil of Persia. An imagined Persia, I confess. A single, well-chosen word, with a pleasing resonance, with a touch of color, is sufficient. Never did I trouble to consult a single source. I’m not sure I ever glanced through an anthology. Nor even a map. It wasn’t until later that I read Hafiz and Ommar Khayam.\(^90\)

Through this filtering of original material, Ravel received a second-hand account of the Orient from his circle of friends such as “Les Apaches.” This group of avant-garde writers, musicians, and artists began to meet around 1900 every Saturday. They supported each other’s art as well as that of their contemporaries. Some of the members included Edouard Benedictus, M.D. Calvocoressi, Maurice Delage, Tristan Klingsor, Paul Sordes, Ricardo Viñes, Manuel de Falla, Gabriel Fauré, Igor Stravinsky, and Ralph Vaughan-Williams.

Ravel did have opportunities to study the music of the Arab world, which he turned down. He was asked to write incidental music for an Oriental drama called *Hassan* by James Elroy Flecker (1884-1915). However, Ravel’s illness possibly did not allow him to complete this task and instead Frederick Delius composed the work.

\(^{88}\) Zank, 219.  
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 185.  
\(^{90}\) Ibid.
Ravel’s absence of differentiation between cultures, however, allows for an artist to reach a pseudo-perfection of the art of other nations:

This music which for forty years took us from Palestine to Madagascar and from Persia to Spain resembles a fine cruise full of wonderful adventures and delightful encounters. Ravel’s ‘exoticism’ in fact is explained not by a feeling for picturesque colonial scenes or the cult of folklore, and not by a feeling akin to Gauguin’s search for lost innocence, but by the extreme mobility of an intelligence capable of assuming any role and of entering into any character. Roland-Manuel describes it as an exoticism without local colour. Ravel can be more Spanish than Manuel de Falla: when he speaks Hebrew he is as Jewish as Darius Milhaud and when he enters the Gypsy caravans he can be as Bohemian as Liszt.91

Perhaps if his deteriorating health had not limited his artistic output, especially after his travels in the 1930s, Ravel could have written *Morgiane* and worked with more distinct Middle Eastern melodies and rhythmical patterns. At this point in his life, however, he was unable to write or even sign his own name.

Ravel is not a pioneer in the Middle Eastern style of writing. It is imperative to note how influential exotic music was on European society. A significant marker in musical Orientalism occurs in 1844, when Félicien David wrote “Ode symphonie” from *Le désert*. In 1889, Julien Tiersot92 marks it as a turning point:

With Félicien David the use of folk melody [*mélodie populaire*] became systematic. We remember the impression of surprise, then enchantment from the first hearing of *Le désert*: it seemed as if this music, so novel in character for its time, transported its French audience into an unknown world, not only full of seductions and charms, but above all a vibrant, living world. How was this achieved? By the direct use of Oriental folk melodies, by the imitation of their rhythms, their shapes, the sonorities of their instruments; everything having been so thoroughly assimilated by the musician (without betraying original qualities) he created a completely personal art. From the point of view of musical color obtained with the help of *mélodies populaires*, *Le désert* marks a date.93

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91 Jankélévitch, 122.
92 Julien Tiersot (1857-1936) was a prominent French musicologist and ethnomusicologist.
93 Zank, 183.
Zank includes a great deal of other exotically inspired music with Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) as an example of someone who traveled throughout North Africa and other parts of the Orient. He concludes that these compositions, which were presented at the Paris Opera and Exposition Universelle, greatly influenced Debussy and Ravel. However, all this came with a price:

It is, nonetheless, an unfortunate—and dark—irony that the roots of such stylistic richness were sustained by a great deal of blood and incalculable human suffering. Relentless in conception, catastrophic in execution, European appropriations of the Exotic served many and diverse ends throughout the hundred or so years leading up to the spectacular Paris exhibitions of 1889 and 1899, then those of 1931 and 1937. As Edward Said has observed (reaching back to Schlegel and Novalis), whatever the disasters of Europe past or present, the lands and cultures regeneration, a ‘plundering,’ then, to be sure, of materials beyond bauxite, rubber, spices, and the like.\(^94\)

Furthermore, by depicting the Orient in conventional ways, Ravel conforms to the clichés of Orientalism.

It would be erroneous and inelegant to cast Ravel in the role of ‘politically progressive’ composer. His aspirations discussed earlier about writing a Jeanne d’Arc as late as 1933 correspond rather fully with the ardent petition comprising the final words of Tiersot’s above-quoted tone on the \textit{chanson populaire} (in fact, with Tiersot’s final word—‘race’), and even before the outbreak of the 1914-1918 War, we can detect in Roland-Manuel’s praise of Ravel some traces of Said’s cultural ‘work’ at play: ‘Through the artifices of our magician, the Orient of our dreams is objectified, devoid of any unseemly effects, through a kind of nostalgic reverie of bewitching charm.’ When describing a projected ballet-spectacle based on the stories of Ali-Baba, Ravel did not hesitate to invoke the tired, conventional shorthand for the Orient: ‘It will be exceptional: there will be blood, sensuousness, and death … I’m going to write some Massenet!’\(^95\)

Of course, these misrepresentations continue to this day. Even with the ethnomusicological approaches that accurately depict the music of indigenous groups,

\(^{94}\) Ibid., 184.
\(^{95}\) Ibid., 219.
error and lack of representation occur. In a comment on selling folk music, Steven Feld\textsuperscript{96} says,

The primary circulation of small-scale, low-budget, and largely nonprofit ethnomusicological records is now directly linked to a secondary circulation of several million dollars’ worth of contemporary record sales, copyrights, royalties and ownership claims, many of them held by the largest music entertainment conglomerates in the world. Hardly any of this money circulation returns to or benefits the originators of the cultural and intellectual property in question. It is this basic inequity, coupled with the reproduction of negative caricature, that creates the current ethnomusicological reality: discourses on world music are inseparable from discourse on indigeneity and domination.\textsuperscript{97}

With regard to an analysis of how Ravel’s music for example, evokes Persia, it can be heard through the piece \textit{Shéhérazade} (1903) that has the alternating of minor and augmented seconds. In Zank’s analysis: “Persia is invoked in the third episode, with a quicker tempo, touch of cymbals and basque drums, dissonant and pointed motives in the winds, and some fragments of stock Oriental themes (again in B minor, as in Ravel’s first \textit{Shéhérazade}).”\textsuperscript{98} What is more, the piece depicts Oriental violence: “The eleventh bounces furtively about the lower regions of strings and voice alike, romanticizing imagined Oriental violence, swelling persuasively several times over in seven broad measures.”\textsuperscript{99} Narrow intervals are crucial to the replication of microtones that is impossible on the modern-day Western instruments, especially the piano. Therefore, in the opening of “Ondine,” Ravel tries to replicate this nostalgia for the Orient at its best.

\textsuperscript{96} Steven Feld (b.1949) is a prominent ethnomusicologist, anthropologist, and linguist.
\textsuperscript{97} Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, \textit{Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music}, 44.
\textsuperscript{98} Zank, 189.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 191-192.
Western Influence on Ravel

Though my paper will primarily focus on the influence of Middle Eastern music on Ravel, I will also examine the influences from the Occident, for his music is jointly the fusion of both East and West.

Ravel’s favorite composer was Mozart. He adored the perfection Mozart portrayed in his music. He also admired Chabrier, Satie, and Saint-Saëns. Ravel himself states:

For Debussy the musician and the man I have had profound admiration, but by nature I am different from him. Although he may not be quite a stranger from my own personal heritage, I would at the first stage of my own evolution come nearer to Gabriel Fauré, Emmanuel Chabrier and Erik Satie. The aesthetic of Edgar Allan Poe, your great American, has been of singular importance to me, as also has the poetry of Mallarmé—illimitable visions but of precise design enclosed a mystery of somber abstractions, an art where all the elements are so intimately linked among themselves that one cannot always analyze the effects but only perceive them. Nevertheless, I think I have always personally followed a direction opposed to that of the symbolism of Debussy.¹⁰⁰

The daunting aspects of the second movement of Gaspard de la nuit, “Le Gibet,” can be attributed to none other than Edgar Allan Poe’s shadow behind this composition. Ravel was highly influenced by Poe’s literature, finding inspiration through the poems and even creating drawings reflecting the poetry. Viñes mentions in his letters the profound effect Poe had on Ravel. In August 1892, Ravel showed Viñes two very dark and somber drawings that he had made, based on Poe’s short stories “A Descent into the Maelstrom” (1841) and “MS. Found in a Bottle” (1833). Soon after, he composed the Ballade de la Reine morte d’aimer (Ballade of the Queen who died from loving) (1893) and “Entre cloches,” (“Among Bells”) from Ravel’s two-piano piece Sites Auriculaires (1895-1897), in which the tintinnabulation of bells reflects Poe’s spiritual influence.

¹⁰⁰ James, 19-20.
Ravel’s fascination with bells, clocks, and chimes continued throughout his compositional writing. The hypnotic tolling pedal point found in “Le Gibet” hauntingly summons the pressure and terror found in Poe’s writings. Without a doubt, Ravel clearly states his respect and admiration for Poe but most importantly his musical influence upon the composer with regard to structure and atmosphere:

My teacher in composition was Edgar Allan Poe, because of his analysis of his wonderful poem The Raven. Poe taught me that true art is a perfect balance between pure intellect and emotion. My early stage was a reaction against Debussy, against the abandonment of form, of structure, and of architecture. 101

By 1900, Paris was one of, if not the most important centers of the arts, where salons of intellectuals influenced the artists of the time. “Les Apaches” would gather here, inviting contemporary artists to present their art. This highly elite group, to which Ravel belonged, introduced the composer to poetry and to non-Western music. It is palpable that the influence of poetry, and specifically Bertrand’s Gaspard de la nuit, was so great that he not only wrote the titles of the poems for the work, but also included the full text of the poems before each of the movements.

The artists who influenced Bertrand would inevitably stimulate Ravel. For example, one of Bertrand’s inspirations came from Jacques Callot (c.1592-1635), who was himself a caricaturist. His emphasis was the portrayal of the grotesque. Also, E.T.A. Hoffman’s (1776-1822) stories impacted Bertrand as well. He was a German writer, composer, music critic, and caricaturist. The themes in his stories involved supernatural beings, as with his opera that featured a character named “Undine.”

101 Orenstein, 433.
Jazz Influence

Although it is not highly apparent in Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit* (except for brief moments with extended harmonies, for example in mm. 32-34 of “Le Gibet”), the composer valued American jazz and strongly believed in its following and future success. In an article called *Musical Digest* (March 1928), Ravel writes: “You Americans take jazz too lightly. You seem to feel that it is cheap, vulgar, momentary. In my opinion it is bound to lead to the national music of the United States.”

Ravel’s open-mindedness to a wide variety of musical styles is admirable and, moreover, evident in his own compositions, such as the jazzy elements in the second movement of his Violin Sonata as well as the Piano Concerto for the Left Hand.

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102 Orenstein, 390.
CHAPTER IV
Introductory Aspects for Gaspard de la nuit

Ravel often suffered from insomnia. During a sleepless period in his youth, Viñes gave Ravel the book of poems by Bertrand called Gaspard de la nuit. These poems included grotesque, morbid, and fairy-tale images, and were accompanied by the drawings of Jacques Callot. We do not know if such stories helped Ravel with his sleeplessness, but we do know that they inspired him to write his masterpiece for the piano in 1908. Bertrand used the title Gaspard relating to the French form of Caspar, one of the Three Wise Men, whose name in Persian means “Keeper of the Treasures,” and “de la nuit” which is translated as “of the night.”

