

Dukas: L'Apprenti sorcier (The Sorcerer's Apprentice); Velléda; Polyeucte
Chantal Santon (soprano), Julien Dran (tenor), Jean-Manuel Candenot (bass-
baritone), Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth
Musicales Actes Sud ASM 12 ****(*)

Placed second in the Paris Conservatoire's 1888 Prix de Rome competition, Paul Dukas's early cantata Velléda tells the tale (to a libretto by Fernand Beissier) of the doomed love affair between Eudore, a Roman general, and the Gaul druidess of the work's title, who is ultimately driven to suicide by her father, Ségenax. Comprising a dusky Prelude and three interlinked scenes, and lasting some 28 minutes, it's imbued with a very Wagnerian lyrical ardour and already shows the 23-year-old composer to be a dab hand with the orchestra. An intriguing and likeable rarity, then, beautifully revived here, and tethered to wholly admirable, newly-minted readings of that scintillating orchestral scherzo The Sorcerer's Apprentice (1897) and the slumberingly passionate overture Polyeucte (1891), with François-Xavier Roth drawing some infectiously committed, atmospheric and notably transparent sounds from his superlative period-instrument band. Vividly truthful live recordings and presentation, too.

–Andrew Achenbach (Classical Ear)