

**RAVEL'S WATER MUSIC FOR SOLO PIANO: *JEUX D'EAU, UNE BARQUE SUR
L'OCEAN AND ONDINE***

By Ting-Yu Liu

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Dr. Alexandre Dossin, Chair of the Examining Committee

March, 2023

Committee in Charge: Dr. Alexandre Dossin, Chairman

Dr. David Riley

Dr. Jack Boss

Accepted by:

Leslie Straka, D.M.A.

Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, School of Music and Dance

© Ting-Yu Liu

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: TING-YU LIU

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, OR

Cleveland Institute of Music, Cleveland, OH

National Tsing Hua University, Hsin-Chu, Taiwan

DEGREES AWARDED:

D.M.A., Piano Performance, 2023, University of Oregon

Master of Arts, Music Theory, 2022, University of Oregon

Master of Music, Piano Performance, 2014, Cleveland Institute of Music

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Piano Performance and Collaborative Piano

Piano Pedagogy

Music Theory Pedagogy

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CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore Ravel's stylistic approach and inimitable textural characteristics in his three water pieces: *Jeux d'eau*, *Une barque sur l'océan*, and *Ondine*. Through this study I aim to show the development of Ravel's compositional style in his piano works related to water, especially the relationship between musical components and extra-musical ideas. Therefore, I will discuss and analyze these three pieces from multiple perspectives: timbre, harmony, and rhythm. As part of the analysis, I will also be looking at a myriad of textural levels and how these characteristics and the overall sonorities relate to portraying water.

1.2 Scope of Research

There has been much analysis done on Ravel's piano works. In this study I will focus on the harmonic colors which characterize Ravel's musical language. *Une barque sur l'océan* displays Ravel's innovative approach to compositional development, one that is full of coloristic effects and tone-painting. *Jeux d'eau*, an early work, is more impressionistic as it relates to harmony and form. Formal analysis is challenging due to the complexity of Ravel's music. The harmonic functions are often ambiguous as a result of a musical structure that is less traditionally tonal. Schenkerian analysis tools may not be helpful when analyzing these works, for they are not supported by a traditional modulation scheme. Oliver Messiaen's analyses of Ravel's piano works reveal a deep musical thinking in terms of harmony, rhythm, and form. Messiaen's writings will be useful, especially when discussing the various poetic perspectives of Ravel's *Ondine*. Thus, in these three water-like pieces, Ravel was inspired by an array of extra-musical ideas.

Jeux d'eau was influenced by Debussy's style, and the concept of Impressionism itself. *Une barque sur l'océan* is Impressionistic and symbolist simultaneously. *Ondine* is based on Aloysius Bertrand's poems. The compositional structure and musical lines depict different types of water-topics and these are projected in a variety of ways. I aim to combine my analysis with a performer's perspective and thus discuss ways to interpret Ravel's water music.

1.3 Review of Literature

Ravel's piano works can be divided in three periods. *Jeux d'eau* (1901) was composed in the first period (1875-1905). Ravel's early style was inspired by Debussy. His compositions reflect these musical expectations and pianistic techniques that are characteristic of Impressionism. The term *Impressionism* was derived from Claude Monet's painting "*Impression: Soleil Levant*" (Rising Sun). Impressionist painters seek to capture an impression of the subject at the visual level. According to musicologist Theodor W. Adorno (1903-69), much of Ravel's music characteristically features of French musical impressionism¹. The inclination of French music deals with the perfection and transparency of sound. *Jeux d'eau* (1901) can be considered a representative work of Impressionism. *Miroirs* (1904-5) and *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908) were composed in the second period (1905-18). In many ways, these two works are still inspired by Debussy's style and impressionism. Compared to Debussy's style of impressionism, Ravel's *Miroirs* adds a pictorial aspect, painting the color instead of only expressing emotion.² Based on Aloysius Bertrand's poems, *Gaspard de la nuit* is one of the most technically challenging works in all of classical piano literature.

In the early 20th century, Paris had many artists, poets, and musicians from all over Europe. Ravel participated in an artistic circle called *Apaches*, one which was active in the early 1900s. Poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) stated "Harmony is at the root of the theory of color. Melody is the unity in color, or color in general."³ Ravel was heavily influenced by symbolist poets and impressionistic artists. At the same time, his style could be described as a combination of impressionism and neoclassicism. Symbolism is the foundation of the Impressionist movement. It was originally a literary movement. "Symbolism was concerned with what lay behind external

¹ Peter Kaminsky, *Unmasking Ravel*. University of Rochester Press, 2011. Pp. 175-6.

² Victor I. Seroff, *Maurice Ravel*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1953. P. 89.

³ Simon Trezise, *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. P. 30.

appearances, with the “intangible” and “inexpressible.”⁴ It seeks to uncover meanings or ideas. *Ondine* is the only one among these three water-topic pieces with a title based on a poem. The epigram or poem appears below the title of the composition, and provides a literary clue to the piece itself. At this point, the context is associated with an extra-musical idea or musical expression. It represents a metaphor to be paired with a cadence, a rhythmic pattern, or a melodic phrase.

1.3.1 *Jeux d'eau*

Jeux d'eau was composed in 1901. This piece reflects Ravel’s admiration for Liszt’s piano work *Les Jeux d'eau a la Villa d'Este*. According to Gruminder K. Bhogal’s article “Ornament and metric Complexity in Ravel’s Piano Music”, Ravel’s music style is characteristic with rhythmic and melodic complexity.⁵ Ravel used a varied figuration of short rhythmic values to evoke the playful water. In the opening of *Jeux d'eau*, the initial four-note figure and its transformation create rhythmic complexity. The rhythmic diminution and the harmonic oscillation produce musical motion.⁶ In Daphne Leong and David Korevaar’s article “Repetition as Musical Motion in Ravel’s Piano Writing”, the musical motion is determined by Ravel’s indications and expresses a subtle and flowing motion.⁷ The initial ascending arpeggiation, the rhythmic diminution of the thirty-second-note arpeggiation, and the harmonic oscillation produce musical motion. The accompanimental figurations support the melody in a structural sense. Harmonically, Ravel uses major seventh chords, arpeggiated dominant ninths and dominant elevenths. The beginning opens with a minor second and a major seventh harmony. There are two themes, but the harmonic relationship between the two are not that of a traditional classical work. Although this is the case, the formal structure

⁴ Paul Roberts, *The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*. Amadeus Press, 1996. P. 18.

⁵ Peter Kaminsky, *Unmasking Ravel*. University of Rochester Press, 2011. Pp. 653-5.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Peter Kaminsky, *Unmasking Ravel*. University of Rochester Press, 2011. Pp. 290-2.

adheres to a classical framework with two main melodic ideas, a development section, and a recapitulation.

Jeux d'eau demonstrates Ravel's stylistic development in terms of ornamentation and modern harmonic principles.⁸ There are two styles of ornaments featured in Ravel's music.⁹ One is rhythmically irregular and metrically dissonant. The second is also rhythmically irregular but is more controlled in terms of meter. According to Ravel's autobiographical statement, *Jeux d'eau* was inspired by the sound of water.¹⁰ There are wide ranges of registers and dynamics that create the illusion of water drops. Coloristic and timbral effects are evident throughout the work. Whole-tone and pentatonic scales are widely used for coloristic effects. Ravel also used the pedal to assist with tone colors and overtone effects. According to Ricardo Viñes "Ravel recommended the use of the pedal in high passages to produce clear tones, (sic) the vague impression of vibrations in the air."¹¹

1.3.2 *Une Barque sur l'océan*

Miroirs was composed in 1905 after Ravel had failed to win the Prix de Rome for the fourth time. It consists of five piano pieces. Following his competition failures, he was invited on a trip to Holland by his friends. Ravel was quite inspired by this vacation and decided to compose a piece based on impressions of the trip. He created *Miroirs* based on external images, transcribing them to the piano. Each piece of *Miroirs* was dedicated to a different member of the French group *Les Apaches*. *Une Barque sur l'océan* was dedicated to French painter Paul Sordes. Ravel composed the piano cycle *Miroirs* when he was in the circle of the "Apaches" in 1904-05. The literal translation of *Miroirs*

⁸ Marguerite Long, *At the Piano with Piano*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons LTD, 1973. P. 10.

⁹ Gurminder K. Bhopal, *Not Just A Pretty Surface: Ornament and Metric Complexity in Ravel's Piano Music*. University of Rochester Press, 2011. Pp. 272-3.

¹⁰ Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975. P.30.

¹¹ Vlado Perlemuter, *Ravel According to Ravel*. Kahn & Averill Publishers, 2005. P. 6.

(mirrors) suggests the reflection of objects. The title *Miroirs* also suggests the process of reflecting, or deep personal interactions. The unreal, the intangible, is often reflected through an image. The title of the piano cycle *Miroirs* should not be considered a programmatic title but instead denotes reflecting, or reflection, on many different levels.

