

MAURICE RAVEL AND PAUL WITTGENSTEIN:

LE CONCERTO POUR LA MAIN GAUCHE

IN RESPONSE TO WORLD WAR I

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ABSTRACT

Austrian pianist Paul Wittgenstein (1887–1961) lost his right arm during World War I. Wittgenstein recovered from the surgery, then in 1915 returned to Vienna to commission one of the most celebrated left-hand piano pieces from Maurice Ravel (1875–1937): the 1930 *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*. Ravel's war experience was not as dramatic as Wittgenstein's, but it still affected him personally, professionally and artistically; his involvement definitely shaped his future compositions and most certainly the Concerto for the Left Hand.

This thesis explores Wittgenstein and Ravel's war experiences through the scope of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*. Fighting on opposite sides, these artists are united post-war around this composition, which stands as a sign of peace and reconciliation. Several inquiries emerge: What makes this composition a war concerto? Is the piece a hymn to resilience, courage and artistic triumph? Does Wittgenstein's recording of it portray a war experience or more specifically *his* war experience? How can elements of fragmentation, jazz and blues, industrial noise and sonic war material, cataclysmic virtuosity and lyric beauty be linked to World War I?

Finally, this research will survey how these musicians' lives were marked by war, one subject to terrible phantom pains for the rest of his life, and the other plagued with insomnia until his death in 1937.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the Conservatory of Music and Dance, have examined a thesis titled “Maurice Ravel and Paul Wittgenstein: *Le Concerto pour la Main Gauche* in Response to World War I,” presented by Aurélien Bastien Boccard, candidate for the Master of Music degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Opening



Figure 1.1 Maurice Ravel and Paul Wittgenstein

Austrian pianist Paul Wittgenstein (1887–1961) lost his right arm during World War I. This tragic amputation could have destroyed his plans to pursue a concert pianist career, but his passion for music pushed him to persevere. Wittgenstein recovered from the surgery, then in 1915, returned to Vienna from Russia, after surviving several war camps. Coming from one of Europe’s wealthiest families, Wittgenstein began to commission major artists of his time, including Maurice Ravel (1875–1937), Sergey Prokofiev (1891–1953) and Paul Hindemith (1895–1963), and these numerous commissions resulted in compositions that immensely enhanced the twentieth-century left-hand piano repertoire. By holding and maintaining the lifetime rights to this music, Wittgenstein ensured for himself fame on concert stages across Europe and in the United States as well as a place among the most influential artists of the twentieth century.

Wittgenstein commissioned one of the most celebrated left-hand piano pieces from Maurice Ravel the 1930 *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*.¹ Ravel's war experience was not as dramatic as Wittgenstein's, but it still affected him personally, professionally and artistically. Ineligible to fight as a soldier, Ravel worked on the front line as a truck driver transporting wounded soldiers. His involvement with the war shaped his future compositions and most certainly his Left-Hand Concerto. Regarded today as a masterpiece of the repertoire, many pianists, injured and non-injured, have played and recorded this virtuosic work. The story behind this concerto continues to be a rich topic of interest, in particular the fact that Ravel disapproved of Wittgenstein's score modifications, which resulted in a friendship-ending quarrel.

I will explore Wittgenstein and Ravel's war experiences through the scope of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*. Fighting on opposite sides, these artists are united post-war around this composition, which stands as a sign of peace and reconciliation. Several inquiries emerge: What could make this composition a war concerto? Is the piece a hymn to resilience, courage and artistic triumph? Does Wittgenstein's recording of it portray a war experience or more specifically *his* war experience? How can elements of fragmentation, jazz and blues, industrial noise and sonic war material, cataclysmic virtuosity and lyric beauty be linked to World War I? Finally, this research will look at how these two musicians' lives were marked by war, one subjected to terrible phantom pains for the rest of his life, and the other plagued with insomnia until his death in 1937.

¹ This composition will be referred to in three ways: *Le Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, The concerto in D and the Left-Hand Concerto.

Literature Review

One might wonder what else could be written on Maurice Ravel, and with good reason; the amount of literature available on the composer is both overwhelming and fascinating. Since his death in 1937, Ravel's life and music have been the subject of numerous books, articles and dissertations. But it is his music, most of all, that has seduced generations of researchers, musicians and composers, and has proven a vector of wonder, inspiration and innovation.

This thesis has no intention to reveal some uncovered secrets on one of the most important French composers of the twenty century, but rather to explore two specific periods in Ravel's life: the war and his subsequent collaboration with a too-often-ignored pianist and revolutionary musician, Paul Wittgenstein.² This research will present details about both musicians' experiences in the Great War as well as their later collaborative work on the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*. This composition provides opportunities to pursue various discussions targeting left-hand piano literature. Monographs on both Ravel and Wittgenstein have been important sources for the historical part of this thesis. Because of the complexity of the topic and the broadness of my scope, the work required careful study of a variety of source materials and led me to research related topics like war history, music and jazz during World War I, music and disability, and performance and recording issues.

² Wittgenstein is today more remembered for his music commissions than his own playing. See discussion Chapter 3.

The literature review is organized into several categories, presenting some of the most important and current sources in the field and also essential historical sources. For clarity, each category is then arranged chronologically. The categories include: life and work on Ravel and Wittgenstein; the left-hand repertoire for piano; analysis of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* and jazz; music and disability; and, performance analysis and recordings. As it is not possible to present here every document written over the past eighty years, the reader is invited to consult the attached bibliography for a more complete overview of the existing literature on the subject.

Ravel's Life and Works

The biographical scholarship on Ravel is mostly in French and English. Among his biographers, one can find numerous famous musicians, musicologists and close friends like Alexis Roland-Manuel, H el ene Jourdan-Morhange, Michel Calvocoressi, Rollo Myers, Arbie Orenstein, Ren e Chalupt, Norman Demuth, L eon-Paul Fargue, Marcel Marnat Fran ois Lesure, Madelaine Goss, Manuel Rosenthal,  mile Vuillermoz and Roger Nichols. Many of these existing biographies match in factual content but differ in style and thus bear a historical relevance because of the time and state of the research in which they were written. It comes as no surprise that recent biographies (those from the last thirty years or so) offer more details, especially about Ravel's relationship with Wittgenstein, World War I and analyses of the *Concerto Pour la Main Gauche*.

One of the first important biographies written on Ravel is Roland-Manuel's *À la Gloire de Ravel* (1938) with English translation by Cynthia Jolly.³ Written shortly after Ravel's death, Roland-Manuel (1891–1966), a close friend of the composer, offers valuable recounts about Ravel's life.⁴ Roland-Manuel's mother was Ravel's *marraine de guerre* during World War I, and she played a crucial role in Ravel's post-war recovery.⁵ A famous music critic and composer, Roland-Manuel taught aesthetics at the Conservatoire de Paris and ultimately authored three books and several articles on Ravel.⁶ His close relationship with the composer is obvious and resulted in some bias, but his testimonial is nonetheless extremely touching:

The intimate friends of a famous man often hesitate to make any public statement about him immediately after his death. Indeed, whether they disguise or disclose what they know, they run the risk of appearing unworthy either of their task or their friend. If I have not been guilty of such hesitation, it is because everything about Maurice Ravel is a delight to describe, except the grief of having lost him.⁷

Roland-Manuel formatted the biography in two parts; the first concentrates on biographical facts and the second on Ravel's music. The first part is certainly the

³ Before him M.D. Calvocoressi and Émile Vuillermoz also wrote biographies.

⁴ Roland-Manuel was introduced to Ravel by Erik Satie in 1911, a couple years before the Great War. Roland-Manuel became Ravel's student as well.

⁵ A *marraine de guerre* (war godmother) was a woman who, during World War I, kept a correspondence and took care of a soldier to help him psychologically and emotionally.

⁶ See attached bibliography.

⁷ Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, trans. Cynthia Jolly (London: Dobson, 1947; New York: Dover, 1972), 11. For the original in French, see *À la Gloire de Ravel* (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1938).

most interesting and the better developed with over one hundred pages.⁸ It provides important facts about Ravel's state of mind during the war. Some published excerpts of Roland-Manuel's war letters corresponding with Ravel are included, as well as interesting iconographical materials that were yet unseen at the time of publication.⁹

Norman Demuth (1898–1968), English musicologist, composer, critic and conductor, wrote several books on French composers, among them a famous biography on Ravel. His 1947 publication, *Ravel*, stands as the second biography written by an English author, the first being from American writer Madelaine Goss in 1940.¹⁰ Demuth drew from Roland-Manuel's book *À la Gloire de Ravel* for the biographical sections. His fourth chapter, "The War and After 1914–1922," contains more detailed explanations than Roland-Manuel's effort ten years prior.¹¹ The book also contains an analysis of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, which presents useful

⁸ See Roland-Manuel's first book for a more developed study of Ravel's style and technique: *Ravel et son Oeuvre Dramatique* (Paris: Les Editions Musicales de la Librairie de France, 1928).

⁹ Maurice Ravel and Roland-Manuel, "Lettres de Maurice Ravel et Documents Inédits," *Revue de Musicologie* 38, no. 113 (1956): 49-53; and Maurice Ravel, Roland-Manuel, et Jean Roy, *Lettres à Roland-Manuel et à sa Famille* (Quimper [France]: Calligrammes, 1986).

¹⁰ Madelaine Goss, *Bolero: The Life of Maurice Ravel* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940). This biography, initiated in 1938 right after Ravel's death, is also interesting because Goss gathered information from friends, family and people who knew Ravel well. She gives detailed information about his declining health and death.

¹¹ Norman Demuth, *Ravel* (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1947), 28. Norman Demuth was British.

personal insights. His views on Cortot's transcription of the Concerto in D are also interesting. Demuth's views supported Cortot's transcription of the work for two hands, saying "There is no reason why it should not take its place in the regular repertory."¹² History proved him wrong — seventy years later, no one would dare transcribe this concerto for two hands. Demuth includes pictures of Ravel, notably a rare photo of him in a combat uniform of the French army.¹³

A couple of years later in 1953, the prolific Russian-American musicologist Victor Seroff (1902–1979), author of numerous popular musicians' biographies, wrote Ravel's life story. His work is important because Seroff personally knew many important figures of the musical world at the time, notably Wittgenstein. Having personally known the pianist enabled Seroff to provide valuable information about the drama that unfolded between Wittgenstein and Ravel in Vienna regarding the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, saying that this "small fracas gave vent to rumors and gossips from which the Austrian pianists suffered unduly."¹⁴ Seroff also revisits the reasons why Wittgenstein modified the music he played and challenges those who claim Wittgenstein was not a great pianist.

In 1960, Rollo H. Myers (1892–1985), musicologist, critic and author of several books on twentieth-century French music and French composers, followed

¹² Ibid., 92.

¹³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴ Victor Seroff, *Maurice Ravel; Illustrated with Photos* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1953), 262. See chapter 2: "The Genesis of *Le Concerto pour la Main Gauche*" to read about what happened when Ravel heard Wittgenstein play his concerto for the first time.

in Roland-Manuel and Demuth's footsteps by publishing a biography of Ravel. *Ravel: Life and Work* does not offer new insights into the composer's life. Per the author:

This book does not to claim to present its subjects in any sense in a new 'light'; nor have I made a special efforts to discover or give prominence to, incidents or events in the life of the composer that do not directly contribute to our knowledge of the man considered in relation to his art.¹⁵

However, Myers' approach is subtler and draws more connections between the inner life of the musician and his music in order to represent the "integral man."¹⁶ The first part offers a thorough biography of Ravel, developed in a clear, organized and sequenced chronology. His "1913–1920" chapter contextualizes Ravel right before the start of World War I and follows with letter excerpts from, during and after the war. The second part of the book is the most original as it contains Myers' personal views on Ravel's work and his own analysis of the music. Myer had already sensed that the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* was "one of the great masterpieces of the twentieth century,"¹⁷ to the surprise of Abram Chasin, as indicated in his 1961 review of the book.¹⁸

Perhaps one of the most important books written in French on the composer is *Maurice Ravel* (1986) by Marcel Marnat, a celebrated musicologist who wrote

¹⁵ Rollo H. Myers, *Ravel: His Life and Works* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁸ Abram Chasin, "Genius set to Music," *New York Times* (1923-Current File: 1961, June 18). <http://search.proquest.com> (accessed, Nov. 2, 2016).

several books on composers like Mussorgsky, Puccini and Ravel.¹⁹ His book is built in two main parts; the first, “L’Après 70,” traces Ravel’s rise to maturity and fame, while the second, “Le Feu,” continues with World War I and ends with Ravel’s death. Marnat’s book is “an attempt to situate [Ravel’s] music within the seemingly limitless panorama of European culture at the *fin de siècle*.”²⁰ The beauty of the prose itself, across its 800 pages, is sufficient for the reader to be immersed for hours in this impressive and comprehensive research. Marnat succeeded where no previous scholar had by placing Ravel’s music into the larger frame of the *fin de siècle* aesthetic, and by situating Ravel’s works inside the spectrum of 300 years of Western European music.

Nulle musique depuis le XVIII^e siècle n’a su, mieux que celle de Maurice Ravel, s’abstraire de son auteur. Seule aussi, depuis le siècle des Lumières, cette oeuvre, en sa quasi totalité, s’est affirmée invulnérable: un épisode anti-Ravel supposerait une imperméabilité annonciatrice de crise. Chacun, certes, a son Ravel mais tous ces Ravel ont su braver des centaines d’écoutes.²¹

¹⁹ Marcel Marnat was the coordinator and programmer of Radio France-Musique from 1978 to 1992.

²⁰ Michael J. Puri, *Ravel by Roger Nichols (Review)*, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/501805/summary> (Accessed, Nov 2, 2016).

²¹ Maurice Marnat, *Maurice Ravel* (Paris: Ed. Fayard, Les Indispensables de la Musique, 1986), 11. “No music since the eighteenth century has been able, better than this of Maurice Ravel, to cut itself off from its author. Alone also, since the Age of Enlightenment, this work, almost in its entirety, has confirmed to be invulnerable: An episode anti-Ravel would imply an impermeability forewarning of crisis. Each of us, admittedly, has his own Ravel, but all of these Ravels have been able to brave hundreds of listening.” Translation by Aurélien Boccard.

Marnat's love for the French composer's music is obvious throughout the book, but he never resorts to simple conclusions. In brief, this book is a goldmine for any musicologist or music lover interested in Ravel's music.²²

Another important French book on Ravel is Vladimir Jankélévitch's (1903–1985) concise biography, *Ravel* (1959). Akin to his contemporary philosopher and musicologist Theodor Adorno, Jankélévitch wrote numerous books in both philosophy and musical fields, but unfortunately his works are often neglected.²³ *Ravel* stands as one of the best introductions available on the composer. It is written in elegant prose and is more accessible than some of Jankélévitch's more musico-philosophical writing. An expert on both Debussy's and Ravel's music,²⁴ Jankélévitch opens his introduction with a comparison of the two composers:

Autant Debussy se montre impressionnable et susceptible aux moindres tressaillements, aux variations les plus fugitives du goût, autant Ravel demeure jalousement insaisissable derrière tous ces masques que lui prêtent les snobismes du siècle.²⁵

²² Marcel Marnat wrote a second book on Ravel: Marcel Marnat, *Ravel: Souvenirs de Manuel Rosenthal Recueillis par Marcel Marnat* (Paris: Edition Hazan, 1995). Rosenthal's souvenirs are an invaluable resource to understand Ravel's personality. The book gives numerous personal stories. On the topic of World War I with the authentic complete citation of the *Manifeste de la Ligue Nationale pour la defense de la Musique Française* (194-195).

²³ Jankélévitch spent most of his academic life teaching in France at the University the Lille and at the Sorbonne after World War II.

²⁴ See Jankélévitch's famous book on Debussy: *Debussy et le Mystère de l'Instant*.

²⁵ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Ravel* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1959), 5-6. "Just as Debussy reveals himself as impressionable and susceptible to the slightest shifts and the most fleeting variations of taste, Ravel remains watchfully elusive behind all the

The book mixes musicological fact and cultural context at the turn of the twentieth century; it also offers succinct analyses of many of Ravel's compositions. Jankélévitch includes an important iconographic review of Ravel's photos, objects he owned, letters as well as paintings.

Ravel (2011) by Roger Nichols is the most complete and most accurate biography on Ravel to date. Nichols, an English music scholar, pianist and specialist on French music, produced several books on Ravel, as well as on Debussy, Satie and Messiaen. Nichols' first books on Ravel, titled *Ravel* (1977) and *Ravel Remembered* (1988), are shorter, but still offer a clear overview of the composer's life and artistic output. The 2011 edition is the result of thirty years of research and collaboration with some of the greatest artists and scholars specializing in Ravel's music. The ten chapters align with the periods of Ravel's life, as do most previous biographies on the composer. Chapter 6, "1914-1920: Patriotism and Loss" and chapter 9, "1928-1937: Two Concerto and a Long Farewell," were the most focused on the periods covered in this research.

Nichols' scholarship owes much to Arbie Orenstein's book, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondences: Articles and Interviews* (1990) as Nichols himself mentions in his preface: "Any study of this composer must begin with the invaluable information in Arbie Orenstein's biography and his collection of Ravel's letters, articles and

disguise due to the snobberies of the times." Translation by Margaret Crosland in: Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Ravel* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 5-6.

interviews.”²⁶ Orenstein’s book is the outgrowth of a 1975 biography on Ravel, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, which was also the result of decades of research essential for my own research.

[Ravel] wrote about 1500 letters in the course of his life time, and these documents, like those of other creative artists, form an inner diary of his career. One may observe Ravel’s personal interests and train of thought, his joys and sorrows, his period of military service during World War I, advice to young musicians, and a wealth of observations about the vibrant Parisian musical life.²⁷

Orenstein (b. 1937–) is an American musicologist and pianist specializing in Ravel’s music, with three books dedicated to the French composer.²⁸

Lastly, Paul Robert’s book on Ravel titled *Reflection* (2012) is the most recent research on Ravel’s piano music. Robert’s chapter on the Great War provides ample information on Ravel and his music from this period. Roberts uses *Le Tombeau de Couperin* to describe Ravel’s heroic engagement during World War I.

Wittgenstein’s Life and Work

It was only after the 2001 death of Wittgenstein’s widow, Hilde Shania, that his entire estate became available; this opened the door to new research on the one-

²⁶ Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), xiii.

²⁷ Arbie Orenstein, ed. *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles and Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), xi. This book was published in French in 1989 by Harmoniques Flammarion. When possible, original letters are cited in French and German in the body of the thesis and then translated in the footnotes.

²⁸ In 1998, Orenstein was awarded the medal of *Chevalier des Ordres et des Lettres* by the French government. He has been teaching for forty-years at the Aaron Copland School of Music.

handed musician and composer, revealing details that had been kept secret for almost forty years following Wittgenstein's death. The following essays and data resulted from a direct encounter with the newly opened archives on the composer and pianist.

Alexander Waugh's book, *The House of Wittgenstein* (2009), stands as a cornerstone of research on the Wittgenstein family. Waugh is not only a writer, but also a businessman, journalist, composer, cartoonist and television producer. *The House of Wittgenstein* is the most up-to-date research on Wittgenstein and his family. Written almost as a novel, Waugh's book provides much information on Wittgenstein's year of imprisonment during the war and sheds light on biographical details relevant to the war. The three main chapters give a stunning depiction of life in Vienna pre and post-war; also included are a number of pictures of Wittgenstein and his family. Beside Waugh's research on the Wittgenstein family, other biographical studies retrace the incredible life of some of its most famous members: Paul Wittgenstein, Karl Wittgenstein (father and industrialist) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (the philosopher).²⁹

Wittgenstein's medical condition has also been the topic of many articles on his abilities as a pianist. Questions such as the legitimacy of a single-handed performing pianist and the meaning behind the signification of the appellation

²⁹ Matthias Kross, "Paul und Ludwig Wittgenstein," in Thomas Karlauf ed., *Deutsche Brüder: Zwölf Doppelporträts* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1994), 287-329; E. Fred Flindell, "Paul Wittgenstein (1887-1861): Patron and Pianist," *Music Review* vol. 32, no. 2 (1971): 107-27. Two fictional books can be found on Paul Wittgenstein's life as well: John Barchilon, *The Crown Prince* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1984) and Lea singer, *Konzert für die Linke Hand* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2008).

“single-handed” are topics covered by some researchers. In his article “Paul Wittgenstein and the Performance of Disability,” Blake Howe discusses questions of body image and limitation, but also the fame that resulted from this condition.³⁰ Other sources essential on the topic of disability include articles by Neil Lerner, Lennard Davis and Michael Davidson, who take on the concept of disability in performing arts, as well as the image of the mutilated body and its meaning.³¹ Wittgenstein’s actual amputation, and the resulting “moving phantom syndrome” is put into evidence, along with two other amputated artists’ profiles in an article by Laurent Tatu and his colleagues: “Phantoms in Artists: The Lost Limbs of Blaise Cendrars, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Wittgenstein.”³²

Left-Hand Repertoire

The subject of left-hand performance and its realization in the piano and concerto repertoires is widely discussed by researchers such as Maurice Hinson, Donald L. Patterson and Theodore Edel, and certain internet sources also proved

³⁰ Blake Howe, “Paul Wittgenstein and the Performance of Disability,” *The Journal of Musicology* vol. 27, no 2 (2010): 135-180.

³¹ Neil Lerner, “The Horrors of a One-Handed Pianism: Music and Disability in *The Beast with Five Fingers*,” in Neil Lerner and Joseph N. Strauss, eds., *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006); Lennard J Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 23-49; Michael Davidson, *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and Defamiliar Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

³² Laurent Tatu, Julien Bougousslavsky, and Francois Boller, “Phantoms in Artists: The Lost Limbs of Blaise Cendrars, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Wittgenstein,” *Journal of the History of the Neuroscience*, no. 23 (2014): 355-366.

essential.³³ Hans Brofeldt created a website dedicated to the memory of Wittgenstein, which provides a list of more than 700 left-hand piano compositions — often dedicated to many other lesser known injured pianists — with composers biographies and pictures attached; the site is an addictive interactive source for researchers and musicians.³⁴ Brofeldt’s ultimate goal is to produce a list of more than 6,000 left-hand works.

Pianist Donald Patterson, who himself experienced a shoulder injury, compiled the most complete and current anthology to date. This impressive anthology, which takes over where Hinson left off in his *A Guide to Pianist’s Repertoire* (1987/2000), gathers no fewer than 2,100 concert and pedagogical piano pieces, all geared toward diverse left-hand and right-hand formations. After an opening discussion on the validity and relevance of this unique repertoire, Patterson presents the book’s catalogue in the following six chapters: “Original works for the Left Hand Alone”; “Music Arranged or Transcribed for One Hand Alone”; “Concerted Works for One Hand”; “Repertoire Anthologies for One Hand”; and “Selected Discography.” This anthology proved useful in locating Wittgenstein’s catalogue.

Another important source is *Piano Music for One Hand* by Theodore Edel, Associate Professor of Piano at the University of Illinois-Chicago who also

³³ *Guide to Pianist’s Repertoire, Third Edition*, compiled and annotated by Maurice Hinson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); *One Handed: A Guide to Piano Music for One Hand*, compiled and annotated by Donald L. Patterson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999).

³⁴ Hans Brofeldt, *Piano Music for the Left Hand Alone*, <http://www.left-hand-brofeldt.dk> (accessed Jan. 27, 2017).

experienced injuries to the right wrist.³⁵ His brief book offers readers alternative suggestions to a repertoire rarely played besides the well-known couple of pieces (Scriabine's *Nocturne*, Ravel's *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*) that most pianists know.

Students occasionally suffer [...] damage to their hands, with more or less dire results. All players, from master pianists to young aspirants – whether they will soon be able to return to the standard repertoire or never again – need to know that there is a vast body of music for them, in every style and genre, from the simplest note-stepping to the dizzy heights of pyrotechnical display.³⁶

More than just an anthology, this two-part book is unique in that it retraces the history of the left-hand repertoire, starting with Alexander Dreishock in the mid-nineteenth century, and then moving chronologically to track some of the major protagonists in the field. The first section ends with Wittgenstein's contributions to the repertoire. The second part is a catalogue of the solo left-hand repertoire, but also includes left-hand pieces with orchestra and in chamber formations.

Interestingly, Edel also discusses the compositions all-but-ignored by pianists — the existing solo compositions for right-hand alone.

There also exists some important German sources on Wittgenstein such as *Empty Sleeves, der Musiker und Mäzen Paul Wittgenstein* (2006),³⁷ "Paul

³⁵ Theodore Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

³⁶ *Ibid*, vii.

