

Maurice Ravel and Pierre Monteux, both born in 1875, were not close collaborators, yet their careers intertwined meaningfully across decades. Ravel, the reserved and meticulous composer, and Monteux, the genial and grounded conductor, shared an aesthetic of clarity, discipline, and balance—values that would shape the interpretation of French music in the 20th century.

Monteux first conducted Ravel's music in the most high-profile of settings: the 1912 premiere of *Daphnis et Chloé* with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. The score was vast and complex, demanding a huge orchestra and chorus. The production was tense—choreographer Fokine clashed with Diaghilev, and Ravel, never fully at ease with theatre, fretted over the details. Yet Monteux held the performance together, bringing structure to the shimmering soundscape. Stravinsky, present at rehearsals, later praised Monteux's ability to "bring clarity to music thick with detail."

Though not personally close, Ravel respected Monteux's musicianship. He distrusted flamboyance in performance and valued conductors who served the score rather than imposing themselves on it. Monteux fit the bill: modest in manner, precise in gesture, and allergic to sentimentality.

Monteux's relationship with Ravel's music deepened in later years, especially through his recordings with the London Symphony Orchestra. In 1959, he conducted a full stereo recording of *Daphnis et Chloé* with the LSO and chorus—still considered by many as definitive. At 84, Monteux brought vigour and exactitude to the sprawling ballet. The famous "Daybreak" section is radiant without excess, glowing with warmth but never awash in sound. The rhythmic episodes remain tightly focused, a hallmark of Monteux's approach: let the music breathe, but never lose control.

This *Daphnis* is a masterclass in restraint and colour. Monteux, having premiered the work nearly 50 years earlier, understood every nuance of the score. His pacing is natural, the transitions seamless, and the orchestral textures luminous. It is not an emotional interpretation in the Romantic sense, but one of architectural clarity—a performance that reveals the bones of Ravel's craftsmanship beneath its sensual skin.

In 1961, Monteux returned to Ravel with two smaller but equally polished recordings: *Pavane pour une infante défunte* and *Rapsodie Espagnole*, again with the LSO. The Pavane, too often treated as a lush indulgence, is here a poised lament. Monteux takes a stately tempo, but nothing drags; the famous horn solo is dignified, not saccharine, and the phrasing throughout is clean and noble. "Ravel must never be sentimentalised," Monteux told colleagues. "It ruins the structure."

His *Rapsodie Espagnole* is elegant, full of rhythmic subtlety and finely judged dynamics. The "Prélude à la nuit" is mysterious but never heavy; the "Feria" dances with sparkle and fire, never tipping into frenzy. Monteux avoids caricature or overt theatricality, trusting Ravel's orchestration to evoke Spain through a French lens. The LSO, clearly attuned to his understated direction, plays with precision and warmth.

Monteux's ability to convey complexity with economy made him a favourite among musicians. An LSO violinist once recalled: "He didn't need to raise his voice. He just looked, and somehow, we all played better." This simplicity of manner, matched with deep insight, made Monteux an ideal Ravel interpreter. He never distorted the music in search of effect—he illuminated it from within.

Though Ravel died in 1937, long before these recordings, one suspects he would have approved. Monteux's interpretations offer no eccentricities, only fidelity to the score's internal logic and expressive restraint. If Ravel built glittering structures, Monteux was the builder who set them standing—clean lines, solid foundations, and no false decoration.

Their personalities were different, but their philosophies aligned. Ravel once said he sought "sonorous magic, not emotion." Monteux, for his part, believed "the conductor is not the composer—only the servant of the score." In their shared devotion to musical integrity, Ravel and Monteux helped define what French music could be: elegant, precise, luminous—and timeless.



monteux

conducts ravel, vol. 2

PRISTINE
AUDIO

PASC 744

RAVEL PAVANE POUR UNE ENFANTE DÉFUNTE -
MONTEUX, LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

RAPSONDE ESPAGNOLE - DAPHNIS ET CHLOÉ

PASC 744

PRISTINE
AUDIO

1. RAVEL Pavane pour une infante défunte, M. 19 (6:44)

RAVEL Rapsodie espagnole, M. 54

2. 1. Prélude à la nuit (4:07)
3. 2. Malagueña (2:15)
4. 3. Habanera (2:36)
5. 4. Feria (6:27)

RAVEL Daphnis et Chloé, M. 57

Tableau I (Une prairie à la lisière d'un bois sacré)

6. Introduction et danse religieuse (7:18)
7. Danse générale (2:43)
8. Danse grotesque de Dorcon (2:18)
9. Danse légère et gracieuse de Daphnis (2:23)
10. Danse de Lyceion (4:38)
11. Danse lente et mystérieuse des Nymphes (4:40)

Tableau II (Camp des pirates)

12. Introduction (2:55)
13. Danse guerrière (4:06)
14. Danse suppliante de Chloé (5:14)

Tableau III (Paysage du première 1er tableau, à la fin de la nuit)

15. Lever du jour (5:12)
16. Pantomime (Les amours de Pan et Syrinx) (5:29)
17. Danse générale (Bacchanale) (4:53)

Royal Opera House Chorus

London Symphony Orchestra
conducted by Pierre Monteux

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on
photographs of Pierre Monteux
and Maurice Ravel

Tracks 1-5 recorded
11-13 November 1961
Producer: Erik Smith
Engineer: Kenneth Wilkinson

Tracks 6-17 recorded
27-28 April, 1959
Producer: John Culshaw
Engineer: Alan Reeve

Recorded in stereo at
Kingsway Hall, London

Total duration: 73:58

For a full catalogue visit
www.pristineclassical.com
or call : (00) 33 967 391 857

© 2025 Pristine Audio