Ravel considered Mozart as his model.¹² He admired the clarity and purity of Mozart's musical style. Ravel looked upon himself as a Mozartean.¹³ In many ways, his music is Mozart-like for it utilizes classical traditions. In *Miroirs*, Ravel changed his compositional style of harmonic development. This piano cycle demonstrates a change in Ravel's harmonic style.¹⁴ Compared to *Jeux d'eau*, there are motivic fragments, rhythmic freedom, and a loose formal structure in *Une barque sur l'océan*. However, Ravel did not consider *Miroirs* an impressionistic work. The portrayal of each object of *Miroirs* is full of imagination and fantasy. The image in *Une barque sur l'océan* is one of a boat on the ocean. The arpeggio-based patterns suggest the waves of the ocean. Ravel used the subject of water to depict a boat that has embarked on an ocean journey. In his autobiography, he suggested that this work should lead to a subjective expression instead of a pictorial description.¹⁵ The harmony is enriched by ninth and eleventh chords, unprepared dissonance, and unresolved appoggiaturas.¹⁶ The arpeggio-based patterns represent different size waves surging across the ocean.

Regarding the tonality of this piece, Ravel's musical language evokes the color of bitonality, for he often superimposes related and unrelated chords over the same pedal point.¹⁷ The opening minor chord in the left hand builds on a triad with added sixth, ninth and eleventh intervals. F# is established as the tonal center.¹⁸ An F# ninth chord is used throughout the work. It can be observed at

¹² Siglind Bruhn, *Images and ideas in Modern French Piano Music*. Pendragon Press, 1997. P.118.

¹³ Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*. Dover, 2003. P. 421.

¹⁴ Christopher Palmer, *Impressionism in Music*. C. Scribner's Sons, 1974. P. 115.

¹⁵ Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel Man and Musician*. Yale University Press, 2009. P.66.

¹⁶ Paul Collaer, *A History of Modern Music*. New York, 1961. P. 165.

¹⁷ Ibid,

¹⁸ Siglind Bruhn, *Images and ideas in Modern French Piano Music*. Pendragon Press, 1997. Pp.81-2.

the beginning in both hands. Here the F[#] serves as a pedal point. In the middle section, there is a traditional transposition to the dominant. The tonal center shifts from the pedal point F[#] to C[#]. The texture here is harmonized by a C[#] minor ninth chord. The harmony is innovative with tone-painting and effects. The music exposes the listeners to the unpredictability and wonder of nature.

1.3.3 *Ondine*

Gaspard de la nuit was composed in 1908. It is based on poems by Aloysius Bertrand. *Ondine* is the first piece from *Gaspard de la nuit*. According to the content of the poem, *Ondine*, a water sprite, is depicted with metaphorical and non-metaphorical images. She is playful, mysterious, seductive, beautiful, and emotional in the first stanza. In the second stanza, *Ondine* is characterized as a child of the waves who lives on a lake. The third stanza contains metaphorical images pertaining to the human condition and desires, as well as non-metaphorical images such as the scene itself. The fourth and fifth stanzas are in the first person singular and should be perceived as the narrator speaking to us. Thus, Ravel's *Ondine* is presented in accordance with the images portrayed in the poem. Regarding the poetic text, two themes represent the two main characters. Theme one represents *Ondine*, and theme two is associated with the man. In the opening, groupings of G[#] and A are juxtaposed to create both metric consonance and dissonance. The harmony of this piece is ambiguous. The texture is bitonal. The melody is supported by an accompaniment with irregular grouping. The accompaniment pattern consists of a repeated triad with the sixth over the root. The rhythmic pattern is predictable with a grouping of 3+3+2.

Ravel displayed his virtuosic skills with subtlety and sophistication in the pianistic textures. The textures not only deliver different timbres, sound colors, and sound effects, but also contain narrative and visual effects. The motif of irregular thirty-second notes portrays the water nymph. These irregular groupings project stability and instability in the background. The rhythmic patterns

generate a complex aural perception. Therefore, Ravel enhanced the metric impact with motivic transformation throughout *Ondine*, including using polyrhythmic passages. The combination of rhythms and meters allows the musical phrases to proceed organically.

In addition to the repeated melodic pattern, the minor second produces tonal ambiguity. Tension is established from the oscillation of G[#] and A.¹⁹ These are contrasting sonorities and create an unusual color. Chords juxtaposed upon a sustained note project the effect of a cluster sonority. The music unfolds from an unusual metric trajectory while the texture supports its melodic line harmonically. The harmonic and multiple metric materials are involved in the motivic development and create a sense of tonal instability. The accompaniment is tightly connected to the motivic repetitions and uses double-note passages. The tonal color is supported by a pedal point.

1.3.4 Conclusion

In *Jeux d'eau*, in order to depict gushing water, Ravel used many arpeggio passages with seventh, ninth and eleventh chords. The formal structure is based on sonata form but the tonal structure does not follow the classic tonal scheme. Pentatonic and whole-tone scales are used to depict different colors and sonorities. *Une barque sur l'océan* displays Ravel's innovative techniques of compositional development, sound effects, and tone-painting. His later piano work *Ondine* is more elaborate in terms of sound production and textural complexity.

Ravel expresses programmatic ideas as well as inner emotions. *Ondine* reflects programmatic content and poetic images. It contains lyrical and romantic expressions. Ravel states, “*Miroirs* is a collection of piano-pieces that mark a change in my harmonic development that is so profound that they have put many musicians out of countenance who up to that point have been

¹⁹ Gurminder K. Bhopal, *Not Just a Pretty Surface: Ornament and Metric Complexity in Ravel's Piano Music*. University of Rochester Press, 2011. P. 291.

the most familiar with my style.”²⁰ Ravel demonstrates his mastery of color and effects. The indicated dynamics are of vital importance in terms of producing the proper effects. His melodic line is concise, and this is achieved through repeated sequences and various textures, with the feeling of a *rubato* being written out among the different levels of rhythmic subdivisions. The performer should feel freedom and flexibility in the rhythmic textures. Therefore, the characteristics of Ravel’s music in his three water-like pieces can be summarized through the following aspects. He used sevenths, ninths and eleventh chords to create dissonant sonorities. Pentatonic scales and whole tone scales are widely used, particularly in *Jeux d’eau*. In *Ondine*, the regular and irregular rhythmic patterns create a complex aural perception. The texture juxtaposes the metric consonance and dissonance as these rhythmic patterns come together with the different groupings of notes G[#] and A.

²⁰ Roland Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*. New York: Dover Publications. P. 41.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION

Jeux d'eau, *Une barque sur l'océan* and *Ondine* are based on different water-topics. These works are simultaneously Impressionistic, Symbolistic and Programmatic. The titles of these three pieces inform the listener as to the various images that Ravel intends to depict. Ravel's musical aesthetic aligns with his personality, which is certainly that of a virtuosic nature. The most salient characteristics of Ravel's musical language are the rich use of ambiguous tonalities, harmonic dissonances, and coloristic timbres to create special effects. His piano works demand a great amount of technical accomplishment from the performer, as well as imagination, mastery of voicing, and subtle dynamic effects. According to Pierre Boulez "*Timbre and Composition*": "...the function of timbre was primarily related to its identity in addition to being charged with certain effective and symbolic characteristics." In Ravel's musical language, timbre is incorporated as a subordinate element to the constitution of the formal structure. The form is most notably reflected in the cohesion of various thematic materials.

Jeux d'eau can be considered a precursor to *Une barque sur l'océan* and *Ondine*. In *Jeux d'eau*, Ravel uses a quasi sonata-allegro form in that only the second theme returns in the recapitulation. Here the rhythmic patterns include horizontal alternation of meters and polyrhythms, whereas *Une barque* and *Ondine* are comprised of smaller units combined with thematic development. The thematic materials of *Une barque sur l'océan* consist of descending thirds and fourths. Ravel proceeds with this harmonic outline until the dramatic climax in *Ondine*. In addition to the use of triads with added 9th, 11th, or 13th in *Jeux d'eau*, bitonalities, mixed modalities, and whole tone scales are widely used in his consequent works *Une barque* and *Ondine*. Ravel used multiple dynamic levels to culminate each in piece in dramatic fashion. The

dynamic intensifications project images of different water wave levels. The dynamic fluctuations draw the aural attention of the listener to the foreground.

CHAPTER III

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

Ravel was born on March 7, 1875 in Ciboure, France, in the Basque county. He is considered one of the greatest composers of the 20th century, known for its subtle timbres, harmonic complexity and technical brilliance. Ravel began his musical training at an early age, studying piano with his mother and later enrolling at the Paris Conservatoire in 1889, where he remained until 1905.

In 1889, Ravel was accepted to enter the Paris Conservatoire. He met Ricardo Viñes, who became his lifelong friend and the pianist who premiered many of Ravel's piano works. In 1889, the *Exposition Universelle* (World Exhibition) occurred in Paris and celebrated the centenary of the French Revolution. French engineer Gustave Eiffel was asked to design a tower for the centenary celebration. Ravel was impressed by the Exhibition. The eastern scales, Asian modes and exotic melodies inspired Ravel greatly. Simultaneously, Ravel encountered the music of the Russian Five when he was listening to Rimsky-Korsakov, who conducted the *Capriccio Espanol*. Ravel failed the examinations in the harmony class for three consecutive years, therefore he was excluded from the piano class in 1895. Ravel returned to the Conservatoire in 1897 and joined Gabriel Faure's composition class. Ravel respected Faure as the most inspired French composer. Despite his genius, Ravel failed to win a prize in composition for two consecutive years. He also failed the first round of the Prix de Rome composition competition. He participated in the Prix de Rome again in 1902 and 1903 but he did not win because the jury commented that his fugue was too untraditional. Despite his exceptional talent, Ravel failed to win the prestigious prix de Rome. But this did not deter from continuing to compose.