³⁷ Irène Suchy, Allan Janik, and Heorg A, Predota, eds. *Empty Sleeve: Der Musiker und Mäzen Paul Wittgenstein* (Wien: Edition Brenner-Forum, 2006).

Wittgenstein und die Klavier-Sololiteratur für die Linke Hand”³⁸ and “Zur Entstehung und Rezeptionsgeschichte des Paul Wittgenstein gewidmeten Klavierkonzerte von Maurice Ravel und Sergei Prokofjew.”³⁹ In the later, Sassmann retraces the nineteenth-century history of the left-hand repertoire and links Geza Zichy’s influence to Wittgenstein’s emergence as the greatest twentieth-century left-hand pianist. Sassmann also researched Wittgenstein’s pedagogical influence as a teacher in Vienna and then United States, the effects of the war on an entire generation of musicians, as well as existing reviews of his performances with rare copies of his concert programs. An entire section of more than 130 pages also lists pieces of the left-hand repertoire.

Gerhard Winkler’s essay “Klaviermusik für die Linke Hand Allein: Aspekte eines Virtuosen (Virtuosen-) Genres,” provides crucial information on the emergence of a left-hand piano repertoire and its ascension toward establishment as a serious genre in the twentieth century.⁴⁰ Winkler shows how several generations of pianist/composers tracing back to C.P.E Bach and Carl Czerny first

³⁸ Albert Sassmann, *In der Beschränkung Zeigt sich Erst der Meister: Technik und Ästhetik der Klaviermusik für die Linke Hand Allein* (Tutzing: Hanz Schneider, 2010).

³⁹ Albert Sassmann, “Zur Entstehung und Rezeptionsgeschichte des Paul Wittgenstein gewidmeten Klavierkonzerte von Maurice Ravel und Sergei Prokofjew,” in *Das Klavierkonzert in Österreich und Deutschland von 1900–1945 (Schwerpunkt: Werke für Paul Wittgenstein)*, ed. Carmen Ottner, Symposium 2007 (Wien: Doblinger, 2009).

⁴⁰ Gerhard J. Winkler, “Klaviermusik für die Linke Hand Allein: Aspekte eines Virtuosen (Virtuosen-) Genres,” in *Das Klavierkonzert in Österreich und Deutschland von 1900–1945 (Schwerpunkt: Werke für Paul Wittgenstein)*, ed. Carmen Ottner, Symposium 2007 (Wien: Doblinger, 2009).

composed pedagogical works and then went on to influence late nineteenth-century left-hand pianists and eventually twentieth-century musicians like Wittgenstein:

Paul Wittgenstein konnte auf eine breite Tradition des linkshändigen Klavierspiels aufbauen. Das Repertoire hat jedenfalls genug Umfang und Konsistenz, um ein entsprechendes Stichwort in einem "Lexikon des Klaviers" zu rechtfertigen.⁴¹

Winkler's research on the influence of the nineteenth-century left-hand virtuosic technique was a particularly important source for my research.

Lastly, it is important to mention an indispensable source on the history of the concerto as a genre: *Le Concerto pour Piano Français à l'Épreuve des Modernités*.⁴² This book compiled by Alexandre Dratwicky, Scientific Director of the Palazetto Bru Zane, gathers several essays retracing the historical development of the concerto in the nineteenth century to reach the event called "la guerre du concerto," which happened to divide the Paris *fin-de-siècle* at the turn of the century. This will prove essential to understanding the politico-cultural context and the reception of pianistic virtuosity by the young post-war generation in which Ravel emerged as a composer, as well as their implication in the composition of both

⁴¹ Ibid., 39. "Paul Wittgenstein was able to build off of a large left-hand piano tradition. The repertoire had, in any case, enough scope and consistency to be justified as a relevant keyword in the piano nomenclature." Translation by Aurélien Bocard.

⁴² Alexandre Dratwicky, *Le Concerto pour Piano Français à l'Épreuve des Modernités* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2015).

concerti. In a more analysis-centered approach, Stephan Zank discussed similar questions in his book.⁴³

World War I

The horrors of World War I brought about an outburst of creativity in every artistic field; however, music often plays some of the most important roles because of its numerous useful attributes. It can elevate troop morale and give courage to soldiers in time of war; it can also soothe the conscience in times of peace and recovery. Although not a historical study of World War I, this research required sources on historical facts of the Great War and the music composed during this period and after. I was also motivated to seek concrete evidence showing the impact of the war on Ravel's compositions and more specifically on his *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*.

I will present one major literary work written on World War I among hundreds of others, the impressive tomes in French edited by Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Jean-Jacques Becker from 2004, *Encyclopédie de la Grande Guerre*.⁴⁴ These 2,000 pages gather some of the most up-to-date research on the Great War with every possible socio-politico-economic topic a researcher might seek, certainly useful in understanding the nature of the war in which Ravel and Wittgenstein participated. Among chapters on war prisoners, war injuries and commemorations,

⁴³ Stephan Zank, *Irony and Sound: The Music of Maurice Ravel* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 42-44.

⁴⁴ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Jean-Jacques Becker, comps., *Encyclopédie de la Grande Guerre, Tome 1 and Tome 2* (Paris: Perrin, 2004).

these volumes also contain several chapters on artists' conditions during the war. Two entries of note are "Les Artistes" and "Artistes et Cinéastes d'Avant-Garde pendant l'Après-Guerre" by Annette Becker. Both Becker and Audoin-Rouzeau are regarded today as among the leading researchers on World War I, contributing to the renewal of the historiography of the Great War.⁴⁵

Several books deal with the role and importance of music during the World War I period, notably *La Grande Guerre des Musiciens* and *Entendre la Guerre: Sons, Musiques et Silence en 14-18* (2014).⁴⁶ This second book, under the direction of Florence Gétreau, comprises several essays, that proved essential to this research. "Les Compositeurs et la Guerre" skims dozens of artists, including Ravel, as well as their artistic production and implications during the war.⁴⁷ This essay recounts the impacts of the war on musicians' creativity, and for some, their sudden nationalistic urge to fight: "La guerre entraîne chez nombre d'entre eux un repli nationaliste et un retour délibéré à la « tradition française,» et ce indépendamment de la diversité des postures face à Wagner et ses prestiges."⁴⁸ Ravel's work, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, is

⁴⁵ Audoin-Rouzeau is the Directeur d'Étude à l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences et Sociales and Président du Centre International de Recherche de l'Historial de la Grande Guerre de Péronne. Annette Becker is a Professor at the University of Paris-Ouest-Nanterre-la-Défense.

⁴⁶ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Esteban Buch, Myriam Chimènes and Georgie Durosoir, eds., *La Grande Guerre des Musiciens* (Vilnius: Collection Perpetuum Mobile, 2009).

⁴⁷ *Entendre la Guerre: Sons, Musiques et Silence en 14-18*, edited by Florence Gétreau (Péronne: ed. Gallimard, Historial de La Grande Guerre, 2014).

⁴⁸ Esteban Buch, and Cécile Quesney. "Les Compositeurs et la Guerre," in *Entendre la Guerre: Sons, Musiques et Silence en 14-18*, 101: "War has led to a nationalist withdrawal and a deliberate return to the 'French tradition,' regardless

taken as an example of a commemoration to the dead. Two other essays “Le Jazz Arrive en Europe” and “L’Oreille Amputée,” were also interesting, the first dealing with the arrival of jazz in Europe and the second one with the question of noise and injuries, which was useful to understanding the sonic universe that inspired the composition of Ravel’s Concerto in D.

Deborah Mawer’s essay on Ravel’s music, “Musical Objects and Machines” was also a formidable source of inspiration to understand Ravel’s fascination with toys, mechanical objects and factory noises.⁴⁹ Mawer retraces the birth of a fascination for machines by the Italian futurists and its supremacy after World War I in artistic fields. Like many other composers of his generation, Ravel consistently integrated these sounds in his music. Mawer then draws on Ravel’s 1932–33 English article, “Finding Tunes in Factories.”⁵⁰ Although not specifically revolving around the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, this essay provided useful information for the analysis section toward considering the concerto as a post-war work influenced by war noises.

Finally, it would not have been possible to understand Ravel’s socialist political inclination during the post-war period without Jane Fulcher’s magnificent book *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France 1914–1940*

of the diversity of postures facing Wagner and his prestige.” Translation by Aurélien Bocard.

⁴⁹ Deborah Mawer, “Musical Objects and Machines,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 47-67.

⁵⁰ See Maurice Ravel, “Finding Tunes in Factories,” in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles and Interviews*, 398-400.

(2005).⁵¹ Fulcher sheds light on how Ravel rejected the cultural “dominant post-war order” among French composers and an ever increasing anti-Semitic period; he also remained opened to Austrian and German cultures (Schönberg’s music in particular), which will have important repercussions in understanding Wittgenstein’s commission of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*.⁵²

Jazz

Because of the strong influence of jazz on the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, it was necessary to find some sources on this topic and on Ravel’s music in general. Ravel’s post-war appreciation for jazz is evident in his music and could be the sole subject of this research; most biographies already cited discuss jazz and its influence on Ravel’s music.

Making Jazz French: Music and Life in Interwar Paris (2003) by Jeffrey H. Jackson proved a particularly useful source for understanding the socio-cultural context in which jazz emerged during and after the Great War.⁵³ The nine chapters recount with great detail how jazz arrived in Europe and forever changed the musical scene. Although specific information on Ravel’s music is absent, the book is an indispensable source regarding how he came to be drawn to this music and

⁵¹ Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France 1914–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 136.

⁵³ Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

perhaps why he used it in his Concerto in D.⁵⁴ Another interesting source, written in 1935 while Ravel was still alive, and which shows the birth of a new musicological interest in jazz, is an article by Roberts Rogers: "Jazz influence on French Music."⁵⁵ Rogers retraces the arrival of ragtime and its influence on the new (and older) generations of composers. Ravel's music is discussed in the context of other contemporary musicians such as Debussy, Les Six, Stravinsky, and others.

Finally, Olivier Roueff's website, "Jazz les Échelles du Plaisir," associated with his published book of the same name, is one of the best sources on the Internet.⁵⁶ Roueff, a researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris, covers every major topic related to jazz, from its creation to the twenty-first century. This source has been invaluable for information on jazz and World War I as well as for understanding the emergence of jazz in the 1920s.

Analysis, Performances and Recording

Numerous analytical sources exist on the entire catalogue of Ravel's music. The *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* is widely analyzed by French, German and English researchers in articles, essays, books and dissertations. One can find a thorough analysis of the *Concerto in D* in three dissertations by Stellio Dubbiosi, Atsoko Josaki

⁵⁴ The Concerto in G is also very much influenced by jazz and Gershwin's music in particular.

⁵⁵ M. Roberts Rogers, "Jazz Influence on French Music," *The Musical Quarterly* vol. 21, no. 1 (Jan. 1935): 53-68.

⁵⁶ Olivier Roueff, "Jazz les Échelles du Plaisir," <http://www.plaisirsdujazz.fr> (accessed Apr. 15, 2017).

and So Young Kim-Park.⁵⁷ Josaki's 2000 D.M.A dissertation for Boston University is methodical and clear. In her score analysis, she relies on Marguerite Long's work, quoting the famous French teacher who worked closely with Ravel and was dedicatee of the Concerto in G.⁵⁸ Kim-Park's impressive dissertation (1999) essentially centers on Wittgenstein's reception of Ravel's *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* with a succinct analysis of the work, but also on four other concertos composed for Wittgenstein, two by Strauss, one by Korngold and one by Britten. The first part of the dissertation also offers relevant information on Wittgenstein's life.

Long's book, *At the Piano with Ravel* (1971), is an indispensable historical source for any performers of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* and other piano works, but though her comments are historically important, I believe it is necessary to look further for more detailed analyses. In the same vein, researchers will find in *Ravel According to Ravel* (1970)⁵⁹ a small book gathering re-edited interviews from radio broadcasts of the Radio Française in 1950 between Vlado Perlemuter and

⁵⁷ Stelio Dubbiosi, "Piano Music of Maurice Ravel: An Analysis of the Technical and Interpretative Problems Inherent in the Pianistic Style of Maurice Ravel, Volumes I and II" (PhD. Diss., New York University, 1967); Atsuko Josaki, "Maurice Ravel's Two Piano Concertos: A Study of Sociology, Analysis and Performance Practice" (D.M.A Diss., Boston University, 2000); So Young Kim-Park, "Paul Wittgenstein und die für ihn komponierten Klavierkonzerte für die Linke Hand" (PhD. Diss., Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 1999).

⁵⁸ Marguerite Long, *At the Piano with Ravel*, ed. Pierre Laumonier, trans. Olive Senior-Ellis (London: Dent, 1973). See also the original French is: *Au Piano avec Ravel* (Paris: Julliard, 1971).

⁵⁹ Vlado Perlemuter and Hélène Jourdan-Morange, *Ravel According to Ravel* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1988).

Hélène-Jourdan Morhange⁶⁰ that offer insightful interpretation advice. French pianist Perlemuter, who studied with the Ravel between 1927 and 1929, discusses a major part of the composer's piano catalogue in his book.⁶¹

Some more recent analyses of Ravel's work include: *Irony and Sound: The Music of Maurice Ravel* (2009) by Stephen Zank, musicology professor at Binghamton University. This research revisits Ravel's piano works under the scope of irony, a subject usually attributed to literary work. Zank warns his readers that "the present study cannot be about irony writ large, or about musical irony per se, but rather about retracing Ravel's music in view of contingent influences acknowledged frequently by him (and many others)."⁶² Zank analyzes the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* in different parts of the books under the scope of sound, form and counterpoint. He also provides useful information on the "sociocultural implications of keyboard virtuosity" between the two wars.⁶³

⁶⁰ Hélène-Jourdan Morhange (1892–1961) was a close friend of Ravel during the last twenty-two years of his life. She even moved to live closer to him near Montfort-L'Amory. She is a dedicatee of the *Sonata for Violin* played and premiered some of his pieces for violin. Widow of French painter Jacques Jourdan (1880–1916), who died during the Battle of Verdun, she was married to the French artist-painter Luc-Albert Moreau (1882–1948). Jordan-Morhange has also published a touching biography of Ravel: Hélène-Jourdan Morhange, *Ravel et nous* (Genève: Éditions du Milieu du monde, 1945). Her book depicts a sensitive Ravel of everyday life, a Ravel that people do not know well with "sa profonde, son humaine et douloureuse sensibilité" 13.

⁶¹ Perlemuter's recordings remain in the canon as some of the most historically accurate to Ravel's intentions.

⁶² Ibid., 16.

⁶³ Ibid., 42.

“Ravel: Le Concerto pour la Main Gauche ou les Enjeux d’un Néo-Classicisme” (1998) by Marie-Noëlle Masson is a fascinating analysis, where Masson situates the work as a Neoclassical piece.⁶⁴ Masson interrogates the cultural context in which Ravel composed, but she also considers forms, structures, materials, harmonies and rhythms all playing a part to form a Neoclassical work. Masson does not look at Ravel’s neoclassicism as a lack of progress but rather as an evolution toward a new writing style unique to Ravel:

Si l’on tente de résumer la position de Ravel face au Néo-classicisme de son époque, on pourrait dire que le « retour à » n’est pas le signe d’un recul ou d’une facilité d’écriture mais celui, parmi d’autres, d’une « inquiétude » et d’une « recherche sincère ». Le néo-classicisme correspond à une ascèse permettant le retour sur soi, c’est à dire le retour à la conscience claire et anhistorique de ses racines les plus profondes, et « au fonds éternel à la musique », et Mozart en est la figure emblématique.⁶⁵

Besides Neoclassical influences, Masson also mentions Ravel’s eclectic tastes and openness to composers of his time like Debussy, but also Stravinsky and Schönberg, without ever losing his own voice and style.

Other analyses of the Concerto in D come in some excellent internet sources:

“The Performer’s Voice: Performance and Analysis in Ravel’s *Concerto pour la Main*

⁶⁴ Marie-Noëlle Masson, “Ravel: Le Concerto pour la Main Gauche ou les Enjeux d’un Néo-Classicisme,” *Musurgia* vol. 5, no. 3 and 4 (1998): 37-52.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 39. “If one attempts to summarize Ravel’s position toward the Neoclassicism of his time, one could say that the “come back to” is not a sign of setback or an ease of writing but rather, among others, a “worry” and a “sincere quest.” Neoclassicism corresponds to an asceticism allowing introspection, meaning a come back to a clear and ahistorical consciousness of its deepest roots, and “basically eternal to music,” and Mozart represents its most iconic figure.” Translation by Aurélien Bocard.

Gauche” from pianists Daphne Leong and David Korevaar offers an insightful analysis of the opening cadenza with useful performance suggestions.⁶⁶ They also compare different historical recordings of this concerto similar to Jozaki’s dissertation. Another useful source is a French website by Nicholas Martello.⁶⁷ His website provides colorful analytical slides to aid in understanding the harmonic and formal structure of the concerto.

This thesis differs from previous research in several ways. It provides a general historical overview of the creation of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* found in other sources, but with a much broader contextualization of the period preceding World War I through the 1930s. Elements touching various fields of studies such as disability, jazz, industrial noise, analysis, form, and recordings help tie together a more complete view of this composition and will offer the reader new perspectives and ideas.

With One Hand

In order to understand the historical significance of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, one must understand the Great War’s impact on both Ravel and on Europe as a whole. Even though the end of the war preceded the concerto by eleven years,

⁶⁶ Daphnee Leong and David Korevaar, “The Performances Voice: Performance and Analysis in Ravel’s *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*,” *A Journal of the Society for Music Theory*, http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.05.11.3/mto.05.11.3.leong_korevaar.html (accessed Feb. 19, 2017).

⁶⁷ Nicholas Martello, “Ravel: Concerto pour la Main Gauche (Analyse),” Education Musicale, <http://www.edmu.fr/2016/08/ravel-concerto-pour-la-main-gauche.html> (accessed Feb. 19 2017).

the links between the war and this composition are striking. In fact, many characteristics remind a listener of the war — the violence of certain harmonies as well as virtuosic gestures mixed with jazz elements contribute to these effects, as the analysis makes clear. The piece’s visual performance novelty creates another connection to war — by requiring the pianist to play with only one hand, this concerto stands as a powerful symbol for an entire mutilated generation.

Mutilation is not, however, the only possible interpretation. The piece could also be read as a memorial to the war, a hymn to the wounded, a message of peace, a display of virtuosity, an exploration of jazz elements or simply another work commissioned by a wealthy man. Wittgenstein commissioned it when he himself was a wounded soldier and pianist who had fought during World War I, a war that Ravel experienced as well. All these elements played their part in the creation of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*. But first, it is necessary to look back at the first left-hand concerto.

Géza Zichy’s Concerto in E-Flat Major (1901) was the first left-hand concerto in history.⁶⁸ No composers wrote piano concerti for the left hand in the nineteenth century, which makes perfect sense through a close study of music history and nationalism. In the nineteenth century, the concerto was the supreme medium for an artist to display his or her virtuosity. A pianist, playing with two hands appeared — and still does — impressive to the general public. But the left-hand concerto defies this trend, introducing an even more unique style of pianism that could

⁶⁸ Irène Suchy, Allan Janik, and Heorg A, Predota, eds., *Empty Sleeve: Der Musiker und Mäzer Paul Wittgenstein*, 101. For more information on Géza Zichy (1849–1924) see Chapter 3: “The History of the Left-Hand Repertoire for Piano,” 54–59.

possibly be linked with the desire for profound societal and artistic changes observed at the turn of the twentieth century. Though it may have started as a genre for wounded pianist/soldiers, it has become in the course of the twentieth century an absolute display of virtuosity.

World War I changed the course of history on many levels, from technology and politics to the arts. Never before in history was a war so destructive, resulting in more than 16 million dead and an immeasurable number of injured. Injuries reached such high numbers (amputations, deafness, disfigurements) that soldiers were often completely dismembered by the incredible violence of battlefield artillery. Today, under what has been labeled “la zone rouge,” it is estimated that more than 300,000 soldiers from both sides are still buried under the earth with more than a million unexploded obus.⁶⁹ It is forbidden to dig up any of these bodies; the battlefield has become their grave. The music making of both Ravel and Wittgenstein are two examples among others of a powerful resilience in response to mankind’s self-annihilation.

⁶⁹ An obus is an artillery shell.

CHAPTER 2

THE GREAT WAR

Artists in the War

It is a common recurrence to see throughout history an interconnection between artists and war, but perhaps never as much present as during World War I. Indeed, numerous artists participated willingly in the war. The socio-political context of the early twentieth-century expected *any* respectable man to join military service, which was not always true of previous wars in which artists played more of an observer role; in fact, few famous composers of the nineteenth century fought in any war. At the end of the 1800s, a strong sense of nationalism arose in French society as well as in other European nations. Cultural and economic tensions among countries took hold of their alliances and would inescapably spread the war worldwide. Because of the unending demand on human resources, never before had so many men been drafted with no regards to profession, thus many artists took a fighting role in a war they perhaps should not have fought, resulting in several great losses for the art world. Eventually, the initial enthusiasm for the war — its idealization of the soldier leaving victorious “la fleur au fusil”¹ — would be replaced by a cruel reality.

The period 1914–18 saw the production of more than 200 French compositions in which the problematics of the war were particularly present (see

¹ Full of innocent enthusiasm

table 1).² The war influenced a change in musical focus and aesthetic during these years as French composers strayed from the influence of Wagner and favored smaller forms such as chamber music. They reconnected with past composers like Rameau and Couperin, initiating a fresh current of Neoclassicism. It is not often the first thing that comes to mind about Ravel's *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, but this composition bears many Neoclassical aspects as will be evidenced in the analysis of the work.

Unlike other French composers of his time, Ravel did not participate in the "Ligue Nationale pour la Défense de la Musique," a group that decided to forbid performances of German and Austrian music still under copyright during the war.³ The group was headed by Camille Saint-Saëns and Vincent d'Indy, and under their direction the Ligue went against French artists not serving in the war, denying them the right to produce or publish. During his service, Ravel wrote to his friend Jean Marnold, music critic of the newspaper *Mercure de France*, on this matter:

All this controversy only strengthens my conviction: all the idiocies uttered by Wagner, Saint-Saëns and Pouëgh [a famous music critic] are of no importance; it's only their music that matters. And the best thing we can do to defend French music is to try to write good French music.⁴

² Esteban Buch and Cécile Quesney, "Les Compositeurs et la Guerre," in *Entendre la Guerre: Sons, Musiques et Silence en 14-18*, 102. Their research mainly focused on French composers and did not take into account hundreds of other international compositions. This number seems to be also limited to the specific classical genre and might not cover popular French song.

³ Norman Demuth, *Ravel*, 29. See appendix B for the complete manifesto.

⁴ Rollo H. Myers, *Ravel: His Life and Works*, 52.

In a letter that he intended to publish at the time, Ravel reacted strongly against this group; it was never published because as a soldier, Ravel was not allowed to publish. He also realized at the time that this matter of music and nationalism would still be a controversial subject. Ravel did write to the secretary of the association, Charles Tenroc:

[...] Il m'importe peu que M. Schoenberg, par exemple, soit de nationalité autrichienne. Il n'en est pas moins un musicien de haute valeur, dont les recherches pleines d'intérêt ont eu une influence heureuse sur certains compositeurs alliés, et jusque chez nous, Bien plus, je suis ravi que MM. Bartók, Kodály et leurs disciples soient hongrois, et le manifestent dans leurs oeuvres avec tant de saveur. En Allemagne, à part M. Richard Strauss, nous ne voyons guère que des compositeurs de second ordre, dont il serait facile de trouver l'équivalent sans dépasser nos frontières. Mais il n'est pas impossible que bientôt de jeunes artistes s'y révèlent, qu'il serait intéressant de connaître ici. [...] ⁵

Ravel did not compose anything during his military service, and he missed music and composing. His first piece after his demobilization was *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, a Neoclassical composition he dedicated to six fallen comrades, which often stands as Ravel's main war composition.

Composers wrote in all genres of music both during and after the war. From funeral and sacred music to military music, and from pieces exhorting the war to pieces dreaming of a better life, war surfaced in all areas of music. Many composers,

⁵ Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Ecrits, Entretiens*, 156. "[...] It matters little that M. Schoenberg, for example, should be of Austrian nationality. He is no less a musician of high merit whose experiments, full of interest, have had a happy influence on certain allied composers and on ours. Further, I am entranced that MM. Bartok, Kodaly and their disciples should be Hungarians, and should show it in their works with such relish. In Germany, apart from M. Richard Strauss, we find only composers of the second rank, whose equivalent it would be easy to find without crossing frontiers. But it is possible that soon some young artists will arise whom it will be interesting to know here." English translation: Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles and Interviews*, 169-70. See appendix C for the complete letter.

today lesser known to the general public, were active at the time. See table 2.1 for a select list of those who in some way participated in the war; some even composed during this period, and many of these pieces certainly deserve to be rediscovered.

