

Maurice Ravel

Le Tombeau de Couperin: Prélude

arranged for percussion ensemble
by Ralph Hardimon



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Notes

Le Tombeau de Couperin was originally a suite for solo piano composed by Maurice Ravel between 1914 and 1917. There are six movements in all: *I. Prélude, II. Fugue, III. Forlane, IV. Rigaudon, V. Menuet, and VI. Toccata*. Each movement is dedicated to the memory of friends of the composer who had died fighting in World War I. Ravel himself was an army driver during the war. According to him, *Le tombeau de Couperin* was an homage to eighteenth-century French Baroque music rather than a personal tribute to composer, organist, and harpsichordist Francois Couperin “the Great” (1668–1733). When criticized for composing a light-hearted and sometimes reflective work rather than a somber one for such a somber topic, Ravel replied: “The dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence!”

This arrangement of *Le Tombeau de Couperin: Prélude* was taken from the orchestral version and is intended to be played with precise clarity at some very soft dynamic levels—especially with regard to ornamentations. There are an abundance of ornamental “turns” throughout the work, as in the xylophone part in measure 2 (see *Figure 1*)*. Ravel was insistent that these turns be played on the beat with the strongest accent on the initial note of the ornament. This should result in a natural diminuendo after the turn and throughout the rest of the sustained (i.e. *rolled*) note, often blurring into any subsequent notes. Ravel also desired a little air (“respirations”) between the phrases.

It is important to remember that all notes need to be heard. While stickings are intentionally being left up to the discretion of the performers, it bears noting that double or even triple stickings may be necessary from time to time in order to achieve the most efficient performance.



Fig. 1

It may seem intuitive to begin certain phrases on the right hand but may actually turn out to be more natural by leading with the left (or vice versa). Experiment with stickings to ensure the end result sounds smooth and effortless. Atypical sticking patterns, non-stepwise motion, and intervallic leaps may be best served by committing them to muscle memory.

Since the particular sonority of the xylophone has the capacity to dominate the ensemble sound, you may want to use rubber mallets—or even a hard cord mallet—to achieve a good blend with the rest of the instruments.

Le tombeau de Couperin has an inherent lightness in nature in both performance and listening. An analysis of the original work will reveal that the dynamic markings and phrasing in this arrangement are a *must* for great musical balance and rhythmic clarity between the lead lines and the rest of the ensemble. They are also part of experiencing the greatness of Maurice Ravel’s compositions.

A tempo range of 156–168 is indicated at the beginning of the score. This was done to provide something of a comfort zone for less experienced ensembles as well as a nice challenge to shoot for with more experienced groups. If you decide to push the tempo (and Ravel would undoubtedly have preferred it this way), it’s good to keep in mind that, while fast, it must remain light!

Now enjoy, and have some fun!

– Ralph Hardimon

*Due to the fast tempo of these turns and the rolls that follow, it may be okay to omit a roll here or there if hand speed and stamina becomes an issue.

Instrument/Parts list

This piece calls for **8 players** in all (7 mallet percussionists and 1 timpanist).

Glockenspiel

A standard glockenspiel is required.

Xylophone

A standard 3.5 xylophone is required.

Vibraphone 1

A standard vibraphone is required.

Vibraphone 2

A standard vibraphone is required.

Marimba 1

A standard 4.3-octave marimba is required (low A).

Marimba 2

A standard 4.3-octave marimba is required (low A).

Marimba 3

A standard 4.3-octave marimba * is required (low A). A triangle is also required for a small part at the end.

Timpani

5 timpani are required. Moderate pedaling.

** Optional 5-octave marimba would enable a low 'D' to be played near the end of the piece. A substitution is provided.*

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♩. = 156 - 168

This musical score is for a percussion ensemble, featuring four staves: Glockenspiel, Xylophone, Vibraphone 1, and Vibraphone 2. The music is in 12/8 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Glockenspiel part begins with a *pp* dynamic and features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The Xylophone and Vibraphone 1 parts start with a *p* dynamic and include the instruction "Pedal conservatively". The Vibraphone 2 part also starts with a *p* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings (*pp*, *p*, *mf*, *mp*). A large, stylized graphic of a map of Africa is overlaid on the bottom left of the page, partially obscuring the lower staves.

Sample Image

12 **B**

G *ppp*

X *p*

VI *p*

V2 *p*

pp

pp

pp

Sample Image

18 C

G *pp*

X *mp* *pp* *mf*

VI *mp* *pp* *f*

V2 *mp* *pp* *f*

M1 *mp* *pp* *f*

M2 *mp* *pp* *r*

M3

T

Sample
Image

30 **D**

G

X

VI

V2

M1

M2

M3

T

p *pp* *p* *pp* *ppp*

p *p* *ppp*

p *pp* *pp*

p

mf *mf*

mf

mf

mp

Sample Image

43

G

X

VI

V2

M1

M2

M3

T

mp *p* *pp* *mf* *f*

mp

p *pp* *ff*

p *pp* *ff*

p *pp* *ff*

mp *p* *pp*

mp *p* *pp*

Sample
Image

49 **F**

G *mf* *pp* *pp*

X *mf* *pp*

VI *mf* *pp* *mf* *pp*

V2 *mf* *pp* *mf* *pp* *p*

M2

M3

M4

M5

M6

M7

M8

M9

M10

M11

M12

M13

M14

M15

M16

M17

M18

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V2

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M3

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Sample Image