

ECONOMY OF MEANS IN RAVEL'S *SONATINE*

by

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Economy of Means in Ravel's *Sonatine*

Thesis directed by Professor Daphne Leong

Maurice Ravel's *Sonatine* is a strikingly brief and internally cohesive musical achievement. A Schoenberg-style motivic analysis reveals that this cohesiveness is achieved through an economical treatment of only a few short motives. This thesis analyzes the work and its component motives, from the motives that make up the basic idea of the first theme, to the myriad appearances and transformations of these motives throughout the rest of the piece. This analysis is in turn used to make suggestions about how the revealed connections translate into performance suggestions, from the puzzling rest that begins the piece, to motivic linkages between the beginnings and endings of each movement.

### **Economy of Means in Ravel's *Sonatine***

Ravel's *Sonatine* holds a unique place in the composer's great oeuvre for solo piano. A miniature piece in accordance with its title, it has often been considered a typical example of Ravel's most neo-classical tendencies. Compared to many of his other works, however, it has relatively lesser technical demands and it has therefore been somewhat neglected in considerations of Ravel's mature pianistic writing style.

In spite of these facets, the *Sonatine* is, upon closer study, a pivotal work in the composer's search for a new means of expression in his piano writing in the early twentieth-century. In this piece, Ravel displays a unity of conception quite remarkable in its depth and internal coherence. From the most basic of musical materials, Ravel is able to create a work of first-rate craftsmanship, one in which the motives not only unify melodies within the movement—and indeed, across movements—but they actually govern the course of the piece in terms of harmonic/vertical content, as well as process-oriented compositional techniques. There is precedent for such motivic unity in Ravel's writing; many of the motives central to the *Sonatine* can also be found in later works such as *Miroirs* and *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. However the real validation of these theoretical claims comes not in their resemblance to other Ravel works, but in the performance directives they suggest.

This paper will identify a small number of motives that account for the majority of musical material in the *Sonatine* as a whole. Once these motives are defined, the paper will explore how they further underscore many of Ravel's own expressive markings and suggest some performance decisions of their own.

## **Background Ravel and his process**

Ravel was a hard-working craftsman as a composer, and the work did not come easily. In 1928, during a public lecture at Rice University, he reflected on his method:

In my own work of composition I find a long period of conscious gestation, in general, necessary. During this interval, I come gradually to see, and with growing precision, the form and evolution of which the subsequent work should have as a whole. I may thus be occupied for years without writing a single note of the work...<sup>1</sup>

This thoughtful gestation is likely a part of what imbues Ravel's music with its clarity and its deceptive sense of ease. Ravel idolized Mozart, and their music often sounds as if adding or subtracting one note would cause the structure to fall apart. In the case of Ravel, this belies a dogged work ethic of refinement and reevaluation. "His numerous modifications were almost invariably refinements of texture and deletions of extraneous material...a sequential pattern would be abbreviated, rather than a precise repetition of the original statement."<sup>2</sup> How interesting then, that the surviving draft of the *Sonatine* contains evidence of such a deletion. There are eleven measures between the first and second themes in the draft that Ravel deleted in the published version. Apparently, economy was a consideration here, too.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the fact that he was a diligent editor of his work, constantly seeking perfection, it is important to note that Ravel's ideals and education were steeped in strict counterpoint. He studied counterpoint and fugue with André Gedalge,<sup>4</sup> and this foundation apparently influenced Ravel's writing process for the rest of his life. Of Gedalge, Charles

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<sup>1</sup> Arbie Orenstein, "Ravel's Creative Process," *The Musical Quarterly* vol. 53, no. 4 (Oct., 1967): 468.

<sup>2</sup> Orenstein, "Maurice Ravel's Creative process," 473.

<sup>3</sup> Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975), 212.

<sup>4</sup> Orenstein, "Ravel's Creative Process," 471.

Koechlin wrote: “He knew in the end that the ear hears vertically and horizontally at the same time.”<sup>5</sup> Such an attitude surely influenced Ravel, and this equality of harmonic and melodic content is certainly visible in the *Sonatine*. Ravel’s sketches provide further evidence of the influence of his education in counterpoint.

Ravel undoubtedly destroyed many of his sketches, and almost all of the remaining ones closely resemble their printed versions. However, the sketches for an unfinished opera, *La Cloche engloutie*, form a striking contrast, in that they clearly depict the genesis of his creative process. It is particularly striking that parts of the sketch consist of a melody and a figured bass, which at first glance resemble one of the composer’s school exercises...Rosenthal was similarly struck when he saw Ravel’s sketches for an unpublished ballet...they consisted solely of some ten pages of melody and figured bass.<sup>6</sup>

Considering all of this evidence, it seems likely that Ravel’s penchant for constant self-evaluation combined with his mastery of counterpoint to produce the type of erudite motivic unity found in the *Sonatine* and other pieces.

### **The String Quartet**

The String Quartet, composed between 1902 and 1903, bears more resemblance to the *Sonatine* (1905) than any other piece that preceded it. The fact that it presents something of a departure from what the composer had written earlier is attested to by Ravel himself, who commented, “my String Quartet represents a conception of musical construction, imperfectly realized no doubt, but set out much more precisely than in my earlier compositions.”<sup>7</sup> If we consider Arbie Orenstein’s description of the Quartet, similarities abound: “...the modus operandi is that of thematic transformation, which

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<sup>5</sup> David Korevaar, “Ravel’s Mirrors” (DMA diss., The Juilliard School, May 2000), 174.

