7 Ballet and the apotheosis of the dance

DEBORAH MAWER

> Ballet is the most lavish and unpractical kind of dancing. Steps are embellished at every point with little angles of the shoulder or head, decorative arm movements, beats and flourishes of the ankles or feet. MACKRELL[1]

> Dance, that is to say stagnation, movement on the spot, the whirling action which, instead of being unleashed on the world, surges back on itself, finds its finality within itself, tramples and turns around. JANKÉLÉVITCH[2]

This chapter serves to point up the significant position of ballet within Ravel's smallish oeuvre, and the idea of dance forms as a way of connecting between music and choreography, focused on movement, phrases (*enchaînements*) and patterning. Additionally, these two arts share an interest in animating space and time; as Mackrell comments, 'Space isn't simply a neutral area where the dance takes place. Like the stillness between movements, it's part of the dance itself', and 'It is rhythm too that allows choreographers to play with Time – to drive it forward, freeze it or make it race.'[3] Although music and choreography exist as autonomous arts, they may still come together for greater collective effect. Despite our main focus on the musical portrayal of dance, ideas from classical ballet and flamenco will influence analytical readings of *Daphnis et Chloé*, *La Valse* and *Boléro* (works whose main embodiment is as ballet rather than as piano music). The first quotation heading this chapter is used to encapsulate Ravel's highly stylised and varied approach to dance (exemplified by *Daphnis*); the second quotation suggests the obsession intrinsic to closed dance forms which leads to Ravel's 'apotheosis of the dance' as a glorified ideal, followed by its destruction in *La Valse* and *Boléro*. (For more on the 'dance-machine' trajectory, see Mawer, Chapter 3.)

Ravel's sizeable ballet repertory, spanning 1909–28, comprises *Ma Mère l'Oye* (Mother Goose), *Daphnis et Chloé*, *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (retitled *Adélaïde, ou Le Langage des fleurs*), *Alborada del gracioso*, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, *La Valse* and *Boléro*.[4] Ballet offered Ravel a multidimensional projection of dance; visual spectacle of exquisite elegance and beauty; a vehicle for fantasy and opportunity for distancing and detachment: 'Ballet not only contrives to display the body in the most pleasing and harmonious arrangements, it also rarely chooses to express raw emotion. Love, cruelty and madness are conveyed through the most decorous of dance metaphors.'[5] Above all, it was Ravel's fascination with

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dance, itself a unifying vehicle for his wide-ranging explorations of classicism and exoticism, that led inexorably to ballet.

Ravel's debt to dance has long been acknowledged. Both Jankélévitch and Jourdan-Morhange noted his extensive enquiries from 'ancient dances' (menuet, pavane and forlane), through 'romantic dances' (waltz) and American dances (foxtrots, 'two-steps' in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*), to Spanish dances (habanera, bolero and malagueña).[6] Jankélévitch presented Ravel's use of dance as a mask that enabled indirect expression and even falsehood in the feigning of indifference, the handling of allegory and contradiction. As an enclosed, often microcosmic, form, dance perhaps matches Ravel's own need for internalisation and self-imposed limitation. His dance is ubiquitous and its connection to physical movement, as choreography, inherent. Supporting the idea of *correspondances* between reality and imagination, Jankélévitch argued (using objective imagery) that 'Dance is the isolating envelope for his dream',[7] while a final image from criticism of the 1920s presented Ravel as Rameau, 'sacrificing above all to the god of the Dance'.[8]

The pre-war context

The impetus for the Ballets Russes (1909–29), founded by Sergey Dyagilev (1872–1929), stemmed from the exposition of new ideas on ballet and aesthetics – superseding those of the aged Marius Petipa – in a publication called *The World of Art*. This magazine was edited jointly by Dyagilev, Alexandre Benois (1870–1960) and Léon Bakst (1866–1924), all of whom later collaborated in projects with Ravel. Around the same time, Mikhail (Michel) Fokin (1880–1942), trained at the Imperial Ballet, gained prominence for his forward-looking views on choreography:

> He believed that ballet should aim for a greater naturalness, just as Noverre had advocated in the eighteenth century, and felt that every ballet should have a style of movement suitable to its theme, country and period. He wanted to reform the long mime interludes and let movement convey the dramatic content and he wished to use the *corps de ballet* as part of the action instead of in its decorative role.[9]

Across 1906–8, Dyagilev capitalised on the West's interest in the East by encouraging artists such as Anna Pavlova (1881–1931), Thamara Karsavina (1885–1976), Bronislava Nijinska (1891–1972), Vaslav Nijinsky (1888–1950) and Fokin to display their talents in Paris. Although the Opéra maintained a modest company, Parisian ballet had lost much of its former popularity and was perceived as jaded and formulaic; thus the French capital was hungry for the originality and technical skill of the

Russian dancers. The astounding success of the opening performance on 18 May 1909 of dances from Borodin's *Prince Igor* and Tcherepnin's *Le Pavillon d'Armide* contributed to a momentum which resulted in Dyagilev's setting up a permanent company in Paris, securing Karsavina as 'prima ballerina' and Nijinsky as 'premier danseur'. Dyagilev's products of 1910 and 1911 – Rimsky-Korsakov's *Shéhérazade*, Stravinsky's *L'Oiseau de feu* (The Firebird) and *Petrushka* – exerted a particularly powerful influence upon Ravel.

Ma Mère l'Oye and *Adélaïde*, Ravel's first completed ballets, provided further experience of artistic collaboration (that for *Daphnis* having begun as early as 1909). The former, with certain additions to (and reorderings of) the piano duet movements, was first performed under Jacques Rouché's directorship at the Théâtre des Arts on 29 January 1912. Gabriel Grovlez conducted, sets and costumes were by Jacques Drésa and choreography by Jeanne Hugard. Highlighting dance, Ravel remarked that 'I wanted everything to be danced as much as possible. Dance is a wonderful art, and I have never been more keenly aware of it than through observing Mme Hugard arrange the choreography.'[10] *Ma Mère l'Oye* presents an attractive childhood fantasy rather than *Daphnis*'s fantasy of another age; additionally, the work enjoys a magically opulent exoticism. 'Laideronnette', especially, with its tolling temple bells, explores the scalic sonorities of Java. *Adélaïde*, discussed further below, was first performed at the Théâtre du Châtelet (like *Daphnis)*, on 22 April 1912 by the troupe of Natasha Trouhanova. Ravel himself conducted the Lamoureux Orchestra, with sets and costumes by Drésa and choreography by Ivan Clustine.

