

### Ravel's *Boléro*

1928: Ravel had been asked to write a Spanish-themed piece for Ida Rubinstein. (Russian-born dancer who had performed with the Ballets Russes.) Ravel wanted to use some of Albéniz's *Iberia*, but after several weeks found that Enrique Arbós had exclusive rights to the music.

Joaquín Nin (contemporary of Ravel's) wrote about the situation in 1938, saying:

"One day I had a short letter saying that he was working at something rather unusual: 'No form in the true sense of the word, no development, hardly any modulation; a theme in the style of Padilla (the terribly vulgar composer of 'Valencia') together with rhythm and orchestration."

Ravel gave Nin a copy of the score a year later, with an inscription:

"*Boléro* is to some extent your fault. If you hadn't warned me I'd have put myself heart and soul into orchestrating *Iberia*, and think how awful that would have been."

And then added

"Be careful how you use the oboe d'amore: it didn't work out as I hoped."

Hélène Jourdan-Morhange (violinist who premièred Ravel's *Berceuse sur le nom de Fauré*, and the *Sonata* for violin and cello in 1922) wrote this in 1945:

"Ravel was extremely surprised at the mass success of *Boléro*. 'They're going to turn it into another *Madelon*, he said, rather crossly; and deep down he felt that the obsessive, musico-sexual element in the piece was probably behind its enormous popularity. But one old lady was proof against the contagion. Ravel's brother saw her, at the first performance, wedged tightly in her seat shouting above the applause, 'Rubbish! Rubbish!' Maurice, when informed by his brother, replied mysteriously: 'That old lady got the message!'"

Jane Bathori (a friend) said this on a recording made in 1961:

"He was always very simple and was a delightful friend. He never sought honours: on the contrary, sometimes he asked himself what people saw in his music, for instance, one day he said to me, 'I've composed a Bolero for Ida Rubinstein – it's a little thing. Ansermet finds it very good, I really can't think why.'"

Alexandre Tansman (composer) told this to Roger Nichols (editor) in 1987:

"*Boléro* was first performed as a ballet by Ida Rubinstein, commissioned by her, and it was not a musical success. And then Toscanini came with the New York Philharmonic and played it much faster. And Ravel was not pleased at all. We were in the same box and he wouldn't stand up when Toscanini tried to get him to take a bow. Then he went backstage and told Toscanini, 'It's too fast,' and Toscanini said, 'It's the only way to save the work.'"

Arthur Honegger (composer- one of *Les Six*) wrote this in 1948:

“Ravel said to me, in that serious, objective manner which was characteristic of him: ‘I’ve written only one masterpiece – *Boléro*. Unfortunately, there’s no music in it.’ “

Edmond Maurat (director of Conservatory at Saint-Étienne) in his memoir in 1977 wrote:

“I was having lunch in Marseilles one day with the conductor Paul Paray and he remembered taking Ravel to the casino at Monte-Carlo. As they went through the gaming room, Paray asked him if he would like a go. Ravel replied: ‘I wrote *Boléro* and won. I’ll stick there.’ “

All this comes from Ravel Remembered, Roger Nichols, Ed.; W. W. Norton, London 1987, New York, 1988, pp. 45-51

Madelon:

Originally a popular song from World War I, 'La Madelon' was composed in 1914 by Camille Robert with lyrics by Louis Bousquet, and describes soldiers flirting with a young waitress. The song was so popular that it was translated into Spanish and into English by Alfred Bryan as 'Madelon, I'll be true to the whole regiment'.

[holocaustmusic.ort.org/resistance-and-exile/french-resistance/la-madelon-x266b/](http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/resistance-and-exile/french-resistance/la-madelon-x266b/)

L'Orchestre National de France, Dalia Stasevka conducting

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg1TDKBSRvg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg1TDKBSRvg)

turn up the volume enough that you can hear the snare at the beginning (you can turn it back down as things thicken up)