I, Eunbyol Ko, hereby submit this work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

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in:

Piano Performance

It is entitled:

Music and Image: A Performer's Guide to Maurice Ravel's Miroirs

This work and its defense approved by:

Chair: Robert Zierolf Ph.D.
Eugene Pridonoff
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Music and Image: A Performer’s Guide
To Maurice Ravel’s Miroirs

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DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

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by

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March 2, 2007

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Abstract

Ravel’s *Miroirs* is a complex work for piano, full of rich expressive and suggestive qualities, as well as unique and challenging keyboard techniques. It is extremely popular among pianists and is frequently studied and performed, both whole or in part, by pianists at various levels. The body of research available on this work primarily addresses its analytical aspects, but unfortunately little is said of the stylistic, interpretive, and technical challenges for the performer. Vlado Perlemuter and Hélène Jourdan-Morhange’s *Ravel according to Ravel* and Nancy Bricard’s introduction and commentary in the Alfred Edition are perhaps the most insightful references for this type of information. In my own study and research, however, it became clear to me that there was a need for a more detailed and imaginative analysis of this work—one that would not only address its analytical aspects but relate them as much as possible to issues of performance and interpretation as well.

This document, therefore, is a performer’s guide to *Miroirs*, geared toward assisting the teacher, student, and performer in their work on and understanding of this piece. Chapter one includes some historical background and significance of the work, as well as a discussion of the merits for descriptive and interpretive analysis. Chapter two is primarily a theoretical, symbolic, and descriptive analysis with findings continually related to matters of performance. The third chapter is essentially a practice guide to one of the most difficult passages, the repeated-note section in the fourth piece of the set, “Alborada del gracioso.” Although the discussion of theoretical, technical, and interpretive matters in a work such as this could essentially be endless, the points covered in this document are the most notable and significant.
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Introduction

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) composed his solo piano music relatively early in his career, a career that spanned over four decades and produced works in many genres. Although Ravel was not noted for composing quickly, hence a relatively small total output, the music he did write is considered some of the finest of his time. His works for piano are no exception, and in fact include some of the most important contributions to the literature.

Ravel’s *Miroirs* is a complex work, full of rich expressive and suggestive qualities, as well as unique and challenging keyboard techniques. It is extremely popular among pianists and is frequently studied and performed, both whole or in part, by pianists at various levels. The body of research available on this work primarily addresses its analytical aspects, but unfortunately little is said of the stylistic, interpretive, and technical challenges for the performer. Vlado Perlemuter and Hélène Jourdan-Morhange’s *Ravel according to Ravel* and Nancy Bricard’s introduction and commentary in the Alfred Edition are perhaps the most insightful references for this type of information. In my own study and research, however, it became clear to me that there was a need for a more detailed and imaginative analysis of this work—one that would not only address its analytical aspects but relate them as much as possible to issues of performance and interpretation as well.

This document, therefore, is a performer’s guide to *Miroirs*, geared toward assisting the teacher, student, and performer in their work on and understanding of this piece. Chapter one includes some historical background and significance of the work, as well as a discussion of the merits for descriptive and interpretive analysis. Chapter two is primarily a theoretical, symbolic, and descriptive analysis with findings continually related to matters
of performance. The third chapter is essentially a practice guide to one of the most difficult passages, the repeated note section in the fourth piece of the set, “Alborada del gracioso.” Although the discussion of theoretical, technical, and interpretive matters in a work such as this could essentially be endless, the points covered in this document are the most notable and significant.
I. BACKGROUND AND STYLE

_Miroirs_ – The Collection

Composed in 1905, _Miroirs_ is one of Ravel’s best-known works. It contains some of his most beautiful and difficult impressionistic piano writing, and through each piece provides five unique views into the imagination of its composer. Each piece is dedicated to a member of _Les Apaches_, a group of painters, musicians, poets, and critics formed around 1900. This group, to which Ravel belonged, met regularly in Paris to discuss issues of music, art, politics, etc, and also to present new works and ideas. In fact, Ravel’s _Pavane_ as well as _Jeux d’eau_ had their premieres at these meetings.

In _Miroirs_ Ravel’s inspiration came from extramusical sources, that is, from imagery and moods not commonly thought of in musical terms. The work implies an objective, yet personal reflection of reality, and each piece is inspired by some kind of external image “mirrored” in sound. In his biography of Ravel, Roland-Manuel says of the descriptive and reflective character: “In _Miroirs_, Ravel was harking back to a secular tradition of French music which, unlike Beethoven, preferred to ‘paint’ rather than to ‘express emotion.’”¹ As a matter of fact, each of the five pieces has a pictorial title, and each displays a different character and mood, from the description of natural objects in the first three pieces – “Noctuelles,” “Oiseaux tristes,” “Une barque sur l’océan” – to the Spanish dance in the fourth, “Alborada del gracioso,” to the exploitation of sonority in “La Vallée des cloches.” Though each of these pieces belongs to _Miroirs_, the set was not...

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intended to be performed as a suite. It was perfectly acceptable and expected by Ravel that a performer would play only a portion of the work on a program.

When Ravel wrote *Miroirs* he was exploring new harmonic and formal avenues. He said, “*Miroirs* forms a set of pieces for piano that mark a rather considerable change in my harmonic evolution, which disconcerted even those musicians who had been accustomed to my style.”² This new style was classified quite hastily by critics and the public as Impressionistic, though Ravel was not favorable toward the term. He wrote, “The title *Miroirs* has authorized my critics to consider this collection as being among those works which belong to the Impressionist movement. I do not contradict this at all, if one understands the term by analogy. A rather fleeting analogy, what’s more, since Impressionism does not seem to have any precise meaning outside the domain of painting.”³ Essentially, Ravel considered these pieces as vague, rather than literal, image paintings. To the performer as well, this analogy might also be fleeting unless it is understood in relation to performing the piece.

**Impressionism and Descriptive Analysis**

Impressionism is a problematic term when applied to music. As Stefan Jarocinski argues in relation to the music of Debussy, “Musicologists found themselves in the same situation as the public which, having come under the spell of Impressionist painting, sought

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³Ibid., 49.
in it resemblances to the music of Debussy.\(^4\) Essentially, the public and critics latched onto the term because they could associate it with something they already knew, but in doing so they confined and restricted the meaning and aims of this music. More accurately, it can be argued that music considered Impressionistic is closer to the suggestive aim of words and sound in Symbolist poetry than to Impressionist painting. Again, not to restrict this music with a single term, but considering it primarily Symbolist provides a clearer aesthetical reference for analysis. The goal of Symbolist poetry was never to describe or to name, but rather to imply all that words alone could not capture. Mallarmé said, “To name an object is to destroy three-quarters of one’s enjoyment of the poem.”\(^5\) As poets such as Mallarmé began to view literal description in poetry as somewhat dull and almost cliché, so too in music did many composers begin to feel that traditional models of form and harmony were becoming tired and overused. In the impressionist/symbolist works by Debussy and Ravel, therefore, one finds relatively new compositional paths being explored, such as sound (harmony and sonority) being used for the sake of sound alone, unrestricted by functional expectations and free to arouse the listener’s senses and imagination. This is why in *Miroirs* one frequently finds non-functional harmonic shifts, static harmonic motion, lack of melody, and quiet and distant textures.

In most analyses of this type of music, musical events are often explained through both theoretical and descriptive analysis. The problem that arises with descriptive analysis, however, is that the goal of this music is to surpass the suggestive power of words with the


\(^5\)Ibid., 38.
suggestive power of sounds. Any attempt, therefore, to explain and interpret these sounds seems to go against the aesthetic goal of the composer. Is there, then, any validity or purpose to analyzing through description? In my opinion there is; however, it depends on whom the description is directed to. There appears to be no justifiable reason to provide a description for a concert audience, as the composer’s goal in writing the music was to surpass the influence of words and descriptions. The audience is meant to experience the music free from a suggested description or characterization beyond what the composer might have provided in a title. If, however, a description is directed toward a performer or analyst, the reason seems valid, as the goal here is to inspire the playing or enhance a theoretical analysis. For the performer, having a specific image or interpretation in mind, while perhaps limiting capacity to enjoy the suggestive effects of the music, might improve the quality of the performance and enhance the music’s effect on an audience. This is certainly a subjective point, because it is possible that the music will have the same suggestive effect on an audience whether the performer has an image in mind or not, but the author has found as a performer that having an image in mind adds a certain element of life and purpose to the playing that might not be there without it.

Interpretations, of course, vary from person to person, and within appropriate stylistic boundaries it is not possible to determine whether one is more correct than another, but the ambiguous and suggestive qualities of the music itself allow for variety. Jarocinski writes, “In our perception of a musical work the only ‘measurable’ quality is its functional aspect; on the other hand, everything it represents and expresses can be interpreted in
various different ways." I believe forming or following an interpretative description is a valuable learning and performance tool. This is why when studying piano music teachers not only provide suggestions for rhythm, fingering, dynamics, etc., but also suggest images, ideas, and interpretations of what the music means. This is often the most important pedagogical factor for getting a student to play with meaning and purpose. Ultimately, all music is subjective and interpretive, so it is up to readers to find inspiration in my ideas or to be moved to develop interpretations of their own.

This is the approach taken with the following chapters. The descriptions and interpretations provided are intended tools, though it is expected that certain ideas will work for some readers and not work for others. Readers should, as they ponder the various suggestions and ideas in the following two chapters, be encouraged to form ideas, images, and interpretations of their own and not rely solely on the author’s views as definitive. They are, essentially, only one interpretation of a work that ultimately defies description.

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*6Ibid., 50.*
II. THEORETICAL, PERFORMANCE, AND INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS

“Noctuelles”

The first piece of *Miroirs*, “Noctuelles” (Night Moths), is dedicated to the French poet, Léon-Paul Frague. Reportedly, the piece was inspired by a line from one of Frague’s poems, which reads, “The owlet moths fly clumsily out of the old barns to drape themselves round other barns.”\(^7\) In the words of Vladimir Jankélévitch, the music depicts the “crazy zigzags of the huge butterflies of the night who knock themselves blindly against walls, reel around lights and in their limp flight, drunk with sleep and vagrancy, look to place themselves somewhere in the confines of the night.”\(^8\)

Throughout the piece, Ravel composed multi-layered rhythms with many changes of meter, clashing dissonance, and extreme dynamic motion to depict the moth image. He chose, however, conventional ternary form to express these intricate and progressive musical ideas. In addition, Ravel added elements of sonata form to the basic ternary structure. One example of this is that the A section has two thematic areas in a manner similar to that of the exposition in sonata form. The tonal scheme of the return of A also suggests an aspect of sonata form, because the second theme (Theme 2, mm. 98-104) returns a fifth lower than in the first A section (mm. 14-20). The relationship of these themes to the tonal center of D-flat, however, is somewhat unusual in that Theme 2 relates by the submediant (B-flat) in the first A section and by the supertonic (E-flat) in the second

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A section. This use of non-dominant second theme relationships, however, is found frequently in sonata movements by Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms.

Also like sonata form, the outer sections of this movement contain transitional and closing material. The transitions, found in mm. 10-3 and 94-7, are modulatory in function and incorporate many elements of the first theme. The closing sections (mm. 21-36 and 105-21) also incorporate elements from both Theme 1 and 2 as well, though they do not function as a means of emphasizing a new key as is common in most sonata forms. In this piece the closing sections are tonally unstable, hinting at various keys until ultimately emerging somewhere definite. The basic formal and tonal plan of this movement can be seen in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Formal and tonal plan for “Noctuelles”

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E-flat M</td>
<td>Th. II mm. 98-104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unstable</td>
<td>mm. 105-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>D-flat M</td>
<td>mm. 121-31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 1 essentially consists of four different motives, each working together to depict the motion of moths (Example 1.1).

Example 1.1: “Noctuelles,” Theme 1, motives a-d.

1.1a: motive a, m. 1.

1.1b: motive b, m. 3.

1.1c: motive c, m. 6.
1.1d: motive d, mm. 8-9.

These motives and their melodic succession of intervals are the basis for this piece even in
the contrasting middle section, which shows Ravel’s economic use of material. One marked
aspect among these four motives is a difference in note lengths. This is very noticeable in
the first three motives, which seem to work together to create a rhythmic irregularity,
moving from sixteenth notes to sixteenth-note triplets, back to sixteenth notes, then to
thirty-second notes while the accompanying material remains steady eighth notes. These
sudden changes in speed and direction seem to be suggesting the erratic movement of
moths. This erratic motion is brought to a head with the almost halting and silent quality of
motive d.