Table 2.1. Major composers/compositions from World War I⁶

André Caplet (1878–1925)	<i>Le Vieux Coffret</i> (1916)	Voice/ piano
Florent Schmitt (1870–1958)	<i>Chant de Guerre</i> (1915)	Voice /piano/orchestra
Paul Marie Masson (1882–1954)	<i>Printemps guerrier</i> (1915–16)	Piano
Georges Hue (1858–1948)	<i>Emotions</i> (1918)	Symphonic poem
Theodore Dubois (1837–1924)	<i>La Prière de France</i>	“Poem-Oratorio”
Henry Février (1875–1957)	<i>Aux Morts pour la Patrie</i>	Hymne
Maurice Emmanuel (1862–1938)	<i>Prométhée</i>	Opera
Vincent d’Indy (1851–1931)	<i>Enchainée</i> (1916)	
	<i>Symphonia Brevis de Bello Gallico</i> (no 3)	Symphony
Alfred Bruneau (1857–1934)	<i>Le Tambour</i> (1915)	Lyric poem for voice and orchestra
Gabriel Pierné (1863–1937)	<i>Les Cathédrales</i> (1915)	Scenic music
Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921)	<i>Aux Aviateurs</i> (1911)	For 4 male voices a capella
Reynaldo Hahn (1874–1947)	<i>A Nos Morts Ignorés</i> (1915)	Voice/piano
Lili Boulanger (18930–1918)	<i>Dans l’Immense Tristesse</i> (1916)	Voice and piano
Jacques Ibert (1890–1962)	<i>Le Vent dans les Ruines</i> (1915)	Piano
Francis Casadesus (1870–1954)	<i>Chant de Guerre</i> (1915)	Voice/piano
Fernand Halphen (1872–1917)	<i>Les Tranchées</i> (1916)	Voice/piano

⁶ Esteban Buch and Cécile Quesney, “Les Compositeurs et la Guerre,” in *Entendre la Guerre: Sons, Musiques et Silence en 14–18*, 100-107.

This discussion would not be complete without mention of Claude Debussy (1862–1918), a fervent nationalist who claimed during the war to hate “les boches.”⁷ Debussy died right before the 1918 armistice on November 11. His composition *Le Noël des Enfants qui n’ont plus de Maison* (L 139, 1915), with famous lyrics written by the composer, resonated like a scream against German brutality.⁸ The song was translated during the war and enjoyed great success in Great Britain, which already had already had sincere admiration for Debussy’s music. The compact piece remains an important composition of this period (See Figure 2.1).

⁷ A “boche” is a demeaning appellation for Germans.

⁸ Claude Pommereau, Claire Maingon, and Guillaume Picon, *Écrivains et Artistes Face à La Grande Guerre* (Paris: Beaux Arts, 2014), 125.

Le Noël des Enfants qui n'ont plus de Maison

Nous n'avons plus de maisons!
Les ennemis ont tout pris, tout pris, tout pris,
Jusqu'à notre petit lit!
Ils ont brûlé l'école et notre maître aussi,
Ils ont brûlé l'église et monsieur Jésus-Christ,
Et le vieux pauvre qui n'a pas pu s'en aller!

Nous n'avons plus de maisons!
Les ennemis ont tout pris, tout pris, tout pris,
Jusqu'à notre petit lit!
Bien sûr! Papa est à la guerre,
Pauvre maman est morte!
Avant d'avoir vu tout ça.
Qu'est-ce que l'on va faire?
Noël, petit Noël, n'allez pas chez eux, n'allez plus jamais chez eux,
punissez-les!
Vengez les enfants de France!
Les petits Belges, les petits Serbes, et les petits Polonais aussi!
Si nous en oublions, pardonnez-nous.
Noël! Noël! Surtout, pas de jujoux,
Tâchez de nous redonner le pain quotidien.

Nous n'avons plus de maisons!
Les ennemis ont tout pris, tout pris, tout pris,
Jusqu'à notre petit lit!
Ils ont brûlé l'école et notre maître aussi,
Ils ont brûlé l'église et monsieur Jésus-Christ,
Et le vieux pauvre qui n'a pas pu s'en aller!

Noël! écoutez-nous, nous n'avons plus de petits sabots!
Mais donnez la victoire aux enfants de France!⁹

Figure 2.1. *Le Noël des Enfants qui n'ont plus de Maison* by Claude Debussy

This short composition (under three minutes) is set as a prayer in which the children of France ask no gifts for Christmas but instead to be avenged among the children of Poland, Belgian and Serbia. In this last song composed by the Debussy,

⁹ See appendix A for the English translation of this song.

who was already very ill, it becomes clear that Debussy was angry at the political situation and probably worried for his wife and daughter.¹⁰

According to Fulcher, Ravel was engaged in the political discussion of the post-war period because he “had Socialist sympathies, subscribing only to the Socialist *Le Populaire de Paris*, and frequented Socialist politicians like Léon Blum and Paul Painlevé.”¹¹ Ravel was firmly opposed to the political cultural position of his time, which was incarnated by the Ligue National de la Défense pour la Musique. Fulcher describes Ravel’s French patriotism as “firmly rooted in the traditional republican, ultimately revolutionary conception of individual responsibility, founded unequivocally in human reason.”¹² Born in a lower class family, he gradually climbed the social ladder to an upper middle-class lifestyle, but his war experience with soldiers of the working class certainly reminded him of his origins and shaped his leftist political inclinations.¹³

The fact that Ravel composed his *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* for Wittgenstein is then not inconsequential, and reveals a composer fighting against the political current of his time, which can be observed in two social and artistic tendencies. First, in a period of growing anti-Semitism, Ravel never stopped frequenting many Jewish intellectuals of his time, notably in the salon of M. and

¹⁰ Debussy was so upset by the war that he added to his signature “musicien français.”

¹¹ Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France, 1914–1940*, 136.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 181.

Mme. Clemenceau.¹⁴ He kept a close friendship with Mme Fernand Dreyfuss and Ida Rubinstein who helped Ravel financially when he needed it, according to Manuel Rosenthal:

[Ravel] aimait beaucoup la discrétion d'Ida Rubinstein qui était très riche, comme on sait (elle était entretenue, à ce moment la par le fameux Guinness, le roi de la bière anglaise). Elle avait un hôtel particulier Place des Etats-Unis... enfin elle était très riche mais elle ne le montrait pas. [...] Il n'avait qu'à dire un mot, montrer quelque chose pour qu'immédiatement, de manière très discrète, elle donne un ordre et on achetait, naturellement à n'importe quelle prix, ce dont Ravel avait besoin.¹⁵

Second, Ravel professed his love for Jewish composers such as Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791–1864),¹⁶ whose music he claimed to have preferred to Wagner's, but also Austrian and German composers such as Schönberg and Mahler. His composition, *la Valse* (1919),¹⁷ is a direct example of Ravel's interest in Viennese culture: "J'ai conçu cette oeuvre comme une espèce d'apothéose de la valse viennoise à laquelle se mêle,

¹⁴ Ravel was sometimes mistakenly taken as Jewish for hanging around so many Jewish friends. (See Manuel Rosenthal, *Ravel*, 88). "Ravel liked very much Ida Rubinstein's discretion, who was very rich, as we know (she was taken care of, at the time, by the famous Guinness, the king of the English beer). She had a mansion Place des Etats-Unis... well, she was very rich but she didn't show it. [...] He had only one word to say, point at something and she would immediately, in a very discrete manner, give an order to buy, of course at any price, what Ravel needed." Translation by Aurélien Boccard.

¹⁵ Marcel Marnat, *Ravel*, 464.

¹⁶ If Meyerbeer (born Jacob Liebmann Beer) is often viewed as a French composer today, this was not the case at the time. Born German and very proud to be Jewish, he suffered from anti-Semitic comments his whole life.

¹⁷ Initially intended as an orchestral work and then a ballet for Diaghilev named "Wien," Ravel abandoned this title certainly judged to provocative in a still unstable postwar period.

dans mon esprit, l'impression d'un tournoiement fantastique et fatal. Je situe cette valse dans le cadre d'un palais impérial, environ 1855."¹⁸

Ravel's openness to, and also provocative utilization of foreign cultures and music, was not limited to his Jewish friends or professing his love for proscribed composers; it extended to his interest and use of jazz elements, evidenced in the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, during what was an anti-American post-war period; beyond that, Ravel even mocked colonialist Orientalism in a work such as *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*.¹⁹

Ravel was a patriot, but as Fulcher notes "his patriotism was clearly that of the French political Left, which identified with the Enlightenment ideal of Universality."²⁰ He even refused his nomination for the Legion d'Honneur, leaving to his brother, Edouard, the task of informing the newspaper *Le temps*, stating: "Les "raisons personnelles" que m'a prêtées Edouard intriguent fort ces messieurs."²¹ Edouard also cited a poem by Baudelaire: "Consentir à être décoré, c'est reconnaître

¹⁸ Maurice Ravel, "Esquisse Autobiographique," *La revue musicale* (1938): 214. In: Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France 1914–1940*, 137. "I conceived this work as a kind of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz with which was mingled, in my mind, the impression of a fantastic and fatal whirling. I situate this waltz in the context of an imperial palace, around 1855."

¹⁹ Ibid., 140. Fulcher makes a point on how Ravel in the solo aria of the Chinese cup consciously mocks colonialist Orientalism of the time.

²⁰ Ibid., 138.

²¹ René Chalupt, *Ravel au Miroir de ses Lettres* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1956), 171. "The 'personal reasons,' which Edouard attributed to me, intrigue those gentleman very much." Translation by Aurélien Bocard.

à l'état ou au Prince le droit de vous jugez."²² Scholars have long discussed the reasons of this political refusal.²³ According to Manuel Rosenthal, Ravel felt betrayed by the government that informed his mother that he enlisted in the army despite the fact that he asked them not to inform her:

S'il l'a refusé, c'est pour une raison toute simple. Vous savez, il avait été reformé à cause de sa taille et il n'a pas pu supporter que son frère, que tous ses amis – dont certains sont tombés, malheureusement, au front – soient mobilisés pour défendre la France et que lui reste tranquillement à l'arrière parce qu'il avait été reformé. Il s'est donc engagé et il a demandé à Painlevé – qui devait être ministre, plus ou moins, ou en tout cas était un homme politique important et qui était un ami de Ravel – il lui a demandé de le recommander de façon que l'engagement de Ravel soit accepté, ce qui a été fait. Mais il avait posé une condition; il avait dit: "Je désire que l'on ne fasse pas savoir à ma mère (elle était déjà malade) que je me suis engagé." Or on l'a fait savoir à la mère de Ravel et c'est pour cette raison, parce qu'il a trouvé que les services publics n'avait pas tenu parole, qu'il a refusé la Légion d'Honneur.²⁴

²² Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France 1914–1940*, 139. To consent to be decorated is to recognize the right of the state or the Prince to judge you (Baudelaire, *Mon coeur mis à nu*). Translation by Aurélien Boccard.

²³ Later on, Ravel accepted diverse decorations in Sweden, Belgium, England and Hungary. For more on this subject see: Marcel Marnat, *Ravel*, 486.

²⁴ Interview with Remy Stricker at France Culture in 1985. In: Marcel Marnat, *Ravel*, 485-486. "If he refused it, it is for a very simple reason. You know he had been reformed because of his short size and he could not bear that his brother, that all of his friends – whom some fell unfortunately at the front – were enlisted to defend France and that he had to stay quietly in the back-front because he had been reformed. He then enlisted and asked Painlevé – who must have been some sort of a minister or at least someone politically important, and who was a friend of Ravel – he asked him to recommend him so that the enlisting be accepted, which was done. But he had stated one condition; he said: "I desire that no one tell my mother (who was already sick) that I enlisted." But it was communicated to Ravel's mother, and it is for this reason, because he found that the public services had not kept their promise, that he refused the Legion d'Honneur." Translation by Aurélien Boccard.

Almost ten years later, Ravel, whose admiration and openness to Austrian, German and Jewish composers clearly was not a barrier, found his hero in the figure of an already famous pianist, Wittgenstein.

Ravel's composition for the Jewish-Austrian pianist, although not composed during the war, can be regarded as a war piece. As the *Tombeau de Couperin* had been dedicated to six fallen soldiers, the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* is dedicated to a broken, dismembered pianist/soldier, but this composition contains a strong message of hope. Even with a single hand, the left hand — often considered the bad one, the weak one — humankind can continue to fight, play, live and create. This concerto is more than a simple piece of music because it carries the memories of a world forever transformed by the atrocities of war. The piece tells the story of two men fighting a war that would forever change them. Both Ravel and Wittgenstein enlisted as soldiers during World War I, willing to fight for their country, but neither lasted long on the front. Both suffered from the horror of the war, and while Wittgenstein certainly endured more physical wounds than did Ravel, not all wounds are visible. Their paths never crossed during the war since they were stationed on two different fronts, but music would come as a source of resilience and salvation in the aftermath of the war. For Ravel it emerged through creation, and for Wittgenstein through performance.

Maurice Ravel

On August 2, 1914, the war broke out in Europe. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on June 28 set Europe on fire, detonating the

nationalistic tensions that had been simmering for decades. Like never before in history, almost all of Europe went to war with the exception of the Iberian and Scandinavian peninsulas, the Netherlands and Switzerland.²⁵ Ravel was 41 years old, and regarded as an accomplished and celebrated musician in France and beyond. Masterworks like *Jeux d'eau* (1901), *L'Heure Espagnole* (1907) and *Daphnis and Chloe* (1912) were already complete and published.

Although discharged from military service due to his short size, being shy of the minimum weight by two kilograms, and his seemingly fragile constitution (including a previously diagnosed hernia), Ravel insisted on fighting on the front.²⁶ He even requested to fight with the air force, one of the most dangerous branches of the army, arguing that his diminutive body could still be of use in that role. To his frustration, he was not accepted. In a letter to his friend Cipa Godeski at the outbreak of the war, August 20, 1914, Ravel argued for his patriotism:

[...] A votre seule exception, tous, mobilisés, engagés, un officier y compris, m'ont blâmé. Vous me connaissez assez pour savoir que ni ces blâmes, ni votre ardeur ne peuvent avoir la moindre influence sur ma résolution: Je partirai (si l'on veut de moi), parce que j'ai envie de partir. [...] Vive la France! Mais surtout: à bas l'Allemagne et l'Autriche" ou du moins ce que ces deux nations représentent à l'heure actuelle. Et de tous coeur: vive l'Internationale et la Paix! C'est pour cela que je pars. [...]²⁷

²⁵ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Jean-Jacques Becker comp., *Encyclopédie de la Grande Guerre, Tome I*, 247.

²⁶ Benjamin Ivry, *Ravel: A Life* (New York: Welcome Rain Publishers, 2000), 91 and Marcel Marnat, *Ravel*, 404: Ravel was 1.65 meters tall or 5 feet 5 inches.

²⁷ Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Ecrits, Entretiens*, 141-42. “[...] Except for you everybody criticized me: those who were mobilized, volunteers, and even an officer. You know me well that neither these criticisms nor your earnest plea will have the slightest influence on my resolution: I will sign up (if they want me) because I want to sign up. [...] Vive la France! But above all, down with Germany and Austria! Or at least what these two nations represent at the present time. And

He went so far as to say, “Je sais que je commets un crime.” But his desire to fight for the “patrie”²⁸ was so strong that no one could stop him, not even his mother.²⁹ On September 26, 1914, Ravel again voiced his discontent in a letter to Stravinsky:

Do let me have news of you. What is happening to you in the middle of all of this? Edouard [his brother] has joined up as a dispatch rider. I haven't been so lucky. They don't want me, but I am pinning my hope on the new medical examination that of those who have been rejected will have to pass and on the strings I may be able to pull when I get to Paris...³⁰

It took Ravel eight long months to convince the army to allow him to finally enlist in March 1915. This eventual enlistment was a success thanks to his friend Paul Painlevé (1863–1961),³¹ a noted socialist politician (minister of war in 1917) and mathematician, to whom he dedicated the second song of his set *Trois Chansons* (1914–15), “Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis.” In the text of this chanson, Ravel makes recurrent references to the war, which he was about to join.³²

with all my heart: long live the Internationale and Peace! That's why I am signing up.” Translation by Arbie Orenstein, ed., *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles and Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 152.

²⁸ Country.

²⁹ Ibid., 142. “I know that I am committing a crime.” Translation by Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles and Interviews*, 152.

³⁰ Rollo H. Myers, *Ravel: His Life and Works*, 49. This letter is not included in Orenstein's book, *A Ravel Reader*.

³¹ Benjamin Ivry, *Ravel: a Life*, 92. Ravel and Painlevé both shared a friendship with Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929), French prime minister from 1917 to 1920.

³² See appendix D. For more information on the link between the *Three Chansons* and Ravel's involvement with World War I, see: Aaron Ronald Jackson,

Before leaving for the front, Ravel was forced to abandon certain projects like *Zaspia-Bat*, a piano concerto on Basque themes. After the war, Ravel never returned to this project, and it would take him fourteen years to even return to this genre. He also finished his *Piano Trio* and the *Trois Chansons* for unaccompanied voices (“Nicolette,” “Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis,” “Ronde”). To his disappointment, he was not admitted into the air force and was forbidden to fight directly on the front, but still Ravel was proud to finally serve his country on par with many of his friends.

To the European public at the time, Ravel was already an important artist, and his enlistment would not have gone unnoticed. An “official excuse” to exempt him from facing a dangerous position on the front was decided: hypertrophy of the heart.³³ Thus, instead of taking up arms, he took the wheel of a truck — which he named Adelaide — transporting war material and wounded soldiers. Through the fall of 1916, Ravel stayed on the outskirts of Verdun, where some of the deadliest battles occurred. There, Ravel witnessed the horrors of the war and its destructive power. Some of his letters attest to these experiences:

Il y a quelques jours, étant de service à ... [Verdun] je venais de dîner avec les brancardiers dans la cours d’une ferme qui sert de poste; et ayant besoin de fumer, je venais de sortir chercher mes allumettes qui étaient dans ma voiture, quant un obus tomba à côté de la table que je venais de quitter. Nous nous sommes précipités avec les autres brancardiers et avons relevés parmi

“Three Chansons and World War I” (D.M.A. Diss., University of North Carolina, 2014).

³³ It is unclear who made this decision for Ravel, but Ivry mentions “influential friends.” Ibid., 95.

les débris de toutes sortes 8 morts et 21 blessés. (À son frère, Edouard Ravel, 26 Mai, 1915)³⁴

“[...] J’ai vu une chose hallucinante: une ville de cauchemar, horriblement déserte, et muette. Ce n’est pas le fracas de là-haut, ni les petits ballons de fumée blanche qui s’alignent dans le ciel très pur; ce n’est pas ce duel formidable et invisible qui est angoissant, c’est de se sentir seul au centre de cette cité qui dort d’un sommeil sinistre, sous la lumière éclatante d’un beau jour d’été. Je verrai sans doute des choses plus épouvantables, plus répugnantes; je ne pense pas éprouver jamais de plus profond, de plus étrange que cette sorte de terreur sourde. [...]” (À son ami, Jean Marnold, 4 avril, 1916)³⁵

It is almost certain that the war impacted Ravel’s health. As an ambulance driver, he no doubt witnessed horrendous things, and it is proved that a soldier never comes back from the front the same. According to Roland-Manuel, Ravel did not have any significant illness before the war.³⁶ Seddon also affirmed that “Ravel’s neurological

³⁴ Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Ecrits, Entretiens*, 148-49. “A few days ago, I was on duty in... [Verdun] I had just eaten dinner with the ambulance drivers in the courtyard of a farm, which was serving as our post; and as I wanted to smoke, I went out to get my matches, which were in my vehicle, when a shell landed next to the table I had just left. We rushed in with the other ambulance drivers and amid all sorts of debris, we pulled out 8 dead and 21 wounded.” (to his brother, Edouard Ravel, dated May 26, 1915). Translation by Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles and Interviews*, 159-160).

³⁵ Ibid., 151. “[...] I saw a hallucinatory thing: a nightmarish city, horribly deserted and mute. It isn’t the fracas from above, or the small balloons of white smoke, which aligns, on the very pure sky; it’s not this formidable and invisible struggle, which is anguishing, but rather to feel alone in the center of this city, which rests in a sinister sleep, under the brilliant light of a beautiful summer day. Undoubtedly, I will see things, which will be more frightful and repugnant: I don’t believe I will ever experience a more profound and stranger emotion than this sort of mute terror. [...]” (To his friend, Jean Marnold, dated April 4, 1916). Ibid., 162.

³⁶ Manuel Roland, *Maurice Ravel*, trans. Cynthia Jolly (New York: Dover, 1972), 80.

health, unstable all his life, can perhaps, if the 1912 brush with neurasthenia is excluded, be said to date from 1916.”³⁷

Ravel’s life took a drastic turn on May 25, 1916, when he fell gravely sick at Châlon-Sur-Marne. His condition worsened, resulting in the need for immediate surgery.³⁸ He was operated on for peritonitis,³⁹ but perhaps more critical and more worrisome for Ravel, at the time, was his mother’s rapidly declining health — that worried Ravel the most. These excerpts of letters to his *marraine de guerre*⁴⁰ Mme. Fernand Dreyfuss (mother of Roland-Manuel) affirms his close relationship and his deep concern for his mother:

[...] Merci des nouvelles que vous me donnez de Maman. Vous savez la joie, le réconfort que j’en puis éprouver. Ma pauvre Maman! [...] (May 12, 1916)
[...] Je ne souffre vraiment que d’une chose, c’est de ne pouvoir embrasser ma pauvre maman, [...]. (June 4, 1916)⁴¹

³⁷ Andrew M. Seddon, “Music Inexpressive: the Tragedy of Maurice Ravel,” *Musical Problems of Performing Artists*, X/2 (1995): 62-65.

³⁸ Certain sources mention dysentery as well. Ravel’s views on modern medicine during his military service were these of a man who trusted doctors as a letter to his friend Jean Marnold conforms on October 10, 1916: “Mon voisin, opéré un jour avant moi, a beaucoup souffert, se plaint encore d’insomnie, de maux de tête. Un type plus costaud que moi, cependant, mais sans doute un peu alcoolique, que l’on a eu beaucoup de peine à endormir et qui, d’ailleurs, s’est présenté devant le billard avec une forte appréhension. Ma confiance absolue en la chirurgie m’a certainement aidé en la circonstance.” See Marnat, *Ravel*, 421.

³⁹ Pommereau Claude, Claire Maingon, and Guillaume Picon, *Écrivains et Artistes Face à La Grande Guerre*, 147.

⁴⁰ Soldiers without family or mother had substitute mothers called *marraines de guerre*.

⁴¹ The correspondence of Ravel with his *marraine* is full of examples of Ravel worrying about his mother. See Maurice Ravel, Roland-Manuel and Jean Roy, *Lettres à Roland-Manuel et à sa Famille* (Quimper [France]: Calligrammes, 1986), 50. “Thank you for the news you’re giving me of my mother. You know the joy and comfort it gives me. My poor mother!” Translation by Aurélien Bocard.

Another preoccupation for Ravel at the time was music. As a soldier he was unable to compose, but music was constantly on his mind. He began to wish for the war to end:

Oui, cependant, il y a autre chose: la musique, je croyais l'avoir oubliée. Depuis quelques jours, elle revient, tyrannique. Je ne pense plus qu'à ça. Je suis sûr que j'aurais été en pleine période de production. L'artiste se chamaille avec l'homme de guerre... (June 4, 1916)

I have never been so full of music: I am overflowing with inspirations, plans of every kind for chamber music, symphonies, ballets. I tell you, there is only one solution - the end of the war or else my return to the front. (July 4, 1916)

Je me fous de tout excepté de la musique... Décidément, un artiste, c'est peut-être fait pour faire la guerre mais sûrement pas pour la vie de caserne. (July 18, 1916)⁴²

His mother's death on January 15, 1917, marked a clear decline in Ravel's health. His closest friend Roland-Manuel remembers, "they had to distract a lost child who showed none of his feelings and whom nothing could comfort."⁴³ Finally discharged from the army early 1917, Ravel went to Lyon-en-Forêt, in the countryside of Paris, to rest in the house of his *marraine* Mme Fernand Dreyfuss.

Ibid., 58. "I am really worrying about one thing, not being able to kiss my poor mother." Both excerpts were found in Rollo H. Myers, *Ravel: His Life and Works*, 51. The date is inaccurate for the first except in Myers.

