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An Exploration of the Jazz Elements in the Music of Maurice Ravel

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ABSTRACT
This study explored the genre and stylistic integration of jazz and classical music through the works of Maurice Ravel, focusing on *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, the *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, and the *Concerto in G major*. The aim was to determine how jazz elements interact with Ravel's compositional method. Through a detailed analysis, this study identified dance rhythms, instrumental dialogue, and jazz-inspired syncopation as key devices of artistic expression in these works. The findings highlight Ravel's innovative synthesis of musical traditions, demonstrating how his incorporation of jazz idioms contributed to both his distinctive style and the broader development of 20th-century composition. State the contribution of this study to scholarship.

Keywords: Ravel. Jazz. Foxtrot. Blues

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INTRODUCTION
Many European composers with different aesthetic views were attracted to jazz because they intuitively sensed the enormous communicative resources of this music. Especially in the first decades of the 20th century, jazz idioms were easily recognisable, perfectly matched the tense social pulse of the time, and fully reflected the psychology of their contemporaries. In addition, jazz was in tune with the idea of creating 'accessible' music that was relevant at the time and expressed by many European composers. At a new temporal level, jazz actualised ancient authentic communicative structures as rituals and play. It is no coincidence that many compositions using jazz stylistics are characterised by ritual and playful concepts. In the first half of the 20th century, the turn of many European composers to jazz stylistics was a great creative discovery. For many European composers, jazz was a kind of musical Esperanto, as its style was striking in its universalism based on the synthesis of various artistic systems, both European and non-European. The latter provided an opportunity to radically renew all the linguistic resources of academic musical tradition, which had already been largely exhausted by that time. Therefore, for many European composers, turning to jazz stylistics has become an important means of expanding traditional performance techniques as well as an opportunity to improve and modernise everyday music.

The issues of the interpenetration of jazz and academic music, which are relevant for both jazz studies and 'traditional' musicology, have been repeatedly addressed in the research of contemporary theorists and musicologists. Indeed, for almost a century, there has been a process of assimilating elements of mainstream jazz into academic music. The aspect related to the study of the factors of the penetration of jazz models into classical music, the theoretical understanding of the mechanisms of such inclusions, has recently been actively developed by various authors. The intense mutual attraction between European music and jazz has led to the emergence of fundamentally new cultural formations that have become an integral part of 20th-century civilisation. One of the most striking types of music, organically combining

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European and non-European elements, is jazz. The concept of ‘jazz’ is interpreted quite broadly in contemporary musicological literature. Jazz is a genre of professional musical art, a type of musical art, a type of music, and a combination of musical styles. The 20th century was marked by global synthesis, clearly identifying one of the stable trends of time-complex polystylistics, a dialogue between different artistic traditions. The interaction between jazz and academic music contains at least two aspects of research: the attitude of academic composers towards the means of expression in jazz and individual jazz elements of musical language, techniques, and musical forms of European compositional creativity.

While jazz was only beginning to emerge in the mid-19th century, Western art music had already undergone a centuries-long process of development. Nevertheless, the trajectories of jazz and art music can be meaningfully compared. Among international scholars, Leonard Feather was one of the first to attempt a comparative analysis of the evolution of jazz and European classical music. He drew parallels between the history of jazz—particularly its early folk-based forms—and the history of art music, beginning with Gregorian chant. In this context, Ravel's music is of considerable interest, as on the one hand, there is a clear distinction between jazz and academic music, while there is an active process of jazz elements penetrating its structure. The first half of the 20th century was marked by composers' attention to early and traditional forms of jazz.

These sources do not exhaust the question of the influence of jazz on classical music, but attention to works created at the intersection of different musical genres, including jazz and academic music, is growing every year. In the history of 20th-century music, there are many ‘academic’ works whose expressive means contain jazz elements: harmony, melody, instrumentation, and improvisational form. Naturally, these elements have changed to varying degrees depending on their adaptation to the new ‘environment.’ Such jazz-related symbioses appear to be a rather broad issue that researchers have repeatedly addressed. The purpose of this article is to analyse various forms of musical ‘classical’ transposition in piano jazz of the first quarter of the 20th century and to identify jazz mechanisms and elements in Ravel's works. The topic of this study is relevant in light of a number of issues that arise in connection with it. The influence of jazz on European musical culture in the first quarter of the 20th century was profound, as jazz came to symbolize a new way of life and a distinct mode of thinking for its contemporaries. In this context, the cultural dimensions of jazz’s emergence are particularly significant. Of special interest is the impact of jazz on the artistic conception of Maurice Ravel’s works. This influence can be examined through two key issues: first, the expansion of the communicative possibilities of art music through the incorporation of jazz idioms; and second, the complex relationship between Ravel’s individual compositional style and the stylistic domain of jazz.

Of these perspectives, the problem of the artistic concept of compositions, conditioned by the influence of jazz aesthetics and stylistics, appears to be the main problem that is common to all topics of the study. The aspects related to the artistic context and social psychology of the era (1910-1930s in European culture) will provide the necessary background for observations. One of the enduring trends in European musical culture at the beginning of the 20th century was the turn of many composers into various jazz-influenced dances. Meanwhile, it should be noted that such an interest in everyday music was not new to European composers. Even the great masters of the past used a wide range of everyday genres in their compositions. Despite the diversity of new ‘hit’ dances of the early 20th century, mainly of African-American origin, some of them were perceived as a modernised analogue of traditional European dances. In this regard, the following parallels arise: march-ragtime, Boston Waltz, and two-step polka.

This study examines four jazz elements in Ravel's composition: jazz rhythms, jazz dance rhythms, blues, and ragtime. Ravel's attention is focused on the fresh and original modal-harmonic complexes of the blues, which are most fully reflected in the second part of the *Sonata for Violin and Piano*. A master of musical colour, a subtle artist of harmony and rhythm, Ravel significantly enriched European music and influenced new generations of composers and new stylistic trends. His work combines the innovation of impressionism with the best traditions of classical music: soft, blurred sounds are carefully woven into a clear structure of familiar forms. Ravel was attracted to jazz by its original folk roots, and he often identified jazz with dance music to comprehend the true essence of this phenomenon. Ravel's novelty lies in the fact that he never pursued it; when inventing something new, he did not deny the old. His greatness lies in the fact that, without seeking to resolve complex philosophical questions, he revealed the beautiful nature of a moment filled with joy or sadness. In this study, a cultural approach was used in the first two

chapters. This paper applied the comparative method, which allows one to identify *the common* and *the specific* through comparison, to different levels of musical organisation in the musical analysis of Ravel's works.

The methodology of the article is to examine how jazz elements are integrated into the music of Maurice Ravel. This study adopts a three-pronged methodological approach: cultural-historical framing, comparative stylistic analysis, and detailed musical analysis. This combination enables both contextual and technical scrutiny of Ravel's jazz-influenced works.

Scientific novelty is determined from the perspective of this study and is related to the fact that Ravel's jazz compositions are considered for the first time as a phenomenon *characteristic* of this period. Thus, it was possible to compare the jazz compositions of the academic composers. In addition, the role of several techniques of interaction between jazz and academic music, previously not described in the literature, has been defined. Although interest in the phenomenon of jazz has grown significantly in Western musicology in recent decades, the stated issues have not been sufficiently developed to date. Overall, the multidimensional sphere of interaction between academic and non-academic musical traditions forms endless expressive resources for the development of contemporary creative practices and opens up truly inexhaustible topics for musicological research.

DISCUSSION

In the first third of the 20th century, jazz captivated many artists and left an indelible mark on European culture. It was a time of denial of the future, when there was an irresistible desire for momentary joy, intoxication with feverish hedonism, and a burning desire to live for today. Jazz became a vivid sound symbol of the time, its spontaneous rhythmic ostinato perfectly reflecting the tense pulse of the era. People sought oblivion from the painful memories of war in jazz, finding a source of energy, the rhythm of the era, and feeling the natural range of sounds of the universe, the hypnotic element of rhythms, and unusual combinations of sounds. The incredible popularity of jazz in the first decades of the 20th century can be explained by its aesthetics, which reflected the psychology and worldview of the 'lost generation'[1] when the end of the First World War caused the collapse of former ideals. American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald proclaimed the triumphant march of the 'jazz age'[2] , which he clearly perceived as the quintessence of modernity, with its inexhaustible dynamism on the one hand and the psychological brokenness hidden behind its outward chaotic activity on the other. According to the writer, the 'Jazz Age' was an age of 'extremes and satire.'[3] Thus, the two main genetic faces of jazz — ragtime, with its inexhaustible energy, motoric drive, and explosiveness, and blues, distinguished by its refined psychological realism — clearly represent the two emotional poles of early 20th-century art.

The stylistics of jazz, with its 'structured' freedom, unpredictability, 'playful' manifestations, and improvisational self-expression, aroused great interest among composers inclined towards shock and exoticism. The wave of enthusiasm for jazz that swept Europe was most noticeable in Paris. 'The climate of frivolity that has reigned in Paris in recent years is particularly conducive to the acceptance of any cultural entertainment […] and jazz is everywhere!'[4] The new lifestyle of the 20th century, frivolous Paris, like some kind of urban giant, highlighted the problem of new forms of human communication. 'Jazz is conquering the Parisian public; the shabbiest bar is turning into a cabaret, a new place for entertainment. The dynamics generated by personalities who are particularly receptive to jazz become reality.'[5] The need for a special 'communicative' music arose more acutely than ever, and jazz was the perfect match for such aspirations.