In Theme 2 (mm. 14-20), Ravel contrasted the chromatically florid and irregular
quality of Theme 1 with a distinct melody built out of two short and repetitive diatonic
motives (motives e and f). Though not as rhythmically irregular as Theme 1, Ravel’s use of
hemiola in m. 17 does add a certain restless quality to this theme as well (See Example 1.2).
In this theme, motive e has an appoggiatura quality while motive f is a more lyrical extension of motive e. These motives appear in numerous instances throughout the piece as well. Examples can be seen in mm. 33-5 (closing material) where the intervallic content of motive f is reordered, and also in mm. 55-6 (B section) where these motives have been harmonized and elongated (Example 1.3a and 1.3b).
Example 1.3: “Noctuelles,” appearances of motives e and f.

1.3a: mm. 33-5.

1.3b: mm. 55-6.

Though Themes 1 and 2 contrast each other in many ways, most of “Noctuelles” is, in fact, linked through a creative combination semitone, whole-tone, and diatonic pitch collections. A notable example of this is the opening of the work where Ravel layered chromatic and diatonic collections in the right hand over a whole-tone collection for the left hand (Example 1.4).
Example 1.4: “Noctuelles,” layering, mm. 1-2.

Also occurring in these measures is a rhythmic aspect of layering occurring between the left-hand triplets and right-hand sixteenth notes. While the combination of all of these elements obscures the tonality somewhat, a Dominant-Tonic relationship in D-flat is still implied by the left-hand music on beat one of mm. 1, 2, and 3.

Another example of layering can also be found in the coda, mm. 126-8. Here, each layer of the chordal passage contains an individual pitch collection. The pitch content of the left-hand music is derived completely from the whole-tone scale, G-A-B-C-sharp-D-sharp-E-sharp, while the rising motion in the top voice outlines the step-wise quality of this collection. The triads by the right hand combine two different whole-tone pitch collections. The bottom voice of each chord creates an ascending step-wise scale with the pitches A-flat-B-flat-C-D-E-F-sharp, while the upper two voices rise to outline an augmented triad.

The pitch collection of this triad is derived from the whole-tone collection for the left hand while the ascending whole-tone line by the right hand alternates chromatically with the ascending whole-tone line by the left, thus creating an inner ascending chromatic line. This can be seen in Example 1.5 below.
Example 1.5: “Noctuelles” mm. 126-8.

The harmonic uncertainly and restless quality created by this interaction of pitch collections is Ravel’s primary means for depicting the whizzing, unreal impression that moths make in their unsettled flight patterns. Though each collection receives special treatment throughout the piece, it is perhaps Ravel’s use of semitone relationships that is most intriguing and significant. Throughout “Noctuelles,” semitones are manipulated in three primary ways: quasi-simultaneously as appoggiaturas, as vertical bitonal juxtaposition, and as horizontal chromatic lines. An example of each can be seen in Example 1.6.

Example 1.6a: Appoggiaturas, m. 1.
From a performance perspective, one must certainly be aware of the theoretical aspects discussed above; however, the following performance directed commentary should provide more specific ideas for interpretation. One of the most important things to consider when performing the outer sections of “Noctuelles” is lightness and clarity. One of the main requirements for achieving this, naturally, is a highly refined finger technique. This is not, however, the excessive or bravura pianistic technique often found in the passagework of Romantic music. That sort of broad and expressive playing has no place here. Rather, the
sound needed is unique and must be clear and brilliantly articulated. One should play with fingers close to the keys, keeping the arms and wrists very light, combined with quick articulation from the fingertips. Keeping a little space between the upper body and the arm helps to achieve this feeling of lightness and fluidity. Ravel’s own marking, *Très léger* (very light), is certainly applicable here and should always be kept in mind by the performer. Additionally, according to Vlado Perlemuter, Ravel insisted very much on the little crescendo and diminuendo “hair-pins” returning to their points for this passage, which also suggests the idea of lightness.9

Before beginning to play this piece, one should take a moment to mentally prepare for the atmosphere and image about to be created. One should imagine that the moths have already begun their unpredictable flight before beginning. This way the beginning of the piece does not sound like a beginning, but more like a continuation or a glimpse of something already happening. The other thing good for mental concentration is to actually imagine or feel a bit of craziness and unpredictability. This is not something visually noticeable, but it helps prepare the mind for the odd and erratic character of this music.

The simultaneous duple and triplet rhythms in mm. 1-5 can be tricky to put together. For this it is helpful to think in long phrases rather than linking individual notes. Because of the distinct nature of these lines, I tend to image them as an interaction between two separate moths. Attracted to the same light, their paths cross and influence each other but are never the same. Perhaps the third rhythm found in motive c is another moth

altogether. The whole-tone, diatonic, and chromatic scales superimposed on these rhythms add a veil of darkness and mystery to this scene. On a more practical note, the left hand must not be late on beat two of the passages in mm. 1-2, as this section must be rhythmically precise.

When Theme 2 begins in m. 14, one should highlight the entrance by approaching it with a slight *ritardando*. Throughout the theme, the sixteenths notes should be kept uniformly smooth and quiet as they pass from hand to hand. Here one should practice the sixteenth-note part slowly and without the melody, aiming for an evenness of touch (especially for the thumb) and for the sound to emerge as through being played with one hand. It is also necessary to differentiate the color between the melody and the accompanimental figure. The melody should be played with a quiet, yet singing, tone, while the quick notes remain light and brilliant in the manner of the first theme. A shallow pedal is also helpful, fluttering as needed in order not to skew the melodic notes. Again, each “hair-pin” should be observed with great care.

The entrance of Theme 2 seems to suggest an additional presence appearing in this scene. It is possible that this melody depicts another, much larger, moth whose flight patterns are somewhat more confident and controlled. Darting and swirling below and around it are the other smaller moths and insects. This picture is still not pleasant and should not be played as a lovely melody-and-accompaniment-style texture. Rather, there should be a bit of anxiety and urgency to the sound. Again, the rhythm must be kept exact to clearly show the randomness created by the fluctuating rhythms underneath.
Measures 21-32 in the following section should be played in a similar manner to Theme 2, though the indication of expressif in m. 21 leaves some room for rhythmic flexibility. The most appropriate place for this flexibility is just before the accent in m. 21 and the like passage in m. 24 (Example 1.7).

Example 1.7: “Noctuelles,” mm. 21-2.

Rather than simply playing this note louder, it is more effective to emphasize it by nuanced timing, delaying the attack ever so slightly. This effect also highlights the unusual chromatic dissonances created by harmonic and melodic qualities by the left hand. Reportedly, Ravel wanted these passages to be played full of color and with a certain inner liveliness.\(^{10}\) Contrastingly, mm. 23 and 26 should be played with outward flare (Example 1.8).

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\(^{10}\)Ibid.
Example 1.8: “Noctuelles,” mm. 23 and 26.

The dynamic range must be huge within this short space, and the rhythm must be exact. The thumb should be very active on the last of each group of four thirty-second notes, coming off immediately to observe the rests. According to Perlemuter, Ravel wanted these bars to sound like a gust of wind between the others, which are expressive and sustained.\(^\text{11}\)

To create the volume one should move both hands toward the inside of the key, keeping the arch of the hand strong and with support from the shoulder. It is necessary to have the fingers close to the keys as well. Economical use of pedaling also can support creation of sudden dynamic changes. Nancy Bricard suggests for these passages that taking a very slight pedal break, like a gasp, and coming under the remaining sound with the \(pp\) notes in the next measure is very helpful.\(^\text{12}\)

One should take care to not make the left-hand’s chords throughout this closing section sound heavy or harsh. All notes must sound together and be voiced to the top note.

\(^{11}\)Ibid.

To achieve this, it helps for the hand and wrist to actually be somewhat stiff, moving into the key as one unit rather than as five separate fingers.

In mm. 33-6, moving toward the middle section, Ravel again adopted the idea of the cross rhythm (Example 1.9).

Example 1.9: “Noctuelles,” cross rhythm, mm. 33-5.

This time, however, the position of the eighths and sixteenths are reversed. According to Perlemuter, Ravel wanted to bring out the accents in the left-hand music. This should guide the pianist in creating a clear rhythmic contrast, not allowing the hands to blend rhythmically until the tremolo. Again, Perlemuter suggests that one observe the rubato here so that the triple rhythm takes place calmly beneath the duple rhythm of the right hand.\(^{13}\) Nancy Bricard’s commentary, however, states that these accents and the rubato are not found in the autograph.

\(^{13}\)Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, 20.
In m. 36, a rapid descending arpeggio figure signals the end of this closing section and harmonically sets up the B-flat tonality of the B section (Example 1.10).

Example 1.10: “Noctuelles,” m. 36.

This passage should be conceived as a single gesture and be played as quietly as possible. Though it is beneficial to group this passage into three units, these divisions must not be heard. Both hands should be extremely fluid while avoiding any accents. It is helpful to keep the fingertips close to the keys and angle the hand slightly toward the thumb for this descending pattern. Additionally, though the sound must be clear here, it should never sound like mere “finger-work.” Throughout the piece there are various other thirty-second-note arpeggio passages that should be approached in a similar way. Examples of these can be found in mm. 19, 52, 89-90, 103, and 120.

When playing the entire section of closing material (mm. 21-36), one should recall the line from Frague’s poem that implies the movement of the moths from barn to barn. This section is their flight of travel. The melodies are longer, more expressive, and in a higher register, which seems to evoke the soaring quality of long-distance flight. Although there are still moments of unexpected movement, the melodic directions fluctuate less and the rhythmic values are relatively consistent. Here, the whizzling of moths back and forth
into various objects should not be pictured; rather, this group of mystical creatures is journeying to its next destination.

In contrast to the outer sections, the middle section (mm. 37-62) appears in a slow-moving chordal texture supported by pedal points. The repeated octaves in the beginning, reminiscent of the bell tolls in “Le Gibet” (yet to be written at this time), seem to evoke something old and ancient, like an empty, isolated old church late at night. Perhaps the moths sleep here. This is their home and dwelling place, and occasionally throughout this section, one flutters by.

In this section Ravel manipulated chords in parallel motion. For example, in mm. 38-40 the right-hand chords consist primarily of minor third and major seventh harmonic intervals, followed by chords built solely from triads in mm. 42-5 (Example 1.11).

Example 1.11: “Noctuelles,” Parallel chords.

1.11a: Minor thirds and major sevenths, mm. 38-40.
1.11b: Triads, mm. 42-5.

These harmonies are non-functional, providing only a sonorous coloring to the melodic notes over the pedal tone, F, in the bass. The triads in mm. 42-5 recall the planing technique often found in Debussy’s Impressionistic music. A similar effect is produced in mm. 51-4 as well, where Ravel provided parallel chords built with open fourths and fifths (Example 1.12).

Example 1.12: “Noctuelles,” mm. 51-4.
These parallel chords are conspicuous features over the pedal points and appear continuously throughout the middle section.

Besides introducing various parallel chords, Ravel also used chromatic parallel thirds in the inner voices in mm. 47-50 and 57-9 (Example 1.13).


1.13a: mm. 47-50.

1.13b: mm. 57-9.

These chromatic thirds are played under a sigh motive (built from a perfect fourth) for the right hand and enhance the somber and pensive atmosphere of this section. This sigh
motive should be brought out over the thirds and be played very expressively. One may recall the appoggiatura quality of motive e in this sigh motive, though significantly modified from its form in Theme 2. Harmonically, the syncopated pedal tone, F, can be understood as a dominant in the relative minor key, B-flat. This is confirmed in m. 55 when the descending pedal point finally reaches its destination, B-flat.

The primary thing to be aware of when playing this section is to maintain a uniform tempo throughout while still remaining expressive. Because of the many syncopated chords, it is easy for this section to drag. The only exceptions should be in m. 49 which is marked ritardando. Ravel was very precise in his indications and did not like pianists to take too many liberties. In fact, he was so precise with his indications that Stravinsky once referred to him as the Swiss clockmaker. Because of the expressive and mysterious character throughout this section, there are many opportunities for a pianist to indulge and play “romantically.” This, however, was not Ravel’s intention, and it would be wrong for a pianist to interpret the music in this way. This section is more of a musical painting, so the expressiveness here should be quite objective, achieved through a masterful control of voicing, timing, pedaling, and color.

Pedaling is perhaps the most important thing in this section. The syncopated F-ostinato at the beginning requires a careful half-change on each tone to produce the portato articulation and to keep the resonance from building up too much. This may not always be possible because of what the other voices are doing, but it should always be imagined and sought after. Because not all pianos are the same, one should take time to locate the exact depth where the pedal begins to activate the dampers, experimenting with different levels of
sustain. For the attack of these octaves, the fingers should begin from the surface of the key and move inward as one unit with the arm and the wrist in a short, quick motion. One should be able to feel the resistance of the key while doing this. This type of technique can be used in many similar passages throughout the section.

