**PROGRAM NOTES**
by Phillip Huscher

**Maurice Ravel**
Born March 7, 1875, Ciboure, France.

**Suite No. 2 from *Daphnis and Chloe***

Ravel began composing *Daphnis and Chloe* in 1909 and completed the score in 1912. The ballet was first presented on June 8, 1912, in Paris; the second suite was probably played for the first time on April 30, 1914, in Paris. The score calls for two piccolos, two flutes and alto flute, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, three bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, bass drum, snare drums, cymbals, triangle, tambourine, castanets, celesta, glockenspiel, two harps, and strings. An optional wordless chorus is omitted at these performances. Performance time is approximately seventeen minutes.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first subscription concert performances of Ravel's Suite no. 2 from *Daphnis and Chloe* were given at Orchestra Hall on November 2 and 3, 1923, with Frederick Stock conducting. Ravel himself led the Orchestra in performances of this suite on January 20 and 21, 1928.

Maurice Ravel wrote home from his first tour of America in 1928: "I am seeing magnificent cities, enchanting country, but the triumphs are fatiguing. Besides, I am dying of hunger." Although he found the food alarming (Ravel traveled with his own favorite wines and cigarettes) and the pace relentless, in city after city Ravel was reminded of the extent of his celebrity. At the matinee concert of the Chicago Symphony on January 20, 1928, Ravel accepted enthusiastic applause throughout the afternoon, a standing ovation at the conclusion of the program, and a fanfare from the orchestra he conducted. The Chicago program included, as its centerpiece, the second suite from the ballet *Daphnis and Chloe*, which Ravel later called his most important score.

Ravel wrote *Daphnis and Chloe* for Sergei Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes. It was begun in 1909, before Diaghilev's troupe had set Paris ablaze with a series of new ballets unlike anything the worlds of music or dance had known, starting with Stravinsky's *Firebird* in 1910 and climaxing with the scandalous premiere of *The Rite of Spring* in May 1913. Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe* wasn't introduced until June 8, 1912, due to the composer's difficulty in finishing the score, compounded by backstage squabbling once rehearsals began. Although *Daphnis and Chloe* wasn't well received, that date isn't engraved in music history, for this isn't music to provoke fistfights or catcalls.

The principal players in the creation of *Daphnis and Chloe* were a distinguished group: Sergei Diaghilev, the impresario; Michel Fokine, the choreographer; Léon Bakst, the designer; Pierre Monteux, the conductor; and Vaslav Nijinsky and Tamara Karsavina, the leading dancers. Ravel worked tirelessly with Fokine to translate the most famous of the Greek prose pastorals into a scenario for ballet—the collaboration partly hampered, as the composer admitted, because "Fokine doesn't know a word of French, and I know only how to swear in Russian."

At first, there was also a serious difference of opinion about the style of the piece. "My intention in writing [Daphnis and Chloe]," Ravel later said, "was to compose a vast musical fresco in which I was less concerned with archaism than with reproducing faithfully the Greece of my dreams, which is very similar to that imagined by French artists at the end of the eighteenth century." But Fokine had in mind the "ancient dancing depicted in red and black on Attic vases." The result has something of the classical austerity of Jacques-Louis David's canvases as well as the stunning clarity of Greek pottery. But it is both more sumptuous and subtle than either.
In rehearsal, Fokine and Nijinsky fought endlessly over the choreography, and Diaghilev grew so tired of serving as intermediary that he finally threatened to cancel the project. As it was, he was forced to postpone the premiere twice, largely because Ravel was having trouble completing the final dance, on which, by the first rehearsals, he had labored for a full year. (And then, when the music was delivered at last, Diaghilev’s dancers were stymied by the finale’s asymmetrical 5/4 meter—Ravel suggested chanting “Ser-gei-Dia-ghi-lev” to each measure to help them keep their place.) Ultimately, the rancor and tension of the Daphnis rehearsals led to a rift between Diaghilev and Fokine, who left the company at the end of the season.

Daphnis and Chloe is the largest orchestral work Ravel wrote; he called it a “choreographic symphony in three parts,” and in its scale and developmental detail it’s as close as he ever came to tackling symphonic form. “The work is constructed symphonically,” Ravel said at the time, “out of a small number of themes, the development of which ensures the work’s homogeneity.” Daphnis and Chloe is perhaps the greatest example of Ravel’s remarkable ear for orchestral sounds, and of the subtlety with which he shades and colors his canvas. Few passages in music are as justifiably famous as the opening of this suite, when the rising sun gently bathes the music in warmth and light.

The story is adapted from a tale by the fifth-century Greek author Longus. Daphnis and Chloe, abandoned as children and raised by shepherds, have fallen in love (Daphnis charmed Chloe by playing for her on his pan-pipes). In the first part of the ballet, Daphnis earns Chloe’s kiss; pirates land and abduct Chloe. In part 2, Pan and his warriors rescue Chloe; part 3 reunites the lovers. Ravel arranged two sets of symphonic fragments from the ballet for the concert hall.

The second suite—the one the Chicago Symphony played under Ravel’s baton in 1928—includes the music of part 3 of the ballet. It opens with the sounds of daybreak, one of the most magical depictions of the gradual awakening of nature in all music. The birds (three solo violins and piccolo) sing and the shepherds stir, and the music is slowly warmed by the brightening rays of the sun. Daphnis wakens and joins Chloe. It is now full day.

In a gentle pantomime, Daphnis and Chloe recreate the old story of Pan wooing the nymph Syrinx—the very event that Pan recalled and which moved him to intervene with the pirates and return Chloe to Daphnis. Pan’s seductive flute solo is one of the most famous in music. Daphnis and Chloe eventually forget their roles and fall into each other’s arms, declaring their love. All that’s left is celebration, accomplished in an extraordinary final dance that took Ravel, perhaps the greatest perfectionist among composers, a year to polish and fine tune.

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