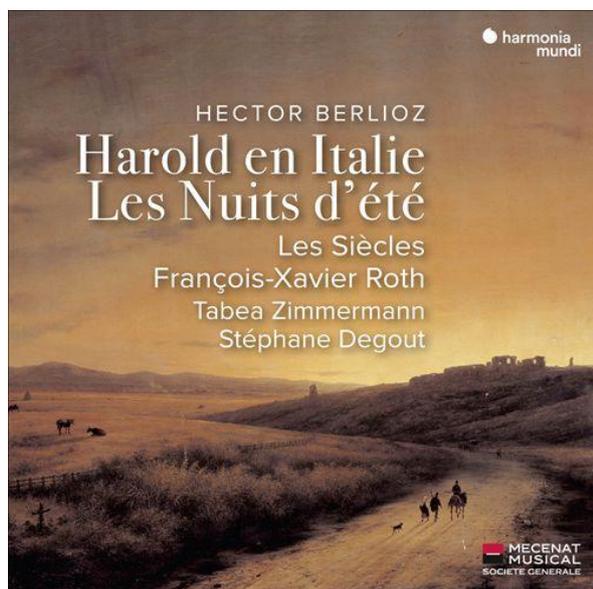


Stéphane Degout / Tabea Zimmermann / François-Xavier Roth / Les Siècles

Hector Berlioz: Harold en Italie; Les Nuits d'été



AllMusic Review by Blair Sanderson [-]

As period specialists and curators of one of the world's largest collections of historic instruments, Les Siècles has explored orchestral repertoire from Berlioz to Stravinsky, paying special attention to the instrumentation and employing vintage strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion that could have been used in the original performances. Conductor François-Xavier Roth took this adventurous band through Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* in a revelatory 2010 release on Actes Sud, and they have gone from strength to strength in recordings for that label and Harmonia Mundi. This 2018 album of *Harold en Italie* and *Les Nuits d'Été* marks their return to Berlioz, though the orchestra's expert playing and the exceptional audio reproduction show a real advance in the quality of the finished product. *Harold en Italie* was Berlioz's second symphony with an obligatory viola part, intended as a vehicle for Niccolò Paganini, though the great violinist turned down the work when he found the solo to be lacking in virtuosic displays. While *Harold* lacks the fire and kaleidoscopic effects of *Symphonie fantastique*, this work has a more subdued and subtle character and shows Berlioz in a lyrical mood, though programmatically rather far from the poem by Lord Byron which inspired him. Despite the supposedly underwhelming solo part, violist Tabea Zimmermann is prominent throughout this performance, and her focused playing is the strongest feature of this recording, even against Les Siècles' most powerful accompaniment. *Les Nuits d'Été*, a song cycle for voice and orchestra, presents a similar issue of a soloist competing with Berlioz's orchestra, though baritone Stéphane Degout holds his own with a warm delivery and a well-supported tone that is fully audible against the rich and radiant orchestral sound.