

WELCOME

Welcome to the International Pianists in Recital Series for 2025, and to this special concert starring **Jean-Efflam Bavouzet in Recital**.

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet is one of the world's most distinguished pianists, admired for the elegance, clarity and artistry he brings to the stage. Renowned for his deep connection with French music, he is especially celebrated for his interpretations of Maurice Ravel.

In this recital, Bavouzet honours the composer's 150th anniversary with a program devoted entirely to Ravel's solo piano works. From the reflective beauty of the *Pavane* to the shimmering colours of *Miroirs* and the grace of *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, his performance promises to be a journey through some of the most poetic and technically brilliant music of the 20th century.

Theme & Variations is proud to be the Presenting Partner of the 2025 International Pianists in Recital Series. For more than 20 years, our partnership with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has brought world-class pianists to Sydney audiences, and it is a joy to continue this tradition with an artist of Bavouzet's stature.

We are delighted to support the Orchestra in presenting such remarkable musicians, performing on the finest instruments in our city's concert halls.

This evening's recital invites us into Ravel's imaginative sound world, illuminated by the artistry of Jean-Efflam Bavouzet. I hope you enjoy this rare and unforgettable musical experience.

Nyree Vartoukian

Co-Founder and Director,

Theme & Variations Piano Services



2025 CONCERT SEASON

INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL

Monday 20 October, 7pm

City Recital Hall, Angel Place

JEAN-EFFLAM BAVOUZET IN RECITAL

CELEBRATING RAVEL

JEAN-EFFLAM BAVOUZET piano

MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937) Sérénade grotesque (1893)

Pavane pour une infante défunte (1899)

Miroirs (1904-05)

i. Noctuelles (Night Moths)

ii. Oiseaux tristes (Sad Birds)

iii. Une barque sur l'océan (A Boat on the Ocean)

iv. Alborada del gracioso (Morning Song of the Jester)

v. La vallée des cloches (The Valley of Bells)

INTERVAL

Gaspard de la nuit (1908)

i. Ondine

ii. Le Gibet

iii. Scarbo

Le tombeau de Couperin (1914-17)

i. Prélude

ii. Fugue

iii. Forlane

iv. Rigaudon

v. Menuet

vi. Toccata

Preconcert talk

By Andrew Howes on Level 3 at 6.15pm.

Estimated durations

Sérénade – 3 minutes

Pavane – 6 minutes

Miroirs - 28 minutes

Interval – 20 minutes Gaspard – 22 minutes

Tombeau - 23 minutes

The concert will run for approximately one hour and 45 minutes

Cover image

By Benjamin Ealovega

Presenting Partner



Principal Partner





Photo by Benjamin Ealovega

JEAN-EFFLAM BAVOUZET piano

Award-winning pianist Jean-Efflam Bavouzet enjoys a prolific recording and international concert career, with performances described as possessing 'exquisite sensibilité, delivered with the most subtly varied, beautiful sound' (Seen and Heard Magazine). He has performed with the Cleveland, NHK Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, BBC Symphony and London Philharmonic orchestras to name a few, and has collaborated with many renowned conductors including Vladimir Jurowski, Gianandrea Noseda, Vasily Petrenko, Ludovic Morlot, Edward Gardner and Louis Lanarée.

Bavouzet's recital schedule takes him across four continents in the 2025/26 season, with performances at major venues such as Sydney's City Recital Hall, Kyoto Concert Hall, Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts, Seoul's Kumho Arts Center, Stockholm's Queen Silvia Concert Hall, the Glasshouse International Centre, Wiener Konzerthaus and Lincoln Center New York. Orchestral collaborations include Queensland, Trondheim, Aalborg and Cincinnati Symphony Orchestras as well as Staatskapelle Weimar, among others.

