approach used simple accompaniments most of the time. The regularly occurring chords have an ostinato effect, but Ravel interrupts the steadiness several times by shifting to new harmonies and sudden dynamic contrasts. The introductory chords do not conform to the traditional twelve-bar-blues pattern, yet they do emphasize the same three primary harmonies of the twelve-bar-blues: I, IV, and V. It is possible, therefore, to feel the shadow of the standard blues pattern, despite Ravel's liberties.[248]

After six measures of these steady pulses, the piano's left hand introduces a perfect fifth interval that sustains for eight counts and then repeats (as shown in the bottom staff in Figure 4-9), perhaps resembling a trombone or a string bass in a rhythm section.[249] Although this prolonged perfect fifth is even simpler than the violin's pulsations, its first appearance makes it very clear that Ravel is *not* a blues musician but rather a modern-era art-music composer. The two sustained pitches are A♭ and E♭—neither of which appear in the violin's G major tonality. In fact, the piano is in a different key altogether; it is set in A♭ major, with a key signature of four flats, in contrast to the violin's key signature of a single sharp. Like his countryman Milhaud (Listening Example 10), Ravel is exploring the use of polytonality during "Blues."

The third layer of Ravel's texture makes its first appearance in measure 8 (the middle staff's second bar as shown in Figure 4-9). This is a short, bluesy riff (in the piano's right hand) that opens with an upper-neighbor motion, E♭–F–E♭. It reminds theorist Mark DeVoto of the opening of the fugue in Tableau I from Milhaud's *La création du monde* (Listening Example 10); see the first measure of Figure 4-2 for comparison.[250]

After the riff is repeated, Ravel abruptly shifts the time-keeping pulses from the violin to the right hand of the piano; he continues the sustained whole notes in the left hand. The violin changes key, unifying with the piano in A♭ major. Now using the bow instead of *pizzicato*, the violinist is told to play "nostalgico" (with nostalgia), perhaps again evoking the blues singing style of earlier in the century. The carefully notated melody is filled with slides and bends that are reminiscent of Bessie Smith's flexibility in "Lost Your Head Blues" (Listening Example 1). Although the image of a blues singer is very clear, some analysts also hear references to the tone of a clarinet or a saxophone.[251]

Like Copland in "Burlesque" (Listening Example 12), Ravel proceeds through a rondo-like structure in "Blues." The "nostalgico" **A** refrain is interrupted by the first episode (**B**), featuring busier ostinato patterns in the piano and a correspondingly simpler violin melody. When **A** returns, a more animated ragtime-style accompaniment supports the violin melody. The **C** episode puts the violin back in the accompanying role of steady *pizzicato* pulses, while the piano plays its own bluesy melody. The violin takes over the tune to lead into the **D** episode. During **D**, the piano performs crisp ostinatos that seem to be based on the short upper-neighbor riff introduced in measure 8, while the violin plays a rhythmically independent bluesy line. When the **C** episode returns—again giving the lead to the piano—the violin plays short pairs of sixteenth notes in a very banjo-like accompaniment. These banjo motifs persist for quite a while, continuing to sound even as the **A** refrain tries to re-enter. At last, the violin's "nostalgico" **A** tune regains the spotlight, this time engaging in a call-and-response with the piano until the piano plays the upper-neighbor riff one more time. At that point, the piano arpeggiates through an A♭ major chord while the violin performs a forceful glissando up to a G♭—ending the piece with a very jazz-like seventh chord.