Voicing is an important feature here as well. It is best to practice each chord separately, outside of its musical context, and focus on directing the weight into the top voice while keeping the lower voices less. Each note must, of course, sound at the same time as well. Voicing is something that is always difficult, but in this passage a somewhat fixed hand position is helpful. The wrist, however, should not be tight, but should channel the weight from the arms and shoulder into the hand and fingers.

Finally, these chords must be shaped according to the phrasing provided by Ravel. Although it is impossible to play true legatos in much of this section, the performer should always have legato phrasing in mind.

When the first theme from the A section begins to return in m. 63, the sound should again be very clear and articulate. Because it is written in a low register, very little pedal should be used. Take care to stay as quiet as possible throughout this section, as the gradual increase in register serves as a built-in crescendo. Many of the same techniques regarding touch, sound, and phrasing mentioned above will apply to these passages as well. Again, the tempo should be very steady, especially with the repeated B-flats in the bass, which may have a tendency to drag. For these, again stay close to the key, give a small yet quick motion inward, and make a slight pedal change on each.
From the beginning of this return through the return of Theme 2 (mm. 63-93), the music seems to evoke a sense of waking or beginning. The many somber harmonies and expressive motives in the previous section have created a dark, gloomy, and mysterious night-time scene in which one can imagine these creatures resting, so when elements from the outer sections begin to appear in m. 63 it is as if the moths are waking, one at a time, to once again whiz through the air. This is why the excitement must be restrained at the beginning, showing only hints of this returning excitement. The combination of these elements from the A and B sections show this duality of atmosphere, but by the time the *forte* is reached in m. 80, the moths are again at full force and have left their resting place behind.

Following a tonally modified return of the A section, which should be approached like the original A section, Ravel provided a short coda in mm. 121-31 (Example 1.14). The first five measures of this passage occur over the pedal point “G” and recall the gloomy setting of the B section. Somehow, the calm here seems to anticipate the impending excitement that closes the piece. Be sure to observe the rest in m. 125, as there should be a clear break before the final flourish. This flourish begins with a low D-flat, an unexpected tritone from the preceding G, enhancing the image of random movements from these unsettled creatures. The layering of whole-tone and chromatic pitch collections in the passage, however, seems to suggest that these moths have finally aligned for their last flight. The augmented triad collection in the top voice for the right hand might represent one moth’s flight, while the inner chromatic line is perhaps another.

The performer should focus on this line while playing this passage in order to coordinate the alternation of the hands. It is beneficial to occasionally practice this by playing only the chromatic notes and leaving the others out, yet with the same fingers that will play when the other notes are put back in. The left hand should be the leader with the right hand simply falling in line. There should be no crescendo, but rather a feeling of fading away. One should observe all the rests in the last measure, as these creatures should not be made to linger, but rather to disappear in an instant. Upon finishing the movement, remain still.
for a moment in the arms and body, so as to not take away from the mood and memory
created by this image.
“Oiseaux tristes”

The second piece in Miroirs is “Oiseaux triste” (Sad Birds). Dedicated to the pianist Ricardo Viñes, a fellow student of Ravel and one of the first interpreters of his music, Ravel made the following statement regarding it in his autobiographical sketch:

The earliest of Miroirs collection and, it seems to me, the most characteristic composition. In this work I evoke birds lost in the oppressiveness of a very somber forest during the most torrid hours of summertime.\(^\text{14}\)

In depicting this scene musically, Ravel presented three sorrowful birds with clearly distinguishable calling motives and characters. Each call is characterized by a specific rhythm and shape, and exists relatively unchanged throughout the piece.

The first bird’s call (C1), introduced at the beginning of the piece in mm. 1-3, consists of two elements: Repeated notes at the beginning in a “short-long” rhythm expressing an emotional sigh followed by a livelier “chirping” figure that ends with a lingering syncopation (Example 2.1).

Example 2.1: “Oiseaux triste,” first bird’s call (C1), mm.1-3.

The two elements of this call are quite different, yet they are subtly related in mood. Throughout the movement the two parts of this call undergo some variation, sometimes

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appearing separately and sometimes in combination. In the opening measures this call includes E-flat, G-flat, A-flat, B-flat, D-flat, and F. This collection can be seen as G-flat pentatonic with the added F on top, a collection which contains elements of a G-flat major-seventh harmony (Example 2.2).

Example 2.2: “Oiseaux triste,” G-flat pentatonic scale

The unaccompanied appearance of C1 in the opening measure eases the listener into the languid character of the piece. The performer might imagine being in the midst of Ravel’s self-stated hot forest when the first bird’s call faintly sounds. Its sad song lingers by itself, softly illuminating the atmosphere of these surroundings. According to Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, a close friend of Ravel, he wanted to hear this call played with rhythmic freedom, not in strict time. The arabesque-like figures should be played faster than written while the long note, A-flat, should be held longer than written. She said, “If one plays strictly what is written, it becomes characterless.”15 Perlemuter adds, “You must not be afraid of lingering on the long note. As soon as you compress the outline of this arabesque, it stands out.”16 The sigh figure should be played with a gentle “down-up” motion by the wrist, in which one should try to catch the B-flat on the rebound before the

15 Frans Schreuder, “Ravel according to Ravel,” The Piano Quarterly 110 (Summer 1980), 37.

16 Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, 21.
key comes up completely, while the “chirping” figure should use a slight circular motion by the wrist. One should be careful to not accent the G-flat, as this interrupts the seamlessness and spontaneity of the line. Playing the repetition of this figure more softly adds to the distant sound of this call.

Additionally, the damper pedal and una corda pedal should be depressed before playing the first note and held down throughout these measures, giving the impression of a distant and hazy atmosphere. One should have the pedals set before beginning to play may to help imagine psychologically that the sound has already been going and also to achieve a more natural and proper color for this music.

The entrance of the second and third bird’s calls (C2 and C3) in m. 4 thickens the texture and adds a sense of heaviness to this hot forest. C2 features a falling major third expressed with legato phrasing and a clear dynamic shape of an accent followed by a diminuendo (Example 2.3).

Example 2.3: “Oiseaux triste,” second and third bird calls (C2 and C3), mm. 4-5.
According to Sigland Bruhn, C2 imitates a kind of sad cuckoo.\textsuperscript{17} It enters on D, a note that holds a rich expressive quality because of the surrounding harmony. This D can be seen as relating to the D-flat from the collection of pitches in C1, because the harmony that enters underneath it includes all of these pitches except the D-flat and F. Whereas the F from C1 creates a major seventh interval with G-flat, here the D forms a major seventh with the root, E-flat (Example 2.4).

Example 2.4: “Oiseaux triste,” pitch relationships between mm. 1-3 and m. 4.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{example24}
\end{center}

The raised relationship of this note to the preceding D-flat and the formation of a major seventh with the bass E-flat give C2 a particularly expressive quality. The call should be played warmly, remaining soft but making its presence known.

The third bird’s call (C3) is expressed with an extended chain of a repeated two-note figure (See Example 2.4). It is a rising major second, and its rhythm is derived from the call of the cuckoo. The rising “appoggiatura” quality of this call evokes more effort than if it were a falling figure. One should feel resistance in each rising figure, as if the heat of the day is causing every aspect of work, even climbing one step up, to be very tiresome and difficult. It should be played with musical tension and a slight delay before the upper note. This call, often used homophonically with a rhythmic diminution of C2 (mm.7-9), seems to

present the most pensive and inward character among the three (Example 2.5). When it enters in m. 4 it must be played extremely gently and soft to let C2 come out and to emphasize the hazy and calm color of this harmony.

Example 2.5: “Oiseaux triste,” C3 with rhythmic diminution of C2, mm. 7-9.

A final motive, which does not resemble a bird call, is the frequent presence of an open fifth in the bass. From the time it enters in m. 4 through its more prominent occurrences in mm. 7-9 (See Examples 2.3 and 2.5), the performer might imagine this sound as something out of an oriental setting. In fact, Vinès used to say of this movement, “It’s a Japanese print.”

As the performer proceeds through this piece, non-functional harmonic changes are often used to shed different light on the birds in this forest. In m. 5, as the fifth in the bass shifts from E-flat-B-flat to B-F-sharp, the notes of C1 and C2 stay the same.

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18 Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, 21.
(enharmonically), causing them to be heard as darker and more mysterious than before (Example 2.6).

Example 2.6: “Oiseaux triste,” mm 4-5.

Ravel set this change off with a \textit{ppp} marking, and the performer might wish to delay the entrance of C2 here slightly with a very expressive touch and color to enhance this effect.

Although the tempo must not drag throughout, the harmonies as well as the writing itself often call for slight expressive delays in timing. Some other examples of this are mm. 10, 21, and 24 (Example 2.7). In m. 10 the wide range of this chord, the arpeggio indication, as well as its harmonic attributes seem to require that time be taken to get to the top. In fact, one may wish to take the top D-sharp with the left hand instead of the right, ensuring that it does not sound rushed. In support of this interpretation Ravel wrote \textit{expressif}. In m. 20 a slight delay is suggested to set off this new section and ease the listener into the return of the bass and the dissonance it contains. The heaviness of this hot forest has returned here. In m. 24 a slight delay may also be appropriate, as this chord seems to be the destination of a falling bass line. There is also a rather large stretch in the
left hand here that will likely need to be broken, along with an arrival at *pp* and a quite interesting dissonance for the right hand.

Example 2.7a: “Oiseaux triste,” m. 10

Example 2.7b: “Oiseaux triste,” m. 19-20

Example 2.7c: “Oiseaux triste,” m. 24

As in “Noctuelles,” “Oiseaux tristes” is a ternary structure, though much more vaguely defined. The returning A section (m. 20) is not a literal repetition of the first, but rather is linked primarily by texture, color, and motives. Tonally, it is difficult to decipher
Ravel’s plan. Harmonic changes are not determined by any rules of tonality, but evolve in order to bring changes in color or sonority. In the first section, for example, the key signature along with the bass voice in m. 4 implies E-flat minor, which is the pitch center. Looking ahead, however, there is no return to E-flat, so there is no confirmation of it as being the tonality. Essentially, this key is merely a starting point for unusual coloristic departures. The first change in the bass, from “E-flat” to “B” (m. 5) shows a harmonic change linked by common tones. It sets up no expectation, and it consequently makes no return to E-flat. This is followed by another change in the bass to A-flat. Here too the harmonies are linked through common tones (See Example 2.6).

A larger look at the piece, however, reveals that these changes, while not functional, are in fact logical, as they are related to intervals that define the various bird calls. The first three changes in the bass (E-flat, B, A-flat), for example, are related by a descending third (either major or minor). As noted above, this descending third is a defining feature of C2. Additionally, in mm. 8 and 9 the alternation of the bass from “A-flat” to “B-flat” has clear ties to the rising major second interval characteristic of C3 (See Example 2.5). This type of alternation can also be seen as the foundation for the B section (mm. 13-9), which includes a rocking from “C-sharp” to “D-sharp” for the left hand (Example 2.8).

Example 2.8: “Oiseaux triste,” mm. 13-4.
The return of the A section in m. 20 is marked by a key change to D minor. Though this key is colored with many additional tones, this tonality is supported by the partial dominant chord appearing for the right hand in m. 20, followed by a partial tonic chord for the right hand in m. 21 (Example 2.9).

Example 2.9: “Oiseaux triste,” mm. 20-1.

Although the bass G in m. 21 does not support this cadence, the music has a distinct draw toward the tonality of D minor. One hears the bass notes more as color, secondary to the harmonic implications by the right hand. In this section as well, the harmonies are linked by
common tones and descending thirds in the bass. The descending fifths in the bass, which occur in mm. 23-4, perhaps have their ties in the characteristic harmonic fifths found throughout the piece. Following a cadenza m. 25, Ravel provided a somewhat compressed version of the opening section in mm. 27-32. Again we see the falling thirds and rising seconds characteristic of the opening and also of C2 and C3. Figure 2.1 provides an outline of the form and tonal areas of this piece.

Figure 2.1: Formal and tonal plan for “Oiseaux triste.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pitch Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A, mm. 1-12</td>
<td>E-flat (minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B, mm. 13-9</td>
<td>E (mm. 13-9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A, mm. 20-32</td>
<td>D (minor) (mm. 20-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cadenza) m. 25</td>
<td>(Unstable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E (mm. 26-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E-flat (mm. 29-32)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, Ravel began using octatonic pitch collections in m. 10 and continued through m. 14, harmonically bridging the A and B sections. The scale used here contains the pitches F-sharp, G, A, A-sharp, (C), C-sharp, D-sharp, E and applies to both the linear and vertical aspects of the section (Example 2.10).