Ravel composed many piano masterworks: *Jeux d'eau* (1901), *Miroirs* (1905), *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1908), *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1917) and the piano concerto (1931). *Jeux d'eau* translates as “Fountains” or “Playing Water”. It was composed in 1901 when Ravel was a student at the Conservatoire. At the time of writing *Jeux d'eau*, Ravel was enrolled in Gabriel Faure’s composition classes at the Paris Conservatoire. This piece is dedicated to his teacher Faure. *Jeux d'eau* is one of Ravel’s earliest works with a classical formal structure. It was premiered in Paris in 1902 by Ravel’s friend Ricardo Viñes.

In 1900 Ravel joined a group called *Les Apaches* (Hooligans), which was a group of writers, artists, and musicians. The group was interrupted in 1914 due to World War I. Ravel was most pianistically productive, both as a composer and performer, between 1902 to 1914. In 1905, Ravel composed *Miroirs*, which consisted of five pieces. Each piece is dedicated to a member of *Les Apaches*. *Mirrors* demonstrates Ravel’s inspiration from extramusical ideas. Ravel explored new harmonic and formal styles as he wrote *Miroirs*.

Composed in 1908, *Gaspard de la Nuit* was inspired by three poems of Aloysius Bertrand. This cycle is considered one of the most virtuosic piano works ever written. Ravel intended *Gaspard* to be very pianistically demanding. *Scarbo* is the most difficult movement. Ravel wanted to set out to make it more difficult than Balakirev’s *Islamey*.

CHAPTER IV

IMPRESSIONISM AND SYMBOLISM

Les Apaches moved away from Romanticism and participated in a new movement around 1870 in France. The aesthetic of the new movement was to use “free verse” style in poetry. “Free verse” does not use any strict meter or rhyme. This movement influenced the art and music that was known as *Impressionism*. *Impressionism* was originally applied to painting rather than music. The term *Impressionism* originated from Monet’s painting ‘Impression, Sunrise’. Art critic Louis Leroy coined the term *Impressionism* after the title of Monet’s painting. Compared to Impressionistic painting techniques, Impressionist painters focused on lighting, used pure colors, and focused on using coloristic nuances to create shapes. These techniques were reflected in the music of the time. Impressionist painters were aware of color relationships and the perception of light and color as a single entity. Monet portrayed subjects by varying the lighting and this is the equivalent of sonority in music, in which composers vary the harmonies underlying a recurring melodic pitch.²¹ Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) are the two representative composers of French *Impressionism*. Their works are mainly centered around subjects such as landscapes, water, and light. In music, timbre is known as tone color or tone quality. Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau* is one of the iconic works of the Impressionistic style that portrays the movement of water. The visual inspiration of impressionism also influenced Debussy’s *Estampes*, Debussy’s two sets of *Images*, and Ravel’s *Miroirs*. The visual images suggested by the titles are brimming with imaginative variances.

²¹ Roy Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier*. Yale University Press, 2014. P.47.

Most historians view impressionism as related to symbolism. Symbolism (in poetry) is derived from the cultural complexity at the beginning of the nineteenth century when romanticism, realism and impressionism co-existed.²² *Les Apaches* in France abandoned romanticism around 1870. They participated in a new movement, which was called symbolism. This new movement aimed to evoke certain feelings and meanings without describing them directly.²³ The idea of symbolism is that one emotional aspect can represent another. In other words, you can assign any symbolic interpretation as a symbol of another particular emotion. The symbolic meaning is beyond what is apparent. Symbolism emphasizes what is behind the external, that which is not tangible or expressible.²⁴ Therefore, impressionism and symbolism are characterized by indirect expression. Impressionism captures a fleeting glimpse of a subject visually whereas symbolism forces a meaning on that which is beyond the surface. Ravel was interested in symbolism, for he was influenced by an American poet Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). In Poe's *The Poetic Principle*, he said that music expresses poetic moods and that music is as perfect as a poem itself.²⁵ Ravel responded to Poe's aesthetic aspects and viewed himself as the little symbolist.²⁶

Ravel and Debussy are considered the two most important impressionist composers. Many music lovers began to apply the term impressionist composer to Debussy and even to Ravel. However, they disliked the label as impressionist composers. Ravel's music and his harmonic language belong to impressionism and symbolism. His use of traditional forms is regarded as neoclassicism. When Ravel composed *Miroirs* in 1903, Debussy was composing *Estampes* at the same time. The repeating idea in *Une barque sur l'océan* from *Miroirs* evokes the title subject,

²² Ibid.

²³ Hye Park Sun, *Elements of Impressionism evoked in Debussy and Ravel's Reflects dans l'eau and Jeux d'eau: The theme of water*. Diss. University of Washington, 2012. P. 3.

²⁴ Paul Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1996. P. 18.

²⁵ Deborah Mawer, *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*. Cambridge University Press, 2000. P. 17.

²⁶ Roger Nichols, *Ravel*. Yale University, 2011, P. 53.

which is considered symbolist. Roland-Manuel states that *Miroirs* is characteristically imbued with symbolist and impressionist aesthetics.²⁷ In *Ondine*, from *Gaspard de la nuit*, the musical motion and tone quality are preceded by the poem that is associated with Symbolism. Ravel used a thirty-second-note motive to depict the story of water nymph, Ondine. The irregular thirty-second-note motive, combined with the melody, symbolize Ondine's love, desire, and failed seduction.²⁸

²⁷ Peter Kaminsky, *Unmasking Ravel New Perspectives on the Music*. University of Rochester Press, 2013. P.102.

²⁸ Ibid. P.583.

CHAPTER V

RAVEL'S MUSIC LANGUAGE OF HIS WATER-TOPIC PIECES

Ravel embraced classicism in his music. He used conventional forms, such as sonata form, in many of his compositions. His melodic lines are clear and concise. Combining with traditional structures, Ravel incorporates innovative elements in his music such as octatonic scales, polytonalities, and dissonances. Like Debussy, Ravel uses pentatonic and whole-tone scales to create various colors and sonorities. In Ravel's early work *Jeux d'eau*, the pentatonic scale is widely used and decorates the musical emotion with Oriental colors. Ravel's melodic line is built on a short and concise theme that repeats through sequential treatment. The theme is mostly supported by arpeggiated chords. The harmony is developed along with the melodic line. Clashing seventh chords or semitones are used in many of Ravel's works. Ravel discarded whole-tone colors after his composition *Shéhérazade*.²⁹ In the early 1900s, Ravel's harmonic language included octatonic modes, semitones, and triadic mixtures.³⁰

Ravel used octatonic collections alternating with semitones. The semitone relationships occur in a horizontal rather than a vertical juxtaposition. Therefore, a dissonant closure creates a strong cadential ending that embodies Ravel's unique harmonic language. Pieces such as *Une barque sur l'océan* and *Ondine* utilize dissonant cadences. His exploration includes the use of diatonic triads, mixtures of major and minor chords, and tritones. For example, in *Jeux d'eau*, Ravel uses C-F# triadic mixtures in the cadenza.

²⁹ Roy Howart, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier*. Yale University Press, 2014. Pp. 49-50.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Pp. 69-70.

Ravel's timbres are pictorial images combined with different sonorities. The entire mood is depicted by different tone colors. Ravel is a master at using modes, keys, and intervals in his virtuosic compositions. The harmonic structure and tonality are decorated with dissonances and non-harmonic tones. Triads, parallel motion of perfect intervals, sevenths, ninths, and elevenths are all aspects of Ravel's characteristic harmonic language. Also, the overall tonality builds on polytonality and/or tonal ambiguity. Ravel favors using diatonic dissonances. For example, in the last few measures of *Jeux d'eau*, the cadence starts from the E major pentatonic scale with an added note of D[#] (m. 84). On the other hand, Ravel varied the rhythmic surfaces by changing speed of the figurations. The increased rhythmic speed portrays the increased speed and power of the water. In *Une barque sur l'océan*, the figurations project the pulse so much that the listener barely has an awareness of the downbeat. The music becomes flowing due to the avoidance of rhythmic squareness. Like Debussy, Ravel employed the 88-note keyboard range up to the top pitches and very lowest pitches. The lowest G[#] is written in *Une barque sur l'océan* (m. 44, and m. 92). The lowest A[#] appears in *Jeux d'eau*.

On the other hand, Ravel used the motivic materials to unify the form and content. The motivic structure is allied with contrasting textures. *Une barque sur l'océan* is based on a large-scale form but constructed through the use of smaller components. The formal structure in *Ondine* is one built from motivic units processed through various transformations. The rhythmic development of the thirty-second-note motive creates dissonance and metric instability.

Glissando techniques are used in both *Jeux d'eau* and *Une barque sur l'océan*. The effect of glissando is to depict the cascading water. In *Jeux d'eau*, the fortissimo glissando suggests a gorgeous water wave descending. Another water onomatopoeia is using the *tremolo* to depict water bubbling incessantly. The *tremolo* in *Jeux d'eau* brings the work to an emotional climax. This

tremolo, combined with the G^b major chord, creates a clear polytonality (m.26). In *Une barque sur l'ocean*, the crescendo during the tremolo depicts enormous incoming ocean waves.

