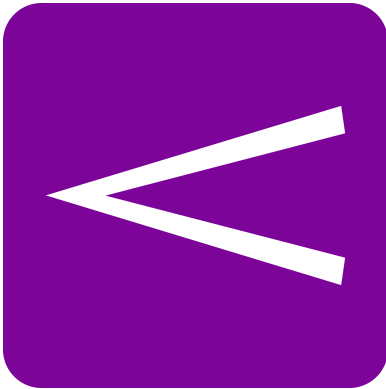


# **BOLERO**

**Maurice Ravel (1928)**



## BOLERO

By Maurice Ravel (France)  
20<sup>th</sup> Century (1928)

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### LESSON INTRODUCTION

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#### Important Terms and Concepts

- \* **Ostinato:** a musical phrase, usually with a distinctive rhythm, repeated over and over in a composition
- \* **Dynamics:** describes how loud or soft a piece of music is
  - **Piano:** softly
  - **Forte:** loudly
  - **Crescendo:** an increase in volume

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### BEHIND THE MUSIC

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Joseph Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937) was a French post-Impressionist composer whose works experimented with form and tone color, as exemplified by the piece *Bolero*. In 1889, at 14, Ravel entered the Paris Conservatoire, where he remained until 1905. During this period, he composed some of his best known works, including the *Pavane for a Dead Princess*, the *Sonatine* for piano, and his String Quartet in F. After three attempts to win the coveted Prix de Rome for composition, a bit of a scandal broke out because the works he submitted were

The Shreveport Symphony Orchestra will perform Maurice Ravel's *Bolero* at the May 6 concert! Encourage your students to come hear this piece performed live!

judged too “advanced” by ultraconservative members of the jury. Ravel never married, and lived the life of a semi-recluse at his country retreat in France. Ravel thought of music as a ritual, having its own laws, to be conducted behind

high walls, sealed off from the outside world, and impenetrable to unauthorized intruders.

Boléro reveals Ravel's mastery of the art of instrumentation. It was originally intended to be a ballet, commissioned for the dancer Ida Rubinstein. Ravel based his piece on the musical form and Spanish dance called *bolero*. The main melody of "Boléro" is adapted from a tune composed for and used in Sufi [religious] training. Ravel decided that the theme had an insistent quality and thus repeated it over and over without any real development, only a gradual crescendo as the instrumentation grows throughout the piece.

## ACTIVE LISTENING

### OSTINATO

1. Watch from 0:00 – 1:15 of the Harry Potter Puppet Pals:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx1XIm6q4r4>
2. Have students come up with their own ostinato based on the rhythm of their own name, which they will repeat over and over again.
3. Point to students one at a time, having them enter with their ostinato. The
4. Explain, "An **ostinato** is a musical phrase with a distinctive rhythm that is repeated over and over in a composition. You have each created an ostinato based on your name, which you repeated over and over in the song we just created."

### LISTENING

5. Hold up the Bolero poster (page 1) and say, "Today's piece is called Bolero, and it was written by a French composer named Maurice Ravel. As we listen, pay close attention to the ostinato pattern!"
6. Watch from 0:00 – 3:11 of Bolero:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KgpEru9lhw>

7. Ask:
1. **Can anyone remember the ostinato pattern?**
  2. **What instruments played the ostinato?** (*The snare drum began with the ostinato, and continues playing throughout the entire piece. After the flute finished playing the melody, it then joined the ostinato rhythm. The harp and violins also participated in the ostinato with their pizzicato*)
  3. **This piece is 17 minutes long! What do you think it would be like to be the snare drum player and play the same ostinato pattern over and over for 17 minutes?**
  4. **Which instruments played the melody?** (*The flute had the melody first; then the clarinet; then the English horn*)
  5. **How would you describe the dynamics at the beginning of the song?**
8. Refer to the “ostinato pattern” on page 6. Lead students in counting and clapping the ostinato as a class. Then, have them continue clapping while you play another section of the song: 4:55 – 7:44.
9. Say, “You may have noticed that you heard the same melody over and over again.
1. **How would you describe the melody? What is its mood?** (*If appropriate, you may want to point out that the melody takes the form AABB*)
  2. **What instruments did you hear playing?**
  3. **How would you describe the dynamics of the middle of the song?”**

**Bolero continued passing the melody around various instruments of the orchestra, and you may notice that he gradually adds more instruments to both the ostinato and the melody as the song progresses. Therefore the song gets louder and louder as more instruments begin playing: it is like one giant crescendo! What dynamics would you expect to find at the end of the song? What instruments do you think will be playing?**

10. **Let’s listen!** (Play from 14:41 – 17:00).

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## GO DEEPER

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### OPTION 1. OSTINATO COMPOSITIONS

Divide students into groups of three or four students each. Have them pick a category (such as foods, TV shows, candy bars, etc.). They will work together to write out an ostinato song based on their category, such that each group member will have his/her own ostinato pattern using an item from the category. Then, have students write out the rhythm of their ostinati and perform their compositions for the entire class.

### OPTION 2. CREATING A LISTENING MAP

Have students create a listening map of the entire piece or a short section in order to demonstrate the musical form and the progression of the orchestration. Create three symbols to represent the ostinato, the A section of the melody, and the B section of the melody. Have students arrange them to demonstrate the way in which they go together. Have them add additional words or symbols to show which instruments are featured in each part.

### OPTION 3. BOLERO

Ravel based his piece on the bolero, a Spanish dance form in a slow triple meter that originated in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Have students listen to original examples of bolero dances. How do they compare with Ravel's piece?

- a. Example 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4lvTOCDDww>
- b. Example 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVKClIjWh8>

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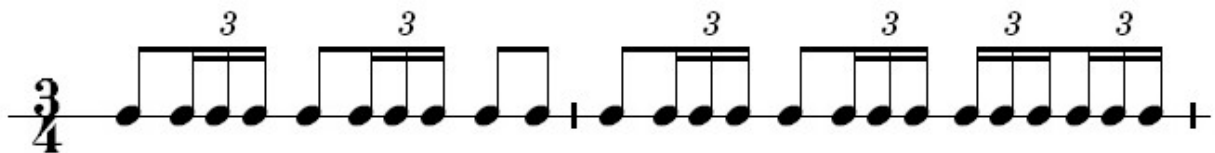
## RESOURCES

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**YOUTUBE RECORDING:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KgpEru9lhw>  
(performance by the Weiner Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel)

**SHEET MUSIC:** [http://imslp.eu/Files/imglnks/euimg/f/fb/IMSLP104723-PMLP03667-Ravel-Bolero\\_cropped.pdf](http://imslp.eu/Files/imglnks/euimg/f/fb/IMSLP104723-PMLP03667-Ravel-Bolero_cropped.pdf)

**BOLERO OSTINATO PATTERN:**



**LESSON ACTIVITIES WERE ADAPTED FROM:**

- Foxy Music Ed Blog:  
<https://foxymusiced.wordpress.com/2011/04/06/ostinatomusical-structures-idea-harry-potter-puppet-pals/>