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Ravel

Daphnis and Chloé

Les Siècles, Ensemble Aedes, François-Xavier Roth
HMM902277

by [Andrew Aronowicz](#) on June 1, 2017 (June 1, 2017) filed under [Vocal & Choral](#) | [Comment Now](#)



A great new Daphnis... Period: François-Xavier Roth brings on some 20th-century HIP ideas to reveal the real Ravel.

Ravel called his glittering score to *Daphnis et Chloé* a 'Symphonie choréographique': essentially a 'symphony with dance', the perfect description for a work of such majesty, where the music really is centre-stage. The score is usually segmented into three suites for concert performance, making a hearing of the full version all too rare a treat. Thankfully François-Xavier Roth with period instrument orchestra Les Siècles and Ensemble Aedes deliver the full ballet on this recent release with Harmonia Mundi, with the most stunning results.



Daphnis et Chloé, M. 57, Acte I, Première partie: In...
Maurice Ravel, Les Siècles, Ensemble Aedes, Fra...



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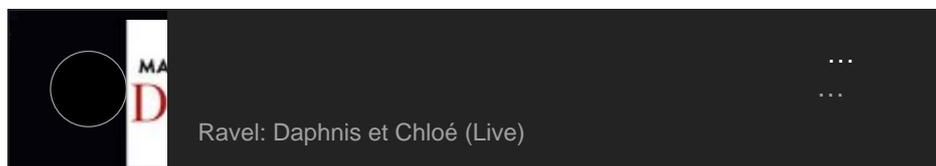
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Malek Jandali: A Syrian Symphony for Peace

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Malek Jandali: A



The exact date of inception of *Daphnis et Chloé* is somewhat disputed, but the original commission came from Diaghilev, for the prestigious Ballets Russes. The composition was fraught with challenges, mainly due to creative differences between Ravel and the choreographer, Michel Fokine. After numerous revisions and a delayed premiere, the ballet finally opened in June 1912, almost a year before Parisian audiences would be scandalised by the riot over Stravinsky's vicious *Rite*.

Underscoring the ancient Greek tale of a pastoral romance between a shepherd and shepherdess, Ravel's music is languorous and enchanting, shimmering with lush orchestral colour, and worlds away from Stravinsky's pulsating nightmare. The beginning and third part are mostly relaxed, dreamy episodes, framing the dramatic central part, in which Chloé is abducted by pirates and eventually released through the intervention of the nature god Pan. The celebration in the form of a riotous bacchanal makes for a truly ecstatic finale.

There's a real dynamism palpable throughout this recording, and the orchestra and chorus – the largest ensemble employed in any of Ravel's works – achieve a nuanced sound, capturing all of the sultry magic in this vivid score. Les Siècles' tonal balance and shaping are excellent, brilliantly managed under Roth's expert hands. Ensemble Aedes as the wordless chorus (often omitted from the suites) adds weight and emotional drive to the music, and in certain moments conjures the most hauntingly beautiful atmospheres. Marion Ralincourt's flute solos are light, finely shaded and effortlessly graceful.

A unique feature of this disc is the use of period instruments. Les Siècles offers a fascinating approach, in a carefully researched and executed performance that sounds authentic, yet still entirely fresh. The use of gut strings, wind instruments of unusual sizes, and original percussion, lends the music at times an endearing fragility, and also a powerful rawness. The opening to the third part in particular is sublime for the fascinating colours that bubble forth from Roth's reading.

Keywords

Ravel , Les Siècles , Ensemble Aedes , François-Xavier Roth , review , Daphnis and Chloé



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FEATURES - CLASSICAL MUSIC | ORCHESTRAL | VOCAL & CHORAL

François-Xavier Roth on the unique colours of period Ravel

by *Clive Paget* on June 1, 2017 (June 1, 2017) filed under *Classical Music* | *Orchestral* | *Vocal & Choral* | [Comment Now](#)



The French conductor, whose *Daphnis* is our Recording of the Month, explains how symphonic music serves the dance.