⁴² To Mme Fernand Dreyfuss: "Yes, however, there is something else: music, I thought I had forgotten it, but since the last few days it has come back to me in a tyrannical way. I can only think about that. I am certain that I would have been in a very productive period. The artist fights with the warrior..." Translation by Aurélien Bocard. See also Rollo H. Myers, *Ravel: His Life and Works*, 51, and note that I have not been able to locate this excerpt in French. See letter to Roland-Manuel in: Marcel Marnat, *Ravel*, 419: "I don't care a damn about anything except music. ... An artist, no doubt, may perhaps be as fit to fight, but certainly not live the life one lives in barracks." Translation by Aurélien Bocard.

⁴³ Ibid., 52.

There, he spent the entire summer of 1917 composing *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, in which each of six movements is dedicated to a lost comrade.

Jozaki insinuates that Ravel suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and it is a credible claim since Ravel was afflicted with insomnia and neurasthenia for the rest of his life.⁴⁴ His health continued to diminish year after year. In 1933, Ravel acquired a serious movement disorder during a swim in St. Jean-de-Luz, not far from Ciboure, his birth village. From this devastating event, Ravel developed two diseases, aphasia and ataxia. Aphasia is a physical condition characterized by a communication disorder where a person has difficulties turning thoughts into words; ataxia is an impairment of muscle coordination due to damage to the central nervous system. Since he could no longer compose due to a deterioration of his mental lucidity and capacity, the final four years of his life were spent in agony. Ravel told his friend H el ene Jourdan-Morhange, "J'ai tant de musique dans la t ete."⁴⁵ But he was incapable of writing the notes down on paper. Brain surgery was the last desperate attempt to "fix" his mind, and the procedure unfortunately took Ravel's life. It is impossible to assert with certainty whether or not the war caused these diseases, but it definitely did not improve Ravel's life.

⁴⁴ Atsuko Josaki, "Maurice Ravel's Two Piano Concertos: A Study of Sociology, Analysis and Performance Practice," 3-4.

⁴⁵ H el ene Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel et Nous*, 244: "I still have so much music in my head." Translation by Aur elien Boccard.

Paul Wittgenstein

Today's pianists owe an incredible debt to Wittgenstein for his role in the creation of so much twentieth-century left-hand keyboard literature. Wittgenstein enjoyed a good reputation as a pianist.⁴⁶ He also published several technical study books, which are today still regarded as some of the most important ever published on the left-hand keyboard technique.⁴⁷ In Wittgenstein's case, it is not always easy to differentiate the true critic from the false one as he was part of one of the wealthiest European families. Money can indeed buy many things, perhaps even fame.

Wittgenstein began his career as a pianist with two hands intact. He was musically inclined, as were many of his siblings. The Wittgenstein palace was visited by great artists like Brahms, Strauss and Joachim,⁴⁸ demonstrating that Karl Wittgenstein was a great contributor of the arts; still, he never supported his son's musical career. It was not until his father's death that Paul was finally set free of his father's resistance to his pursuit of a music career.⁴⁹ Wittgenstein's musical

⁴⁶ Perhaps because Wittgenstein made very few recordings of mediocre quality, the common assumption has persisted that he was not a good player.

⁴⁷ Paul Wittgenstein, *School for the Left Hand*, vols. 1-3 (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1957).

⁴⁸ Joseph Joachim (1831–1907) was Karl Wittgenstein's cousin.

⁴⁹ Alexander Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein: A Family at War* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 36.

education was off to a good start from working with Malwine Brée (1861–1937),⁵⁰ the most famous disciple of Theodor Leschetizky (1830–1915), a student of Carl Czerny (1791–1857).⁵¹ Once Brée thought her student was ready to study with Leschetizky, she transferred him to the master after he finished his military service in 1910. Leschetizky held Wittgenstein in great esteem and believed he could have a career as a pianist, sometimes even referring to Wittgenstein as “the Mighty Key-Smasher.”⁵² Nonetheless, by the 1910s, Wittgenstein was playing with the violinist Joseph Joachim and with Johannes Strauss when the composer visited the family palace.

It is certain that money helped Wittgenstein gain access to some of the most famous artists of his time, but ultimately, money cannot buy talent. Wittgenstein proved to be extremely talented. In fact, his debut on December 1, 1913, was considered a great success; he played an unusual program featuring a John Field concerto, and against all odds it was well received by famous critic Max Kalbeck (1850–1921), Brahms’ biographer:

Any young man, a member of Viennese high society, who launches himself on the public in the year 1913 as a piano virtuoso with a concerto by John Field

⁵⁰ Malwine Bree published the only known book of Theodor Leschetizky’s method with his approval.

⁵¹ Leschetizky was along Liszt, one of the most important teachers of the second part of the nineteenth century and *fin-de-siècle*. He co-founded the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music in 1862 and then held a private studio in Vienna after his return there in 1878. Most major pianists of this period (I. Paderewsky, A. Brailowsky, M. Horszowsky, B. Moisewitsch to cite only a few) came to study with him. It goes without saying that studying with Leschetizky was an immense honor and could open serious career opportunities.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 43.

must either be a fanatical enthusiast or a very self-confident dilettante. But Herr Paul Wittgenstein-for it is he of who we speak – is neither one nor the other but (better than either as far as we are concerned) a serious artist. He undertook this hazardous adventure without knowing how quite risky it was, driven by a pure love for the task and guided by the honorable intention of placing before the public as test, both reliable and rare, of his eminent skills. [...] Inside that immaculately clean technique, which seems to us today as cool as inorganic matter, lives a tender and sensitive soul and we felt its warm breath.⁵³

This critique had to be written carefully since Kalbeck was a friend of the Wittgenstein family. Other critics commented about Wittgenstein, saying, “further practice would add greater perfection to his abilities and refine his performances.”⁵⁴ Another important critic, Julius Korngold (writing for the *Neue Frei Presse*),⁵⁵ apparently disappeared during the concert; his review was more tempered than Kalbecks:

The debut of the young pianist Paul Wittgenstein aroused lively interest ...[his] freshly acquired technique, his sheer joy in music making and his classically trained feeling for style could all be sympathetically indulged without the need for taking further risks.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Julius Korngold (1860–1945), father of renowned composer Erich W. Korngold, was one of the most important music critics in Vienna, along with Edward Hanslick. Korngold worked for the *Neue Frei Presse* from 1904 to 1938 before immigrating to the United States at the Anschluss.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 56-57.

Wittgenstein had a huge ego and was sensitive about others' opinions, a preoccupation that can be heard in his interpretations.⁵⁷ It seems, however, that his performing career was off to a good start until the war cut short this progress.

Wittgenstein, like Ravel, experienced a deep nationalistic urge to serve his country and to protect the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. It was an honor to serve in the army, so he enlisted almost immediately in the summer of 1914 and was made second lieutenant. He had completed his military service five years before the war struck, and was in great shape and ready to serve. Wittgenstein, at age 28, was much younger than Ravel when he enlisted.

From then on, things took a turn for the worse. While dispatched on a reconnoiter mission on the Galician front, Wittgenstein was severely wounded by a bullet, which literally pulverized the elbow of his right arm. Carried for miles to the nearest hospital in Krasnystaw (near Izbica), his arm was removed. One can only imagine his horror when he awoke, as well as the blistering pain. Perhaps equally difficult, however, was the fact that while being operated on, his hospital was overtaken by the Russians. Not only was Wittgenstein crippled, he subsequently became a prisoner of war for more than a year.

During his difficult period of captivity, Wittgenstein was lucky to find an upright, yet out-of-tune piano on which he could practice several hours every day. This luxury, his rank as an officer, and perhaps the money sent by his family for a

⁵⁷ To read more reviews on Wittgenstein, see: Fred Flindell, "Paul Wittgenstein (1887–1962): Patron and Pianist," 117. So Young Kim-Park, "Paul Wittgenstein und die für ihn Komponierten Klavierkonzerte für die Linke Hand," Anhang 2.

while, made his situation less difficult. He sent a message on April 15, 1915, asking Joseph Labor to compose a left-hand concerto for him; the piece became the first well-known concerto composed for the left hand. By mid-summer 1915, negotiations for Wittgenstein's release began. He was finally considered a "severely wounded or disabled prisoner of war whose disablement permanently prevented his military service."⁵⁸ He finally returned to Vienna on November 21 and was received with joy by his mother; Wittgenstein's mother was as worried about her son as Ravel's mother was about hers, as was reflected in a letter to his sibling Ludwig Wittgenstein in November 1915:

My dear, good Ludwig,

Just imagine: early on the 9th – after we heard nothing of Paul for a long time other than he was in Moscow to be examined, we read that he was in the group that was being exchanged and which had arrived at the Finnish-Swedish border post in Haparanda on the 8th. On the afternoon of the 9th, we had a telegram from Paul from Ljusdal in Sweden. Yesterday we learned that the group had passed through Sassnitz and today Paul is already in Leitmeritz. Today I had a report from Stradels and Wolframs; both were at the station at midnight to greet him and they assured me that he looked he splendid form, very well and in the best of moods. [...] ⁵⁹

Upon his return, Wittgenstein immediately consulted doctors in Vienna as he was in great pain. The amputation in Krasnystaw had been in a rush, and the resulting scar on the stump was extremely painful. Doctors decided to reopen the wound to reshape the stump. After complete healing of the stump, Wittgenstein

⁵⁸ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 95.

intended to wear a prosthetic arm, but that never happened. For the remainder of his life, he decided to wear an empty sleeve hanging by his side.

Many amputees experience intense discomfort, stump pain and phantom limb pain, common side effects of post-amputation, which can prevent amputees from wearing prosthetics; Arthur Rimbaud is one famous example.⁶⁰ Wittgenstein, according to an article published in 2014 by European medical doctors, was a great example of a 'moving phantom' (impressions of movement) case.⁶¹ They asserted that his moving phantom right hand played a decisive role in the acquisition of his extraordinary left-hand technique.⁶² One of his students, Erna Otten-Attermann, recalls observing his stump moving in the 1930s:

I had many occasions to see how involved his right stump was whenever we went over the fingering for a new composition. He told me many times that I should trust his choice of fingering because he felt every finger of his right hand. At times I had to sit very quietly while he would close his eyes and his stump would move constantly in an agitated manner. This was many years after the loss of his arm. [...] His finger choice was always the best!⁶³

This observation shows how Wittgenstein's ability to visualize and kinesthetically connect with the score played a crucial role in acquiring his impressive left-hand technique. These methods are commonly used nowadays by

⁶⁰ His right leg amputated, Rimbaud could never wear a prosthetic leg due to neuralgia.

⁶¹ Laurent Tatu, Julien Bougousslavsky and Francois Boller, "Phantoms in Artists: The Lost Limbs of Blaise Cendrars, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Wittgenstein," *Journal of the History of the Neuroscience* 23, (2014): 362.

⁶² Ibid., 365.

⁶³ Ibid., 363.

many pianists who practice away from the piano, by visualizing and feeling their hands playing on the keyboard; it proves to be a useful technique for memorization as well. One might also suggest that this empirical technique was a way for Wittgenstein to fight against pain, as “phantom limb movements form the basis of specific rehabilitative treatment to fight against phantom limb pain.”⁶⁴

The war changed Wittgenstein. His body was mutilated and he had to deal with pain for the rest of his life. Music was, of course, his salvation in all these difficult times as asserted by Alexander Waugh:

Memories of his father, of his suicidal brothers Hans and Rudi, guilt at having deserted his comrades in the Krepost, the grim realization of his present armless condition, thought of his wrecked career, of Ludwig’s unstable mind, of the starvation and disease that were overtaking Vienna, frustration of every kind – artistic, familial, sexual – not to mention the endless, slow and slow losing of the war, these were the things that preyed upon him and sought to destroy his moral equilibrium.⁶⁵

It is no doubt that without music in his life, Wittgenstein would have had a much more difficult time in recovery. He began to present more and more concerts in Vienna and elsewhere, becoming an inspiration for a whole generation of crippled soldiers returning from the front. Hired by authorities to help with troop morale, he gave concerts in many cities, playing in front of soldiers, workers and invalids. His debut in Berlin was a great success, and according to his sister Hermine, audiences

⁶⁴ Ibid., 364.

⁶⁵ Alexander Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein: a Family at War*, 112.

judged him on the quality of his playing and not by the fact that he was a one-arm pianist.⁶⁶

For the next 40 years, Wittgenstein enjoyed a successful career as a pianist in Europe, and in the United States, where he emigrated to right before World War II began. He also enjoyed a successful career as a piano professor in Vienna and New York. His love for the instrument, along with his substantial wealth helped to expand the piano repertoire by more than 280 works for the left hand alone, in a repertoire that today totals only a couple thousand compositions. He commissioned concerti from all major composers of the twentieth century, including Ravel, Prokofiev, Schmidt, Korngold, Britten, Strauss, Demuth, Bortkiewicz and many others.⁶⁷ He was not, however, an easy pianist to please, and he had no problem refusing to play a work he commissioned, which was the case for the Prokofiev and Hindemith concertos. Wittgenstein never played these two compositions and greeted the Prokofiev's concerto quite harshly: "Thank you for the concerto, but I do not understand a single note of it and I shall not play it."⁶⁸ Hindemith's concerto went on to an even more incredible fate, as it is only when Wittgenstein's archives

⁶⁶ Ibid., 115.

⁶⁷ All of these concerti are listed in Theodore Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand*, 108-113.

⁶⁸ Barabara Nissman, "The many Faces of Prokofiev as Seen Through his Piano Concertos," <http://www.sprkfv.net/journal/three04/manyfaces4.html> (accessed April 15, 2017). Prokofiev himself was not very fond of this work as he continued saying: "And so this concerto has never been performed. I have not formed any definite opinion about it myself: sometimes I like it, sometimes I do not. I intend to write a two-hand version of it some time." Prokofiev's Fourth Concerto was only premiered in 1955 in Berlin by a German pianist, Siegfried Rapp (1915–1982), who had also lost his right hand but in World War II.

where opened in 2002 that his concerto, composed in 1923, was rediscovered and premiered by Leon Fleisher in 2004. While Prokofiev had some doubts about his concerto, Hindemith was proud of the work and hoped that Wittgenstein would like it, as he attests in a letter dated May 9, 1923: "I would be sorry if the piece didn't bring you joy - you might find it a bit strange to listen to at first - I wrote it with a great deal of love and like it very much."⁶⁹

⁶⁹ <https://www.eamdc.com>, "Hindemith's Recently Rediscovered Piano Concerto for the Left Hand, Op. 29 Premieres in Canada," April 6, 2006, <https://www.eamdc.com/news/hindemiths-recently-rediscovered-piano-concerto-for-the-left-hand-op-29-premieres-in-canada/> (accessed Apr. 15, 2017).

CHAPTER 3

LE CONCERTO POUR LA MAIN GAUCHE

History of the Left-Hand Repertoire for Piano

It was in the second half of the nineteenth century when the major-left hand compositions for keyboard instruments emerged, and this was no coincidence. Several technical advancements of the piano, such as the metal frame and the double escapement action, offered composers new possibilities for composing more demanding and powerful pieces. Furthermore, it was the development of the *sostenuto* pedal (and later the middle pedal) with its endless possibilities of resonances that perhaps played the most crucial role in the expansion of the left-hand repertoire. The escalation of virtuosity in the piano repertoire, a nineteenth-century society phenomenon, pushed pianists and composers to constantly seek new ways to impress a public eager to hear and see pyrotechnics.

Beside technical and societal reasons, one might wonder why the “right-hand only” repertoire did not develop instead of the left-hand one. For centuries, right-handedness has been considered the norm, imposed and enforced by societal constructs, the church and the school. Ignaz Drozdov notes, “the Latin word *dexter* [“right”] is associated with skills whereas *sinister* [“left”] is associated with wickedness.”¹ Also, because of the more constant use of the right hand in daily activities, this is the one that eventually became more subject to injuries.

¹ Ignaz Drozdov, Mark Kidd and Irvin M. Modlin, “Evolution of One-Handed Piano Repertoire, Hand Amputations and the Piano,” published by Elsevier, Inc., vol. 33A (May–June 2008): 781-782.

Statistically, lefthanders also represent a smaller portion of the population, from 8 to 15 percent.² With the increasing violence of warfare in the nineteenth century first with the Napoleonic wars, 1803–1815, and the American Civil War, 1861–1865, limb amputations became a frequent surgical procedure that proved efficient in saving lives.³ One can then assume that “to a large extent, piano music for one hand is a legacy of military and surgical practice of the nineteenth century, and the predominant pianist dedication to the left hand (80 percent), reflects the long-standing social prejudice proclaiming the usage of the right hand as a societal norm.”⁴

The history of the left-hand repertoire began first as pedagogical exercises before becoming a stage show. Carl Czerny (1791–1857), who studied with Beethoven and taught Liszt, composed numerous exercises to strengthen the left hand. Before Czerny, Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach composed *Eine Studie für der Rechte oder Linke Hand zur Stärkung des Daumens*. Another influence on the development of the left-hand repertoire was the three-hand technique often attributed to Sigismund Thalberg (1812–1871). Liszt was known for developing this technique in which the thumb of the right hand would play an independent melody creating a three-hand effect. Oddly, this three-hand technique could be the missing

² Different sources state different numbers, but it remains a small fraction of the population.

³ From the invention of gunpowder in the fourteenth century, the number of amputees significantly increased and reached its peak with World War I.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 782.

link between the pedagogical function of the left-hand repertoire and its accession to the concert stage.⁵

Alexander Dreischock (1818–1869), a Czech pianist, is considered the first pianist to have played a left-hand composition in public.⁶ According to his peers, his left-hand technique was incredible and could compete with that of Liszt and Thalberg. For example, Dreischock would play the left-hand opening of Chopin's Etude, op. 10, no. 12 in octaves. 1843 marks the first recorded date of a concert including a left-hand piece with Dreischock performing his *Variations for the Left Hand Alone*, op. 22. This tour de force made his concert successful. Later, Eduard Marxsen (1806–1887), Brahms' teacher, composed *Three Left Hand Impromptus* in Dreischock's memory. Theodor Leschetitzky also composed a piece for the left hand, a paraphrase on the well-known Sextet from *Lucia di Lammermor*.

Another important pianist at the time was Adolfo Fumagalli (1828–1856). While he has fallen into oblivion today, he was a sensation during his lifetime. The most successful pianist out of a family of four brothers, also pianists, he composed many pieces for the left hand, mostly paraphrases of opera scenes, although he was not one-armed. His *Fantasy on Meyerbeer's Robert le Diable* and his left-hand version of "Casta Diva" from Bellini's *Norma* count for some of his most successful compositions. He was one of the most celebrated Italian pianists of his time, praised

⁵ Gerhart J. Winkler, "Klaviermusik für die Linke Hand Allein: Aspekte eines Virtuosen (Virtuosen-) Genres" (Wien: Doblinger, 2009), 40-41.

⁶ Keith Snell, "Guest-Post: A History of Left-Hand Piano," *The Crossed-Eyed Pianist*, <https://crosseyedpianist.com/2012/05/14/guest-post-a-history-of-left-hand-piano/#comments> (accessed Sept. 21, 2016).

by both the public and critics. His biographer, Filippo Filippi, recounts a Parisian concert during which a French critic was stunned by Fumagalli's technique:

The first time he played it [the Robert Fantasy] at the Salle Herz, the public stood up to see if he really was one hand playing with such strength and sending such a cloud of notes into the air. Scudo, France's greatest critic was fooled himself, having arrived at the concert little late, just as Adolfo was playing the *Robert Fantasy*, he stood in the back behind the crowd, listening and without looking at his program. He thought he was hearing the usual piece for two hands and gave warm signs of approval heard one of his neighbors say "It's impossible that this is one hand." At these words, Scudo looked closely at his program, stretched his neck and saw the artist's glove hand resting on his knee. Scudo usually so reserved and sparing of praise could not resist shouting "Bravo!" and declaring his admiration afterwards in the pages of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.⁷

Unfortunately, Fumagalli died in 1856 from cholera, a year after launching his European career. Theodore Edel recalled, "although he was perhaps not a very inspired composer, his works for left hand alone stand nonetheless as an important testament in the progress in technique and virtuosity of the period especially of a single-handed works."⁸

The most famous left-hand pianist of the nineteenth century was certainly Count Géza Zichy (1849–1924), the first celebrated pianist to have physically lost an arm.⁹ Just like Wittgenstein, Zichy came from a wealthy family. Beginning piano at age five, he demonstrated some talent at the piano, but was no prodigy. Tragically, at age 15, his right arm had to be amputated after he shot himself in a hunting

⁷ Theodore Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand*, 22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 23. See Appendix E for a picture of Adolfo Fumagalli.

⁹ See Appendix E for a picture of Count Géza Zichy.

accident. With extreme strength and resilience, he managed to pull himself together.

He refused to be helped in any way by his servant:

I chased him out of the room, locked the door and dressed myself. It took three hours but I did it. I used the doorknob, the furniture, my feet and my teeth achieve it. At meals I ate no food I could not cut myself, and today I peel apples, clip my fingernails, ride, drive a four in hand, I am a good shot and I have learned to play the piano a little.¹⁰

It took a many years of intense practice for Zichy to train his left hand as he surprisingly decided to become a concert pianist after his hunting accident:

I got a piano teacher – a hard merciless woman... my arm got stronger, my fingers turned to steel. I wanted to play piano and began to use my thumb as a right hand. I was empiricist. I didn't ponder over theories of one-handed piano playing; I knew nothing about how it could be done, but I did.¹¹

Zichy's musical debut and development are unclear, but it was in 1876 at age 26 that his career took a turn for the better when he performed his own arrangement of Schubert's song *Der Erlkönig* in front of Franz Liszt. Liszt was greatly impressed and this encounter marked the beginning of a long-lasting friendship between them. The master encouraged the younger pianist to perform and publish his *Six Etudes*; a couple of years later, Zichy's concerts were a complete success in Europe. Wherever he went, the reviews were ecstatic. Liszt himself mentioned in a letter to the Baroness von Meyendorff that "Géza Zichy's reputation is not just parochial Hungarian. He is an astonishing artist of the left-hand, who is remarkably dexterous to the point that the greatest pianists would be hard put to

¹⁰ Géza Zichy, *Aus meinen Leben: Erinnerungen und Fragmente* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlanganstalt, 1911), 82.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

match him.” (Budapest, February 18, 1882).¹² But critics like Eduard Hanslick recalls a concert in Vienna:

The most astounding thing we have heard in the way of piano playing in recent times has been accomplished by a one-armed man – count Geza Zichy. Many can play, some can enchant, but Zichy is the only one who can work miracles. ... Count Zichy displayed a marvelous and astonishing volume of tone in a ‘Concert Etude’ and a Hungarian both of his own composition, and then in Bach chaconne arranged by himself for the left hand, and his lightening –like jump, skips and glides and his polyphonic legato playing were so extraordinary that his listeners could scarcely believe their ears and eyes.¹³

Count Zichy’s wealth was so immense that throughout his career he gave all the money he earned to charities. His concerts were important social gatherings for the aristocracy and monarchy; indeed, he played for nearly every king, queen, prince and princess of Europe. Today, Zichy’s music has been forgotten and it is not easy to find his music; unfortunately, he also never made any recordings. Although Zichy was the first one-armed concert pianist to enjoy such a career, he is best remembered today as the author of *Das Buch des Einarmigen* (The Book of the One-Armed), a book he published in 1915 to help amputated soldiers with exercises complete with pictures and explanations, to regain their autonomy.

¹² In: *The letters of Franz Liszt to Olga von Meyendorff 1871-1886 in the Mildred Bliss Collection at Dumbarton Oaks*, Translated by William R. Tyler (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 421.

¹³ Theodore Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand*, 27.

Image and Disability

It did not take long for Paul Wittgenstein to rebound from his injury and to resume practicing. While in captivity in the Russian prisons and even with the soreness of his scars surging, he managed to find a piano to play. He commissioned a concerto for the left hand from his long-time teacher and friend Joseph Labor, and actively practicing every day as much as possible, Wittgenstein tried to determine the best way to adapt two-handed pieces for the left hand alone.

One can only imagine Wittgenstein's despair after his amputation and the dilemma that he faced: should he stop or should he continue to play? He had barely launched his career, but so far had mostly enjoyed successful reviews. He had dedicated twenty-seven years to mastering his art, and had worked with some of the greatest musicians of his time; music was clearly his life. Surely, he must have asked himself whether or not he was still worthy to play with only one hand, but neither his new disability nor his fear of a negative public reaction stopped him from his artistry. His family and friends were, in fact, encouraging: they feared he would contemplate suicide as several of his siblings had already taken their own lives.¹⁴

Perhaps the biggest challenge for Wittgenstein was earning respect and recognition from his peers. Of course, a disability is rarely considered an advantage in any field, and certainly not in music performance. But in many artistic fields there exist examples of those who have found a way to reverse the stigma of their appearances and limitations. As Michael Davidson suggests, these are artists who

¹⁴ Three of his four brothers committed suicide.

