

Double Bill by MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

Overall running time: 1 hour 35 minutes

Performed 2013 with the LPO at Glyndebourne

(1) *L'heure espagnole* premièred 1911 in Paris

Libretto by Maurice-Etienne Legrand after his own comedy

Concepción, wife of Torquemada	<i>Stéphanie d'Oustrac</i>	Soprano
Gonzalve, a poet	<i>Alek Shradar</i>	Tenor
Torquemada, clockmaker	<i>François Piolono</i>	Tenor
Ramiro, a muleteer	<i>Elliot Madore</i>	Baritone
Don Íñigo Gómez, a banker	<i>Paul Gay</i>	Bass
Conductor	<i>Kazushi Ono</i>	
Director	<i>Laurent Pelly</i>	

Synopsis (Eighteenth century Toledo)

Ramiro, a muscular mule-driver, takes his broken watch to the shop of the clockmaker Torquemada. As it's Thursday – the day when Torquemada regulates all the town clocks – he has to ask his wife Concepción to entertain him while he waits. Ramiro is shy, and Concepción is equally embarrassed because her poet lover is due to arrive. Torquemada has asked her to choose a large grandfather clock, so Concepción begs the muleteer to carry her choice up to her bedroom. Gonzalve immediately drifts in, but he warbles poetically until Ramiro returns. Concepción declares a sudden preference for a different clock, and sends the mule-driver to retrieve the original clock while she conceals her poet in the SECOND clock.



A stout banker Don Íñigo Gómez arrives unexpectedly to court her. Ramiro, back again with the FIRST clock then carries off the SECOND clock with negligent ease, with Concepción as an anxious escort. Don Íñigo whimsically squeezes himself into the FIRST clock, and prudently shuts the door when Ramiro returns alone. Concepción suddenly reappears and angrily demands that the SECOND clock must be retrieved as it's too loud. While the muleteer is away,

Don Íñigo successfully pursues his lascivious strategy with the lady. When Ramiro returns with the SECOND clock – and Gonzalve inside – he offers to take the FIRST clock (containing Don Íñigo) back upstairs. Concepción follows at his heels.

The dismissed poet sings an effusive farewell to his clock dungeon, but hides as Ramiro comes back. Concepción descends in a fury – the FIRST clock must be removed from her bedroom. While Ramiro fetches it, she expresses her bitter disappointment: Gonzalve can do nothing but rhapsodize, and now Don Íñigo is inextricably stuck in his clock. Ramiro returns bearing the latter. Concepción, appreciating his physical strength, sends him back – without any clock – and follows him up to her room.

Torquemada comes home to find two gentlemen occupying his clocks, who both explain brightly that they are interested customers. When his wife reappears much happier, their reluctant purchases have been settled. Ramiro heaves Don Íñigo out of his expensive prison, and promises to give Concepción advance notice before he ever comes past with his mules. In a final quintet, everyone agrees on a Boccaccian moral: in the pursuit of love, we reach a time when the muleteer deserves a turn.

Interval

(2) L'enfant et les sortilèges première 1925 in Monte Carlo

Libretto by Sidonie-Gabrielle Collette

... with a cast of 21 plus chorus including ...

The Child [mezzo]	<i>Khatouna Gadelia</i>
Mother, Chinese Cup, Dragonfly [low mezzo]	<i>Elodie Méchain</i>
Chair, Bat [soprano]	<i>Julie Pasturaud</i>
Fire, Princess, Nightingale [soprano]	<i>Kathleen Kim</i>
Cat, Squirrel	<i>Stéphanie d'Oustrac</i>
Teapot, Little Old Man (Arithmetic), Frog	<i>François Piolono</i>
Tom Cat, Grandfather Clock	<i>Elliot Madore</i>
Armchair, Tree	<i>Paul Gay</i>



Synopsis: L'enfant et les sortilèges

A naughty child dawdling over his homework is reprovved by his mother. Left alone, he flies into a tantrum and assaults everything including the family cat. One after another all the things he has maltreated come to mournful life, including furniture, clock, tea service, and the princess from his torn story book. He bitterly regrets the lost ending of this tale. Suddenly his neglected arithmetic pops up to challenge him with impossible exercises. Completely unstrung by now, he expects even the cat to speak. Instead it miaows a mock-Wagnerian erotic duet with its mate in the garden. Meanwhile the scene revolves from indoors to outdoors.

After the innocent murmuring of animal voices, trees break in to lament cruel wounds from the child's pocket knife. A dragonfly and a bat grieve mates that he's killed, and a squirrel tries to warn a dim frog about ever-present danger. At the climax of a utopian wildlife ballet, the squirrel addresses a poignant rebuke to the child. Chastened, the child feels rejected by the harmonious animal realm and he whimpers for his Maman.



Unforgiving trees and beasts close in on him, but in the commotion a wounded squirrel limps towards the boy. The child binds the squirrel's paw with a ribbon. Other animals respond to his instinctive kindness, and they all try to call 'Maman!' more effectively. Maman comes out after an internal light has been switched on. The child extends his arms towards her, then the opera suddenly finishes.