The outside movements are dedicated to pianists Harold Bauer (1873-1951) (“Ondine”) and Rudolph Ganz (1877-1972) (“Scarbo”), and the middle movement is dedicated to a critic and Ravel’s aficionado Jean Marnold (1859-1935) (“Le Gibet”). It was written between May and

103 Louis Jacques Napoléon Bertrand (1807-1841), who used Aloysius Bertrand as his penname, was the author of Gaspard de la nuit. After his father’s death in 1828, Aloysius Bertrand at the age of 20 had to become the man of the house. He had strong literary inspirations from his contemporaries such as Victor Hugo (1802-1885), Jean Charles Emmanuel Nodier (1780-1844), and Émile de Saint-Amand Deschamps (1791-1871), whose literary salons Bertrand would often attend in 1828-1829. Already at this time he suffered from tuberculosis. Around 1833, he had three different names that he went by: Louis, Aloysius, and Ludovic. He had a friend/patron who was a sculptor named David d’Angers (1788-1856) who throughout his life would help Bertrand out if needed financially, since their first encounter in 1836. He acted as an older brother to Bertrand even though Bertrand often times acted stubborn when he was in deep financial problems. Because of the financial situation of Bertrand’s family, David d’Angers, Victor Hugo, and Francois Villemain (1790-1870) helped out Bertrand’s mother and sister. Finally Bertrand’s Gaspard de la nuit was published in November 1842 after actively pushing for it to be published. Unlike Ravel’s Gaspard de la nuit, the poet’s Gaspard de la nuit did not receive recognition until the late 1800s and early 1900s when a group of important poets discovered it and recognized it as a treasure of French literature. Bertrand was inspired by the works of Rembrandt and Callot. The poet uses supernatural, Gothic, and medieval themes throughout his works that evoke the Middle Ages. The poet’s short life was filled with illness, poverty, and lack of steady income. Bertrand died at the young age of 37.

104 Harold Bauer (1873-1951) was an English pianist as well as a violinist. He taught at the Manhattan School of Music.

105 Rudolph Ganz (1877-1972) was a Swiss pianist, conductor, and composer who introduced Ravel’s works to the American public.

106 Jean Marnold (1859-1935) was a close friend of Ravel. He co-founded the Mercure musical and was a critic for the newspaper Mercure de France, in which he offered his great support for Ravel’s music.
September 1908. According to a letter to Ganz, the piece was finished on September 2, 1908. Durand published Ravel’s autograph and paid Ravel 1,500 francs for *Gaspard de la nuit*. The reception of the work was favorable: “‘Ondine’ provoked a rash of airy French phrases (‘féérique délicatesse’, ‘ruissellement harmonieux’: fairy delicacy, harmonious rustling), while the ‘bitter uneasiness’ of ‘Le Gibet’ and the ‘dreamlike, hallucinatory and rather morbid phantoms’ of ‘Scarbo’ were also appreciated.”

The three-movement work begins with a mermaid called Ondine who falls in love with a man on Earth. According to the poem, the water nymph sings outside of the man’s window during the night. She attempts to seduce and enchant him with her sensual singing, pleading him to marry her and follow her into her underwater palace. He rejects her coldly, and she creates turbulent waves as she laughs and swims away from him. The man resists her and keeps his windows shut, away from her lures.

Similar to the discovery of the ship filled with treasures in Richard Donner’s movie *Goonies* (1985), “Ondine’s” opening conjures the miraculous discovery of gems in an underwater world. The wash of sound and cumulative growth developed through the crescendos leaves one in ecstasy and awe. Here not even one note stands out over another, aside from a hidden murmuring of a melodic line sung by Ondine. A sense of ontological time is created with the hypnotic opening right-hand figure. The abundant glissando-like arpeggios leave us in a state of limbo between heaven and Earth. The performer is acutely aware of the transcendental difficulty of the piece, but the most overwhelming aspect is its emotional depth. After the final pause and calmness at the end of m. 83, a state of deep sadness occurs, lasting for only a short amount of time.

107 Nichols, 106.
This is brusquely interrupted in m. 88 with the arpeggios which gradually wash the listener back onto land.

Throughout the work, the harmonies are so lush that they become hypnotizing.

In the second movement, “Le Gibet,” Ravel forms an ostinato on B-flat from the beginning to the end of this seven-minute piece. It happens 153 times! The constant repeated note represents a city’s bells ringing. A man is hung on a gibbet while the sun is setting and reddening the land. As the poem describes, the spiders are creating webs around his neck and the flies are sucking on the blood below his body. Utter despair and sobbing can be heard as the lush chords and harmonies create an eerie atmosphere of regret, pain, and suffering. The body decomposes along with the harmonies.

The music of “Le Gibet” is meant to generate goose bumps and produce a spooky, frightening suspense for the listener. The monotony creates a trance-like state. Though
the material moves at a slow pace, the harmonies are so exotic and mesmerizing that one does not lose focus. Ravel again establishes an ontological time and invents an unnerving moment that can be possibly described as someone waiting for death. This state of limbo is formed by the introverted and jazzy harmonies. The vertical aspect of the piece, unlike in “Ondine,” produces a place of ambiguity. For the listener, this movement can feel like five, twelve, or even thirty minutes. In moments of agony, all sense of time is lost and Ravel clearly symbolizes this in “Le Gibet.” With the abstruse harmonic changes and its vagueness of direction, one feels that even Ravel does not know where the music eventually cadences. This improvisatory style is typical of jazz music, which Ravel adored. The bells continue tolling as they are surrounded by unrelated harmonies of sevenths and ninths. Beginning in mm. 48 to the end, the B-flat octaves allow for uncertainty of tonality. The listener gets lost in the realm of E-flat minor or B-flat major.

Figure 3. “Le Gibet” mm. 48-end: (image includes mm. 46-end)
With the loose ABA form, the return recalls a life and time long gone, one that has led to a tragic end through death. The last B-flat bell disappears through time and space.

As stated, Ravel wanted to make the last movement, “Scarbo,” more difficult than the already most difficult piece in Balakirev’s piano repertoire, Islamey. The poem describes a frightening goblin that scares us in all his forms as we are lying in our bed in the middle of the night. His shadows enlarge; he dances feverishly; he scratches on the side of the bed; he flies down from the ceiling. It is difficult to determine if we are dreaming of this diabolic creature or if he is real. But what we do know is that “Scarbo” is a pianistic nightmare.

Throughout the nervous repeated patterns, one realizes that after the trembling of those notes only evil awaits us at the end. A monster lurks at the bottom of Hell, represented by the lower register. Sporadically in the work, outbursts of Spanish-sounding musical phrases appear. The full range of the piano is used to take complete advantage of the wealth of the keyboard’s monstrous sound. “Scarbo” follows the polar-opposite character of “Le Gibet.” With the terrifying opening, “Scarbo” gradually leads us to death. “Scarbo” is restless and obsessive without a sense of morality, while “Le Gibet” has a regretful and passive atmosphere. The crushing sound comes from the roaring of Hell filled with outbursts of fire explosions. This is Ravel’s most violent and powerful work.

Though Bertrand died in poverty in 1841, Ravel was able to hear a successful premiere of Gaspard de la nuit by Viñes on January 9, 1909 in Paris’s Salle Erard.
CHAPTER V

The Dulcimer

Throughout the world, there are various types of dulcimers. In this study, I focus on one specific type called the santur, whose performance style I find resembles the pianistic approaches Ravel formulated in *Gaspard de la nuit*. With the influence of Balakirev’s *Islamey*, the abundance of ethnic music streaming into Paris at the time due to colonialism, and the exhibitions in Paris such as the Exposition Universelle of 1889, Ravel might have had encounters with the sonorities of this particular instrument. It is not my argument that Ravel thought primarily of the *santur* but, rather, that a hypothesis can be developed, based on Ravel’s compositional style of the piece and the repertoire of the *santur*, that he was consciously or subconsciously influenced by this instrument. We do know that there was a *santur* in the collection of the Musée du Conservatoire National de Musique in Paris in 1884. However, we do not know if Ravel had the opportunity to view this instrument when he lived in Paris.

The dulcimer can be found in Iran, Iraq, India, Kashmir, Turkey, Greece, Armenia, China, and Tibet, and its names vary from country to country: *santur*, *sadouri*, *sanṭūr*, *sant’ur*, *santuri*, *sintir*, *tsintsila*. Documents from the ancient Babylonian and neo-Assyrian eras show that the first model could have been the harp that had two sticks that struck the strings. Spanish Muslims knew of the instrument in the eleventh century. The instrument was also found in North Africa in the fourteenth century. ¹⁰⁸

Parallel to the development of the dulcimer, the cimbalom also developed in Hungary through the Gypsy community. The Exposition Universelle of 1889 offered

these Hungarian Gypsies opportunities to perform their music. Jann Pasler explains some of the important elements in the music as described by Julien Tiersot: “Hungarian Gypsy music was a hit, from Tiersot’s perspective, in part because, ‘not playing on the beat,’ it seemed to express ‘the absolute liberty inherent in the Gypsy’s nature,’ freedom being a trope republicans never stopped promoting. Likewise for Arab music—‘so different from our own that is seems always new.’”109

Paul M. Gifford, in his book The Hammered Dulcimer: A History, opposes the writings of Curt Sachs,110 who asserted that dulcimers came from the Middle East:

… Sachs confuses the psaltery with the dulcimer in using the relief sculpture at the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela as evidence and provides no further sources for his claim. Chapter 4 demonstrates that in Iran the santur first appears in its modern form as a dulcimer only at the end of the fifteenth century and that in an earlier, Egyptian form it was a vertically held box-zither identical to the early qanun. The dulcimer, on the other hand, first appears in textual and iconographic sources from Western Europe during the early fifteenth century, prior to the earliest Islamic iconographic evidence of a struck dulcimer.111

The origin of the santur in Persia has also generated major debates, but from manuscripts of the eighteenth century we know that the santur existed. For example, there is a painting from the early nineteenth century that shows a female musician in Tehran playing the santur in a court harem.

The Iranian form of the dulcimer, santur, is in the shape of a trapezoid, composed of walnut wood. Its strings are attached to hitch-pins on its left side while the tuning of the strings can be done with the use of a tuning-key and by adjusting the metal wrest-pins on its right side. Jean During describes it this way:

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110 Curt Sachs (1881-1959) made major contributions in organology—the study of musical instruments.
Each quadruple set of strings rests on a movable bridge of hardwood (kharak). These bridges are aligned almost parallel with the sides of the case. The right-hand rank corresponds to the bass strings and that on the left to the treble strings. In the centre of the santur the low-pitched strings on the right cross the high-pitched strings on the left. The left-hand strings can be played on either side of the bridges. In this way three different courses of strings are available: the lowest-sounding on the right, a second series, sounding an octave higher, left of centre, and the highest-sounding series, giving the third octave, on the left. There are nine (or sometimes 11) quadruple strings on either side so that, with 18 groups of strings, 27 different notes can be played. The bass strings are of brass and the trebles of steel. The first series of strings has a range of $e'–f''$, the second $e''–f'''$ and the third $e'''–f''''$. The tuning can be readily modified by adjusting the position of the bridges.\[112

The two mallets are light wooden sticks called mezrāb that have a broad blade in an oval-shape. Each hand holds a mallet between the thumb, index, and middle finger. The use of wrist flexibility through “rapid alternating movement”\[113 allows for the tremolos.

The santur plays an important role in an Iranian music ensemble and has its own repertoire, although it shares some of the same repertoire as the Persian long-necked lute instruments (tar and setar). This repertoire refers to the radif—the musical repertoire on which the improvisation of Persian classical music is grounded. Depending on the repertoire, the santur player adjusts the tuning of the strings based on the twelve modes called dastgāh, which comes from the radif. The tuning is built on diatonic scales that include microtones.