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[1] According to *Britannica* the term 'lost generation' is a group of American writers who came of age during World War I and established their literary reputations in the 1920s. The term is also used more generally to refer to the post-World War I generation.The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Lost Generation," *Encyclopedia Britannica* , February 18, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lost-Generation.https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lost-Generation.

[2] The term 'jazz age' or 'jazz era' was coined by Fitzgerald himself and referred to the period of American history from the end of the First World War to the Great Depression of the 1930s.

[3] F. S. Fitzgerald, " Echoes of the Jazz Age," in *Collected Works in 3 Volumes. Novellas and Essays* , vol. 3 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1977), 398.

[4] Carine Perret, "L'adoption Du Jazz Par Darius Milhaud et Maurice Ravel: L'esprit plus Que La Lettre," *Revue de Musicologie*, 2003, 313.

[5] Perret, "L'adoption Du Jazz Par Darius Milhaud et Maurice Ravel: L'esprit plus Que La Lettre,"314.

The famous jazz pianist Dave Brubeck reflected on this: Jazz cannot always be called music — it is a unique form of communication, a mutual exchange of human emotions, a meeting of energies from the audience and the stage. You can only find this in jazz and, all too rarely, in concert music.[6]
The famous jazz arranger Stan Kenton expressed a similar idea: 'Jazz is a new way of expressing emotions. I consider jazz to be new music that came to us just in time'.[7]

Ravel's fascination with jazz

Parisian Maurice Ravel was a regular at the café **Le Bœuf sur le toit**, founded in the early 1920s by poet Jean Cocteau and pianist Jean Vieuxtemps, a virtuoso jazz musician.[8] Here, Ravel most likely first heard Gershwin numbers, including **The Man I Love.**[9] Impressed by the music he heard, Ravel became fascinated with jazz and was among those who saw in it something more than fashionable entertainment—a source of vivid expressive means capable of renewing traditional musical forms.[10] 'Practically every composer in France since Debussy has felt the insidious influence of jazz'.[11] Jazz brought together and formed a unique synthesis of folk traditions of European and African origins. 'For many modernist composers, jazz in its classical style, as a form of eclecticism, became an important means of infecting their authorial voice'.[12]

Ravel's work belongs to the origins of the interaction between academic and non-academic musical traditions and the search for new, 'exotic' means of musical expression. In 1925, the composer turned to African music for inspiration. He wrote three **Madagascar Songs** to words by the 19th-century poet Évariste Désiré de Forges for voice, flute, cello, and piano. There is nothing 'jazzy' about these songs, but there is a rhythmic pulsation, a very complex polyrhythm. In the instrumentation of his ensemble, Ravel imitates the trumpet on the flute (in the low register) and uses the 'percussive' sound of the piano, while the cello (pizzicato) imitates a percussion instrument. This imitation creates a certain polytonality effect. With limited means, Ravel created the atmosphere of an unusual jungle country with exotic landscapes. The search for French painting, from Gauguin's exoticism to Picasso's fascination with African art, found a unique musical continuation in this composition by Ravel.[13]

In 1928, Ravel embarked on a four-month concert tour of the United States. In New York, he met Gershwin at a party organised by singer Eva Gautier on the eve of Ravel's departure for France. On 7 April 1928, Ravel gave a lecture on contemporary music in Houston, where he noted the expressive possibilities of the blues. After his trip to America, Ravel's desire to use elements of jazz music was realised in two concertos for piano and orchestra, which he worked on almost simultaneously (*Concerto in D major*, 1930; *Concerto in G major*, 1931). In his letters, Ravel draws attention to the common features of the concerto and the violin sonata, which are reflected in the use of jazz techniques.[14] The improvisational nature, rhythmic originality, rich timbral contrasts, and dynamic musical compositions characteristic of jazz attract musicians from the academic tradition. Jazz elements penetrate various genres of classical music, interacting with contemporary classical techniques. Ravel was among the musicians who saw jazz as something more than fashionable entertainment, but as a source of technical and expressive means capable of renewing traditional forms.

Jazz rhythm in Ravel's works

As is well known, jazz rhythm includes syncopation (textural syncopation), re-accentuation (staccato syncopation), and a special ternary rhythmical proportion (the 'triolisation' of the rhythmic pattern). These techniques are aimed at creating a 'swing' of the basic metric beats, a certain tartness of sound so

[6] Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin'to Ya* (Courier Corporation, 2012), 378.
[7] Shapiro and Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin'to Ya*, 355.
[8] Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (Courier Corporation, 1991), 83.
[9] Maurice Sachs, *In the Time of the Boeuf Sur Le Toit* (Paris: Grasset, 2005).
[10] During Ravel's stay at the Belvedere in 1925, the composer acquired a new pet, a dog named Jazz, and 'those who knew his tastes were not surprised'M. Gérard and R. Chalu, *Ravel in the Mirror of His Letters* (Leningrad: Soviet Composer, 1988), 155.
[11] M Robert Rogers, "Jazz Influence on French Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1935): 55.
[12] D. Mawer, *Crossing Borders: Ravel's Theory and Practice of Jazz* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 139.
[13] Ravel transferred some of the techniques found in these songs (polyrhythm, two-part polyphony in different timbres) to *Blues* from his *Violin Sonata.*
[14] Gérard and Chalu, *Ravel in the Mirror of His Letters*, 241.

characteristic of jazz, which, in turn, is inherent in many other levels, such as harmony and timbre. The main principle of jazz rhythm is invariably linked to syncopation, which is based on two processes: One of them is related to the establishment of a regular pulsation (in jazz, this is called 'timing' or 'beat'), and the other to overcoming it and creating rhythmic dissonance. These processes can occur simultaneously in the presence of two interacting, rhythmically individualised voices. They can also occur in a single rhythmic voice when the pulsation is first established, fixed, and then disrupted. In the first case, the contrast is achieved directly; in the second, a basic pulsation (beat) is first formed, and then a shift occurs in relation to the expected rhythm (an imaginary or conventional beat exists in the human mind at this time due to inertia – an 'imaginary accent').

Jazz rhythm, with its striking regular accentual organisation, was the necessary 'building material' for many non-jazz composers. 'Jazz is favourable for composers. It changes and contradicts itself as never before,' believed the composer.[15] Ravel skilfully 'embedded' his elements in his pseudo-jazz works, where various jazz rhythmic techniques were juxtaposed with certain rhythmic laws derived from the traditions of symphonic music and the composer's own rhythmic systems. As Vladimir Yankelevich notes, Ravel perceived in jazz 'not a state of mind, but mainly technique, rhythmic innovations'.[16] This form of *rhythmic polystylistics* in Ravel's work manifests on a horizontal plane—that is, through alternation across movements. In the *Violin Sonata* (1923–1927), for example, the first movement employs entirely non-jazz rhythms, the second features predominantly jazz-inspired rhythms, and the third returns to primarily non-jazz rhythmic material.

According to Ravel's theoretical framework, his compositional approach incorporates a blend of appropriation and adaptation—that is, the transformation of borrowed material into highly individualised forms. In jazz, anticipatory syncopation is commonly encountered, where rhythmic accents are shifted ahead of the beat. Jazz scholarship has even established specific terms for such anticipatory figures depending on their metric placement: for example, the 'Scotch snap' (or 'Lombard rhythm') on the second beat, and the so-called 'jazz upbeat' (or 'jazz anacrusis') on the fourth. Syncopations that anticipate the strong or relatively strong beats of the bar, however, remain unnamed in jazz theory. This type of anticipatory syncopation can also be observed in jazz-influenced classical works. For instance, in the *Blues* (second movement) of Ravel's *Second Violin Sonata*, the violin part features inventive anticipatory syncopations on all four beats of the bar. However, particular emphasis is placed on the 'jazz upbeat' (see Figure 1).[17]

Figure 1: Maurice Ravel, 1927. Second Violin Sonata, second movement Blues, bb. 12-26 (violin part).

Another feature of jazz rhythm is re-accentuation (staccato syncopation), which is a technique of shifting the accent from a strong beat to a weak one in the absence of a syncopated pattern, creating the effect of disrupting even pulsation through a specific emphasising stroke on a metrically unstressed note.

[15] I I Martynov, "Moris Ravel'[Maurice Ravel], Muzyka, Moscow," (Russ, 1979), 391.
[16] Gérard and Chalu, *Ravel in the Mirror of His Letters*.
[17] The numbers indicate the beats of the bar that are anticipated by the syncopations.