Analytical aside

Before the first analytical reading, a brief aside on musical language and analytical approach seems apt (this also offers something of a summary for Chapters 4–6). Ravel employs a broad modality, as an extension of traditional tonality, which includes ionian (major), lydian, dorian and aeolian ('minor') modes, as well as pentatonic, whole-tone, chromatic and octatonic collections. As Orenstein and Philip Russom have acknowledged,[11] beyond chords with added thirds, pedal-points, appoggiaturas and harmonic substitutions, Ravel viewed his music within structural levels governed by a melodic 'voice-leading' (directed linear motion from one pitch to another) not so dissimilar to that of the music theorist Heinrich Schenker. In one of several short analyses of his own music, Ravel reduces part of *Valses nobles* to suggest larger-scale 'prolongation' (structural continuation of pitches which underlie more superficial embellish-

ments); conflicting accidentals in 'Oiseaux tristes' are not problematic when they operate at different levels (ornamental pitches equate to 'foreground diminution'), while implicit resolutions of appoggiaturas are denoted by parenthetical pitches.[12] As Russom notes, 'Certain basic organizational schemes stand out in our study of the RSCs [Referential Scale Collections] in the horizontal dimension, namely: linear progressions, neighbor motions, arpeggiations and sequences. In Ravel's bass lines, these patterns are arranged so as to direct motion toward a particular bass note which asserts its priority as the tone center.'[13] Ravel's awareness of these ideas will be borne in mind in the readings below, each of which is presented chronologically to aid listening with a score, or study prior to a ballet production or concert performance.

Reading dance in *Daphnis et Chloé*

Following an extended gestation, *Daphnis et Chloé* ('symphonie chorégraphique') was premiered by Dyagilev's Ballets Russes at the Théâtre du Châtelet on 8 June 1912. Pierre Monteux conducted, choreography was by Fokin, with sets and costumes by Bakst. Nijinsky and Karsavina danced the title roles some ten days after, and rather overshadowed by, Nijinsky's erotic premiere of Debussy's *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune*. Indeed, *Daphnis* shared the programme with Debussy's *Prélude*, Rimsky's *Shéhérazade* and Weber's *Le Spectre de la rose*.

Ravel's view of the myth, as told in Longus' Greek 'romance', was coloured by his reading of it through an eighteenth-century French intermediary, Jacques Amyot. His often quoted aim was to paint 'a vast musical fresco, less concerned with archaism than with faithfulness to the Greece of my dreams, which is similar to that imagined and painted by French artists at the end of the eighteenth century'.[14] For Ravel, it was a pastoral idyll of classical purity and innocence, symbolised perhaps by the small Hellenistic figurines around his home at Montfort-l'Amaury. Significantly for a dance-orientated reading, Calvocoressi remarked:

> I also remember that the very first bars of music which Ravel wrote were inspired by the memory of a wonderful leap sideways which Nijinsky (who was to be Daphnis) used to perform in a *pas seul* in *Le Pavillon d'Armide*, a ballet produced by Diaghilev that very season; and that they were intended to provide the opportunity for similar leaps – the pattern characterised by a run and a long pause, which runs through Daphnis' dance.[15]

Artistic fusion through ballet was not, however, without its problems. Ravel was unsupportive of Fokin's striving for a more literal archaism, in

terms of Greek pagan dance with an erotic physicality, so that *Daphnis* might 'recapture, and dynamically express, the form and image of the ancient dancing depicted in red and black on Attic vases'.[16] Equally, the dancers failed to appreciate the 5/4 metre of Ravel's 'Danse générale', though such metric challenges must have soon paled in comparison to those of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre* (1913). Nonetheless, increased synthesis and choreographic sensitivity on Fokin's part were noted by Louis Vuillemin, writing in the *Lanterne* (21 June 1921) on the later Opéra production: 'Gestures and steps, group entrances, general dances, are truly complementary to the symphonic episodes.'

The first feature which strikes the listener to the ballet music, rather than just the suites ('Nocturne', 'Interlude', 'Danse guerrière'; 'Lever du jour', 'Pantomime', 'Danse générale'), is how important dance is as a unifying vehicle; the music is evidently only part of a multi-dimensional creation. Putting aside Pierre Lalo's indictment in *Le Temps* (11 June 1912) that *Daphnis* 'is lacking the first quality of ballet music: rhythm', our reading looks to vindicate Emile Vuillermoz's view (supported by Louis Laloy and others), that 'Maurice Ravel's score is a ballet score' and that his dances 'have a surprising dynamism and an irresistible impetus'.[17] Of the eighteen subsections of the ballet, no fewer than eight are extensive dances, constituting well over half of the performance duration. In exploring the nature and role of dance in *Daphnis*, our main emphases are on melody, rhythm and metre:

> The rhythms and melodies of a score can't strictly be separated from its structure, yet in some dances we're aware of them as unusually compelling elements in the dance [choreography]–music relationship. When rhythm strikes us in this way, it's because the movement isn't just riding along with the counts of the music, but seems to be grappling with it, like some elemental force.[18]

The 'Introduction' (up to Fig. 5) sets the scene dramatically and musically as Ravel's motivic exposition: muted stacked fifths proceeding in slow common time (Jankélévitch's six-note 'frontispiece') suggest a primeval awakening of the past, then complemented by a series of harmonic double-fourth 'objects' on horns. The first melody on flute sets up inevitable association with Pan and, indeed, this is the nymphs' theme (Example 7.1; Fig. 1). Its initial D♯ secures a lasting tritonal relation with the bass on A which may support a lydian or whole-tone inflection; equally prevalent are descending melodic fourths. Affinity between the horns' material and that of the wordless chorus, which now accompanies with reiterated double-fourths, constitutes one of several instances of ambiguity, substitution and equivalence in *Daphnis*, convincingly explored by Danielle Cohen-Lévinas in association with Symbolist *correspondances* or synaes-

Example 7.1 *Daphnis et Chloé*, 'Introduction': flute theme (Fig. 1, bars 1–4)