Some of the important pioneers of the instrument in the nineteenth century were Mohammed Hasan, Mohammed Sadeq Khan, and Soma Hozur. Abolhassan Saba (1902–1957) began a Western notation for santur by compiling the radif. Farāmarz Pāyvar


\[113\] Ibid.
(1933-2009) is also a prominent figure in Persian classical music; his skillful playing and writing of performance technique made him one of the leading Iranian santur players.\textsuperscript{114}

An essential Persian musical style on which some Persian classical music is constructed is called \textit{čahārmezrāb}, which means four strokes. It is similar to the Western etude in which the \textit{čahārmezrāb} is traditionally virtuosic. This solo instrumental work shows off the technical abilities of the soloist. Unlike many other Persian forms, it is not meant to be played in an ensemble but rather as a solo piece. The content of the work is centered on short, motivic melodic patterns founded on scales. Its insistent rhythm usually falls in compound duple meter and, at times, simple duple and triple meter. “The traditional \textit{čahārmezrābs} are usually short, and admit a certain degree of improvisation within the established rhythmic pattern. This improvisation is in the order of repeating phrases, or building melodic sequences on the existing phrases.”\textsuperscript{115} A pedal point, which relates to “Le Gibet,” also exists in the \textit{čahārmezrāb} and is created by the repetition of a note. Also, an emphasis is placed on a four-note melodic pattern. The rhythmical structure focuses on two sets of three sixteenth notes. Here is an example of this in Ravel’s “Scarbo”:

Figure 4. “Scarbo” mm. 52-56:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{scarbo.png}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{114} He incorporated many Western virtuosic approaches in his own playing, such as parallel thirds, arpeggios—traits featured abundantly in “Ondine.”

\textsuperscript{115} Hormoz Farhat, \textit{The Dastgāh Concept in Persian Music}, 119.
The melodic material is quite simple and is based purely on four pitches. It might seem mundane but as Farhat explains, “the interest lies in the way that the melody is embellished, and in the difficulty that, as a fast piece, it may pose to a performer.”¹¹⁶

Some other similarity the santur shares with the piano is that the echo on santur resembles the damper pedal of the piano. Also the santur is considered a highly virtuosic instrument, struck by two hammers. There are even theories that the piano came from the santur because of the piano’s hammered mechanism.

The cimbalom, a type of dulcimer, attracted many prominent composers of the late nineteenth century and twentieth century. Liszt, Bartók, Kodály, and Stravinsky had works that integrated this instrument in their compositions. Stravinsky was even taken aback by the cimbalom after hearing Aladár Rácz (1886-1958), a famous cimbalom player, perform in various venues including recital settings. Stravinsky began to learn the instrument and practiced it daily for more than twenty years.

**Comparing Gaspard de la nuit and the Santur**

In order to build a relationship between Gaspard de la nuit and santur writing, one needs to compare the scores of the santur repertoire. In the notation, the highly repetitive pattern resembles the writing in “Scarbo.”

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 120.
Also, the opening figure of “Ondine,” with its mismatched G-sharp against A-natural, produces the microtonal effect Ravel possibly yearned for. By repeating the same melodic pattern that features the minor second, he is trying to recreate the sonic effect of microtonal music. The constant inharmonious minor second replicates the clashing of overtones that exist in microtonal music.

117 Abolhassan Saba, *Dore-haye Santur-e Radif-e Ostad Abolhassan Saba*, 129.
Moreover, the octave leaps to neighboring notes in *santur* writing relates to “Scarbo’s” left-hand figures throughout the work.

Figure 7. *Santur* example.\(^{118}\)

![Santur example](image1)

Figure 8. “Scarbo” mm. 478-483:

![Scarbo example](image2)

The displacement of octaves in the melodic material of “Ondine” shares similarities to typical *santur* writing, which is seen through the grace notes.

Figure 9. “Ondine” mm. 14-15:

![Ondine example](image3)

\(^{118}\) Ibid., 25.
The tremolo-like figures in “Scarbo” with repeated bass notes followed by alternating seconds look like the writings for the santur. These are basically melismas in Persian music.

Figure 11. “Scarbo” mm. 215-219: (image includes mm. 211-221)

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119 Ibid.
Often, the grace notes are executed in a fashion that is comparable to the melodic but percussive material in “Scarbo.”

120 Ibid., 64.
121 Ibid., 17.
Figure 14: Santur example.\textsuperscript{122}

Figure 15: Santur example.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 25.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 62.
The specific type of intervallic relationship and the use of repetition can be heard throughout the *radif*. Instead of each note exactly mimicking its predecessor, ornamentation can be placed on it (see Figure 15). The circles above the notes refer to *takieh* (leaning), meaning to incline into the next note. *Takieh* is an essential embellishment in the repertoire of Persian classical music.

Also the repetition in the melodic material throughout is present in both the *santur* repertoire and “Scarbo.”
There is an abundance of minor seconds throughout the work that can be heard in the *radif* of *santur*. These neighboring pitches allowed Ravel to produce a microtonal effect, which has been shown in both the opening figuration of “Ondine” as well as this passage in “Scarbo.”

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124 Ibid., 129.
The melodic material in “Ondine” mm. 52-54 as well as the incomplete repetition in mm. 55-56 can be traced to the Persian modal quality.

125 Ibid., 64.
Also, the eerie repetitive material in mm. 430-432 and 445-447 in “Scarbo” produces a Middle Eastern impression that is also evident in santur writing. The augmented second yields towards a classic Oriental effect.

Figure 22. “Scarbo” mm. 430-431:
The rhythm of “Ondine” continues throughout the movement with thirty-seconds except for mm. 63-66 and 85-89. This continuous rhythmic drive resembles the Persian compositional form known as the čahārmezrab, which was mentioned earlier in the chapter. The insistent, fast, biting repeated notes in “Scarbo” correlates to other čahārmezrab pieces. This sense of repetition in a fast, repeated matter reconstructs the monotony and the trance-like state often heard in Dervish music. In “Scarbo,” this hypnotic music mimics the way that the character Scarbo spellbinds the creature he is about to eat. The constant B-flat heard in “Le Gibet” also relates to the octave persistence of the santur, as it reestablishes the repetitiousness heard in a melancholic radif. Using a continuous octave pedal parallel to excerpts of santur repertoire, the consistent funeral-like bells of “Le Gibet” evoke a similar dreariness. Ravel’s pedal tone effect might have been inspired by the drone-based nature of Persian classical music. For example, in santur performance, the sympathetic strings act as drones.

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126 Dervishes are believers of a sect in Islam called Sufism. They take a mystical approach to experience devotion through whirling and dancing in order to receive a religious ecstasy. Many of the Dervishes choose to live in poverty, beg for food and money, and then give away to the poor. This is a means to learn about humility.
During a time when exoticism abounded and the study of such material interested many, pioneers such as Tiersot studied the music of the Others and, in his comparisons of ethnic works, found that they related to trance states:

Tiersot was particularly taken with the ‘exercises’ of Aïssaoua, Moroccan Sufis who used music to go into trance. He found that the songs, rhythm, and ‘musical noises’ driving their bodies into contortions had a powerful effect on the nerves of the spectators as well as the performers, and compared this with the power of music as understood by the ancient Greeks.127

Ravel attended the exhibitions where Aïssaoua would demonstrate their spiritual dances, dances in which an ecstatic state was reached. This form of semiconscious trance can be heard throughout all of the three works in Gaspard de la nuit. The continuation of the thirty-seconds throughout “Ondine,” the continuous B-flat tolling bells in “Le Gibet,” and the insistent repeated pitches in “Scarbo” all suggest Ravel’s potential quest for a monotonous, hypnotic state.

127 Pasler, 573.
CHAPTER VI

Aspects of Orientalism and the Santur on the Performance of Gaspard de la nuit

I suggest that Ravel merges an array of Oriental musical elements with lush French harmonies to craft a unique soundscape that is not European.

“Ondine”

The thirty-second tremolos in the opening of “Ondine” resemble music written for the santur instrument. However, the melodic material needs to be sung since this is the most melodious and exotic of the three movements. Its sad style of singing needs to be quiet and murmuring. According to Jourdan-Morhange, the opening theme should not stand out but rather should be immersed within the sonorities. Ravel did not mind about the “odd wrong note” and, moreover, it was crucial to maintain this ambiance. Also, Ravel told the pianist Paul Loyonnet (1889-1988) not to worry about the number of figures in the opening of “Ondine” because he was not concerned whether there were more/less than six beats of the thirty-second notes.

Figure 24. “Ondine” m.1:

These arches of melodic material could reflect the influence of melodic singing from the Persian classical soundscape, which Ravel likely heard in the Exposition Universelle. The monotonous murmur of the opening figure of a C-sharp major chord
with an added A-natural signifies the combination of an Oriental tone color. A successful interpretation would not neglect that A-natural non-chord tone. The opening figure in the right hand with the clashing of the A against the G-sharp could be a means for Ravel to create a microtone that is not possible on a modern piano (see Figure 24). This mixed mode suggests the Orient. With this note included in the figure, Ravel constructs a glimmering quality that requires it to be performed with a shimmering tone and the utmost clarity and precision. The opening should be extremely steady and very articulate, with careful attention given to making the left hand sound smooth. A sensitive performance pays close attention to the harmonic changes by making abundant color contrasts. Since I correlate the work to santur style playing, the melodic line could actually be detached physically but shaped melodically. In order to emulate such an effect, the performer can make a clear distinction between the mallet-like right hand and the flowing left-hand melodic line. Throughout the work, the melodic line battles with the cascading showers of arpeggios. The well-defined difference between the melodic line and the arabesque figurations are imperative for a strong performance.

“Ondine” has abundant arpeggios that imitate the arabesque style and the waves of water. The arabesque passages in m. 16 display the tremendous architectural influences of the Moors on Spain.
These passages also silhouette the mermaid’s body. In order to show the architecture of the arabesque figures, the performer could shape gradually up and down throughout the contours, creating lucid outlines that can be heard without turning this passage into a technical note-like pattern.

The harmonic change in m. 23 can be stressed by amplifying the sound when arriving on the E-flat major chord. As the mood lightens here, more articulation in the thirty-second figures is required.

Similar to the *santur*, which often plays octave unison melodic lines to create even greater resonance against its soundboard, Ravel assembles numerous melodic
passages that are doubled to create this resonance and glistening quality. These octave figures occur, for example, in mm. 14-15, 20-22, and 47-49. The performer needs to give his/her utmost attention to the higher pitch of the octave when the surrounding material is laden with arpeggios for expressive purposes.

Figure 27. “Ondine” mm. 14-15:

Figure 28. “Ondine” mm. 20-22: (image includes mm. 20-23)
In m. 44 the interpreter could take some time in order to show the shape of the arabesque figures and also to not rush to the end of m. 46 but rather taper off the end of the phrase.
The modal material in m. 52 clearly reflects an Eastern quality. Here, Ravel arrives on an A dominant seventh but if one follows the melodic line from mm. 52-54, which include the highlighted notes, it does not suggest a D natural minor scale.
The surrounding figures are ornamental gestures that add a ringing timbre throughout the phrases. The performer should not neglect the left-hand arpeggio figure in this phrase. Many pianists choose to take a slower tempo in mm. 52-54, partially because of its difficulty but also because of its hazy atmospheric material. In my opinion, all notes need to speak clearly so that the arpeggio material projects through the atmosphere. The melodic line in mm. 55-56 is the same as the previous section except that the arabesque figure accompanies the line, giving it a more Oriental flavor.

Figure 32. “Ondine” mm. 55-56:

In mm. 57-65, the performer need to stretch out a gradual crescendo that reaches its climax in m. 66, wherein both hands play in contrary motion in a cascading manner. In order to create a powerful climactic point, the performer should reserve energy beginning in m. 57, so as not to get too loud too soon.