<sup>6</sup> Orenstein, “Ravel’s Creative Process,” 473-474.

<sup>7</sup> Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, trans. Cynthia Jolley (Kingsway London: Dennis Dobson Limited, 1947) 36.

occurs within individual movements as well as between the movements.”<sup>8</sup> This “thematic transformation” is certainly also a trait of the *Sonatine*, one that stands out even on a first hearing. Orenstein continues, describing the String Quartet movement by movement, saying of the first: “The prevailing mood is lyrical, with an underlying optimism and classical restraint. The sonata form is clear, with themes one and two joined in various transformations in the development section...building to its most climactic point just before the recapitulation.” This commentary could be mistaken for a descriptions of the *Sonatine*’s first movement. It is clear that two pieces spring from a similar stylistic approach in Ravel’s output.

The counterpoint of the String Quartet also serves as an important precursor to the *Sonatine*. It is noteworthy that while Ravel used Debussy’s String Quartet as a model, he separated himself from its harmonic underpinnings in an interview with the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf*, saying “...Stravinsky is often considered the leader of neoclassicism, but don’t forget that my String Quartet was already conceived in terms of four-part counterpoint, whereas Debussy’s Quartet is purely harmonic in conception.”<sup>9</sup> An interesting quote in many ways, it certainly indicates that Ravel took pride in his contrapuntal skill and saw himself as an important figure in the developing school of neoclassicists. These facts help contextualize the composition of the *Sonatine*, and further legitimize a contrapuntally-based approach to analyzing the work.

### **Background on the *Sonatine***

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<sup>8</sup> Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 155.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Zank, *Irony and Sound*, (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 98 – 99.

The *Sonatine* was composed in 1904, and published by Durand in 1905. Ravel began the work with the intent of entering it into a Parisian newspaper competition “for a first movement of a sonatina, not to exceed 75 bars,”<sup>10</sup> but it seems this competition never came to fruition. The composer seems to have finished the first movement, and even performed it at a soirée of Madame de Saint-Marceaux in January of 1904, before he eventually added the second and third movements just before he began work on *Miroirs* some time later that year.<sup>11</sup> It was not until March 10, 1906 that Paule de Lestang gave the first public performance of the complete work.<sup>12</sup>

I believe the *Sonatine* was a testing ground for Ravel’s developing musical language. It is unsurprising that Ravel would use the String Quartet and *Sonatine* as a way of experimenting with a newer, more cyclic approach to form. As Charles Rosen discusses in *Piano Notes*, the string quartet and the piano have always afforded an opportunity for composers to address the purely musical, owing to their uniformity of tone color across a wide *tessitura*.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Orenstein notes, “The piano is the privileged instrument in Ravel’s art...because virtually all of the fresh trends in his style first appear in the piano music.”<sup>14</sup> It is interesting, then, that Orenstein goes on to list numerous stylistic adaptations in various piano works, and makes no mention of the *Sonatine*. In any event, the link has often been observed between the String Quartet and the *Sonatine*, for their “neo-classic and obviously cyclic techniques.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Roberts, *Reflections: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel*, (Milwaukee, WI: Amadeus Press, 2012), 124.

<sup>11</sup> Roberts, *Reflections: The Piano Music of Maurice Ravel*, 124.

<sup>12</sup> Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 224.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Rosen, *Piano Notes* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2002), 50 – 51.

<sup>14</sup> Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 135-136.

<sup>15</sup> Korevaar, “Ravel’s Mirrors,” 13.



## ***Miroirs* and Mirror Motives**

If we look beyond the String Quartet, we see much of Ravel's tight motivic unity in his 1904-05 masterpiece *Miroirs*. "Ravel's *Miroirs*...demonstrates the composer's interest in a kind of post-Lisztian compositional method based on the organic development and manipulation of the simplest, most basic material."<sup>16</sup> While it is tempting to only compare the much more virtuosic, pictorially titled movements of *Miroirs* to the earlier *Jeux d' eau*, it also shares many theoretical elements in common with the *Sonatine*. "The musical language of *Miroirs*, while related to the 'impressionistic' piano style of *Jeux d' eau* and Debussy's *Estampes*, *Masques* and *L'Isle Joyeuse*, explores new possibilities in its tight motivic development, using mirrored trichordal cells...as a basis for harmonic and melodic development throughout the cycle."<sup>17</sup> These trichordal cells are later catalogued by Korevaar, and they include two different versions of cells containing a perfect fourth plus a major second (one an inversion of the other, total span of a fifth), and major and minor triads (again related by inversion of their component intervals).<sup>18</sup> In addition to recognizable motive play, *Miroirs* also displays a "consistent use at important musical points of two pairs of pitches."<sup>19</sup>

Ravel not only uses cellular motives in transformative ways, he uses them as musical representations of the "mirror" programmatic element of the piece. Is it possible, then, that these pitch mirrors were already at play in the earlier *Sonatine*?

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<sup>16</sup> Korevaar, "Ravel's Mirrors, 164.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> In other words, set classes [0,2,7] and [0,3,7].

<sup>19</sup> Korevaar, "Ravel's Mirrors," 71.

## Analytical Approach

Upon first playing the *Sonatine*, I was immediately struck by the coherence and brevity of the piece. This cohesiveness immediately made me curious as to what connections I intuited in the music. The analytical journey that followed has been revealing.

