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Maurice Ravel : A Life

By Benjamin Ivry

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Maurice Ravel: A Life is the first convincing attempt to paint a portrait of the life and work of the hitherto enigmatic composer of Bolero, Piano Concerto for the Left Hand, and L'enfant Et Les Sortileges. Ivry offers here a convincing solution to the much-discussed "mystery" of Ravel's sexuality. More than simply "outing" Ravel as a gay man for the first time among numerous writers on this composer, this book discusses how his secretive sexuality impacted his work. Using unpublished documents, letters, articles and memoirs, many of which were previously unknown even to Arbie Orenstein, universally considered the world's leading scholar of Ravel studies, Ivry presents a more rounded view of Ravel, man and musician. Descriptions of musical works are in non-technical language, friendly to the reader with no specialized knowledge of classical music. Like Ivry's widely acclaimed biography of Poulenc, universally seen as the standard life of this composer in any language, his new Ravel is likely to become a classic of contemporary musical biography.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Thoroughly steeped in French culture, poet and translator Ivry has already written studies of Rimbaud and Poulenc. He comes to this brief but tightly compressed biography of Ravel with a thesis that the composer was "a very secretive gay man" whose works often displayed a tension between potent creativity and iron control, a duality that was also exemplified by his life. Ravel has always been a mysterious figure, with acquaintances (he had few close friends) willing to swear he was homosexual, heterosexual or simply asexual. This is not simply a matter of prurient interest, as Ivry makes clear, for Ravel's hidden sexuality showed itself in his music, which varied enormously from the early opera *L'Heure Espagnole* to the famous *Bolero*, perhaps the most ubiquitous symphonic score of the 20th century. (Ivry explains that Ravel is by far the most financially successful composer, classical or pop, that France has ever produced, with royalties still running at the rate of several million dollars a year.) A fervent belief in sorcery and the primitive powers of the ancient wood god Pan melded with Ravel's determined dandyism and his outspoken conviction that sincerity was the enemy of true art. Artifice, he felt, was all, and though his exquisitely crafted scores do not eschew emotion, a glittering surface seems to have been what he chiefly prized. (He despised Beethoven as "the big deaf one.") Ivry is particularly good at relating Ravel's work to his life, and if at the end of the book the composer remains a remote, somewhat chilly figure, that seems to have been Ravel's choice. Illustrations not seen by PW. (Aug.)

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From Library Journal

In this short biography, the author's thesis is that Ravel, the most popular French composer of our time, was secretly gay. Indeed, the issue of Ravel's sexuality has been discreetly avoided by previous biographers, who have tended to note his idiosyncratic behavior but have dismissed it as irrelevant to his professional life. Making extensive use of interviews and previously unknown documents, Ivry (Francis Poulenc) tries to make the case that Ravel's creative output cannot be separated from his sexual persona. There seems to be little question that Ravel was an affected, intensely secretive dandy with gay inclinations (he was clearly attracted to many aspects of the gay Parisian subculture, such as its fascination with the Greek god Pan). Too often, though, the evidence that his homosexuality has any bearing on his artistic output is thin or nonexistent. Nonetheless, this is an enjoyable read, as Ivry's prose is lively, empathetic, and quite often insightful. Even readers who may be skeptical of the book's premise will appreciate its refreshingly broad view of the 20th-century socioartistic scene in Paris. Certainly, one comes away with a more complete picture of this enigmatic and elusive composer. Recommended for public libraries."Larry Lipkis, Moravian Coll., Bethlehem, PA

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Review

Ivry's prose is lively, empathetic, and quite often insightful... -- *library journal*

Thoroughly steeped in French culture, poet and translator Ivry has already written studies of Rimbaud and Poulenc. -- *publisher's weekly*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Tisha Betancourt:

Maurice Ravel : A Life can be one of your basic books that are good idea. Most of us recommend that straight away because this publication has good vocabulary that can increase your knowledge in vocab, easy to understand, bit entertaining but delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort to place every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing Maurice Ravel : A Life yet doesn't forget the main level, giving the reader the hottest as well as based confirm resource data that maybe you can be considered one of it. This great information can easily drawn you into new stage of crucial thinking.

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