Figure 33. “Ondine” m. 57:
Even though Ravel (unlike Debussy) generally avoids the use of whole tone scales, he embraces them in the most pivotal moment of “Ondine.” The grandiose mm. 66-67 contain what is possibly the peak of the entire movement with a falling whole tone scale in its melodic content.

Inevitably, Ravel cannot avoid the use of whole tone scale, and he subtly hides this compositional effect by covering it with flowing arpeggios.
In mm. 70-71, the performer should be aware of the melodic line that is featured in the three octave arpeggio figures which also appears in mm. 68-69.

Figure 36. “Ondine” mm. 68-71:

The material in mm. 72-75 should evoke a glissando-effect throughout, even though some of the passagework will be fingered with individual fingers.
The performer should follow the new tempo change beginning in m. 75 (see Figure 37).

With a slower approach to the thirty-second notes, the phrase beginning in m. 80 should convey utter despair with a *subito piano* or *meno mosso*. Otherwise, this emotional material will be rushed and will move neither the performer nor the audience.
Modern-day performers often play with a full pedal from mm. 84-87.

Having listened to historical recordings and studying the poetry, I strongly believe this section should not be played with pedal in order to reflect the meaning of the poem. In these four measures, Ondine’s love interest rejects her bluntly and coldheartedly.
The violent outburst of Ondine’s laughter occurs immediately after his soliloquy.

Here, the sound can be supported with the help of the bass at the beginning of m. 88.

Figure 40. “Ondine” m.88:

In the same measure, Vlado Perlemuter\textsuperscript{128} indicated that the passagework should be non-legato, according to Ravel.\textsuperscript{129} As the mermaid continues to laugh to the end, important voicing needs to occur with the sixteenth notes towards the end of the measure. Mm. 89 to the end require a beautiful ringing of the top thirds in the right hand.

Figure 41. “Ondine” mm. 89-end:

\textsuperscript{128} The pianist Vlado Perlemuter will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter XII: “Historical and Present Recordings of Gaspard de la nuit.”

\textsuperscript{129} Maurice Ravel, \textit{Gaspard de la nuit}, ed. Peter Jost, 46.
A perfect ending requires a nice ping at the end and, therefore, voicing is of utmost importance. According to Roger Nichols, Ravel wanted the ending to appear as if nothing had happened—Ondine’s complete indifference to her rejection.¹³⁰

Imagery is crucial in a programmatic work like this, with its focal point on exoticism that is expressed through irregular phrase lengths, rhythms, meter, and form.

“Le Gibet”

The second movement, “Le Gibet,” takes us to the world of cold-hearted, medieval hangings. The man suffering on the gibbet may have been innocent. The key characteristic of the piece is its perpetual pedal of the B-flat octave in the middle register. According to the poem, it resembles and refers to the bell in the town during sunset. Musically, it also evokes the instrumental timbre of a santur drone. The continuous bells can be perhaps associated with a human’s heartbeat. Towards the end of the movement, the rhythm of the octaves symbolizes the final heartbeats of the hanging man.

Figure 42. “Le Gibet” mm. 49-end:

¹³⁰ Maurice Ravel, Gaspard de la nuit: Three Poems for Piano by Aloysius Bertrand, ed. Roger Nichols, 45.
The tempo is an important issue to address given that Ravel battled Viñes, his long-time friend and the primary performer of his works, over the issue. Ravel wrote to M.D. Calvocoressi in 1922:

I’m not asking Ricardo for 2 reasons: first, I think he’s supposed to be in Spain about that time; second, I would especially like to have *Gaspard de la nuit* recorded, and Viñes never wanted to perform these pieces, in particular ‘Le Gibet,’ according to the composer’s intentions. I did say wanted: I don’t know if you were ever present at one of those discussions in which he assured me that if he observed the nuances and the tempo that I indicated, ‘Le Gibet’ would bore the public. And nothing would make him change his mind.131

Ravel wanted the work to be played with a monotone quality, meaning without any tempo flexibility. He was extremely passionate about his tempo decision for the work and, as such, did not want Viñes to record it.

The B-flat bells need to be shaded in three different ways based on the three different articulations: accented note, slurred staccato note, and tenuto note.

Figure 43. “Le Gibet” mm. 1-3:

According to the French composer Henri Gil-Marchex (1894-1970), he suggested to use twenty-seven different styles of touch in “Le Gibet.”132 Ravel told Henriette Fauré133 that he did not want the bells to be louder than their surroundings and that they should not

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131 Orenstein, 219.
132 Nichols, 101.
133 Henriette Fauré studied with Ravel in 1922 and was the first to give an all-Ravel recital on January 18, 1923 in the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées in Paris. *Mon maître Maurice Ravel* (Paris, 1978) is a book she wrote of her recollections with Ravel.
dominate. Creating these three layers of sound consistency is crucial to producing this hypnotizing, static, monotonous atmosphere. The beautiful F-flat₄ in m. 7 should be treated in a subdued voice but with close attention paid to the warm tonal quality.

Figure 44. “Le Gibet” m. 7: (image includes mm. 4-7)

![Figure 44](image1)

Mm. 12-19 have a beautiful left-hand bass that supports the chords nicely on top.

Figure 45. “Le Gibet” mm. 12-19: (image includes mm. 12-21)
The performer should open the sound in m. 17.

Figure 46. “Le Gibet” m. 16-18: (image includes mm. 15-18)

Ravel marks the dynamic here with *mf*, the loudest dynamic marking of the piece. Also, a similar effect can be used in m. 35, in order to stay consistent with Ravel’s markings.
In m. 20, the lush chords destroy any stability in tonality but the bell tones still resonate, and in m. 23 form into E-sharps.

That is the challenge of this work: to maintain this ringing tone of B-flats as the chords disrupt any sense of peace with their harmonic dissonance. Ravel’s dynamic range in “Le Gibet” spans from pianississimo to mezzo forte. He allows the loudest dynamic level, mf, to last for only three measures. Therefore, it is fundamental to continually project and to
take advantage of the use of constant *una corda* from beginning to the end. However, in larger halls, the performer ought to project and, possibly, disregard the *una corda* marking.

Towards the end of “Le Gibet,” one can have a heavier B-flat pedal tone beginning with m. 40.

Figure 49. “Le Gibet” mm. 40-42:

Staying static throughout the work is vital in order to project its pathetic, rejected, lifeless character. Though the piece consists of colorful harmonic beauty, the most important element to highlight is suspense. There are tremendous shapes in the outside movements. Here it is essential to stay in control of the tempo, to make sure the B-flats always speak, and to voice effectively.

“Scarbo”

Similar to the opening of “Ondine,” Ravel enters his second measure of “Scarbo” with a terrifying trembling on a D-sharp.
This repetition is apparent in many of his works, such as the “Toccata,” “Oiseaux tristes,” and “Le Gibet,” and even in orchestral forms like Boléro. The repetitive trait is also particularly common in dulcimer writing. Ravel’s repetition in these pieces contributes both to their resemblance to the santur and to the dance-like quality of “Scarbo.” The repetitions generate a wash of vibrancy, but also evoke fright. Here Ravel builds anxiety and trembling before the little monster transforms into a larger version of itself. With regards to notational and editorial changes, the performer should reconsider what the low register pitches should be. I agree with Nancy Bricard’s idea that “if Ravel had had an instrument with an extended keyboard (Bösendorfer) he would have written F-double sharp and G-sharp as he did in the following measure instead of A-natural and A-sharp.” One must also be careful not to read the composer’s mind.

134 Nancy Bricard is an editor for Alfred publishing company. Her critical edition of Gaspard de la nuit will be discussed in detail in Chapter VIII: “Editions of Gaspard de la nuit.”
135 Maurice Ravel, Gaspard de la nuit, ed. Nancy Bricard, 40.
Beginning in m. 32, Ravel reveals his Spanish musical influence. The composer told Gil-Marchex that here, the right-hand figure could say “Quelle horreur!” The following melodic line (D♯5-E♭5-D♯6-C♯6-B♭5-A♯5-G♯5-D♯4-D♯5-E♭5-A♭5) is not in the usual Western mode.

The half step relationship between the D-sharp and E designs the foreign flavor within the piece, since minor second intervals are abundant in Middle Eastern music. This intervallic dissonance of the clashing minor seconds is ample throughout “Scarbo.” It

\[^{136}\text{Zank, 321.}\]
repeats in m. 110 with a smaller variation in the left-hand figure as well as with the phrase ending.

Figure 55. “Scarbo” mm. 110-114:

It builds a moment of anticipation of horror that foreshadows the appearance of the terrifying creature. In mm. 52-56, the small pattern of D♯4-D♯4-D♯4-C♯4-D♯4-C♯4-D♯4-A♯3-G♯3-C♯4-G♯3 and the repeated passages bear a resemblance to the striking of santur strings to produce a distinct short phrase, accompanied by the continuous B drone.

Figure 56. “Scarbo” mm. 52-56:

Ravel reveals another dramatic and exotic phrase to scare off the monster in the melismatic passage in m. 80.

Figure 57. “Scarbo” mm. 80-83: (image includes mm. 78-83)
To intensify the anxiety, Ravel raises the pitch a fifth higher with abrupt and biting left-hand figures. Similar to melismatic singing, the melodic line needs to be shaped. These are, again, the arabesque figures abundantly used by Ravel throughout “Ondine.”

The tremolo-like material reappears in m. 122. This is not quite a pianistic approach, but is instead closer to a santur style of playing.

Figure 58. “Scarbo” mm. 122-127:

The back and forth of the repeated pattern can be heard in some Persian classical repertoire. Ravel intends to frighten us. Just like in a scary movie, in which the audience awaits the killer around every corner, here both the composer and the performer recreate dramatic irony for the listener. Small abrupt gestures interrupt; however, it is not until m. 204 that we reach one of the climaxes in the work.

Beginning in m. 256, this theme comes back and modulates from one key to another in a rather foreign language. One can identify this phrase as Oriental for the following reason: in m. 422, through the densely pedaled, blurry grumbling in the lower register, an almost magical Middle Eastern scale passage emerges in a perpetual manner, as if Scarbo imitates a whirling Dervish.
This scale passage repeats as it reaches higher octaves. The theme in m. 431 reappears, but is presented in rhythmic augmentation, where D♯₅-D♯₅-D♯₅-C♯₅-D♯₅-C♯₄-D♯₄-A♯₃-G♯₃-C♯₄-G♯₃, are rhythmically stretched out.

Here is the savasana of the whole work, a moment of relaxation. Finally, a breather occurs for the pianist and, most importantly, here is where another suspenseful
atmosphere can be formed. The whole work is about apprehension more than just playing grandiloquently. The anticipation is usually well-executed, if the performer keeps the repeated notes even in sound and rhythm. This takes great control, but with a relaxed wrist and quiet hand one can achieve those objectives.

According to Perlemutter and Jourdan-Morhange, Ravel wanted the bass to have a timpani effect in m. 367.\(^{137}\)

Figure 61. “Scarbo” m. 367: (image includes mm. 366-371)

From m. 430 on, Ravel uses figuration that sounds exotic. Benjamin Ivry’s description addresses this in *Maurice Ravel: A Life*:

The final movement, *Scarbo*, named after a goblin, is Mussorgskian in its ominous chords, bursting into virtuosic runs to depict a demonic rampage. Like a Morse code operator gone mad, the pianist raps out Asian-sounding groups of high notes. After a great, malignant, hopping dance, there are low echoing notes, and slowly the whirling returns in the best horror-film style.\(^{138}\)

Figure 62. “Scarbo” m. 430:

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\(^{138}\) Ivry, 60.
Mm. 446-447 also display another unique-sounding mode with the $B_3$-$C_\#_4$-$D_4$-$E_4$-$G_\#_4$-$F_4$-$D_4$-$C_\#_4$. In m. 446 the D should definitely be a D-natural, otherwise it would not function as an exotic scale.