CHAPTER VI

6.1 *Jeux d'eau*

Jeux d'eau was written in 1901 and dedicated to Ravel's teacher Gabriel Fauré. It is one of Ravel's major piano works, one which emulates Liszt's *Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este* (1870). On the title page of *Jeux d'eau*, Ravel included a quotation "Dieu fluvial rant de l'eau qui le chatouille..." ("River God laughing from the water that tickles him..."), which is taken from French poet Henri De Regnier's work "*Fête d'eau*". The quotation suggests a programmatic image for Ravel's *Jeux d'eau*.

Jeux d'eau is a metaphor for a fountain, and it depicts the mimetic effects and sound of the Latona fountain.³¹ As Ravel said: "inspired by the sound of water, and the music of fountains, cascades, and streams."³² Characteristics of this piece include repetition, motivic sequencing, arpeggiated gestures, pentatonic scales, whole tone scales, and the use of high and low registers. *Jeux d'eau* is clearly imbued with an impressionistic aesthetic. Many moments that evoke *Exoticism*, such as the pentatonic scale, refer to the Orient, while the augmented second and *ostinato* effects allude to Arabic music.

According to Ravel's autobiographical sketch, the tonal scheme of *Jeux d'eau* is based on thematic sonata form.³³ Ravel departed from a classical tonal scheme by having the thematic material reoccur and transform in the development and in the recapitulation. In terms of the motivic materials, the melody is diatonic and develops through repetition or a series of sequences rather

³¹ Peter Kaminsky, *Unmasking Ravel New Perspectives on the Music*. University of Rochester Press, 2013. P. 32.

³² Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel Man and Musician*. Columbia University Press, 1975. P.37.

³³ Deborah Mawer, *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*. Cambridge University Press, 2000. P. 80.

than motivic development. Nevertheless, *Jeux d'eau* stays within the traditional structure of an A-B-A form. The third theme is presented in the development section. The content is unified by the repetition or sequential treatment of small motifs. The structures in *Miroirs* and *Gaspard de la nuit* are more innovative. The motives in Ravel's music are typically short. These motives may involve a combination of dynamics, harmony, rhythm, and texture. The musical motion is generated by varied repetitions. In the case of Ravel's music, static harmonic and melodic structures are intended to portray the salient characteristics of inanimate nature.³⁴ The mechanical motion, combined with static harmonies and repeated figures, is metrically regular. The texture becomes increasingly complex through the layering of metric dissonance and rhythm.

Jeux d'eau is in sonata form, a classical tonal structure. The texture is rich and assists in increasing the linear motion. Ravel maintains clear harmonic sequences. In terms of harmonic language, the work includes modal inflections, bitonality and even atonality. The major seventh, minor second, or the clash of various seventh chords, are all widely used in the opening or closing of Ravel's piano pieces. The minor triads, major sevenths, and the diminished octaves are part of Ravel's characteristic harmonic language.

³⁴ Ibid. P. 451.

6.1.1 Harmony and Texture

The opening is marked *Très doux* and *pp* to suggest the calm and delicate movement of water. E major and A major seventh chords dominate throughout the entire work. The main theme is built on two chords in mm.1-2 (Figure 6.1.1). E major chord and A major seventh chord mostly dominate throughout the entire piece. The initial four-note motive and its transformations (alternating between sixteenth and thirty-second notes) create rhythmic complexity. The second theme appears in mm.19-20 (Figure 6.1.2). In the left hand, the melody is based on pentatonic scale (F[#]-G[#]-A[#]-C[#]-D[#]) with arpeggiated major seconds in the right hand. As the third theme appears, it incorporates an eleventh chord (C[#]-E[#]-G[#]-B-D-F^{##}) along with arpeggios in contrary motion in mm.38-39 (Figure 6.1.3). Starting from measure 38, two new and short motives develop and reach a climax (m.48) on a trill of chords followed by a *glissando* (Figure 6.1.4). Ravel also uses perfect fifths in parallel motion to fill up the texture with impressionistic colors and to suggest various movements of water. In many places, the perfect intervals (fourths, fifths and octaves) in parallel motions together with different chords project different layers of sonorities (m.51) (Figure 6.1.5).

(Figure 6.1.1)

(♩ = 144) *Très doux*

pp

2nd Ed. E_M

$A_{M7}^{\#}$

(Figure 6.1.2)

Figure 6.1.2 shows a musical score for a piano piece. The score is written for two staves, treble and bass clef, in a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo is marked *pp* (pianissimo). The right hand features a complex, multi-measure passage with a '6' above it, indicating a sixteenth-note figure. The left hand features a pentatonic scale, which is highlighted with a red box and labeled 'pentatonic scale' in red text below the staff.

(Figure 6.1.3)

Figure 6.1.3 shows a musical score for a piano piece. The score is written for two staves, treble and bass clef, in a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo is marked *p* (piano). The right hand features a complex, multi-measure passage with a '7' above it, indicating a seventeenth-note figure. The left hand features a complex, multi-measure passage with a '3' below it, indicating a triplet. The score includes the instruction *le chant un pent en dehors* above the right hand. Several notes in both hands are circled in red, highlighting specific melodic or harmonic elements.

(Figure 6.1.4)

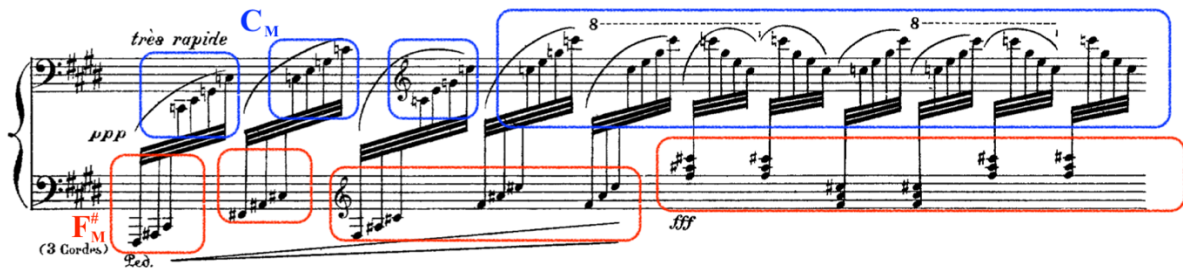
Figure 6.1.4 shows a musical score for a piano piece. The score is written for two staves, treble and bass clef, in a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo is marked *ff* (fortissimo). The right hand features a complex, multi-measure passage with a '10' above it, indicating a ten-note figure. The left hand features a complex, multi-measure passage with a '10' above it, indicating a ten-note figure. The score includes the instruction *glissando* above the right hand and *long.* (long) below the left hand. The score also includes a '8' above the right hand and a '4' below the left hand, indicating the number of notes in the figures.

(Figure 6.1.5)



The first theme reoccurs in m.62 but with a different harmonic texture. The tonality is supported by a G# in the bass. The superimposition of the two chords F# major and C major project polytonality (m.72) (Figure 6.1.6). The second motive returns and ends in a slow tempo. In terms of the musical motion, the opening of *Jeux d'eau* involves a rather mechanical motion to imitate water from a fountain, where the speed of the water is controlled. The arpeggiated motion with decorative figurations describes waves of water. The different speeds of the arpeggiated figurations alternating between the sixteenth and thirty-second notes present the perception of relaxation and tension.

(Figure 6.1.6)



(Figure 6.1.7)

In figure 6.1.7, we see a harmonic interruption assist in the linear motion of the recapitulation. The E^{7th} chord is utilized by both the melody and its harmony. A clash of seventh chords occurs at the beginning and the end of *Jeux d'eau*. As the seventh chord reappears, the tonality builds on the pedal point G[#] (m.62) (Figure 6.1.7). Ravel was aware of large structural prolongation. According to Hepokoski and Darcy, the tonal trajectory in the development is interrupted by a dominant chord.³⁵ Chromatic scales permeate at the surface-level to prolong the diatonic mechanisms prior to the arrival of the recapitulation. The standard cadence V/V-V-I is decorated with chromatic elaboration (mm. 51-9).³⁶

6.1.2 Pentatonic Scales, Whole-Tone Scales and Octatonic Collections

Pentatonic scales, whole-tone scales, and octatonic collections are widely used in *Jeux d'eau*. At the beginning of *Jeux d'eau*, the arpeggio in the right hand is a whole-tone collection. The whole-tone scale accommodates diatonic triads. They can be a tritone apart or a blending of major or minor triads. The Petrushka chord combines two triads, C major and F[#] major. These two

³⁵ James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*. Oxford University Press, 2006. P. 197.

