



Distinctive Style in Ravel's Piano Concerto in G Major

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Abstract: Ravel, a French impressionist composer, writing a plenty of successful music pieces. The orchestration and piano compositions are the crucial milestones in the history of music. His Piano Concerto in G major is a great example. Ravel broke the convention of composition which was popular and taught in the conservatory, especially the strict rules in the classical music. This study examines Maurice Ravel's innovative compositional techniques in his Piano Concerto in G Major, focusing on the integration of jazz and Spanish music elements, polytonality, and unique pianistic devices. Through a detailed analysis of the concerto's first movement, this paper reveals how Ravel broke with classical conventions to create a fusion of piano and orchestration that showcases his pioneering spirit. These innovations demonstrate Ravel's contributions to modern composition and his distinctive style that blends diverse influences.

Keywords: piano concerto, Maurice Ravel, Spanish music, orchestration.

1. Introduction

Ravel's Piano Concerto in G Major is often regarded as a key work that synthesizes multiple musical influences, including jazz and Spanish folk traditions. This paper seeks to analyze how Ravel's innovative techniques in orchestration, rhythm, and modality contribute to his signature style and explore the implications of these techniques for modern composition. Striking innovations like the jazz elements, Spanish music, pianolization of orchestral parts, polytonality and the different modalities are well represented in the first movement. The concerto in G is a representative piece of the late Ravel which marks his culmination of composition. He is a great composer both in piano and orchestra so that he combines the piano and symphony music in a good way. The first movement of the Piano Concerto in G major totally has 36 sections. Maurice Ravel's Piano Concerto in G major opens with the piccolo solo accompanied by the piano and the string family. The Cellos establishes the basic tone because it plays only one chord in the form of the tremolo.

2. The influence of Spanish music

Ravel incorporated Spanish musical elements in this G major piano concerto. Spanish music usually reminds people with the feeling of vivid, evocative, passionate and colorful, sometimes is melancholy, with an air of indolence. The dance rhythms infuse the Spanish music as well. The flamenco elements could be found in the first movement, especially in the second theme: the *cante* in the mm.52-55 and mm.88-96; the *toque* playing in the mm.131-134; the *Baile* in mm.99-103. The opening of the concerto shows the vivid, dance rhythm in a fiery dance in the 2/2 meter. From the author's opinion, the opening was like the enthusiastic Iberians are celebrating and hug with each other. Below the piccolo, the drum and the cellos are played to sustain a long and deep foundation to make the piccolo solo stands out.

Another contrasting Spanish instance is mm. 45-48. It is a slow dance also in the 2/2 meter. However, the author thinks it is 4/4 meter in terms of dance. From measure 44 to measure 50, the orchestral parts have disappeared completely, only leave the piano solo. How much Ravel desires to make this section. The left-hand accompaniment is in the quarter value and every measure has four even notes. Ravel ingeniously uses of the different slurs and the accents from last downbeat these two ways make the section a sentimental dance with the pedal on the root position in every beat from the harmony. The various combinations of the slur settings make those left-hand quarter notes more danceable. The more interesting thing is that the three-note slur includes the two-note slur which makes the music light and fluent.

3. The influence of Jazz music

The jazz device is another element which Ravel adopts in the G major concerto. Another reason why the concerto sounds exotic is the composer imposes the jazz music idea. The orchestral parts help the music create more jazz effects. The instance shows two main applications of the jazz melodies in a major scale — the lowered third against the major tonic triad and +5 chords.

10

Figure 1. Ravel, Piano Concerto in G, 1st movement, mm.50-58

The symphony is set on D major here, as a result, the +5 is A# for the piccolo, the according transposition is F-sharp major, which contains its lowered third chord “D# F# A”. Form measure 52 to measure 55, the piccolo jazz melody is constructed by D sharp, A nature, F sharp and the passing tone within them while the piano and string family in D major use the

A sharp whatever the form are long notes or the triplets. Obviously, these A sharps enhance the jazz content. Ravel composes the piano part the ascending and descending lively triplets and the contrasting whole note chords of the string family. The percussion family join in this section as well. The Timpani is played the F sharp on the first beat in every measure and cymbals are played on the second and fourth weak beats in every measure which create the dance feeling. In the late music, the left hand takes over the task from measure 55 to measure to measure 62 to play the chords instead of the percussion sound. Mm.275-276 is another jazz element Ravel sets in the first movement. The bassoon, viola and cello play the bass with the left hand of the piano solo. The trumpet plays the similar melody of the previous music.

The diminished chord is another important element the composer used from jazz. For example, in mm.135-136, the F# A C and D F Ab. Ravel also demonstrates the transformed melody well here. He changes the melody happened before into a triplet octave form using both hands while the woodwind instruments hold the long melody and the string family serves as the harmonic support which balance the whole orchestration well.