Example 7.2 *Daphnis et Chloé*, 'Danse religieuse' (Fig. 5, bars 1–5)

thesia.[19] A solo horn response to the flute statement presents the love-theme of Daphnis and Chloé, objectified by the fifth interval (see Example 3.1: Chapter 3). Complementary fourth/fifth objects (*x* and *y*) act in almost all the thematic material, appearing in descent or ascent (*x* or *x'*), as prefix or suffix, singly or in combination, and in simple or decorated forms (see Examples 7.1 and 7.2, and later Examples 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5). The large-scale bass of the 'Introduction' comprises an octave descent from the modal 'final' on A, whose 'unfolding presents a complete whole-tone referential scale collection'.[20]

Dances in *Daphnis* loosely exemplify four types, or tendencies, which are not mutually exclusive and may be used in combination: ritual, high-speed, character-portraying and exotic dances. (On 'exotic dance', see also Russ, '*Shéhérazade*': Chapter 6.) Dance firstly expresses a deep-rooted pagan spirituality in the mysterious 'Danse religieuse' ('Modéré': Figs. 5–15), shown in Example 7.2, suggesting an extended lineage from some legendary primordium. Such ritual dance (type 1) may offer a means of exchange between everyday and heightened spiritual existence – between mortality and immortality; reality and unreality. This is dance to propitiate the nymphs as pagan deities, with a later incarnation in Stravinsky's *Le Sacre*: 'In Spring, at the edge of a sacred wood, young men and girls come to make offerings to the altar of the Nymphs.'[21] There is greater momentum now with fluid triplet contours, initially subdued, that repeatedly build to a tutti climax; a lydian melodic inflection is maintained, together with some pentatonicism. The *corps de ballet* function here to reflect and comment upon the main action as would a Greek chorus, though André Levinson found the massed, ritualised effect problematic: 'These dancing Hellenes, barefoot or in sandals, throwing their knees up high, sauntering

Example 7.3 Melodic/motivic comparison
(a) *Daphnis et Chloé* (Fig. 29, bars 4–7)
(b) *La Valse* (Fig. 5, bars 1–4)

around in pairs or forming sculptural groups and processions in simulation of ritual mime, are intolerable, like any vulgarisation of great art and almost inscrutable sacred objects.'[22]

An initial 'Danse générale' ('Vif': Figs. 17–29) brings together the *corps de ballet* and soloists, and is later transformed for the finale. This is high-velocity dance (type 2) which celebrates the excitement of speed and may progress to 'risk', mechanisation and potential cataclysm. Metre is articulated and characterful: 7/4 subdivided as 3 + 4 (as in the finale of Stravinsky's *L'Oiseau de feu*); texture is now more differentiated between smooth and staccato qualities. From an introductory portion (focused on D♭), the dance develops (on G♭) and leads to its presentation proper (back on D♭); its intervallic hallmark is again the falling fourth. Another brief scene ('Moins vite': Figs. 29–32) introduces on solo violin the legato waltz-theme associated with Chloé (Example 7.3a), and surely a catalyst for *La Valse* (Example 7.3b): the intervallic similarities and (partial) inversional relationship are striking. The diminished fifth (*z*) suggests tension, conveying an unfulfilled yearning within a chromatic voice-leading descent of 'sighs': C–C♭–B♭–A.

Dance is also used for musical and dramatic character portrayal, as an operatic aria without words; thus it has a role in acting and semblance. Circumscribed forms facilitate clear characterisation. Chloé (a shepherd-ess), Daphnis (a shepherd) and Dorcon (a goatherd) each feature in their own 'character dance' (type 3), using the second balletic sense of the term: 'Dancing based on the classical steps performed primarily to define an individual'.[23]

A brief 'Danse grotesque de Dorcon'('Très modéré': Figs. 32–41) assumes a heavily accented 2/4 metre, with crude octave reiteration in the

Example 7.4 *Daphnis et Chloé*, 'Danse légère et gracieuse de Daphnis' (Fig. 43, bars 1–3)

Example 7.5 *Daphnis et Chloé*, 'Lyceion danse' (Fig. 57, bars 1–3)

bass on E and humorous melodic characterisation by three bassoons, so presenting the unlikely suitor as a clumsy laughing-stock. By contrast, the 'Danse légère et gracieuse de Daphnis' ('Assez lent': Figs. 43–51), shown in Example 7.4, is founded on the 6/8 metre of the barcarolle, with pitch-structure also much more sophisticated. The ternary design articulates a progression from a centricity on F to one on F♯, featuring octatonic modality (Figs. 47–8), and back again. Nijinsky's 'sideways leap' is conveyed by arpeggiated pizzicato interjections between the lilting flute phrases. Beyond the fourth/fifth hallmark (*x* and *y*), this dance explores issues of time and space amid imaginative timbral effects. Cohen-Lévinas notes a confounding of expectation when the second-beat resolution of the intial rhythmic stressing is delayed by the pause 'in mid-air'.[24]

And so the heroic, would-be lover, Daphnis secures his kiss from Chloé (Figs. 51–3), while the disgusted Dorcon appropriates and sullies Chloé's waltz-theme within his own 2/4 metre – a pathetic likeness. After a re-hearing of the love-theme (Figs. 53–4), Daphnis falls into an ecstatic dream-like state which again suggests *correspondances* (and possible Freudian association). In the ensuing episode with his temptress, Lyce[n]ion ('Très modéré': Figs. 57–60), whose music is quoted in Example 7.5, dance offers a vehicle through which to legitimise the erotic, often via the exotic (types 4 and 3 combined). Again, one theme masquerades as another in deceptive semblance: the far-reaching variant of the love-theme on solo horn suggests unavoidable connection between love and lust (cf. Examples 3.1 and 7.5). Lyceion also assumes the 6/8 metre (and flute) of the slumbering Daphnis in her refined dance whose modality blends G minor and B♭ major, spiced by

pentatonicism and chromaticism. As Cohen-Lévinas says of *Daphnis* as a whole: 'The work no longer offers a definitive face, but rather its likeness.'[25]

Following Chloé's abduction by pirates (Figs. 61–70), a transitional 'Nocturne' ('Modéré': Figs. 70–4) sees the statues of the nymphs – flute, horn and clarinet – come to life, mirrored by harmonic subterfuge which combines G♯ (minor) and D⁷, then E (minor) and B♭⁷, in *Petrushka*-like fashion with a similar underpinning octatonicism. The 'Danse lente et mystérieuse des nymphes' (Figs. 74–83), heralded by the wind machine, balances the early 'Danse religieuse'. In empathy with Daphnis, the nymphs also adopt a 6/8 metre whose rhythmic identity is intricate and fluid. Beyond the fixed falling fourths, pitch-structure too is flexible, with semitonal activity and trills, though broadly contained within a D♭ lydian mode. Dance here affords Daphnis spiritual solace in his sorrow. Stravinskian harmonics cue a mystic episode where the nymphs lead Daphnis (in re-awakened reality) to invoke the assistance of Pan (as supernatural unreality), whose form emerges from an immense stone (Figs. 78–82). An 'Interlude' (Figs. 83–8), set for unaccompanied SATB choir, offers a poignant extemporisation on Chloé's theme with the bass-line initially assuming an unworldly whole-tone identity.