Re-accentuation aims to create sophistication and originality in a composition, a kind of rhythmic tartness, which is actually the main purpose of swing. In his *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, Ravel resorted to the rhythmic innovations of jazz. The re-accentuation in the second movement of the work, along with the use of syncopation, dotted rhythms, and phrasing articulation, is a consequence of the introduction of jazz rhythmic principles into the composition. This technique by Ravel sets the listener up for a jazz vibe: the violin has 'wandering' accents in a short intro,[18] which, apart from the metrically unjustified accents, does not have any other jazz elements. Furthermore, the re-accentuation penetrates the piano part, and before the dynamic climax, Ravel 'plays' with accents between the violin and piano parts. An academically progressive, dynamic development of the jazz rhythmic technique was constructed. The composer told an interviewer from *Musical America*: 'The most captivating part of jazz is its rich and distracting rhythm. Jazz is a very rich and vital source of inspiration for contemporary composers, and I am surprised that so few Americans feel its influence.'[19]

Jazz dance rhythms in Ravel's music

Dance forms the basis of the thematic material in many of Ravel's works, which cover a wide range of genres, forms, and imagery. Serge Lifar noted: 'Ravel possessed an extraordinary 'sense of dance; I consider the thesis of the superb dance quality of all his music to be one of the foundations for understanding Ravel's work'. Dance became an important means of artistic generalisation for composers. The inclusion of a specific dance in the context of a work and the specific way in which its choreographic components are indirectly reflected in the elements of musical language are means for the composer to realise the ideological and imaginative concept of the composition.[20]

The foxtrot belongs to the category of so-called 'light genres' whose social function lies in entertainment and leisurely pastimes. Shortly after its emergence, foxtrot was transplanted into the realm of serious music. Perhaps for this reason, composers who used it tended to imitate the genre's archetype—often recreating its everyday context—or to consciously devalue its status by employing its expressive features in a parodic or ironic manner. Instances of foxtrots in art music are relatively rare. In some cases, its treatment borders on quotation: composers reproduce the genre's characteristic traits and simulate its situational settings. For example, Marietta's song in foxtrot rhythm from Imre Kálmán's operetta **Die Bajadere** is directly tied to the performance of dance. In other cases, the foxtrot is used as a means of characterisation in a comic or satirical mode (e.g., Puccini's **Gianni Schicchi**; Shostakovich's **The Golden Age**).

Another trend is the attempt to evoke the spirit and performance style of jazz through the foxtrot (for example, Georges Auric's **Adieu, New York**, foxtrot for two pianos; Ernst Krenek's **Blues** from the opera **Jonny spielt auf**). Some composers also treated the foxtrot as a symbol of modern urban culture and its embrace of constructivist ideals, as in Paul Hindemith's **Kammermusik No. 1**. In Ravel's foxtrot-inspired works, one finds manifestations of all these tendencies, shaped by his unmistakably individual approach to the melodic and rhythmic idioms. The **Teapot and Teacup Duet** from the opera-ballet **L'enfant et les sortilèges** (1925) is a prime example of a whimsical miniature in the spirit of the music hall. Its stylised detachment from concrete domestic reality is conditioned by the absurdity of the scene (inanimate objects turning into living beings), the characters' contrasting personalities, and an undercurrent of gentle humour. Ravel playfully hints at the African American 'origin' of the Teapot character: the porcelain is black, the character sings in English (with occasional French insertions), and its movement is defined by the stylised foxtrot theme. The character's dance-like quality is especially evident in the Teapot's theme, which incorporates march-like traits—most notably, the prominence of a dotted rhythmic figure in the melody (see Figure 2).

[18] Notably, in the musical notation these syncopations are marked not with articulation symbols such as accents or staccato, but rather through sudden dynamic shifts—much like in Debussy's *Cakewalk*.
[19] Boston Evening Transcript, " Music Section," April 21, 1929.
[20] In addition to Ravel's natural affinity for dance idioms, it is also evident that the repertoire of early jazz orchestras—rarely extending beyond dance music—played a role in shaping his approach.

Figure 2: Comparison of anticipatory syncopation patterns

In the accompaniment, we observe a summation rhythmic formula (Figure 2), which in this context reveals an iambic tendency, a steady pulse resembling the regularity of a walking pace, uniform textural density, and an even distribution of weight across all beats. Interestingly, the solo vocal line is accompanied by winds, percussion, and piano. The bouncy march-like meter, elevated volume, and predominance of sharp, detached, and exaggeratedly accented articulations—evoking the ragtime idiom of Scott Joplin—convey a sense of assertive, forceful, even aggressive movement that characterises the enraged Teapot. However, this aggressiveness is partially offset by the warmth and lyricism of the tenor voice, which enhances the comic tone of the scene and prevents the Teapot's anger from being taken too seriously. Certain jazz idioms rooted in ragtime and cakewalk traditions are reimagined in highly original ways in this duet. The impression of rhythmic duality arises in the first part of the scene (rehearsal nos. 29–30) due to a subtle sense of polyrhythm. In the piano, bassoon, and bass clarinet parts, a basic meter is maintained through steady quarter notes, with harmonic emphasis on the metrically strong beats (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Contrasting rhythmic layers in the accompaniment to the Teapot and Teacup Duet.

In the remaining voices of the texture, the strong beats are delayed by one quarter note relative to the notated meter (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Maurice Ravel, 1925. Fragment from Teapot and Teacup Duet from the opera-ballet L'enfant et les sortilèges.

In the melodic line—formed by the vocal part in conjunction with interjections from clarinets, flute, and trumpet—two variants of the so-called 'oom-pah-dit-le' rhythm alternate.[21] This interplay results in non-coinciding strong beats across different metric layers. Additionally, rhythmic 'conflict' is introduced through syncopation (e.g., bar 25) and the weakening of metrically strong beats via rests, which shifts emphasis onto weaker beats (off-beat, e.g., bar 21). Even more diverse polyrhythmic techniques appear in the second part of the duet (rehearsal nos. 31–32). Here, a 'dialogue' unfolds between the genre prototype and its transformed versions, forming one of the planes of musical-intonational development. This interaction reflects the creative process itself—the birth of musical images, the flow of thought, and the flight of imagination. An illusion emerges: that the music is being conceived in real time, as though the work is coming into being through its very performance. This quality reflects the improvisational spirit that is organically inherent in both jazz music and jazz dance. Set within an illusory soundscape, the music exhibits a capacity for transformation—adopting new guises while always retaining its core identity. Against the steady quarter-note pulse in the piano part and the sixteenth-note movement in the strings, the mezzo-soprano and celesta parts provide rhythmic contrast. The vocal line is filled with syncopations and triplet figures, producing continual disruptions in accentuation and a feeling of dynamic instability.

The celesta part is entirely based on triplet motion, which, when combined with the quartal (i.e. groups of four) patterns in the strings, creates an effect of disproportional pulse coordination. Moreover, the accents within this rhythmic layer—due to specific syntactic phrasing—are delayed in relation to the notated metre, resulting in a subtle but persistent sense of temporal displacement (Figure 5).

Figure 5 : Maurice Ravel, 1925. Fragment from Teapot and Teacup Duet from the opera-ballet L'enfant et les sortilèges.

In the initial passage (bars 37–41), a motive is subjected to sequential development, based on a rhythmically sharpened cakewalk formula (see Figure 6).[22]

[21] The distinctive 'bouncing' rhythm (Fig. 1) was coined Umpateedle (an onomatopoeic term) by American musicologist Don Knowlton in his article *Anatomy of Jazz* (1926). This rhythmic pattern frequently forms the foundation of foxtrot rhythm, likely due to its vivid sense of energetic, forward-moving stride. When this rhythmic model is carried through sequentially, it results in an alternation between two variants of three-note rhythmic groupings (Fig. 3). On the level of the underlying beat pulse, the rhythmic accent gradually shifts from the 1st beat to the 3rd, 4th, 2nd, back to the 3rd, and so on. This intricate play of rhythmic and metric accents in the leading voice is layered over a different system of metric emphasis in the accompaniment (Fig. 2), producing a complex and playful interplay of rhythmic stresses.

[22] The dotted rhythm is placed not on the third note, but on the final one.

Figure 6: Cakewalk-inspired rhythmic formula with displaced dotted note (on final pitch instead of third).

The intonational prototype appears here as an allusion—a subtle hint at genre—due to subdued dynamics, an extremely high register, and extended pauses between the segments of the sequence, all of which disrupt the thematic continuity. From the initial motive, a new one unexpectedly emerges (bars 42–47), in which the features of the foxtrot become noticeably more distinct. Its rhythmic structure is reminiscent of the opening theme from the Teapot and Teacup Foxtrot. The composer also draws upon the expressive potential of the *umpateedle* rhythm and polyrhythmic devices, which lead to metric displacement between different layers of pulsation. The texture draws attention to its 'lightened' accompaniment, based on a typical foxtrot formula, and a compact melody constructed predominantly in parallel fourths—a technique often encountered in *novelty*-style ragtime. In a rapid descending motion, the melody spans a wide range (from B♭3 to B♭). A pause on a weak beat, combined with the unstable VII43 harmony, generates a sense of incompleteness—a collapsing or folding of the musical process. Upon repetition of both elements, the tessitura rises and the scale is reduced, creating the impression of a fleeting, ghostly dance vision. In the refrain (cue 4), another theme in foxtrot rhythm emerges in polytonal counterpoint with the main theme. It is based on the development of the dotted rhythmic motive from the introduction. The image of the dance is rendered more clearly here than in the previous section. The theme is marked by unity, relative completeness, and syntactic clarity, and is presented in the form of a bipartite period (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Maurice Ravel, 1925. Fragment from Teapot and Teacup Duet from the opera-ballet L'enfant et les sortilèges.