Do you remember your first encounter with the score of *Daphnis et Chloé* and your reaction at the time?

Yes, I remember precisely when I heard *Daphnis et Chloé* for the first time. I was a teenager, something like 13 years old. It was only the Suite No 2 with a recording by Charles Munch and I was very impressed and very moved by this music. I was really fascinated.

Where do you rank *Daphnis et Chloé* among the work of the Ballets Russes and among Ravel's work as a composer?

When we look at the whole Ballets Russes production, the premieres that Diaghilev organised, *Daphnis et Chloé* may be the one the most attended, the most expected. It is nothing to do with an academic style but it is really a master ballet in the tradition of the French ballet. It is maybe musically one of the biggest French ballets ever written. So it is exceptionally big with amazing forces. For Ravel itself, it is with no doubt his big orchestral work – the longest and the most developed.



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François-Xavier Roth rehearsing Ravel. Photo © Julien Mignot

What, if any, were Ravel's influences or inspirations when writing *Daphnis*?

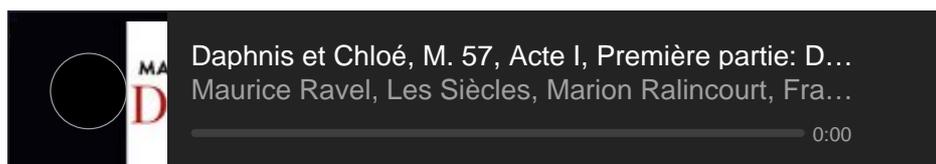
I think, in the tradition of French ballet music by composers like Rameau or Gluck, Ravel is inspired by this antique story. The simplicity of the story allows him to develop a very rich, versatile and contrasted music. He is, in terms of the music, not at all influenced by any composers. He writes this ballet himself using all of his power as a composer.

The ballet has been described as “symphonic” in style. What exactly does that mean for a listener?

This ballet is first of all a symphonic music – a music organised in all the different combinations that Ravel is master of. The symphonic music is really to serve the dance, and *Daphnis* is really a music to be danced all the time.

Does the ballet at all hearken back in style to either Greek drama or the pastoral idylls popular in the early Baroque?

There are references to the early baroque and there is no doubt that this aspect is in the culture of Ravel. We remember the piece *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, a piece very influenced by Couperin and Rameau. So Ravel is definitely influenced by the French tradition.



Period instruments are more commonly associated with music from the 18th and 19th centuries. What does *Les Siècles* bring to a work from 1921? And what are the main differences between the instruments of 1921 and those used today?

Using period instruments in Ravel's music is very important, because as I

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often say, composers who experimented in the orchestra, like Ravel, Debussy, Berlioz, Beethoven or Rameau, these composers were attentive and took a special care to explore the limits of the instruments they knew. If you use these instruments, you can realise the exact way and the exact colours the composers wanted to obtain.

The difference between the instruments of today and the instruments of 1921 is huge. The winds for instance were completely different. We also have to remember that at that time Paris was the capital of wind instrument making! With period instruments, it is also much simpler to achieve balance between the sections, correct articulation and rhythmic energy. The overall colour tends more towards sweetness and intense sensuality.



Do you have a favourite moment or moments that you look forward to whenever you conduct the score?

No, there is no special moment. The dramaturgy of *Daphnis* is really well built and every new sequence, new tableau is very exciting itself. For sure, the *Apothéose*, the end of the ballet is something remarkable but I love all the passages of the work. One of my hits is also the small *a cappella* section. It is some of the purest music Ravel composed. When I conducted *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* recently, I wondered why Ravel did not compose more for the choir. He is such a master in choral writing.

What other 20th-century works would you like *Les Siècles* to tackle?

There are many, many works that we are going to explore with *Les Siècles*. For sure, music that is expected of us – Bartók, Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky – but also, with the culture of the orchestra, we are gonna spend much time on the Second Viennese school, because I think the orchestra can bring a new way of hearing, I hope, to this repertoire.

François-Xavier Roth's recording of Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloé* is *Limelight's* Recording of the Month in June 2017

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