



A scandalous concert in tribute to the Apache Ravel
Creation 2025

**Au fou ! = He's Crazy!*



Edito

'Au fou!' (He's crazy!) exclaimed an irritated audience member at the premiere of Ravel's *Boléro* in 1928? To which the composer is said to have replied softly, with a half-smile on his lips: 'That one, she understood!'

This cry, uttered in the midst of an audience stunned by repetitive music before its time, crowned the career of an innovative and daring composer who, throughout his musical life, provoked scandals, the surprise of audiences and the incomprehension of critics.

Behind the image of a giant in the history of music, celebrated unanimously throughout the world and applauded without reservation, the silhouette of this creative genius, impertinent and non-conformist, is discreetly outlined; the man who, with his Apache friends, loudly defended new music, shook up routines, shocked the Prix de Rome juries with his refusal to bow to convention, organised daring concert experiments without authors' names, introduced guinea fowl into French melody or proclaimed a pacifist message in a great anti-colonialist cry.

This wind of freedom blows through *Les Histoires naturelles*, *Les Valses nobles et sentimentales*, the *Boléro*, *Les Miroirs*, *Les Chansons Madécasses* and emerges in his fugues for the Prix de Rome essay competition. It is this state of mind and this amused taste for provocation that unites these singular works, born of the same tumultuous impulse and an atmosphere of lively uproar.

The cheers, whistles, laughter and booing that greeted each of these masterpieces are brought back to life and become the musical material for new works commissioned by Les Apaches. These sound, vocal and physical reactions were given to the

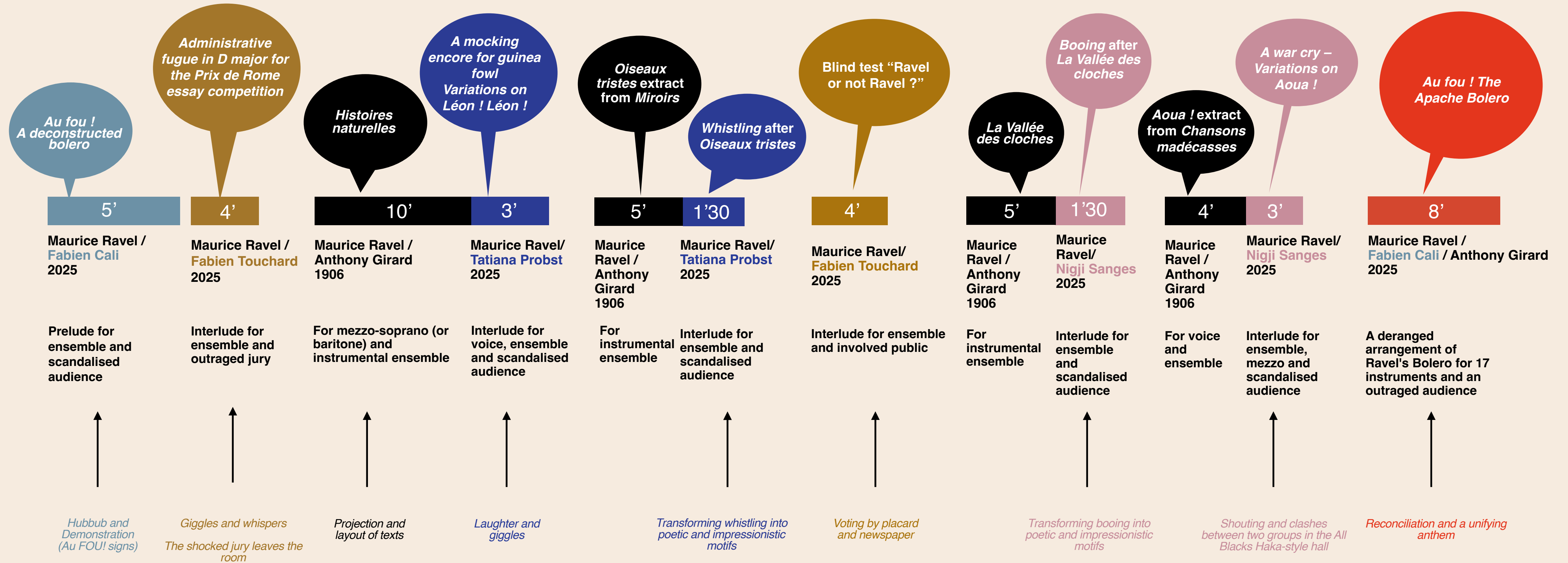
composers as writing instructions and stimulated their creativity. Wouldn't making them resonate today in hybrid musical forms be the best way to reveal to the public the modernity of Ravel's language and to wake up concert halls that have become so passive and silent?

