

Daphnis and Chloé, Suite No. 2

Maurice Ravel

transcribed by MGySgt Donald Patterson*

The famous Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev burst onto the international music scene in 1907 with a series of significant musical events in Paris. Among the first of these was a production of Modest Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov*, which until that point had not been performed outside of Russia. Two years later, Diaghilev brought his newly formed *Ballets Russe* to Paris and began to commission new works for the company. The resulting collaborations during those first three years in Paris produced an unprecedented string of some of the most important works in the ballet repertoire, including the monumental contributions of Igor Stravinsky in *The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911), and *The Rite of Spring* (1913).

Tucked amidst these masterpieces by Stravinsky was another by Maurice Ravel. *Daphnis and Chloé* was debuted by the *Ballets Russe* in 1912, though Diaghilev and Ravel had begun discussions on the work nearly as soon as the company arrived in Paris in 1909. Diaghilev's choreographer Mikhail Fokine created the dances and Leon Bakst the scenic design for the ballet. In a letter from the composer to his friend Madame de Saint-Marceaux in June of 1909, Ravel described early work on the concept: "I must tell you that I've had a really insane week: preparation of a ballet libretto for the next Russian season. Almost every night, work until 3 a.m. What particularly complicates matters is that Fokine doesn't know a word of French, and I only know how to swear in Russian. Even with interpreters around you can imagine how chaotic our meetings are."

The composer, choreographer, and set designer seemed at odds about the tone of the production from the very beginning, and their conflicts inevitably contributed to the long gestation period of the ballet. The plot was based on a treatment of the ancient Greek novel by Longus which had been prepared by Fokine, but where the choreographer wanted to capture the erotic pagan imagery depicted on ancient Greek vases, Ravel was interested in a somewhat more chaste love story. He envisioned "a vast musical fresco, less thoughtful of archaism than of fidelity to the Greece of my dreams, which identifies willingly with that imagined and depicted by late eighteenth-century French painters...."

Through three painstaking years, Ravel crafted his incredibly colorful score, and at about fifty minutes, the ballet is the longest single work in his catalogue. With several recurring leitmotifs weaving the ballet together, Ravel described *Daphnis and Chloé* as a "symphonie chorégraphique" (though Diaghilev famously complained that it was more "symphonique" than "chorégraphique"). The role of Daphnis was danced by the legendary Vaslav Nijinsky, who also had very specific ideas about the story and his role. The artistic disagreements that had plagued the work's creation continued into rehearsals, and after the première on June 8, 1912, it received only two performances that season.

Despite the shortcomings and lukewarm reception of the production, the brilliant music immediately captured attention. Ravel considered his music to *Daphnis and Chloé* to be among the most important he had ever composed, and he quickly fashioned two orchestral suites from the score. The second of these has become one of the most often played concert works in the repertoire and a stunning example of Ravel's mastery of orchestral color. The suite is essentially drawn from the entire third part of the original ballet beginning with a spectacular symphonic sunrise and ending with a hair-raising general dance that employs the full capabilities of the orchestra, including an impressive collection of percussion instruments. The scenes depicted by the music of the suite were described by the composer:

[I] No sound but the murmur of rivulets of dew trickling from the rocks. Daphnis lies still before the grotto of the nymphs. Little by little, day breaks. Bird songs are heard. Herdsmen arrive searching for Daphnis and Chloé. They find Daphnis and awaken him. In anguish, he looks around for Chloé, who at last appears surrounded by shepherdesses... Daphnis and Chloé mime the story of the nymph Syrinx who was beloved of the god Pan. Chloé impersonates the young nymph wandering in the meadow. Daphnis appears as Pan and declares his love. The nymph repulses him. He grows more insistent. She disappears among the

reeds.

[II] In despair he plucks some reeds and shapes them into a flute and plays a melancholy tune. Chloé returns and dances to the melody of the flute.

[III] The dance grows more and more animated and, in a mad whirl, Chloé falls into Daphnis' arms... A group of young girls, dressed as bacchantes, enters... A group of young men invade the stage. Joyous tumult. General Dance.

This transcription for band of Suite No. 2 from *Daphnis and Chloé* was prepared for "The President's Own" by Master Gunnery Sergeant Donald Patterson.