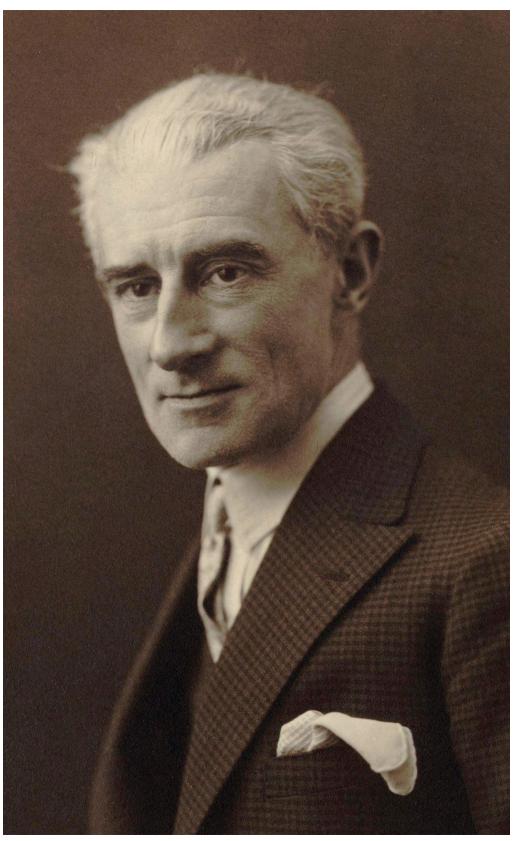
In recent seasons, Bavouzet has appeared with Philharmonia Orchestra (on an eight-concert tour of China, under Lan Shui), Philadelphia Orchestra, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, Shanghai, São Paulo, Adelaide, Sydney, Tokyo Metropolitan and BBC Symphony Orchestras, play-directed a three-concerto programme with Seattle Symphony and toured the Baltics with Manchester Camerata. Bavouzet is a frequent guest at Verbier and Bravo! Vail Music Festivals, and a regular recitalist at London's Wigmore Hall.

Bavouzet's recordings have garnered multiple *Gramophone*, *BBC Music Magazine*, Diapason d'Or and Choc de l'Année awards. Recording exclusively on the Chandos label, his most recent release, Ravel: Complete Works for Solo Piano, was praised by *Gramophone Magazine* for its 'seasoned mastery, stylish perception and

caring commitment to [the] repertoire.' He performs the complete works of Ravel in recital at over twenty venues in the 2025 150th anniversary year. Other notable recordings include the complete Haydn Piano Sonatas series, which was hailed by Gramophone as 'a modern benchmark': Pierre Sancan: A Musical Tribute with the BBC Philharmonic under Yan Pascal Tortelier: The Beethoven Connection. which earned multiple accolades from publications including The New York Times (following on from his much-lauded complete Beethoven Sonatas, and playconducted Beethoven Piano Concertos with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra): the complete Mozart Piano Concertos with the Manchester Camerata under Gábor Takács-Naav: and Bartók's and Prokofiev's complete Piano Concertos with the BBC Philharmonic under Gianandrea Noseda, the latter winning in the Concerto category at the 2014 Gramophone Awards.

Bavouzet has worked closely with Sir Georg Solti, Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Zoltan Kocsis, György Kurtág, Maurice Ohana, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Bruno Mantovani and Jörg Widmann and is also a champion of lesser-known French music, notably that of Gabriel Pierné and Albéric Magnard. In 2012 he was ICMA Artist of the Year, and in 2008 was awarded Beijing's first ever Elite Prize for his Beethoven complete sonata series.

He is the International Visiting Artist in Keyboard Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music.



Maurice Ravel in 1925. Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France/Wikimedia Commons.

ABOUT MAURICE RAVEL

In some exasperation, Ravel once asked a friend, 'Doesn't it ever occur to those people that I can be "artificial" by nature?' Stravinsky described him – affectionately – as the 'Swiss watchmaker of music', and Ravel's stated aim was indeed 'technical perfection'. In fact, his love of mechanical intricacy led Ravel to collect various automata and other small machines, and he dreamed, as he put it in a 1933 article, of 'Finding Tunes in Factories'.

His passion for precision and order was also in evidence in his fastidious, even dandvish, appearance, but he was a man of great courage. In the First World War, despite being 39 years old, short and underweight, he cared for the wounded and after some months became a military truck driver. With his truck, Adelaide, he faced a number of dangers, and for the rest of his life suffered terrible insomnia. (This experience may also have contributed to the debilitating aphasia of his last years when he could no longer write his own name, let alone the music which still rang in his head). His great Piano Trio, written during the War, puts paid to any idea that Ravel's music lacks an emotional heart.

Ravel's works are, frequently, exquisite simulacra of existing styles and forms, or pieces 'in the manner of' various composers. In Le tombeau de Couperin, he pays homage to the style of the French Baroque master. In Gaspard de la nuit he set out to write his version of Lisztian piano music, wryly suggesting that he 'might have overdone it'. His Shéhérazade songs evoke a typical early-20th century view of Asia where orchestration and subject matter relate directly to Russian music, especially that of Rimsky-Korsakov.