³⁶ Ibid.

major triads, a tritone apart, clash together to create a dissonant effect. In the cadenza of *Jeux d'eau*, the triadic root, made up of C-F[#], was used in Stravinsky's *Firebird* and *Petrushka*.³⁷ Ravel applies non-diatonic pitch collections during the cadenza before the recapitulation. He incorporates non-diatonic pitch collections into diatonic structures. The triads are superimposed on F[#] and C, which is the same sonority as the *Petrushka* chord. It is a conventional diatonic practice related to the Russian octatonic tradition.³⁸ According to Richard Taruskin, Ravel applied the *Petrushka* chord to constitute triads and provide functional root progression³⁹. The tri-tone relationship provides a stable tonality. His *Petrushka* chord derives from a French augmented sixth chord and prolongs the pre-dominant in E major before the recapitulation. For example, in m.72, the right hand and the left hand are a tri-tone apart clashing with two different chords (Figure 6.1.6). In mm. 68-69, the C major chord in the right hand is superimposed over an F[#] chord in the left hand. In the right hand, a series of major and minor triads is combined with whole-tone scales (mm. 68-69) (figure 6.1.8). The roots of each triad are derived from the whole-tone scale (E^b-F-G-A-B). The left hand is inundated with seventh chords and augmented triads. The triadic roots comprise the whole-tone scale (G[#]-F[#]-E-D-C) (Figure 6.1.8).

The pentatonic scale (F[#]-G[#]-A[#]-C[#]-D[#]) ascends to a higher register and is followed by tremolos which bring us to the emotional climax of the piece (Figure 6.1.9). In the coda, Ravel employs pentatonic scales in *Jeux d'eau* to achieve an Oriental atmosphere. The pentatonic *arpeggio* (A-(B)-C[#]-E-F[#]) in the upper voice, and the melodic line in the middle voice suggest an Oriental sonority (m.80) (Figure 6.1.10).

³⁷ Roy Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier*. Yale University Press, 2014. P. 71.

³⁸ Steven Baur, "Ravel's Russian Period: Octatonicism in His Early Works, 1893-1908." *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. Vol. 52, No. 3, 1999. Pp.564-5.

³⁹ *Ibid*.

(Figure 6.1.8)

Figure 6.1.8 displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a common time signature (C). The music features a series of arpeggiated chords, each marked with a circled '7' in the treble clef. The second system continues this pattern, with a circled '1' in the treble clef of the final measure. A dashed line with the number '8' is positioned above the first measure of each system, likely indicating a measure number or a specific fingering.

(Figure 6.1.9)

Figure 6.1.9 shows a musical score for a piano piece. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 2/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains two measures, each marked with a circled '10' in the treble clef. The second system begins with a circled '8' in the treble clef, followed by a measure marked with a circled '1'. This measure is marked with the performance instruction *glissando*. The final measure of the second system is marked with *ff* and *long.*. Two red boxes highlight the first two measures of the first system.

(Figure 6.1.10)

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a complex, flowing melodic line. The middle staff is a treble clef with the instruction 'Un peu marqué' and a simpler melodic line. The bottom staff is a bass clef with the instruction 'M.G.' and a pentatonic scale. A red box highlights the top two staves. A red label 'pentatonic scale (A-B-C#-E-F#)' points to the bottom staff.

6.1.3 Rhythmic Structure and Ornamentations

In the early 20th century, Ravel's music became emblematic of the French piano school. Ravel quite often focuses on rhythmic complexity and decorative figurations. The texture emphasizes ornamental and rhythmic complexity. Rhythmical irregularity and metrical dissonance are the two styles of ornamentation that can be identified in *Jeux d'eau*. Although the work is rhythmically irregular and metrically unstable, the texture and musical continuity are controlled in a classical manner. The depiction of water shifts through short rhythmic values. The texture is characterized by rhythmic figurations combined with an independent melody that emphasizes ornamentation.⁴⁰ In the recapitulation, the rhythmic values are reduced to describe a slower flow of water (m.72). The pitches, rhythmic structure, and repetitions create motion and lend themselves to performance gestures. The rhythmical irregularity and metric dissonance depict different shapes of water.

⁴⁰ Peter Kaminsky, *Unmasking Ravel New Perspectives on the Music*. University of Rochester Press, 2013. P. 272.

6.2 *Une barque sur l’océan*

Miroirs was completed in 1905 and first performed by Ricardo Viñes in 1906. Each movement of *Miroirs* was dedicated to a different member of *Les Apaches*. The third piece of the *Miroirs*, *Une barque sur l’océan* (A Boat on the Ocean), was dedicated to Paul Sordes, a French painter. Although Ravel composed an orchestral version in 1906, he was not pleased with the results. Oliver Messiaen commented on his orchestration:⁴¹

“There exists an orchestral kind of piano writing which is more orchestral than the orchestra itself and which, with a real orchestra it is impossible to realize.”

The piano version sounds much richer than the orchestra because the orchestral instrumentation cannot project these particular water effects as effectively as the piano. As in the title *Miroirs*, literally translated as “mirrors,” each piece suggests the reflection of objects and evokes the image its title suggests. According to Ravel’s comments about *Miroirs*:

“The title *Miroirs* (Reflections), five piano pieces composed in 1905, has authorized my critics to consider this collection as being among those works that belong to the Impressionist movement. I do not contradict this at all, if one understands the term by analogy. A rather fleeting analogy, at that, since Impressionism does not seem to have a precise meaning outside the domain of painting. In any case, the word “Mirror” should not lead one to assume that I want to affirm a subjectivist theory of art”⁴².

Thus, Ravel prefers to paint the color (creating an image that corresponds to the piece’s title) rather than to merely express emotion.⁴³ The images in *Miroirs* are pictorial descriptions. *Une barque sur l’océan* is the third piece of Ravel’s *Miroirs*. The music evokes the image of a boat on the ocean.

⁴¹ Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel Man and Musician*. Dover Publication, 2011. P.74.

⁴² Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*. Dover Publications, 2003. P. 66.

⁴³ Victor I Seroff, *Maurice Ravel*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1953. P. 89.

The arpeggio figurations represent the waves, and the melody suggests the boat's journey on the ocean. Roland Manuel, who was Ravel's student, states that *Miroirs* contains symbolist and impressionist aesthetics.⁴⁴ According to Roland-Manuel's articles and statements, Ravel did not intend to directly express emotional or musical aesthetics, but to "evoke."⁴⁵ His aesthetic is related to symbolist notions of imagery, although Ravel followed an opposite path from Debussy's symbolism. Nevertheless, we can still observe the possibly symbolic meaning that is associated with musical objects.⁴⁶ In his "An Autobiographical Sketch," Ravel noted that his symbolism suggests that the correspondences and ambiguities are between aural and the visual, whereas Debussy's piano works are characterized by the production of sounds. The idea of symbolism in Debussy's music is primarily colored with impressionistic aesthetics such as different levels of dynamics, colors, tones, and sonorities.

6.2.1 Motivic Materials

Une barque sur l'océan is constructed from small motivic materials to form a large-scale structure with contrasting textures. The repetitive motivic patterns join together to form the larger sections. Each motive is transformed by rhythmic augmentation or diminution. The small motivic units interact with one another in order to create proportional intensity. Concise motives are repeated to create richer textures. The first ten measures represent the basic and underlying motion. Ravel used the entire range of piano in *Une barque sur l'océan*. The ocean-wave-like pattern in the left-hand spans over a one-octave distance from F# to A (mm.1-2). The first motivic

⁴⁴ Peter Kaminsky, *Unmasking Ravel New Perspectives on the Music*. University of Rochester Press, 2013. P. 154.

⁴⁵ Ibid. P. 196.

⁴⁶ Deborah Mawer, *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*. Cambridge University Press, 2000. P. 49.

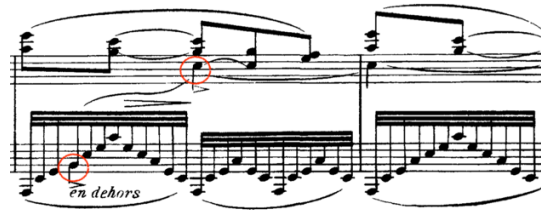
components consist of a minor third, a perfect fourth, and a major second (mm.1-2) (Figure 6.2.1). Ravel blurred the downbeat by tying the second note of the first beat to the first note of the second beat, thus avoiding the sense of a downbeat (m.1). The melody in the middle register suggests horn calls or a human presence on the ocean.⁴⁷ Thus, the G[#] and C[#] in the middle voice add a new color to the texture (m.4) (Figure 6.2.2). The texture of this piece consists of three layers. The blending of the three different levels evokes a musical motion resembling an ocean wave. The music projects the flow of the ocean suggested in the title. The second motive is a descending two-note phrase (mm. 11-12) suggesting a sigh (Figure 6.2.3). Another essential motivic aspect is that of a tremolo from *pp* to *ff* (mm. 38-43), one that suggests a strong wind over a tumultuous and surging ocean (Figure 6.2.4). The harmony of the third motive builds on the triad with added sixth (m. 38, 40, & 42: G[#]-B-D[#], E[#]) (m. 39 & 41: B-D-F[#], G[#]) (m. 43: F[#]-A[#]-C[#], D[#]). It is harmonically static and is repeated in every measure. The harmonic continuity is used across all registers. The dynamic range goes from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* or even to *fff* in only two or three bars, depicting the intensity of a powerful ocean wave.

(Figure 6.2.1)



⁴⁷ Peter Kaminsky, *Unmasking Ravel New Perspectives on the Music*. University of Rochester Press, 2013. P. 456.