Figure 63. “Scarbo” mm. 446-447:

According to Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, in mm. 448-459, Ravel wanted the chromatic seconds to be full of pedal (see figure below).\textsuperscript{139} The relationship of the half-step movement and the subsequent fifth interval can be heard throughout the work. When dissecting the bass line from mm. 448-468, one will find a Middle Eastern scale again: $D_3$-$C_\#_3$-$B_2$-$B_7$-$G_\#_2$.

\textsuperscript{139} Ravel, ed. Nichols, 46.
Again in mm. 580-583, similar to mm. 32 and 110, Ravel develops a huge sweeping gesture with the melodic line D♯₄-E₅-D♯₆-C♯₆-B₅-A♯₅-G♯₄-D♯₄.
The trembling of m. 616 is reminiscent of the opening material of “Ondine.” This generates both a grandiose closure and a connection between all the movements.

The trembling of the thirty-second notes never ceases until the final note of Gaspard de la nuit. Akin to the previous two movements, “Scarbo” ends surreptitiously. Ravel marks FIN (end) as soon as a final arpeggio extinguishes the piece, just as the dwarf blows out the flickering candle. Is it simply the end of the work, or did Scarbo “end” his prey? Analogous to this is the pivotal moment of the movie The Usual Suspects where the crippled con man Roger “Verbal” Kint reveals himself to be Keyser Söze, the legendary villain:
Who is Keyser Söze? He is supposed to be Turkish. Some say his father was German. Nobody believed he was real. Nobody ever saw him or knew anybody that ever worked directly for him, but to hear Kobayashi tell it, anybody could have worked for Söze. You never knew. That was his power. The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist. And like that, poof. He’s gone.\textsuperscript{140}

Figure 67. “Scarbo” mm. 626-end: (image includes mm. 622-end)

After Ravel finished \textit{Gaspard de la nuit}, he began work on \textit{Daphnis et Chloé}. The instrumentation in the ballet includes instruments such as cymbals and tambourines which forms an atmosphere far away from France. Also, some of the musical ideas in \textit{Daphnis et Chloé} are in a Turkish-style component. Since the latter was written around the same time as \textit{Gaspard de la nuit}, one must assume that Ravel was in his Oriental compositional period.

However, though he was open to the new world, he also harbored the prevalent prejudices of the time. Just as the sensual curves of “Ondine” evoke exotic belly dancers, so does “Scarbo” represent a foul creature whose musical content is much more Oriental. These pieces suggest a distant land, foreign and perhaps hideous. In “Scarbo,” the Other is meant to be the villain. “Scarbo’s” frequent use of terrifying motifs originates in these musical patterns. That is how people viewed the Others: foreign, strange, and possibly evil.

\textsuperscript{140} Christopher McQuarrie, \textit{The Usual Suspects}.
Ravel was fascinated by different cultures. In his three songs of *Chansons madécasses* (1922), one can clearly understand his political position, his desire to protect the natives of Africa from colonization. The concept is that rather than viewing other nations as villains, we should embrace these differences and celebrate them. Composers like Ravel did. So should politicians and the rest of society.
CHAPTER VII

Historical and Present Recordings of Gaspard de la nuit

Within a hundred years of composing Gaspard de la nuit, many great artists have recorded it. However, the recordings of this work by Vlado Perlemuter (1904-2002), Marcelle Meyer (1897-1958), Robert Casadesus (1899-1972), and Jacques Février (1900-1979) are considered historical because they received direct guidance from Ravel. Also, Ravel’s recordings of his own compositions such as “Le Gibet” exist and are essential to examine as well. In this chapter, I will discuss not only these historical recordings, but also a contemporary recording by Ivo Pogorelich (b.1958).

Ravel playing Ravel

In order to fully understand the historical recordings, it is important to study Ravel’s own piano skills and the piano on which he composed and practiced. Even though Ravel’s compositions for the piano require the utmost technical skill, Ravel himself was not focused on perfecting his own piano technique. He rarely practiced unless he had to perform one of his own works publicly. Rather, he enjoyed “experiment[ing] with chordal sounds and harmonic combinations.”141 Also, he had the physical disadvantage of having small hands. Gil-Marchex wrote about Ravel’s piano abilities:

He takes an amazingly low seat at the keyboard, a peculiarity which is perhaps one of the reasons why he never plays octaves; his long agile fingers and slender hand attached to an extremely supple wrist seem to be those of a sleight-of-hand conjurer; his thumb comes back to the palm of his hand with incredible facility;

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141 Vlado Perlemuter, Complete Piano Music.
which enables him easily to strike several notes together. It is this thumb which explains the seconds in Scarbo.\textsuperscript{142}

When considering the interpretation of Ravel’s piano music, one needs to understand the piano’s tone that influenced Ravel’s music. He owned an Erard piano that was built in 1820. When I visited his home and played his Erard, I noticed that the sound was rather bright and the action of the piano was quite light.

Ravel made two recordings of his own piano music using a piano-roll system, one in 1913 (Paris) and the other in 1922 (London). In 1913, he recorded the first and second movements of Sonatine as well as Valse nobles et sentimentales. In the first movement of Sonatine, it is interesting to notice the displacement of hands, while in the second movement, Ravel maintains a steadiness throughout the charming minuet. The lack of pedal throughout some sections of Valse nobles et sentimentales is striking but the piece’s exuberant quality is evident in Ravel’s pianistic capabilities.

His London recording includes five works: “Oiseaux tristes” and “La vallée des cloches” from Miroirs; Pavane pour une infante défunte; “Toccata” from Le tombeau de Couperin; and “Le Gibet.” Allegedly, Ravel asked Casadesus to record some of the works during the recording session. This recording and Casadesus’s collaboration will be discussed in further detail in this chapter.

\textbf{Vlado Perlemuter}

Vlado Perlemuter recorded \textit{Maurice Ravel Complete Piano Music} (Vox VBX 410) in France. Perlemuter is considered one of the most valuable interpreters of Ravel’s piano music. When he was twenty-three years old, at the beginning of his concert career,

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
he studied all of Ravel’s piano music with the composer himself; it was an intensive six-month apprenticeship, with Perlemuter traveling several times a week to take lessons with the composer. Perlemuter also studied with one of the most important piano pedagogues and pianists Alfred Cortot (1877-1962) at the Paris Conservatoire.

Perlemuter’s pianistic qualities are evident in the fact that he does not over-interpret—that is, allow subjective interpretation beyond the composer’s indications. This is imperative because Ravel was opposed to performers who did not obey his directions. Perlemuter also plays with an extremely articulated sound—enunciating each note distinctly and carefully—that is consistent with the precision Ravel demanded. There is very little tempo flexibility in Ravel’s music, unless where indicated, which Perlemuter carefully follows. Perlemuter begins “Ondine” with a well-defined and pronounced touch. The melodic line in the opening is shaped exquisitely and dominates clearly over the thirty-second figures. He does not linger within the phrases and maintains an extremely steady tempo in the lyrical opening. In m. 29, he slows down gently as Ravel indicates the performer should. There is definite use of pedal but never a moment of a pure “Impressionistic” wash of sound. Perlemuter utilizes the pedal in “Ondine” to conjure an oceanic setting, but always maintains clarity in his playing. Most pianists take some time to prepare m. 52, but Perlemuter goes right into the phrase. He reserves his energy beginning in m. 57 to set up the most climactic moment in the piece in m. 66. Perlemuter builds a wonderful atmosphere that is, beginning in m. 75, not very articulate for the first time in the piece. He does not repeat the bottom G in m. 80, a decision which has been the source of some debate. The most controversial interpretation occurs in mm.
84-87 in which he does not use pedal. I highly agree with this interpretation, as I have indicated previously.

In “Le Gibet,” Perlemuter makes a notable difference between the accented B-flats and the non-accented B-flats. He stays very consistent throughout the piece with the tempo. Perlemuter follows through carefully with the diminuendos between mm. 12-19. He prevents the thick chords from covering the tolling bells in mm. 20-25. Again, he sensibly observes the hairpins throughout mm. 35-39. Perlemuter does not play all the full chords in mm. 40-41, 43-44, or 20-23, choosing notes necessary to preserving the icy aura of the piece.

“Scarbo’s” opening eighth notes are quite fast and close to the tempo of the following measure. Many pianists choose to use a slower tempo to establish more mystery. The repeated D-sharp notes beginning in m. 2 are not played articulately, or even rhythmically. This helps to generate the très fondu—very melted—effect. He emphasizes the crescendos and diminuendos by exaggerating them, thereby producing a swooping and spooky effect. The accompaniment material beginning in m. 52 remains quiet while the melodic material pierces through emphatically. There are some physically technical challenges for Perlemuter in m. 93, as this section requires utmost agility. Beginning in m. 131, Perlemuter eliminates the use of pedal and executes these rapid gestures with a short and accented touch. The repeated octaves surrounding this, however, provide for a ghostly, discreet mood. He detaches the staccato sixteenth notes in m. 168 slightly and applies this articulation to similar figures. Though the long crescendo in m. 228 begins with ppp, Perlemuter decides to play with a fuller sound but still manages to build an effective crescendo. Most pianists use a different tempo in m. 256,
however, Perlemuter holds the tempo back, allowing him to accent the jagged melody. However, he shapes the sensual melodic material greatly in mm. 314-316. For Perlemuter, anything that has a staccato marking is played without the use of pedal. For example, mm. 329 and 335 have an enunciated quality that does not use the pedal; the result of this is the creation of a major turbulence of sound. Many pianists approach mm. 389-394 romantically, stretching out the melodic material. Perlemuter stays true to the tempo and does not alter it. By creating an extremely subdued sound, he gives careful attention to the dynamic markings in mm. 402 and 409. The bottom D-sharp is present in m. 424 but, unlike in Ivo Pogorelich’s interpretation, which will be reviewed later, it is not pounded out. Perlemuter forms an echo between the hands in mm. 433-434 as well as in mm. 443-444. His outstanding technical skills allow him to use an animated accelerando starting in m. 452. He controls the left hand very well in m. 477 by keeping it very quiet, while the right-hand melodic material projects clearly with a sharp and piercing tone. Again, Perlemuter stretches the crescendos gradually and develops a growling effect in mm. 523-524, 528-529, 534-535, and 539-540. He avoids pedal in mm. 554 and 555 allowing for a percussive and turbulent chordal sound. As the climactic moments progress, he broadens an important statement in m. 573. The ending is extremely quiet as the low bass resonates with a subdued right-hand passagework in m. 616. The melodic material shines through nicely, but in a passive manner. The last two measures have a different rhythmic style than most pianists’. He takes time between the last two notes of the piece. His tactic makes for a very witty and biting ending.

There is an unemotional aspect to Perlemuter’s performance, specifically in the touch. The dynamics are nicely observed and there is no bending of the tempo unless
Ravel indicated, but the kind of artistry that would add flavor to a unique interpretation of this piece is absent. The recording is very ordinary though its representation of the piece as a whole is entirely accurate. Ravel’s guidance is evident in that Perlemuter very carefully adheres to the composer’s markings on everything from tempo to articulation. “Ondine” is not romanticized in any way. “Le Gibet” stays steady throughout and I find the acute attacks in “Scarbo,” with the reduced pedal approach, quite effective.