Ravel was born in south-western France but spent his entire life in Paris. Like Tchaikovsky, he saw a strong connection between childhood and enchantment. In his opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges* a destructive child learns the value of compassion when furniture, trees and animals in the garden all come magically to life. The evocation of 'the poetry of childhood' in the original piano duo version of *Mother Goose* led Ravel to 'simplify my style and refine my means of expression'.

ABOUT SÉRÉNADE GROTESOUE

In 1888 the teenaged Ravel met a boy his own age who would become his best friend. Ricardo Viñes had come with his family from Spain to study music and in 1889 both he and Ravel were accepted as piano students at the Paris Conservatoire. Together they explored Spanish music and both developed a love for the work of Emanuel Chabrier. Ravel was a fine pianist if not a virtuoso, and from the mid-1890s Viñes premiered many of Ravel's works: in around 1900 both men joined the Société des Apaches, a club for smart young artistic men. Thanks to Viñes the Apaches often met at the home of Ida and Cyprien Godebski, whose patronage would be of immense value to Rayel. Viñes also introduced Ravel to the poetry which would inspire Gaspard de la nuit, in which Ravel out-Liszted Liszt; sadly, Ravel was not happy with Viñes' premiere of the piece in 1909, which spelled the end of their friendship. Ravel would henceforth work with pianists such as Marguerite Long, and yet, as composer Francis Poulenc recalled, in 1914 Viñes 'was the only virtuoso who played Debussy and Rayel.'

The Sérénade grotesque (originally just Sérénade) is Ravel's first known piano work, though it was never published during his lifetime. It was written for Viñes around 1893, so unsurprisingly is 'Spanish' in flavour, in part resulting from Ravel's and Viñes' love of Chabrier (whose greatest hits include España).

The 'grotesque' element can be found in Ravel's pervasive use of dissonance and in the music's frequent and sudden changes of mood and speed. It is bookended by a passage of simple short chords marked Très rude (very rough) and pizzicatissimo suggesting, perhaps, a tersely-plucked auitar. A few slow bars introduce the main material, a section whose use of offbeat accents obscures the 6/8 pulse. (A version of this idea will make its way into the 'Alborada del gracioso' movement of Miroirs.) The music doesn't stick with any idea for long. but always returns to this 6/8 idea at least briefly, before a final reminiscence of the opening gestures.

ABOUT PAVANE POUR UNE INFANTE DÉFUNTE

Like Ravel's Boléro, the Pavane pour une infante défunte had immediate and widespread success, which was, of course, to his advantage; but neither work could be said wholly to represent the composer's individual musical personality. As his friend and contemporary, pianist Alfred Cortot put it: 'the success of this work has always seemed at odds with intelligent reasons to admire Ravel's genius'. Ravel certainly felt that the piece was 'too flagrantly' indebted to the style of Chabrier, especially, perhaps, the latter's celebrated *ldylle*, and in later years complained of the work's 'poor form'.

It was composed in 1899 for Ricardo Viñes who premiered it at the Salle Pleyel in 1902, and was dedicated to the Princesse Edmond de Polianac, oriainally Winnaretta Singer. an heiress to her father's sewing-machine fortune. One reason for the Pavane's instant success was that it is within the technical reach of non-professional pianists; another was its romantic title. It was a matter of some annovance that he had to spell out that, in Spanish, infanta refers to a princess of particular rank, who need not have been a child, or enfant. Moreover, as Ravel had on occasion to point out, it is not a funerary dance for a dead princess. A payane is, of course, a stately dance much loved in the courts of Renaissance Europe. Ravel's piece, as it were, imagines the elegant dance of a princess of that time; it is the memory on an era that is now irretrievably passed.

Here, the Renaissance dance is evoked in its stately rhythm, with diatonic melody and a simple accompaniment whose occasional flourishes at the end of phrases suggest the lute or guitar. The piece's ABACA form corresponds to that of any number of Renaissance-era fantasias, but the harmony, with its chords of the seventh and ninth on strong beats, is pure Ravel.

For all his ambivalence, Ravel contributed to the piece's popularity by playing it himself on numerous occasions (in a determinedly nonelegiac manner). Given the delicate clarity with which the piece remembers a lost time, it is no surprise that Marcel Proust wanted it played at his funeral.