Au fou! cry out the new Apaches once again in admiring tribute to their genial elder. Our composers, musicians, singers, young student actors and musicians, who have 'infiltrated' the auditorium, confront each other and come together to plunge the audience into the heart of the reactions and emotions aroused by Ravel's music at the time and today. The Apaches' new challenge is to give the audience a whole new experience and make them the central players in the concert!

So, let's sit down, let's be indignant, let's stand up, let's marvel, let's cheer! Perhaps with the hope that Ravel will lean towards us with his mischievous smile and whisper in our ear: 'These people, they've understood...'

Julien Masmondet, Artistic Director

Program





Working notes

Works by Ravel that were the subject of scandal and/or strong public reaction

The ***Boléro***, because of the reaction of an irritated audience member at the premiere. To which the composer is said to have replied softly: 'That one, she understood.'

The **Ravel Affair** In 1905, Ravel entered the Prix de Rome for the 3rd time. He failed the eliminatory tests (writing a school fugue) and was not even admitted to the cantata test. The decision caused a scandal and the press seized on it, triggering the Ravel Affair. Following the scandal, Théodore Dubois resigned as director of the Conservatoire and was replaced by Gabriel Fauré.

The ***Histoires naturelles***, with their prosaic subject matter about animals (particularly guinea fowl) and the popular pronunciation of the song with the elision of the final e, were described as 'café-concert practice'. One critic reacted sharply: 'Mr Ravel, are you a deadpan or an unconscious person? I don't know, but you'd better not do it again!'

The ***Miroirs*** marked a considerable change in Ravel's writing, disconcerting critics, audiences and musicians accustomed to his style. The first two *Miroirs*, *Noctuelles* and *Oiseaux tristes*, were particularly incomprehensible to the public.

The ***Valses nobles et sentimentales*** was a daring experiment by the SMI in 1912 with several friends (students of Fauré) who wanted to shake up the routines and conventions that were in danger of stifling the composers of the younger generation. Knowing the effect of the snobbery, prejudice and preconceived ideas of the critics they called the arbiters of good taste, the Apaches decided to organise a concert without an author's name and to confront the public and the critics with anonymous manuscripts and observe their spontaneous reactions. Ravel's score drew jeers and sharp

reactions, and these pages were judged ridiculous...

The ***Chansons madécasses***, which caused a scandal when it was first performed in 1926 because it was set to a text by the anti-colonialist Évariste de Parny (1753-1814). The pacifist message came through loud and clear at the first performance of 'Aoua' in October 1925, when a man who saw a direct link between Ravel's melody and the war going on in Morocco rose in anger and indignation and exclaimed at the end of the piece: 'It's shameful to sing such things when our soldiers are fighting in Morocco, I'll write to the author!'

Works commissioned from 4 young composers Apaches d'aujourd'hui

In homage to the boisterous public in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century, Les Apaches are commissioning works by young composers based on the noises, reactions and demonstrations of the public. Entitled 'Interludes pour ensemble et public scandalisé' (Interludes for ensemble and outraged public), these creations will link Ravel's various works by using the reactions they provoked as musical material, thus rediscovering this direct contact with today's public, a central player in the musical event and a stimulus to the composers' creativity.

Léon-Paul Fargue, poet and member of the Apaches, wrote about this in his book on Maurice Ravel:

'It seems to me that concert audiences from 1893 to 1914 were not the same as those of more recent years. From a distance, I find the old audience warmer to listen to, more combative, more passionate to discuss with, more profound to listen to, more genuinely attentive (...). The audience of my youth, the audience of Ravel's youth, rose from their seats, demonstrated, intervened, frowned, whistled at the concertos that they ostentatiously

shunned to go outside and smoke the liberating cigarette. The halls were packed. Sometimes we would step over layers of reclining bodies on the stairs, plunged into the abyssal depths of the music. We needed this atmosphere to live happily and poorly'.

