

MAURICE RAVEL

Born March 7, 1875 in Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, France; died December 28, 1937 in Paris.

Rapsodie Espagnole (1907-1908)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Paris, March 15, 1908

Concerts Colonne

Edouard Colonne, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 17 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: two piccolos, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, two harps and strings

In the years immediately following his failure to win the Prix de Rome in 1905, Ravel enjoyed a burst of creativity probably fueled by his freedom from academic restraints for the first time in his life. In the late summer of 1907, when he first took up the *Rapsodie Espagnole*, he was bothered by the street noises bombarding his apartment in Paris, and some friends offered him the use of their yacht moored at Valvins. He gladly accepted, and soon took up the life of a recluse, seeing no one except the boat's gruff but likable captain, with whom he shared his meals. Ravel worked quickly, and he as soon able to return to Paris with the finished score.

Rather than a single span of music, the *Rapsodie Espagnole* is a miniature suite of three dances with a prelude. Ravel described the first section of the *Rapsodie*, *Prélude à la nuit* ("Prelude to the Night"), as "voluptuously drowsy and ecstatic." The *Malagueña* was based on a genre that was initially a Spanish courting dance which had developed into a virtuoso vehicle for the café singers of the 19th century. The *Habanera*, whose rhythm is similar to that of the tango, is an orchestration of Ravel's piano piece of 1895, subtitled in both versions *Au pays parfumé que le soleil caresse* ("In the fragrant land caressed by the sun"). The *Feria* ("Festival") is an exhilarating depiction of a sun-splashed Iberian holiday.