The neoclassic title and structure of the *Sonatine* certainly made the beginning stages of analysis easier. I started by examining the form, and then tried to identify themes and their components. I used Caplin's definition of *sentence* form to describe this first theme: "The sentence is normatively an eight-measure structure. It begins with a two-measure basic idea, which brings in the fundamental melodic material of the theme. The basic idea frequently contains several distinct *motives*, which often are developed in the course of the theme..."<sup>20</sup> This basic idea (usually two measures in length) is then repeated. This repetition delineates the boundaries of the basic idea, as well as creating the feeling that finality in the theme has not been reached, which necessitates the continuation function that follows. The continuation function (usually four measures in length) consists of some type of fragmentation of component units and harmonic acceleration, which culminates in a cadential function.<sup>21</sup> Once I identified this first theme as a sentence, I defined what I considered a reasonable basic idea, and then probed deeper for the motives within the basic idea that could explain the rest of the music that followed best.

Arnold Schoenberg is generally credited with the "discovery" of the sentence as a theme type.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Caplin's idea of the "basic idea" and the formal processes he

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<sup>20</sup> William Caplin, *Classical Form* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

identifies (“e.g. repetition, fragmentation, extension, expansion”<sup>23</sup>) all owe much to Schoenberg’s ideas of “developing variation,” “musical shape,” and “musical idea.”<sup>24</sup> In the end, my approach linked closely with Schoenberg’s ideas of motive and motivic transformation.

Schoenberg defines a motive as “a sounding, rhythmicized phenomenon that, by its (possibly varied) repetitions in the course of a piece of music, is capable of creating the impression that it is the material of the piece.”<sup>25</sup> While my identification of motives lacks a rhythmic component, Schoenberg’s definition nonetheless proved invaluable in identifying characteristic motives in the basic idea of the first theme of the *Sonatine*. Schoenberg goes on to catalogue different ways, including “rhythmic changes and intervallic changes,” as well as the concept of “developing variation,” in which “the changes proceed more or less directly toward the goal of allowing new ideas to arise.”<sup>26</sup> In the analysis that follows, it is this latter type of variation that was key to tracing the motivic links and developments at work in the *Sonatine*.

### ***Sonatine* Analysis**

While there are certainly a number of possibilities for how the form of the first movement could be described, let us take as a given that the exposition runs from mm. 1 – 25, the development from mm. 26 – 55, and the recapitulation from m. 56 to the end of the movement. Within the exposition, I would suggest that the first theme is stated in mm. 1 –

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> John Covach, “The Americanization of Arnold Schoenberg? Theory, Analysis and Reception,” ZGMTH vol. 15, no. 2 (2018): 155-175, doi: <https://doi.org/10.31751/991>.

<sup>25</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, *Coherence, Counterpoint, Instrumentation, Instruction in Form*, trans. Charlotte Cross and Severine Neff, Ed. Severine Neff (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 29.

<sup>26</sup> Schoenberg, *Coherence, Counterpoint, Instrumentation, Instruction in Form*, 39.

12, which opens in F-sharp minor and closes in a half-cadence-like arrival in A major, with the E-dominant chord in mm. 11 – 12. The second theme area, which essentially prolongs C-sharp minor/major harmony, begins at the *a Tempo* in m. 13 and continues until the first and second endings, with the first ending comprising a restatement, albeit somewhat altered, of the basic idea from the first theme, and the second ending representing the beginning of the development section. The second theme area has three main modules, the first running from mm. 13 – 19 (essentially prolonging the C-sharp dominant harmony), the second from *Un peu retenu* until the *a Tempo* in m. 23 (harmonically alternating between D-sharp half-diminished-seven and C-sharp minor, thereby prolonging the dominant until another half-cadence-like E-dominant chord at m. 23), and the third, or “closing material,” beginning at the *a Tempo* at the pickup to m. 24 and continuing until the first/second ending (harmonically transitioning from the A major suggestion of the E-dominant chord at m. 23, back to F-sharp-rooted harmony in the repeat and the start of the development section).

Taking a closer look at the first theme, it presents a fairly sentential thematic form, even if abbreviated and without cadence. The basic idea is presented (mm. 1 – 3) with repetition (pickup to m. 4 – 5), albeit incomplete, and continuation follows. The continuation portion of the theme begins at the pickup to m. 6 and continues until m. 12, and is complete with fragmentation and acceleration of the harmonic rhythm. While there is no true cadence to end the first theme area, such omissions should come as no surprise in a brief *Sonatina* form.

Within this general outline of the form, a comparison of the different theme areas reveals striking similarities. To better ascertain the nature of these similarities, I broke the

first theme into component motives that I considered short enough to assure their singularity of conception, yet distinctive enough to represent unique musical ideas. Creating such a catalogue of musical objects necessitates overlap—the leaps naturally overlap with scale passages, and considerations such as these led me to the catalogue of overlapping Theme 1 musical objects contained in Example 1.

**Example 1:** Motives in Theme 1 (mm. 1 – 3)



Within the basic idea of Theme 1, the metrically-segmented musical elements are:

- 1) M1: The descending perfect fourth of the opening;
- 2) M2: The neighbor tone motion created between the C-sharp and B that follows;
- 3) M3: The scalar ascension of a third, which is related to M4 (in that its range comprises a major third); and
- 4) M4: The rocking third motion created between G-sharp and E (which mirrors the rocking between C-sharp and B, only this time at a larger interval).

These four motives describe all of the pitch material of the basic idea of the first theme. In fact, this parsing of the basic idea materials could be considered three elements, with M3 and M4 regarded as variants of one another.