“have reassigned the meanings of their disability in their own terms.”¹⁵ Creator-artists like Beethoven, Schumann, Monet, Goya and Nerval are well known — certainly more than disabled *performance* artists. For the public, it often comes as a surprise that such beauty could have been produced in spite of such disadvantages. Wittgenstein was a model of resilience and accepted the challenge to not only work as a concert pianist but also as an inspiring teacher and mentor for many of his students.

Besides Labor, another figure acted as an important role model for Wittgenstein in his battle against his disability – Zichy. In a post-World War I context, amputee soldiers numbered in the thousands and Count Zichy, who had lost his right arm in a hunting accident in 1872, was already a celebrated pianist. In fact, Hanslick had crowned him in the Viennese press as “the greatest marvel of modern times on the piano.”¹⁶ To aid this new generation of amputees, Zichy wrote a manual — *Das Buch des Einarmigen*— with photographic examples that explained how to face daily activities with a single arm. The method spans from learning how to crush meat rather than cut it, to how wash one’s hands by holding the soap against the chin and getting dressed. He writes: “You must learn how to put on your pants on by yourself,” because “it would be too humiliating to have to ask someone else’s help.”¹⁷ In 1915 Zichy gave a concert to an audience of nothing but one-handed soldiers. In

¹⁵ Michael Davidson, *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and Defamiliar Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 2.

¹⁶ Alexander Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein: a Family at War*, 83.

¹⁷ Ibid.

today's collective mind, this picture seems impressive, but in the context of the violence perpetrated during World War I, these soldiers proved in fact more presentable than many others who had lost their entire faces, many of whom remained locked up so as to not diminish troop morale.

Wittgenstein received a copy of Zichy's book during his time in the Russian prisons.¹⁸ He had not yet met the count, but this book was certainly a great inspiration for him. Leopold Godowsky (1870–1938), one of the greatest early twentieth-century piano masters, had also inspired Wittgenstein: he knew of Godowsky's impressive left-hand transcriptions of Chopin's etudes, published from 1894–1914, and he attempted to figure out just how Godowsky managed to transcribe such difficult etudes for one hand.

Freed from captivity, Wittgenstein performed many concerts in Vienna and Eastern Europe to help with troop morale. Authorities regarded his concerts positively, since they sensed he inspired wounded soldiers. Wittgenstein's impressive resilience to overcome his tragedy sent a message of hope. After all, if a man managed to bypass his disability and produce such beauty practicing in one of the most demanding professions, anyone could find his or her way out of this tragedy.

What constitutes a disability for a pianist can vary greatly. Wittgenstein's case is extreme because his arm was permanently removed, and even a century later

¹⁸ Wittgenstein probably received this book from his family with who he was in contact. He spent time in several prisons and camps during his captivity.

the medical field only just witnessed the first hand and arm transplant in 2016.¹⁹ The complexity of the finger, hand and arm apparatus involved in fine motor skills required of any pianists to play at high level remains today unfixable by modern science and conditions far less dramatic than an amputation can bare dramatic consequences for a pianist's career.

Today's artists perform left-hand repertoire for four different reasons: for technical development, to strengthen the left hand, to display virtuosity and due to injury to the right hand. The last most closely resembles war amputees of World War I because it is not related to a pianist's choice. Forced to play this repertoire, the temporarily injured musician is, in a way, a representative of a modern kind of amputee when suffering from tendinitis, carpal tunnel, focal dystonia or impairments collectively labeled RSI (Repetitive Strain Injuries). These RSI are what forbid today's musicians to play their instruments and have replaced gruesome war amputations. In some cases, these conditions are almost incurable as is the case with artists such as Leon Fleisher, Gary Graffman and others.

The question of disability in a field like music and performance has many facets, but in Wittgenstein's case it bears a striking visual aspect. He wore an empty sleeve on stage and did so for the rest of his life. There was no cover, no prosthetic to mask his disability. Wittgenstein did not only carry the horror of the war in his artistry: he threw it at the public in a dramatic visual way. The absence of flesh then raises crucial questions in terms of aesthetic. Was he still musical in the same way as

¹⁹ Stephen Matthews, "Man, 32, Born without Hand Undergoes 'World First' Surgery to Have a New Limb Attached" *Dailymail.com*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-4058672/Man-32-born-without-hand-undergoes-world-surgery-new-limb-attached.html> (accessed Mar. 5, 2017).

was a two-handed pianist? It is one thing to know that a composer was deaf when composing a piece of music or that a painter was half-blind when producing a piece of art; it is another to witness a pianist performing on stage with one hand and creating art *in medias res*. This difference between a visible and an invisible disability can play an important role in the public's reception and perception, in which the term "aesthetic" finds its root, as well as in its critique of a performance. Should the performer be evaluated with the same standards as everybody else or should one create new standards for the disabled pianist? For Wittgenstein, the answer was clearly no, and his career demonstrated it: his purpose and mission was to prove his worthiness — to be considered an artist like any other pianist. Competitive athletic fields have addressed to this issue by creating different categories, as both competition and body performance are inseparable: unfortunately, one will probably not find an entire piano competition just for the left (or right) hand, thus making it much harder for injured musicians to appear publicly.

The left-hand piano repertoire provides the perfect medium for considering the aesthetic of disability. When Wittgenstein began his research on left-hand pieces, only 270 compositions for the left hand existed. The left-hand piano repertoire often compensates for the lack of a hand, and must, as Davidson says, "imitate the full pianist range, coloration, and dynamics of the nineteenth-century virtuoso style."²⁰ By commissioning most composers of the time to compose for the

²⁰ Michael Davidson, *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and Defamiliar Body*, 2.

left hand, Wittgenstein imposed a new set of rules. In a sort of mirror game, he disabled the composer, forcing him to rethink his compositional approach, and Ravel for one, was excited by this challenge:

[...] Le problème que pose à un compositeur un parti pris de ce genre est assez ardu. Les tentatives faites pour les résoudre demeurent d'ailleurs fort rares, et la plus connue d'entre elles, les *Six Etudes pour la main gauche* de Saint-Saëns, évite, par sa brièveté et son compartimentage, le côté le plus redoutable de la question, qui est d'entretenir l'intérêt dans une oeuvre de longue haleine avec des moyens limités. Mais la crainte de la difficulté n'est jamais aussi vive que le plaisir de se mesurer avec elle et, si possible, de la vaincre. C'est pourquoi je me suis laissé tenter par la demande que me faisait Wittgenstein de lui écrire un concerto, et j'ai mené ma tâche assez allègrement puisqu'elle était résolue au bout d'un an. Ce qui représente pour moi un délai minimum. [...] ²¹

Ravel created a new compositional method, a new aesthetic — and that may be the reason why, among the dozens concertos commissioned by Wittgenstein, this concerto is one of the few for the left hand that has survived the test of time.

Wittgenstein recalled in an article by Joseph Wechsberg: “[Ravel] was intrigued by the musical challenge. “Je me joue des difficultés.”²² This concerto certainly uses the

²¹ *Le Journal*, January 14, 1933. See Appendix G for the complete article. Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Ecrits, Entretiens*, 328-329. “A severe limitation of this sort poses a rather arduous problem for the composer. The attempts at resolving this problem, moreover, are extremely rare, and the best known among them are the *Six Etudes for the Left Hand* by Saint-Saëns. Because of their brevity and sectionalization, they avoid the most formidable aspect of the problem, which is to maintain interest in a work of extended scope while utilizing such limited means. The fear of difficulty, however, is never as keen as the pleasure of contending with it, and if possible of overcoming it. That is why I accepted to Wittgenstein’s request to compose a concerto for him. I carried out my task with enthusiasm, and it was composed in a year, which represents a minimum delay for me.” English Translation: Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 396.

²² Joseph Wechsberg, “His Hand Touched our Hearts,” *Coronet Magazine*, vol. 25, n. 8 (1959): 27-28. “I make a game of difficulties.” Translation by Joseph Wechsberg.

disability as an advantage, almost as if Ravel composed for a newly invented instrument.

Alfred Cortot attempted to transcribe the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* for two hands against Ravel's wishes.²³ There are no clear reasons behind such a project; perhaps Cortot thought it would be easier to play the piece with two hands, as Demuth proposes. Demuth even further suggests that the title of the concerto is the reason why it is not performed as much as it could be:

[...] the restriction to performance with the left hand in the case of the D major, a restriction emphasized by the use of its description "Concerto for the Left Hand." Re-christen it "Concerto in D," let everyone forget its original form, and there is no reason why it should not take its place in the regular repertory. In this way it would be available for a greater number of players and would remove any charge of acrobatism from its performance.²⁴

One can safely assume that any pianist today would disagree with this idea and align with Clifford Curzon's reply to Demuth when he says "the work is so wonderfully written that it really would be more difficult to play it with two hands."²⁵ He further explains his views:

Ravel has given the melodic line to the heavy (thumb) side of the hand where it receives a natural accentuation and singing quality. This is to be noticed especially in the last big cadenza. If, for practice, one picks out the melody notes with the right hand, it is surprising how much less well they form the natural apex of the left hand arpeggio figures. The roll of the arpeggio brings the melody note at the right moment musically with the right quality of tone.²⁶

²³ See Appendix F for an excerpt of Cortot's transcription.

²⁴ Norman Demuth, *Ravel*, 92.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

Later on, Curzon argues that it is exactly these limitations that pushed Ravel and allowed him to compose such a great concerto.

Jacques Février also recalls his last conversation with Ravel on November 2, 1938, about the concerto:

Le déjeuner fut gay. Bien entendu, on parla beaucoup du Concerto. Il était question, quelque temps auparavant, de le transcrire pour deux mains. Ravel ne le désirait pas. En effet, à part quelques très rares passages où l'on doit sauter d'un coté du clavier à l'autre, et où la main droite faciliterait l'exécution, l'oeuvre est si admirablement écrite ainsi, avec une telle ingéniosité, une telle intelligence pianistique, que l'intervention d'une autre main n'en pourrait que fausser les accents. De plus, les thèmes ont été conçus pour la seule main gauche et, sans aucun doute, eussent été différents pour deux mains.²⁷

The discussion about whether or not this concerto should be transcribed for two hands should then be forever closed; as Février remembered, Ravel did not want that and his wish should be respected.²⁸

By composing such a magnificent left-hand work, Ravel offers a one-handed pianist — a mutilated pianist — the opportunity to regain his artistry and the possibility to be equal with two-handed pianists. The *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* then becomes a message of hope for all pianists dealing with any forms of career

²⁷ Jacques Février, "Les Exigences de Ravel," *La Revue Internationale de Musique*, vol. 5-6, (April 1939): 894. "Lunch was gay. Of course we talked a lot about the Concerto. It was question, sometime ago, to transcribe it for two hands. Ravel did not desire it. Indeed, beside a couple very rare passages where one has to jump from one side to the keyboard to the other, and where the right hand would facilitate the execution, the composition is so well written like that, with such ingenuity, such pianistic intelligence, that the intervention of another hand would only bring false accents. Moreover, the themes have been composed for the left hand and, without a doubt, would have been different for two hands." Translation by Aurélien Boccard.

²⁸ The conversation on what disability and visual impact consist of in pianism should continue.

threatening injuries. In this aspect, Wittgenstein's resilience and performance after World War I can be regarded as a "triumph over adversity."²⁹

Genesis of *Le Concerto pour La Main Gauche*

In 1929, Ravel took on the huge task of simultaneously composing two concerti, the *Piano Concerto pour la Main Gauche* and the *Concerto pour Piano et Orchestre en Sol*. Ravel had previously thought about composing a concerto utilizing Basque subjects³⁰ or drawing his inspiration from "Le Grand Maulnes" of young writer Alain Fournier.³¹ Zank considers Ravel's intention to simultaneously publish two concerti as bold, offering a reason more rooted in a complex sociocultural context.³² At the turn of the twentieth century, the concerto genre had declined and the Parisian public grew tired of hearing these virtuosic works, often rejecting them

²⁹ Michael Davidson, *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and Defamiliar Body*, 5.

³⁰ According to Alfred Cortot, this work would become the Concerto in G: "In Ciboure, M. R. had undertaken to compose a work for me entitled 'Basque Rhapsody,' which would become his dazzling G Major Concerto. It turned out that I was not to be the official dedicatee of the Concerto." See Bernard Gavoty, *Alfred Cortot* (Paris: Buchet-Castel, 1977), 126. One can wonder if Cortot's intention to transcribe the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* was not a puerile act of revenge on Ravel. This act, however, would cost Cortot his friendship with the composer.

³¹ *Le Grand Maulnes* (1913) is a famous coming-of-age French novel by Alain Fournier (1886-1914). Fournier died fighting during World War I.

³² Stephen Zank, *Irony and Sound: the Music of Maurice Ravel*, 42.

with force and disdain.³³ French Poet Léon-Paul Fargue (1876–1947) recalls this hostile public of Ravel’s generation:

Le public de ma jeunesse, de la jeunesse de Ravel, se levait de sa place, manifestait, intervenait, fronçait ses manies, sifflait souvent les concertos qu’il fuyait avec ostentation pour aller fumer dehors la cigarette libératrice. Les salles étaient bondées. Il nous arrivait d’enjamber dans les escaliers des strates de corps couchés, plongés dans les profondeurs abyssales de la musique. Nous avions besoins de cette atmosphère pour vivre heureux et pauvres.³⁴

In this context, it is clear why Ravel was in no hurry to compose a concerto for piano. It is the encounter with “hero figure” Wittgenstein that inspired him to compose the Concerto in D.³⁵

It took Ravel until Autumn 1931 — almost two years — to finish both concerti. In *Le Journal*, dated to 1933, Ravel recounts the original idea of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*. The article opens with an announcement for the opening night followed by Ravel comments:

L’Orchestre symphonique de Paris créera, mardi prochain, un concerto de M. Maurice Ravel pour piano et orchestra. Ce concerto d’un genre tout à fait particulier a été conçu pour « main gauche » seulement. Avant de le « conduire » lui-même, mardi, M. Maurice Ravel a bien voulu, dès aujourd’hui, présenter son œuvre à nos lecteurs.

³³ For more thorough information on the decline of the concerto see: Hans Engel, *Das Instrumentalkonzert: Eine musikgeschichtliche Darstellung*, vol. 2, *Von 1800 bis zur Gegenwart* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1974), 111.

³⁴ Léon-Paul Fargue and Ravel had been friends since 1902. See Fargue, *Refuges* (Paris: Émile Paul Frères, 1942), 197. “The public of my youth, of Ravel’s youth, would jump out of our places, demonstrate, intervene, indulge our follies, even whistle impatiently at concertos as we fled from them out the nearest door to have a cigarette. The halls were packed, we had to work our way through layers of bodies, all lost in the profound depth of music. We needed this kind of life to survive, to remain both poor and happy.” Excerpt from Stephen Zank, *Irony and Sound: the Music of Maurice Ravel*, 43.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

La première idée du Concerto pour la main gauche, dont je dois diriger l'Orchestre symphonique de Paris la première audition ces jours-ci, date d'un voyage que je fis à Vienne voici trois ans. Durant mon séjour dans cette ville, séjour occupé d'autre part par les répétitions à l'Opéra de *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* et par les spectacles de Mme Ida Rubinstein où je conduisais *La Valse* et *Le Boléro*, j'eus l'occasion d'entendre le pianiste autrichien Wittgenstein, amputé de la main droite à la suite d'une blessure de guerre, interpréter un concerto de Richard Strauss pour la main gauche seule. [...]³⁶

Ravel was accustomed to challenges. Many of his pieces explore the instrumental limits of virtuosity and color possibilities. Also, since not many pieces of this magnitude had been composed for the left hand alone, it was both difficult and liberating, allowing him the freedom to create something totally new. It is not certain whether or not Ravel knew some of the newly composed concerti for Wittgenstein, but one can assume that he had not heard most of them as Wittgenstein was the dedicatee and did not record them. At least nine composers had composed left-hand concerti for Wittgenstein before Ravel:³⁷

³⁶ *Le Journal*, January 14, 1933. Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Ecrits, Entretiens*, 328. "Next Tuesday, the Paris Symphony Orchestra will give the first performance of a Concerto for piano and orchestra by M. Maurice Ravel. This concerto falls into a special category, having been written for the left hand alone. Before conducting it himself next Tuesday, M. Maurice Ravel kindly agreed to introduce his work to our readers. The initial idea of the Concerto for the left hand, which I will soon conduct with Paris Symphony Orchestra, dates from a trip I made to Vienna three years ago. During the stay in Vienna, which was occupied by rehearsals at the Opera of *L'Enfant et Les Sortilèges* and by Mme Ida Rubinstein's performances in which I conducted *La Valse* and *Le Boléro*, I had the occasion to hear the Austrian pianist Wittgenstein. His right hand had been amputated following a war injury, and he performed a concerto for the left hand alone by Richard Strauss." English translation by Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 396.

³⁷ This information, with sometimes contradictory dates between sources, has been gathered from several sources: Edel, *Piano Music for One Hand*, Chapter 8; Patterson, *One Handed: A Guide to Piano Music for One Hand*, Chapter Four; Kim-Park, "Paul Wittgenstein und die für ihn Komponierten Klavierkonzerte für die Linke Hand," 36.

Table 3.1 Left-hand concerti composed for Wittgenstein before 1930.

Joseph Labor (1842–1924)	Three Concerto Pieces: f min. (1915), E-flat Maj. (1917) and D Maj. in the Form of Variations (1923)
Paul Hindemith (1895–1963)	Klaviermusik für die linke Hand mit Orchester, Op. 29 (1923)
Erich W. Korngold (1897–1957)	Piano Concerto for the Left Hand in C-sharp min., Op. 17 (1923)
Franz Schmidt (1874–1939)	Two Concerti: Konzertante Variationen über ein Thema von Beethoven (1923) and Concerto in E-flat Maj. (1934)
Richard Strauss (1864–1949)	Two Concerti: Parergon zur Symphonia Domestica für Klavier linke Hand und Orchester, Op. 73 (1924–25) and Panathenäzung, Op. 74 (1926-27)
Eduard Schutt (1856–1933)	Paraphrase für Pianoforte Linke Hand und Orchester (1929)
Sergei Bortkiewicz (1897–1952)	Three Concerti: Concerto for Piano in C min.; Concerto Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra (?), Piano Concerto in E-flat Maj., Op. 28, no. 2 (1929)
Rudolf Braun (1869–1925)	Piano Concerto for the Heft Hand in F min. (1927)
Karl Weigl (1881–1949)	Piano Concerto in E-flat min. (1924) ³⁸

Wittgenstein commissioned Ravel's *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* during the summer of 1929 for 6,000 U.S dollars.³⁹ Although scheduled for completion in June

³⁸ Wittgenstein never played the work in public. For more information see: <http://www.karlweigl.org/works.php?work=9>.

³⁹ So Young Kim-Park, 153. This is the only source I have found that provides a dollar amount for Ravel's work. She unfortunately does not mention where she

1930 as Ravel mentioned in a letter dated May 8, 1930, he finished it around August 1930: “[...] Il faut que Wittgenstein ait son concerto pour la fin du mois prochain et c’est loin d’être terminé.”⁴⁰ The Concerto in G was commissioned later in December. With two major works on his shoulders, Ravel’s health did not improve. The Concerto in G appeared to be much more of a challenge for Ravel than the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*:

Je suis fatigué, très fatigué, et j’ai besoin de m’échapper pendant quelque temps. Je viens de finir mon Concerto pour la Main Gauche, que j’ai écrit pour Paul Wittgenstein. Blessé au cours de la guerre, mais j’ai malheureusement du interrompre le travail sur mon nouveau concerto pour piano.⁴¹

On the contrary, the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* was composed quickly, in under one year. As the commissioner of the piece, Wittgenstein performed it for the first time in Vienna on January 5, 1932, under the direction of Robert Heger (1886–1978) with the Viennese Symphonic Orchestra.⁴² Below is the review of the concert from the *Neue Frei Presse*⁴³ on January 18, 1932:

found this information and why the payment was made in U.S dollars or if it was a conversion from the original currency actually used.

⁴⁰ René Chalupt, *Ravel au Mirroir de ses Lettres*, 245. “Wittgenstein must have his concerto for the end of next month, and it is not done at all.”

⁴¹ Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Ecrits, Entretiens*, 361. “I am tired, very tired, and I need to get away for a while. I finished my piano concerto for the left hand, which I wrote for Paul Wittgenstein, who was wounded during the war, but unfortunately, I had to interrupt my new concerto.” English translation: Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 239.

⁴² Marcel Marnat, *Maurice Ravel*, 649.

⁴³ *The Neue Frei Presse* was a Viennese Newspaper running from 1864 to 1938.

Nach Richard Strauß und Erich Wolfgang Korngold hat nun auch Maurice Ravel, noch immer der führende Musiker Frankreichs, für die linke Hand Paul Wittgensteins ein Konzert geschrieben, das seine Uraufführung im vierten Symphoniekonzert der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde erlebte. [...] Paul Wittgensteins eminente linke Hand bewältigt siegreich und mit verblüffender Treffsicherheit die wilden Arpeggien, die weiten Sprünge, die tollkühnen Oktavenglissandi: immer wieder bewundern wir die Folgerichtigkeit der mit einer Willenskraft ohnegleichen aufgebauten, scheinbar in der Sonderfunktion des Daumens verankerten Griff- und Springtechnik, die ebenso individuelle wie sinnreiche Pedalwendung. Paul Wittgensteins virtuose Leistung entfesselte stürmisch Beifall. (r.)⁴⁴

The first performance of this Concerto was initially thought to be November 27, 1931, based on the Marguerite Long and Roland-Manuel's rendition, but later research done by Orenstein suggested a more accurate date. In an undated letter to Arturo Toscanini, Ravel expresses his desire for the director to conduct his concerto:

C'est encore moi... simplement pour vous dire que je souhaiterais vivement que le *Concerto* que j'ai écrit pour Wittgenstein fût donné en première audition *in the world* par vous et l'admirable orchestre que vous avez formé. Et je suis sûr que Wittgenstein ne me contrediras pas.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ So Young Kim-Park, "Paul Wittgenstein und die für ihn komponierten Klavierkonzerte für die linke Hand," Anhang 2, xii-xii. "Following Richard Strauss and Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Maurice Ravel, the actual French leading composer, has also written a concerto for the left hand for Paul Wittgenstein, which saw his première in the fourth symphony concert of the Society of Friends of Music. [...] The impressive left hand of Paul Wittgenstein victoriously overcomes with the most amazing accuracy the wild arpeggios, the large leaps, devilish octave glissandi: we constantly marvel at the consistency which built this unequalled strength of will, at the special function of the thumb showing off grasp- and leap technique, which is also differentiated by ingenious changes of pedal. Paul Wittgenstein's virtuosic performance unleashed a storm of applause." Translation by Aurélien Boccard.

⁴⁵ Harvey Sachs, *Toscanini* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1980). "This is only to tell you that I would very much wish to have the world première of the Concerto [in D Major for Piano (left hand) and Orchestra] which I have written for Wittgenstein given by you and the admirable orchestra that you have created. And I am sure that Wittgenstein will not feel differently." French letter by Marcel Marnat in *Maurice Ravel*, 648.

But there is no evidence that Toscanini ever answered Ravel, so Heger conducted it. Ravel did not attend the première, perhaps because of bothersome health issues, but also perhaps due to his personal conflict with the pianist.

The story behind the première of the Concerto in D has become a famous one; audiences enjoy it because of its drama. It poses an eternal question of authenticity in performances between what the composer intended and what the pianist desires to re-create. How much liberty can an artist take until a work is no longer the composer's? With Ravel, the answer was definitely almost none: "Performers are slaves," he famously said.⁴⁶

On January 30, 1932, eager to finally hear his work, Ravel left for Vienna accompanied by his friend and pianist Marguerite Long.⁴⁷ Wittgenstein had invited Ravel to dinner and prepared a two-piano performance of his *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, with Walter Bricht (1904–1970) at the second piano.⁴⁸ The evening did not go as planned as Long described in her memoirs:

Ravel et moi entendîmes [le Concerto pour la Main Gauche] à Vienne, au cours de notre tournée européenne, chez son dédicataire, Paul Wittgenstein. Celui-ci, qui l'avait déjà reçu quelques mois auparavant, l'avait déjà interprété en public dans la capitale autrichienne le 27 novembre 1931. Nous fûmes conviés chez lui à un grand dîné suivi d'une soirée. On donna le

⁴⁶ Marguerite Long, *Ravel at the Piano*, 59.

