



STRAVINSKY

The Firebird

VARIOUS COMPOSERS

Les Orientales

Les Siècles/François-Xavier Roth

Musicales Actes Sud ASM 06 60:12 mins

BBC Music Direct £13.99

This is a fascinating recording, combining a performance on period instruments with a reconstruction of *Les Orientales*, *The Firebird*'s original partner. First, though, a gripe. With such rich material, why provide only the briefest of programme notes? The press release had substantial information, so why deny those buying the disc?

An attempt to replicate the success of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, *Les Orientales* brings together movements from works by Glazunov, Sinding, Arensky and Grieg, and it is easy to imagine the kind of spectacular set piece dances the music would prompt from the Ballets Russes. It is fun, and provides a musical context to Stravinsky that is all too easily overlooked.

That said, *The Firebird* is the undoubted star of this show, and its orchestral plumage is subtly different here from other performances. Surprisingly, perhaps, this is more apparent with the strings than the wind, even though the timbre of the latter is distinctive. Hearing the more sweeping passages, such as the 'Khorovod' and 'Aurore' played by a large ensemble using gut strings gives a new perspective to Stravinsky's sound-world. Roth drives the music with a sure touch for dramatic pacing to ensure it's more magical *Firebird* than undercooked turkey. The recording is audibly live, but that is a small price to pay for capturing Les Siècles in full flight.

Christopher Dingle

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

RECORDING

★★★