Beyond introductory fanfares and chromatic flourishes, Part II consists almost entirely of dance. The fine 'Danse guerrière' *à la* Borodin ('Animé et très rude': Figs. 92–104) expresses the primitive celebrations of the plundering pirates in Dorcon's vulgar 2/4 metre. This savage, energetic dance (type 2) minimises melody with a percussive tritonal bass pounding beneath continual semitonal figuration. Within the overall modality of *Daphnis*, the centre on B here acquires the status of an alternative dominant. Back in a modality of A lydian, the central section (Figs. 104–22) features the piccolo's exotic melody with its augmented second and tritone: the alluring but dangerous 'diabolus in musica'. This exotic/erotic dance (type 4), bearing some resemblance to Stravinsky's 'Dance of the Firebird', suggests the promiscuity of the pirates who want to rape Chloé.[26]

Direct juxtaposition highlights the heroine's anguished response in the 'Danse suppliante de Chloé' (Figs. 131–3; 133–9), with its unusual fluctuating tempo. Additionally, the intervals of her theme are expanded for emotional heightening and expressed in the remote context of G♯ minor (five sharps, as used by the nymphs), later balanced by five flats (Fig. 136). Falling fourths abound in the cor anglais motif which suggests Chloé's thinking of Daphnis (Figs. 133, 139). This dance denotes the centre of the work as classical ballet, in terms of its focus upon the prima ballerina.[27] Mysterious and awesome sonorities, foregrounding the tritone C–G♭/F♯, then mark Pan's entry as the *deus ex machina* who rescues

Chloé from her tormentors (Figs. 144–53). The enharmonic changes suggest musical masquerading (*trompe-l'oreille*) between opposed states.

Part III begins with the famous 'Lever du jour' (Figs. 155–70), founded on D major (subdominant) with a prominent added sixth, and also featuring melodic pentatonicism. This dawning symbolises the lovers' reunion; musically, it involves the gradual restoration and intensification of the love-theme. The ensuing 'Pantomime' (Figs. 172–87), based on F♯, was an important convention of classical ballet, though generally anachronistic by the time of Fokin's reforms.[28] In thanksgiving, Daphnis and Chloé mime the story of Pan's intense, unrequited love for Syrinx, and so finally they dance together, though only briefly under assumed roles as yet another quasi-Symbolist 'equivalence'. As Larner points out, 'Most extraordinary of all, Daphnis and Chloé are denied the amorous *pas de deux* which any choreographer and any other composer would have considered basic to the whole enterprise.'[29] Nonetheless, Chloé does finally fall into Daphnis's arms, at which point the love-theme reappears, suggesting at least a symbolic consummation at the emotional peak of the work (Figs. 187–92) which concludes on the powerful supertonic, B major.

Finally, the 'Danse générale' (Fig. 194ff.; type 2) in 5/4 metre, on a restored if chromatically obscured final of A, leads seamlessly into the irrepressible Bacchanalian celebrations – Fokin's choreographic 'whirlpool' – whose compositional demands took Ravel over a year to resolve. Although Ravel made no secret of Rimsky's influence (as at Fig. 196), 'This last episode – which is twice as long as in the 1910 version and immeasurably more dangerous in its use of a pagan five-in-a-bar metre rather than a civilised three-in-a-bar – remains one of the most exciting passages in the choral and orchestral repertoire.'[30] Descending fourths persist, reinforced as double-fourth objects on E♭ clarinet, then paralleled by trumpet, lastly writ large by woodwind tutti (Figs. 200–2). Beyond restating the main materials, this dance dissolves melody into waves of chromaticism so as to focus on the sheer rhythmic drive and ultimate breakdown of repeated formulae, as a development from 'Feria' (*Rapsodie espagnole*). Metric diminution compounds the effect, reducing from 5/4 to 3/4 and ultimately to 2/4.

The stature of this work is beyond doubt. Rollo Myers expresses a consensus when he states that 'The score of *Daphnis* is one of the richest in the whole repertoire of ballet and shows clearly the influence of the Russian Ballet aesthetic with which the whole of civilized Europe was permeated in those years before the first world war.'[31] More particularly, *Daphnis* comprises an astonishing collection of dances: Ravel's 'composite portrait'. Dance is employed imaginatively for various purposes (divided above into four main types), but therefore does not have the single-minded, devastating intensity of the post-war dances.

The post-war context

The First World War, the death of his mother and poor health clearly impact on the post-war ballets. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, with its dual homage to friends killed in the War and to a broader eighteenth-century French past, received its staged premiere with the newly inaugurated Ballets Suédois on 8 November 1920. Désiré-Emile Inghelbrecht conducted, Jean Börlin created the coquettish choreography and Pierre Laprade designed the sets and costumes: 'This delicate and charming evocation of the eighteenth century was something of a light relief for Rolf de Maré's aggressively avant-garde company.'[32] Discussion of *Le Tombeau* has typically promoted its objective basis to the extent of viewing the dances as receptacles: 'It was unremarkable that he [Ravel] should have taken readily to the disguise of Neoclassicism in *Le Tombeau de Couperin* for piano or orchestra (1917–19), where the forms of a French Baroque suite are made to hold self-contained ideas of characteristic finesse.'[33]

Although *Adélaïde* (*Valses nobles*) is a pre-war work, its relevance here is within a trajectory of essays on the waltz which extends from *Gaspard de la nuit*, through *Ma Mère l'Oye*, moments of *L'Heure espagnole* and *Daphnis*, to its culmination in *La Valse*. From a celebration of Schubert's own *Valses nobles*, Ravel proceeds to the ultimate rethinking of waltzes of the Strauss family. Both works delight in nostalgia, with James Harding highlighting in *Valses nobles* 'the tangy harmonies and unexpected accidentals which flavour the nostalgia generated in these wonderfully expressive dance movements'.[34] On the larger trajectory, the creation and destruction of dance, which directs this whole chapter, it is worth recalling Constant Lambert's assertion that 'There is a definite limit to the length of time a composer can go on writing in one dance rhythm (this limit is obviously reached by Ravel towards the end of *La Valse* and towards the beginning of *Bolero*).'[35]

