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Remi Chiu

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immediate predecessors and contemporaries, Bach has become one voice in a rich historical counterpoint.

Janette Tilley

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Published in 2000 to mark the 125th anniversary of Ravel's birth, *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* offers a smorgasbord of current research on the composer's aesthetics, music, and reception history. One of the mandates of the *Companion* is to "broaden the base for Ravel studies beyond France" and to "bring in 'new blood' from other related areas" (p. 2). To that end, the majority of the contributors are scholars who have established their reputations not in Ravel studies, but in neighboring research areas such as Debussy, Milhaud, Satie, Bartók, and even Webern. Each essayist brings a distinct set of expertise to the discussion, which helps to connect Ravel to the broader trends in music research, interpretation, and criticism.

The book, organized into three parts, contains a total of eleven essays, together with an appendix of a selection of early reviews, some previously untranslated, of Ravel's main works. The first part of the *Companion*, entitled "Culture and aesthetic," contains three essays that contextualize Ravel's aesthetics through references to various aspects of his biography. The first essay, by Barbara Kelly, situates Ravel within French musical and cultural traditions,

beginning with his relationship with the Conservatoire—the “establishment”—then moving into his connections with other French composers and his place in French aesthetic history, and finishing by looking outwards at the influences of Schoenberg and jazz. Robert Orledge’s contribution, “Evocations of Exoticism,” broadens the geographical scope to examine the aesthetics of French musical exoticism and to situate Ravel’s engagement with diverse cultures within that history. Orledge’s essay explains how Ravel’s musical approach to “otherness” is inherently French.

Deborah Mawer provides the last essay of the first section, in which she sympathetically examines claims for a detached objectivity in Ravel’s music. Mawer begins by explicating the idea of “musical objects”—the tolling B-flats in “Le Gibet,” the tritone in *La Valse*, and other such devices that, unlike motives, are fixed and do not engender organic growth—and explores their use in a variety of other works. She also looks at the source of Ravel’s interest in machinist aesthetics and its manifestation in works such as *Boléro* and *L’Heure espagnole*. Mawer is thereby able to draw some thought-provoking parallels between the composer’s music and other artistic movements such as Symbolism, Cubism, and Italian Futurism.

The second section of the *Companion*, “Musical Explorations”, further elaborates and substantiates through closer musical analysis some of the thematic kernels offered in the essays of the first section. It makes up the bulk of the *Companion* and includes six analytical essays that examine Ravel’s *oeuvre* by genre: piano, chamber, orchestral, ballet, and vocal works. Roy Howat takes up Barbara Kelly’s discussion of the relationship between Ravel and composers such as Chabrier and Debussy and examines the motivic, harmonic and other idiomatic correspondences among a few piano works by the three composers. Likewise, Peter Kaminsky looks at the exotic aspects of some of Ravel’s vocal output. This thematic interweaving lends cohesion to the *Companion* and is especially helpful in mitigating against the unfocused eclecticism that often plagues essay anthologies.

In her essay in this section, Mawer discusses Ravel’s ballets from a variety of angles: categorization of dance types in *Daphnis et Chloé*, the idea of duality in *La Valse*, and a fuller exploration of machine aesthetics in *Boléro*. The aim of Mawer’s essay is “to aid listening with a score or study prior to a ballet production or concert performance” (p. 143). She succeeds, I think, in catering to a dual audience, those interested in a closer analysis of the music as well as those looking for more challenging-than-usual program notes. This is not the case for all the essays in this section, however, as some of them, such as Mark Devoto’s more theoretically based essay “Harmony in the Chamber Music” and Michael Russ’s discussion of Ravel’s orchestral music, can only be appreciated properly with the additional use of a score.