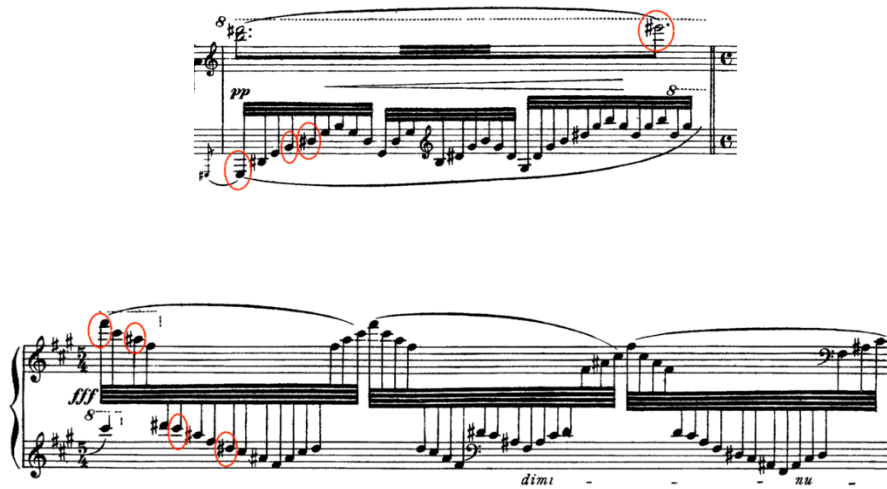
(Figure 6.2.2)

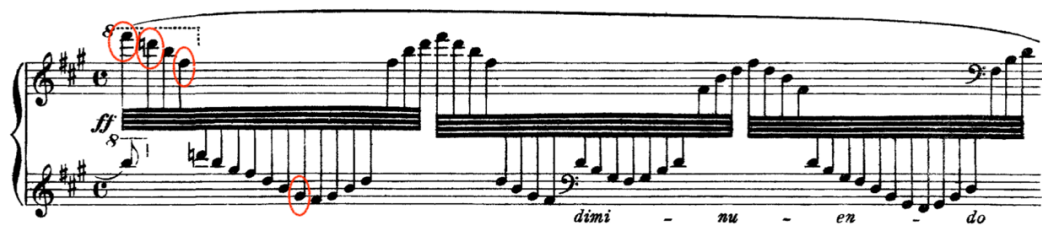


(Figure 6.2.3)



(Figure 6.2.4)





6.2.2 Texture and Harmony

The texture contains sophisticated shadings of color by using arpeggios, tremolos, and different layerings of sound. Ravel combined the linear motion and the formal structure with dissonance to reflect Impressionist aesthetics. The beginning of *Une barque sur l'océan* projects a distinct three-layered texture describing different objects. The opening arpeggiated pattern in the left hand is quite pianistic with a rolling motion (F[#]-C[#]-E-A). The f[#] minor ninth chord is sustained for ten measures (mm.1-10)(6.2.5). The melodic line consists of intervals of minor third, perfect fourth and major second. This melody is repeated several times with the arpeggiations by the left hand in mm. 1-10. The pitch center in the beginning is built on f[#]. Considering the tonality, the secondary tonality explores the relationship of tonic (c[#]) and dominant (g[#]) (mm.48-49) (Figure 6.2.6). The dissonance often increases the thickening of textures without resolution, or it resolves with a dissonance before returning to the dominant key in m. 59 (Figure 6.2.7). A contrasting section is in mm. 81-110 where the texture is imbued with a new accompaniment pattern. The pattern contains an oscillating figuration based on F[#]-A in the right hand and combines with the descending two-note phrase in the left hand (Figure 6.2.8).

(Figure 6.2.5)

D'un rythme souple — *Tres enveloppé de pédales*

pp

f[#]_{m9}

Detailed description: This musical score is for a piano piece in 8/8 time, key of D major. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with a slur. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a rhythmic accompaniment. A red rectangular box highlights a section of the bass clef staff, which is marked with a red *f[#]_{m9}* dynamic marking. The tempo/style instruction at the top reads "D'un rythme souple — *Tres enveloppé de pédales*".

(Figure 6.2.6)

Detailed description: This musical score is in 8/8 time, key of D major. It features two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur. The bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment with a slur. A dynamic marking of *f* is present in the bass staff.

(Figure 6.2.7).

Detailed description: This musical score is in 8/8 time, key of D major. It features two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur. The bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment with a slur. A dynamic marking of *pp* is present in the bass staff.

(Figure 6.2.8)

pp sans nuances

p expressif

Detailed description: This musical score is in 8/8 time, key of D major. It features two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a slur and a dynamic marking of *pp sans nuances*. The bass staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment with a slur and a dynamic marking of *p expressif*.

The tone color and effects of Ravel's music are incredibly complex, beautiful, and imaginative. His later pieces, such as *Une barque sur l'océan* and *Gaspard de la nuit*, are more elaborate in terms of texture. In terms of the texture in *Jeux d'eau*, the tonality mostly hovers around the key of E major. *Une barque sur l'océan* and *Gaspard de la nuit* consist of concise and short motivic materials. The harmonic texture is changed in accordance with the motive and context. Harmonic textures, tone qualities, and pianistic aspects are all expanded in these two works. The dissonant intervals of major sevenths and minor ninths are used extensively in *Miroirs*. The descending two notes, F-D, provide dissonance against the tonality of f# minor in mm. 81-95. The texture is bitonal, a harmonic feature reminiscent of Stravinsky (Figure 6.2.7).

The harmony resolves to the octatonic collections in the transitional measure. The eleventh and thirteenth chords appear with added notes to produce a dissonant sonority (m. 49) (Figure 6.2.9). These chords form an octatonic collection, $OCT(0,1)\{3,4,6,7,9,10,0,1\}$. $OCT(0,1)\{0,1,3,4,6,7,9,10\}$ can also be observed in mm. 38-42. After a glissando on the black keys, a pentatonic scale (F#-G#-A#-C#-D#) is used to create an exotic quality (Figure 6.2.10). On the other hand, the structure and tonality are based on different pitch centers. Ravel establishes F# as the tonal center. In mm. 1-10 and mm. 14-20, the harmony is derived from the f# minor ninth chord. B^b appears as a new central pitch in mm. 28-35, mm. 68-80 and mm. 103-110 (Figure 6.2.11).

(Figure 6.2.9)



(Figure 6.2.10)



(Figure 6.2.11 pitch center)

measures	1-27	28-37	38-43	46-49	61-67	68-75	76-102	103-110	111-116	132-139
pitch center	f#	B ^b	g#	g#-c#	c#	B ^b	b, f#	E ^b	a	f#

6.2.3 Rhythm and Dynamics

Une barque sur l’ocean depicts a boat’s journey on the ocean. The melody in *Une barque sur l’ocean* is linked with varied rhythms. The rhythmic figure in the opening section is relatively static (mm.1-27). It is a two-part section with a harmonic prolongation on B flat. The harmonic texture hovers between the notes B and C, yet it continues to prolong a B-flat harmonic center (mm. 29-37). Ravel indicated *d’un rythme souple* to suggest that the music is supposed to sound

relaxed and flexible like the ocean itself. In the beginning, the rhythm of the right hand expresses the opposite pattern (duplet to triplet) of the habanera rhythm (triplet to duplet) (Figure 6.2.12). The alternating of different note values imitates the varying speeds of ocean waves. Different levels of sudden dynamic changes are intended to depict the power of the ocean. Alternately, the double note tremolos with quick crescendos suggest the effect of an ocean wind. The tremolo is set against an arpeggio with a huge crescendo and decrescendo. The wide range of dynamics accumulates in volume and creates the effect of gushing winds.



(Figure 6.2.12)

6.3 Ondine

Gaspard de la nuit integrates Ravel's signature musical language, that of extended tonality, modal relationships, and non-functional harmony.⁴⁸ In Ravel's harmonic language, the sonority is demonstrated in both horizontal and vertical textures. *Gaspard de la nuit* is associated with extramusical ideas and programmatic content. Its musical texture is characterized by timbre, coloristic harmonies, and sonority.

⁴⁸ James E. Frazier, *Maurice Duruflé: The Man and His Music*. New York: University of Rochester Press, 2007. P. 102.

Ondine, from *Gaspard de la nuit*, corresponds to the poem of the same title written Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841), introduced to Ravel by his friend and eminent pianist Ricardo Viñes. The French poet Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841) published the poems *Gaspard de la nuit* which inspired Ravel. Ravel's friend Ricardo Viñes introduced him to *Gaspard de la nuit*. The piece was composed in 1908 and published in 1909. The music was inspired by the legendary water nymph Ondine. Ondine, a maiden who dove into the Rhine due to desperation over her faithless lover, was created by the German writer Baron Friedrich Heinrich Karl de La Motte-Fouqué (1777-1843). She became a water nymph and sits at the top of the rock to attract men with her beautiful voice and golden hair. Ondine is from the third *Fantasia* "*La Nuit et ses prestiges*." As a musical work inspired by literary sources, composers have their own insights into the poetry and interpretation of the narrative as they transcribe poetry into music. Ravel's *Ondine* portrays the story of the poem. The musical motions express the extra-musical aspects of the poem.