Perlemuter’s utmost control in rhythmical precision engages the audience’s focus and interest. The tone does not seem to have the flat finger approach that is often associated with playing Impressionistic music. The concept of having twenty-seven different touches in “Le Gibet” is evident. There is a total uniformity with the bells and that never lessens throughout the piece. None of the tempos he chooses display a lack of control. Perlemuter selects standard tempos and sticks to them without pulling and pushing, which many pianists cannot follow due to technical difficulties. Naturally, the sound quality at the time of Perlemuter’s recording differs greatly from the quality available in modern-day recordings and is of utmost importance to consider in one’s evaluation of the performance.

**Marcelle Meyer**

Marcelle Meyer, a student of Viñes, also studied Ravel’s piano repertoire with the composer. In 1920, Meyer performed the two-piano version of _La Valse_ with Ravel for Diaghilev, Stravinsky, Massine, and Poulenc and in 1954 recorded _Gaspard de la nuit_.

Unlike Perlemuter’s, Meyer’s approach to “Ondine” pays more attention to the “accompaniment.” For example, the opening figure is interwoven significantly with the
left-hand melodic material. The thirty-second notes are as important as the melody. Meyer subtly takes a small amount of time in m. 10, which is very effective. The beginning thirty-seconds are almost as overly-articulated as Perlemuter’s interpretation; however, when the material changes in m. 16, Meyer produces a “watery effect” in the arabesque runs with a melancholic quality of touch. The sudden harmonic changes between mm. 22 and 23 are done in a very delicate manner with a slight slowing down that is almost unnoticeable. Similar to the opening, Meyer has a more “notey” right-hand figure in m. 30 and again in m. 41. Meyer reaches a great climax in m. 66 and drastically emphasizes the right-hand eighth note melody, which adds great drama to this movement. She takes a bit of time between mm. 76-77 and 78-79. Ravel does not mark this slowing down, but the harmonic material needs to be heard by playing it slower. Ravel’s lush harmonic language should never be understated when playing his works. Similar to Perlemuter, Meyer does not use pedal in mm. 84-87. Meyer creates a murmuring and magical atmosphere from m. 89 to the end by under-articulating the thirty-second arpeggios.

In Meyer’s “Le Gibet” the chords sound rich and warm, making the harmonies heartfelt to the listener. Many performers of the piece exaggerate the dissonance in m. 7, but Meyer does not. Unlike Perlemuter, she avoids the huge “hairpin” swells that are marked throughout the piece. She takes the signs as an opportunity to build fuller sonority but avoids over-shaping the phrases. The bells are audible throughout but never pierce through the piece. She rolls some chords beginning in m. 20 and breaks some of them into blocks—all notes together. At the pivotal moment of the piece, in m. 32, she reaches all the notes of the chord, establishing a great depth to the sound. Meyer plays the
heavy chords in m. 35 with a full tone. In mm. 40-41, she arpeggiates some chords while others are played in blocks. She treats mm. 43-44 similarly. The ending has a daunting ambiance as she generates the booming effect of the B-flats towards the end. She holds the ending longer, as if Ravel had marked a fermata.

Meyer begins “Scarbo” with fast opening eighths. The tremolos that follow are even, but subdued. She has an articulated sounding approach to the piece which is apparent in m. 80 where everything is clear with a stinging tone, and less use of pedal. Meyer implements the pedal only on the beginning of the downbeats, for example, in m. 98. The tempo throughout is not rushed so that each note can speak clearly—a very appropriate and standard tempo. Unlike Perlemuter, though, she uses pedal in m. 132 on the eighth note chords and in the following patterns. However, the material in m. 168 is extremely detached unlike Perlemuter who takes advantage of the pedal in order to connect the right-hand sixteenth staccato note to the quarter-tied note. Meyer chooses rather to have an even more articulated style to these abrupt gestures, which adds to the image of “Scarbo.” The fast passage works in mm. 232-234 and 253-255 are extremely enunciated to the very last note. There is a definite tempo change in m. 256, which is common amongst most pianists. She has an articulated interpretation, as well, in the sixteenth note staccato passages in mm. 299-302. Her romantic and wild approach to mm. 314-317 builds a great, powerful drama; quite possibly for technical reasons, she takes her time in mm. 345-352. The material is very thick, and she wisely broadens this section. Meyer brings out the bass effectively in mm. 353-365, producing a great crescendo to m. 366. The repeated D-sharps beginning in m. 396 are extremely blurry with her lavish use of pedal. She forms an Oriental soundscape that has a sensual shape in
the right-hand figure beginning in m. 430 and, furthermore, blurs this section and designs an echo in mm. 433-434 and 443-444. This is a similar tactic to Perlemuter’s, except his echoes are more noticeable. It would have been more effective had she started the section in m. 448 at an extremely soft volume. In general, Meyer applies more pedal than Perlemuter, apparent in mm. 544, 549, and 554-555. She accumulates a mammoth sound with her *accelerando* prior to the clmatic moment presented in m. 567. Meyer sustains the same agile vitality in m. 602, as she does in the preceding figures. Her tremolos in m. 616 are treated with utmost delicacy, and she pedals through to the end.

**Robert Casadesus**

Another important interpretation to consider is that of Robert Casadesus. On June 30, 1922 Casadesus accompanied Ravel to London to record some of the piano works on a piano roll. Casadesus possibly played some of the more challenging material on the recording. He likely recorded “Le Gibet” and the “Toccata.” Ravel supervised these recordings. The composer was very impressed by Casadesus’s interpretation of *Gaspard de la nuit* when he heard it performed in 1922. Ravel felt that Casadesus did not take the tempo liberties that many pianists took in “Le Gibet,” but rather played it as the composer intended with a slow tempo. Casadesus and Ravel often performed *Ma mère l’oye* together. Casadesus even gave an all-Ravel performance on June 11, 1924 at the Salle Pleyel. On December 4, 1951, Casadesus recorded the complete *Gaspard de la nuit*.

The tempo Casadesus chooses for “Ondine” is faster than that of his contemporaries such as Meyer and Perlemuter. Indeed, his is one of the faster historical recordings. The melodic material is nicely projected with a simply shaped contour in a
steady tempo. However, he takes time slightly between mm. 7-8. This beautiful harmonic change needs a slight tapering of tempo and dynamic and Casadesus masterfully accomplishes it. He designs a beautiful water effect in the arpeggios beginning in m. 16 and follows carefully with the ppp, pp, and p marking, thus forming three levels and a powerful buildup. Casadesus lands effectively and places the chord in m. 23. The thirty-second figures from the beginning as well as in m. 30 have a hammer-like feature. This helps keep the momentum and the drive of “Ondine.” The tempo slows down a bit in m. 52. Beginning in m. 57, Casadesus treats the passagework in the right hand with a martellato characteristic, making it very restless. He supports the climax of m. 66 with a thick left-hand tone. Similar to all the other historical recordings, he does not repeat the tied G-sharp in mm. 80-82. This was an error in Durand’s original printing of the score. Also, Casadesus does not use pedal in mm. 84-87. These unpedaled clear tones reflect the poetry where the mortal man proclaims his rejection of Ondine. He brings out the bass of m. 88 instead of starting a sudden crescendo from bottom to top. Casadesus closes “Ondine” with the right hand top thirds (C-sharp and E) ringing to the end.

Viñes’s faster tempo upset Ravel very much; Ravel preferred Casadesus’s tempo for “Le Gibet.” In Casadesus’s rendition, the B-flats do get lost in some measures, such as m. 23. Casadesus focuses more on the chordal harmonies than the continuation of the B-flat projection. He does not embellish on the lushness of mm. 31-33, where many pianists usually treat it romantically by taking some time. The C bass booms in m. 35 and some of the B-flat notes are absent in m. 44. His bells are not very poignant and even disappear at times, as he is fading away towards the end. The B-flat bass does not last at the end of the two measures.
An important recording to listen to is *Ravel plays Ravel*. It has been said that Ravel did not record “Le Gibet,” but had Casadesus record it instead because of Ravel’s smaller hands and Casadesus’s ease with the large span of chords. However, after comparing the Casadesus “Le Gibet” recording and the possible Ravel “Le Gibet” recording, one can see that they are very different. One important contrast is that the alleged Ravel recording rolls the large chords subtly. Also, often times hands are not played together, even if the material is in unison melodically and rhythmically. Assuming it is Ravel playing, he uses much less pedal than Casadesus. Because of the articulated approach, the pedal does not catch the bass notes at times; for example in m. 30, Ravel loses the bass. Instead of keeping the B-flat consistent in regards to dynamics, the composer proportionately changes volume based on the material surrounding it. Ravel allows the bells to dominate from mm. 35 to the end which differs from Casadesus’s recording.

The opening of “Scarbo” is slower than the previous performers. Even the tremolos after the three-note eighths are not very fast. By playing the opening slower, one can conjure the mystery and spookiness necessary for the main character of the piece. He does not *crescendo* in mm. 54-61, which could have added a great anxiety to the personality of “Scarbo.” He treats the material from mm. 104-108 with an articulated sound. Casadesus does not use a detached style to the sharp-sounding sixteenth notes beginning in m. 131. He is behind the beat and takes a slower approach. His energy stays powerful even in m. 207, where most performers *diminuendo* and drop the vigor. In his

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143 It should be noted, however, that many people believe that the piano-roll system does not reflect or “record” pedaling truthfully. Therefore, it is not always a good idea to judge pedaling based on recordings from rolls.
interpretation, Casadesus has a booming bass in mm. 232-253. Unlike the majority of pianists, he does not change the tempo in m. 256. In the recording, one can hear the difficulty of playing with accuracy throughout this section. Similar to many renditions of this piece, Casadesus presents mm. 345-352 in a slower tempo. He ends with the pedal right before m. 366, thus interrupting the connection and intensity between the sections. He brings out the bass and melody in m. 390, crafting a marvelous and passionate climax followed by very enunciated and slow tremolos. As he goes to the lower D-sharps—partly because of the thickness of the piano’s lower strings—he plays with a deep and heavy tone but without clarity. The murmuring continues into m. 430. The sixteenth-note seconds beginning in m. 460 sound detached and spastic; he chooses to keep this dry effect in mm. 472-476 without pedal. To keep the rhythmic turbulence going, he accentuates the down beats beginning in m. 478 in the left hand. Casadesus keeps the same quality of the growling bass octaves. The climactic moment of m. 564 is at a slower tempo. Unlike Meyer, who accelerates in this section, Casadesus broadens here, which allows everything to be heard prominently. He treats the melodic material in m. 593 with a very nostalgic quality whereas I “hammered” the melodic material with the una corda. With the pedal sustaining to the last note, Casadesus comes off the keys exactly on time without lengthening the last note. The character Scarbo disappears in the end.

**Jacques Février**

I will now turn to Jacques Février and his performance of *Gaspard de la nuit*. He was the son of one of Ravel’s colleagues, Henri Février (1875-1957), a composer who also studied with Ravel at the Conservatoire de Paris. Ravel knew Jacques Février since
his childhood. Because Ravel preferred Février’s left-hand concerto rendition to Paul Wittgenstein’s, he asked Février to premiere it in France.

Février carefully measures the thirty-second figure in the right hand. He feels the beats and alternates between bringing out the G-sharp and the A. All the thirty-seconds are treated with precision in exact steadiness without any tempo flexibility. He nicely places the arpeggio in m. 16, thereby avoiding rushing to the next section. There is a beautiful mysterious quality to m. 32 which Février awakens. Unlike some interpretations, he avoids taking a slower tempo in m. 52. He begins the thirds in m. 57 a bit slower and then rushes as the phrase builds. Février’s sensual tone creates a harp-like quality beginning in m. 72. He presents the material in m. 75 with a muffled tone, developing an obscure haze. Just like all the other pianists that have been analyzed, he also eliminates pedal in mm. 84-87. As the passage spirals down in the middle of m. 88, Février favors an arid sound, emulating the shrieking laughter of the mermaid. He closes “Ondine” by again measuring the bass and the tops of the arpeggios in mm. 89 to the end.

