



How did WW1 affect French composer Maurice Ravel?

Ravel's musical tribute to fallen friends - Narrated by Sara Mohr-Pietsch

In the months leading up to the outbreak of the First World War, Ravel started writing a piano suite called *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. A Tombeau in French is both a tomb and a memorial.

(Music: Le Tombeau de Couperin: Prelude)

He was drawing upon the work of the celebrated 18th century French composer Francois Couperin.

But he didn't complete the work until 1917... and what had started as a celebration of the golden age of French music ended up as a double homage. Ravel dedicated each of its six movements to a friend or group of friends who died in the War.

In the opening movement, the Prelude, Ravel combines the traditional structures of a French baroque suite with modern harmony. The Prelude is dedicated to Lieutenant Jacques Charlot, a cousin of Ravel's publisher, who died on the battlefield on the 3rd of March, 1915.

(Music: Le Tombeau de Couperin: Forlane)

Ravel first began the Forlane – the third movement of the suite – in 1914. A Forlane was a popular French aristocratic court dance dating from the early 18th century. The dedication, to Lieutenant Gabriel Deluc, was added retrospectively. Deluc, who died at Souain in northern France on the 15 September 1916, was an artist: one of his paintings still hangs in Ravel's house today.

(Music: Le Tombeau de Couperin: Toccata)

The final movement brings the suite to a triumphant end. It's dedicated to Captain Joseph de Marliave, who died at the beginning of the war. De Marliave was a musicologist, and he was married to the celebrated pianist Marguerite Long, one of Ravel's most trusted friends and interpreters. Fittingly, she was the one who gave the first performance of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* in 1919.

Notwithstanding its title, *Le Tombeau de Couperin* is anything but funereal, perhaps reflecting the fact that the dedications were added after the work was completed. Some of Ravel's contemporaries were even shocked by music that is, at times, joyful; but essentially, at heart, this music is more ... homage, than commemoration.