One of the highlights of this section of the book, and indeed of the entire *Companion*, is Roy Howat’s discussion of Ravel and the piano. Arguing that the strength of Ravel’s piano works lies in their formal properties, Howat analyzes their sophisticated small-scale and large-scale structures. The most

interesting part of this essay is a discussion of motivic extension in “Alborada del gracioso” that recalls Howat’s earlier work on the Golden Section in Debussy’s music. Examining the patterning of four basic motives, the author finds a sequence of musical events that follows the Fibonacci series. I wish Howat had gone a little further and pursued enquiry into the aesthetic significance of the Golden Section, but as it is, this section of Howat’s essay well justifies the *Companion*’s mandate for a broadened intellectual base to Ravel studies.

Peter Kaminsky devotes a substantial portion of his essay on Ravel’s vocal music to *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* and its underlying Symbolist aesthetic. He examines Ravel’s method of “transposing” poetry into music and makes enlightening observations about the correlations between the music and the poetic imagery and form. He takes the word “l’Azur,” for example, and traces the poetic and musical trajectory organized around its diverse shades of meaning as it recurs in the poem “Soupir”.

Richard Langham Smith’s chapter on Ravel’s operas offers yet another note-worthy perspective on the composer’s music. He briefly discusses Melanie Klein’s psychoanalytical interpretation of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*, focusing primarily on the issue of childhood sadism. Langham Smith attempts to bring a few of Klein’s observations to bear on the music itself, an insightful approach that certainly deserves further elaboration. The crosspollination of discourses often produces interesting fruits, and Smith’s work offers an intriguing glimpse into the possibilities of interdisciplinary scholarship.

The third section of the *Companion* contains two essays dealing with issues of performance and reception. In his contribution on performance practice, Ronald Woodley argues that because musicians who provide us with early recordings of Ravel’s works were so immersed in the contemporary culture and aesthetics, they offer us a more direct and extremely educational access to Ravel’s music. Woodley begins his analysis with Ravel’s own piano recordings, revealing some of the composer’s intentions that lie beyond the semiotic limitations of the notated score. Amongst other findings he discovers a little *legerdemain* in the composer’s 1922 recordings of “Toccata” and “Le Gibet”: Woodley provides convincing evidence—stylistic nuances and the physical impossibility for Ravel to play certain chords unrolled—that Robert Casadesus ghosted certain recordings that had been sold as authentic Ravel performances. Woodley also examines the piano recordings of Vlado Perlemuter and Alfred Cortot, making valuable observations through inter-performer and cross-chronological comparisons. Also included in this essay are brief discussions of the early recordings of the String Quartet, *Introduction et allegro*, a few vocal works, the Piano Concerto in G, and *Boléro*.

Roger Nichols rounds out the *Companion* with a short essay on reception history. He attempts to answer the question why Ravel’s *œuvre*—undoubtedly brilliant as it is—has fallen short of being “canonic.” Are entertaining works of less value than confrontational ones? What can Ravel’s place in music history tell us about twentieth-century expectations of the “serious” composer?

One may well take issue with Nichols' premise that Ravel is not a part of the canon, especially since—and this is perhaps the greatest shortcoming of this essay—Nichols does not explain his working definition of “canonic” with much finesse. (Besides, wouldn't the inclusion of Ravel in the *Cambridge Companion* series itself suggest the conferral of a canonic status on the composer?) Objection aside, Nichols' work does provide some valuable insights into Ravel's legacy. Where the first part of the *Companion* looks at the formative influences of others on Ravel, Nichols' essay explores the influence of Ravel upon others, among them Debussy, Satie, Honegger, Poulenc, Messiaen, as well as composers outside of France such as Stravinsky, Vaughan Williams, and Britten. The emergent picture of reception seems to be one of lukewarm ambivalence. Ultimately, Nichols finds it difficult to pin down Ravel, who has been criticised for assiduous conservatism in his handling of form, yet, in the 1920s and 30s, was considered to be a more “modern” composer than Stravinsky!

In the conclusion to his essay, Nichols wonders whether the twenty-first century will bring a better understanding to the music of Ravel. Come what may, this *Companion* makes a fine start.

Remi Chiu