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The Guardian and Observer 2011 music season



Stravinsky: The Firebird, etc – review

Les Siècles/Roth

(Musicales Actes Sud)

3 / 5

**Andrew Clements**

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Founded in 2003 by the conductor François-Xavier Roth, Les Siècles is a period-instrument orchestra with a huge collection of instruments from all eras at its disposal, and a repertoire to match. Roth and his players have already recorded Berlioz, Saint-Saëns and Chabrier, and now extend their explorations into the first decade of the 20th century, with this disc devoted to the return visit to Paris in 1910 of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and specifically to the programme that included the premiere of Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, where it was prefaced by a curious hybrid ballet *Les Orientales*, containing music by Glazunov, Sinding, Arensky and Grieg, that has been reconstituted for this recording. Roth has also meticulously recreated the orchestra that would have played for that season, using French-made string and wind instruments from the period, and adopting styles of playing as taught at the Paris Conservatoire at that time. The performances are sometimes startling: the woodwind detail is more pungent and characterful, less suave, than we are used to today, the gut strings warmer and deeper toned. However, the recording tends to spotlight the percussion in a way that detaches it from the rest of the orchestra – the leadup to the Infernal Dance in *Firebird* virtually becomes a xylophone concerto, while the timpani dominate the final number. The recording is not ideal, but it is certainly vivid.

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