

Pierre Monteux (April 4, 1875 - July 1, 1964) was an orchestra conductor born in Paris, France.

Monteux studied violin from an early age, entering the Paris Conservatoire at the age of nine. He became a proficient violinist, good enough to jointly win the Conservatoire's violin prize in 1896 with Jacques Thibaud. However, he later took up the viola and played at the Opéra-Comique, leading the viola section in the premiere of Claude Debussy's opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1902.

In 1911, with a little conducting experience in Dieppe behind him, Monteux became conductor of Sergei Diaghilev's ballet company, the Ballets Russes. In this capacity he gave the premieres of Igor Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (1911) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913) as well as Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*. This established the course of his career, and for the rest of his life he was noted particularly for his interpretations of Russian and French music.

With the outbreak of World War I, Monteux was called up for military service, but was discharged in 1916, and he travelled to the United States. There he took charge of the French repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City from 1917 to 1919, conducting the American premiere of Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The Golden Cockerel* while there.

Then he moved to the Boston Symphony Orchestra (1919-24). He had a big effect on the Boston ensemble's sound, and was able to fashion the orchestra as he pleased after a strike led to thirty of its members leaving. He also introduced a number of new works while there, particularly by French composers.

In 1924, Monteux began an association with the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam, working alongside Willem Mengelberg. In 1929, he founded the Orchestre Symphonique de Paris, which he conducted until 1935. In the year the orchestra was founded, he led them in the world premiere of Sergei Prokofiev's third symphony.

Monteux then returned to the United States, and worked with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra from 1935 to 1952. In 1943, he founded a conducting school in Hancock, Maine, the childhood home of his wife, Doris Hodgkins Monteux, where Monteux was now living. There he taught such future luminaries as Andre Previn and Neville Marriner. In 1946 he became a United States citizen.

Monteux made a number of records in his life, most of which are widely admired. He himself claimed to dislike them, however, saying they lacked the spontaneity of live performances. From 1961 to 1964 he was principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, before dying in Hancock, Maine in 1964.

Pierre Monteux was the father of the flautist and conductor Claude Monteux.



Debussy

Nocturnes (Nuages • Fêtes) • Afternoon Of A Faun

Ravel • Rapsodie Espagnole • Pavane For A Dead Princess

Pierre Monteux • London Symphony



Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun, French Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune, tone poem for orchestra by Claude Debussy. The original orchestral version was completed in 1894, and Debussy reworked it for performance on two pianos in 1895. The work is considered a quintessential example of musical Impressionism, a compositional style popular at the turn of the 20th century that was influenced by the artistic school of the same name.

Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun is a musical evocation of Stéphane Mallarmé's poem Afternoon of a Faun, in which a faun—a half-man, half-goat creature of ancient Greek legend—awakes to revel in sensuous memories of forest nymphs. Debussy begins with a sinuous flute melody evocative of a graceful female form. Gently swelling phrases for strings, harp, and horns are soon added. The music proceeds without abrupt shifts; themes blend into each other, slowly rising and falling. The middle section features clarinet and oboe solos before the flute gradually retakes the spotlight. In the final moments, airy touches of percussion from finger cymbals are heard.

Claude Debussy's Three Nocturnes for Orchestra went through several incarnations before eventually assuming their final form. They were sketched under the title "Trois scènes au crépuscule" as early as 1892, and prior to their completion in 1899, Debussy toyed with the idea of casting them as vehicles for solo violin and orchestra. Debussy's developing skill as an orchestral colorist, first hinted at in 1892 with the Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun, comes to the fore in the Nocturnes, particularly the second, "Fêtes," which is regarded by many as one of the composers supreme creations.

A special role is allotted to the English horn in "Nuages" (Clouds), the first piece of the group. Thin, two-voice counterpoint in steady quarter notes provides a background for the English horn's rather plaintive gesture. The same melodic fragment is repeated several times with very little alteration or extension, interrupted occasionally by comments from the French horn section. A stark contrast is provided by a pentatonic interlude, scored for flute and harp against a sustained chordal background and marked "Un peu animé." The English horn raises its quiet voice again, only to dissolve against the pianissimo tremolo background as the flute takes up its melody one more time. The quietly pulsating pizzicati of "Nuages" conclusion provide a sense of "grey agony," as Debussy put it.

"Fêtes" (Festivals) will be friendly ground to any listener familiar with the final movement of Respighi's 1929 work along the same lines, Feste Romane. The juxtaposition of a forceful, even percussive, rhythmic ostinato in 12/8 time with the earthy tune of the brass band (representing the Garde Républicaine) provides for the same kind of multi-textural feel that Respighi would exploit even further three decades later. Through sheer repetition the music builds to several swaggering climaxes, only to be deflated each time and have to begin the process all over again. The music trails away into nothingness as the brass band finally completes its journey through the heart of the celebration. Remarkable about "Fêtes" is Debussy's ability to hint at raunchiness and vulgarity within the context of his own extremely refined soundworld.

