

Pavane pour une infante défunte (Pavane for a dead infant)

"Pavana", Italian form of "Pavane", stems from "Pava" which is a dialect form of Padua, the Italian city. Therefore, a Pavana is originally a typical dance from Padua. First appeared in the 16th century as a court dance, a pavane has developed into a slow dance usually used for processions or services. Ravel composed *Pavane pour une infante défunte* for solo piano in 1899, while he was still studying with Gabriel Fauré at the Paris Conservatoire. It became an instant hit when it was premiered by Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes in 1902. Nonetheless, Ravel was not proud of the piece and dismissed it as being too much in the shadow of Chabrier.

Admittedly, the unusual title of the work does, to a certain extent, arouse a curious interest and contribute to its popularity. Despite the literal meaning of the title, Ravel never intended it to be a lament of anyone in particular. On the contrary, he dedicated the Pavane to a living person named Winnaretta Singer, who became the Princess of Polignac through her second marriage and was a generous patron of the arts. It is a known fact, that Ravel claimed that he put together this title for the pleasure of alliteration. But he also suggested that the work was "an evocation of a pavane that a little princess might, in former times, have danced at the Spanish Court." At any rate, it seems that the title was not the center of Ravel's attention, but rather just an afterthought that he made up to go in accordance musically with the piece.

Ravel provided an orchestration for the piece in 1910 which has become another gem in orchestral repertoire.