

sinuously answered by the cello and violin, which enter into an attenuated dialogue, rounded with an exquisite coda, suggesting an esoteric, erotic ritual. The final movement, Presto, synthesizes the visceral impact of the preceding in an animated opening dance, yielding to a sensuously sated interlude before the barbaric whirl resumes more wildly, with the flute calling through eerie string harmonics, only to vanish suddenly on a puckish cadence. The premiere was given by the Quintette Instrumental de Paris at the Salle Gaveau, Paris, on October 15, 1925.

Joseph Guy Ropartz: is he another Maurice Ravel -- or just another Albéric Magnard? Is Ropartz, like Ravel, a contemporary of Debussy who courageously struck out on his own original approach to music, or is he like Magnard -- or, for that matter, like Caplet, d'Indy, Schmitt, and a half-dozen other minor French composers of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century -- just another contemporary of Debussy who stubbornly stuck with the highly chromatic harmonic language of the fin de siècle, and thus never broke into the international big time. More like the latter than the former, one has to admit. This doesn't mean Ropartz's music is no good. As this lovely disc shows, his music is beautifully wrought, deeply felt, and sometimes even quite moving. His Piano Trio from 1914 is a large-scale, four-movement work with enormous energy and immense emotion. The String Trio from 1934-1935 is a smaller-scale four-movement work with a slightly more reserved tone but no less control over the materials. The Prélude, marine et chansons for flute and harp plus string trio from 1928 is an intimate three-movement work that's tonally more austere but emotionally no less intense. Superbly played by three different ensembles of French musicians in this richly colored and ideally balanced 2007 recording by Timpani, anyone looking for the next Albéric Magnard need look no further.



MELOS ENSEMBLE
WITH OSIAN ELLIS - HARP

RAVEL
INTRODUCTION AND ALLEGRO
DEBUSSY
SONATA FOR FLUTE, VIOLA AND HARP
ROUSSEL
SERENADE
ROPARTZ
PRELUDE, MARINE AND CHANSONS

The Introduction and Allegro (1905) is one of the few pieces by Ravel that has remained more or less in the shadows -- save in the minds of harpists -- throughout the last century. While it is certainly not among the composer's most striking works, it is nevertheless a pleasant enough showpiece that looks forward to the raw sensuality of *Daphnis et Chloé* while hearkening back with great affection to the music of Chabrier and, especially, Franck. The full title of the work is Introduction and Allegro for Harp, Accompanied by a Quartet of Strings, Flute, and Clarinet. Although it is often conveniently designated a septet, it is really a kind of miniature (10-minute) harp concerto, complete with virtuoso writing and an extended central cadenza for the instrument. Chamber performances of the work, in fact, are few and far between; it is far more frequently heard in the orchestra hall with a full complement of strings. The general simplicity of form and harmony have led some to conclude that the Introduction and Allegro might have originally been composed as a test piece for the Paris Conservatoire; certainly it did not stand out sufficiently in Ravel's own memory for him to include it in his list of works.

Claude Debussy's Sonata for flute, viola, and harp (1915) is the second entry in a projected series of six chamber sonatas (of which the composer completed three). The sonata is at once evocative and emotionally ambiguous, though a great deal less harmonically adventuresome than its two companions; Debussy once remarked that he didn't know whether it "should move us to laughter or to tears. Perhaps both?" The sonata opens with a freely constructed movement marked *Pastorale: Lento, dolce rubato*. Debussy subjects six essential musical cells to a free variation treatment as the music unfolds. When he reprises these melodic strands, he does so without regard for their initial ordering, and yet with a clear dramatic impact. The atmosphere, seemingly relaxed, is nonetheless charged with a sense of repressed passion; the pause in the second measure,

for instance, is positively bursting with psychological tension. The second movement, *Interlude: Tempo di minuetto*, recalls the Menuet of Debussy's *Suite bergamasque* (1890) in its vague implication -- rather than explicit modeling -- of a dance form; here, though, the rhythmic structure is more sharply defined. In the finale, marked *Allegro moderato ma risoluto*, the reason for Debussy's decision to abandon the sonata's original scoring -- flute, oboe, and harp -- becomes clear. Without the viola's passionate pizzicati, the finale would lose much of its essential character; indeed, its opening would be unrecognizable. Listening to such an abstract, non-representational movement, it is easy to understand why Debussy was moved on one occasion to refer to anyone who described such music as "impressionistic" as an "imbecile."

Composed between July and September 1925 at the prompting of flutist René le Roy, Roussel's pithily brief *Sérénade* heralds the series of acerbic, linear, corybantic masterpieces that would occupy him until his death -- the *Suite in F* (1926), *Piano Concerto* (1927), *Psalm 80* (1928), the *Symphony No. 3* (1929-1930), and the ballet *Bacchus et Ariane* (1930), to name but the greatest. Indeed, the *Sérénade* is something of a symphony in miniature, tripping its sonata-form tropes with elegant, aerial concision. Finally, it is the most brilliant, if not the most substantial, of several works for flute with which Roussel immeasurably enriched the literature for that instrument -- the *Deux Poèmes de Ronsard* for voice and flute (1924), *Joueurs de Flûte* for flute and piano (1924), and the *Trio* for flute, viola, and cello, Op. 40 (1929).

Against a blithe, insouciantly coruscating background, the flute traverses an exposition with two themes, a development section, and a recapitulation within the space of about four minutes to make, with its adroit rhythmic shifts, an *Allegro* first movement of kaleidoscopic interest. The central mysterious *Andante* opens with a long-breathed melody for the flute over the plucked chords of a slow, sensual dance -- reminiscent of the ballet sequences in *Padmâvatī* --

Melos Ensemble

Osian Ellis, harp

Ravel, Debussy, Roussel, Ropartz

1 Introduction Et Allegro

Composed By – Maurice Ravel 10:28

Sonate Pour Flute, Alto Et Harpe

Composed By – Claude Debussy

2 I Pastorale 5:57

3 II Interlude 5:04

4 III Finale 4:22

Sérénade

Composed By – Albert Roussel

5 I Allegro 3:56

6 II Andante 7:54

7 III Presto 4:03

Prélude, Marine Et Chanson

Composed By – Guy Ropartz

8 I Prélude 4:21

9 II Marine 2:56

10 III Chanson 4:39

Engineer – Kenneth Wilkinson Producer – Ray Minshull

Recorded by Decca in October 1961



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Melos Ensemble & Osian Ellis, harp plays Ravel, Debussy, Roussel, Ropartz

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