The programme's participatory approach

Two groups of drama and music students will be placed anonymously in the concert hall. They will have worked in advance with Apaches supervisors on the various interventions designed to draw the audience into the atmosphere of hubbub, demonstrations, cheering, giggling, whispering and whistling typical of concert halls in early 20th century Paris.

They will take part in each interlude and also in the final Bolero: the student musicians will stand up in the hall with the musicians to play with the professional musicians of Les Apaches, as well as with the student actors who, through onomatopoeia, shouts and whistles written especially for the work, will join in this joyous and tumultuous finale.

Distribution



**theatre
students**

30 students



**music
students**

30 students

Les Apaches !

17 solo musicians
Julien Masmondet, conductor

Aliénor Feix,
mezzo-soprano
or

Eléonore Pancrazi,
mezzo-soprano

Gordon,
stage direction and set design

Sylvie Deguy, vocal preparation for groups of student musicians and actors, in collaboration with two Conservatoire reference teachers

2 groups of drama and music students from the Conservatoires
(2 x 30 students)

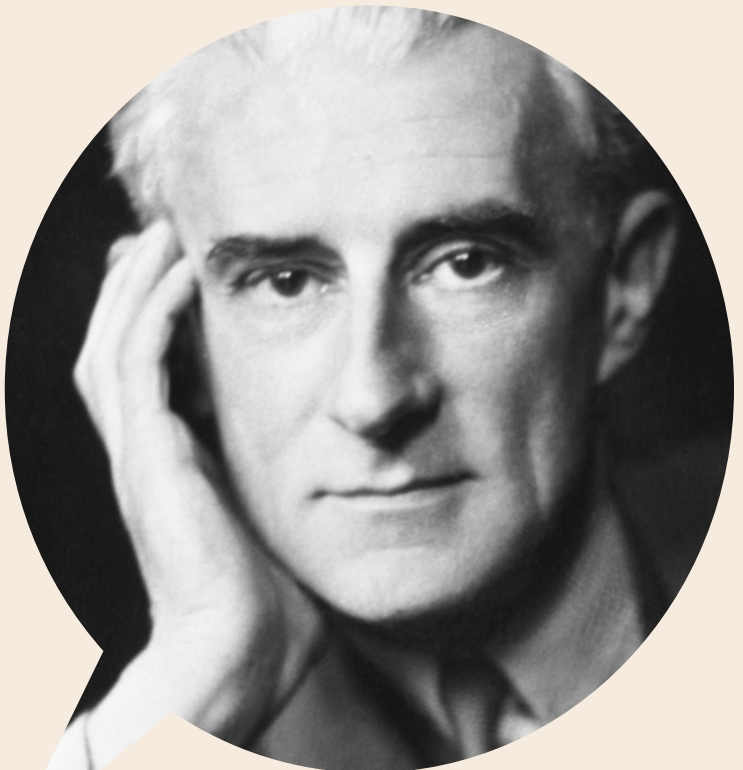
Time:
Approx. 1 hour - no interval

On tour:
2.1.2.1 – 1.1.1.0 – harp - 2 perc – 1.1.1.1.1 (17 musicians)

Music and compositions



Tatiana Probst



Maurice Ravel



Fabien Cali



Fabien Touchard



Nigji Sanges



Schedule

Since 2023	Emergence of the artistic idea for the programme & Musicological research
December 2023	Writing of the project by Julien Masmondet and Gordon
May 2024	Programming by La Folle Journée
June 2024	First meeting of the creative team
July 2024	Specifications for the musical commissions and the visual universe
Autumn/Winter 2024	Delivery of musical commissions / scenographic and dramaturgical writing Readings and musical rehearsals in Paris Design of the newspaper accompanying the performances Design of signs and instructions
24-26 Jan. 2025	Theatrical and musical rehearsals at the Conservatory in Nantes
29 Jan - 2 Feb 2025	La Folle Journée (Nantes)
3-5 May 2025	La Folle Journée (Japan)
Autumn/Winter 2025	Optional dates: Cité de la Musique, Paris & Musée d'Orsay, Paris

