

Classical, July 14

Debussy — La Mer; Première Suite d'Orchestre Les Siècles, cond François-Xavier Roth

Musicales Actes Sud ASM10

This Paris-based period-instrument band and their founder-conductor were chosen by Roger Wright, director of the Proms, for tonight's centenary performance of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* at the Royal Albert Hall. Following their acclaimed live recording of Stravinsky's complete *Firebird*, Roth and his players weave their special sonic magic on Debussy's "symphonic sketches", *La Mer*. Debussy on period instruments is nothing new, but recordings have been rare. Here we hear Lorée oboes, Couesnon clarinets, Buffet-Crampon bassoons, Courtois trombones — the Parisian instrument-makers of the early 20th century were specialists — in music that was fresh off the page as they came out of the factories. The transparency of sound from gut strings means the woodwind and brass soloists emerge as if naturally from the orchestral texture. In such an "impressionist" score as *La Mer*, with its evocations of waves, wind and sea birds, this is all gain: listen with refreshed ears. The coupling is a Debussy recording premiere: the rediscovered suite of 1883-84 (a student work indebted to Chabrier, Delibes and Massenet), with the orchestration of the third movement, *Rêve*, newly completed by Philippe Manoury. This delightful music may not be mature, vintage Debussy, but is a welcome addition to the catalogue.

- Hugh Canning