Example 2.10: “Oiseaux triste,” octatonic collection, mm. 10-3.
The rhythmic motion and texture for this section is also in stark contrast to the outer sections. When performing it, one should begin thinking about the new character of the B section in m. 10, as this three-measure group (mm. 10-12) functions as a transition between these two moods.

In m. 10 the top voice should be brought out the most, though never harshly. The chords below should be very quiet with only slight voicing toward the top. One should not hear individual notes, just a blanket of sound. When the right hand begins its syncopation in m. 12, the finger tips must become more active, thus not slowing and keeping the rhythm very precise. When the sixteenth notes begin in m. 13 the performer should turn attention to the melodic eighth notes and use this as the rhythmic foundation. The sixteenths are certainly important, but they should not dominate the texture or sound “notey.” One should take care to distinguish between triplet and duple sixteenth notes. It is natural to want to put a dot on the F-sharp, but this is not what Ravel wrote. The chords above marked $f$ should be
played crisply and strongly. It is best to start from the key, keeping the fingers and arch of
the hand strong while supporting with weight from the shoulder. These chords are an
inversion of C2, but the character is quite different now. The contrast can be quite big
compared to the opening. It is in this section where all the bird calls begin to interact.
Perhaps they are no longer sad in this section, but now a bit upset instead.

Measures 15-9 of the B section display some of Ravel’s most radical harmonies
(Example 2.11). The harmonic rhythm moves faster here as well, and a pungent dissonance
governs throughout. This is certainly the climax of the piece. Ravel achieved this
dissonance through non-functional major triads for the left hand against a chromatically
altered root for the right hand. The notes move so quickly here that this section resembles a
sort of a bird scream rather than bird song. These birds are now flying as well, flapping
their wings frantically as they try to escape this miserable forest.

Example 2.11: “Oiseaux triste,” mm. 15-9.
The repeated notes in m. 15 signal their take-off. The pianist should not hesitate to play this passage aggressively. The quality of tone should have confidence and strength, along with rhythmic clarity and excitement. Shifting the position of the right wrist to be in line with the top note of the broken chords helps to achieve the power and voicing needed here. It is also necessary for the left hand to lead in this passage, creating one long musical line with it.

As a whole, the B section is rhythmically symmetrical. It is preceded by slow eight-note triplets in mm. 10-11, moving to sixteenth-note triplets in mm. 13-4, then to thirty-second notes in mm. 15-7, and finally backward through the same procedure in mm. 17-9
(See Examples 2.10 and 2.11). Ravel’s ingenious musical plan here highlights this climax through a rhythmic crescendo as well as a dynamic crescendo.

Though the return of the A section contains many performance similarities to the opening A section, there are also a number of differences. The most significant is the cadenza in m. 26. This passage should sound improvised, like a bird’s flight. One should not begin exactly in tempo but gradually find the tempo over the first two or three eighth notes. Just as a bird is not at full speed when it takes off, perhaps a pianist should not be either. The sound should be kept light and clear and there should be no Romantic surges. Ravel set off the descent of these notes back to earth with a *ritardando*. Be sure to observe this along with a complete clearing of the pedal at the *ppp*. At this point, though soft, the right hand must be heard over the left hand.

As the languid forest returns, one’s sound or thoughts should not become optimistic. The piece must remain somber until the end. If anything, the heat has only become worse, the sighs heavier, and the forest more unbearable. From m. 29 until the end, continue to voice well, letting each call be heard at a different dynamic level. Again, after the last note do not make any movements that are out of character. Remain still until the sound has completely died away.
“Une barque sur l’ocean”

The third piece, “Une barque sur l’océan,” (A Boat on the Ocean), is dedicated to the painter Paul Sordes, who was also a capable amateur pianist. The piece is one of many examples of “water music,” a style typical of impressionistic work. Like Ravel’s outstanding water music, Jeux d’eau, “Une barque sur l’océan,” is characterized by extended arpeggios covering the entire range of the piano, creating watery or wave-like effects.

The title of the work rather plainly sets the scene, telling merely that there is a boat and that this boat is on the ocean. Nothing in the title suggests an atmosphere or character for the piece (unlike “Sad Birds”); rather, Ravel leaves it solely to the music. Music critic Gaston Carraud provided an interesting, though somewhat cynical, description of the piece when he wrote, “. . . like a succession of colors imposed on a drawing barely sketched . . . . Unfortunately the view changes every moment. It is a confusing kaleidoscope and we can not even tell what kind of weather prevails on this ocean.”19 Whether unfortunate or not, Ravel’s writing in this piece is capable of evoking a myriad of “ocean” scenes and certainly requires a lot from the imaginations of its listeners.

Mirroring the unending quality of the ocean, “Une barque” is written in a continuous one-part form. Within this form, however, it is possible to sectionalize the work somewhat based on various reappearing rhythmic and melodic gestures. There are seven basic motives, all of which combine to create thirteen loosely defined sections. The motives are often quite similar to each other in that they almost all contain “water-like”

arpeggations; however, it is the introduction of various unique traits that distinguish them from one another. The structure and tonality of the piece may be seen Figure 3.1.

**Figure 3.1: Formal and tonal plan for “Une barque sur l’océan.”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>A’</th>
<th>C’</th>
<th>D’</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>C”</th>
<th>D”</th>
<th>A”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pitch Center</td>
<td>f#</td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>g#</td>
<td>c#</td>
<td>c#</td>
<td>c#</td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>b/f#</td>
<td>f#</td>
<td>(Eb)</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>V7 of f#</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The piece begins with a flowing arpeggio figure underneath a gently swaying melodic gesture for the right hand (Example 3.1).

**Example 3.1: “Une barque sur l’océan,” mm. 1-2.**

![Example 3.1: “Une barque sur l’océan,” mm. 1-2.](image)

The gesture is characterized by a falling line consisting of a minor third, perfect fourth, and major second, with all but one note harmonized as a perfect fourth or perfect fifth, before it leaps a minor seventh upward and begins again. The rhythm here is characterized by an alternating duple-triple progression. This gesture is the most characteristic element of the A section, repeated numerous times in mm. 1-10 then in slight variants until the close of the section in m. 27. When combined with the harmonically static arpeggiations by the left hand, the image created is that of a boat rocking gently on a rather calm ocean. The rhythmic ambiguity of the right-hand music, along with its downward
melodic shape and short length, contrast the wave-like arpeggiations, which rise and fall rhythmically and melodically, independent from the right hand music. This contrast creates a vivid sense of the irregular, yet somehow peaceful, sway of water. Because this sense of sway is so vivid, it is possible that Ravel was imagining a rather small boat, one that might be easily manipulated by the ocean’s movements.

As with the previous two pieces, “Une barque sur l’océan” should begin as if it is a continuation of something already existing. The sound should not “begin,” so to speak, but should somehow emerge. To help achieve this the performer should start with hands already in position followed by a slow and deep breath in, and on the beginning of the exhale, a gentle descent into the keys. The arms should be light and free throughout the passage, using little weight from the shoulders or back. The finger technique by the left hand must be very refined here, as there can be no accents or unevenness in the sound. This will likely require considerable practice of the figure separately and in as many different ways as possible, paying careful attention to the thumb, which has a tendency create accents. Despite this difficulty, however, the arpeggio must never sound “notey.” One should take great care to play this accompaniment with beauty and shape, always very quietly. As suggested by Ravel, the sound should be Très envelopé de pédales (Very enveloped with pedal,) to create an atmosphere and blending of harmonies appropriate for this scene. When the right hand is added, its sound must not interfere with the continuity of the left hand. Although the notes between the hands must align with each other on their respective beats, there must not be a sense of placement or of verticality in the lines. Each line must be shaped and stated beautifully and independently from the other, perhaps only
taking time to meet on the downbeats of the measures. In fact, making a slight, practically imperceptible, delay before each downbeat can add to the sense of lilt and sway needed in this passage. If one were to continue through these measures with constant forward momentum, the music would sound hurried and this lilt would be lost. According to Perlemuter, Ravel wanted the beginning of the piece to be played “without hurrying and not too fast.”²⁰ His indication for a supple rhythm supports this as well. Perhaps it is best to say that one should be more concerned with the musical and natural quality of this passage than with simply playing thirty-second notes as fast as possible.

In m. 4, the appearance of an accented G-sharp and C-sharp in the inner voice adds a new element to this texture.

Example 3.2: “Une barque sur l’océan,” m. 4.

Perhaps there is now another presence here. No longer is this boat uninhabited, but there may now be a human presence in the scene. Perhaps these notes also allude to the sound of a boat whistle. In addition to Ravel’s marking, en dehors, he told Perlemuter that these

²⁰Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, 22.
notes should be played “softly, but like a call.”\textsuperscript{21} Whatever these notes are, their presence should be made known.

As the section continues in mm. 11-27, and much of what is found in the opening continues to appear, a few new elements can also be seen. In m. 11 the left-hand music for the first time descends deep into the bass. Although the pedal should typically be changed with harmony changes, a full pedal in this low register is too much, causing the left hand to become too loud and thick, and ultimately overpowering the right-hand notes. An occasional half-pedal will be needed here, as well as occasional flutter-pedaling (Example 3.3).

Example 3.3: “Une barque sur l’océan,” m. 11-2.

The second new element that can be found is the fragmentation of the opening right-hand line into two-note phrases. This occurs first in mm. 11-2 (See Example 3.3) and again in m. 21-5. The accents found in these phrases (typically on beat three) should not be achieved through a sudden loud sound, but rather should be realized agogically—that is, after a slight delay. This helps to avoid any harshness and contributes to the sense of lilt. In fact, the arpeggiations written in before most of these accents seem to be Ravel’s way of insisting that they be played agogically.

\textsuperscript{21}Ravel, 31.
The B section (mm. 28-37) consists of three layers. The lowest is characterized by a B-flat pedal tone in various rhythms and registers. It is most present in the first half of the section, less so in the second half, then returns on the final beat of m. 37. The middle layer (which later becomes the top layer in m. 33) is defined by block chords in the middle register. From mm. 29-32, however, these chords have only a secondary melodic importance to the third layer, which is characterized by a descending whole-tone scale ornamented by rapid arpeggios in the highest registers. After this line descends in mm. 29-32, it begins to rise again, first through various half steps, whole steps, and thirds, and finally completely by whole tones in mm. 36-7.

Example 3.4: “Une barque sur l’océan,” mm. 35-7.

The atmosphere in this section is much more foreboding than the A section. Sharp dissonances and a quicker harmonic rhythm reflect unrest and increased anxiety here. The
pianist must be aware of the mood change. As opposed to the A section, which requires a flexible swaying rhythmic approach, this section should be played with direction and intent. Essentially, the section is one long line. It is wise to periodically play only the harmonies of this section, leaving out or blocking the arpeggios, in order to understand the linear quality. Voicing is of particular importance here, as at no time should the chords sound thick or harsh. Certain acute dissonances, such as beat one of m. 32, should be approached with care for the sound. Once the arpeggios are added back in they should be played with clarity and brilliance. Unlike the arpeggios of the A section, which should remain quiet and always under the melody, the fast notes must help to propel the melody. They must be played somewhat more clearly and athletically, as the high register calls for brilliance. Throughout, however, they must be shaped and not sound like a mere finger exercise.

The anxiety of this section reflects some sort of change from the calm ocean of section A. Measure 28 seems to be a short calm before the storm begins. With m. 29 the wind is now blowing, pushing this boat faster along the water, rocking it side-to-side with more force than before. The dissonances seem to imply a struggle, perhaps between man and nature, as the human presence glimpsed in the A section is struggling to regain control. As the line rises the ocean seems to be becoming stronger and stronger, and the struggle more and more difficult. The climax of this section is reached in m. 35 with a ff dissonance followed by a long decrescendo. The contradiction of a rising line but falling dynamic level represents the unpredictable character of this ocean, and is in a way a dynamic representation of the rise and fall of the waves.
In m. 38, a haunting tremolo grows furiously over a sea of arpeggios, setting off and characterizing the C section (m. 38-45) (Example 3.5).

Example 3.5: “Une barque sur l’océan,” mm. 38-9.

Here both the arpeggios and tremolos seem to have equal significance as they alternate measure by measure. Three alternations in all occur, and at no time is there anything that might hint at a human presence or a struggle in the texture. It seems that in this section this human presence has been overwhelmed and is not able to speak over the fierce winds, heavy rains, and raging sea. It is not until m. 44, as the storm seems to calm, that an eighth-note bass pattern, perhaps the boat, begins to emerge (Example 3.6).
Example 3.6: “Une barque sur l’océan,” m. 44-5.