His “Le Gibet” is extremely powerful and daunting. Février’s tempo is slower than the other historical recordings previously mentioned. He enhances great depth and drama to the tone by stressing the lower bass notes such as the upbeat to m. 17. Also, Février never loses the B-flats throughout mm. 20-25. The booming bass B-flat notes in mm. 40 and 41 are terrifying. The most important interpretative aspect here is Février’s very static manner to “Le Gibet.”

Février takes a fast approach to the three-note eighths in the opening of “Scarbo.” The thirty-second tremolos are not very even and there are many technical mistakes throughout the piece. He takes a long break between m. 120 and 121. The left hand is
very weak beginning from m. 168. His tremolos that reappear in m. 396 have an incisive sound. He emphasizes the D-sharp in m. 430 on the main beats and accents the pulses again in m. 445. The sixteenths in m. 477 are too swift and it is difficult to distinguish the musical figures. The melodic material prevails in m. 593 with great conviction unlike Casadesus’s performance. As Février spirals down in m. 611, he plays with a slight touch of pedal. Again, the thirty-seconds in m. 616 are measured and he ends with no pedal in the last two measures. Throughout his “Scarbo,” the characters are very convincing but the technique is lacking.

**Ivo Pogorelich**

The influence of Orientalism is most evident in the final recording analyzed here. Hitherto, none of the previous performers have sufficiently embraced the Oriental character of this piece. I chose a contemporary recording in order to compare the historical interpretations to our modern-day pianists’. Ivo Pogorelich is known for his eccentric and convincing performances, and also for his recording of *Gaspard de la nuit*. He begins “Ondine” at a very moderate tempo, which is similar to the historical recordings. However, Pogorelich takes greater liberties with the tempo, especially in the opening melodic line. He tapers the phrase endings and maneuvers sensitively within the phrase as he outlines the arabesque-like shapes. Similar to Meyer, Pogorelich lingers between mm. 7-8; unlike any other recording, however, he uses small amounts of pedal in m. 23, which can be related to the dulcimer. Deviating from some pianists, he keeps the same tempo in m. 52. Similar to Février, he gradually builds momentum in the thirty-second thirds of the right hand in m. 57. Opposite to any of the performers in the
historical recordings, Pogorelich relaxes the material beginning in m. 75 into a leisurely tempo. The G-sharp bass notes in mm. 80-82 are placed gently and quietly. Pogorelich rejects the extended pedal throughout mm. 84-87, but does connect the individual notes of the phrase with syncopated pedal making sure to have an eighth rest audible in m. 85. He causes a booming effect in m. 88, and instead of a gradual crescendo he cultivates an explosive sound from the bottom to the top. “Ondine” concludes with the constant ringing of the thirds from mm. 89 to the end and effortlessly finishes with a slight slowing down and placing of the last third. Throughout “Ondine,” Pogorelich has a more romantic approach because of his use of tempo flexibility. He is extremely intuitive to the harmonic changes and handles every note with great delicacy in tone and timing.

Pogorelich’s tempo of “Le Gibet” is slower than that of the historical recordings I have examined. He takes time when he wants to place the sixteenth notes in mm. 8 and 10. There is a thunderous quality to the E-flat notes in mm. 17 and 18, but he changes the pedal and does not sustain the bass for the rest of the measure. None of the chords are rolled but rather sound full, beginning in m. 20. He does not use the crescendo between mm. 31-33, but there is still a particular tenderness to his playing which is heard in the lushness of the harmonies. The daunting, huge, resounding B-flat notes beginning in m. 40 eventually fade away toward the end of the movement.

“Scarbo’s” unsettling character opens with three slow eighth notes. The D-sharp notes are very sharp and defined. Pogorelich emphasizes the thick chords of m. 32 and accentuates the Spanish flavor of the passage. He uses an unbelievably fast tempo. It is distinctive from all of the historical recordings. Of course, with the audio recording technology of today, pianists have more freedom to splice material rather than choosing
from one of the few complete, unspliceable takes that they recorded. Because of his fast
tempo and absolute control, every note has a thrilling spark throughout the piece.
Pogorelich’s technical skills are remarkable. Most pianists choose to take a different and
slower tempo in m. 256; by contrast, Pogorelich maintains the intensity of the tempo.
Since he plays with such clarity, all the details of the phrase are audible. When Ravel
taught his “Toccata,” he would tell his students to play at a tempo in which one can hear
all the notes clearly.¹⁴⁴ In this case, Pogorelich is playing as quickly as possible, but with
utmost clarity. In all the rigorous material that has a *martellato* effect, Pogorelich avoids
the pedal, for example in mm. 309-312. This is a common interpretation in the historical
recordings, too. When he reaches one of the climactic moments of the piece in m. 366, he
breaks the musical figures into three measures, which he achieves by having a sudden
halt between mm. 368-369 and 371-372. Again, in m. 396, Pogorelich comes back to the
same musical idea with the same dry tone. He slows down slightly in m. 407. His
interpretation adds to the mystery of what is about to happen next which builds suspense
for the next portion. Pogorelich states the D-sharp notes in mm. 422-426 in a hammered-
like manner. The Oriental material is played in a more sensual style than in the historical
recordings while the musical content here is expressed in a tranquil tempo beginning in
m. 430. Pogorelich amplifies the haunting bass notes in mm. 448 and 450 and after a wild
ride of hammered seconds, returns to his original fast tempo. He plays the octave
material, such as mm. 554-555, without pedal, but with great power. His staccato endings
in m. 578 are violently disjunctive. Despite the *una corda* indication, Pogorelich

¹⁴⁴ Orenstein, 556.
magnifies the melodic line in m. 593. The ending vanishes in a steady tempo and with a lack of pedal.

Ivo Pogorelich’s interpretation is definitely more Oriental. He takes time between phrases, over-shapes the arabesque material, has a dull touch when the mallet-like passages are present, and overdramatizes the Spanish phrases. I believe that a certain amount of exaggeration in the piece is necessary. Because of the work’s programmatic nature, the drama needs to cut through in all the passages. Every note that exists on the page is attached to the poem. If the performer merely focuses on the pianistic abilities, he/she will lose the piece’s literary and thematic connection.
CHAPTER VIII

Editions of Gaspard de la nuit

Igor Stravinsky described Ravel as “the most perfect of Swiss clockmakers”\(^\text{145}\) as a way of emphasizing a characteristic they shared—both were pedantic about notational details. The intricate elements of Ravel’s works can be clearly seen in his scores. Ravel not only indicates what to do in the music, but also what not to do. The composer would often tell his performers: “Do not interpret my music, just play it!” From writing *sans ralentir* in both endings of “Ondine” and “Scarbo,” to detailed articulation markings in “Le Gibet,” he was very clear about what he wanted. But due to publishing errors, highly edited scores, and oral and written comments from Ravel to his interpreters, one can still find discrepancies. Thus, a detailed analysis of the four major editions—Durand (first edition, 1909), Peters (edited by Nichols Rogers, 1991), Henle Verlag (edited by Peter Jost, 2010), and Alfred (edited by Nancy Bricard, 2003)—is essential to a performer’s accurate study of this work. I will offer a general overview of the editorial issues in this following chapter.

**Durand Edition**

The Durand edition was published during Ravel’s lifetime. There are no critical commentaries even though the score contains many mistakes that most current editions try to correct. A careful performer will want to see this edition as the most prominent of its time and compare it to the current editions.

\(^{145}\) Nichols, *Ravel*, 1.
Peters Edition

In the Peters Edition, Roger Nichols uses Ravel’s corrected edition, the first printed edition, and the autograph as his primary sources. Also, he refers to the printed editions that belonged to Perlemuter. Though there are handwritten comments by Ravel and Perlemuter, Nichols uses only Ravel’s corrections. The secondary sources include the printed copies with corrections by Lucien Garban;¹⁴⁶ the recordings of piano rolls of Ravel’s playing; and the historical recordings of pianists like Casadesus and Perlemuter, who were guided by Ravel. Nichols also refers to Perlemuter’s interviews with Jourdan-Morhange and Henriette Fauré for further interpretation of the score.

Henle Verlag

The Henle Verlag is the most recent edition. It includes the poems and its translations in three different languages (French; English, translated by Jeremy Drake; German, translated by Peter Jost). Throughout the work, there are asterisks that indicate changes or comparisons to the different sources which direct the reader to the critical commentary at the end of the edition. The last page has a list of the expressions and tempo marks with their translations into German and English. Peter Jost was primarily guided by Ravel’s first copy of the first edition. For further clarification, he referred to the autograph. Even though Ravel made corrections for the new engraving of the revised second printing, the printing never took place. The Henle edition does not alter any of the pedal markings found in the first edition and, thus, there are no notations for releasing the

¹⁴⁶ Lucien Garban (1877-1959) was a lifelong friend of Ravel’s and worked as a proofreader for the Durand publishing company.
pedal. This can be helpful for the artistic performers who choose to interpret their extent of pedal usage without the guidance of editorial pedal markings.

**Alfred Edition**

The Alfred edition is edited by Nancy Bricard. She includes details from pedal markings that indicate the releases, depressing, and fluttering techniques to detailed fingering suggestions that provide the composer’s ideas as well as her own advice. Though it is heavily edited, the notes are corrected at the bottom of the page and not within the score. Redistribution of notes between the hands is also suggested throughout. The lack of certain markings, such as arpeggio signs, is indicated, and she mentions the origins for these corrections. Bricard studied with Marcel Ciampi (1891-1980), who was also on the faculty of Paris Conservatoire with Perlemuter. Both knew the composer and studied *Gaspard de la nuit* with Ravel. She mentions Ciampi often throughout the edition. This edition is convenient for those that want to learn the music quickly without deep investigation as both of the Urtext versions go into. Further editorial markings include the metronome marks as well as her translations of the French terms into English. She translated the poem not in a “poetic” sense but in a more literal sense.

The most important contribution is her idea on the arpeggios of “Le Gibet.” Discussing mm. 20-25, 40-41, and 43-44, Bricard says,

The chords must not be arpeggiated in this passage or in similar passages, according to Vlado Perlemuter. I am in total agreement. However, this poses a problem for those with small hands. Although some redistribution of notes between the hands is possible, it may still be necessary to leave out one or two well-chosen notes. It is much more important to project the atmosphere of these passages than to include every note by arpeggiating, which destroys the emotional content. The notes I leave out are in brackets and shown in the example below
along with a suggested redistribution of notes. The example is written in A major as I find it easier to read and retain these measures in this key.¹⁴⁷

The performer should still produce the full harmonic sonority without losing too many notes so that the arpeggios will not lose the icy effect needed in this section.