⁴⁷ Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles and Interviews*, 594.

⁴⁸ Walter Bricht was a student of Franz Schmidt, who composed diverse concerti for Wittgenstein and certainly befriended the left-handed pianist in the 1920s. In the 1930s, Bricht composed two Fantasien and three Klavierstücke for Wittgenstein. The source stipulating that he played the second piano during the famous concert evening in Ravel's presence is unknown. See E. Fred Flindel, "Paul Wittgenstein (1881–1961): Patron and Pianist," xxxii.

Quatuor et le maître de maison devait jouer le *Concerto* avec son accompagnement d'un second piano afin que Ravel puisse entendre enfin son œuvre. J'étais un peu inquiète car, assise au dîner à droite de Wittgenstein, j'avais reçu de ce dernier la confiance qu'il avait du faire quelque « arrangements » dans l'ouvrage. L'excusant dans mon cœur, car je croyais son amoindrissement physique responsable de ces libertés, je lui avais conseillé d'en faire part d'avance à Ravel. Il n'en fit rien.

Pendant l'exécution, je suivais sur la partition le *Concerto* que je ne connaissais pas encore et pouvais apprécier sur le visage de Ravel, qui s'assombrissait de plus en plus, les méfaits des initiatives de notre hôte. Dès que ce fut terminé, avec l'ambassadeur Clauzel, je tentais une diversion pour éviter un incident. Hélas! Ravel s'avavançait lentement vers Wittgenstein et lui dit: « mais ce n'est pas cela du tout ! » et l'autre de se défendre : « Je suis un vieux pianiste et cela ne sonne pas ! » C'était exactement la chose à ne pas dire. « Je suis un vieil orchestrateur et cela sonne ! » répliquait Ravel. On imagine le malaise. Je me souviens que notre ami était dans un tel état d'énervement qu'il renvoya l'auto de l'ambassade et que nous rentrâmes à pied, comptant sur cette marche par un froid rigoureux pour apaiser sa contrariété.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Marguerite Long, *Au Piano avec Maurice Ravel* (Paris: Julliard, 1971), 87-88: "Ravel and I heard [the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*] in Vienna during the course of European tour at the house of Paul Wittgenstein, to whom the *Concerto* was dedicated. He had received the score several months previously and had played it in the Austrian capital on 27th November 1931. We were invited to a grand dinner followed by a soiree. The quartet was performed, and the host was to play the *Concerto* with accompaniment on a second piano, so that Ravel could at last hear his work. I was rather anxious, while seated at dinner to the right of Wittgenstein, he confided to me that he had made certain 'arrangements' in the work. Inwardly I excused him, thinking his physical disability was responsible for such liberties and I advised him to speak in advanced to Ravel. He did not do so. During the performance, I followed the score of the performance, which I did not yet know, and I could read our host's enterprising faults on Ravel's face, which became increasingly somber. As soon as the performance was over, I attempted a diversionary tactic with ambassador Clauzel, in order to avoid an incident. Alas, Ravel, walked slowly toward Wittgenstein and said to him: 'But that's not it at all.' He defended himself: 'I am a veteran pianist and it doesn't sound well.' That was exactly the wrong thing to say. 'I am a veteran orchestrator and it sounds well,' was the reply. One can imagine the embarrassment! I remember that our friend was in such a state of nervous tension that he sent back the embassy automobile and we returned by foot, counting on this walk in the bitter cold to calm his nerves." Marguerite Long, *At the Piano with Ravel*, 58-59.

Wittgenstein had exclusive rights to the performance for six years (1931–1936), which was not long in comparison to other pieces he had commissioned from other composers. However, Ravel did not have a choice other than to work out his conflict with the pianist in order to move the project forward. In a letter from Wittgenstein dated March 7, 1932, Ravel continues to show his disagreement and ask for strict adherence to his music.⁵⁰ However, Wittgenstein did not make any compromises, as states his March 17, 1932 reply:

As a formal commitment to play your work henceforth strictly as it is written, that is completely out of the question. No self-respecting artist could accept such a condition. All pianists make modifications, large or small, in each concerto we play. Such a formal commitment would be intolerable: I could be held accountable for every sixteenth note and every quarter rest, which I omitted or added. ... You write indignantly and ironically that I want to be 'put in the spotlight.' But, dear Maître, you have explained perfectly: that is precisely the special reason why I asked you to write a concerto! Indeed, I want to put in the spot light. What other objective could I have had? I therefore have the right to request the required modifications for this objective to be attained. ... As I wrote to you, I only insist upon several of the modifications, which I proposed to you, not all of them: I have in no way changed the essence of the work. I have only changed the instrumentation. In the meanwhile, I have refused to play in Paris, as I cannot accept impossible conditions.⁵¹

They must have eventually resolved their differences as Ravel gave the Parisian première of the concerto with Wittgenstein at the piano on January 17, 1933. Over the years, Wittgenstein himself came to appreciate the work and understand its grandeur.

⁵⁰Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles and Interviews*, 594.

⁵¹ Ibid.

At an unknown date, Ravel had invited Wittgenstein to the Belvédère (his house in Montfort L'Amaury near Paris) to present his work. The composer played for him the left-hand part with two hands as well as he could, and explained the orchestral part. The pianist recalled this encounter:

Ravel took me to his workroom and played the new concerto for me. He played the solo part with both hands, of course; and he also played the orchestral score. He was not an outstanding pianist, and I wasn't overwhelmed by the composition. It always takes me a while to grow into a difficult music. I suppose Ravel was disappointed, and I was sorry, but I had never learned to pretend. Only much later, after I'd studied the concerto for months, did I become fascinated by it and realized what a great work it was.⁵²

Wittgenstein's birth and education strongly show that he was a pianist who was influenced by the nineteenth-century aesthetics. As attest his preferred tastes in music, innovation such as jazz or bitonality were not something to which he was immediately attracted to:

Meine Ueberzeugung ist: die fuer mich geschriebene Konzerte von Labor, Schmidt und Richard Strauss, so grundverschiedene so untereinander sind, sind musikalisch Wertvoller, musikalisch hoeher stehend, und daher letzten Endes lebensfaehiger als das Konzert von Ravel. Das seine solche Ansicht hier in den U.S.A., wo Labor und Schmidt gaenzlich unbekannt sind, Ravel aber auf die Hoehe seines Ruhmes steht, paradox klingt, dass weiss ich aber es macht nicht irre. Dabei kann ich versichern, dass ich hierin weder von oesterreichischem Lokalpatriotismus, noch von persoenlicher Freundschaft im geringsten beeinflusst bin.⁵³

⁵² Joseph Wechsberg, "His Hand Touched our Hearts," *Coronet Magazine*, 28.

⁵³ For the 1957 letter from Paul Wittgenstein, see: So young Kim-Park, "Paul Wittgenstein und die für ihn komponierten Klavierkonzerte für die linke Hand," 26. "My conviction is: the Labor, Schmidt, and Strauss concerti composed for me, although totally different from each other, are musically more valuable, musically higher, and finally more durable than Ravel's Concerto. That such an opinion, here in the USA, where Labor and Schmidt are totally unknown, and Ravel is at the heights of his fame, sounds paradoxal, I know it, but it does not mislead. I can assure you that I am absolutely not influenced by a local Austrian patriotism or by my personal friendship." Translation by Aurélien Bocard.

Over the years, however, Wittgenstein grew fond of this concerto. He always dismissed the idea that he was technically not able to play the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, affirming that it was not at all the most challenging ever written for him:

I never complained about the Concerto being too difficult (as a matter of fact, of all the concertos written for me, Ravel's is the least difficult of all). It is true that I proposed a change, *but not for the facility's sake*, before the entrance of the piano in the last cadenza, but Ravel objected. I had to submit and *I did* submit! It was I who played it under Ravel's own conducting for the *first time in Paris*. Ravel never made the slightest objection against my interpretation, which he certainly would have done, if he hadn't been satisfied with it. After that he wanted to conduct it again with me as soloist, at Monte Carlo.⁵⁴

This letter attests that the initial disagreement and perhaps much of the dispute between the two artists has been exaggerated for the sake of drama. Wittgenstein had great respect for Ravel's music and certainly complied with his wishes while Ravel was alive.

In the end, disappointed by Wittgenstein's performance, Ravel chose a French pianist, Jacques Février (1900–1979), to play his work the way he wanted it to be passed down to future generations. They had to wait, of course, for the expiration of the rights on the concerto. Ravel worked and coached Février for what he considered his real première of the work on March 19, 1937, with Charles Munch (1891–1968) conducting.⁵⁵ It was Ravel's intention to establish a good, legitimate

⁵⁴ For the letter dated August 24, 1947, from Wittgenstein to Madelaine Goss, see: Fred E. Flindell, "Paul Wittgenstein (1887–1962): Patron and Pianist." 123.

⁵⁵ After the March 19 première, Février gave several other performances of *Le concerto pour la Main Gauche* in 1937: October 1937 with Philippe Gaubert (1879–1941), November 12 and 13 in Boston and New York with Serge Koussevitzky (1874–1951), who had previously played it in the same venue with

interpretation for the posterity of his concerto as attests a letter to the Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet (1883–1969) two months before Ravel’s passing: ⁵⁶

“[...] À ma connaissance, Jacques Février est le seul, je crois, qui actuellement sache mon concerto pour pouvoir l’interpréter immédiatement; je n’ose, pour plusieurs raisons que vous comprendrez aisément, citer Alfred Cortot, qui doit, m’a-t-il été dit, le jouer à une date que j’ignore. Mais, si un recul de trois semaines ne vous paraissait pas impossible, Jacques Février, dès fin novembre, à son retour d’Amérique, vous propose de venir jouer gracieusement le concerto, à la date qui pourrait le mieux vous convenir, voulant par là, vous témoigner à la fois la joie qu’il aurait d’interpréter mon oeuvre sous votre haute direction et de son désir de marquer sa reconnaissance à vos fidèles de Genève et de Lausanne, et j’espère que cette suggestion pourra être retenue par vous.”⁵⁷

This was Ravel’s last known letter. Février was the first French pianist among many successors to interpret this piece, but the Swiss pianist Jaqueline Blancard (1909–1994) ended up giving the première in Geneva and Lausanne et Geneva on November 8 and 10, 1937, instead of Février, who was still touring the United states.

Recordings

Wittgenstein in 1934 and December 5 with Albert Wolff (1884–1970). See Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 327.

⁵⁶ Ravel’s sickness, diagnosed as aphasia, hindered his writing.

⁵⁷ Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 327. “To my knowledge, Jacques Février is the only one, I believe, who presently knows my concerto well enough to perform it immediately; for several reasons, which you will easily understand, I don’t dare mention Alfred Cortot, who, I have been told, is supposed to play at the date which I do not know. But if a delay of three weeks doesn’t strike you as impossible, Jacques Février, upon his return from America at the end of November, would be pleased to play the concerto for you whenever it would be most convenient; he would thus express his joy in performing my work under your distinguished baton, and acknowledge his gratitude to your audiences in Geneva and Lausanne. I trust that you will find this suggestion acceptable.” Translation by Aurélien Boccard.

Following Février, countless pianists around the world played the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*. In a strange turn of events, this concerto became the only left-hand concerto of the entire piano literature to enter the repertoire.⁵⁸ Others (by Strauss, Britten, Prokofiev) are heard only rarely, but it is not uncommon to see Ravel's concerto programmed every year and hear students practicing it in every music school. There may be several reasons for this. First, the brevity of the concerto (around 18 minutes) eases the challenge of playing with only one hand. The extraordinary quality of the music, with its embedded catchy tunes and virtuosic moments, appeals to the general public and balances the concerto. Lastly, even considering the amount of work required to play this piece, it remains easier than some other left-hand concertos which are much more "showy" and not as attractive to the average listener.

Table 3.2 lists all major French pianists who have played and recorded this concerto in the last seventy years, demonstrating a long existing tradition among French pianists to record this work.⁵⁹ There also exist many other beautiful recordings from non-French pianists like Christian Zimmerman, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Leon Fleisher, Marc-André Hamelin and Alicia de Larrocha.

⁵⁸ Marguerite Long wrote in her book on Ravel: "Since their appearance these two works [both concertos] have stayed in the classical repertoire. — From the very first they have been on the 'gold standard' — where they will ever remain." Marguerite Long, *At the Piano with Ravel*, 42.

⁵⁹ This table has been compiled from many different sources, but one can find much information in the Appendix F of *A Ravel Reader* by Arbie Orenstein: Jean Touzelet, *Historical Interpretations (1911–1988)*, 526-600.

Table 3.2 Major French pianists who played Ravel's *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*

Jacques Février (1900-1979)	1937/1943
Jacqueline Blancard (1909-1994) ⁶⁰	1938/1953
Alfred Cortot (1877-1962)	1939
Vlado Perlemuter (1904-2002)	1956
Jacques Février (1900-1979)	1957
Robert Casadesus (1899-1972)	1946/1960
Jean Doyen (1907-1982)	1954
Samson François (1924-1970)	1959
Monique Haas (1909-1987)	1965
Anne Quéffelec (1948-)	1976
Jean-Philippe Collard (1948-)	1979
Pascal Rogé (1951-)	1982
Abdel Rahman El Bacha (1958-)	1984
François Duchable (1952-)	1986
Michel Beroff (1950-)	1988
Philippe Entremont (1934-)	1991
Georges Pludermacher (1944-)	1993
François-Joel Thiollier (1943-)	1993
Jean-Yves Thibaudet (1961-)	1995
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet (1962-)	2010
Alexandre Tharaud (1968-)	2014

Wittgenstein recorded the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* twice: in 1937 with Bruno Walter and in 1958 with Max Rudolf.⁶¹ It is also possible to see Wittgenstein playing, with his empty sleeves, in some short video excerpts from the Pathé-Journal News recorded on January 17, 1933, at the Salle Pleyel in Paris, the day of the Paris

⁶⁰ Jacqueline Blancard was actually Swiss (French speaking). She was the first Swiss pianist to record the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* under the direction of Ernest Ansermet in 1938.

⁶¹ I invite the reader to listen to these recordings, easily found online, and determine the validity of the liberties taken by the pianist. Among several researchers, Atsuko Jodaki talks about these modifications in her brilliant 2000 dissertation.

première with Ravel conducting.⁶² The listener can hear even more modifications in Wittgenstein's later recording than in the 1937 recording. The performances of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* with Wittgenstein are listed chronologically in table 3 (see table 3.3).

Ravel's *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* was never a favorite of Wittgenstein (perhaps because of its style, restrictions imposed by Ravel or simply personal tastes), and according to different sources this dislike has been verified. Pianist, pedagogue and friend of Wittgenstein, Adolph Baller (1909–1994)⁶³ told Atsuko Josaki that, "the Austrian pianist never became fond of the concerto."⁶⁴

⁶² Paul Wittgenstein, "Paul Wittgenstein plays Ravel – Piano Concerto for the Left Hand (Solo Excerpts)," YouTube, 3:10, Posted Feb. 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zQteXqbYas
John O'Rourke, "Paul Wittgenstein: The One-armed Piano Maestro of WW1," BBC ARTS, Nov. 5, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3WX6QVVc7wtQRCKJzNHPJ0/paul-wittgenstein-the-one-armed-piano-maestro-of-ww1>

⁶³ Austrian-American pianist Adolph Baller had much in common with Paul Wittgenstein. Both Austrian and Jewish, they fled the Nazi oppression during the 1938 Anschluss by immigrating to the United States. Besides being known for being the teacher of Jerome Rose (1938-), Baller is mostly known for touring the world as Yehudi Menuhin's accompanist.

⁶⁴ Atsuko Josaki, "Maurice Ravel's Two Piano Concertos: A Study of Sociology, Analysis and Performance Practice," 125.

Table 3.3. List of known performances of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* with Wittgenstein between 1932 and 1937.

Conductor	Orchestra	City, (place) and date
Robert Heger ⁶⁵ (World première)	Vienna Symphony Orchestra	Vienna, Grosser Musikvereinsaal, January 5, 1932
Sir Henry J. Wood	BBC Symphony Orchestra	Promenades Concerts, August 16, 1932
Maurice Ravel	Orchestre Symphonique de Paris	Paris, Salle Pleyel, January 17, 1933
Paul Parray (Ravel is present)	Orchestre National de l'Opera de Monte Carlo	Monte Carlo, April 12, 1933
Douglas Clarke (1893– 1962)	Montreal Symphony Orchestra	Montréal, November 17, 1934
Serge Koussevitzky	Boston Symphony Orchestra	Boston, November 9 and 10, 1934
Serge Koussevitzky	Boston Symphony Orchestra	New York, November 17, 1934
Bruno Walter	Concertgebouw Orchestra	Amsterdam, February 1937 ⁶⁶
?	?	Montréal, May 5, 1947 ⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Most of this information was found in Jean Touzelet, Appendix F, 593-595 in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*. It is most likely not complete as one can surely assume that Wittgenstein publicly performed this concerto more often than mentioned. On pages 115-116 of: "Paul Wittgenstein (1887–1962): Patron and Pianist," by Fred Flindell, is one an exhaustive list of Wittgenstein's performances with orchestra from 1921–1961, but unfortunately his repertoire is not mentioned. However, in So Young Kim-Park's dissertation: "Paul Wittgenstein und die für ihn Komponierten Klavierkonzerte für die Linke Hand," Anhang 1, there is more information about some of Wittgenstein's repertoire performed between 1913 and 1958, but that list is not exhaustive. There is here certainly an interesting archival research to do.

⁶⁶ For more reviews of some of these concerts see: Fred Flindell, "Paul Wittgenstein (1887–1962): Patron and Pianist," 117.

⁶⁷ I found this performance in Flindell's article where he mentions the critique of the concerto by Dominique Laberge from the news paper *La Patrie*: "Le concerto de Ravel est en un seul mouvement, il demande de son interprète une virtuosité extraordinaire; Paul Wittgenstein la possède au plus haut degré, car avec

In another source, Wolfgang Stähr mentions that “the pianist confessed that, of all the compositions he had motivated, Britten’s work came closest to fulfilling his needs and wishes. Thus, Paul Wittgenstein did manage to show gratitude to at least one of the composers who worked for him.”⁶⁸ Wittgenstein was a difficult pianist to please, but this last statement seems to contradict what has been presented previously because Wittgenstein held in great esteem Labor and Strauss’ left-hand concertos both written for him. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Ravel’s *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* was not among his favorites.

sa seule main gauche il fait des miracles.” English translation by Aurélien Boccard: “The concerto of Ravel is in a single movement, it demands from its interpreter an extraordinary virtuosity; Paul Wittgenstein possesses it at the highest degree because with his sole left hand he does miracles.”

⁶⁸ Wolfgang Stähr, “Mixed muses for the Left Hand,” SONY compact disc, SONY SK 47188, 1992, insert booklet, 7.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONCERTO AND THE WAR

Jazz in the Post War

*Nous voyons danser sur cet ouragan de rythmes et de tambours une sorte de catastrophe apprivoisée*¹

- Jean Cocteau, 1918

The end of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of jazz and blues, the musical language that captured African-American slaves' suffering and hope for a better future. This music directly resonated with European composers who saw countless lives vanish in World War I, from soldiers fighting to civilians affected by disease.² By the turn of the century, Paris was the main cultural center in Europe where many artists, intellectuals and wealthy American tourists gathered to marvel at its beauty.³ The onset of the Great War further expanded this mingling of cultures by opening even more Europeans to musical and artistic novelties. Yet, the war brought a completely different element to the collective population – soldiers - and among them were many African Americans.⁴ Among them, thousands no doubt visited Paris, playing a crucial role in bringing jazz music to the Parisian society and to French military troops.

¹ We see danced on this storm of rhythms and drums a kind of a tamed disaster.

² It is estimated that the (1918–20) Spanish influenza killed three times more people than the 17 million deaths (civil and military) of World War I.

³ Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar*, 13.

⁴ It is estimated that two million U.S soldiers crossed the Atlantic to fight among the Allies during this period. See Jackson, 13.

Ravel, like every composer of his generation, did not escape these new sounds coming from the New World. Like the majority of the composers of the time, he saw jazz as an interesting compositional opportunity, and he regularly deployed elements from its genres and styles through the end of his life. For both the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* and the Concerto in G, Ravel was inspired by jazz, but he was not the first or the only one of his age to use jazz rhythms and melodies to his advantage. Debussy, for example, integrated ragtime idioms (the piano style was well-known in Paris by the turn of the century) in some of his compositions such as *Golliwog's Cake Walk*.⁵ Before the war, Ravel's music was also in some way influenced by these new sonorities, as evidenced in his earlier work *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* (1911).

Ravel had no difficulty embracing jazz because it is a direct continuation of his own music, which also contained complex harmonies, bitonality and syncopations. It made sense, then, for him to include it in his compositions. By the beginning of the 1920s, Ravel was fully immersed in jazz while Paris saw its population increase drastically with a new generation of composers like Aaron Copland and George Gershwin, both eager to study with the great composer-pedagogue Nadia Boulanger (1887–1979).

Ravel talked and wrote about jazz often, and with great respect. He immediately saw the potential of this music and understood its significance. In an

⁵ Debussy's music is filled with complex harmonies reminiscent of jazz chords.

unsigned interview dated October 16, 1923, in the London newspaper *The Star*,
Ravel expressed his views:⁶

Il ne faut pas mépriser, dit-il, le jazz américain dans son ensemble. Le meilleur jazz est écrit par de bons musiciens et recèle des harmonies très intéressantes. Elles viennent des Noirs, sans aucun doute. Mais je ne suis pas sûr que leur origine véritable ne soit pas en partie anglaise et en partie écossaise. Soyez persuadés que lorsqu'une musique populaire devient nationale, c'est du moins qu'elle n'a rien d'artificiel.⁷

Beside a joke on the possible English and Scottish jazz origin in this informal interview, Ravel also made a point about the nationalistic importance of this music. In more serious articles, Ravel consistently defended jazz as a major influence on his music but also on modern music in general: "Personnellement, je trouve le jazz extrêmement intéressant: les rythmes, le traitement des mélodies, les mélodies elles-mêmes."⁸ When talking about his Concerto in G, he said:

I frankly admit that I am an admirer of jazz, and I think it is bound to influence modern music. It is not just a passing phase, but has come to stay. It

⁶ *Famous French Composer in London*, in: Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 428-429.

⁷ Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Ecrits, Entretiens*, 348. "Jazz from America," he said, "is not wholly to be despised. The best jazz is written by good musicians and contains essential harmonies. They come from the Negroes, no doubt, but I'm not sure their real origin is not partly English and partly Scotch. You may be sure that when popular music becomes national there is at least nothing artificial about it." English translation by Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 428-429.

⁸ Maurice Ravel, "Il Faut Prendre le Jazz aux Sérieux!," *Musical Digest* (March 1928) in: Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Ecrits, Entretiens*, 368. "Personally, I find jazz most interesting: rhythms, the way the melodies are handled, the melodies themselves." Maurice Ravel: "Take Jazz Seriously!" in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 390.

is thrilling and inspiring, and I spend many hours listening to it in nightclubs and over the wireless.⁹

In the 1920s, it is in music halls, nightclubs and Vaudeville that Ravel would have heard the first Parisian jazz. It is difficult to know exactly what bands Ravel listened to, but we know that he enjoyed Billy Arnold's white band on December 1921.¹⁰ During his 1928 American tour, Ravel also heard Paul Whiteman's Orchestra in a recording session with Bix Beiderbecke.¹¹ Although Ravel's personal record collection contains several examples of music-hall songs and popular chansons, he seemed to only own one title clearly associated with jazz: "Tiger Rag."¹²

Ravel's explicit use of jazz in his music can be traced to the beginning of the 1920s with *l'Enfant et les Sortilèges* (1920–25), *Sonate pour Violon et Violoncelle* (1920–22), *Sonate pour Violon* (1923–27) and his two concerti (1929–31). Ravel definitely followed the new fashion of the time, led by avant-garde composers such

⁹ Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 490.

¹⁰ Deborah Mawer (ed.), "Crossing Borders II: Ravel 's Theory and Practice of Jazz" in *Ravel's Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 116.

¹¹ Ibid., 117. For more information on this subject, see: Deborah Mawer, ed. "Crossing Borders II: Ravel's Theory and Practice of Jazz" in *Ravel's Studies*, 114-137 and Carine Perret, "Une Rencontre entre Musique Savante et Jazz, Musique de Tradition Orale et les Oeuvres aux Accents Jazzistiques d'Erik Satie, Darius Milhaud, Igor Stravinsky et Maurice Ravel, *La Revue des Musiques Populaires*," vol. 1 (2003): 43-67.