The majority of this section is built around G-sharp, although there is a one measure departure to F-sharp major on the **fff** climax of m. 43. In mm. 44, as the storm calms, G-sharp is reestablished. The tremolos, which have a whole-tone quality, create a wonderful and almost supernatural color over these arpeggios.

The execution of these tremolos requires strong fingers and a loose, well-coordinated arm. The primary technical “tool” here is rotation, not only from the wrist but also from the forearm and into the upper arm. The wrist will stay somewhat firm (though not tight) while the fingertips stay very active and close to the keys. Toward the height of the crescendo, the entire hand should have the feeling of shaking. One must hold nothing back here. At the time the tremolo reaches its end, one should feel at the same time that one is about to lose control but is saved by the arrival of the arpeggio. Ravel’s suggestion to Perlemuter was to play the tremolos with a slight pause before each one. He also commented that the arpeggios that follow should sound like a harp.\(^{22}\) Reportedly, Ravel wished many other figures in the piece to sound like a harp as well. In playing the arpeggios one should consider the first G-sharp in each as a starting point, providing a deep

\(^{22}\)Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, 23.
resonance on which to build. Because of the speed of this figure, it is wise to redistribute the notes between the hands. Grouping them as 4-4-7-3 in alternations of R-L-R-L allows the pianist to get more sound from the piano and to achieve a brilliant and even sound.

The D section is signaled by a sequence of chords over a rocking accompanimental figure, and also by the first significant absence of continuous arpeggations in the texture. Following the stormy B and C sections, the appearance of these chords seems to reflect the reemergence of the human presence after a grueling battle with nature (Example 3.7).

Example 3.7: “Une barque sur l’océan,” mm. 46-8.

The low register and sustained quality of these measures give the impression of fatigue, perhaps even exhaustion, while the indication très expressif (very expressive) suggests deep emotion. These chords emerge over an accompanimental figure reminiscent of the boat rhythm in section A. Having been seriously shaken during the storm, it can be seen that this bass rhythm in m. 44 reflects the boat emerging from the storm, which is followed by an emergence of the human presence in m. 46. The unusual melodic and harmonic contour of this line over the G-sharp pedal tone (mm. 46-8) adds a particularly painful quality to the sound. The pianist should be aware of this line, projecting it with good voicing but with
depth and fullness. The accompanimental figure should be kept buoyant, despite the low register, as it must evoke a rocking sensation similar to the beginning.

The sporadic arpeggios that appear in mm. 49-52 seem to reflect the remnants of this passing storm. The water that slaps against the side of the boat, the spray from the ocean, or a softer fall of rain may be imagined with all of these arpeggios. As the waters calm, the arpeggios sink into a lower register and softer dynamic level. They require a clear and brilliant sound in the higher registers (as in the B section) but a lighter and weightless technique in the lower registers (as in the A section).

Harmonically, the G-sharp pedal tone of mm. 44-8 in retrospect acts as a dominant to C-sharp, which is reached in m. 49. This remains the tonal center until the end of the E section in m. 67.

The E section (mm. 55-60) continues the calming trend of the D section, reaching an even softer dynamic level and a more peaceful harmonic area with a lush C-sharp major tonality throughout. In both sound and appearance on the page, the right-hand arpeggiations resemble the continuous rippling of water that might be found on the surface of a calm ocean (Example 3.8).
Example 3.8: “Une barque sur l’océan,” mm. 55-7.

The static harmonic motion, limited range, and repetitive figuration continue the transition back to a peaceful atmosphere. The human presence from Section D does not appear to be present here, but perhaps is resting and recovering from the preceding drama. The arpeggios in this section must not be “notey,” but should be gentle, clear, and resemble the natural flow of the ocean. The finger technique is similar to that used in Section A, although here it must be transferred to the right hand. The shape of this figure quite naturally calls for a small circular motion by the wrist, lowering slightly as the thumb is played then elevating the hand slightly as the fifth finger plays. Above all, these figures should remain quiet and calm.

A transposed version of the A section returns in m. 61, reestablishing the serenity of this wide ocean. This scene does not last long, however, as a restatement of the tumultuous and desperate C and D sections returns mm. 68-79. The appearance of C-section material does not invoke the image of a storm approaching, rather its abrupt appearance sounds like
it arrives as a dream, as if the human presence is reliving this fright all over again. This dream lasts until m. 79, when the appearance of new material sets up a new scene on this ocean.

At the end of the second D section, a new figure is introduced in m. 79 in place of the fragmented arpeggios of the first D section (Example 3.9).

Example 3.9: “Une barque sur l’océan,” mm. 79-82.

This motive, which becomes the primary element in section F (mm. 82-102), is introduced in m. 79 in order to gradually end the dream and overlap it with reality. This reality, which characterizes the rest of the piece, is not the peaceful reality of the beginning but a lonely and uncertain reality evocative of darkness, helplessness, and isolation.

These measures are some of the most difficult in the piece to play. A harmonically ambiguous ostinato figure for the right hand permeates the first sixteen measures of the section (mm. 82-97), until it is modified into fuller harmonies in the remaining five measures. The difficulty here is playing the passage quietly and evenly for the duration of the section. Although it is possible to redistribute some of these notes between hands, it
cannot be done for the first part of the section and can even lead to unevenness in the sound where it *can* be done. Essentially, a great deal of practice must be done here. One should not only practice with various rhythms, which will build strength and clarity, but should block the notes in one position and practice moving quickly to the notes that occur in the next hand position. This will help build speed and accuracy. The arm should be very free throughout, applying little weight and moving comfortably in line with the changes of hand position. Nancy Bricard suggests playing this section in different keys but using the same fingerings to build endurance. She specifically recommends practicing it a half step lower. Although there may be some benefit to practicing the passage in this manner, one would be wise to devote the most time to the difficulties presented by original key.

Beneath the right-hand arpeggiations, the left-hand music in mm. 82-91 recalls the expressive quality of the human presence, similar in shape to the chords found in section D (Example 3.10).

The lack of support from the bass here, with harmonically static figuration above, provides an image of isolation and loneliness. This person has awakened in the midst of a dark sea with the lingering anxiety of the drama just lived through. Now that the sea has calmed, it is this person’s mind and heart that begins to race. This person begins imagining all that could happen and the powerlessness to do anything about it. Whether it is panic that increases in this person or the reawakening of the sea, a storm slowly begins to emerge once again.

The left-hand figures in mm. 83-5 must be clearly heard over the figuration. One should play out here, giving enough sound at the beginning so there is room for it to fade by the end of each three-note phrase. For the dynamic swells that occur in mm. 86-7 and 92-3, the performer should lead with the left hand, adding arm weight to each part as $f$ is reached. The left-hand music should still be heard as a melody here, as it still represents the human figure. The melody from m. 100 contains whole-tone scale characteristics, such as a tritone leap upward followed by descending whole steps, recalling the restless sonorities of section B and adding to the overall water imagery (Example 3.11).

Example 3.11: “Une barque sur l’océan,” m. 100.

In mm. 98-102, the left-hand music should be heard over the right hand’s. These thick chords must be voiced well and with a singing and expressive sound. As the passage
continues, each repetition should grow slightly louder and more urgent. The heart of this human presence is racing more than ever now, while the ocean, too, begins to rage. The figure should be played with constant forward momentum, never breaking the sense of long line even though the phrase structure is short and repetitive. In the final measure of this crescendo (m. 102), the left hand should lead the increase and momentum all the way into m. 103.

This arrival marks the beginning of section G (mm. 103-10) and also the climax of the piece. Human and nature seem to go against each other with full force here, though the outcome is not as tragic as one might expect. This $fff$ unification of the two instead produces a magical and powerful effect. The sound evokes pure water imagery as this huge wave descends with great energy from the highest registers in m. 103 to a much lower register in m. 107 (Example 3.12). The A-natural that appears in the top voice in m. 107 has a particularly dark character as it interacts with the major seventh below, B-flat, and the tritone, E-flat. This A-natural recalls the human character while a separate motive of a rising fourth indicates, perhaps, the tolling sound of the boat whistle heard in the opening measures of the piece.

The right-hand passagework in m. 103 must be brilliant and clear. One must make sure to avoid accenting only the first note of each group of four, but rather give a full, clear sound on every note. The fingers must really work here along with support from the back and shoulders in order to achieve a full sound. In m. 107, however, this passagework must
be kept very quiet, using little weight from the arm and very active fingertips. The melody must be heard distinctly above it. One should avoid using too much pedal here, as the low register can create a too-blurry sound and the rhythm becomes difficult to decipher. A half pedal should be sufficient, but as always the ear should be the final guide.

The brooding character that defines the second half of the G section joins with the windy imagery of the C section in m. 111, though the dynamics are less exuberant this time. In m. 119 a revised version of the D section appears with interspersed arpeggios recalling the figuration of section F. As the texture remains thin in mm. 125-31, a constant rocking in the bass with the human sighs above seem to again show a bleak image of a figure alone on a boat (Example 3.13).


The rhythmic duality here (two against three) again conveys the arbitrary rippling of the water. These rocking octaves must be played as smoothly and as legato as possible, as
though they were being bowed by a stringed instrument. When the peaceful theme from section A finally returns in m. 132, it is short lived, lasting only two measures before being interrupted by the hollow D-section figuration. This happens once more in an even shorter interval, followed by a complete absence of this peaceful image. The lonely figuration grows shorter and shorter, and finally seems to vanish out of sight as the last notes of this piece are played. Although the same serene theme from the beginning appears again at the end, it is no longer naïve. It has been transformed by the drama that unfolded during the piece and now seems to approach the ocean with apprehension. Though the human presence in this piece has survived his struggle and the ocean has returned to its calm state, it can not be enjoyed as it once was, as the memory of its power remains.

According to Perlemuter, Ravel did not want the end slow because the impression of a *rallentando* is created by the rhythmic notation.\(^{23}\) Thus, the pianist must keep the pulse until the end and try to play the small notes as light and fast as possible within the beat. The figures written in small notes must be played lightly and grouped into one single gesture, almost as if they were glissandi.

Throughout the piece, it is very important for the performer to keep the pulse, even in the transitions from very busy textures to the more bare textures (such as section C into section D). Because this music is the depiction of water, it should flow incessantly and without any interruption.

Although “Une barque” is very pianistic in the use of pedal and arpeggio figures, it was in fact orchestrated by Ravel as well. It would be wise for one to become familiar with

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 24.
this version, as it can provide a deeper understanding into the imagination of the composer. The prominent use of the harp, for example, can provide a clear and vivid sound for the pianist to imitate.

This piece is certainly full of many ideas, images, and moods. Whether Ravel had the particular narrative described above in mind is impossible to say, but it is certainly one possibility for what this music might represent. Perhaps the most important thing for a pianist is to search for meaning in these notes and strive to express something thoughtful and convincing with them.
“Alborada del gracioso”

Dedicated to M. D. Calvocoressi, noted mainly for his translations of operas into French, the fourth piece, “Alborada del gracioso,” (most commonly translated as Aubade of the Jester) provides a stark contrast to the rest of Miroirs. The impressionistic character of the previous works, depicting natural objects such as the sea or a hot forest, is no longer evident in this piece. In his book Ravel: Life and Works, Rollo H. Myers described this aspect as follows:

The outlines are sharper and the accents more pronounced than in the other numbers of Miroirs; the impressionist mists of the north have here given way to a burst of strong Mediterranean sunlight.\(^{24}\)

Drawing inspiration from the music of Spain, Ravel created a vibrant dance full of Spanish rhythms, harmonies, and modal colorings. Because of the technical demands for clarity and precision in this piece, it has become notorious as one of the most difficult in the piano literature. On the other hand, this same brilliant and effective virtuosity is also one of the reasons this piece has become a favorite among pianists.

The title of this work immediately evokes a Spanish scene, as it is the only piece from this collection with a Spanish title. Even the sound of the title itself, “Alborada del gracioso,” has a certain rhythmic liveliness when spoken. It may be a stretch to assume that Ravel considered this when he titled it, but there are, in fact, a few accounts of him taking a certain pride in subtleties of his titles. He once commented that he chose the title Pavane pour une infante défunte because he liked the alliteration it created, and is reported to have

chosen to write a “Rigaudon” in his *Le Tombeau de Couperin* suite because it also created a nice alliteration with the name of its dedicatee, Pascal Gaudin.

The *Alborada* is what can be called a “dawn song,” that is, a morning song which is traditional in Spain. In Ravel’s “Alborada del gracioso,” numerous rhythmic, melodic, and formal aspects reflect this Spanish influence. Frequent alternations between 6/8 and 9/8 meters, shifting accents, syncopations, and hemiola are prime examples. This style, however, is contrasted by a lyrical and improvisatory-sounding middle section. This section shows distinct qualities of the old Andalusian folk style, *cante hondo* (*jondo*), a favorite among regional gypsies.25

“Gracioso,” on the other hand, was the name for a comedic or eccentric figure, such as a clown or court jester, in Spanish theatrical works from the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This period, often referred to as The Golden Age, saw the production of numerous works where the gracioso emerged not merely as a secondary character, but in fact became a driving force behind the direction and action of the plot. Though today the word has numerous meanings and connotations, Ravel certainly had the satirical, foolish, and eccentric qualities of this character in mind when composing this piece.