Duality in *La Valse, poème chorégraphique*

'I conceived of this work as a sort of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz, mingled with, in my mind, the impression of a fantastic, fatal whirling . . . Although essentially intended to be danced, it has only been staged until now in the Antwerp theater and at Madame Rubinstein's ballet performances.'[36] Ravel's apotheosis elevates Viennese dance-band music to the status of orchestral high-art music and amateur dancing couples to professional ballet-dancers. Most importantly, he elevates musical materials to their breaking-point. This apotheosis leads to 'a dancing, whirling, almost

hallucinatory ecstasy',[37] and consequent ideas of dream and memory. Given the fundamental choreographic basis, it would be perverse not to consider *La Valse* in its full balletic embodiment, especially since the music's implicit concern with succession and simultaneity still owes much to Cubist views on visual representation. Ravel's own scenario prefaces the score: 'Through breaks in the swirling clouds, waltzing couples may be glimpsed. Little by little they disperse: one makes out (A) an immense hall filled with a whirling crowd. The stage is illuminated gradually. The light of the chandeliers peaks at the *fortissimo* (B). An Imperial Court, about 1855.'

Although intended for the Ballets Russes, Dyagilev's deprecating response to the score caused the final rift between the two artists: 'Ravel, it is a masterpiece . . . but it is not a ballet . . . It is the portrait of a ballet . . . the painting of a ballet.'[38] *La Valse* received its orchestral premiere on 12 December 1920, with the Lamoureux Orchestra under Camille Chevillard (and symphonically has never looked back), but had to wait until 23 May 1929 for the Opéra production by Ida Rubinstein (1885–1960), with choreography by Nijinska and sets and costumes by Benois. The main conductor of the programme was Gustave Cloez, but press reviews such as from *Le Figaro* (25 May 1929) suggest that Ravel may have directed his own work. Unfortunately, Rubinstein and Nijinska seriously compromised Ravel's scenario in favour of an idiosyncratic, light-weight interpretation: 'We are, on the bank of the Danube, in a marble swimming pool surrounded by high, massive columns' where 'Mme Ida Rubinstein, in a silver corset and a cap with flaxen plumes, appears as a kind of water goddess of the Waltz'![39]

The characterising slant for this reading is that of duality: the existence of two levels, balancing states or planes, within various dimensions. One perspective, building on Ravel's scenario, views the work's moving in and out of focus as quasi-Symbolist *correspondances* between present and imagined past, reality and a fantastical dream-world. Musically, duality shows itself successively by the large-scale structural division close to that of Golden Section (Fig. 54), as noted by George Benjamin; harmonically, 'The narrative trajectory of *La Valse* is above all realised through a harmonic language in which the opposing forces of civilised order and destructive disorder are characterised by a range of interconnected techniques.'[40] *La Valse* offers an explosive forum for diatonicism versus chromaticism, chordal juxtaposition, bitonality and enharmonic change. Metric/rhythmic interaction thrives on hemiola, essentially 2/4 groupings within 3/4. Early thematic searchings and some later developments, which balance antecedent (ascent–descent) and consequent (descent–ascent), are characterised by two main intervals: the tritone (z) – intrinsic to the V^7–I duality of the waltz – and the ubiquitous perfect fourth/fifth (x/y).

Example 7.6 *La Valse*: melodic searching (Figs. 1–2)

Furthermore, the emerging theme (as at Fig. 5) has a former, partly inverted, existence in *Daphnis*, and its various transformations receive binary-type constructive treatment (especially Fig. 18ff.).

Musical duality may be mirrored by staging and choreography. Cyril Beaumont remarked on Nijinska's revised production of 22 June 1931: 'The curtain rises on a scene which suggests a painting by Eugène Lami, a crimson and gold ballroom lined with enormous mirrors and lit with groups of candelabra. At the far end folding doors give onto a second ballroom.' In this way, two spaces are positioned as foreground (immediacy) and background (remoteness), connected by doors that enable or deny access. In addition to the main couple, 'She' and 'He' first danced by Rubinstein and Anatole Vilzak, Beaumont alluded to a choreographic duality: 'At another stage dancers are seen in the distant room, and a very interesting form of choreographic counterpoint is provided by the dancers in the second room moving quickly in a chain, while those in the foreground slowly revolve to the languorous strains of the waltz; later the rhythms are reversed.'[41] So, in *La Valse* we find a complex of dualities in musical and choreographic domains, whose paired entities may exist in neutral balance (as likeness), in interlocked conflict (as opposition), or harmonised in at least partial synthesis.

The opening evokes an unformed primordium: Benjamin's 'birth' process. Divided, muted double basses oscillate between E–A♭ and E–F and provide pizzicato pulses: 'a heartbeat evolves, intimating perhaps that the origins of the waltz are atavistic and physiological, not merely cultural'.[42] Association with creation in Stravinsky's *Le Sacre* is ensured by the use of bassoons for the melodic searching. Essentially this introductory portion is focused on the dominant-of-the-dominant (i.e. chord V of A), but Ravel likes obscuring matters through enharmonic 'otherness' and modal flexibility, as with A♭ (i.e. G♯) and F (the phrygian upper neighbour-note of E). The bassoons present two significant intervallic objects (Example 7.6; Figs. 1–2): the tritone z', A♭(G♯)–D (suggesting E[7]), balanced and partly resolved by the perfect fourth x', A♭–D♭ (preceded by a descending sixth). Ironically, this 'resolution' is part of another seventh chord with embedded tritone: F, A♭(G♯), C♭(B), D♭(C♯); basically a semitonal contraction of the outer voices of an E[7] sonority (i.e. E–F and D–C♯).