This is, of course, not the only possible delineation of elements in the basic idea. An alternate interpretation could look like this:

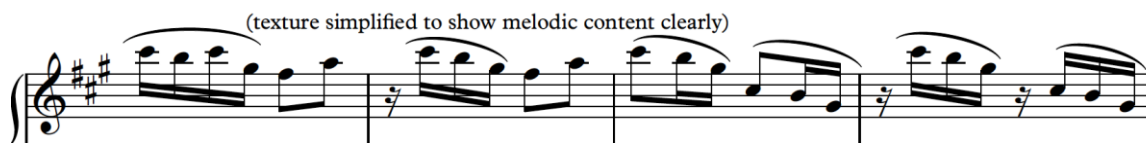
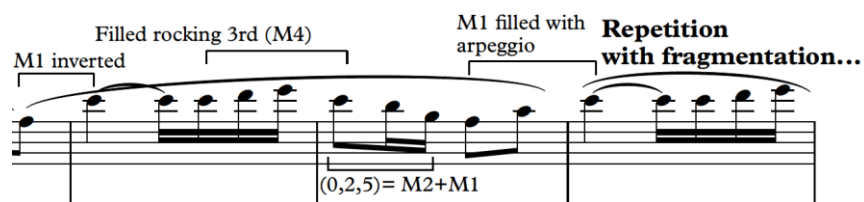
**Example 2:** An Alternate Parsing (mm. 1 – 3)



We will discuss this question later in terms of performance considerations. Otherwise, the repetition of the basic idea starting in measure three is unremarkable, save for the fact that its completion is elided by the arrival of the continuation material that begins with the pickup to m. 6 (M4 is interrupted by the F-sharp pickup to m. 6).

The second half of Theme 1 presents some seemingly new motivic material, but these are actually the original motives in new guises. The pickup to m. 6 inverts the original F-sharp to C-sharp motive, suggesting that Ravel will henceforth use these two intervals interchangeably from a motivic point of view.

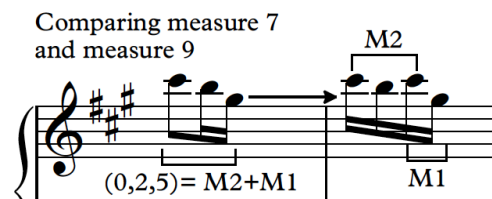
**Example 3: Motives in the Second Half of Theme 1 (mm. 6 - 12)**



He follows this with a slight variant of the rocking third motion (M4), simply filling in the ascending third by scale (which can also be interpreted as a combination of M3 and M4). The motive marked [0,2,5] in the above diagram can really be understood as another combination of germinal motives from the basic idea; in this case, the C-sharp to B neighbor motion of M2 exists within the descending fourth motion of M1. This motive is also significant in that it fills in the fifth between C-sharp and F-sharp with a stepwise motion

away from both notes. This underlying pitch scheme (fourth or fifth, with upper and lower neighbor motion) will prove extremely important to the rest of the piece. In this way, the perfect fourth with embedded major second is the most significant motivic combination of the continuation portion of the first theme. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Ravel uses this motivic idea in fragmentation to conclude the first theme area. The rest of the music contained within the continuation portion of theme 1 is easily explained as elaboration of the basic idea's motives. The pitch A is used for the first time in a melodic guise in measure seven, and in this case Ravel is simply elaborating on the F-sharp to C-sharp motive (M1) by filling it in with an arpeggiation. In m. 9, Ravel highlights the neighbor motion plus fourth explanation of the aforementioned [0,2,5] motive by separating it into its component parts: first, the alternation back and forth between C-sharp and B (on the same pitch classes as in the opening!), and then the descending fourth from C-sharp to G-sharp:

**Example 4:** Combining Motives to Form [0,2,5]



The fragmentation of this melodic material serves to hasten the arrival of the second theme area at m. 13.

**Motives and Connections in the Rest of the Exposition**

Having demonstrated that the musical material of the first theme area is all melodically derived from the basic idea, let us now consider cross theme relationships. In what ways do the themes relate to one another?



Ravel begins the second theme area with material entirely recycled from the first theme. This theme area is defined harmonically by its hovering around C-sharp minor and major; the harmony throughout this theme essentially prolongs the dominant. The melody opens with a rocking motion between B and C-sharp, an inversion of the neighbor motion between C-sharp and B (and back) found in the basic idea of Theme 1.

**Example 5:** Motives in Theme 2, Module 1 (mm. 13 – 19)



The following C-sharp to E to C-sharp rocking third motion provides another iteration of M4. M. 15 can therefore be seen as another interpretation of the origin of the [0,2,5] motive: in this case it is a combination of neighbor-motion (M2) and rocking-third motion (M4). M. 16 follows suit, with another “filled-in” rocking third, which therefore comprises a combination of M3 and M4. The last three pitches of m. 16 form the pitch class set [0,1,5], which can be considered equivalent to [0,2,5] in Ravel’s modal landscape. Ravel then repeats these two bars ending the Theme 2, Module 1 area with a descending filled-in fourth, the last two pitches of which are accompanied by a B to C-sharp in the bass voice and a pair of neighbor-related fourths in the alto voice. Now while the entire passage represented in example 5 is on a more background level, a stepwise descent from B to E, the local motivic connections cause me to hear the theme as a combination these smaller components, due mainly to their striking similarities to the motives of the piece’s opening.