Harmonically, “Alborada” is based on the most popular mode in Spanish music, the Phrygian. There are several classified Phrygian-mode types used in Spanish music, and for this piece Ravel chose the type in which the natural and raised third degrees are employed at the same time. This results in certain dissonances in many chords as well as tonal

25 Ravel, 14.
ambiguity in which implications of D minor (D-E-flat-F-G) and D major (D-E-flat-F-sharp-G) exist at the same time.

The formal scheme of this piece is the most clearly distinguishable in *Miroirs*, being heard easily as ABA plus a coda. As in “Noctuelles,” some features of sonata form are subtly mingled into the basic three-part form, such as two thematic areas in the A section. Unlike sonata form, however, the two themes are not contrasting, but rather remain unified in character through the dance rhythm in the bass. This economic use of material permeates the work, as the same thematic figures appear numerous times and in similar form. Also unlike sonata form, developmental procedures are scarcely found, giving the work a closer association to the repetitive quality of a folk song. In the following figure it can be seen that each theme in the outer sections travels through numerous keys before new material is introduced (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Formal, tonal, and thematic plan for “Alborada del Gracioso”.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>D/d-Bb-Db</td>
<td>mm. 1-42</td>
<td>Theme 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 43-57</td>
<td>Theme 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 58-70</td>
<td>Theme 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>b-a-G-F#/f#</td>
<td>mm. 71-104</td>
<td>Theme 3a &amp; b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 105-26</td>
<td>Theme 4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 127-32</td>
<td>Theme 5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>mm. 133-56</td>
<td>Theme 4</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>mm. 157-65</td>
<td>Theme 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Eb-F#</td>
<td>mm. 166-73</td>
<td>Theme 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f#-e</td>
<td>mm. 174-95</td>
<td>Theme 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>D-(c)-D</td>
<td>mm. 196-229</td>
<td>Themes 1, 2, &amp; 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Alborada” begins with a decisive rhythm and seems to toy with a hemiola effect by placing an accent on the first and fourth eighth note in the midst of hand alternations that occur every other eighth note (Example 4.1).


The crisp sound easily brings to mind the sound of Spanish guitars, especially in the strumming effect created by rolled chords by the right hand. Ravel’s indication to play “sec les arpèges très serrés” (dry, the arpeggios very taut,) must be followed, as these opening chords set the character and rhythm for the rest of the piece. Unlike the others pieces in Miroirs, where the beginning seems more like a continuation of something, “Alborada” must start decisively and with intent. Ravel wanted Perlemuter to play each chord very short, like a guitar being plucked, and in a lively tempo. Each chord should be played with a quick upward motion, the fingers beginning from the surface of the keys and remaining close to them following the attack. The fingers and fingertips should hold an almost locked position as a quick rotation from the entire hand creates the impulse for the sound. Although it is difficult to sustain a quick tempo throughout, it is really necessary to do so from the very beginning in order to convey the true spirit of this music.
In m. 6 Ravel introduced a sixteenth-note triplet figure, bringing to mind the sound of castanets. This figure, characteristic of the flamenco style, later (in m. 12) becomes a defining element of the jester’s song (Example 4.2).

Example 4.2a: “Alborada del Gracioso,” castanet figure, mm. 5-9.

Example 4.2b: “Alborada del Gracioso,” jester’s song, mm. 10-3.

This figure in mm. 6 and 8 must be played as one quick gesture and without interrupting the consistency of the pulse. Again, one should start from the key and give a slight quick rotation of the hand over the last note played by the thumb. Although the measure is marked $f$, beginning softer on the first note of the triplet and crescendoing to the last adds to the effect of this figure. Ravel was very specific with dynamic indications here, providing hairpins for each measure from mm. 6-10. They must be followed with great care, the last of which (in m. 10) should crescendo to greater than $f$ so the following $mf$ will truly sound like a subito, as indicated.
By m. 12 the stage has been set for the entrance of the jester. He bursts on the scene with an energetic rising figure into m. 12, followed by an exuberant and repetitive melodic figure (Example 4.2b). This melody overlaps with the rhythmic Spanish accompaniment, projecting a lively image of the jester moving and jumping about. Although a D-Phrygian tonality is established in the introduction, a shift of the bass to C in m. 12 immediately sets up the modulation to B-flat major. This, in turn, provides a softer harmonic cushion for this melody to exist over, giving a slightly more tender quality to the melody. Even the appoggiatura created on the downbeat of m. 12 (C over D) offers a slightly expressive aspect. This expressive quality is heard more clearly at the end of the phrase (mm. 14-5) when two long sustained notes provide a sort of sigh over this dance figure (Example 4.3).

Example 4.3: “Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 14-5.

This melody can be difficult to play when using the fingering suggestions of most editors, as they essentially call for the third, fourth, and fifth fingers to do most of the work. There are a few redistributions of the hands, however, that one may wish to take to make this entire passage a little more manageable.
Example 4.4: “Alborada del gracioso,” fingerings and redistributions, mm. 12-9.

After the initial melodic statement in mm. 12-15, a repetition occurs one octave lower, though reharmonized to bring it to a conclusive B-flat major cadence in m. 18.

The introductory quality of the first 11 measures, combined with the jester’s song beginning in m. 12, creates an image of two distinct forces. One is perhaps an ensemble that is providing a musical accompaniment for the jester, and the other is the jester himself. The scene is perhaps some royal occasion and the jester has been called upon to perform for the gathering. The players offer him a Spanish dance to which he responds appropriately, darting about and entertaining his distinguished audience. The melody is short and
fragmented because it should be easily understood and quick to repeat to the various corners of this gathering. His first statement in mm.12-21 is a success. As his players provide a short interlude in the new key (mm. 22-9), he considers how he can impress the crowd in his next attempt.

The solution is a shocking ff, stating in fragments a variation on the last two measures of the previous melody (Example 4.5).

Example 4.5: “Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 29-31.

The full and dissonant quality of these chords creates a shocking, yet jubilant effect. Although the rhythmic aspect is the same as the previous statement, its character has been transformed through harmony and dynamics. One must play with great power, using the full weight of the arms and shoulders as well as a strong hand to achieve a biting ff. Good voicing still must still be heard. A slight decrescendo is advised on the resolution in the melody, from F-sharp to G, to avoid a vertical sounding phrase. The greatest difficulty in these measures is the sixteenth-note triplets in m. 31 (Example 4.5). Unlike the previous statement, a redistribution of the hands is not possible here. One should work to achieve a quick movement by the thumb from A to F-sharp, occasionally practicing only the inner voices here (A-D-A-F-sharp) to isolate the difficulty. In the final tempo one should not
imagine three even sixteenth-note triples, as there would not be enough time for the thumb to move the distance of a minor third A to F-sharp at this speed. Instead one should play the group as fast as possible, almost like a written-out mordent, to ensure that the following chord will not be late.

Along with the dance rhythms, Ravel continued to employ elements of the Phrygian mode throughout this section. In m. 31 both the right and left hands contain a B-flat major chord rising to the chord F-sharp-B-E-flat, followed by a resolution on a C-minor chord (Example 4.6).

Example 4.6: “Alborada del gracioso,” m. 31.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Example 4.6: “Alborada del gracioso,” m. 31.}
\end{array}
\]

This progression sounds enharmonically like B-flat major rising to B major followed by C minor, a succession that reveals a half-step relationship typical of the Phrygian mode. Additionally, cross-accents between the hands in mm. 31-2 add to the rhythmic energy of this passage, and the “hairpins” at the end of mm. 33 and 34 also achieve a rhythmically impulsive effect (Example 4.7). Perlemuter suggested that to play such “hairpins” the pianist must play the first chord very quietly in order to give impulse to the second one.\(^{26}\)

\(^{26}\)Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, 25.
Example 4.7: “Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 33-4.

Through another brief interlude in mm. 33-6, the phrase modulates to D-flat major and is followed by another statement of the jubilant theme from mm. 31-2. Following a short stay in this key, it again begins modulating, this time quite rapidly up by thirds, first to E major in m. 42 then to G-sharp major in m. 43.

Example 4.8: “Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 41-3.

This same third relationship can be seen between the first two key areas of this piece, D major/minor and B-flat major.

The arrival at G-sharp major introduces not only a new theme, but in fact another new key as well, as the resolution to C-sharp minor in m. 44 reveals that the G-sharp tonality only functions as a dominant in the new key, rather than a new key itself. The second theme of this piece is one of the most difficult in all the piano literature as it includes an extended section of repeated notes over a continuing dance rhythm. The
character here should be quite fleet in terms of sound and articulation. As there are many ways to approach this passage, a pedagogical discussion has been written in chapter three to address various practice techniques and fingering possibilities.

Following theme two (mm. 43-57), in m. 58 there is a return to a fragment of the jester’s original melody, creating a hemiola effect for the left hand as the harmonies set up a cadence back in D major (Example 4.9).


Just as this section of the piece began with an accompanimental figure, a similar one in mm. 62-70 closes it as well.

The middle section (mm. 71-165) is in a lyrical and improvisatory style, providing a stark contrast to the persistent rhythmic drive of the previous one. It opens with a lyrical, single-note melody that evolves freely, unbound by any rhythmic pulsation (Example 4.10).

The ornaments should be played on the beat. The sound should be quite warm, and the subtlety of these rhythms should evoke an almost sensual atmosphere. One might picture the title character of Bizet’s *Carmen* for inspiration in depicting this scene. The second part of this theme (mm. 75-9) offers a metered contrast, distantly recalling the dance of the outer sections (Example 4.11).

Example 4.11: “Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 75-8.

Many pianists tend to play these chords too fast, influenced to excess by Ravel’s marking *1er Mouvement* (Tempo I). Ravel, however, asked Perlemuter to play these passages not too fast and with a remote sound like a distant murmuring.⁷ Perhaps it is better for the pianist not to image these chords as being in the same tempo as the first section, but being just slightly faster than the preceding improvisatory statement. These chords should have a clear

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⁷Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, 26.
sound, which can be achieved by playing the inner notes very quietly and slightly voicing the upper note. Those that exist as eighth notes (m. 76) should be imagined as one continuous upward motion rather than three separate downward motions in order to avoid verticality and heaviness. The left hand as well must remain rhythmic, providing not only a rhythmic attack to each low note but a precise and rhythmic release as well.

As the section continues, these two elements continue to alternate. In the lyrical passages, legato should be the governing rule. One should strive to imitate bel canto-style singing throughout by constantly shaping and linking sounds, and avoiding accents. Those accents that are marked should again be interpreted agogically and not as a sudden increase in volume. The metered sections must always remain rhythmic and quiet, always sounding as though they are distant from the melody. Even as the melody increases in sound, this metered theme must stay quiet and independent from it.

In m. 105 both lyrical and rhythmic elements begin to appear simultaneously (Example 4.12). The melody here is almost chant-like as it interacts with syncopated, bell-like chords. Though still very expressive, this melody lacks the freedom of the previous melody due to its more regular rhythm. According to Robert Casadesus, Ravel wanted the transition into this section to begin with a slight accelerando in m. 100 and continue by the left hand until the rallentando in m. 106.\textsuperscript{28} The bell figure that begins in m. 105 exists primarily on the pitches E-sharp and G, which, in this key of B minor, refer symmetrically to the dominant, F-sharp. Though alluding to a harmonic function, their primary role is to provide a rhythmic coloring to the melody. They should be played close to the keys in order

\textsuperscript{28}Ravel, 57.
to keep the sound quiet and the tempo from dragging. The melody, which is often doubled at the octave, should be played with depth and expression. One should avoid emphasizing only the top note, as the bottom voice must provide support. Care should be taken not to play the many repeated notes in this melody too vertically as well. Though there are many accents, each note should have a different inflection.

Example 4.12: “Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 105-10.

In m. 111 a third element enters into the texture, imitating a tonic-dominant relationship of distant timpani in the bass (Example 4.13).

Like the metered passages in mm. 71-104, the lyrical melody here alternates with the thematically similar timpani call. The staccati should be played very quietly and rhythmically, though a half pedal is recommended to keep an appropriate color for the repeating right-hand chords. Care should still be taken, however, to observe the eighth-note rests for the left hand.

