

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

La flûte enchantée, from *Shéhérazade* (1903), arranged for wind quintet by Adam Lesnick
Ma mère l'oye (1908-1910), arranged for wind quintet by Frank Morelli

As a young composer Ravel was entranced by the extraordinary collection of Persian and Indian tales recounted in the *Thousand and One Arabian Nights* by the legendary storyteller Scheherazade, and contemplated composing an opera on the subject, a project he never realized. However, in 1903 Ravel's friend Tristan Klingsor (the pseudonym of poet Léon Leclère, 1874-1966) published a collection of poems inspired by the *Arabian Nights*, and choosing three of the poems, Ravel composed the beautiful song cycle *Shéhérazade*, for voice and piano, the same year, orchestrating it soon after. The middle movement, *La flûte enchantée*, is a simple reverie on romantic love. In the orchestral version the flute first introduces the singer, then remains nearly omnipresent, now in response, now in duet, impersonating the singer's unseen lover and alter ego.

La flûte enchantée

L'ombre est douce et mon maître dort
Coiffé d'un bonnet conique de soie
Et son long nez jaune en sa barbe blanche.
Mais moi, je suis éveillée encore
Et j'écoute au dehors
Une chanson de flûte où s'épanche
Tour à tour la tristesse ou la joie.
Un air tour à tour languoureux ou frivole
Que mon amoureux chéri joue,
Et quand je m'approche de la croisée
Il me semble que chaque note s'envole
De la flûte vers ma joue
Comme un mystérieux baiser.

The Enchanted Flute

The shade is sweet and my master sleeps
Wearing a conical hat of silk
His long yellow nose in his white beard.
But I, I waken again
And I hear outside
The song of a flute pour forth
By turns sadness or joy.
A song by turns languid and gay
That my darling lover plays,
And when I approach by the window
It seems to me that each note steals away
From the flute toward my cheek
Like a mysterious kiss.

Ma mère l'Oye, or Mother Goose, was composed for Mimie and Jean, the young children of Ravel's closest friends, Xavier and Ida Godebska, to provide inspiration and a pedagogical bonbon for these two fledgling piano students of limited technical means. The first four movements are musical illustrations of familiar Mother Goose stories; the fifth offers a simple tribute to the magic we love in all such tales.

1. *Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant*. A musical evocation of the familiar sleeping beauty story: pricking her finger on a spindle poisoned by a jealous fairy, the story's beautiful princess falls into a death-like state. Instantly an impenetrable thorny wood grows up surrounding the castle where she lies waiting for the lifting of the curse.

2. *Petit Poucet*. The youngest and tiniest son of a woodcutter, forced to fend for himself in the forest, lacking other means marks the way home by leaving behind him a trail of breadcrumbs, only to find as he turns to retrace his steps that, alas, the crumbs have been eaten by birds, every one.

3. *Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes*. One of a pair of royal twins is the object of a curse making her too ugly to look upon. In self-exile, she enters the land of the *pagodes et pagodines*, little nodding Chinese dolls. In this scene she is in her bath surrounded by the dolls playing lively music on miniature instruments. Laideronnette's own larger movements are evoked by the slower, deeper theme of the middle section.

4. *Les entretiens de la Bella et de la Bête*. The familiar story of Beauty and the Beast:

- "When I think how good-hearted you are, you do not seem to me so ugly."

- "Yes, I have indeed a kind heart; but I am a monster."

- "There are many men more monstrous than you."

- "I wish I knew what to say in thanks, but I am only a beast. Beauty, will you be my wife?"

- "No Beast!"

- "Then I die content that I have had the pleasure of seeing you one more time."

- "No, my dear Beast, you shall not die: you shall live to be my husband!"

And the Beast is transformed.

5. *Le jardin féérique*. The difficulties of all the previous stories resolve themselves in this final movement, The Fairy Garden.

Program notes © copyright 2014 by Richard Festinger