Example 7.7 *La Valse*: main theme (Fig. 9, bars 4–11)
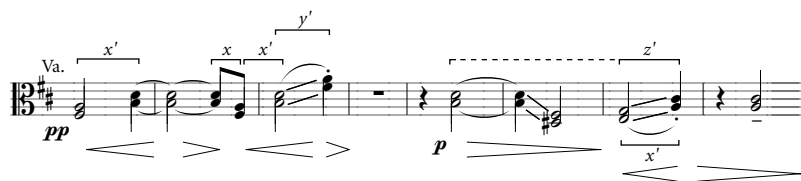
Mysterious building from rhythmic/melodic fragments continues (Figs. 3–4) aptly viewed by Benjamin as 'cinematically edited glimpses of future themes'. Increased focus comes with the violas' melancholic phrase: that close relative of Chloé's waltz-theme in *Daphnis*, featuring an upper pedal underpinned by a chromatic voice-leading ascent: A–A♯–B (see again Example 7.3b; Fig. 5). Harmonic support is offered by the first bass descent to D, as the final of a flexible modality which favours the flattened seventh.

An expectant trill on G♯ (large-scale lydian raised fourth) leads via the dominant to an overt D major and Ravel's letter A of the scenario (Fig. 9): 'one makes out an immense hall filled with a whirling crowd'. Vision clarifies and with it perhaps a sense of the real beginning. The waltz is formed, its theme on violas now features the reinflected perfect fourth (x'/x), with regular phrasing supported by secure harmony (Example 7.7; Fig. 9^{+4}). A process of musical intensification begins (Figs. 13–17) as 'The stage is illuminated gradually.' Violins assume the melody with new timbral warmth and impetus through hemiola, mutes are removed, texture enriched and dynamic increased. The intensity and rhythmic vivacity at the first climax (Fig. 17; letter B) – 'The light of the chandeliers peaks at the *fortissimo*' – has the immediacy of the present although this is just affectionate nostalgia masquerading as memory of 1855. Nonetheless, as false, imagined memory it is doubtless more powerful; as Stravinsky mused: 'I wonder if memory is true, and I know that it cannot be, but that one lives by memory nevertheless and not by truth.'[43]

Inevitably, the image soon fades with the next episode (Figs. 18–46), marked by thinner texture and reduced instrumentation, though still founded on D. This is Benjamin's 'suite of waltzes', though all material is closely related and ultimately derives from the two intervallic hallmarks, used as prefix, suffix and in decorated forms. The oboe melody here (Fig. 18) assumes greater importance later as a destructive agent in the corresponding recapitulatory reading, while the repeated bass formula (E♭–A–D–A–C♯–A) resembles Chloé's theme in *Daphnis*, mirroring the violas' material. Distance is increased by sequential modulatory treatment (Figs. 22–6), leading to an abundance of possible Straussian rhythmic allusions within a chromaticised B♭ modality (Figs. 26–9). Indeed, the

elder Strauss's *Radetzky March* Op. 228 appeared in 1848 and the younger's *Tales from the Vienna Woods* Op. 325 in 1868, but to force closer association would be foolhardy and largely pointless. Ravel is after all much more interested in the fake than the real. More consequentially, since flats later acquire significance (beyond Fig. 54), it is worth highlighting a remote Neapolitan inflection on E♭ (Figs. 30–4). Other dualities include bitonality (Fig. 36) and the use of D minor as tonic 'otherness' (Figs. 39, 44). It is hard, incidentally, to ignore a motivic similarity to the Scherzo of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, especially when presented on A (Figs. 38–9). A further episodic section (Figs. 46–50) represents the remotest region, with mysterious nocturnal qualities. This music is intricate, kaleidoscopic and fluid in its exploration of the flat key areas of B♭ and D♭ major. Dominant preparation, with trills above a tritonal bass, then builds to a *fortissimo* and signals the reprise (Figs. 50–4).

The primordial return (Fig. 54) denotes the start of the second crescendo and Benjamin's 'decay'. Whereas the first segment (exposition and central episode) maintained convention and might have predated the War, the second segment (reprise) explodes that convention and is emphatically post-war. This segment rewrites its earlier history and so creates a large-scale antagonistic duality. Initially, there is clear correspondence, albeit telescoped and with interpolated reference to the central episode. The first significant slippage (using a technique implicit as early as Figs. 1–2) is a literal pulling-down of the viola pitches from A to A♭ (cf. Figs. 57 and 5), while enharmonic change on E♭/D♯ offers a new deceptive duality (Figs. 58–9: $\hat{2}$ of D♭; $\sharp\hat{4}$ of A). Deviation continues in an increasingly dissonant harmonic climate. The Beethovenian figure returns (Figs. 63–6) with intensified internal struggle, after which tension is briefly dissipated in the Neapolitan section (Figs. 66–8). A modulatory passage then leads to the subdominant for a *fortissimo* climax (Fig. 73), punctuated by bass drum and cymbal roll.

The return of the tonic and sense of rebuilding from primitive principles suggest, albeit prematurely, a coda (Fig. 76). Two chromatic bass ascents coupled by greater harmonic change and quickening tempo soon diminish the tonic's status (Figs. 78–80, 82–5) and are mediated by a pedal-point on A♭, again semitonally 'one out' (Figs. 80–2). The climactic moment (Fig. 85) offers the most expansive, ecstatic treatment – a Lisztian transformation – of a previously subdued idea (Fig. 46), supported by bass drum, tam-tam and string glissandos. Its D minor key signature is belied by an increasing tritonal emphasis, with diminshed seventh constructs in the bass (Figs. 86–8). String passage-work derived from the upbeat to Fig. 19 brings a new urgency (Figs. 87, 89 and 91–3), while tritonal relations are intensified by the conflicting bass and treble: A♭–D versus F♯–C (Figs. 88, 90 and 93).

Marked by a striking chromatic divergence, the mechanism begins to stutter and go awry (Figs. 93–4). The bass is locked into mechanical cadential formulae (in D), antagonised by chromatic disruption in the brass and a skewing towards G in woodwind and strings. Melodic figurations are truncated, distorted and endlessly repeated, like a needle stuck at the end of a gramophone record (Figs. 94–8). The only exception is a slow-motion 'flashback' to the theme which began the central episode (cf. Fig. 97^{-2} and Fig. 18). Melody, increasingly formless again, reduces to chromatic ascent–descent and rhythmic gesture (Fig. 98: Benjamin's coda); grotesque touches include the bestial 'snorting' of the brass. Another enharmonic duality presents on B♭/A♯ (Figs. 98–9), with the sharpened fifth sustained until the last three bars, so balancing the earlier preoccupation with the flattened dominant. In its death throes, the brief 'rattle' of the penultimate bar destroys the final rhythmic vestige of the waltz's identity (a detail reserved only for the full score). Ravel's alternative, cataclysmic, reading is now complete.