The genre model receives a distinctive interpretation in this section. The theme is characterised by a specific sonority imparted by the use of a *Lombard rhythm*, which is not typical of the original dance prototype. The repeated use of an inverted dotted rhythm (in the bass), containing an intra-beat syncopation, lends the rhythm a particular elasticity. This quality—combined with metrical instability arising from the displacement of rhythmic accents and the use of hemiola—gives the dance an impulsive, unpredictable character. The unexpected tonal shifts at the ends of phrases (A♭ to C♭, B to D), as well as the peculiar 'stalling' on the opening motive in bars 58–59, create an impression of developmental illogicality. These features evoke associations with whimsical movement and abrupt, angular gestures. Such associations are further reinforced by the astringent sonorities of the polytonal harmonies, the muted resonance in the low register, and the staccato articulation in the piano part. Due to the slight truncation of the second statement of the theme, there arises a sense of interruption rather than completion. The image of the dance appears to slip away, giving way in the composer's imagination to a different character, now embodied in a theme of a song-dance nature (cue 5). When compared to other dance-related episodes, the theme of the middle section of the second episode (cue 6) presents the attributes of the foxtrot most fully. The textural treatment of this fragment comes closest to the genre prototype: the musical fabric is clearly differentiated into melody and accompaniment, which are perceived as integral components of a single theme, rather than a synthesis of distinct thematic elements, as in previous instances (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Maurice Ravel, 1925. Fragment from Teapot and Teacup Duet from the opera-ballet L'enfant et les sortilèges.

The process of dynamic intensification—cultivated through rhythmic variation of the motive, sequential repetition, heightened dissonance, and a powerful crescendo—is abruptly interrupted at its climactic peak. It resumes in the reprise of the central episode (cue 7) and again in the refrain (cue 9). The musical dynamism reaches its apex in the final episode (cue 10), where the theme of the central episode undergoes a striking transformation. Alongside its dance origins, the theme now clearly exhibits march-like features: emphatic accentuation, a dense texture, and the syllabic chanting of a single sound complex in the violin part, articulated in a summative rhythm, driven by a recurring fourfold ratio of long to short note values. The music conveys a sense of ponderous stride, muscular energy, and forward momentum. The supple, virtuosic grace of the foxtrot recedes into the background. In the final bars of the theme—where metrical instability is overcome, and the quadruple metre is re-established—the dance element is effectively suppressed by the march, resulting in a genre mutation (Example 2).

In the process of musical intensification, a significant role is played by the continued sequential development, the dissonant chordal writing saturated with clusters, and the gradual increase in volume up to *fff*. In the climactic section (bars 133–136), the regular alternation between two rhythmico-intonational variants is disrupted, resulting in an effect of uncoordinated or chaotic motion. These new elements radically transform the character of the theme, which now evokes an image of elemental, raw, and aggressive force. The intrusion of this forceful theme abruptly interrupts the contrapuntal interplay between the violin and piano melodies in the refrain, as well as the presentation of the motive from the second episode. However, even the third episode remains unresolved; the image it conveys is perceived as a dark, fantastical vision.

The modal-melodic features and harmonic language of the theme reveal affinities with genres of African-American music, whose characteristics were assimilated into the foxtrot. For example, the diatonic foundation of the melody is coloured by a 'blues seventh'—the E natural in bar 84, sounding simultaneously with E-sharp, creates an effect of tonal instability. This is further enhanced by the use of typical intonational patterns: a trichord featuring a neighbouring figure and an ascending third motion in the upper voice of the accompaniment; a descending line in the melody from a 'blues-inflected' unstable degree to the tonic; and the overall tonal dissonance of the harmony. This section vividly demonstrates one of the most essential rhythmic traits of jazz dances: the 'conflict of rhythms'. The rhythmic structure unfolds across three perceptual layers. The basic layer of a steady pulse is formed by the complementary coordination of the textural voices. The other rhythmic layers allow for irregularities, resulting in metric destabilisation. In the freely flowing violin melody, the inertia of the primary metric pulse is broken by continuous syncopation and the introduction of triplet rhythmic figures.

The accompanying line is built on an ostinato alternation of dotted rhythmic figures characteristic of the foxtrot genre: the initial motive with a modified pitch contour and its variant. This corresponds to a technique typical of jazz, signified by the terms 'riff' or 'pattern'. The rhythmic grouping, as well as the syntactic and harmonic rhythm of the ostinato complex, form a new metrical structure marked by periodic shifts in beat count—5/4 to 3/4. In this way, metric modulation occurs, and the quadruple metre is only restored at the conclusion of the theme. The deep contradictions between metre and rhythm lead to a sense, from the very first bars of the theme, that despite a restrained outward expression, the tension of the musical development is steadily and inexorably increasing. In the harmonic language of Ravel's foxtrot, the influence of jazz is strongly felt through the vivid harmonic colour created by the pervasive use of dissonant chords. At times, within the tart dissonances featuring altered tones, one can discern echoes of the 'detuned' intonation characteristic of blues. For example, in the D7 chord with a split seventh (bars 17–18), the simultaneous sounding of the note D with closely spaced D♭ and E♭ produces a 'dirty tone' effect—an area of unstable intonation that evokes blues practice.

Within the harmonic development, one finds progressions and sequences typical of jazz functional harmony: a plagal cadence in the parallel major (bars 23–24); an ascending sequence of minor triads—mostly in small third relationships—incorporating foreign tones and progressing through V♯ – I♯ – I – IV in A major (bars 75–76), accompanied by parallel fifths in the lower voices; and striped motion (or *locked hands* voicing in jazz terminology)—chromatic movement of major triads with octave doubling (bar 76). The orchestration of this number also reflects principles akin to jazz orchestration. Prominence is given to instruments most closely associated with jazz practice: the brass section and the percussion group, which includes not only traditional drums, timpani, cymbals, and xylophone, but also exotic instruments such as a whip, cheese grater, and wooden block. The timpani plays F♯ on the first beat of each bar, while the cymbals sound on the second and fourth weak beats, establishing a palpable sense of dance rhythm.

Among the brass instruments, the trumpet, trombone, and horn take on leading roles as melodic instruments capable of emulating the vocal intonation style associated with African American singing. In contrast, the woodwinds, piano, and strings primarily serve a pulsating rhythmic background, functioning as a kind of jazz rhythm section. Notably, the strings never fulfil their typically expressive, cantabile function. In the exposition and the reprise, they are entirely absent; in the middle section and coda, their role is reduced to supporting the melody with pizzicato chords, evoking the timbre of a banjo or guitar. The vocal timbre—whether tenor or mezzo-soprano—reflects a typical feature of popular and jazz-influenced music, namely the predominance of low female voices and high male voices. In the duet, the melody is intoned by the female singer in the second section and by the male singer and solo wind instruments in the first, following the principle of call and response. Within the melodic line, one can identify intonational formulas characteristic of authentic blues and jazz dance pieces, including:

- (a) a trichord consisting of a neighbour-note figure around the initial tone followed by an ascending third;
- (b) a trichord that combines a descending major second and third;
- (c) a movement to the tonic from the flattened supertonic (II♭) or subdominant (IV), bypassing the leading tone;

- as well as short motivic figures that cover a wide ambitus within a very brief span (highlighted in Figure 9).

Figure 9: Maurice Ravel, 1925. Fragment from Teapot and Teacup Duet from the opera-ballet L'enfant et les sortilèges.

Ravel employed original techniques and devices in his foxtrot, anticipating developments in later jazz. These include the use of polytonality in recapitulation, modal techniques, a certain simplification of functional harmony, and an emphasis on rhythmic and timbral aspects of the musical texture. These features would later become characteristic of modal jazz. These elements are particularly prominent in the solo episodes of Teacup. The central section of the foxtrot, which presents the animated character of the Chinese Teacup, is composed in the spirit of Oriental exoticism. The expressive, cantilena-like vocal melody unfolds against a backdrop of delicate pizzicato chords in the strings, reminiscent of a rustling sound and the mesmerising timbre of the celesta in the upper register. The celesta's melody, built on motivic-variant development within the framework of a major pentatonic scale and doubled at the interval of a fourth, evokes associations with the 'crystalline' ringing of Chinese bells, while also suggesting an ornate and whimsical decorative pattern. The winding contour of the melody, the significant role of symmetry in its design, and the intricate play of accents all convey an impression of the character's refined and graceful dance movements.