This same melodic excerpt is also interesting when analyzing the ranges of melodic motion contained within it. This melody is comprised of three intersecting fourth-ranged components (see example 6).

**Example 6:** Interlocking Fourths in Melodic Ranges (mm. 13 – 19)

If we consider how this is accompanied (example 7), we find that the accompaniment material is recycled as well—the alto and soprano voices convey two fourths a step apart (F-sharp/B and G-sharp/C-sharp).

**Example 7:** The Upper Two Voices of Theme 2, Module 1 (mm. 13 – 14)

The pitch collection formed by these neighbor motion-related fourths can be conceived of in a multitude of ways. Motivically, it is the collection created by the perfect fourth of M1, combined with neighbor motion on both sides in opposite directions from the F-sharp and C-sharp “poles” (as highlighted in red in example 7). Interestingly, this view of the pitch collection is in fact the first four pitches presented in the full version of the Theme 1 basic idea that Ravel reveals in the development section, which is the same version he keeps in the recapitulation (see example 8).

**Example 8:** Underlying Interlocking Fourths/Fifths

The image shows a musical score on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The notation is divided into two sections. The first section, labeled 'Theme 1, Recap. Version', consists of six measures. The first three measures feature a melodic line with eighth notes and a triplet of eighth notes. The last three measures show a harmonic progression with chords of G#4, F#4, and C#4. The second section, labeled 'Theme 2, Module 1 (upper two voices)', also consists of six measures. The first three measures show a melodic line with eighth notes and a triplet of eighth notes. The last three measures show a harmonic progression with chords of F#4, C#4, and B4. Arrows above the notes in both sections indicate a rightward melodic motion.

If we conceive of this pitch collection in another way, it can be seen as two trichords, namely G-sharp, F-sharp, and C-sharp, as well as F-sharp, C-sharp and B. These trichords are inversions of one another, and interestingly form two of the essential trichords that make up *Miroirs*, what Korevaar has labeled as X and I<sub>x</sub>.<sup>28</sup>

This pitch collection could also be viewed as a pair of harmonic fourths/fifths separated by step. It is certainly this secondary viewpoint that Ravel exploits in the harmonization of the second theme. As shown in example 8, this concept of fourths/fifths separated by step explains the *cambiata* motion of the lowest three voices (example 7), as well as the interaction between the soprano and alto lines in this same spot. This *cambiata* motion also harkens back to the earlier discussion about the alternate parsing of the motives contained in the basic idea; the upper and lower neighbor motion that surrounds the F-sharp and C-sharp “poles” has returned in parallel fifths in the left hand at the beginning of theme 2 (see example 7, left hand). This verticalization of the first motive of the piece indeed reveals much about the equality with which Ravel treats his melodic and harmonic content. The parallel fifths are also a feature of the left-hand chord voicings at the beginning of the piece, so in that sense, Ravel has treated fourths/fifths as a vertical and horizontal motive all along. Consider also the way in which he brings the first module of Theme 2 to a close.

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<sup>28</sup> Korevaar, “Ravel’s Mirrors,” 72.

**Example 9:** Interlocking Fourths and M2 Highlighted (m. 19)

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece, specifically measure 19. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The treble clef staff contains a melody of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C#5. The bass clef staff contains a bass line of quarter notes: B2, C#3, D3, E3. A bracket under the bass line notes B2 and C#3 is labeled 'M2'. Above the treble clef staff, a bracket under the notes B4 and C#5 is labeled '4ths separated by step'. The notes B4 and C#5 are also connected by a vertical line, indicating a stepwise motion.

This could be seen simply as a subdominant to dominant motion, but the voicing is intriguing. Ravel deliberately highlights the B to C-sharp motion by doubling it in octaves, and then once again calls attention to two harmonic fourths, separated by step in the alto voice. The significance of this neighbor motion in the bass is bolstered by the fact that Ravel deploys the motion using the same pitches (B and C-sharp) as in the earlier instances of the motive, and as in the basic idea.

It should be noted that two pairs of fourths, separated by step, creates a pitch collection that is inversionally symmetrical, or mirror-like. Given Ravel's fascination with mirrors and mirror pitch constructions later in his career, this is surely not coincidental.

So far, we have explored mostly examples in which the fourths-fifths are separated by stepwise motion between the lower voices. In many instances in the piece, however, Ravel interlocks the four pitches of the collection by step between the *middle* two pitches. Consider once again this example from the second theme area, in which the melodic ranges reveal interlocking fourths:

**Example 10:** Interlocking Fourth Ranges (Theme 2, mm. 15 – 16)



Here we see that the ranges presented by these two melodic fragments reveal the interlocked fourths shown after the arrow mark. Note that the step occurs this time in the middle of the four-note collection, interestingly enough, between the B and C-sharp pitch classes, this time in the exact register as in the basic idea! Now if we look for other instances of this unique, symmetrical interlocking of fourths, we can find it again in the closing theme area, once again in the upper melodic voice.

**Example 11:** Interlocking Fourth (End of Exposition; mm. 25 – 26)



Here as elsewhere, the stepwise motion occurs in the middle of the four-note collection, creating a symmetrical pitch collection of two interlocked fourths.