Ravel inserted the text of Bertrand's poem in his *Gaspard de la nuit*. There are two characters in Ravel's *Ondine*: Ondine and a nameless man whom she seeks to seduce and destroy.

Jonathan Kregor views Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit* as program music:

Indeed, *Gaspard de la Nuit* also represents a new stage in programmatic thinking. Whereas the overwhelming majority of programmatic compositions take a single perspective of a subjective experience as their aesthetic basis, *Gaspard de la Nuit* attempts to juggle multiple perspectives simultaneously.⁴⁹

In programmatic compositions, subjective experiences are influenced by aesthetics. Ravel's combination of extramusical ideas in *Gaspard de la nuit* may be considered revolutionary in the

⁴⁹ Jonathan Kregor, *Program Music*. Cambridge University Press, 2015. P. 278.

context of program music. On the other hand, Ravel was obsessed with technical perfection.

According to his statement in “Some Reflections on Music”:

My objective... is technical perfection. I can strive unceasingly to this end, since I am certain of never being able to attain it. The important thing is to get nearer to it all the time. Art, no doubt, has other effects, but the artist, in my opinion, should have no other aim.⁵⁰

Thus, the technical perfection and the individual consciousness guide the inner emotion and inner content of creation⁵¹. The link between the artwork and the author is conjoined through emotion.

6.3.1 Formal Structure

Ravel’s structural plan is elaborate. The harmony is quite often ambiguous. The harmonic scheme contains dissonance and often deviates from traditional diatonic structures. The texture and sonorities are incredibly varied. Within this, Ravel favors classical forms and concise thematic contours. Lesley A Wright states about Ravel’s treatment of the formal approach:

On the surface it may even appear that Ravel used traditional forms but as in Debussy’s music, the proportional element uncovers patterns that are more complex and intricate.⁵²

The structural relationship between Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit* and Bertrand’s poems are quite close. *Ondine* is in ternary form, but this is difficult to identify on a first hearing of the work. We may analyze the formal structure as an arch shape, something achieved by interlinking motifs in the development and recapitulation sections. The structure is comprised of small motivic materials that return in varying orders and transformations. The form may be considered

⁵⁰ Peter Kaminsky, *Unmasking Ravel New Perspectives on the Music*. University of Rochester Press, 2013. P. 122.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Lesley A. Wright and Scott McCarrey, *Perspectives on the Performance of French Piano Music*. Taylor & Francis, 2016. P. 199.

ABA¹CA². Furthermore, the most characteristic compositional technique in *Gaspard de la nuit* is the use of thematic transformation. In *Ondine*, the first and second themes are developed in the exposition and recapitulation.

According to Roy Howat's statement on form, *Ondine* is in sonata form but the motivic units interlink into a long melodic line.⁵³ The overall structure of *Ondine* consists of thematic sequences. Sections are centered on different pitches and tonalities. The key scheme is not based on traditional harmonic modulations. On the other hand, Peter Kaminsky states in his discussion of Ravel's sonata form scheme:

From a form standpoint, one could interpret this as (Charles) Rosen does: that Ravel relies on conventional tonal baroque and classical form in order to provide the necessary chains for his unique contributions in harmony, orchestration, and so forth.⁵⁴

The contour of the formal structure is based on traditional sonata form. Regarding the formal analysis, thematic transformation is the inner element that is utilized throughout the piece. The harmonic structure lacks clear cadences. The tonality is ambiguous due to the thirty-second-note motive which pervades the entire work. Additionally, we may suggest a correlation between Bertrand's poem and the formal structure of *Ondine*.

(Figure 6.3.1 formal structure of Ravel's *Ondine* and Bertrand's poem)

stanza	Stanza I	Stanza II	Stanza III	Stanza IV	Stanza V
measure	mm. 1-29	mm. 30-41	mm. 41-83	mm. 84-91	mm. 84-91
pitch center	C#	G#	D#/C#/d#	C#	C#

⁵³ Roy Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier*. Yale University Press, 2014. P. 105.

⁵⁴ Miljana Tomić, *The Role of Harmony and Timbre in Maurice Ravel's Cycle Gaspard de la Nuit in Relation to Form*. Norwegian Academy of Music, 2020. Pp. 71-2.

(Figure 6.3.2 formal structure of Ravel's *Ondine*)


Exposition	Development	Recapitulation	Coda
mm. 1-41	mm. 42-65	mm. 66-83	mm. 84-91

(Figure 6.3.3 motivic units of *Ondine*)

Lent $\text{♩} = 58$ (60)

ppp

2 

2  *très doux et très expressif*

a

4 

b

10

toujours pp

c

12

32

pp

d

34

45

ppp

e

Ondine

...I thought I heard a vague harmony enchanting my slumber, and near me spreading a murmur like songs broken by a voice, sad and tender.

CHARLES BRUGNOT “Two Spirits”

“Listen! Listen! It is I; it is Ondine, who lightly brushes with water drops the resonant diamond-shaped panes of your window, lit by the dull rays of the moon; and here, in her silk dress, is the lady of the manor, who muses from her balcony on the beautiful starry night and on the lovely sleeping lake.”

“Each wave is an Ondine swimming in the current; each current is a pathway winding towards my palace; and my palace is built fluidly, in the depths of the lake, in the triangle of fire, earth, and water.”

“Listen! Listen! My father whips the croaking water with a green alder branch; and my sisters caress with arms of foam the cool islands of grasses, of water lilies, and of gladiola, or tease the decaying bearded willow, fishing with a line!”

After murmuring her song, she begged me to receive her ring on my finger, and be an Ondine’s husband and to visit her palace with her and to become the king of the lakes.

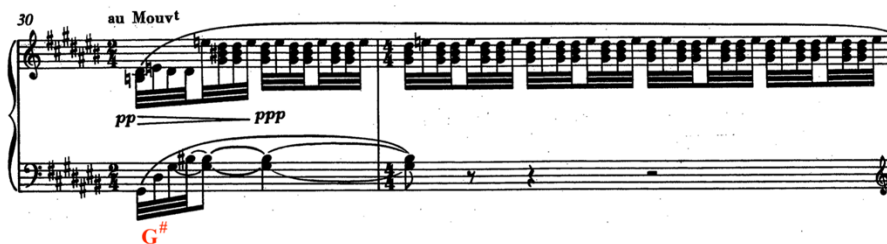
And when I told her that I loved a mortal, sullen and vexed, she shed a few tears, burst into laughter, and vanished in a sudden shower that streamed white trickles down my blue stained glass windows.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Aloysius Bertrand, “Gaspard de La Nuit: Fantasies in the Manner of Rembrandt and Callot translation, Introduction, and notes by John T. Wright.” University Press of America, 1994. P. 61.

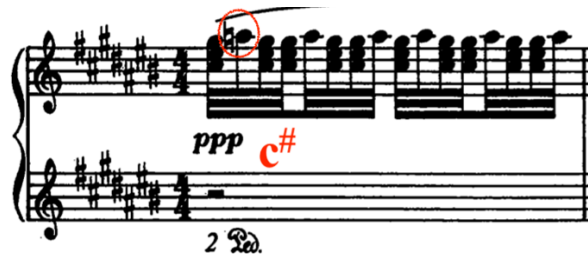
6.3.2 Thematic Materials, and Tonality

The thematic materials are tied to the harmonic structure. The exposition consists of two themes. The primary theme (mm. 1-23) establishes the tonal center of a C# major chord. The second theme (mm. 30-41) modulates to the dominant chord of G# major (Figure 6.3.1). Theme I is based on an F# melodic minor scale (F#-G#-A-B-C#-D#-E#). In terms of the motivic materials, the first theme comprises five motivic units: A, B, C, D, E. These thematic units are varied through the use of motivic development techniques. The introductory figure in mm. 1-2 builds on a C# major chord with the note “A”, which blurs the harmony (Figure 6.3.2). In the opening section the texture changes at m.14, and this thematic material is based on motivic unit A. The cadential point in this section ends on the tonic of G# major (m. 30). In the transition section (mm. 16-41), the fragmented motives are derived from the first theme. The second theme consists of the motivic units D. The harmony starts to center on the tonic of G# major rather than on C# major tonality.

(Figure 6.3.1)



(Figure 6.3.2)



The development section (mm. 41-65) contains motivic units A and B from the first theme. The tonality builds on a D[#] major tonality. The themes in mm.41-44 are derived from motivic units A and B. New motivic material is introduced in the episode (mm. 45-61). Motivic units A, B, D, and E from the first and second themes are developed in this episodic section. The thematic materials from the exposition reappear in the recapitulation (mm. 66-87) (Figure 6.3.3), which is the climax of the entire piece. However, the texture is different from the exposition. The tonality is in b minor instead of the home key of C[#] major. Motivic units E and D are used in the second theme in the recapitulation with greater textural diversity. Motivic unit B is used in the second transition in mm. 72-79 and ends in the dominant cadence of g[#] minor. The coda section mm. 84-91 excludes any thematic units. The tonal center returns to the home key of C[#] major.