The recapitulation and coda of the ternary form are based on the interplay of themes from the initial sections, reflecting a duet-like dance. In the recapitulation, the polytonal stratification of texture and the timbral distinctiveness of the themes (the Teacup theme in F major, featuring the vibrating tone of the trombone; the Teapot theme in A-flat minor, played by the horn) emphasise the contrasting physicality and behaviours of the characters. In the coda, the use of a full orchestral tutti, the intensified role of percussion, the alternation of contrasting thematic elements, and dynamic fluctuations reminiscent of Russian musical idioms create an image of a temperamental and eccentric dance. Thus, the consistent realisation of the foxtrot genre through a series of thematically related episodes in the second movement of the **Violin Sonata** suggests both the dramaturgical significance of this representational sphere and a distinctive method of developing the genre. While preserving the essential characteristics of the foxtrot,

Ravel employs varied techniques of genre realisation to reveal the semantic polyvalence of the depicted dance form. The differing reframings of the dance prototype across blues-related themes—whether in terms of their degree of adherence to genre traits, structural completeness, formal articulation, or expressive and semantic function—allow us to interpret the music as a reflection of the artistic process itself. In the unfolding of the form, one perceives the stages of this process: the formation of a musical image, the gradual development of thematic material, the search for new intonational solutions, and the transformation of the imagery.

There is a need to recall Modest Mussorgsky's piece *Two Jews: One Rich, the Other Poor* (historically the first example of this kind) and the scene of the Teapot and Teacup from Ravel's opera *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. In both cases, the themes and tonalities of each character are introduced sequentially before being layered atop one another: in Mussorgsky's case, in a dramatic 'simultaneous dialogue', and in Ravel's case, in a humorous foxtrot duet. The analogy between such fundamentally different works—divergent in genre, style, and artistic conception—is striking, particularly considering they are separated by nearly half a century: the former was composed in 1874, before Ravel was born. Could this resemblance be accidental or coincidental?

The study now looks at the biographical evidence and Ravel's scores. In 1922, Ravel orchestrated Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and then embarked on a concert tour. Upon his return in 1923, he composed an opera. Thus, these two works appear consecutively in his creative biography. One cannot help but suspect that the French master borrowed Mussorgsky's technique. This hypothesis is further supported by Ravel's orchestration: in addition to retaining the tonal colouring intended by Mussorgsky, he also preserved specific timbral associations—strings and low woodwinds for the rich man's theme and muted trumpet for the poor man's. It seems clear, then, that Ravel not only understood Mussorgsky's idea but also enhanced and reinterpreted it within the framework of his own work. Therefore, the *Foxtrot* is imbued with a light irony, harmonically linked to jazz idioms through the use of pentatonic scales. At the end of the piece, the chorus—almost unaccompanied—achieves a direct and poignant emotional effect through the simplest of means.

In terms of orchestration, the work is said to introduce new techniques and a fresh aesthetic. One can clearly discern elements of *estrade* (popular stage) music, especially in the duet of the Teacup and the Teapot, written in the style of a foxtrot. On the one hand, the music does not completely distance itself from its everyday dance prototype. Within the context of stage action, it is combined with actual choreographic movement, which is why the duet reproduces the characteristic attributes of the foxtrot with considerable accuracy, including features of jazz style. On the other hand, Ravel elevates these everyday dance elements to the idealised realm of poetic and fairy-tale associations. The genre prototype is recognisable primarily through musical features: a moderately fast tempo, quadruple metre, an accompaniment texture based on alternating bass notes (on the strong beats) and chords (on the weak beats), and a resilient, march-like rhythmic pulse.

The abundance of polytonal episodes, jazz-inflected rhythms (the Teacup and Teapot duet—a graceful foxtrot; the Boston waltz of dragonflies and butterflies in the second tableau), and timbral effects inspired by jazz (such as the gliding, glissando-like vocalisation in the Cat and Female Cat duet at the end of the first tableau), along with the percussive treatment of the piano, all contribute to an atmosphere of creative spontaneity and striking imaginative vividness. Alongside the driving energy of jazz rhythms, the *Foxtrot* also reflects the melodic and intonational character, harmonic language, and unusual orchestral timbres associated with jazz. In the duet, the melody is intoned by the singer in the second part and by the male vocalist and solo wind instruments in the first part, following the principle of 'call and response'. Ravel's sustained interest in dance genres emerges as one of the defining features of his artistic identity.

Blues in the *Second Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1927)

Ravel called the second movement of his *Second Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1927) 'Blues'. What prompted Ravel to write such a starkly contrasting second movement? Perhaps his original intention was different.[23] However, the composer had always loved such contrasts. For example, he included the brilliant *Alborada* in his lyrical piano notebook Reflections, where it seems almost like a foreign element.

[23] The sonata was begun in 1923 but continued and completed in 1927.

'Ravel's demarche was constantly driven by a desire to resist foreign cultural languages and his own style. That is why he was in no hurry to introduce elements of jazz into Western music,' suggests one researcher.[24] When asked how the second movement of his *Second Sonata for Violin and Piano* was created, Ravel replied: 'The blues in my *Sonata* is stylised jazz, more French than American in character, perhaps, and perhaps more strongly influenced by your music, which you call 'folk'.[25]

In the introductory section of the *Blues*, over pizzicato chords[26] in the piano's lower register, the motif V–VII–V–I is played twice in a springy dotted rhythm (as shown in Figure 4; bb. 8–11 and 26–27), serving as the intonational seed for a number of subsequent themes. Its sound sets up the listener's perception for the entrance of a dance theme. But this is only a 'pre-echo' of the dance. Instead of the expected dance-like theme, the refrain presents a lyrical, freely flowing main theme of the movement.

Figure 10: Motif V–VII–V–I in dotted rhythm, introduced in the low register pizzicato piano part (bb . 8–11, 26–27), functioning as an intonational nucleus for subsequent thematic material.

In the vocal and brass parts, melodic elements and performance techniques that imitate the specific effects of blues intonation can be observed. Glissando is especially prominent in various forms: direct sliding between notes when intoning wide intervals or stepwise motion, portando articulation, and melodic grace notes. The performance of the Cup Theme on the trombone using the vibrer avec la coulisse technique evokes associations with the vocal vibrato widely used by blues singers. To this group of techniques, we can add the tenor's falsetto singing (bar 66) and the very loud chanting of short motifs by the singers (consisting essentially of a meaningless combination of foreign words), which recalls the sharp interjections blues performers would often use to disrupt the smooth flow of a lyrical melody (rehearsal number 36).

Ravel makes use of polytonality and several jazz rhythmic effects. 'But the only element of real blues that he captures is the glissando. The musical essence of the blues lies in its harmony, but Ravel remains within his own harmonic style'.[27] Carl Engel has rightly observed that 'jazz is rag-time, plus 'blues,' plus orchestral polyphony'.[28] Nikolai Slonimsky, however, believes that 'Ravel was interested in the element of jazz that is characteristic of the blues—namely, the instability between major and minor, and sliding effects'.[29] If ragtime expressed the essence of popular stage jazz, blues absorbed all the characteristics inherent to jazz as a folkloric phenomenon. Unlike ragtime, blues was a genre that composers attempted to recreate in its entirety, not limiting themselves to borrowing individual expressive techniques. At times, blues—at least in their imagination—interacted with related genres such as gospel and spirituals, as well as popular jazz.

As a result, the modal, harmonic, and rhythmic features of blues were often applied to foxtrots and rags. Although no true blues form is present in the piece, the strophic principle typical of blues is preserved. Rather than adhering to a strict 12-bar blues structure, Ravel presents a generalised version of a typical jazz form, built from several sections that vary from one another, with an essential return to the

[24] A. Orenstein, " Maurice Ravel: Letters, Writings, Interviews ," *Original Conference Delivered in Houston, April 1928* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 327.
[25] Martynov, "Moris Ravel'[Maurice Ravel], Muzyka, Moscow,"233.
[26] The even rhythm and chordal texture reveal the march-like character of this thematic material. Later on, the march-like pulsation is latently 'present' throughout the exposition and development of all the themes.
[27] Rogers, "Jazz Influence on French Music," 64.
[28] P. F. Laubenstein, "Discords Mingled. In Jazz—Debit and Credit," *The Musical Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1929): 610–17.
[29] Boston Evening Transcript, " Music Section."

original material at the end. In the main theme of the second movement of the sonata, Ravel vividly emphasizes the characteristic features of the blues—its fragmented, open-ended melodic structure (Figure 10), which becomes especially evident when compared to the original blues theme *Jelly Bean Blues* (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Lena Arant and Ma Rainey, 1924. Fragment from Jelly Bean Blues.

The polytonal effect of A flat/G also draws attention. As is well known, this is characteristic of blues style: 'polytonality is embedded in the very primary melodic-harmonic structure of the blues'.[30] This can be explained by the fact that, in blues, the focus is not so much on movement toward a tonal centre as on the tension created by the conflict between the melodic line and the chordal accompaniment. A significant role is played by the 'dissonant' blues tones (rehearsal number 1, bb. 6–7), which clash with the 'pure' functional chords. The development of the melody, just like in an original blues theme, is based on constant variation, which is what allows for such expressive diversity. A comparison between the development of Ravel's blues theme and that of an original blues shows this clearly (Figure 12 and 13).

Figure 12: Unknown Author, c. 1921. Careless Love, main theme.

Figure 13: Lena Arant and Ma Rainey, 1924. Fragment from Jelly Bean Blues.

[30] V. M. Smirnov, *Ravel and His Work.* (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1981), 231.