Ravel's Pavane pour une infante défunte (Pavane for a Dead Princess), composed in 1899, was the second of the composer's piano works to see publication. Despite Ravel's half-hearted efforts to later disown the piece -- he felt it to be too clearly oriented around the musical language of Chabrier, an early hero of his -- it is not at all difficult to understand why the Pavane instantly and irrevocably caught the attention of European concert-goers and why, along with Boléro (1928), it remains the composer's best-known music. It is a work of great but subtle charm, infused with the lightness of touch that emerged as one of Ravel's compositional hallmarks.

Ravel composed this music in 1907, but didn't orchestrate it until just before the premiere on March 15, 1908, with Edouard

Colonne conducting "his" orchestra at one of "his" Paris concerts. It is lavishly scored, with winds and brass mostly in threes and fours, and plenty of percussion. In fact if not in title, this kaleidoscope from Ravel's 33rd year is a symphonic suite in four related movements that derive -- like the single-act comic opera, L'Heure espagnole, finished in 1909 -- from his Basque mother's memories of Madrid, where she spent much of her childhood. During that time, the "Habanera" from Cuba -- without a tilde over the "n," please -- had enjoyed special but ephemeral popularity. Ravel's "Habanera" in the Rapsodie is a note-for-note orchestration of his early work for two pianos, composed in 1895, which he and Ricardo Viñes played.

The first performance was feebly conducted and restively heard by the audience in expensive seats on the main floor. In the upper gallery, however, Ravel's students and friends made a great noise, calling for an encore of the second movement ("Malagueña"), after which the young composer Florent Schmitt called out in a stentorian voice, "Just once more, for the gentlemen below who haven't been able to understand." Like most concert-hall outbursts in Paris, this one added to (rather than subtracted from) Ravel's reputation.

In the Prélude à la nuit (Très modéré (3/4, open key), two octaves apart, muted violins and violas play a descending four-note motif that repeats over and over, never louder than mezzo-forte throughout. A six-measure theme interrupts, in effect a cadenza for clarinets and later bassoons, before the music evanesces on a chord in the high strings. Ravel's own description was "voluptuously drowsy and ecstatic."

The Malagueña (Assez vif) begins in 3/4 with an open key, but later changes to 2/4 and B major. Originally a Spanish courting dance, this quick-moving evocation of Málaga is a long crescendo that begins very quietly with an ostinato motif in the bass, until a muted solo trumpet plays the main theme with tambourine accompaniment. The tempo slows for a new melody of Moorish cast, sung plaintively by the English horn, following which the opening motif from Movement 1 returns.

Ravel subtitled the Habanera in A major "Au pays parfumé que le soleil caresse" (In the fragrant land that the Sun caresses) both in his two-piano original of 1895 and 12 years later in this orchestral setting, with minor-second dissonances in the accompaniment and triplet-spiced themes.

The Feria, a high-spirited holiday scene, came several years after Debussy's "Fêtes" movement in Trois Nocturnes, but predated a similar fiesta finale in Debussy's Ibéria, the second Image pour orchestre. Ravel interrupts his celebration with a languorous interval, soft as suede, played by the English horn and solo clarinet, followed by the four-note motif from movement one, before the merriment resumes even more frenziedly and brilliantly.

Ravel complained of the Pavane's "quite poor form." Indeed, the work is perhaps excessively sectional; it basically unfolds in an ABACA scheme, with both the B and C sections containing two parallel but differing statements of the same theme. The key of G major seems an unlikely and unusually bright one for such a sober subject, yet it is just this harmonic context that makes the gently plaintive B and far more exuberant C sections so effective. Here is no adult weeping for a dead child, but in essence a gentle, nostalgic celebration of the sweet innocence of childhood on the tragic occasion of its loss. (The origin of the work's title is unclear; it has been suggested that Ravel simply liked the way it sounded.) The Pavane rides along upon a steady eighth note pulse, in keeping with the pavane's origins as a stately Renaissance dance, and is filled with stylized rhythmic gestures. The final iteration of the opening melody is much fuller than the previous two, and here Ravel allows himself to make a dramatic move from pianissimo to fortissimo over the course of the last few bars.

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1 Prélude À L' Après-Midi D'un Faune 9:15

Nocturnes 12:45

2 Nuages

3 Fêtes

Rapsodie Espagnole 15:05

4 Prélude À La Nuit

5 Malagueña

6 Habanera

7 Feria

8 Pavane Pour Une Infante Défunte 6:29

Total Time: 43:34

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For more info e-mail us:
admin@highdeftapetransfers.com
or visit our website:
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