The only portion of the exposition we have not thus far discussed is the second module of theme 2 (beginning at m. 20). This material relates to the motives of the basic idea in several ways. The A to G-sharp motion represents the stepwise component of the basic idea's motives, while the arpeggiation of a C-sharp minor triad that follows comprises the M1 portion of this theme. To understand how this is true, some reduction is necessary. This "head motive" could essentially be reduced to A-G-sharp-C-sharp, a re-interpretation of M1 and M2 wherein the stepwise motion of M2 is inverted to form a step from above (A

to G-sharp), and the descending perfect fourth of M1 is transformed into a descending perfect fifth (G-sharp to C-sharp). Interestingly, Ravel includes the third as a way of filling in the distance between the G-sharp and the C-sharp. This downward arpeggiation is interesting in two ways. Firstly, it conjures aurally the memory of the rocking third motion between the G-sharp and the E at the exact same *tessitura* as in the beginning of the piece. Secondly, it mimics the way that Ravel used variation technique in the continuation portion of the first theme. In the continuation of theme 1, Ravel first presented the rising perfect fifth of F-sharp to C-sharp (mm. 5 – 6) and then filled it with an ascending minor chord arpeggiation at its repeat as F-sharp to A to C-sharp (mm. 7 – 8). Now in the second module of theme 2, he fills the *descending* fifth of G-sharp C-sharp with an arpeggiation in the same way. In this way, the arpeggiation in the second module of theme 2 is an inversion of the arpeggiation in theme 1. This interpretation is bolstered by the fact that Ravel has linked motives across different theme areas by inversion more than once (for example, the inversion of M2 at the start of the second theme, or the inversion of the [0,2,5] motive in the second theme).

The second module of theme 2 presents two other noteworthy items. Its conclusion (m. 23) highlights a rising fourth from G-sharp to C-sharp in the soprano line. This both confirms the hegemony of the piece's fourths/fifths and illustrates the variety with which these melodic relationships are expressed, given that the motion is obscured by the cross-handed arpeggiation and is quite different in character from the perfect fourth motive that opens the movement. The other interesting motivic connection in theme 2's second module concerns a more hidden deployment of the M1 pitches F-sharp and C-sharp (example 12). If we consider the beginning of this module (m. 20), we see the tenor F-sharp highlighted

by its downbeat placement, its upward stem and its *tenuto* marking. On the next beat, the C-sharp follows in the soprano voice, a perfect fifth above, highlighted by the fact that it is the highest sounding note in the texture. In this way, even though the relationship is clearly between Ravel's indicated voices, the F-sharp to C-sharp pole of M1 are made audible by Ravel's markings and the texture itself. In this instance, it occurs as an ascending perfect fifth (an inversion of the M1 form), but interestingly a similar cross-voice F-sharp to C-sharp occurs in the corresponding spot in the recapitulation, this time as a descending fourth, as in the opening. Example 12 compares these two instances.

**Example 12:** Cross-Voicings (m. 20 and m. 75)

Exposition	Recapitulation
<p><i>Un peu retenu</i> <i>très expressif</i></p>	<p><i>Un peu retenu</i> <i>très expressif</i></p>

**Harmonic and Process-Oriented Fourth/Fifth Relationships**

I have already alluded to the idea that Ravel treats much of the harmonic content in the *Sonatine* as a vertical manifestation of the melodic motives of the basic idea. Let us now consider a brief catalogue of such instances.

- 1) The “rocking third” in the accompaniment figures of Theme 1:

- 2) Theme 2: the fourths formed by the upper voices at the head of the theme (see example 7).
- 3) The left-hand fifths at the opening of the second theme area (mm. 13 – 15).



- 4) The perfect fourth ranges of melody fragments that make up theme 2 (see example 6).
- 5) The rising fourths sequence in the end of the development section.

While the first four items on this list have already been discussed in some detail, the last item requires more explanation. In the transition back to the recapitulation, Ravel sequences Theme 2 materials starting at the *a Tempo* at measure forty. Ravel begins with a three-measure quotation of the second theme that starts on the pitch E, then fragments this idea to a two-measure version (mm. 43 – 44) that starts on A (up a fourth), then alternates between one-measure fragments starting on D and then G, respectively (mm. 45 – 48), before arriving at the peak of the sequence on C at the *Animé* (m. 49). This sequence therefore outlines an upward ascent by fourths from E to A, D to G, and finally C. It is also accompanied by quartal harmony in the left hand. This creates a confluence of activity generated by fourths. The upwards sequence is accompanied by quartal harmony, albeit all over an E pedal in the bass, until measure forty-nine when Ravel inserts a transition between the upward sequence and the F-sharp minor tonal world of his original theme. The *Animé* section brings a chromatic ascent in the inner voices of both the left and right hands. Ravel brings all of this drama to a close with a scalar descent back into the



recapitulation, with the surprise recurrence of the upper neighbor to the F-sharp, which we immediately hear as the “true” version of theme 1, now that the rest has been filled with the upper neighbor that was missing in the first version at the beginning of the piece.

### **Performance Implications for the First Movement**

All of these analytical points imply certain things about how the music is put together. It would be arrogant to imply that my analytical work somehow elevates my performance suggestions to the level of any type of definitive reading of the piece. So let me simply proceed by suggesting that the performance suggestions that follow are useful for a performer who subscribes to the aforementioned analysis of this piece, and wishes to bring out certain details about the relationships this analysis implies. In some instances, the analysis above really does not change what a performer might choose to do in any tangible way. In other cases, the analysis seems to simply strengthen elements of the performance indications Ravel has already written in the score. And finally, in a few cases, my analysis suggests some connections that the performer must play differently in order for an audience to perceive. This last category is therefore the most subjective of my performance suggestions.