¹² Bruno Sebald's listing in Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader*, 607. It is certainly possible that records have disappeared over the years as it seems surprising that Ravel would not have owned more jazz records.

as Les Six,¹³ Erik Satie (1869–1954), Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) and Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971), who all breathed into their music these unheard jazz rhythms, melodies and instruments.¹⁴ Important compositions influenced by jazz at the time include: *Le Boeuf sur le Toit* (1920) and *La Création du Monde* (1922–23) by Darius Milhaud; *L'Histoire du Soldat* (1918) and *Ragtime* (1918) by Igor Stravinsky; and *Parade* (1916–17) a ballet by Erik Satie.¹⁵ Cocteau's famous description of a scene featuring an American jazz band in 1918 Paris describes the novelty and cataclysmic impact of this new music on the younger generation:

Ce qui balaie la musique impressionniste, c'est, par exemple, une certaine danse américaine que j'ai vue au Casino de Paris.

[en note]

Voilà comment était cette danse.

Le band américain l'accompagnait sur les banjos et dans de grosses pipes de nickel. À droite de la petite troupe en habit noir il y avait un barman de bruits sous une pergola dorée, chargée de grelots, de tringles, de planches, de trompes de motocyclette. Il en fabriquait des cocktails, mettant parfois un zeste de cymbale, se levant, se dandinant et souriant aux anges.

M. Pilcer, en frac, maigre et maquillé de rouge, et mademoiselle Gaby Deslys, grande poupée de ventriloque, la figure de porcelaine, les cheveux de maïs, la robe en plume d'autruche, dansaient sur cet ouragan de rythmes et

¹³ Les Six was the appellation given to a group of composers working in Paris, Montparnasse, whose musical style(s) aimed to be a reaction against post romantic composers such as Wagner and Mahler, and impressionist composers such as Debussy and Ravel. The name of the group was inspired by the "Russian Five" and was mentioned for the first time in a 1920 article written by Henri Collet: "Les Cinq Russes, les Six Français et M. Satie." The group includes Georges Auric (1899–1983), Germaine Tailleferre (1892, 1983), Francis Poulenc (1899–1963), Louis Durey (1888–1979), and Darius Milhaud (1892–1974).

¹⁴ Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris*, 116.

¹⁵ Vincent Cotro, "Jazz et "Classique," Un Couple dans son Siècle," *Revue 303* no. 129, "L'Amérique, le Jazz et Nous," May 26 (2015): 8.

de tambour une sorte de catastrophe apprivoisée qui les laissait tout ivres et myopes sous une douche de six projecteurs contre avions. La salle applaudissait debout, déracinée de sa mollesse par cet extraordinaire numéro qui est à la folie d'Offenbach ce que le tank peut être à une calèche de 70.¹⁶

The atrocities of World War I and the artistic novelties that followed forced Ravel to reposition himself in the French musical scene, which was not easy for an established composer in his forties as Orenstein summarizes:

During the postwar years, Ravel was forced then to adjust to a new, uncomfortable situation, one in which he was no longer a member of the avant-garde, but rather a follower of the trends set by Schoenberg, les Six, Prokofiev, and others. The new sounds in the air were those of jazz, polytonality, and atonality, as the lush velvet of impressionism gave way to the hard steel, which had been prophesized in *Le Sacre du Printemps*. In addition, many composers were turning to a spare texture in a reaction to the mammoth orchestrations of Wagner, Mahler, and Strauss. The postwar years thus presented many fresh challenges. Ravel listened a great deal, absorbed, and composed with difficulty, generally requiring considerably more time for his new works.¹⁷

¹⁶ Cocteau calls the saxophones “grosses pipes de nickel” (big nickel pipes) and the drummer, “barman de bruits” (a barman of sounds). Jean Cocteau, *Le Coq et l'Arlequin: Notes sur la Musique* (Paris: Stock, 1979 [La Sirène, 1918], 53-54. “Impressionist music is outdone, for example, by a certain American dance which I saw at the Casino de Paris. “This was what the dance was like: The American band accompanied it on banjos and thick nickel tubes. On the right of the little black-coated group, there was a barman of noises under a gilt pergola loaded with bells, triangles, boards, and motorcycle horns. With these he fabricated cocktails, adding from time to time a dash of cymbals, all the while rising from his seat, posturing, and smiling vacuously. Mr. Pilcer, in evening dress, thin and rouged, and Mile. Gaby Deslys, like a big ventriloquist's doll, with a china complexion, flaxen hair, and a gown of ostrich feathers, danced to this hurricane of rhythm and beating of drums, a sort of tame catastrophe, which left them quite intoxicated and blinded under the glare of six anti-aircraft searchlights. The house was on its feet to applaud, roused from its inertia by this extraordinary turn, which, compared to the madness of Offenbach, is what a tank would be by the side of an 1870 state-carriage.” Translation by Rollo. H. Myers in: *Cock and Harlequin* (London: the Egoist Press, 1921), 14.

¹⁷ Arbie Orenstein, Ravel, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 84.

Ravel foreshadowed that this was not just a generational music, but the music of the people.

Vous les américains, prenez le jazz trop à la légère. Vous semblez y voir une musique de peu de valeur, vulgaire et éphémère. Alors qu'à mes yeux c'est lui qui donnera naissance à la musique nationale des Etats-Unis. Vous n'avez pas encore de véritable langage. La plupart de vos compositeurs trahissent des influences européennes – espagnoles, russes, françaises ou allemandes – plutôt qu'une personnalité américaine.¹⁸

In the same interview, Ravel talked about his conception of jazz and its influence on movement two, Blues, of his Violin Sonata.

A l'étranger nous prenons le jazz au sérieux. Il exerce une influence sur notre oeuvre. Le « blues » de ma *Sonate*, par exemple, est du jazz stylisé, plus français qu'américain de caractère, peut-être, mais cependant fortement influencé par votre musique dite « populaire».¹⁹

Ravel consciously used a stylized version of jazz in his compositions instead of direct caricature. He integrated this new musical language into his own, blending and transforming it so well that for him it became “French.” When he talked again about his Violin Sonata in a lecture at Rice University in 1928, he related to the following:

¹⁸ Maurice Ravel, “Il Faut Prendre le Jazz aux Sérieux!,” *Musical Digest* (March 1928) in: Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Ecrits, Entretiens*, 368. “You Americans take jazz too lightly. You seem to feel that it is cheap, vulgar, momentary. In my opinion it is bound to lead to the national music of the United States. Aside from it you have no veritable idiom as yet. Most of your compositions show European influences, either Spanish, Russian, French, or German – rather than American individuality.” Maurice Ravel: “Take Jazz Seriously!,” in Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 390.

¹⁹ Ibid. “Abroad we take jazz seriously. It is influencing our work. The Blues in my sonata, *par exemple*, is stylized jazz, more French than American in character, but nevertheless influenced strongly by your so-called “popular music.”

To my mind, the “blues” is one of your greatest musical assets; truly American despite earlier contributory influences from Africa and Spain. Musicians asked how I came to write “blues” as the second of my second movement of my recently completed sonata for violin and piano. Here again the same process, to which I have already alluded, is in evidence, for, while I adopted this popular form of your music, I venture to say that nevertheless it is French music, Ravel’s music, that I have written. Indeed these popular forms are but the material of construction, and the work of art appears only on mature conception where no detail has been left to chance. Moreover, minute stylization in the manipulation of these materials is altogether essential.²⁰

For Ravel, jazz had become an integral part of his compositional style, and when asked about jazz influence in his Concerto in G he answered: “What is written today without the influence of jazz?”²¹

Jazz, Noise and Reconciliation

*Tout ici est grandiose, monumental, à l'échelle des horizons flamboyants, des monstrueux holocaustes, où se consomment les corps et s'engloutit l'esprit des vastes troupes humains grimaçant de souffrance et d'angoisse. Et cette fresque colossale, au dimension d'un univers calciné, ce sont les cinq doigts de la main senestre, reine des mauvais présages, qui vont en broser les âpres reliefs.*²²

- Marguerite Long, *Au Piano avec Maurice Ravel*, Paris, 1971

²⁰ Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 46. The original manuscript in French is lost.

²¹ “Ten Opinions of Mr. Ravel on Compositions and Composers,” an unsigned interview from *De Telegraaf*, April 6, 1932. In Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 494.

²² Marguerite Long, *Au Piano avec Ravel*, 64. “Here everything is grand, monumental, on the scale of flaming horizons and monstrous holocausts that consume the body and submerge the spirit. Crowds of human beings grimace in anguish. This colossal fresco, the dimensions of a fiery universe, is to be detailed in harsh relief with the five fingers of the left hand.” Translation by Olive Senior-Ellis in Marguerite Long, *At the Piano with Ravel*, 57.

The *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* is evidently one of Ravel's greatest homages to jazz and America, but it is more than that. Composed right after a tour in the United States and for an Austrian soldier amputee, it is difficult to avoid viewing the work as a means of reconciliation among France, the United States and Germany. The concerto bears three distinct influences: German in its traditional form; French in harmonic language and orchestration; and American in spirit and its novelty. A fourth influence could be added to this list — Ravel's fascination for industrial noises and mechanics. This modernistic current, which inspired most music to come, emerged in the 1910s alongside other trends associated with Futurism and Dadaism,²³ but also with composers such as Erik Satie, Arthur Honegger (1892–1955), Georges Antheil (1900–1959) and Edgard Varèse (1883–1965).²⁴

Before discussing the topic of industrial noises, it is necessary to look at the question of form in this composition. Ravel's views on concerto writing were influenced by a long lineage.²⁵ In an article for the *Daily Telegraph* dated July 31, 1931, Ravel discussed with Calvocoressi the differences between his two concertos and his interest in traditional form:

²³ The reader is invited to consult Luigi Russolo's manifesto: *The Art of Noises* (1913) and *Bruit Secret* (1916) by Marcel Duchamp.

²⁴ The reader is invited to listen to *Pacific 131* (1923) by Honegger, *Ballet Mechanic* (1924) by Antheil and *Ionisation* by Varèse (1929–1931).

²⁵ See Appendix G for the complete article: "Concerto for the Left Hand," *Le Journal*, January 14, 1933. Ravel says the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* is in two movements. English translation by Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 396-97.

Deux concertos contrastés.

Concevoir les deux concertos simultanément était une expérience intéressante. Celui dont je serai l'interprète [*Concerto en sol*] est un concerto au sens le plus vrai du terme. J'entends par là qu'il est écrit dans l'esprit de ceux de Mozart et de Saint-Saëns. La musique d'un concerto, à mon avis, doit être légère et brillante, et ne pas viser à la profondeur ou aux effets dramatique. [...] J'avais d'abord pensé à intituler mon concerto « divertissement ». Puis il m'est apparu que ce n'était pas utile car le titre même de « concerto » doit être suffisamment clair quant au caractère de l'œuvre. A certains égards ce concerto n'est pas sans rapports avec ma *Sonate pour violon*. Il comporte quelques touches de jazz, et l'écriture n'en est pas aussi légère. Le *Concerto pour la main gauche* est en un seul mouvement et très différent. Dans une œuvre de cette nature, il est indispensable que la texture ne donne pas l'impression d'être plus mince que celle d'une partie écrite pour les deux mains. L'une des caractéristiques de l'œuvre est qu'après la première partie écrite dans ce style traditionnel, il se produit un changement soudain et la musique de jazz commence. Par la suite, seulement, il apparaît à l'évidence que cette musique de jazz est en fait bâtie sur le même thème que la partie initiale.²⁶

A couple of years later, Ravel changed his mind and declared that his concerto was in two movements. He provided more details:

A l'inverse du *Concerto de piano* créé l'an dernier par Marguerite Long, et dont l'orchestre symphonique se contentait d'un matériel réduit, celui-ci utilise l'orchestre symphonique au grand complet. Il se divise en deux mouvements enchaînés l'un à l'autre: Un lent exorde sert d'introduction à

²⁶ M. D. Calvocoressi, "M. Ravel Parle de son Oeuvre: Le Bolero Expliqué," in Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Ecrits, Entretiens*, 364. "Two contrasted concertos: Planning the two concertos simultaneously was an interesting experience. The one in which I shall appear [*Concerto in G*] as the interpreter is a concerto in the truest sense of the word. I mean that it is written very much in the same spirit as those of Mozart and Saint-Saëns. The music of a Concerto, in my opinion, should be lighthearted and brilliant, and not aim at profundity and dramatic effects. [...] I had thought at first of entitling my concerto 'Divertissement.' Then it occurred to me that there was no need to do so, because the very title 'Concerto' should be sufficiently clear in the matter of characterization. In certain respects this concerto is not unrelated to my Violin Sonata. It has touches of jazz. The concerto for the left hand is in one movement, and very different, in contains a good many jazz effects, and the writing is not so light. In a work of this kind it is essential to give the impression of a texture not thinner than that of part written for both hands." English translation by Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 477.

l'oeuvre et prépare, par contraste, l'entrée en force d'un premier thème auquel s'opposera ensuite une deuxième idée, expressive et traitée au piano comme les deux mains, une courbe d'accompagnement évoluant autour de la ligne mélodique. Le deuxième mouvement est un scherzo établi sur deux thèmes, rythmiques l'un et l'autre. Au milieu survient un nouvel élément, sorte de mélopée obstinée, étalée sur un groupe de mesure indéfiniment répétée mais constamment variée dans les harmonies sous-jacentes, et sur laquelle se greffe mille dessins rythmiques de plus en plus serrés. Cette pulsation, croissant en intensité et en fréquence, aboutit, après un rappel du scherzo, déjà à une reprise magnifiée de l'idée initiale de l'oeuvre. Et enfin à une longue cadence où, autour du thème de l'exorde, les divers éléments remarquables depuis le début luttent jusqu'à se briser dans une péroraison brutale.²⁷

It is clear that Ravel's Concerto in G was influenced by the traditional classic concerto; however, at first glance, it is not as easy to find similar influences in the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*. Masson, however, explains brilliantly how this concerto "revisits the historical concerto with specific Ravelian idioms."²⁸ Masson provides specific detail to prove her case: she shows that Ravel derives the first theme from the Gregorian *Diaes Irae* intonation in the opening material (mm. 3-4; 23) and states that his second theme (at m. 83) is an auto-citation of one of his own

²⁷ *Le Journal*, January 14, 1933. "The work begins with a slow introduction, which stands in contrasts to the powerful entrance of them one; this theme will later be offset by a second idea, marked "espressivo," which is treated pianistically as though written for two hands, with an accompaniment figure weaving about the melodic line. The second part is a scherzo based upon two rhythmic themes. A new element suddenly appears in the middle, a sort of ostinato figure extending over several measures which are indefinitely repeated but constantly varied in their underlying harmony, and over which innumerable rhythmic patterns are introduced which become increasingly compact. This pulsation increases in intensity and frequency, and following a return of the scherzo, it leads to an expanded reprise of the initial theme of the work and finally to a long cadenza, in which the theme of the introduction and the various rhythms noted in the beginning of the concerto contend with one another they are brusquely interrupted by a brutal conclusion." English translation by Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 396-97.

²⁸ Marie-Noëlle Masson, "Ravel: Le Concerto pour la Main Gauche ou les Enjeux d'un Néo-Classicisme," 51.

melodies from *Ronssard à son âme* (1923–24).²⁹ Masson also believes that the concerto is in fact not structured in either one or two movements; rather, it is in three movements, built around two tempi organized in the opposite order of the traditional scheme: slow (Numbers 1-14), fast (Numbers 14-27), slow (Numbers 27-53). Ravel also chooses to link these movements in a continuous form rather than having three distinct, fragmented movements.³⁰ Finally, Masson mentions that Ravel's use of harmonies is, in essence, still traditional, but that the tonal functions have lost their "organizational strength."³¹

Ce qu'elle perd en valeur fonctionnelle, l'harmonie ravélienne la regagne dans sa puissance rythmique, dans sa capacité à engager des couleurs, c'est à dire des timbres d'harmonie, et à intégrer les subtiles variations modales des lignes mélodiques.³²

While *La Valse*, composed right after the war, symbolizes the destruction of a fin-de-siècle era, the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* represents its antithesis; it is still dark and serious, but it contains a message of hope, in which jazz and blues idioms play a crucial role.³³ Ravel never explicitly mentioned any programs for his works composed after the war, so one can only imagine what exactly he had in mind for the

²⁹ Ibid., 42-43. See Example 4.1.

³⁰ Ibid., 44.

³¹ Ibid., 49.

³² Ibid., 50. "What it loses in functional value, the Ravelian harmonies regain it in rhythmical power, in its ability to create colors, that is timbers of harmonies, and to integrate subtle modal variations in the melodic lines."

³³ Stephen Zank, *Irony and Sound: the Music of Maurice Ravel*, 81.

concerto; however, the war no doubt impacted his compositional output in some ways. Some of his war letters, in fact, attest to this psychological impact.³⁴

Atsuko Josaki believes that “In this concerto, jazz may not only represents the United States and its general culture, but also the manner in which America saved France from ultimate disaster in World War I.”³⁵ This statement, although historically true, seems fuzzy at first, but she makes an interesting case.³⁶ The opening of the concerto gives some clues by discreetly stating the “blues” motive: B flat –A –G; (see Example 4.1.)

Example 4.1: *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, Number 1, mm. 8-10

The image displays a musical score for the first movement of Ravel's *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*. It consists of two systems of music, each with a piano (p) part and a solo part. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D-flat minor), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system shows the piano accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pattern in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand. A circled '1' is placed above the first measure of the solo part. The second system continues the piano accompaniment and the solo part, which includes some syncopated rhythms and dynamic markings like *ff* and *mf*.

The same motive is then restated in syncopation to foreshadow the jazz section to come (see Example 4.2).

³⁴ See pages 43-44.

³⁵ Atsuko Osaki, 17-18. The United States officially entered the conflict on April 6, 1917, a year and a half before the end of the war.

³⁶ Another issue present in many discussions around Ravel's jazz influences in his music is an unclear differentiation between jazz and blues. Jazz seems to be often used as a broad category encompassing blues.

Example 4.2. *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, Number 3, mm. 23-24



This whole opening (Numbers 0-4), blurred in a mass of sounds made up of cellos, basses and contrabassoons, can be heard as the sound of the war in the distance, becoming louder and louder. Ravel never physically fought on the front, nor was he injured on the battlefield; as a truck driver behind the front, though, this could well have been what he heard daily. These thirty-two suspenseful measures of introduction set up the entrance of the soloist, and could symbolize the soldier getting closer and closer to the front.

Further, this three-note motive serves as the main material of the jazzy second movement in Number 28. Atsuko thinks that “this veiled reference at the outset of this ‘War-Concerto’ could signify the hope for American involvement, as the closing portion symbolizes the actualization of it.”³⁷ This “closing portion,” made of twenty-six measures (Numbers 28-30), is built upon the same march-like ostinato

³⁷ Ibid., 18.

of the jazzy opening scherzo (Number 14), but this time the motive is transposed a fourth higher (E flat – D - C) and played by the bassoon (see Example 4.3). This motive is fragmented seven times, as was the case at the beginning of the work (Numbers 1-2; 3-4) and it presents a complex rhythmical synchronization of a 6/8 march under a 2/4 “blues” melody.

Example 4.3. *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, Number 28, mm. 277-287

Ravel’s fascination for industrial noises and mechanics also plays an important role in shaping the sound realm in which the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* evolves.

Typical of many other Ravel post-war compositions, *Le Bolero* being one example, this concerto was largely influenced by his interest in factory noises. In this concerto, particularly in the piano entrance in m. 33, which mimics the explosion of a bomb, one can hear it clearly (see Example 4.4).

Example 4.4. *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, Number 4, m. 33

The end of the first cadenza also brings to mind one of the chaotic battlefields by jumping, running and sliding across the keyboard's range (see Example 4.5).

Example 4.5. *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, Number 4, *Vivo* to 5, mm. 57-58

Three years after his death, Ravel's brother Edouard recalled how Ravel was fascinated from an early age by everything dealing with machines:

My brother admired everything, which was mechanical, from simple tin toys to the most intricate machines tools. He would thus spend entire days... in front of street vendors' stalls, and was delighted to come with me to factories or to expositions [exhibitions] of machinery. He was happy to be in the midst of these movements and noises. But he always came out struck and obsessed by the automation of these machines.³⁸

In a 1933 English article titled "Finding Tunes in Factories," Ravel explained his ideas, fascinations and influences of mechanical noises and sounds in his music:

[...] Unquestionably the mechanics of this age will leave their imprint on music that will be handed down through generations, and more and more of our composers will find inspiration in what some regard as mere noise. In the past, battles have been made the themes of world-famous symphonies, and surely the sound of battle is no more inspiring than the hum of a vast machine. [...]³⁹

After reading this article, it would be difficult to not hear some of Ravel's *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* aspects being derived from the influence of machines and perhaps from his auditory experience with war machines. World War I was a terrifying conflict, and bombs and shrapnel caused for millions of soldiers the amputation of limbs. This war was also a deafening war – "un enfer sonore."⁴⁰ The intensity of the artillery and constant bombings left millions of soldiers deaf, a misunderstood trauma at the time since the malady was invisible. Perhaps one can hear a glimpse of this deafening war in Ravel's *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* in the

³⁸ Letter from Edouard Ravel to Jacques Rouché on February 19, 1940. See Deborah Mawer, ed., "Musical Objects and machines," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 59.

³⁹ Maurice Ravel, "Finding Tunes in Factories," in Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 398-400.

⁴⁰ Gaëtan Bruel, "L'Oreille Amputée," in *Entendre la Guerre: Sons, Musiques et Silence en 14-18*, ed. Florence Gétreau, 121.

scherzo; the violence with which it begins recalls the burst of machine gunfire (see Example 4.6).

Example 4.6. *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, Number 14, mm. 121-123

1-1
ff Allegro (♩ = 138)
ff

This movement also presents one of the most technical passages of the work (Numbers 43-46), successive ascending jumps recall the repetitive gestures in factories of assembly-line production workers (see Example 4.7).

Example 4.7. *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, Number 43 and following, mm. 437-453

43 *Piu vivo ed accel.*
p
non legato
p
44 *cresc.*
cresc.
45

In the same spirit, the ending of this concerto could recall the violence of an execution by firing squad (see Example 4.8).

Example 4.8. *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*, Number 53, mm. 526-530

The image displays a musical score for measures 53 and 54 of the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*. Measure 53 is marked 'Allegro' and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music is written for piano and includes dynamic markings such as 'Sb.' (subito piano) and 'gliss.' (glissando). The score shows a complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand.

These are only the most important and visually striking examples that show how the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* abounds in sonic war material. Each listener is left to wonder what Ravel had in mind, but knowing the context of this composition makes it difficult to not picture a battlefield.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The impact and consequences of World War I on Maurice Ravel and Paul Wittgenstein's lives forever changed the twentieth-century musical scene. While so many men's lives vanished both during and after the war, these two artists not only showed courage in participating in the conflict, but also demonstrated impressive resilience in healing their physical and psychological wounds by continuing to share their love of music with the rest of the world. For Ravel, this meant he would continue composing and pouring his war experience into his artistic products; for Wittgenstein, it meant he would maintain his activities as a pianist. His career and aspirations crushed, Wittgenstein managed to redirect his destiny and market his disability and public image to his advantage. He then became a world-famous pianist with a unique label: the left-handed — the one-handed — the one-armed pianist. Moreover, Wittgenstein's extraordinary wealth allowed him to commission any composition he desired, making him an influential patron in the history of left-handed piano repertoire.

If Wittgenstein had never been injured, it is difficult to say whether or not his name would be praised or even remembered: no one will ever know. All that matters is his extraordinary ability to rebound from a terrible fate. Wittgenstein toured the world as a constant living reminder — a musical totem — of the violence perpetrated during World War I, proving that life goes on and that even a disabled artist can keep creating beauty. More than that, Wittgenstein reached for artistic

collaborations across borders in a politically challenging time with nations that were once enemies. Ravel's *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* symbolizes this reconciliation on every level. While it is a sonic journey retracing the horrors of World War I, it is also a message of hope and openness between foes — foes who fought against each other for so long.

Although not composed during the war years, this concerto bears all the aspects of a war concerto in its violent motives and sonic effects, all of which evoke to a listener what war might sound like. Structural fragmentations wrapped within a continuous discourse make the work's form somewhat of a mystery and invite the soldier and the listener to journey back in time through the trenches. This work could be regarded as a monument to those who did not come back or to those who came back mutilated.