In analogy with an original blues, Ravel's theme is built on recurring structural tones with typical neighbouring motion around the seventh. In its first statement (rehearsal no. 1), the theme contains the central expressive contradiction between the free, 'blues-like' melodic structure, the accompaniment (which consistently maintains the underlying 'basic' rhythm), and a menacing short march-like rhythmic formula (bb. 8–9). Beginning at rehearsal no. 2, the blues theme becomes more dynamic: the rhythm changes, and the tessitura rises. All of this is perceived as a struggle to break through or disrupt the basic rhythmic foundation. Indeed, starting at rehearsal no. 3, the 'basic' rhythm disappears altogether. In its place emerges a new theme reminiscent of the middle section of the Foxtrot from The Teapot and the Cup (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Maurice Ravel, 1927. Second Sonata for Violin and Piano, second movement, bb. 37-40 (piano part).

Against this backdrop, the violin introduces dreamy, blues-inflected intonations. Gradually, two intonational and semantic zones begin to emerge: the march-like theme, which embodies a puppet-like mechanical force, and the blues theme, which is a symbol of fragile lyricism. These two elements enter into a musical confrontation. The puppet-like force grows increasingly dominant, eventually 'crushing' the blues theme (rehearsal no. 10), which is reduced to a monophonic line that sounds broken and delicate. Its intonations are tenderly shaped in a chamber dialogue between the violin and piano. The refined rhythmic nuances of blues are rooted in the vocal nature of the genre. However, the most defining rhythmic feature of blues, shared with other jazz styles, is the displacement and misalignment of accents across musical layers. For instance, throughout the entire second movement of Ravel's *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, the piano maintains a steady chordal pulse on every quarter note, forming a rhythmic grid. With this accompaniment, the violin part unfolds with greater rhythmic flexibility. The solo techniques of the violin in this movement are particularly striking. Compared to the first movement, the violin here gains greater freedom of movement, with arpeggiated passages and pizzicato chords evoking the sound of a banjo or guitar. More broadly, the texture of the second movement evokes not only the characteristic violin glissandi but also the effects of wind instruments—*portando* trombone slides, the distinctive dynamic techniques of the saxophone, and the signature glissandi of African American fiddle players—all of which bring a unique colour to the sonata, which is rare in chamber instrumental music.

Composers placed the greatest emphasis on one of the fundamental principles of blues form—the technique of responsorial exchange, or what is commonly referred to in the context of blues and African-derived music-making as the 'call and response' technique. In blues music, the instrumental element is perceived as an organic extension of the vocal line. It is both a refrain and not a refrain, since it always contains a 'response' to the vocally intoned melody, is inseparable from it, is equal in status, and constitutes an integral part of the structural framework of the blues. The authentic structure of the blues—based on the so-called 'blues square', a complete 12-bar functional-harmonic cycle forming the basis of the theme and repeated throughout the piece without major changes—was not precisely reproduced by academically trained composers. However, certain features of this form, such as the repetition of the harmonic framework and variations in harmony, texture, and rhythm, were absorbed and adapted in numerous jazz-influenced compositions. Most composers, including Ravel, did not aim to replicate the strict 12-bar blues scheme, typically structured as four bars of tonic (T), four bars of subdominant (S), and four bars following the progression tonic–dominant–subdominant–tonic (TDST). Ravel was no exception. Rather than imitating jazz literally, he freely combines its rhythmic and timbral elements, creating what

has been described as an 'idealised' abstracted version of the genre, detached from its everyday context [3, p. 204]. Ravel's *Sonata for Violin and Piano* does not contain formal 'blues squares'. More likely, bypassing the genre's formal structures, the composer reproduces the actual expressive duration of blues performance, which often depends heavily on performance style, with numerous ritardandi and accelerandi. This results in a non-square phrasing of the musical material in the second movement. The main theme unfolds in the following sequence of bar groupings: 2 + 3 + 5.5 + 4.5.

The dramaturgical character of the movement is defined by the interaction between two expressive semantic planes: one of lyrical contemplation, the other of the composer's personal reflection and fantasy. The main theme (rehearsal no. 1), rooted in the blues (in this case, a solo song of an improvisatory nature), is associated with the first plane of the narrative. This theme, with its origins in vocal and speech-like intonations, is perceived as an immediate lyrical utterance. It is coloured in somber hues, imbued with intonations of sorrow and regret, underscored by the composer's marking of **nostalgico**. Despite its improvisatory character, the theme displays clear structural completeness in its exposition, with well-defined textural and registral contours and coherent tonal-harmonic logic.

The second dramaturgical plane introduces a theme drawing on song and dance genre origins—first fully presented at rehearsal no. 5, and later reappearing in fragments at rehearsals nos. 7, 9, and 10—alongside a series of dance-like themes. These themes are often marked by incompleteness, formal openness, and, at times, by a disjointed or 'illogical' intonational flow, suggesting that they may represent dances imagined by the composer rather than actual physical or social movements. The dance-like themes, which appear both in the episodes and in the refrain[31], grow out of a single motif and are similar in their rhythmic structure and textural design. This allows us to speak of a unified genre prototype underlying them.

At the initial stage of formal unfolding, the structure appears blurred and indistinct. Gradually, the contours take shape, and the image of a dance resembling a foxtrot begins to materialise. Originally, the blues was an improvisation over a fixed bass line, so melodic variation was inherent to the genre itself. In Ravel's treatment, the accompaniment consists of two layers: long bass notes that determine the overall harmonic framework and steady chordal motion that generates the phonic (textural) effect. Ravel's notion of 'blues-ness' is primarily associated with modal characteristics. He addresses this through the use of polytonality: the duality of the blues mode is achieved by superimposed tonal layers. In this regard, Ravel succeeds in fully capturing one of jazz's essential qualities—improvisational freedom–which implies freedom of expression, continual renewal, and an inexhaustible variety of intonational techniques and forms. In doing so, the composer expresses the instability (in the European understanding of tempered tuning) of certain scale degrees. Ravel wove jazz elements into the fabric of his music in such a way that they became an integral part of his compositional language. Through this work, blues were introduced into chamber music for the first time by Maurice Ravel.

Ragtime in Ravel's Piano Concertos

The characteristic features of ragtime (from the English 'ragged time', referring to its syncopated rhythm) include the juxtaposition of a constantly syncopated melody against a metrically steady, march-like accompaniment (typically bass–chord alternation), the use of ostinato melodic and rhythmic patterns that do not align with the bar structure, and a distinctive approach to compositional form. In Ravel's works, ragtime elements appear only subtly and reflect the composer's broader interest in jazz rather than in ragtime as a specific genre. Nonetheless, certain ragtime-inspired features can be found in both his *First Piano Concerto* and *Second Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* (both composed between 1929 and 1931). In the *First Concerto*, these elements are rather stylised and minimal, whereas in the *Second* they are more vividly expressed.

The *Second Concerto* has been described as a unique echo of Sturm und Drang, marked by a kind of nervous tension and sharpness. According to one critic, '[Ravel's] characteristic scepticism takes shape in contact with the grotesque element of jazz music, which enters the Concerto's imagery as something

[31] The *Blues* is written in rondo form with significant deviations from the typical pattern, due to the complex interaction of themes from different dramatic planes and the free nature of the unfolding of the intonation process.

alien'.[32] Though structured in a single movement, the *Concerto* possesses a thoroughly symphonic development, in which individual episodes are intricately interwoven. This interpenetration is particularly evident in the interaction between the concerto's principal themes and a contrasting jazz-inspired theme, which first appears with the marking *Allegro* and later returns to conclude the work (Figure 15). Initially, this theme emerges in a veiled, 'preliminary' form as the second element of the introduction, and echoes of it recur throughout the entire piece.

Figure 15: Maurice Ravel, 1931. Second Piano Concerto, theme of the middle section (piano part).

Its jazz-like character is underscored by its rhythm: strong accents on weak beats, a result of sequencing a three-quaver motif within a 4/4 meter. Additionally, the octave presentation of the theme alludes to the texture of ragtime piano writing (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Maurice Ravel, 1931. Second Piano Concerto, fragment Allegro (piano part).

[32] Martynov, "Moris Ravel'[Maurice Ravel], Muzyka, Moscow,"256.

In its principal form, the jazz theme in E major appears at the beginning of the section that functions as development. Although it creates a strong contrast at that point, it does not disappear without a trace; it reappears at the conclusion. 'It's only five bars long, three of which are filled with rhythmic motion, while in the final two bars, parallel triads cascade downwards (played by the piano and doubled by the orchestra)'.[33] However, due to their striking character and uniqueness, these five bars remain in the listener's memory from their initial appearance in the development and are perceived as a logical culmination at the end of the work.

