

Les Siècles, François-Xavier Roth: Maurice Ravel

By **Raul da Gama** - May 4, 2018



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Ma mère l'Oye, Le Tombeau de Couperin, Shéhérazade – Ouverture de Féerie: **Maurice Ravel**; Les Siècles, **François-Xavier Roth** cond

As period ensembles go few can rival Les Siècles, thanks to its musical director, conductor and, indeed, its master-chef, François-Xavier Roth for there are few conductors in Europe and the rest of the world who could cook up such a storm as M. Roth does on this disc dedicated to the iconic French composer, Maurice Ravel. That M. Roth and Les Siècles can do no wrong is evident in their masterful negotiation of Ravel's delicately beautiful "Le Tombeau de Couperin", but it is also clear that there is so much more to cheer about on this disc than merely that piece.

To begin at the beginning, "Ma mère l'Oye" sweeps us into Ravel's world with his fascinating (originally) piano work for the Godebski children, Mimi and Jean, aged 6 and 7. Of course what we hear is the version that Ravel orchestrated in 1911, played in all of its nuanced-hued grandeur by Les Siècles. The pictorial quality of the work is – and particularly



this performance – is astonishing, its most magical moments coming in "le troisième tableau: Les Entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête. Mouvement de valse modéré", in which, through highly original instrumental colour, Ravel creates an utterly convincing world that is both playful and beguiling.

Ravel's "Shéhérazade", based on the poems of Tristan Klingsor, a young symbolist whose mildly perfumed verses conjured up a fantasy landscape of the exotic Orient, was a triumph especially after his failed attempt at composing an opera based on *The Arabian Nights*. The selection "Ouverture de Féerie", is (naturally) an instrumental one (others from the work featured vocal performances), and Les Siècles commanded by François-Xavier Roth present their gripping silken version sans singing, of course, but with just as much seduction. The music's heavy-lidded *fin de siècle* beauty comes across magnificently – even without the words – to convey the precision and poise of Ravel's work.

Despite his dictum that "the music of a concerto ...should be light-hearted and brilliant, and not aim at profundity or dramatic effects" Ravel's homage to Francois Couperin "The Great" (1668–1733) – "Le Tombeau de Couperin", a piece written as a memorial does not have to be constrained by those characteristics. And this orchestrated (piano) piece has its own dramatic twists and turns especially in the movement "IV. Rigaudon. Assez vif", which begins with a

whipcrack, then hustles and gambols on towards the pivotal slow movement before repeating itself to being this magnificent work – and this exquisite disc – to its (final) dénouement.

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Based in Canada, Raul is a musician and an accomplished writer whose profound analysis is reinforced by his deep understanding of music, technically as well as historically.

