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Classical CDs Weekly: Dubois, Sam Hayden, Liszt

A little-known French romantic, Liszt in contrasting moods and startling sounds from a contemporary British composer

by [Graham Rickson](#) | Saturday, 25 August 2012

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Les Siècles rediscover the music of Théodore Dubois

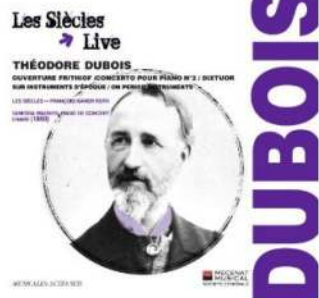
Simone Paltrieri

Théodore Dubois: Piano Concerto no 2, Ouverture de Frithiof, Digtuar Les Siècles/François-Xavier Roth (Musicales Actes Sud)

François-Xavier Roth's period band have already given us invigorating takes on [Stravinsky](#) and [Saint-Saëns](#), and now turn to the music of Théodore Dubois (1837-1924). Barely known outside France, Dubois was known as an organist and as director of the Paris Conservatoire at the turn of the century. The weightiest work here is the Piano Concerto no 2. Immediately engaging,

this is a fun listen – though you're constantly reminded of concertos by other composers with stronger profiles. Nothing outstays its welcome – a brief, rapturous slow movement and a witty, ephemeral scherzando whoosh past in barely seven minutes. Soloist Vanessa Wagner plays an 1874 Érard - the lighter, clearer sound perfectly foiled by Les Siècles; the concerto's manic, chattering close sounding so, so French. Delicious.

Yet more distinctive is the *Digtuar* scored for wind and string quintets. Dubois's wind writing is always idiomatic; there's a lovely passage for horn and clarinet at the start of the *Lacotta*, and the whole work just feels 'right' with period



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the start of the *Larghetto*, and the whole work just feels right, with period instruments lending gossamer lightness to the faster music. The disc opens with the *Ouverture de Frithiof*, ten minutes of entertaining, slightly anonymous melodramatic fluff. Excellent performances which leave you curious to hear more by Dubois.



Sam Hayden: presence/absence *Trio EKL, elision/Eugene Ughetti, ensemble mosaik/Enno Poppe (NMC)*

Writing about contemporary music in a lucid manner is like juggling cats. You read a statement in the booklet like “the idea behind *system/error* is the contradiction between the theoretical precision and control of formalised compositional systems and the practical imprecision and accidents associated with the sonic realities of performance and interpretation of notations” and your first instinct is to run away. It’s hard

work, in other words. But take a deep breath and concentrate, and you’ll find that *system/error* is a blast. Sam Hayden has a brilliant ear – the overlapping violin, flute and percussion lines deliciously collide and converse. You’re left reeling at the fact that these rich sounds can be produced by so few players and can actually be notated.

In terms of sonority, Hayden’s *misguided* is a triumph – 20 minutes of rasping, reedy blasts from brass and winds, the apparent randomness of the outbursts uniquely unsettling. Like eavesdropping on players warming up individually in a green room and suddenly making eye contact. The larger scale *Die Modularitäten* feels still more accessible, the range of gestures more familiar, though the ghostly electronic interruptions chill the blood. NMC didn’t have room for Hayden’s *schismatics* on the disc, so you can get it as a free download on their website. Mieko Kanno’s electric violin duets with Hayden’s live electronics, the two voices feeding off each other. The artificial sounds are mesmerising, transforming a two-person chamber piece into something larger and less tangible. All stimulating, and Virgil Ferragut’s sleeve art is equally imposing.

Watch Sam Haydn talk about *presence/absence*

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