Through mm. 120-25, the alternating timpani call segues into a lyrical passage (mm. 126-29) whose accompanimental figure is in a continuous dance style (Example 4.14). Though the melody is expressive here, one should stay exactly in tempo, as the expressive timing is already written into the line. One should project quite emphatically in the right hand and use the left hand to create direction in this passage.


This entire passage occurs again in mm. 157-60 following a modulation to the relative major, D, in mm. 148-51. In this second appearance, though the right hand lessens its
intensity by m. 160, the left hand must continue in a subdued but lively fashion as it segues
directly into the returning A section in m. 166.

Example 4.15: “Alborada del gracioso” mm 157-66.
The returning A section contains many of the same thematic and performance elements as the first A section; however, one element that distinguishes it is the addition of double-note glissandi in mm. 175-80. One of Ravel’s favorite compositional techniques in piano music is the glissando, as can be seen in his earlier *Jeux d’eau* (1901) and later *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1908). These glissandi, along with the repeated-note passages, add to the infamy of this work.

Example 4.16: “Alborada del gracioso” mm.175-80.
A wise and detailed suggestion on how to practice this passage is given by Nancy Bricard in her commentary on this piece: She writes:

I find the main problem here to be the left hand, not the right hand. If you attempt to play the glissandos before the left-hand notes are fluid, it forces you to stop the glissando midstream. When you lose the rhythm of the gesture, you also lose skin! Practice the left hand with the right hand, playing only the first of the glissando using 4/2, and then turn your hand so that you will be playing on the nails. Go through the motion of a glissando all the way to the top. Do not play the notes! At the top, straighten your hand, change your fingers to 3/1 and play the top fourth. Come down with the motion of a glissando on the nail of the thumb and the pad of the third finger flat on the keys. Do not play the notes. After a while, these glissandos will play by themselves. 29

Though Ravel’s fingerings, 4-2 and 3-1, are used by many pianists, all should experiment with other combinations in order to find what works best for each particular hand. Beyond fingering, a high wrist is advisable along with a pedal change mid-measure. One should avoid pressing too deeply, as a heavy hand will cause the glissando to slow or even stop completely.

Although a good hand position and masterful coordination are essential here, it is often up to the piano itself to grant or deny one success on this passage. As one might soon discover, certain pianos lend themselves better than others to glissandi. In a case that the piano is unforgiving, one might take comfort in recalling that Ravel himself preferred a good single-note glissando to a bad, stiff double-note one. 30

Following this glissando section, Ravel continued in a manner similar to the opening, providing a return to the jester’s lively song in m. 191 following a continuation of

29Ibid., 62.

30Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, 26.
the repeated-note section in mm. 181-90. One should apply the techniques discussed above to these measures.

Following the return of the A section in mm. 166-95, Ravel provided an elaborate coda from mm. 196 to the end. Recalling the B section, which combined lyrical elements with distant-sounding dance rhythms, the coda combines the same lyrical elements from the B section with the dance and repeated-note themes from the A section. Some of these elements can be seen in Example 4.17.

Example 4.17: “Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 200-5.

![Example 4.17: “Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 200-5.](image)

Additionally, the melodic and rhythmic shape of the right-hand music in mm. 206-7 and 219-20 seems to recall the timpani’s call in mm. 111-54 (Example 4.18).

Example 4.18b: “Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 111-2.

D Phrygian is clearly distinguishable at the beginning of the coda, seen in the B-flat added to the tonic chord in m. 196 and the E-flat that precedes the tonic in m. 197 (Example 4.19).

A short departure to C Phrygian mm. 213-8 creates an extended area of harmonic tension and anticipation, which finds fulfillment in a victorious return to D major in m. 219 (Example 4.20).


The character of this coda combines the expressive quality of the B section with the wild character of the A section, though both characters to a greater degree. The characters seem to be conversing in this coda, alternating between primarily melodic and primarily rhythmic statements. Those that are expressive should be played almost excessively so, and those that are rhythmic must be energetic and playful. From the key change in m. 213, only the dance remains, beginning a gradual increase to the climax, which lasts mm. 219-end. This section (from m. 213) should begin very quietly, almost restrained at the beginning before the repetitive figure in mm. 216-17 brings the tension to its peak. One may wish to begin this crescendo less than the indicated $f$ in order to create a large swell. Though no dynamic other than $ff$ is indicated for the rest of the piece, one must still continue to vary
the dynamics using the repetitive figures in mm. 221-23 and 226-27 as opportunities to
decrease in volume then again grow louder on each repeat. The ending, from mm. 224,
should be explosive. One should imagine the full power of a huge orchestra here. One may
also picture in this scene that the jester has charmed his audience into an uproar of applause
and that these final chords are his triumphant finish. It is also plausible, however, due to the
somewhat unsettling quality of the harmony, that the end of this piece depicts this character
being put to death, having failed to please his audience. In this case the preceding coda
might depict his pleading while the final chords signal the death blow. Whatever the image,
this final drive to the end should be powerful.

This piece, like “Une barque sur l’ocean,” was orchestrated by Ravel, and could
also be beneficial for students in their study of it. The technical demands of “Alborada” are
extremely high. The orchestral nature of the writing coupled with mechanical limitations
and variety among pianos make many elements of this work (such as the repeated notes and
double-glissandi) near impossible to “conquer”. Though diligent and intelligent practice
will always bring one closer to their goal, a work such as this seems to always leave a
performer wanting more in terms of speed, clarity, and rhythmic vitality. Beyond the
technical demands, however, lies an incredible work full of vivid imagery and character.
Conveying these images, such as the lively Spanish dance, the whimsical jester’s tune, and
the sensuous gypsy melody, with spirit and imagination is, perhaps, ultimately more
important than achieving technical perfection, though one should always strive toward both.
“La Vallée des cloches”

The last piece of *Miroirs*, “La vallée des cloches,” (The Valley of the Bells) is dedicated to Maurice Delage, Ravel’s friend as well as one of his few pupils. The mood of this piece is completely different from the preceding “Alborada del gracioso.” Here Ravel experimented with the sonority of the piano through the depiction of a number of different bell sounds. The harmonic language is somewhat more radical than the previous pieces, as Ravel employed quartal harmony extensively to evoke the sound of these bells. Furthermore, Ravel’s concept of layering is clearly portrayed in the notation, as each system contains three staves. Alfred Cortot, ever the poet, said:

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

From the performance perspective, Walter Gieseking said that “La vallée des cloches” requires a most minute respect of the most subtle nuances of touch.

The piece is written in an arch form as outlined in Figure 5.1:

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32 Ibid., 30.
Figure 5.1: Formal and tonal plan for “La vallée des cloches.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Tonal Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>mm. 1-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>mm. 12-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>mm. 19-41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B’</td>
<td>mm. 42-48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’</td>
<td>mm. 49-54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The outer sections each display five sets of bells, each distinguishable by pitch, frequency of stroke, loudness, and sonority. The pianist, therefore, should introduce each bell very clearly to reflect their unique characters and sounds. The first set of bells enters in m. 1 and is represented by two alternating G-sharp octaves (Example 5.1).

Example 5.1: “La vallée des cloches,” first bell, mm. 1-2.

The ringing quality of these octaves immediately sets the distant quality of this scene. The irregular strokes of these bells add to this sense of spaciousness, as well as to imply a certain rhythmic freedom in their chiming. The pianist must play them absolutely pp, but very clear and bell-like. One might recall or imagine a similar sound in the opening of “Oiseaux tristes.” Before beginning this piece one should take time to imagine the sound of
these opening octaves. When the performer is finally ready to begin, the arms should be raised slowly to the keys, remain there for short moment, then, along with a slow exhale of the breath, ease into the first sound. If one is playing *Miroirs* as a set, and therefore finishes “Alborada del gracioso” only moments before, a considerable amount of time must be taken to regain this calm and quiet mood. Additionally, the pedal should be depressed before the first octave is struck in order to allow all the overtones of these notes to ring as well. These G-sharp octaves are played through m. 11 and should remain *pp* and clear throughout.

The second set of bells, introduced in m. 3, contains five pitches based on a pentatonic collection and built on perfect fourths (G-sharp-C-sharp-F-sharp, B, and E) (Example 5.2).

Example 5.2: “La vallée des cloches,” second bell, m. 3.

The rhythm and volume of these bells should be played as indicated – “*très doux et sans accentuation*” (very soft/calm and without accents). Their effect should be that of a distant chiming color in this *pp* atmosphere, though they must still be technically and rhythmically
refined. The pianist should practice and listen for absolute evenness and *pp*, the double-notes precisely together, the hands exactly together, and everything in tempo.

The third bell is first heard in m. 4 and is defined by a perfect fourth, B-E, falling a minor third down to another perfect fourth, G-sharp-C-sharp (Example 5.3).

Example 5.3: “La vallée des cloches,” third bell, m. 4-5.

![Example 5.3](image)

The pitch component and intervallic content are clearly based on the two earlier sets. Throughout the piece, the time between each recurrence of this sighing figure varies while various distortions of its melodic motion occur as well. For instance, in the middle of the piece, from mm. 24-33, the minor-third falling motion of this bell is replaced by a new rising motion of a major second (Example 5.4).

Example 5.4: “La vallée des cloches,” mm. 24-5.

![Example 5.4](image)
When playing this motive in the A section, however, one should observe the indication *un peu marqué* (a little marked,) and bring out the top notes, E and C-sharp, with a slightly quicker and more direct attack. The slightly louder sound here will allow the bell to blend with the other bell sounds as well as link it more successfully into its next appearance.

A fourth bell, first heard in m. 6, sounds very low as a single accented note marked *p* (Example 5.5).

Example 5.5: “La vallée des cloches,” mm. 6-7.

![](image)

The harmonic clash between this bell’s G-natural and the pentatonic content of the other bells is very distinct. Though this bell appears primarily in the first A section, a variant of it can be found in the low C of mm. 16-9 (Example 5.6).
In these measures, however, this tone confirms and enhances, rather than clashes with, the C-major tonality of the above notes.

The fifth bell appears in m. 6 and is defined by a three-fold repetition of E-sharp with accents on each note (See Example 5.5). Its dynamic is *mf*. Like the fourth bell, the E-sharp here clashes with the pentatonic collection of the first three bells. In fact, it creates a dissonance with the G-natural of bell four as well. Throughout the piece this motive of a
three-fold repetition is heard often. For instance, it can be found, among other places, on B-flat in mm. 16-8 (See Example 5.6) as well as E-flat in mm.34-7 (Example 5.7).

Example 5.7: “La vallée des cloches,” mm. 34-7.

![Example 5.7: “La vallée des cloches,” mm. 34-7.]

Because of the intrusive and persistent character of this bell, it should cut through the texture quite distinctively. The sound should be deep and sustained, creating a resonant, ringing tone. One should take care that the sound does not become too loud, however, and vary the degree of accent on each in order to keep the resonance from building up.

With regard to pedal, one should consider using one long pedal from the beginning through the second half of the second beat in m. 6, then catch the low G with a half-pedal change and a clear and slightly accented tone. Though this is contrary to pedal markings found in some editions, it serves to create a very effective sonority. The same type of
pedaling is suggested in mm. 6-11, giving a half change on each low G. In general, Ravel’s use of the pedal is very individual and delicate. It was difficult for the composer to direct the player on the score just where and how to pedal, because pedaling is so dependent upon the instrument itself, the room in which one is playing, and the tempo the performer selects.

A good general guide for pedaling, however, is the analysis of the harmonic changes. One should almost always take a full pedal on the chord changes, then additional shallow or “flutter” pedals if there is a need for further clarity. This is particularly true of the B and C sections in this piece, which are more melodically and harmonically clear, though in the A section, due to the overlapping of different sounds and registers, it is somewhat different. Here it is this overlapping of different harmonies and registers that creates the wonderful atmosphere Ravel intended. Still, beyond these few general rules, one’s ear must always make the final decision.

In addition to the five different sets of bells, there are other musical features that characterize this piece. In the B section, mm. 12-19, Ravel introduced a very solemn and somewhat mysterious chordal gesture that is distinguishable from the sound of bells (Example 5.8).
Example 5.8: “La vallée des cloches,” mm. 12-9.

Unlike the quartal and pentatonic harmony used in the A section, this section consists primarily of tertian harmony. Although its general mood and harmonic coloring are different from that of the A section, a number of motives heard in the A section are still
employed, either in the same way that they appeared before or in a slightly modified way. Examples of this can be seen with the appearance of the third bell in mm. 12-3 and bells four and five in mm. 16-8.