### **The Changing Fates of Theme 1**

As discussed earlier, theme 1 charts an interesting trajectory throughout the course of the first movement. The first question I had about this theme is why it starts with a conspicuous eighth rest. Couldn't Ravel have simply written the first measure as a pickup bar of one-and-a-half beats in length? This initial question led me to others. Why the abrupt rest separating the basic idea from its immediate repetition in measure three? And finally,

why is it that the F-sharp pickup in measure three has an accent, while the one that starts the piece does not?

The answer to the first question becomes apparent when we examine the fixed version of the first theme as it appears in the recapitulation.

**Example 13:** Theme 1 in its Recapitulation Form (m. 56 – 58)



Now it is clear that the rest in the beginning of the piece exists as some sort of placeholder for the G-sharp that comes in the later version. And when it comes, the G-sharp has an accent, which explains why the first F-sharp of the piece does not have an accent.

Furthermore, the rest between the basic idea and its repetition make more sense now as well. Initially, the rest in measure three prevents hearing the G-sharp to F-sharp stepwise connection before Ravel intends (i.e., before its revelation later in the piece), and it also serves to make the repetition of the basic idea more like the basic idea—the beginning of a gesture, not on a downbeat. In other words, the silence that precedes both the F-sharp that begins the piece and the F-sharp that begins the repetition of the basic idea create a sense of beginning that conflicts with the metrically weak placement of those beginnings. Finally this arc of differentiation explains one more instance in the piece: the theme 1 quote in the development section. Out of the haze of the stagnant F-sharp dominant-seventh chord that begins the development, the “true” form of the first theme of the piece is first revealed (this

time in the key of B minor). To dramatize this moment, Ravel marks it *mezzo forte, très expressif* and approaches it by way of a luxuriant grace-note arpeggiation. The accent over the C-sharp is a product of the theme's identity going forward—the accent is retained in the recapitulation version and it acts as a resolution of the metrically weak first version of Theme 1, which is now replaced by a strong, accented downbeat beginning. In this way, the myriad of meanings that our analysis of Theme 1's iterations reveal merely reinforce Ravel's original markings. The theme's changes provide a sort of narrative unfolding that allows the performer to make better sense of the markings on the page.

This narrative trajectory of Theme 1 also implies something about the opening. Since the first version of Theme 1 is incomplete, with a rest occurring in the place where a note will be added later in the piece, it can be *performed* as incomplete. Whether the performer chooses to imagine the G-sharp that is added in the recapitulation, or imagines the minor v chord harmony implied at the opening of the recapitulation, the critical point is for the performer to *imagine* something missing in the space of the rest that begins the piece. This will substantially change the sound of the first measure for the audience, and it sets up the “incompleteness” of the first version of Theme 1 in a way that is resolved over the course of the first movement.

Other motivic connections, such as the myriad of transformational and inversionsal relationships between motives of Theme 2 area and Theme 1, expose connections that are more difficult to articulate in performance. These relationships surely relate to the initial sense of coherence I intuited in the *Sonatine*. Schoenberg noted that this type of coherence was rooted in repetition. But how is coherence perceived? To answer this question, I would point to two other related concepts described in Schoenberg's writing: *understanding* and

*comprehensibility*. Schoenberg's sense of *understanding* related to "the capacity to recognize the similarity among the components to things that are familiar."<sup>29</sup> In this way, one can *understand* the similarity of motives in the *Sonatine* with the aid of analysis, in which the motives are explained in familiar analytical terms. *Comprehension*, Schoenberg argued, was a different matter: "Something is *comprehensible* if the *whole is surveyable* and *consists of parts* that have relationships not too remote from each other and from the whole...and if the arrangement of these parts is such that their relationship to each other and to the whole is not lost."<sup>30</sup> In performance, this type of *comprehensibility* is dependent on the interaction of three individuals: the composer, the performer, and the audience. The composer's skill in connecting similar and different components, coupled with the performer's skill in understanding and highlighting the interactions of these components, and finally the audience's level of awareness and aptitude to understand all come together to determine how *comprehensible* a work is. Furthermore, "comprehensibility depends on the degree to which essential features held in common are conspicuously or inconspicuously used or worked out. It can be reduced to a minimum if the performer is little concerned with his listeners' capacities of comprehension."<sup>31</sup> With Schoenberg's definitions in mind, it could be suggested that the *Sonatine* is definitely a coherent work, as evidenced by the repetition and development of its motives highlighted in this paper. In the case of Theme 1 and Theme 2 motivic relationships, I would argue that once the coherence of the material is *understood*, it is difficult for a performer or audience member to *not* hear the repetition and development of these motives throughout the piece. Therefore the act of

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<sup>29</sup> Schoenberg, *Coherence, Counterpoint, Instrumentation, Instruction in Form*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

analysis impacts our ability to understand, whether we are performers or audience members, and as long as we *understand*, we will naturally *comprehend* the performance without an articulation of the analysis by the performer.

Still, the performer may willfully bring out other connections, in order to create new and interesting interpretations. This is something I strive for in the second module of the second theme area. As was discussed earlier, this theme area contains certain cross-voice iterations of the F-sharp to C-sharp M1 that opens the piece. While the first ascends, the second descends, and the voices which reveal these two pitches are different in the recapitulation than they are in the exposition. Since I find this difference intriguing and the cross-voice suggestion compelling, I bring this out by highlighting especially the tenor F-sharp and soprano C-sharp in measure twenty, while subjugating the alto voice. In the corresponding spot in the recapitulation (m. 75), I highlight the alto and then the tenor again on beat two. I believe one can hear this cross voice relationship without ignoring Ravel's markings here; I also admit that Ravel writes nothing to indicate such a cross-voicing, but I do it anyway because it seems to me an interesting possibility just under the surface of what Ravel wrote.