(Figure 6.3.3)

Un peu plus lent

66

ff

8 6 7 5 5 5 6 5 5

(Figure 6.3.4 sonata scheme of *Ondine*)

	Exposition	Transition	
theme	mm. 1-15 (theme I)	mm. 16-29	mm. 30-41 (theme II)
motivic unit	a, b, c, d,	b	d
tonality	C# major	G# major - D# major	G# major
	Development		Re-transition
	mm. 41-44	mm. 45-61	mm. 62-65
motivic unit	a, b	a, b, d, e	e
tonality	D# major	f minor	C# major
	Recapitulation	Transition II	Coda
theme	mm. 66-71 (theme II)	mm. 72-79 mm. 80-83 (theme I)	mm. 84-91
motivic unit	d, e	b	a, b, c, d,
tonality	b minor	G# major	C# major

6.3.3 Rhythmic Complexity

Ravel used ornamentation and complex rhythmic groupings in *Ondine*. The formal structure is a sonata form template which is unified by a thirty-second-note motif which represents waves. The structural emphasis on ornamentation is combined with Ravel's metric style. *Ondine* reflects Ravel's signature rhythmic and metric techniques. The irregular thirty-second-note motive is used to describe the water nymph *Ondine*. This motive is used as a framework throughout the entire work. There are three different groupings of the thirty-second-note motive. The groupings can be divided by 3+3+2, 2+3+3, or 3+2+3. Even though there are three ways of grouping, each

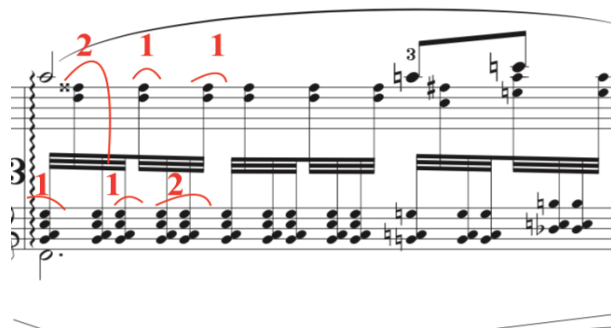
grouping is rhythmically irregular. According to Stephen Zank’s reference to Ravel’s *Ondine*, the 32nd note groupings portray the “gently relentless fabric of rhythmic and metrical ambiguity.”⁵⁶ The metric environment alternates between stability and instability. The irregular metrical groupings create metrical dissonance. Irregular groupings are prominent during the exposition and development sections. However, unlike the previous two piano works, *Jeux d’eau* and *Une barque sur l’océan*, the rhythmic consistency is often interrupted. The arpeggiated motion is interrupted by a thirty-second rest (m. 52). This incomplete arpeggiation creates dissonance by adding B-flat octaves which stand in opposition to the sonority of an A Major 7th chord.

Regarding the metric patterns, the groupings demonstrate the neighbor-note motive. The motivic transformation expands with metric instability and dissonance. Starting in the transition (m. 23), Ravel transforms the pattern 3+3+2 into 1+2+1+1+2+1. The 3+3+2 pattern has an uneven amount of the notes G# and A; whereas the 1+2+1+1+2+1 pattern has four attacks on each note (Figure 6.3.5) (Figure 6.3.6)

(Figure 6.3.5)



(Figure 6.3.6)



⁵⁶ Stephen Zank, *Irony and Sound: The Music of Maurice Ravel*. University of Rochester Press, 2009. P. 247.

Ravel used changes of note duration and grouping to differentiate the short motives of the musical phrasing. Regarding interpretation, the music implies a connection between the literal and the poetic text. The larger musical sections may relate to several stanzas or text groupings. The tone painting reflects the poetry contained in the music. The rhythmic density of the 32nd notes present varied expressions of energy throughout the piece. Thus, the metric environment alternates between stability and instability through the rhythmic development of the thirty-second-note motive. Ravel juxtaposes and superimposes the rhythmic motives against different groupings to create dissonance. In the coda, he transforms the metric irregularity into regular grouping to project metric consonance.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Ravel's music is characterized by its unique blend of impressionism, symbolism and neoclassicism. In his music, this influence can be seen in his use of harmonies, as well as his exploration of tonalities and scales. Ravel's innovations of harmony, texture, and form result in striking musical colors and sonorities. Parallel harmonies, seventh chords, pentatonic scales, and whole-tone collections are employed in Ravel's music as his unique music language. Ravel used non-chord tones to create subtle color changes or dissonant clashing effects. The harmony often becomes vague. Therefore, Ravel's music is quite frequently polytonal. Additionally, Ravel widely employed polyrhythms and an overall rhythmic complexity in his music.

Jeux d'eau reflects Ravel being influenced by the gamelans he heard at the 1900 *Exposition Universelle*. Ravel's formal process is one of structural emphasis on short motives and rhythmic complexity. Regarding the musical textures of a 'water-topic', the shifting motives consist of varied figurations with short rhythmic values. In early 20th century French piano music, rhythmic intricacy was combined with melodic and accompanimental textures. Ravel's *Jeux d'eau* demonstrates how ornaments can contribute to rhythmic complexity.

Jeux d'eau and *Ondine* are examples of Impressionism. Both their formal structures can be considered quasi-sonata form. These textures are innovative. *Jeux d'eau* is more impressionistic than *Ondine*, in that Ravel used eastern colors such as parallel fifths and pentatonic scales in *Jeux d'eau*. The most salient characteristic of *Ondine* is that Ravel used thematic transformation to develop motivic materials. *Ondine* not only includes innovative textures but also evokes Bertrand's poems. The rhythmic irregularity in *Ondine* represents a clear characteristic of Ravel's music. The

thirty-second-note figures continue throughout the piece. The pulse and rhythmic clarity contribute to the recognition of the motivic materials. *Une barque sur l'océan* may be considered to contain both Impressionism and Symbolism. The descending motives evoke the title subject. The *arpeggio* motion in the left hand suggests a wave on the ocean. The middle-voice may refer to a horn call. The *tremolo* with rapidly increasing dynamics depicts a powerful gust blowing over the ocean.

Ravel's harmonic language contains Impressionistic characteristics such as ambiguous tonalities, modal scales, and the use of dissonances without resolution. In terms of harmony and texture, seventh, ninth, and thirteenth chords are used in *Jeux d'eau*, *Une barque sur l'océan* and *Ondine* to add unique colors. Ravel employed parallel chords to project a distinct timbre in *Jeux d'eau*. Pentatonic scales and whole-tone collections are used widely in *Jeux d'eau* and *Une barque sur l'océan* to present Oriental sonorities. The blending of the three different levels: the melodic line, the middle ground, and the bass line, evokes a musical motion resembling an ocean wave. *Miroirs* presents a considerable change in Ravel's harmonic evolution. His innovative harmonic language is often one of ambiguous tonalities. The tonal center focuses on a particular pitch center or results in polytonality. Additionally, Ravel's melodic lines are compact and clear. In *Jeux d'eau*, thematic development is based on traditional sonata form, with some variation therein. *Un barque sur l'océan* is constructed from small motivic materials to achieve a large-scale form. The repetitive accompanying patterns join together with the motives to slowly and masterfully expand the musical pace and dynamic contours. In *Ondine*, the structure also consists of smaller units used to form larger sections. Moreover, Ravel used motivic transformation to develop themes throughout the piece. The texture becomes more intricate compared to *Jeux d'eau* and *Une barque*.

The connection tying together *Jeux d'eau*, *Une barque sur l'océan*, and *Ondine* is the arpeggiated figures or repetitive patterns which provide the basic material to support the overall

texture as an ostinato. The rhythmic and metrical complexity breaks across bar-lines to project rhythmical flexibility. Compared to *Jeux d'eau* and *Une barque sur l'océan*, the texture is even more virtuosic in *Ondine*. The rhythmic and metric pulses are in accordance with the line structure and stanza of the poetry. Ravel's metric and rhythmic compositional techniques reflect the structural aspects and inimitable expressiveness of his music. Rhythmic complexity contributes to increasing the texture and thematic development. Rhythmic components are used to unify the piece. Varied configurations and short rhythmic values contribute to the quickly shifting motives. In *Jeux d'eau*, the texture is decorated with ornamentation and intricate rhythms that evokes the play of water. The rhythmic figurations in *Une barque sur l'océan* are relatively static. The rhythm of the melody expresses the opposite pattern of the habanera rhythm. Thirty-second notes create a consistent middleground in *Ondine* to represent waves of water. Ravel used a thirty-second-note pattern in *Ondine* to achieve great metric irregularity. The specific rhythmic and metric methodology reflect the poetic narratives. The asymmetrical rhythmic motives and the thematic units refer to the story of *Ondine*.

Overall, Ravel is a master of creating colors and painting pictures in music. His works are characterized by concise motivic materials. The formal structure is expanded with motivic developments. Added 9th, 11th, and 13th chords are widely used to project an ambiguous harmonic scheme. Ravel often used whole tone scales and mixed tonalities in the two later piano works. Therefore, the sonorities generate fantastically coloristic timbres. The different textural levels symbolize various objects and project the most wonderfully delicate colors. The varying rhythmic figurations create musical freedom and speak directly to the listener with fervent emotion. It is for these reasons that Ravel is truly adored by classical music aficionados and is regarded as one of the greatest composers to have ever shared his gifts with humanity.

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