ABOUT MIROIRS

In 1904-5 Ravel composed Miroirs, which he described as 'a collection of piano pieces which in my harmonic evolution mark a change considerable enough to have disconcerted musicians who, up to now, have been most accustomed to my style.' Once again, Ravel had felt trapped by the success of a particular work, in this case his was finding it annoying to be thought of as 'the man of Jeux d'eau, a masterpiece that had appeared in 1902. Each of the five pieces (not composed in concert order) is dedicated to one of the Apaches, but as writer James Burnett notes, each piece engages with Debussy's ideal that music should sound 'like a sketch or an improvisation'. Ricardo Viñes, dedicatee of the second piece, premiered Miroirs in 1906.

Noctuelles has the restless and arhythmic nature of the flight of owlet moths, who give it its title, in its frequent changes of metre, its use of groups of three against four notes, the sudden silences, and equally sudden, static flourishes. Unexpected moments of calm occur, as in one that features a repeated note like a distant bell, or night bird.

Ravel is supposed to have heard birds singing in the gardens at Fontainebleau and been inspired to write the second piece, *Oiseaux tristes* to evoke 'birds lost in the torpor of a dark forest during the hot hours of summer'. Ravel doesn't try, like Messiaen, to reproduce birdsong literally – though during his war service in 1916 he notated birdsong heard in rare moments of quiet. In this piece he gives us several fragments of 'birdsong' of varying lengths and extravagance, with forest murmurs suggested by subtle, repeated textural patterns.

Une barque sur l'océan has been described as one of the more Debussyan of Ravel's works; the sea on which the ship sails glitters in the sun, with occasional darker clouds and large swells admitting the possibility of danger. As in the opening movement, Ravel cultivates metrical ambiguities (groups of two versus three) over surging arpeggios in the left hand. Interestingly, Ravel later orchestrated this movement and the following Alborada del gracioso, but suppressed Une barque; the larger range of colour available seems to weaken the vividness of Ravel's pictorial imagination.

Most agree that **Alborada del gracioso** (which very roughly translates, from the Spanish, as 'Morning Song of the Jester') is the standout work of the collection, with its 'arabesque' melodies and subtly accented rhythms.

Ravel also pays homage to vernacular music but also to that of Domenico Scarlatti who spent much of his professional life in Spain and whose keyboard music often, as here, is composed in such as a way as to evoke guitar music. Scarlatti and Ravel achieve this by the use of wide leaps, frequent arpeggiations, and the tremolo effect of rapidly repeated notes.

The work makes dramatic use of wildly different moods and textures, but Ravel, who according to Burnett, 'once demonstrated to Maurice Delage that the structure of the Alborada was as strict as that of a Bach fugue.' The set concludes with another Debussyan 'sketch', La vallée des cloches whose apparent inaction and simplicity is largely illusory (the score is written on three staves to separate out the background, foreground and middle-ground 'streams' that make up the music).

ABOUT VALSES NOBLES ET SENTIMENTALES

Ravel's artificial nature led him to reinvent the French Baroque in *Le tombeau de Couperin*, Lisztian Romanticism in *Gaspard de la nuit*, and the dance music of the early 19th century – 'following the example of Schubert' – in the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, or so he said. Apart from a title similar to that of some of Schubert's works, the eight *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, the music is not very Schubertian. Critics have noted similarities to moments in certain works of Chopin, Johann Strauss II and Gabriel Fauré, and Ravel's biographer Alexis Roland-Manuel noted in 1926 that the *Valses*:

do not at all evoke 'les belles Viennoises' in competition with Schubert's dances, but rather the pretty subjects of Louis XVIII, who delighted in the 'Walse,' newly imported from Germany. Ravel never abandons the eighteenth century in which his imagination chose to reside without spending time along the way to enjoy the charms of the Restoration.

Coming after the fireworks of *Gaspard* this set of eight contrasting waltzes baffled some of Ravel's followers. Composed in 1911, with the superscription 'the delightful and always novel pleasure of a useless occupation', it was premiered by its dedicatee, Louis Aubert (Viñes had fallen from Ravel's grace by now) at a concert at which the works on the program were listed anonymously; only a small minority guessed that Ravel was the composer, and some audience members even hissed.