Operatic Context (1) – L'heure espagnole

The playwright Legrand was surprised when Ravel asked permission to set his highly improper vaudeville to music, and he then mistakenly suggested that the resulting composition should be more concise. An analogy between wound-up automata and erotically driven people is delineated lucidly rather than crudely in Ravel's score.

The glittering surface of Ravel's score conceals its musical invention: metronomes ticking at different speeds in the prelude, 'popular' harmonies derailed by contemporary sophistication, and an impossibly low note for Don Íñigo in the finale which is helpfully supplied by a double bassoon.

Despite Ravel's affection for his mother and her Basque/Spanish heritage, the Hispanic influence here owes more to Albéniz (who died in the year that Ravel completed this opera). His exaggerated adherence to Wagner's leitmotiv method includes a pompous fanfare for Don

Íñigo and lusty timpani rhythms for Ramiro. Gonzalve constantly mimics effete fin-de-siècle art songs. Concepción – the only character who is clever and sensible – has no leitmotiv, though the music associated with Torquemada's shop isn't far removed from the magical garden in Ravel's next and final opera.

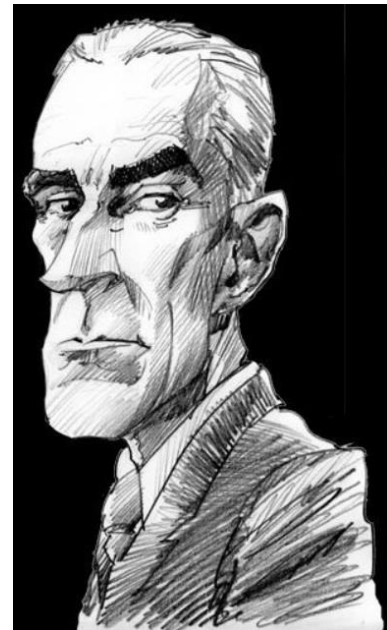
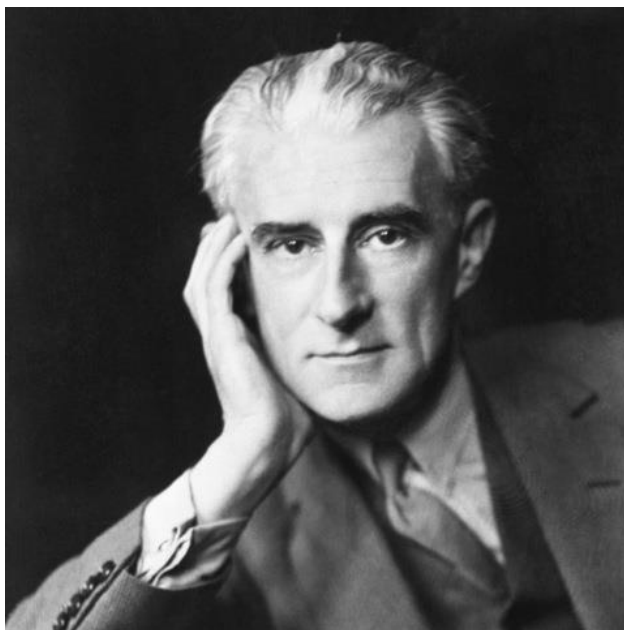
Operatic Context (2) – L'enfant et les sortilèges [The Child and the Magic]

Ravel and the cat loving librettist Colette were both keen to have a feline duet at the heart of this opera. Ravel also appreciated the challenge of animating inanimate objects (including a clock that's much noisier than any in *L'heure espagnole*). Ravel encouraged a revue-influenced libretto that would reflect his growing interest in American popular music.

The opera presents severe challenges to a producer's imagination, not least the indication that an adult should play a child of 'six or seven years'. Ravel's brother concluded that a Disney animated film could be the best solution! The score is intricately constructed with bewitching orchestral sounds, and echoes that include Ravel's own *Mother Goose* suite (*Ma mère l'oye*). A prominent piano part allows some plonking revue-style accompaniments.

Maurice Ravel

The composer's susceptibility to Spanish influences and his enthusiasm for ingenious mechanisms – which are both particularly evident in *L'heure espagnole* – can be traced back to his mother and father (the latter was a Swiss civil engineer). However Ravel's overall musical language develops from Fauré, Chabrier and much of Debussy, as well as Rimsky-Korsakov and other Russians known as 'the Mighty Handful'.



Rigorously self-critical during four decades of composing, Ravel published only a few hours of music. Studying at the Paris Conservatoire he wasn't stimulated by the academic Prix de Rome competition, but during the next seven years he produced – as well as his first opera – many songs, a range of piano pieces, *Introduction and Allegro* for harp and ensemble, *Rapsodie espagnole*, and the first sketches for *Daphnis et Chloé*. During his early years he considered other operatic possibilities based on Hoffmann, Maeterlinck and Hauptmann, and some of these sketches were subsequently recycled in his two published operas.

As a celebrated orchestrator, it's disappointing that his orchestration of Mussorgsky's incomplete *Khovanshchina* failed to survive 1913 performances by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. *Tombeau de Couperin* and *La valse* were both completed well before *L'enfant et les sortilèges* was finally staged. Afterwards with declining health he composed more slowly, but his late works include *Boléro* and two piano concertos.