

# Chabrier; Massenet; Ravel; Debussy CD review – joyous and wonderfully vivid

Les Siècles/Roth(Musicales Actes Sud)

**Andrew Clements**

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François-Xavier Roth's exploration of the late-19th and early-20th-century French orchestral repertoire with the period instruments of Les Siècles seems to grow more assured with every disc. Like their previous albums of Stravinsky, Debussy and Dukas, the recordings are taken from concerts and come with applause after each work, but the problems of balance that took the edge off some of those performances seem to be in the past, and every item in this joyous, Spanish-flavoured anthology is wonderfully vivid and crammed with crisp orchestral detail, especially from the lower woodwind and the brass. The real highlight is Chabrier's showpiece *España*, in which every rhythm is perfectly primed, but the suite of ballet music from Massenet's opera *Le Cid*, propelled along by the castanets, is almost as special. And though some may prefer more warmth in Debussy's *Ibéria* triptych and more humour in Ravel's *Alborada del Gracioso* than Roth brings to his slightly detached performances, the clarity with which he and his orchestra illuminate the textures in both is beguiling enough in itself.

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