Musicologist Michael J Puri argues that the models for the *Valses* were multimovement works by Robert Schumann, whose *Carnaval* and *Papillons* consist of strongly contrasting character pieces arranged according to a clear hierarchy of keys, and which share motivic material, just as Ravel's *Valses* do. Furthermore, the *Valses*' 'Epilogue' is very Schumannesque in its recollection and gradual liquidation of material that we have heard in the foregoing pieces.

Rhythmic games abound in the *Valses*: the first begins on the downbeat with a short-short-long-long pattern (Schubert would probably have started with the two short notes on an upbeat), the fourth uses hemiola (a device featured in Schumann's 'Rhenish' Symphony) with accents grouping pairs of beats against the three-beat pulse of the music, while the fifth ties notes over beats to unmoor them from the prevailing pulse.

Above all, as James Burnett writes, 'the aesthetic basis of *Valses nobles et sentimentales* is concision of form designed to throw into high relief the *nouvelles harmonies* of which he had been growing increasingly fond.' Thus the contrast of mood between the energetic first and languid second hides the pervasive use of added note-chords to create a thorough-going web of mild dissonance.

A year after the premiere, Ravel was persuaded to orchestrate the music for a ballet for Natalia Trouhanova. Any resemblance to Schubert is diluted by the purely Ravelian orchestration.

The composer himself wrote the libretto for the ballet, Adélaïde, ou le langage des fleurs, which takes place in the Parisian salon of a courtesan, Adélaïde (also the name of Ravel's wartime truck!), in 1820, and which plays on the symbolism of flowers.

The dances show the interactions of Adélaïde and her two suitors: a duke and a passionate younger man, Lorédan, with the fourth waltz a pas de deux for Adélaïde and Lorédan. The party breaks up, leaving the two alone. In the epilogue, Adélaïde hands Lorédan a poppy, suggesting forgetfulness, but he pledges passionate love. The epilogue's remembered snatches of melody from the previous movements make this seem unlikely.

ABOUT LE TOMBEAU DE COUPERIN

Le tombeau de Couperin, a memorial not so much to the great French Baroque composer as to Baroque music in general, began with an idea for a 'French Suite', though, as Ravel assured his friends, 'La Marseillaise will not be in it, but it will have a forlane and a gigue, no tango though...' (There would, finally, be no gigue, either.) Each movement of the piece was dedicated to a comrade fallen in the Great War, and as pianist and scholar Roy Howat notes, 'Ravel's decision to dedicate these dance-like pieces to comrades fallen in the war...tallies with the old French tradition that a posthumous tribute had no need to be sombre.'

In 1914 Ravel began caring for the wounded as a volunteer; by the March 1915 he was a military driver, who, with his truck *Adélaïde* faced a number of potentially fatal dangers before he was invalided out of the army in 1916. As Howat also notes,

arriving at a scene of devastation after the battle of Verdun, Ravel found the area abandoned and in ruins, every tree defoliated – and a bird singing obliviously on a bare branch. According to Hélène Jourdan-Morhange and Manuel Rosenthal, he determined to incorporate this haunting scene into *Le tombeau de Couperin* as 'Le rossignol indifferent' (according to Jourdan-Morhange) or 'La fauvette indifferent' (according to Rosenthal.

Sadly there was to be no indifferent bird of any kind in the final piece.

The Prélude's 6/8 metre may compensate for the lack of a gigue, and with its Rococo ornaments has an improvisatory flourish especially when compared with the more formal Fugue, characterised by tension between duplet and triplet rhythms that we have heard in much of the foregoing music on this program. The Forlane, contains quirky 'wrong-note' harmony but maintains a stately 6/8 metre. (and in fact follows the shape of the forlane from a particular work of Couperin's) where the Rigaudon begins with fast and extroverted music in 2/4 time, though with a reflective central section that barely takes hold before the fast material returns. The Menuet contains typically limpid modal harmony, though Rayel told pignist Marguerite Long, who premiered the suite in 1919, that it should be played at the speed of the Menuetto in Beethoven's Op.31 No.3. Howat wonders if the scene at Verdun might not be quietly encapsulated in the quiet, central 'musette' section of this movement. The final Toccata is dedicated to the memory of Long's husband, Joseph de Marliave.

Gordon Kerry © 2025



Ravel with Ricardo Viñes, 1905. Photo by Pierre Petit (1831–1909).

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