Machine and flamenco in *Boléro*

'It constitutes an experiment in a very special and limited direction . . . There are no contrasts, and there is practically no invention except the plan and the manner of the execution. The themes are altogether impersonal – folk tunes of the usual Spanish Arabian kind.'[44] So Ravel explained the predetermined mechanical structure in the spirit of his father's experiments, with the Spanish Arabian reference implying the likely relevance of flamenco. *Boléro* was premiered by Rubinstein's troupe at the Opéra on 22 November 1928; Walther Straram conducted, choreography was by Nijinska, with sets and costumes by Benois. The first concert performance was on 11 January 1930, with Ravel conducting the Lamoureux Orchestra.

Ironically, despite Ravel's down-playing of *Boléro*, this work has engendered more discussion than any other; even Ravel's life has been characterised by *Boléro*.[45] Approaches range from Lévi-Strauss's early linguistic/semiotic reading, through a perceptual study of listeners' responses to repetition measured on semantic scales (for example, 'open–suppressed', 'fantastic–realistic'), to one which represents Ravel's most rigorously constructed object by means of a computer model.[46] *Boléro* inspired twenty-five recordings in the 1930s alone, including those by Ravel and Toscanini (see Woodley, 'Recordings of *Boléro*': Chapter 10); it has been associated with film (1934, 1941) and ice-dance (1984). Additionally, it has spawned many transcriptions.

An agenda concerned with the machine and flamenco – extreme objectivity coupled by cultural 'otherness' – is directed by movement and the tension of opposites, especially fixed elements versus free. Essentially, we might see the music as machinist, with imagery derived from Ravel's writings (whistles, sirens, 'traveling belts', hammers, files, and saws; see 'Ravel's writings on machines': Chapter 3), and the choreography as flamenco-inspired. Rubinstein's concept centred on 'a flamenco dancer exciting the admiration and lust of drinkers as she works herself into a frenzy on a table top'.[47] But there is more subtle interaction: 'Mme Rubinstein understood that the strength of the score was such that the dance must appear as a kind of projection on the visual plan of this radiant music.'[48] Equally, flamenco is relevant to the treatment of melody and ostinato accompaniment.

Boléro was originally entitled 'fandango': 'A Castilian and Andalusian courtship dance in triple time and moderately fast tempo; less frequently, a slow, plaintive sung melody belonging to the class of *cante flamenco* (gypsy song).'[49] Closely related, the bolero represents a more reserved version. Despite Ravel's suppposed distance from the traditional dance, he adopts the moderate tempo, triplets (which connect with the polonaise) and a modified AAB formula (AABB). Moreover, 'The entry of the voice is preceded by at least one bar of sharply marked rhythm, and short instrumental interludes separate the sung couplets.'[50] Flamenco also synthesises song, dance (*baile*) and guitar music (*toque*), and emanates from the gypsy/Moorish heritage of Andalusia. It is characterised by phrygian modality, ornamentation and polyrhythm, using hand-clapping (*palmas*), heel-stamping (*taconeo*) and finger-snapping (*pitos*); nasal vocal timbre (*rajo*) is much prized, while guitar styles include strumming (*rasgueado*), passage-work (*paseo*) and interludes (*falsetas*).[51]

Boléro is not strictly a crescendo but a series of terraced steps from *pp* to *ff*; similarly, the piece is not concerned with organic growth but with the phased depression of a lever, stopping only at inevitable mechanical failure. Its basic plan comprises two related, repeated melodic materials (AABB), of thirty-four bars' duration. Ravel himself perceived 'an analogy between the alternation of these two themes riveted one to the other and the links of a chain or a factory assembly-line [chaîne]'.[52] The AABB formula is heard four times (up to Fig. 15); internal repetitions are then removed for doubled momentum (Figs. 16–18) which prompts the final switch to E 'major' and the imminent breaking-point.

In Debussy's 'Ibéria', Derrick Puffett noted that 'Against a guitar-like, strumming background (prominent strings and harps), a solo viola, doubled by first oboe, spins out a long, improvisatory line which turns back upon itself again and again before alighting on its modal centre or

Example 7.8 *Boléro*: ostinato basis (opening)

Tempo di Bolero moderato assai

Example 7.9 *Boléro*: melodic basis
(a) Material A, first part (bars 5–12)

(b) Material B, first part (Fig. 2, bars 3–10)

"final", F♯.'[53] *Boléro* shares this combination of a meandering melody (material A/B) and a reiterated guitar-like background: Ravel's 'ostinato machine'. The main layered elements, shown in Example 7.8, are the pulsing (basso) ostinato 1 of interlocking cogs (elaborated by promiscuous seconds on harp: beats 2 and 3 from Fig. 2) and the triplet ostinato 2 (side [snare] drum doubled by flute from Fig. 1). The repeating melodic material A/B, shown in Example 7.9, comprises ostinato 3. Ostinatos 1 and 2 span just two bars, repeated obsessively in circular motion; the unerring intonings of single pitches resemble morse-code patterings. This aspect quickly acquires a monotony (Ravel's 'drudgery'?), so that only 'ennui' temporarily relieves what would otherwise be intolerable

tensions. Beyond the machine, complex counter-rhythms and cross-accentuations occur in flamenco dance, while triplets are prominent in guitar technique.[54]

Melodic material A is confined within C, with which pitch the theme has an incantatory preoccupation (reinforced by lower and upper neighbour-notes, B and D), suggesting a ritualistic dimension (Example 7.9a). Intervals expand from the seconds of stepwise motion, through thirds to the perfect fourth; in particular a small intervallic object (*a/a′*), the minor third, initially $\hat{6}$–$\hat{1}(\hat{8})$, evokes the exotic and antique. Overall, the shape is an octave descent, C–C, with the first part concluding on an imperfect close, approached via the supertonic, D. The second part develops the modal interest in the supertonic and presents another voice-leading descent to C; in flamenco, too, a characteristic cadential formula comprises a strong descent (from A minor, through G and F majors ($\flat\hat{2}$), to E major).[55] As yet, the flamenco singer/dancer seems unable to characterise the material sufficiently; the flamenco perspective is compromised by the emotionally devoid machinist one. Alternatively, this could be merely an act of suppression – a musico-sexual smouldering – which certainly has a role in flamenco, as in the tango. Picture the Vienna Opera House production where, 'with an almost demonic indifference, Ida Rubinstein rotated without halting, in this stereotyped rhythm, on an immense round tavern table, whilst at her feet the men, expressing an unleashed passion, beat themselves until the blood came . . . '[56]