### **Performance Indications Relating the Three Movements**

Motivic analysis can reveal certain connections within a movement, but it also highlights certain narrative qualities revealed throughout the three-movement work.

Stephen Zank has already suggested one such interpretation of the three movements of the *Sonatine*. He identifies it so well and clearly that I will quote the passage in its entirety.

Marcel Marnat has already noted a "buoyant *accelerando* from one movement to the other," but a bit more may be proposed: the *Sonatine's* three movements may

viewed [sic] in mirror image to what was proposed in *Sheherazade*, as a dynamic intensification, a crescendo in Ravel's temporally structured materials of tempi, the perceived time of music as it unfolds. Given the work's interlocking and cyclic thematic references, a rather straightforward harmonic plan moving from the "softer" minor to the "brighter" major modalities (F-sharp minor—D-flat or C-sharp Major—F-sharp Major), and the increasingly quick tempo indications of the three movements (*Modéré—Tempo de menuet—animé*)—to say nothing of the accelerando of the final page (a coda moving from "trés marqué" in 5/4 meter to "Accelerez" in 3/4, finally to "Trés animé," with duple-hemiola effects)—it is not too much to perceive beyond Marnat's "*léger accelerando*" a more specific crescendo in the unfolding of the *Sonatine's* time in music, through to its very last measures.<sup>32</sup>

The beginnings of the three movements are also interesting in the ways in which their head motives provide an audible links to one another.

**Example 14: Head Motive Links**



Example 14 shows that melodically, the melody of the second movement is an inversion of the first two melody notes of the first movement. Both movements also feature prominent parallel fifths in the left hand. Most remarkably, the voicing of the two chords is identical: the right hand sixth is embedded within the left hand fifth, causing the thumbs to cross in the beginnings of both movements. The figuration of the third movement necessitates a similar hand-crossing gesture, as illustrated in example 15.

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<sup>32</sup> Zank, *Irony and Sound: The Music of Maurice Ravel*, 72.

### Example 15: Hand-Crossing in the Third Movement



Ravel also links the third movement's opening to that of the first by presenting the F-sharp to C-sharp motion of movement one, but in reverse order, when the melody enters in the third movement (3<sup>rd</sup> movement, m. 4; see example 16).

### Example 16: Motives Linking First and Third Movements



Furthermore, the first and third movements are also linked by the rapid repetition of shared pitches between left and right hands (see example 17). These repetitions are physically awkward, as they force the performer's hands into uncomfortable proximity and overlap. They also repeat across different voices, which especially in the third movement, necessitates different voicings in quick succession. In all these ways, the three movements look, sound and especially *feel* similar to one another.

### Example 17: Rapid Repetition Between Hands (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Movements)



Do these similarities imply anything about performance? They seem to alert the performer that the gesture of playing the openings of all three movements are similar by design. Because of this fact, I choose not to do any re-arranging or re-distributing of the hands. I also like to think of the heads of each movement as being linked by “head motives,” resembling head-motive linkages between individual dance suite movements in the Baroque period. Whether this second interpretation is audible or not is irrelevant to me—thinking this way deepens my feeling of connection between the openings of the different movements.

There is another such narrative to be told in the way that Ravel ends each movement. In movements one and two, the last version of the perfect fourth interval (M1) that is audible is a G-sharp to C-sharp (or A-flat to D-flat in movement two). This is significant because this transposed version of M1 acts as a sort of foil to the hegemony of the F-sharp to C-sharp version that begins the piece. In the case of the ending of the first movement, the ending on C-sharp as the last sounded note foreshadows the beginning of the second movement, on D-flat.

**Example 18: First and Second Movement Endings**







The third movement (example 19) contrasts with these earlier movements emphatically. It ends with a driving, repetition of F-sharp to C-sharp (descending, as in the beginning of the piece), and then brilliantly concludes with a flourish that evokes F-sharp minor, the key of the first movement (by way of the G-double-sharp in the left hand final arpeggio), on its way to a final F-sharp major chord, the closing key of the third movement (see example 19). This final mix of modes recalls the minor mode of the opening, as does the cross hand voicing of the final chord. The voicing of the final chord also reinforces the supremacy of the F-sharp to C-sharp version of M1 sounding those two pitches simultaneously at the top of the chord.

**Example 19: The Brilliant Final Flourish in the Third Movement**



**Conclusion**

Any analysis of music bears the bias of its author; indeed, analysis itself is an artful act of interpretation. This is particularly true when we mix the crafts of performing music and analyzing it—in what directions do the arrows of cause and effect point? Perhaps the

measure of an analytical performance interpretation should be based, therefore, not on its perceived validity, but on the malleability of its application.

In my analysis, I showed connections at a cellular level. I exposed some of the technical facets that lend the *Sonatine* its striking sense of coherence. To do this, I have relied on formal principles and motivic analysis inspired by the writings of Arnold Schoenberg. Furthermore, I have connected these formal principles to other works by the composer, and to other scholarly descriptions and analyses of his work. Finally, I explored interactions between performance and my analysis.

My hope is that this analysis proves a useful and versatile tool to its readers. While my performance suggestions are not definitive, they represent one attempt at voicing the connections demonstrated throughout. I hope readers might try others.

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