Jazz music influences the concerto not only in the harmonic and melodic patterns, but also the rhythmic pattern. The author has rigorously analyzed the concerto, revealing for more about the stable beats and the unexpected rhythmic settings within the stable beats. For example, from measure 10 to measure 12 indicates a group of accented notes on the weak beats. The piccolo plays both G and B on the second, third and fourth beat while the harp, violins, viola and cello play the corresponding chords on the weak beat as well.

Another refined rhythmic pattern the composer uses from jazz is the accumulation of the overlapping rhythms which also shows the percussive sound effect, usually let the audience feel chaotic. In mm.187-188, the right hand of the piano part repeats the slur and the left hand repeats the chords; the two violins repeat the quarter notes; the viola and cello duplicate the dotted rhythm. The audience will trace the jazz melody concealed in the clusters if they listen carefully.

4. The influence of Piano techniques

Ravel incorporates some pianistic passages which makes the G major piano concerto a more famous and typical piano concerto. Measure 245 looks like Chopin Etude, Op.25, no.12.

Figure 2. Ravel, Piano Concerto in G, 1st movement, mm. 244-245.

The sixteenth up and down dense notes. The difference is Ravel sets six notes per beat while Chopin inserts four. The orchestra here is almost gone except the string family. The strings only accompany for the piano part in the ways of single note, simple chords and the corresponding dynamic range. Also in the mm.255-256. But Ravel uses eighth notes instead of the sixteenth. The dynamic mark is the same with this etude. The orchestra does not show anything here.

Figure 3. Ravel, Piano Concerto in G, 1st movement, mm. 255-256.

The author wants to mention the measure 171 pentatonic scale again. The one unmeasured cadenza-like solo part usually appears in the piano works to serve as the bridge passages or demonstrates pianist' technique.

Figure 4. Ravel, Piano Concerto in G, 1st movement, mm. 171.

The glissando is another pianistic technique Ravel composed in the concerto. From measure 16 to measure 25, the whole orchestra are all playing. In woodwind family: the flute, oboe, English horn and E-flat clarinet play the simple staccato quarter notes with the piccolo melody; the B-flat clarinet plays one melody fragment as well which is in counterpoint with the upper piccolo; the bassoon plays the intervals on every beat to rich the music. in brass wind family: the French horn play the complex tone in the way of the syncopation first and then plays on every beat with the bassoon, the trombone seems insignificant and just plays several syncopated notes and then disappears.

5. The influence of modalities

The G major concerto also demonstrates another Spanish modality. In the first movement, Ravel uses the Phrygian and Dorian more and that explains the music is somewhat reminds people of the flamenco and Iberian folk music. The author wants to do some researches in the use of Ravel's various modalities. In addition to the regular major and minor, the composer uses Dorian mode, Phrygian mode, polytonality, mixed modes, pentatonic mode, jazz melodies and polytonal passages. The example, in measure 192 to measure 194.

Maurice Ravel, French composer and pianist and was recognized as a master of orchestral orchestration. The music he composed was sometimes delicate and emotional, sometimes sharp and dramatic, but all were precise and ingenious, and he even spared a great deal of time and effort in revising his works over and over again, striving for perfection. He arranges the orchestral parts in an ingenious way, which assists the piano performance and music expression. In the first movement of Ravel's Piano Concerto in G major, the jazz elements, Spanish influence, the fusion between the piano and orchestra and the modality reflect Maurice Ravel's unprecedented spirits in composition. The orchestral parts were arranged to the point

to set off the piano part in different aspects. All in all, Ravel promote his piano and orchestra in an intelligent way to show his new exploits in composition.

The “virtuosity” in Ravel’s piano concertos is a recurring compositional treatment in his works, and is an important element of his style. At the macro level, virtuosity is reflected in Ravel’s overall planning and conceptualization of difficult techniques, which mentally, physically, or conceptually challenge the performer in new ways.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

As a master composer of Impressionism, Ravel integrated Spanish music, jazz music, various of modalities and piano techniques into this G major concerto and gave the concerto a higher level of interpretation. Spanish music’s passion and sentimental are well illustrated by the coordination between the string and wind instruments. Moreover, The piccolo and drum sound mimics Spain’s unique dance rhythm. Typical jazz music elements including lowered third triad , +5 chords and the jazzy rhythm give the first movement a more modern feel. The virtuosity of the piano display and the orchestration were complemented each other in an intelligent method by the composer. The use of different modalities reminds listeners of Spanish music, Iberian folk music and even Oriental music which is the key point to the exotic nature of the music

Ravel broke the strict rules of the classical academic concerto, combining piano and orchestra parts perfectly, giving the music a deeper expression, which made his late works reach the creative peak.

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