

Welcome to **aMUSE Issue #1**—a music newsletter by and for Spence students.

MUSIC · CULTURE · STORIES WORTH HEARING

COMPOSER OF THE ISSUE

Maurice Ravel

Considered one of the most celebrated French composers of all time—and one of music's greatest rule-breakers.

BY CLAIRE LEE '29 & IRENE LEE '27

Ravel is one of the most celebrated French composers of all time. Influenced by his father, who was a prominent inventor, Ravel's works incorporated elements of Impressionism and even jazz. In his youth, he was part of a cohort of rising composers nicknamed "*Les Apaches*"—or, the Hooligans. Although he was a painstakingly slow composer, Ravel produced several critically-acclaimed works, including a piano concerto for just the left hand.

Quick facts: Did you know that...

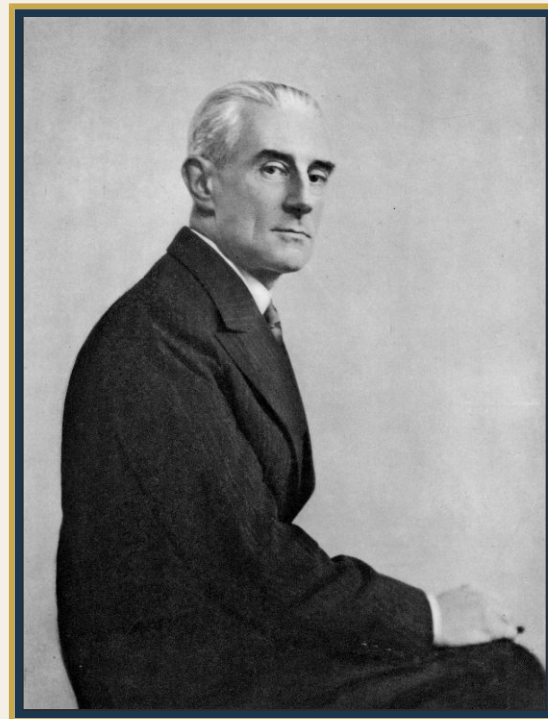
★ Ravel was born in the same region that invented the delicious Basque cheesecake.

★ Due to his small stature, Ravel served in World War I as a truck and ambulance driver for the French Army.

★ When the French government gave him the Legion of Honour, the highest and most prestigious French national order of merit, Ravel rejected it, believing that the government had no right to judge his musical skill.

🎵 Highlight: *La Valse*

Originally conceived as a ballet, *La Valse* evolved into one of Ravel's most celebrated concert works. It begins quietly before gradually building into a sweeping, gorgeous waltz. This piece has been described as tracing the birth, glory, and demise of the waltz itself. By the end, the music unravels into something chaotic and loud. Ravel himself wrote that the scene opens with "waltzing couples faintly distinguished through whirling clouds." Some listeners find it reminiscent of the orchestral music of classic Disney movies.



MAURICE RAVEL · 1875–1937

🎵 LISTEN THIS WEEK

La Valse: Listen to [the piece](#) on YouTube!

Scandals Galore!

Although Ravel was considered a brilliant composer, his life was marked with scandals regarding his volatile relationship with the Paris Conservatory. He made **five attempts** to win France's most prestigious prize for young composers, the *Prix de Rome*—and failed every time. During his last attempt at thirty years old, Ravel's elimination from the 1st round caused such public outrage that the French government had to step in and **force the director of the Conservatory to resign.**

5
FAILED
ATTEMPTS

THAT'S CLASSICAL?

Radiohead & Ravel

Thom Yorke of Radiohead has long cited Ravel as one of his major harmonic inspirations. The two share a striking similarity: both Ravel and Radiohead have works that feels dark and eerie yet beautiful in some way. "**Burn the Witch**" (2016) is noted to be a particularly striking example of Radiohead's inspiration from Ravel. If you already love Radiohead, you might like Ravel's music!