A key role in this is played by the descending figure in parallel triads, first performed by three trumpets and then repeated by the piano. Passing the same material between different instruments is characteristic of Dixiel and jazz. On one hand, it fragments the musical fabric, giving each instrument its own 'voice'; on the other, it unifies the texture through the repetition of the same material coloured by different timbres. Thus, the concerto's 'stylistic fusion' is highly unusual. This contributes to the communicative character of the piece, which arises from the vivid presence of recognisable musical intonations—those of Mozart, Saint-Saëns, and Bach, as well as Basque and blues-inflected elements. This kind of stylistic fusion allows Ravel to construct a unique intonational-semantic triad: folk–jazz–neoclassical, in which jazz acts as the centring link, possessing an assimilative flexibility and polycentric quality. In the concerto, Ravel seeks to find common ground among the elements of this triad:

Folk – Jazz	**Jazz – Neoclassical**
A focus not on the traditional classical 'compositional' method, but on *improvisation*, as the concerto was originally conceived as a *divertissement*.	A *turn toward a new simplicity* in the means of musical expression.
Like *Basque folk music*[34], jazz is characterised by a pronounced rhythmic drive.	Thanks to the *neoclassical current,* jazz intonations are *reinterpreted*—the blues is gradually freed from sensuality and shifts into the *psychological realm of 'pure' lyricism*.
Ravel's engagement with both *folk and jazz idioms* fostered his pursuit of musical expression beyond the confines of conventional notation.	As in jazz, a strongly articulated rhythmic drive is a hallmark of the *neoclassical style.*

Overall, the following features stand out in the sphere of jazz influences:

- Cinematic qualities, reflected in the rapid, kaleidoscopic succession of episodes (Movement I, section III), and in the inclusion of distinctive 'instrumental' improvisations (Movement I, bb. 10–12);
- Emphasised concertante style, marked by impulsivity and a vigorous dialogue between instruments (Movement I);
- Extensive use of ostinato techniques (Movement I, bb. 16, 29–30; Movement III, bb. 11–12);
- A pronounced rhythmic drive (Movement I, Movement III);
- Stylisation of blues-inflected intonation (Movement I, bar 5);
- Rhythmic patterns and textures typical of 1920s jazz compositions.

The incorporation of jazz elements enhances the work's communicative orientation. The very term concerto—implying a coming together, a competition—is strikingly aligned with the spirit of jazz. One need only recall the street brass band 'battles' of early jazz or the now-traditional jam sessions—impromptu, collaborative performances introduced by New Orleans musicians. In addition, the virtuosity of instrumental technique and the principle of active interplay between ensemble voices are organic traits of both jazz style and Ravel's musical language.

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[33] Martynov, "Moris Ravel'[Maurice Ravel], Muzyka, Moscow,"257.

[34] In the *Concerto in G major*, Ravel had originally intended to incorporate material from an unrealised *Basque Rhapsody* (according to another version, a *Fantasy on Basque Themes*). The typical instrumentation of the main theme, evoking the spirit of Basque folk music—specifically flute in harmonics and tom-tom—is noted by A. Gilles Marché.

The *Concerto in G major* follows a traditional three-movement structure, with a slow movement framed by two fast ones. The first and third movements adhere to sonata form, while the central Adagio is cast in a ternary form. However, due to jazz influences and elements of Spanish folk music, the traditional boundaries of form are transcended, resulting in exceptionally dynamic structures. One has the impression that the logic of sonata form is transformed into a colourful kaleidoscope of impressions and contrasting episodes. There is a sense of seamless continuity in the *Concerto*, with no sharply defined boundaries between movements. Instead, a through-composed dynamic arc emerges, evoking either a divertimento or the spontaneous character of jazz performance. The motoric imagery of the first movement continues as a kind of emotional crescendo in the finale, while the lyrical second movement heightens the overall contrast. Notably, the second movement incorporates the greatest number of dispersed jazz idioms, which function, in our view, as a kind of sonic sign language, conveying an underlying communicative programme. In the first movement, Ravel also employs the jazz pattern technique (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Maurice Ravel, 1931. Piano Concerto in G major, fragment from first movement.

It is an ostinato melodic-rhythmic formula or model. The pattern does not align with the underlying metrical pulse, creating a mismatch in accentuation. Through repetition, it produces a destabilising effect—disrupting and loosening the metric foundation. The communicative function of the pattern lies in its ability to heighten the tension of musical motion, serving as a key element of formal structure and thematic development. A similar function of dynamic intensification is performed by Ravel's use of the jazz device known as the riff—a rhythmically repeated ostinato figure (see Figure 18).

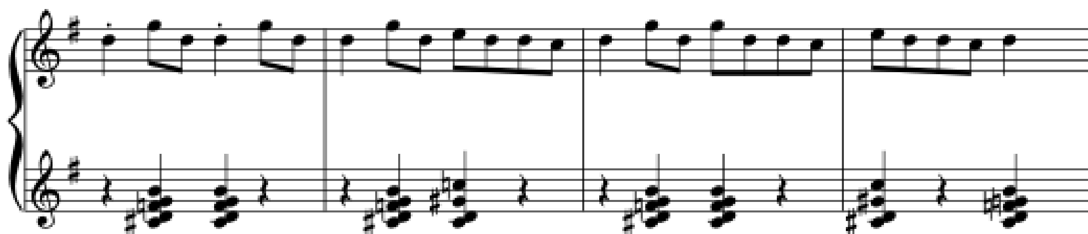

Figure 18: Maurice Ravel, 1931. Piano Concerto in G major,
fragment from first movement, (piano part).

When examining the lyrical dimension of the *Concerto* through the lens of jazz idioms, particular attention should be paid to the stylisation of blues-inflected intonation. This includes the use of characteristic dirty tones—tones produced through microtonal inflection or pitch bending (e.g., the alternation between A and A-flat in section 6, bar 5)—which recreate the distinctive African-American vocal intonation style, marked by its pitch flexibility and expressive nuance. Additionally, at various

points, the contours of the blues scale become apparent, notably through the use of lowered third and seventh scale degrees—features typical of blues tonality (see Figure 19).

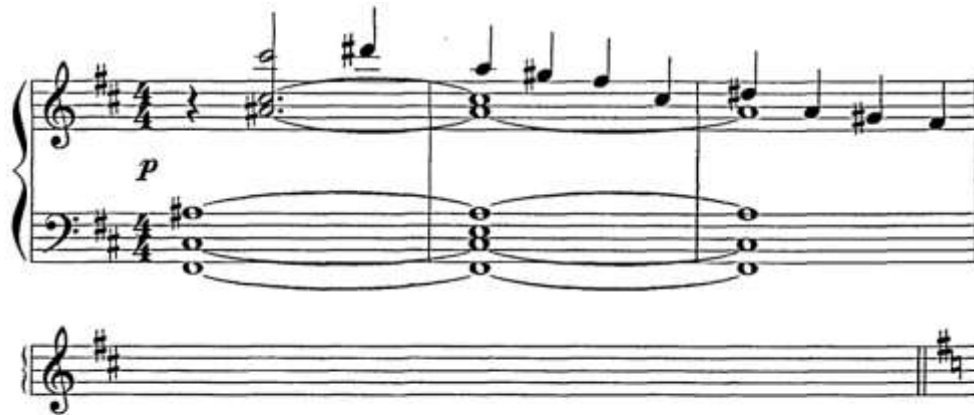

Figure 19: Maurice Ravel, 1931. Piano Concerto in G major, fragment from first movement (piano part).

Within the strict confines of traditional notation, Ravel attempts to capture swing nuances—that is, a type of metric pulsation characterised by micro-deviations from the strict tempo (section 4, bars 5–6). In this case, the phrasing anticipates the downbeat, slightly preceding the strong beats of the bar. This creates in the listener a sensation of concentrated inner energy held in a state of unstable equilibrium, giving rise to the characteristic 'swinging' feel of the sound. Ravel makes extensive use of the jazz device off-beat accentuation, which involves shifting emphasis from the first and third beats of a 4/4 bar to the second and fourth (section 6, bar 16). He also employs simple syncopation (section 6, bars 6–8) and concealed polymetre (section 6, bars 13–15). Among the jazz techniques used to enhance musical dynamism is the break—an improvisatory interjection that typically interrupts the ensemble texture. During a break, ensemble playing halts, allowing for a solo or dramatic pause. The communicative effect lies in the disruption of formal continuity—in essence, the break acts as a 'structural syncopation', intensifying the listener's sense of anticipation. In the *Concerto in G major*, breaks occur before the statement of the main theme (sections 10–17 and 29–34). Jazz influence also extends into the harmonic sphere of the *Concerto*. Ravel draws on the characteristic barbershop harmony—a style of harmonic accompaniment based on parallel chromatic voice-leading between chords, reflecting the fingering patterns of the banjo (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: Maurice Ravel, 1931. Use of 'barbershop' harmony in Piano Concerto in G major (piano part).

Moreover, it is not difficult to observe Ravel's general inclination toward parallel motion in voice leading and a linear, melodic approach to composition. This may be linked to the traditions of African choral singing, as well as the frequent use of seventh chords in European harmonic practice. Another broader tendency is the extensive incorporation of percussion-derived effects—that is, specific performance techniques and rhythmic patterns borrowed from the practice of playing percussion instruments (Movement I, bb. 10–12 and section 4.1, bb. 29–30).