This concerto speaks to so many people because everyone can find in it whatever he or she desires: a jazzy spirit with entertaining rhythmical gestures; a wild virtuosity and tenderness that give the illusion, with only the pianist's left hand, of accomplishing the impossible; a dense, dark orchestral texture conversing with the piano's soloistic moments; an ambiguous form hidden under neoclassical traits with the appearance of a romantic concerto or even of a tone poem; and finally, complex harmonies made accessible to the general public. This concerto certainly holds a unique place in the twentieth-century repertoire by being the only left-hand concerto performed regularly in programs over the world. By acting as a reminder of what happened in World War I, it also bears today the mark of a "commemorative concerto."

But for Ravel and Wittgenstein the war never really ended. It is an experience that both carried for the rest of their lives, and a weight to bear that would have proven terrible if not properly managed. Both artists paid a severe price; for Ravel, composing the *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* was certainly one way to cope with this weight, and for Wittgenstein, to simply keep playing and sharing. Perhaps the final words should come from someone who knew Ravel well; his friend, Marguerite Long, speaks openly about Ravel's last years and the true meaning of this composition:

He who has followed the slow and cruel dissolution of our friend as I have and seen from afar the distant symptoms which invaded his lucidity will realize, but not without heartbreak, that Ravel has written his destiny into this work.¹

¹ Marguerite Long, *Au Piano avec Maurice Ravel*, 63.

APPENDIX A

Le Noël des Enfants qui n'ont plus de Maison (1915) in English¹

A Christmas Carol

We have no more house nor home!
Enemies took all we had: all gone,
All gone, even our own little bed!
The school they burnt; They burnt our teacher too.
They burnt our church and also the Lord Jesu-Christ,
The poor old beggar too, Who could not get away!

We have no more house nor home!
Enemies took all we had: all gone,
All gone, even our own little bed!
Surely, Daddy to fight has gone,
Poor mummy is in Heaven!
Died and did not see all this.
O! What shall we do now?
Jesu! Infant Jesu! Do not go to them, don't go back to them ever
Punish them all!
Avenge the Children of France!
The little Belgians, the little Serbians and the Polish children too!
Yet should we some forget, pray forgive us.
Noel! Noel! No toys! We want no toys!
But may we please get back again our daily bread.

We have no more house nor home!
Enemies took all we had: all gone,
All gone, even our own little bed!
The school they burnt; They burnt our teacher too.
They burnt our church and also the Lord Jesu-Christ,
The poor old beggar too, Who could not get away!

Jesu! Listen to us, our wooden shoes we have no more;
So, please give Victory to the Children of France

¹ English translation by Swayne René Taillandier reproduced from the 1916 edition.

APPENDIX B

Manifesto of the National League for the Defense of French Music

In French:²

Manifeste de la Ligue Nationale pour la Défense de la Musique Française Sa prédominance en France, Sa propagation à l'Étranger

Dans toutes les sphères de l'activité, l'idée fixe du triomphe de la Patrie nous impose le devoir des groupements et des unions.

L'Art musical dont le rôle est économique et social ne doit pas rester étranger à cette précaution de solidarité active.

La Ligue Nationale est née de ce besoin d'action.

Il s'agit, par tous les moyens, de chasser, puis de traquer l'ennemi, de prévenir pour le retour des infiltrations funestes.

S'il ne peut être question de répudier, pour nous et les jeunes générations, le « classique » qui constitue l'un des monuments immortels de l'humanité, il importe de condamner au silence l'Allemagne moderne pangermaniste.

Notre but est donc de nous unir et de nous solidariser, de faire bloc pour préparer l'avenir et l'affranchissement, dans l'abandon des petites querelles de coteries.

D'abord, afin d'écarter de chez nous, pour longtemps, l'exécution publique des œuvres austro-allemandes contemporaines, non tombées dans le domaine public, leurs interprètes, Kapelmeister et virtuoses, leurs opérettes viennoises, leurs films cinématographiques qui pullulent, leurs disques phonographique plus ou moins maquillés, de démasquer leurs manoeuvres, les pseudonymes de ces auteurs de chansons qui, même actuellement, trompent la censure ; de veiller à ce que l'ennemi ne « passe pas ».

Puis, afin d'assurer le développement de notre musique ; de veiller aux intérêts professionnels de nos compatriotes; de conserver notre patrimoine national, sans distinction de genre ou d'écoles ; de travailler par tous les moyens à la prédominance, en France, de notre art, à ses débouchés par l'éditions de l'exécution publique. De créer des bases d'échanges avec les nations alliées – et ce, tout en accueillant aussi largement que possible l'art de celles-ci.

Nos moyens d'action, dépendant des circonstances, seront multiples : coalitions, contrôles, propagandes, interventions auprès des pouvoirs publics, réforme des cahiers de charges, règlement de nos écoles, mises en interdits, actions communes en vue de l'édition française, lutte contre les trusts suspects, subventions, décentralisations, etc. tout ce que suggèrera la volonté durable de briser les revanches ennemies.

² Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Écrits, Entretiens*, 527-28.

La Ligue a été constituée conformément à la loi dans son assemblée du 10 mars 1916. Les statuts ont été élaborés. Sa cotisation de principe est insignifiante (0 fr 25 et 1 franc).

Adhérer, soutenir la Ligue par l'appui du nombre et de la volonté, c'est faire œuvre patriotique et artistique. C'est se compter aussi parmi ceux qui voudront se souvenir.

Les grands syndicats professionnels lui assurent un concours puissant.

Elle fait appel au concours de tous les Musiciens et amis de la Musique qui, dans les limites de leurs moyens et s'inspirant de l'effort sublime de nos frères sous les armes, s'intéressent aux destinées de l'art de chez nous, veulent l'affranchir désormais et faire acte de Français.

La Musique de France aux Français.

Présidents d'honneur: MM. Camille SAINT-SAENS, Théodore DUBOIS, Gustave CHARPENTIER, membres de l'Institut; Vincent d'INDY, Xavier LEROUX, Charles LECOCQ, Paul Meunier, Lucien MILLEVOYE, députés, présidents du groupe parlementaire de l'Art.

Le secrétaire: Jean POUËIGH.

Le Président-fondateur : Charles TENROC.

In English:³

National League for the Defense of French Music

Its Predominance in France – Its Propagation Abroad

In all spheres of activity, the obsession with the triumph of our fatherland imposes upon us the duty of collective action and of unity.

The art of music, whose role is economic and social, must remain sympathetic to the precaution of active solidarity.

The *National League* was created because of this need for action.

It is concerned with chasing, then ferreting out the enemy by all possible means, and preventing the return of his disastrous infiltrations in the future.

If it is out of the question for us and for future generations to repudiate the classical masterworks, which constitute one of the immortal monuments of humanity, it is important to condemn Pan-Germanic *modern* Germany to silence.

Our aim, therefore, is to unite and make common cause in order to pave the way for our future and our liberation, by abandoning the pretty quarrels of various coteries.

First, to discard for a long time the public performance of *contemporary Austro-German works which are not yet in the public domain*, their interpreters,

³ Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 170-71.

conductors, and virtuosi, their Viennese operettas, their cinematographic films which swarn over us, their phonograph records which are more or less a camouflage; let us unmask their maneuvers as well as the pseudonyms of their song writers, who, even now, are deceiving our censorship. Let us watch that the enemy "shall not pass."

Then, in order to safeguard the development of music, let us protect the professional interests of our compatriots; preserve our national heritage without discrimination with regard to style or school; work with all the means available for the predominance of our art in France, for its emergence by publications and public performances; let us create the bases for exchanges with our allies and welcome their art *as generously as possible*.

Our means of action, depending on circumstances, will be multifarious: coalitions, censure, propaganda, intervening with public authorities, reforms of adjudications and of the by laws of our schools, the placing of injunctions, communal action favoring French editions, struggles against suspected trusts, subventions, decentralizations, etc., all these things which inspire our firm will to smash the enemy's return.

The league has been constituted according to the law passed at its meeting on March 10, 1916. Its statutes have been fully worked out. Its assessment in principle is insignificant (25 centimes or 1 franc).

Let us adhere to the League, support it willingly and in large numbers; to do so is a patriotic and artistic act. It also means counting oneself among those who wish to remember.

The large trade associations have assured the League of their influential cooperation.

The League calls for the cooperation of all musicians and friends of music, who, within the limits of their means, inspired by the sublime effort of our brothers in the armed force, are interested in the destiny of our art, wish to set it free from now on and wish to act as Frenchman.

French Music for the French

Honorary President: Messieurs Camille Saint-Saëns, Théodore Dubois, Gustave Charpentier, Vincent d'Indy, Xavier Leroux, and Charles Lecocq; Paul Menier and Lucien Millevoye, deputies, presidents of the Parliamentary Group for art; Jean Poueigh, secretary; Charles Tenroc, president-founder.

APPENDIX C

Letter from Ravel to the Committee of the National League for the Defense of French Music

In French:⁴

Zone des Armées

7/6/16

Messieurs,

Un repos forcé me permet enfin de répondre à l'envoi de la notice et des statuts de la Ligue nationale pour la défense de la musique française, qui me sont parvenus avec beaucoup de retard. Excusez-moi, je vous en prie, si je n'ai pas pu vous écrire plus tôt: mes diverses mutations, mon service aventureux ne m'ont guère laissés de loisirs jusqu'ici.

Excusez-moi aussi de ne pouvoir adhérer à vos statuts. La lecture attentive de ceux-ci et de votre notice me l'interdit.

Bien entendu je ne puis que louer votre « idée fixe du triomphe de la Patrie », qui me poursuit moi-même depuis le début des hostilités. En conséquence, j'approuve pleinement le « besoin d'action » d'où est né la Ligue nationale. Ce « besoin d'action » a été si vif chez moi qu'il m'a fait quitter la vie civile, alors que rien ne m'y obligeait.

Où je ne puis vous suivre, c'est lorsque vous posez en principe que « le rôle de l'Art musical est économique et social ». Je n'avais jamais considéré le rôle de la musique ni les autres arts sous ce jour là.

Je vous abandonne volontiers ces « films cinématographiques », ces disques phonographiques », ces « auteurs de chansons ». Tout cela n'a que des relations lointaines avec l'art musical. Je vous abandonne même ces opérettes viennoises », pourtant plus musicales et d'une facture plus soignée que les produits similaires de chez nous. Cela, comme tout le reste, serait plutôt du domaine « économique ».

Mais je ne crois pas que pour la « sauvegarde de notre patrimoine artistique national » il faille « interdire d'exécuter publiquement en France des œuvres allemandes et autrichiennes contemporaine, non tombées dans le domaine public ».

« S'il ne peut être question de répudier, pour nous et les jeunes générations, le classique qui constitue l'un des monuments immortels de l'humanité », il doit être encore moins question « d'écarter de chez nous, pour longtemps », des œuvres intéressantes, appelées peut-être à constituer à leur tour des monuments, et desquelles, en attendant, nous pouvons tirer un enseignement utile.

Il serait peut-être même dangereux pour les compositeurs français d'ignorer systématiquement les productions de leur confrères étrangers et de former ainsi

⁴ Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Ecrits, Entretiens*, 156-57.

une sorte de coterie nationale : notre art nationale, si riche à l'époque actuelle, ne tarderait pas à dégénérer, à s'enfermer en des formules poncives.

Il m'importe peu que M. Schoenberg, par exemple, soit de nationalité autrichienne. Il n'en est pas moins un musicien de haute valeur, dont les recherches pleines d'intérêts ont eu une influence heureuse sur certains compositeurs alliés, et jusque chez nous. Bien plus, je suis ravi que MM. Bartók, Kodály et leurs disciples soient hongrois, et le manifestent dans leurs œuvres avec tant de saveur.

En Allemagne, à part M. Richard Strauss, nous ne voyons guère que des compositeurs de second ordre, dont il serait facile de trouver l'équivalent sans dépasser nos frontières. Mais il est possible que bientôt de jeunes artistes s'y révèlent, qu'il serait intéressant de connaître ici.

D'autre part, je ne crois pas qu'il soit nécessaire de faire prédominer en France, et de propager à l'étranger toute musique française, quelle qu'en soit la valeur.

Vous voyez, Messieurs, que sur bien des points mon opinion est bien différente de la votre pour ne pas me permettre l'honneur de ne figurer parmi vous.

J'espère néanmoins continuer à faire acte de Français » et à me « compter parmi ceux qui voudront se souvenir ».

Veillez croire, Messieurs, à l'expression de mes sentiments distingués.

Maurice Ravel

In English:⁵

To the committee of the National League for the Defense of the Music

Military Zone
Gentleman,

June 7, 1916

A compulsory rest enables me at last to reply to your letter containing the notice and status of the National League for the Defense of the Music, which reached me with considerable delay. I beg you to excuse me for not having replied sooner, but my various transfer and active duty have left me very little free time until now.

Excuse me, also, for not being able to subscribe to your status: having carefully studied them, and your notice as well. I feel unable to do so.

Of course I have only praise for your "obsession with the triumph of our fatherland," which has haunted me since the outbreak of hostilities. Accordingly, I fully approve of the "need of action" which gave birth to the National League. I felt this need for action so keenly that I gave up a civilian life, although nothing compelled me to do so.

I am unable to agree with you when you assert as a principle that "the role of the art of music is economic and social." I have never considered music, or any of the arts, in that light.

⁵ Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 169-70.

I willingly grant you “cinematographic films,” “phonograph records,” and “song writers.” All of these are only distantly related to the art of music. I would even grant you the “Viennese operettas,” although they are more musical and more polished in workmanship than our own productions. These compositions, like all the rest, would be in the “economic” sphere.

But I do not believe that “in order to safeguard our national artistic inheritance” it would be necessary to “forbid the public performance in France of contemporary German and Austrian works not yet in the public domain.”

“If it is out of the question for us and for future generations to repudiate the classical masterworks, which constitute one of the immortal monuments of humanity,” how much less so should we “discard for a long time” interesting works, which some day may be cited as monuments, and from which we may draw useful lessons in the meantime.

It would be even dangerous for French composers to ignore systematically the productions of their foreign colleagues, and thus from themselves into a sort of national coterie: our musical art, which is so rich at the present time, would soon degenerate, becoming isolated in banal formulas.

It is of little importance to me that Mr. Schoenberg, for example, is of Austrian nationality. This does not prevent him from being an outstanding musician, whose very interesting discoveries have had a beneficial influence on certain allied composers, and even our own. Moreover, I am delighted that Messieurs Barók, Kodály and their disciples are Hungarian, and show it so unmistakably in their music.

In Germany, apart from Mr. Richard Strauss, there appear to be composers of the secondary rank, whose equivalent could be easily be found within France. But it is possible that soon some young artists may soon be discovered, whom we would like to know more about there.

Besides, I do not believe it necessary to have all French music, of whatever value, predominate in France and propagated abroad.

You will observe, Gentleman, that our views are frequently so disparate, that it is impossible for me to join your organization.

I hope nevertheless to continue to “act as a Frenchman,” and to “count myself among those who wish to remember.”

Very truly yours,

Maurice Ravel

APPENDIX D

Ravel : Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis⁶

Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis	Three beautiful birds from paradise
Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis, (Mon ami z-il est à la guerre) Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis Ont passé par ici	Three beautiful birds from paradise, (My beloved is gone to war) Three beautiful birds from paradise Passed by here.
Le premier était plus bleu que le ciel, (Mon ami z-il est à la guerre) Le second était couleur de neige, Le troisième rouge vermillon.	The first was bluer than the sky, (My beloved is gone to war) The second was color od snow, The third was red vermillion.
"Beaux oiselets du Paradis, (Mon ami z-il est à la guerre) Beaux oiselets du Paradis, Qu'apportez par ici ?"	"Beautiful little birds from paradise, (My beloved is gone to war) Beautiful little birds from paradise What are you bringing here"
"J'apporte un regard couleur d'azur, (Ton ami z-il est à la guerre) "Et moi, sur beau front couleur de neige, Un baiser dois mettre, encore plus pur"	"I am bringing an azure-colored glance (Your beloved is gone to war) "And I, on beautiful snow-colored forehead, Must place a kiss even more pure "
"Oiseau vermillon du Paradis, (Mon ami z-il est à la guerre) Oiseau vermillon du Paradis, Que portez-vous ainsi?"	"Vermillion bird form paradise, (My beloved is gone to war) Vermillion bird form paradise, What are you bringing here?"
"Un joli coeur tout cramoisi... (Ton ami z-il est à la guerre)" "Ah! Je sens mon coeur qui froidit... Emportez-le aussi."	"A pretty heart completely crimson (Your beloved is gone to war)" "Ah! I feel my heart freezing... Take it as well."

⁶ Aaron R. Jackson, "Three Chansons and World War I," 50.

APPENDIX E

1916 iconography of Maurice Ravel as a soldier during World War I

b) Two pictures of Ravel as a stretcher-bearer near Verdun



Figure E.1. Ravel as a stretcher-bearer near Verdun.



Figure E.2. Ravel 1916.

b) Three pictures of Ravel on leave at the house of his “marraine de guerre,” 1, rue de Chazelles in Paris⁷



Figure E.3. Ravel 1916 on leave.

¹ Source of the street's name in: Marcel Marnat, *Ravel: Souvenirs de Manuel Rosenthal Recueillis par Marcel Marnat* 98.



Figure E.4. Ravel 1916 on leave.



Figure E.5. Ravel 1916 on leave.

APPENDIX F

Count Géza Zichy (1849–1924)



Figure F.1. Count Geza Zichy (1849–1924).

APPENDIX G

Adolfo Fumagalli (1828–1956)



Figure G.1. Adolpho Fumagalli (1849–1924).

APPENDIX H

Excerpt of Alfred Cortot's Transcription of Ravel *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*⁸

Manuscrit
de la transcription pour deux mains
du Concerto pour la main gauche.
de Ravel, par Alfred Cortot.

- 8 -

⁸ Bernard Gavoty and Henry-Louis La Grange, *Exposition Alfred Cortot (1877-1962)*, 17 mai-21 juin, 1988, (Paris: Bibliothèque musicale Gustav Mahler) 8.

APPENDIX I

Ravel's analysis of his *Concerto pour la Main Gauche* in 1933

In French:⁹

L'Orchestre symphonique de Paris créera, mardi prochain, un concerto de M. Maurice Ravel pour piano et orchestra. Ce concerto d'un genre tout à fait particulier a été conçu pour « main gauche » seulement. Avant de la « conduire » lui-même, mardi, M. Maurice Ravel e bien voulu, des aujourd'hui, présenter son œuvre à nos lecteurs.

La première idée du concerto pour la main gauche, dont je dois diriger l'Orchestre symphonique de Paris la première audition ces jours-ci, date d'un voyage que je fis à Vienne voici trois ans.

Durant mon séjour dans cette ville, séjour occupé d'autre part par les répétitions à l'Opéra de l'Enfant et les sortilèges et par les spectacles de Mme Ida Rubinstein ou je conduisais la Valse et le Boléro, j'eus l'occasion d'entendre le pianiste autrichien Wittgenstein, amputé de la main droite à la suite d'une blessure de guerre, interpréter un concerto de Richard Strauss pour la main gauche seule. Le problème que pose à un compositeur un parti pris de ce genre est assez ardu. Les tentatives faites pour les résoudre demeurent d'ailleurs fort rares, et la plus connue d'entre elles, les *Six Etudes pour la main gauche* de Saint-Saëns, évite, par sa brièveté et son compartimentage, le côté le plus redoutable de la question, qui est d'entretenir l'intérêt dans une oeuvre de longue haleine avec des moyens limités.

Mais la crainte de la difficulté n'est jamais aussi vive que le plaisir de se mesurer avec elle et, si possible, de la vaincre. C'est pourquoi je me suis laissé tenter par la demande que me faisait Wittgenstein de lui écrire un concerto, et j'ai mené ma tâche assez allègrement puisqu'elle était résolue au bout d'un an. Ce qui représente pour moi un délai minimum. A l'inverse du *Concerto de piano* créé l'an dernier par Marguerite Long, et dont l'orchestre symphonique se contentait d'un matériel réduit, celui-ci utilise l'orchestre symphonique au grand complet. Il se divise en deux mouvements enchaînés l'un à l'autre:

Un lent exorde sert d'introduction à l'oeuvre et prépare, par contraste, l'entrée en force d'un premier thème auquel s'opposera ensuite une deuxième idée, expressive et traitée au piano comme les deux mains, une courbe d'accompagnement évoluant autour de la ligne mélodique.

Le deuxième mouvement est un scherzo établi sur deux thèmes, rythmiques l'un et l'autre. Au milieu survient un nouvel élément, sorte de mélodie obstinée, étalée sur un groupe de mesure indéfiniment répétée mais constamment variée dans les harmonies sous-jacentes, et sur laquelle se greffe mille dessins rythmiques

⁹ *Le Journal*, January 14, 1933. Arbie Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel, Lettres, Ecrits, Entretiens*, 328.

de plus en plus serrés. Cette pulsation, croissant en intensité et en fréquence, aboutit, après un rappel du scherzo, déjà une reprise magnifiée de l'idée initiale de l'oeuvre. Et enfin à une longue cadence où, autour du thème de l'exorde, les divers éléments remarquables depuis le début luttent jusqu'à se briser dans une péroraison brutale.

In English:¹⁰

Next Tuesday, the Paris Symphony Orchestra will give the first performance of a Concerto for piano and orchestra by M. Maurice Ravel. This concerto falls into a special category, having been written for the left hand alone. Before conducting it himself next Tuesday, M. Maurice Ravel kindly agreed to introduce his work to our readers.

The initial idea of the Concerto for the left hand, which I will soon conduct with Paris Symphony Orchestra, dates from a trip I made to Vienna three years ago. During the stay in Vienna, which was occupied by rehearsals at the Opera of *L'Enfant et Les Sortilèges* and by Mme Ida Rubinstein's performances in which I conducted *La Valse* and *Le Boléro*, I had the occasion to hear the Austrian pianist Wittgenstein. His right hand had been amputated following a war injury, and he performed a concerto for the left hand alone by Richard Strauss

A severe limitation of this sort poses a rather arduous problem for the composer. The attempts at resolving this problem, moreover, are extremely rare, and the best known among them are the *Six Etudes for the Left Hand* by Saint-Saëns. Because of their brevity and sectionalization, they avoid the most formidable aspect of the problem, which is to maintain interest in a work of extended scope while utilizing such limited means.

The fear of difficulty, however, is never as keen as the pleasure of contending with it, and if possible of overcoming it. That is why I accepted Wittgenstein's request to compose a concerto for him. I carried out my task with enthusiasm, and it was composed in a year, which represents a minimum delay for me.

The work begins with a slow introduction, which stands in contrast to the powerful entrance of the first theme; this theme will later be offset by a second idea, marked "espressivo," which is treated pianistically as though written for two hands, with an accompaniment figure weaving about the melodic line.

The second part is a scherzo based upon two rhythmic themes. A new element suddenly appears in the middle, a sort of ostinato figure extending over several measures which are indefinitely repeated but constantly varied in their

¹⁰ Arbie Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 396.

underlying harmony, and over which innumerable rhythmic patterns are introduced which become increasingly compact. This pulsation increases in intensity and frequency, and following a return of the scherzo, it leads to an expanded reprise of the initial theme of the work and finally to a long cadenza, in which the them of the introduction and the various rhythms noted in the beginning of the concerto contend with one another they are brusquely interrupted by a brutal conclusion.

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VITA

A French speaker and native from Geneva, Switzerland, Aurélien completed his Doctorate in Piano Performance at UMKC Conservatory in 2017. He previously obtained degrees in Music Education, Piano, German and Musicology at Geneva Conservatory, Bern Conservatory and the University of Geneva. He also holds a Masters and Advanced Certificate in Piano Performance from the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville.

As an experienced pedagogue, Aurélien has taught music to children and young adults for over ten years in the U.S. and internationally. As a performer, Aurélien has been an active soloist and collaborator in Europe as well as the U.S. and his love for languages has brought him to work with many singers. He has played for opera productions for the Opera Theater in Fayetteville, AK. His most recent performance in Kansas City featured Debussy's Preludes Book I, a selection of Cage's Prepared Piano Sonatas and Ravel's *Concerto pour la Main Gauche*.

In his desire to transmit and help others through music, Aurélien's interest has brought him to seek knowledge in fields such as biomechanics, human anatomy, somatic education, psychology and coaching. He has been working in the field of injury prevention for pianists and musicians with some of today's leading methods and approaches such as the Lister-Sink method, the Taubman approach and Alan Fraser's approach to technique. Aurélien is also a Consultant of the Tomatis® Method, a technique of sound sensory stimulation that has tremendous success helping children and young adults with developmental delays, psychomotor difficulties, and communication disorders. (Contact: boccardstudio.com)