

*Marinella Guatterini*

Unlike Nijinska's first *Bolero* – an entanglement of dark passions set in a Spanish tavern – Maurice Béjart's does not tell a story; instead, it interprets the musical structure, following the timbral transformations of the oriental theme played by the flute at the beginning of the piece, and hypnotically repeated by other groups of instruments in an identical form.

The performer dances on a large, round table, bathed in orange light, while, at the beginning, a chorus of dancers remain seated on chairs arranged along the walls of the stage. What happens in only sixteen minutes can be summed up as an ecstatic musical crescendo: in the middle of the table, the performer, dressed in black tights, continues to dance barefoot, provoking through his swaying movement the chorus that is gradually called on to join in the dance – in groups of four, eight, twelve and sixteen – as the various families of instruments come into play. The chorus then surrounds the table and, along with the orchestra, grows in intensity, until all the participants reach out toward the soloist and submerge him with their arms in an assault that appears as though they are devouring an idol, destined perhaps to be overcome.

Béjart changed this formula several times, replacing a female soloist with a bare-chested man, surrounded in turn by other men, or women, or substituting the chorus of dancers with musicians. Each option, however, alludes to a timeless ritual, stripped of any Iberian flavour. Ravel transformed the bolero – a late 18th-century Spanish dance in a moderate three-four time – into a motif that is obsessively repeated until it reaches a fever-pitch in the finale; Béjart made this musical intuition oriental and ecstatic.

*(Traduzione di Chris Owen)*