The second movement of the *Concerto* continues the lyrical tone introduced in the secondary theme of the first movement. Gradually, its initial blues colouring transforms into a brighter neoclassical current (bars 1–5). According to Ravel himself, he composed this theme 'bar by bar with the help of Mozart's Quintet'.[35] The continuous development of the theme (bar 36) evokes a direct analogy with jazz improvisation, whose central principle is to exhaust all thematic possibilities. Here, the theme unfolds as a purely melodic construct. Its intonational richness arises from the oscillation of tonal centres and the ornamentation of variably shifting tonal anchors. The 'infinite' quality of the melody is largely a result of rhythmic variation, which overcomes the typical squareness and symmetry of phrase structure. In the central section of the Adagio (section 2), one notes the juxtaposition of parallel major and minor modes (overlaying the major onto the minor of the same tonic), which recalls the dirty tones previously encountered in the first movement.

The concise finale of the concerto unfolds as a succession of episodic scenes, each developing in rapid sequence—reminiscent of flickering film frames (the overall tempo is *Presto*). Moreover, the spirit of competition and contest between soloist and orchestra emerges here even more vividly than in the first movement. Ravel resolves all of this in a style best described as 'lively and witty divertissement'. The finale's episodes feature, in his own words, 'playful grimaces, a Basque procession, jazzy slides, and toy-like arabesques'.[36] It is like a dazzling panorama of a modern city at night—a vibrant cacophony of urban streets, passing faces, and fleeting encounters. One might ask whether the musical imagery of the finale evokes Ravel's impressions of Paris in the 1920s and '30s, where, as one account put it, 'jazz roared late into the night, and the snobs were enraptured by syncopations'.[37] In addition to the techniques already noted in the first movement—breaks and riffs—the finale introduces several new elements. Most notably, it is marked by a dynamic attack on sound, giving the music a sharply accentuated, percussive edge. Ravel also employs a technique typical of jazz piano playing: block chords, where the right and left hands move in monorhythmic chordal motion (bars 1–4). More than in the first movement, the finale is characterised by the effect of drive—a gradually intensifying forward momentum, creating the impression of accelerated tempo. As one commentator described it:

> In the finale, the relentless, hurried clatter of wheels becomes ever more audible. It is as though time itself is racing ahead like an express train… The violins strive in vain to hold back their motion, to retrieve the past. But the past is irretrievable. And yet—how beautiful life is![38]

The central episode of the *Concerto in D major* is interpreted by Gilles Marché as an 'aggressive game, the image of youth that prefers sunstroke to moonlight. Here returns the vigorous Allegro style of Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*—transformed under the influence of jazz'.[39] I believe this episode is crucial for understanding the overall concept of the work. Through the stylistic language of jazz, Ravel vividly conveys the image of a fatal game, one whose mechanistic energy harbours total destruction. It becomes a tragic expression of life itself—a fateful cycle of events beyond human control. Intriguingly, Ravel presents this puppet-like quality precisely through jazz idioms, possibly reflecting his association of jazz with the new face of urbanised culture and its psychological pressures. Against a shimmering ostinato, the second theme of the introduction (section 28, bars 1–4), reminiscent of a spiritual, sounds even more ominous than in the opening. Its recurrence introduces both polyrhythmic and polytonal layers (C minor vs. C major). These function as psychological counterpoints between themes, which are key to understanding the work's conceptual framework. The numerous open-ended sections of the Concerto (e.g., sections 1–4, 1–5, 12–14) appear as shifting mood-episodes within a continuous improvisatory stream, closely echoing the aesthetics of jazz performance. Among the broader jazz techniques employed, one must note the percussive approach to articulation (section 4, bars 5–6), *glissandi* (Figure 21), and vibrato (Figure 22) as integral features of jazz intonation.

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[35] Smirnov, *Ravel and His Work.* 181.
[36] Smirnov, *Ravel and His Work.* 181.
[37] Smirnov, *Ravel and His Work.* 133-134.
[38] Y. Krein, *The Symphonic Works of Maurice Ravel* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1962).192.
[39] Martynov, "Moris Ravel'[Maurice Ravel], Muzyka, Moscow,"256

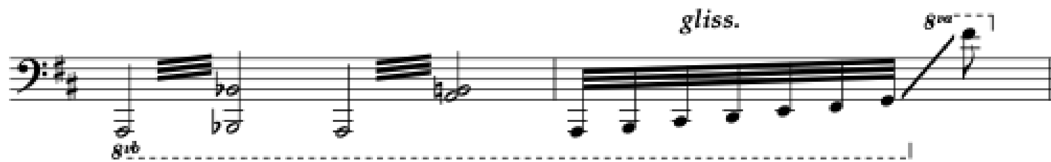

Figure 21: Maurice Ravel, 1930. Glissando in Piano Concerto in D major as an expressive element of jazz idiomatics (piano part).

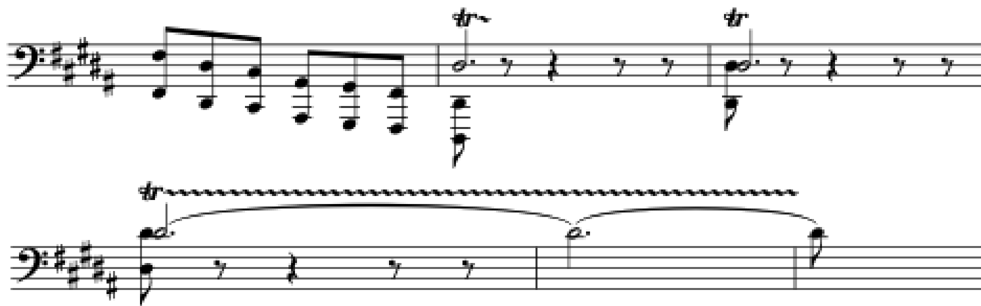

Figure 22: Maurice Ravel, 1930. Use of vibrato in Piano Concerto in D major, illustrating the influence of jazz intonation techniques (piano part).

As in the *Concerto in G major*, Ravel embraces the concertante ethos, emphasising virtuosity, evident in the frequent extended cadenzas (section 4, bars 1–4; sections 49–50). Also recurring is the jazz break—a sudden rupture in the expected flow of musical development (sections 43–45)—used to great dramatic effect. This function is paralleled by short, ascending glissandi, known in jazz as slur and slim figures (Figure 23), as well as the use of drive—a playing technique marked by energetic propulsion, creating an effect of unstoppable forward motion and accelerating tempo (section 4, bar 27).

Figure 23: Maurice Ravel, 1930. Short ascending glissandi (slur and slim) in Piano Concerto in D major (piano part).

The melancholic character typical of the blues is preserved by Ravel. However, unlike authentic blues compositions, the French composer's work is permeated by a sense of dramatic development. Still, it should be noted that Ravel does not fully achieve an authentic blues colour—and perhaps does not aim to. He appears to deliberately constrain himself within the boundaries of the academic concert genre,

introducing only a hint of the blues, which serves to intensify the music's emotional sharpness, as well as its conflictual and dramatic nature.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of Ravel's works reveals his consistent engagement with jazz idioms in his orchestral works. Ravel perceived in jazz an inexhaustible reservoir of *dynamic* resources—capable of liberating perception from conventional stereotypes, encouraging the search for unconventional expressive effects, and stimulating the listener's imagination, thereby transforming the listener into an active participant in the musical process. It is worth noting that Ravel does not treat jazz as a stylistic foundation, but rather as an additional colour, integrating isolated elements into the broader fabric of his musical textures. In his creative explorations, Ravel turns to the *primary* principles of musical thought: the ideas of ostinato, variation, organic growth, and the continuous intonational evolution of musical material. Symptomatically, most of the works under consideration are large-scale (in the genre of the concerto, aspiring to complex conceptualisation), where ritualistic elements function within an expanded, 'symphonised' context. When discussing the *playful* means of expression in Ravel's music, it is essential to highlight his pronounced inclination—often thanks to jazz's influence —toward *improvisational logic* and *non-standard structures*, yielding a special musical quality that implies spontaneity and immediacy. In Ravel's **jazz-inspired** compositions, akin to the act of play itself, there is a marked tendency toward direct expression and entertainment value associated with humorous imagery. Through jazz techniques imbued with their ritualistic and ludic character, a new conception of musical language emerges in Ravel's oeuvre. Its key features include the following:

1. *Intonational freedom***,** manifesting as a liberated modelling of sound, is treated as a kind of sensual equivalent that embodies the fullness of human experience. This calls for a new type of musical discourse that enhances perceptual flexibility. As in jazz, this requires active intonation and a search for effective intonational form.
2. *Effective intonational forms*, such as
   - *Signal-like figures* (for example, *Concerto in G major***,** I mov., bars 1–4; cue 7, bars 1–4; *Concerto in D major*, cue 4, bars 15–16)
   - *Suggestive incantations* (e.g *Concerto in D major*, cue 3, bars 1–10)
   - *Dialogic structures* (e.g. *Violin Sonata***,** II mov., cue 12).
3. *A distinctive treatment of rhythm.* Influenced by jazz, the rhythm in Ravel's work acquires substantial expressive meaning, reflecting a new emotional sensibility and serving as an embodiment of the artistic psychology of the modern era.
4. The skilful **classical** manipulation of compositional techniques has been pushed into the background. In the foreground is the emphasis on *frequent 'emotional modulations'* and heightened impressions—characteristics that are also central to jazz-performance aesthetics.

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