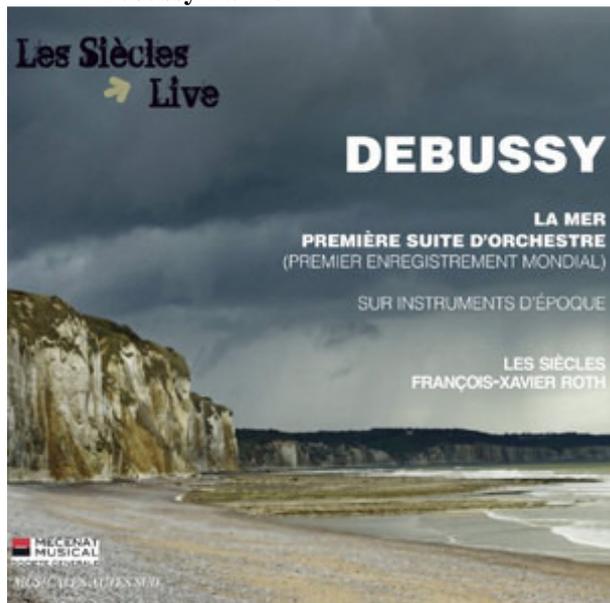


Malcolm Hayes Sinfini Music! 14 June 2013

14 June Debussy La Mer



Debussy's seascape *La Mer* played on period instruments? It does work - brilliantly in fact, says Malcolm Hayes. And there's a world-premiere recording of some early Debussy, to boot.

Label: Actes Sud Musicales

Rating5

Debussy's orchestral masterwork *La Mer* (The Sea) here has unusual company. The *Première Suite*, composed in the early 1880s when Debussy was a Paris Conservatoire student, was thought to be a lost early work – until, in 2006, a collector presented the incomplete score to a New York library. French composer Philippe Manoury has since orchestrated the third of the *Suite's* four movements from Debussy's piano-duet version; and both works are played here by Les Siècles on early 20th-century instruments, the period when *La Mer* was composed.

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In his booklet note François-Xavier Roth, who conducted the *Suite's* first performance with Les Siècles, says that the work 'has a charm beyond its curiosity value as a rediscovery'. Well, he would, wouldn't he? And he has a point. The two outer movements, 'Fête' (Festival) and 'Cortège (Procession) et Bacchanale', relate attractively to easy-listening French convention of the time. 'Ballet' offers some gorgeous exotic sounds; and while Manoury's super-skilled orchestration of 'Rêve' (Dream) is a bit sumptuous for early Debussy, it does bring out how the music points ahead to *La Mer's* three-movement seascape. This is played with a level of deftness and precision that has the music sounding as fresh as the day it was written; there's a natural blending and balancing of period-instrument groups – soft silky string tone, not-too-rich horns and woodwind – that beautifully suits the shifting colours and moods of Debussy's wondrous score. Less than 50 minutes of music amounts to a short CD. Even so, the quality is special.

Artists: Les Siècles/François-Xavier Roth

Malcolm Hayes is a composer, contributes to BBC Music Magazine, and is currently writing a book on Sibelius