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## Sabine Devieille: Mirages

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You'd be forgiven for assuming that this release, featuring a French coloratura soprano in repertoire that includes the *Hamlet* Mad Scene, an extract from *Thais* and hit numbers from *Lakmé*, might be a conventional affair. You'd be wrong. As a quick glance down the rest of the track-listing shows, this adventurous programme places those familiar showpieces into the most fascinating of contexts, exploring, to quote Sabine Devieille's brief note in the booklet, 'the fantasy image of a different country' that was such an obsession in *fin de siècle* France.

Those *Lakmé* numbers can rarely have sounded fresher or more original, with Devieille joined by Marianne Crebassa in a supremely seductive account of the Flower Duet and offering some breathtaking coloratura in the Bell Song. And the latter, in particular, is heard in an entirely different light when juxtaposed with Maurice Delage's remarkable *Quatres Poèmes hindous* (1912) – almost ethnographic in their attempts to capture the strange sounds of an exotic world.

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Author: Hugo Shirley



Sabine Devieille: Mirages

### Sabine Devieille: Mirages

Madame Chrysanthème, Le jour sous le soleil beni

Pelléas et Mélisande, Mes longs cheveux

Lakmé, ~, Où va la jeune indoue (Bell Song)

(4) Poèmes hindous

(La) Romance d'Arlel

Lakmé, ~, Viens Mallika

(Le) Chant du Rossignol, 'Song of the Nightingale'

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Similarly, the programme underlines that weird orientalist episode that turns up half way through Ophélie's Mad Scene (at 7'20" here) and forces one to hear Thais's *charmeuse* afresh – we have just that small episode from Massenet's wonderful score, rather than any of the title character's numbers. Stravinsky makes a guest appearance with the brief Nightingale's Song from *Le rossignol*, here in its French version.

'Le voyage' from Charles Koechlin's voice-and-piano setting of Tristan Klingsor's *Shéhérazade* poems serves as a beguiling intermediary palate-cleanser, as do Berlioz's own delicate *La mort d'Ophélie* and Debussy's *Le romance d'Ariel* – all three are superbly accompanied by Alexandre Tharaud. The briefest wisp of *Pelléas et Mélisande* – sung with disarming artlessness – takes us into another strange, distant world between the different easts evoked by Messager and Delibes, minimal gaps between tracks allowing them almost to blend into one another.

The performances themselves are terrific. François-Xavier Roth exploits the period instruments of Les Siècles to emphasise the sheer variety of orchestral colours on display (captured in excellent sound) and accompanies with sensitivity. Devieille, meanwhile, has a wonderfully instinctive and apparently effortless way with this music. The voice is on the light side but marries seductive delicacy with astonishing pinpoint accuracy, as well as an ability to turn on a sixpence from cool, quasi-instrumental purity to seductive warmth.

All in all, this refreshing, fascinating and beguiling album is impossible to resist. Highly recommended.

Hamlet, A vos jeux, permettez-moi de grâce (Mad Scene)

La mort d'Ophélie

Thais, Celle qui vient est plus belle

Le voyage

Lakmé, Tu m'as donné le plus doux rêve.

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