Material B (Example 7.9b: first part) focuses increasingly on the phrygian collection: C, B♭, A♭, G, F, E♭, D♭, C, as an intervallic mirror-image of material A: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. The reinflection of D as D♭ (and B as B♭) increases harmonic tension with the bass; as Puffett observed in 'Ibéria', 'the flamenco melody itself is constantly enriched by its associations with the prevailing harmony.' Exhibiting 'a curious refusal on the flamenco's part to commit itself as to mode',[57] this material is much more pitch-inclusive and fluid in its inflections: E/E♭; A/A♭. The raised mediant, E, offers an alternative imperfect close, often tritonally associated with B♭, and sometimes founding a diminshed seventh construct: E–G–B♭–D♭ (comprising further minor-third objects). Ornamentation is increasingly foregrounded, with triplets, accentuations and stressings in the bassoon and E♭ clarinet renditions (Figs. 2–4).

By the second mechanical cycle of AABB (Fig. 4), the continually enlarging pizzicato patterns of ostinato 1 begin to resemble the strumming formulae (*rasgueado*) and accentuations of flamenco guitar. A six-stave presentation, including a superimposed quaver articulation, leads to proliferation across eight staves (Figs. 6–7) and the threat of all-consuming

Example 7.10 *Boléro*: material A, polytonal travelling belts (Fig. 8, bars 3–6)

mechanisation. Material A seeks the *rajo* timbre of the oboe d'amore (Fig. 4) although the actual sonority disappointed Ravel, while the trumpet/flute coupling first suggests parallel travelling belts and melodic mechanisation (Fig. 5). Conversely, material B maximises ornamentation as expressive characterisation: acciaccaturas, portamentos and blue pitches played by three different saxophones (Figs. 6 and 7; later by trombone, Fig. 10). Tension develops between this increasingly 'humanised' melody and its hyper-restrictive tonic–dominant accompaniment: such modal/tonal disparity is ultimately untenable.

By the third hearing, ostinato 1 has enveloped nine staves, the bass increasingly suggestive of a punctuating hammer (Fig. 8). The travelling belt complex of material A now presents polytonally on C, G and E majors, attesting to the continuing fascination with simultaneity: the grating simultaneity of factory life (Example 7.10). A subsequent bitonal presentation, organum-like on C and G (alternatively, a composite mode with lydian tendency: C, D, E, F/F♯, G, A, B, C), receives five-fold amplification in the woodwind (Fig. 9); the side drum of ostinato 2, now more dynamically evident, has the dry precision of castanets, while ostinato 1 assumes thirteen staves with fully-notated strumming effects. The *forte* dynamic marks a nine-fold proliferation of material B (Fig. 11), starting on pitches B♭, E and G, as the intermeshed cogs of a large mechanism. This material could also be seen as localised B♭ lydian although the bass-pedal on C confirms B♭ as the overall flattened seventh. Returning to Ravel's '*Boléro* factory' (see again Chapter 3), we were perhaps previously concealed behind the doors where all was heard in muted, colourless terms, but now

those doors are opened and we approach a huge mechanised process. From a film perspective, beyond an initial wide-angled panorama, we are dealing increasingly with acute, close-up, camera angles.

The fourth rendition is briefly monotonal with material A warmed by violins (Fig. 12), but bitonality returns, thickened by thirds, in a 'block' harmonisation (Fig. 13); fighting against the infiltration of ostinato 1, this melodic mechanism now involves seventeen parts. Modal unity returns for material B (Fig. 14), but is again obfuscated by multiple lines starting on B♭, E and G (Fig. 15). Intensification results from the *fortissimo* dynamic, the myriad of semiquaver triplets (linking ostinatos 1 and 2) within a suffocating tutti orchestration, the removal of melodic repetition and the entry of the second side-drummer (Fig. 16).

This pent-up energy cannot be contained indefinitely. In Leonard B. Meyer's terms, the over-extended 'implication' finally receives some 'realization',[58] with the crude transposition of the whole apparatus up a major third (Fig. 18): popular song technique gone-one-better. The immediacy of effect simulates the pushing of an electric switch and signals an impending cataclysm; as Larner nicely expresses it, 'the friction between melody and mechanism finally causes ignition, the tonality lifts off from C major to E major and, as it falls back, the edifice collapses'.[59] This final cycle lasts only fourteen bars, eight of which comprise a distorted melodic variant in what is effectively an altered mixolydian mode: E, F♯, G♯, A, B, C, D, E (see also DeVoto, 'The Piano Trio: modality and form': Chapter 5); the use of this scalic collection, together with a small phrygian inflection, maximises connection with C.

The last six bars constitute the breaking-point: melody is destroyed, reiterated movement is merely impotent stasis. Drastic chromatic cacophony on saxophones and trombones might suggest the ear-piercing whistle of steam-pistons, but it better resembles a distressed bestial braying, or human wailing. As Manuel Rosenthal observed: 'in the later part of his life many of Ravel's compositions show that he had a feeling for a dramatic death – the *Boléro*, for instance.'[60] This musical outburst relates to ideas of Jacques Attali, who regards noise as a 'simulacrum of murder': 'In its biological reality, noise is a source of pain . . . A weapon of death. It became that with the advent of industrial technology.'[61] The penultimate bar denotes the final stutter, or Attali's 'rupture': the destruction of the (inhuman) mechanism and death of the (human) dance. The final melodic descent is fittingly phrygian; the only possible cadence is plagal (iv♭13–I) since there is nothing left in the tonic–dominant domain. Thus this piece is at least in part a working-out of the ambiguous relationship between man and machine that so fascinated Ravel. Despite Ravel's great enthusiasm for the machine as man's 'noble inspiration' (see again

Chapter 3), perhaps it was all along just a 'vast monster', albeit a highly compelling one.

And so these three works constitute Ravel's balletic 'dance-machine' trajectory, founded on creation–apotheosis–destruction. Each brings its own characterisation to this agenda, and our final images might be of *Daphnis et Chloé* as Ravel's expansive classical fresco, *La Valse* as a late-Romantic oil-painting and *Boléro* as a stark twentieth-century photograph.