



Maurice Ravel - Valses nobles et sentimentales

In 1911 Maurice Ravel composed a series of eight piano waltzes entitled *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. As he himself declared, the inspiration came from Schubert, whose catalog includes the thirty-four *Valses sentimentales* op. 50 and the twelve *Valses nobles* op. 77. The pianist Louis Aubert baptized the opera on 9 May 1911 in the Salle Gaveau in Paris, during an unusual evening with an unfortunate outcome in which the public would have had to guess the authorship of the pieces performed. Already the following year Ravel hastened to orchestrate the *Valses* for a ballet - *Adélaïde ou le langage des fleurs* - thus creating a second version, also used as a concert suite, which would have had more success than the original piano version. The epigraph at the beginning of the score that quoted the lines of the poet Henri de Régnier "... *the delicious and ever new pleasure of a useless occupation*" led some to believe that Ravel had created the *Valses* for pure creative leisure. In fact, beyond the pleasant and casual elegance that frames the work, a sound world steeped in melancholy and bitterness emerges in the *Valses*. The rhythm of the Viennese waltz gives life to the eight episodes, which alternate in slower and more choppy tempos during the score, but it is a rhythm that is often only hinted at, masked or broken by syncopes and dissonances that question its very nature.

Robert Schumann - Concerto in A minor Op.54 for piano and orchestra

In the midst of stylistic maturity and after the numerous and beautiful pages dedicated to the solo piano, the idea of the solo concert makes its way into Schumann's mind. As he confides in a letter to his wife Clara from 1839, Schumann knows that he cannot write a concert as a keyboard virtuoso and that he must aim for something different, that is, an opera "halfway between symphony, concert and great sonata". The project for the concert for piano and orchestra committed him on several occasions, from 1841 to 1845, in one of the happiest creative periods of his career. In 1841 he made the *Fantasia in A minor* for piano and orchestra, a piece in a single movement performed privately by Clara who, as a good counselor and excellent musician, invited her husband to continue on the path he had taken. In 1845 Schumann added two movements to the *Fantasia* (*Andantino* and *Rondò*) which together with what had already been composed would constitute the defined structure of the *Concerto in A minor* op. 54. At a time when the solo concert was characterized by spectacularity and technical skill, Schumann chose to subordinate virtuosity to poetic inspiration, but not only. In the *Concerto in A minor* he also goes beyond the canons of form, renouncing thematic development in favor of a motivic unity animated by the humoral and passionate impulses, typical of his piano writing, and creating a balanced dialogue between piano and orchestra and free from any traditional constraint.

Igor Stravinskij - Le Sacre du Printemps

Le Sacre du printemps made its debut in Paris at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on May 29, 1913, one year after Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*. The story of his debut speaks volumes about the prophetic and explosive power of this work, considered a symbol and pillar of modern music. Third effort by the young and talented Igor Stravinskij for Djagilev's Ballets Russes, *Le Sacre du printemps* unhinged the canons of musical beauty without half measures, describing a barbaric ritual of pagan Russia with an unprecedented sound violence of that page was so shocking that on the evening of the premiere it degenerated into a brawl, amidst whistles and screams of dissent. An ancient propitiatory ritual takes place against the disturbing and mysterious background of primitive Russia: a girl chosen as a sacrificial victim will have to dance to death to win the favor of the gods of Spring. In the two parts into which the composition is divided - *The adoration of the earth and the Sacrifice* - the violent and sudden explosion of the Russian spring and the immutable laws of Nature of death and rebirth are translated into a musical writing with an explosive force, made of strident timbral effects, irregular accents, obsessive and exasperated rhythmic pulsations. Despite the initial failure, *Le Sacre du printemps* will be destined to make the echo of its originality and its rhythmic complexity resound in the music of the future and Igor Stravinskij, "the young savage who sometimes picks the nose of the music", according to a famous definition by Claude Debussy, he will be confirmed as a brilliant exponent of musical modernism.