Before entering the new section in m. 12, one should carry the sound over from the previous measure, changing the pedal only at the moment the first F-sharp octave in the bass sounds. In mm. 12-5 one should play the hands precisely together on the chords, clearly bringing out the melodic quality of the top note. One also should play the chords and double-notes as legato as possible, or at least try to imagine the legato when it is not possible to physically connect. The opening quarter-note rest in m. 12 should not be rushed through. Though a consistent tempo is important, it is possible to stretch the beats slightly to convey the très calme (very calm) atmosphere desired by Ravel. One should consider using only one pedal per measure in mm. 12-3, avoiding the natural desire to change on the fourth beat. In m. 14 it is advisable to change on beats one, four, and five, as a single pedal in this measure would obscure the rests in the bass and cause too much blurring in the chords above.

In this section (mm. 12-9) one should work to distinguish the sound of each motive. For the low left-hand octaves in mm. 12-5 it is advisable to play with a dark tone, supported by the weight of the arm, perhaps resembling the low pedal sounds of an organ. Above, the thick chords should be played with a lighter arm while the continuation of the third bell in the middle register should be well voiced. For the repeating B-flat octaves in mm. 16-9 one should pay particular attention to the dynamic markings, as the decline from \textit{mf} to \textit{p} to \textit{pp} depicts an ever-distant echoing of a bell. The surrounding harmony of C major through
these measures causes the B-flat octaves to act as a dominant-seventh link to the following section, whose first harmony in the middle staff is an F-minor chord (Example 5.9).

Example 5.9: “La vallée des cloches,” mm. 18-20.

![Example 5.9: “La vallée des cloches,” mm. 18-20.](image)

The appearance of a B-flat in the bass in m. 20 (a fifth below the tonic) provides a harmonic coloring similar to the D minor cadence in m. 21 of “Oiseaux tristes.”

The appearance of a lyrical melody in mm. 19-41 creates a unique counterpart to the presentation of the bells. It is as if, as in “Une barque sur l’ocean,” a human presence has entered this scene. The continuing appearance of bell motives, both above and below this melody, reflects this surrounding effect of bells in a valley while this figure travels through it. In fact, the continuous three-staff notation alludes to this surrounding quality in the scene because the melody appears primarily in the middle system with the bell figures occurring in the outer systems (Example 5.10).
Hélène Jourdan-Morhange claimed that the calmness of this section brings the broadest example of lyricism found in Ravel’s music. The entire section, therefore, must be sung beautifully with a full yet mellow tone. According to Perlemuter, many pianists hurry through this section due to the simplicity of the theme, as well as the accompanimental figures. One should therefore be very sensitive to the pulse and allow for these lines to sing very broadly. Being sensitive to the different harmonic colors created, as well as to the contour of the line, should guard against this tendency. Between beats four and one of mm. 24-5, for example, this type of care for the melodic and harmonic qualities is seemingly written into the music already. The leap up from D-flat to F for the right hand is an expressive melodic gesture, which, if played only as a melody would require a certain amount of rhythmic inflection and color on the F. Ensuring that this line is not rushed through, Ravel brought attention to this moment with a large leap for the left hand, which,

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33 Perlemuter and Jourdan-Morhange, 27.

34 Ibid., 27.
if played with a good sound, requires a slight lengthening of the beat, thus reinforcing the
melodic climax of the line (Example 5.11).

Example 5.11: “La vallée des cloches,” mm. 24-5.

The major 7 relationship between the melody and the bass on the downbeat adds a
particularly expressive quality to this moment as well. This kind of care for the line should
be applied even in places where the left hand’s movement does not make it necessary.

Additionally, in mm. 19-41 one must differentiate the sound for the various layers.
As a general rule the melodic line (found on the middle system until m. 24 and primarily on
the top system until m. 41) should sing the most, the bass should be given secondary
importance, and the various material that falls in between should be the softest. This is
especially true for mm. 24-7, where the “busyness” of the accompanying triplets makes it
difficult to keep them quiet. Even when the repetitive toll of the fifth bell returns in m. 34,
it should not be projected as a melody, but instead blend with the sound of the fading
melodic tone C beneath it (See Example 5.7).

In considering the pedaling, an important redistribution of the notes should be
considered in mm. 20-1. Although it requires a rather large stretch, it is beneficial to take
the low D-flat, found on beat two of m. 20 (and its repetition in m. 21), with the left hand
while continuing to hold the B-flat-F fifth in the bass. The right hand should then, after
playing the first F-minor chord as written, take the top D-flat with the second finger in
order that it may play the remaining bell tolls from the top and bottom staves. The reason
for doing this is so the pedal may be changed on beat two of the measure, avoiding the half-
step blurring of C and D-flat between beats one and two, which is particularly distinct in
this low register (Example 5.12).

Example 5.12: “La vallée des cloches,” m. 20.

Following a transposed appearance of the B section in mm. 42-48, the piece is
brought to an end with fragmented reappearances of four of five of the opening bells,
creating a gradual dying away of their sounds. As in the first section, the dynamic must be
very quiet and distant. The *una corda* pedal should be used throughout. Only one element
should stand out here, the appearance of what may be considered a sixth bell on beat five of
m. 50, signaling the final tolls of the piece (Example 5.13).
In his autograph, Ravel wrote the words *laisser viber* (let it ring) on the first of these tolls. Each one should be played softer than the previous one, as Ravel indicated. To enhance the fading-away quality here, one may wish to voice very well on the first two tolls, less on the third, and finally no voicing on the last toll, giving a particularly distant and hazy color.

Following the attack of this last toll, the performer must remain motionless until the sound has completely faded. It may seem like a great while, but the remaining sound should not be cut short out of any anxiousness to finish the piece. In fact, depending on the hall, one should consider remaining motionless a few moments in the remaining silence.

Though this piece has the fewest outwardly technical challenges, it requires a great deal from a pianist in terms of pedaling, touch, and variety of sound. Nearly the entire piece is marked *p* or softer, and the loudest passages are not indicated higher than *mf*. Though Ravel often provided dynamic indications specific to a motive or texture, it is still the challenge and task of the pianist to project different textures and create many different sound levels through a somewhat limited dynamic landscape. Not limited, however, is the
amount of wonderful imagery and color Ravel created here. One should not stop searching
for meaning and beauty in this incredible blending of sound and space.
III. SAMPLE PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS:
“Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 43-57 and 181-90

One of the most infamous passages in *Miroirs*, and perhaps all piano music, is the repeated note passages in mm. 43-57 and 181-90 of “Alborada del gracioso.” The pedagogical approach below offers some suggestions for practicing these measures, from the very earliest stages through up-to-tempo performance ideas. Though there are numerous factors beyond proper preparation that can influence a performance, the well-prepared pianist can still transmit an effective idea, even when the conditions are not ideal. The two passages in this piece are very similar, so this study will focus on the first, mm. 43-57.

The first step any pianist should take when approaching this section is to find a practical fingering. In this passage, as in much of Ravel’s piano music, redistributing notes between the hands often proves beneficial. In mm. 43-51 it is practical to take the first of most every group of three with the left hand, while the right hand uses 3-2 on the remaining two notes (Example 1).

Example 1: “Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 43-51.
In mm. 52-7 this redistribution is not always possible due to the demands on the left hand. There are, however, instances where redistributions are possible; these are shown in the following example from the first few measures of this section (Example 2).
Each pianist, of course, has an individual preference, so in the case that these redistributions do not prove effective, one can search for alternative distributions or of course simply play the notes as written. In the case that one chooses to play the notes as written, it is suggested to play each group of three with 1-3-2 wherever possible, adjusting as necessary for changes in position. Nancy Bricard’s fingering suggestions in the Alfred edition here are also worth referencing. The score is well marked and often provides two solutions; however, it is not exhaustive in mentioning the redistributions found in mm. 52-5 (See Example 2) and the similar passage in mm. 56-7.

The technical challenges of this passage may be approached in various ways. For the purpose of developing right-hand technique the author has found it beneficial to create a separate study of repeated black notes (Example 3). While this study certainly cannot replace the benefits which come from practicing the section as written, it does allow for isolated work with repeated black notes along with an alternative for practicing only on the
pitch G-sharp, a task which can become quite tiring and monotonous. The following study incorporates the triplet pattern found in “Alborada” as well as leaps of a fourth (among other intervals) similar to those found in mm. 52 and 54.

Example 3:
Two fingering patterns have been provided in order to address the variety of fingering possibilities encountered in Ravel’s passage. It is suggested that each be practiced equally and with considerable diligence.

To address the redistribution of notes which are possible in Ravel’s passage (most notably those found in mm. 50-1), a variation on this pattern has been created in which the left hand plays the first note of each group of three while the right hand plays the following two notes (Example 4). The 3-2 motion in the right hand should be played with a light and relaxed wrist while the fingers draw quickly over the keys (Bricard calls this a “slipping” motion\textsuperscript{35}). The sound should be light and very clear.

Example 4:

\textsuperscript{35}Ravel, 55.
When practicing these exercises, it is beneficial to practice with various rhythms imposed onto the written notes. Although there are numerous possibilities in this regard, the most obvious are divisions of the triplet into the rhythms “long-short-short,” “short-long-short,” and “short-short-long,” with each grouping applied in turn to the entire exercise.

Practicing in this way, the opening of this exercise might resemble the following notated realizations (Example 5):

Example 5a: “long-short-short”

Example 5b: “short-long-short”

Example 5c: “short-short-long”
Again, one should take care to keep a relaxed wrist, active finger-tips, and a clear sound throughout when practicing in rhythms.

The left hand should begin working immediately with the written notes themselves. It is beneficial to practice this hand alone with the same type of three-note rhythms the right hand used above. One should feel lightness in the wrist and quickness in the fingertips here as well, moving quickly from position to position.

Upon putting these hands together, it is again useful to practice with various rhythms. Not only does it vary the practice and allow for greater concentration, it allows focus on combining a precise and quick finger technique with relaxed arms and wrists in short, “non-threatening” increments. These rhythms should be practiced at various speeds and dynamics as well, but ultimately focusing on quickness and clarity for the sixteenth notes. As comfort increases with the short three-note increments, the groupings may be expanded to include groups of six or nine notes, perhaps even an entire measure.

In addition to practicing with varied rhythms, one should also take time to go through small sections at a slow tempo, using a metronome for assistance. As the passages become more comfortable, speed should gradually be increased.

When one finally nears or reaches performance speeds for this passage, to convey the music effectively, bigger groups must be thought of rather than individual sixteenth notes. From the beginning of this section, it is important to feel the music in two-beat phrases. The left hand, because of its clear rhythmic qualities, should take the lead, never allowing the rhythm to slow and always remaining light. The right hand must also be light, playing the sixteenths as clearly as possible but not slowing the tempo in order to do so.
Regarding this section Ravel wrote *legèremen flute* in the score of his student, Vlado Perlemuter, meaning lightly, like a flute.\footnote{Ibid., 54.} Ultimately, the repeated notes are an effect and should never take away from the dance character of the piece.

Although numerous variants and additions are possible for the suggestions above, a thoughtful and careful approach to what has been provided will likely render a more effective performance and interpretation. Naturally, one must already have a certain amount of technical proficiency to play this passage; however, these hints and approaches may serve to free up a perfectly capable technique that is simply approaching the passage in an ineffective manner.
Conclusion

It is the author’s hope that performers and teachers alike have found the suggestions in this document to be helpful points of reference, both technically and interpretively. Although aspects of fingering, voicing, distribution of the hands, etc. should already be discussed in a lesson, the ideas in this performance guide offer some additional possibilities for teachers to pass on to their students or for students to discover on their own. Furthermore, to the performer who has perhaps played this work in public, the descriptive analyses and performance suggestions provide an impetus to reevaluate a long-held interpretation or to perhaps search for additional technical and musical possibilities as well.

Though the author’s ideas regarding Miroirs have been expressed, the range of interpretations or approach to any piece of music can be endless. From the very basic mechanics, such as fingering or pedaling, to the more personal and imaginative components, no two pianists will agree in every regard. It is not expected, or even hoped, that the ideas in this document will be copied or agreed with completely. It is far better if the ideas serve to inspire new, or perhaps very different, interpretations. Whether one forges a path from a connection to the ideas here or in disagreement to them, the important thing is that an imaginative and meaningful path be chosen.

One of the greatest aspects of “impressionistic” music is its capacity for variety in effect and interpretation. Both Ravel and Debussy sought this level of expression as they transformed the vague imagery of Symbolist poetry into music. Greater than the suggestive power of words, however, this music has the ability to both veil its meaning, as well as make it indescribably tangible at the same time. It is a dynamic force that constantly calls
us to reevaluate our relationship to it. Though many specific images have been presented in this document, there is essentially no “correct” idea one should keep in mind. A view, image, interpretation, or emotion associated with any area of this work should always be free and open to reevaluation. Even now, though they are stamped on paper and presented with some certainty, there is, in fact, a great likelihood that even the author’s views and interpretation of this work will change in time.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