**Editorial Issues: Fingering**

Arthur Schnabel, in his preface of his Beethoven Sonata editions, mentions that his fingerings are primarily to give performers an understanding of the musical objectives and ideas for creating the right quality of the sound. In the few indications of fingering in *Gaspard de la nuit*, Ravel maintains a similar notion. The original and limited fingering from the autograph is included in all the four editions. However, Alfred is the only edition that includes alternate options for fingering. Peters and Henle have the same exact fingering. These come from various sources including the autograph, Ravel’s corrected copy of the first edition, and comments from various pianists that worked with Ravel on the piece. In “Ondine,” there are Ravel’s fingerings in mm. 14, 20, 41, 55, 57, 60, 66, 69, and 88-89. In m. 14, Ravel’s fingering suggestion helps with the awkward right-hand passage (which can be more comfortable if redistributed between two hands). Ravel indicates the fingering in m. 41 on beat three. If one follows his fingering, the passages can sound musically correct. It is essential to remain *piano* and to produce a similar atmosphere as the opening figure. However, repeating with the fourth finger, a rather weak finger for most pianists, can affect the steadiness of the tempo. An alternate fingering could be 3 and 1 instead of 3 and 2. In m. 55, the fingering possibly suggests a *legato* touch for the octaves. The treacherous passage in m. 60 needs to follow a fingering

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¹⁴⁷ Ravel, ed. Bricard, 35.
that can be light in the right hand without losing the intensity of the speed. “Le Gibet” has no fingering indications. “Scarbo’s” fingerings are found in mm. 2, 232-233, 448-472, and 511-512. The très fondu, en tremolo in m. 2 can be highly effective with the 1 and 2 repeated finger pattern. However, the goal for the performer should be to find a comfortable fingering that sounds good. If alternating between 3 and 2 and 1 is essential, then the performer should just be aware to stay close to the keys. The danger lies in making this passage sound very pointy. The performer needs to have depth in sound and provide a grumbling-sounding mood. M. 232 can have many fingering options. The performer must be careful not to fixate on a single, poor fingering and stubbornly try to perfect it. Experimentation is crucial when choosing a fingering that fits one’s hands. In m. 448, the thumb on two notes is indicated in a gradually accelerating passage. This is a great suggestion. It is unconventional but helpful to the chromatic seconds in the passage, which greatly speed up and accumulate in volume.

The only fingerings in the Durand edition are found in mm. 88-89 of “Ondine” and in mm. 448-472 and 512 of “Scarbo.” These first edition markings are found in the subsequent editions.

Bricard’s Alfred edition includes a great deal of her own fingering and a very helpful guide for redistribution of the hands, which is very beneficial for Ravel’s piano writing. For “Le Gibet,” she indicates a change of finger for the repeated B-flat. However, in order to be consistent with the articulation markings, another option is to use either the fourth but preferably the fifth finger, and to strike the key in the three different articulations marked on the score. The accented B-flat uses the finger weight attack from above; the following staccato note is played by sliding inwards toward the fallboard; and
the tenuto B-flat is just pure weight from the arm. Whether the fingers alternate or stay the same, the goal of the repeated B-flats is to have three different articulations and three consistent articulations throughout the 153 times. Bricard’s most helpful hand distributions are in “Scarbo,” where in m. 263 she suggests some alternatives to what is originally notated.

**Editorial Issues: Pedal**

The pedal indication is sparse in the Peters, Henle, and Durand edition. Only the Peters includes some editorial marking of the suggested release of pedal. Looking at “Ondine,” for example, in m. 41, the editor decides to place the “pedal off” marking in the middle of the bar, which can help the listener remember the opening figure. But one can equally argue that the harmonic material within the measure does not change and, therefore, there is no need to change the pedal. However, it can be quite essential to change the pedal in the following measure. Here, the emptiness and upper register timbre is particularly important. A similar pedal release marking is indicated again in m. 47, achieving the same effect as in m. 42. This provides another reason why it can be strange to change the pedal again in m. 41. A pivotal moment of the work occurs in m. 84, where the Peters edition chooses to write a release of pedal. This moment can be convincingly played with a release of pedal or with half a pedal. When a student studies scores that are edited in this manner, he/she can easily, blindly follow the “composer.” However, we do not know whether Ravel wanted a pedal release in this section. Mm. 84-87 can have a powerful effect if played with an utterly unsettling quality while using a slight touch of pedal. Dryness can make it sound too abrupt and out of character. But one could argue
that it is this moment in which the mortal tells the mermaid that he is in love with another mortal and rejects Ondine. In this interpretation, a dry effect would powerfully depict the coldness and indifference of the rejection.

Bricard states in the Alfred edition: “The sostenuto pedal should never be used! Ravel composed his music on an Erard piano. This instrument, like all French pianos of that era, was not equipped with this pedal.” However, “Ondine” and “Scarbo” could make use of the sostenuto pedal, if it were used with caution. In “Ondine,” m. 56 could include the sostenuto pedal with the C-sharp bass in order to avoid the wash of sound. The intricate chromatic line can be extremely powerful if it is not purely blended in with pedal. In “Scarbo,” m. 460 might also benefit from the use of sostenuto pedal. Here, the fierce left-hand arpeggios can be highly effective by sustaining the low B with the sostenuto pedal.

A present day performer has the opportunity to play on a modern piano with an extended keyboard range such as the Bösendorfer. This capability allows the performer to change the pitches Ravel notated, accommodating the pattern that is developed in mm. 17-22. For example, the pitches then vary in “Scarbo” in m. 15 in order to match the pitches an octave higher in mm. 17-22, though the Peters edition does not indicate the change. However, Ravel did not give that option in the score.
Editorial Issues: Metronome Marking

Durand has no metronome marking for all three movements. Peter and Henle editions indicate that Perlemuter’s metronome marking in “Ondine” was suggested by Ravel as 58 = † and also 60 in parenthesis, 69 = † in brackets for “Le Gibet,” and none for “Scarbo.” Alfred indicates 58 = † in “Ondine,” 60 = † in “Le Gibet,” and 88 = † in “Scarbo.” One’s tempo choice can be based on the concert hall’s acoustics, but even more importantly, on the performer’s individual connection to the music.

Editorial Issues: Notes and Articulation Discrepancies

In mm. 1-13, most of the editions, except in the Durand, show Ravel’s corrected copy as well as his students’ corrections.

Numerous notes are inaccurate in the Durand edition. With the use of common sense and harmonic and melodic understanding, Peters, Henle, and Alfred have altered these notes, and added many courtesy accidentals to give the performer greater security of the note reading accuracy. In m. 73 of “Ondine,” Peters and Henle note that the last
two pitches in the bass are corrected in the printed copy of Garban’s score with an octave sign below it. This follows the pattern of the previous beat in the same measure as well as “Ondine’s” ending.

The consistency of ties is lacking in the first edition of “Le Gibet.” Peters and Henle mark these changes, while Alfred gives the alternate version with commentary.

**Translations and Dedications**

Translations for the musical terms appear in the Alfred and Henle editions, while the Durand and Peters only offer the French terms. With the translations in the score, the performer can understand the musical meaning at a higher level.

The autograph does not include any dedications. However, all of the other editions have the dedicatees noted above (Peters, Durand, Alfred) or below (Henle) the movement titles.

**Summary**

After studying the various editions, it is essential to decide which edition would fit the different types of *Gaspard de la nuit* learners. The various editions are suitable for the different styles of pianists. If the learner is a younger pianist who is used to detailed comments from his/her teacher, of course, the Alfred is the most convenient guide. Here, Bricard gives fingering suggestions that can be helpful for smaller hands. For a scholar, the Henle Verlag edition is recommended because of the highly detailed documentation of discrepancies and the alternate figurations of Ravel’s writing. A standard edition or a good midpoint for most performers’ needs would be the Peters edition. The least useful
edition, from a performer’s standpoint, would be the Durand edition. There are ubiquitous mistakes in this edition which offers no alternative corrections or editorial commentaries. Though it was printed during Ravel’s time, this French edition is the least accurate and intelligible edition, as well as one of the most expensive scores.
Conclusion

Judging from historical context, it is evident that *Gaspard de la nuit* is a product of French colonialism at a time when many European artists were striving to cultivate non-Western styles. Consequently, though *Gaspard de la nuit*’s considerable intricacies provide an attractive subject for discussion and analysis, they become trivial in comparison to the more significant issues of its Middle Eastern roots.

A performer can develop a stronger connection with *Gaspard de la nuit* by understanding the Middle Eastern musical traits and emulating the *santur* style technique. The *santur* examples attempt to illustrate the strong relationship of this instrument with the modern-day piano. Therefore, when studying *Gaspard de la nuit*, performers should emulate the musical and technical character of dulcimers, and specifically the *santur*. Undoubtedly this was what Ravel had in mind.

I hope that this dissertation will introduce elements that a performer studying *Gaspard de la nuit* finds innovative, imaginative, and helpful toward faithful representation of typical French sounds mixed with Middle Eastern suggestions. As a product of both Western and Middle Eastern cultures, I was deeply moved and inspired to discover the fusion between these two cultures which Ravel so masterfully put together. Learning and creating a unique interpretation of *Gaspard de la nuit* was for me a most gratifying undertaking, indeed a labor of love. *Gaspard de la nuit* taught me not to be intimidated by grandiose technical criteria but instead to think of images, visions and, especially, the poetry that inspired Ravel. To play *Gaspard de la nuit* well, it is crucial to have an understanding of these programmatic settings.
It was also my intention to build a connection between Orientalism and Impressionism. Because impressions of the Orient are unmistakable in the music of Ravel and Debussy, a performer ought to highlight the intricate musical characteristics of the Orient in order to create an authentic interpretation of those French masterpieces. I believe that Ravel’s worldly nature, his fondness for travel, and constant thirst for the unique musical styles of cultures outside his own, demand such connections and understanding.

In summary, appreciation of Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit* as well as other works of his and his contemporaries can be greatly enhanced by grasping the meaning of Orientalism, recognizing references to art history, and connecting the diversity of musical sources. Listening to the various historical recordings allows the listener and potential performer a more faithful interpretation of Ravel’s work. Analysis and study of the various editions also contribute to a better understanding of the score.

The opportunity to study and touch the original manuscript of *Gaspard de la nuit* and to visit Ravel’s home was a powerful and memorable experience for me as it was indeed the culmination of my studies of the composer’s life and work. Ravel’s sensitivity, interest in and affinity for other cultures is reflected in his lush harmonies and hypnotizing melodies. His music evokes a fantasized Orient that touches the soul and fuels the imagination of the dreamer who wishes to travel to distant lands.
Appendices

Appendix A (Figures 1-5):
Manuscript illustrations at the Ransom Research Center in the University of Texas at Austin. Photography by Sanaz Rezai taken on August 10, 2013.

Appendix B (Figures 6-25):
Artifacts from Ravel’s house, “Le Belvédère,” in Montfort l'Amaury, France.
Photography by Sanaz Rezai taken on September 21, 2013.
Figure 1. First page of Ravel’s manuscript of *Gaspard de la nuit*.
Figure 2. Ravel’s manuscript mm. 22-39 of Gaspard de la nuit’s “Ondine.”
Figure 3. Ravel’s manuscript m. 59 of *Gaspard de la nuit*’s “Ondine.”
Figure 4. Ravel’s manuscript mm. 1-25 of Gaspard de la nuit’s “Le Gibet.”
Figure 5. Ravel’s manuscript mm. 409-459 of Gaspard de la nuit’s “Scarbo.”
Appendix B

Figure 6. Ravel’s house.
Figure 7. Ravel’s house.
Figure 8. Ravel’s Erard piano.
Figure 9. Japanese print.
Figure 10. Japanese print.
Figure 11. One of many coffee/tea sets in Ravel’s home.
Figure 12. Coffee set of Arab origin.
Figure 13. Chinese vase.
Figure 14. Japanese print napkins.
Figure 15. Décor in vitrine of Egyptian sphinx.
Figure 16. Various artifacts from Asia in one of Ravel’s main rooms.
Figure 17. Ravel’s vest.
Figure 18. Chinese jewelry box and various decorative items on a Chinese tea table tray.
Figure 19. Native American hand carved and painted eagle totem pole.
Figure 20. Chinese tray.
Figure 21. Chinese teakettle.
Figure 22. Chinese lion candleholder and writing utensils.
Figure 23. Japanese inspired garden.
Figure 24. View from Ravel’s balcony.
Figure 25. Sanaz Rezai playing Ravel’s Erard piano.
Selected Discography

Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit*:


*Santur* and Related Instruments:


References


