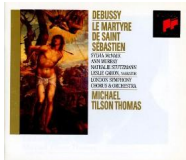


Debussy □ – Le Martyre De Saint Sébastien (1992)

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I. Le Cour Des Lys / The Court Of Lilies 1 N^o1: *Prélude. Lent* - «Frère, Que Sera-t-il Le Monde» 7:46 2 N^o2: «Sébastien!» 2:06 3 N^o3: *Danse Extatique De Sébastien Sur Le Charbons Embrasés. Assez Animé* - «Hymnes, Toute L'ombre S'efface» 6:11

II. Le Chambre Magique / The Magic Chamber

4 N^o1: *Prélude. Très Modéré* 3:46 5 N^o2: «Je Fauchais L'épi De Froment» 2:17 6 N^o3: «Qui Pleure Mon Enfant Si Doux» 5:40

III. Le Concile Des Faux Dieux / The Council Of The False Gods

7 N^o1 [& N^o2]: *Prélude. Modéré* 1:57 8 N^o3: «Païan, Lyre D'or, Arc D'Argent!» 1:46 9 N^o4: «Avez-vous Vu Celui Que J'aime?» 8:50 10 N^o5: «Ne Pleurez Plus!» 1:23 11 N^o6: «Io! Io! Adonias!» 0:43 12 N^o7: «Il Est Mort, Le Bel Adonis» 3:05

IV. Le Laurier Blessé / The Wounded Laurel

13 N^o1: *Prélude. Sombre Et Lent* 4:22 14 N^o2: «Il Est Là, Le Pasteur. Regardez» 3:56 15 N^o3: «Hélas!» 6:35

V. Le Paradis / Paradise

16 N^o1: *Interlude. Modéré* 1:14 17 N^o2: «Gloire!» 4:39

Chorus – London Symphony Chorus Chorus Master – Stephen Westrop Conductor – Michael Tilson Thomas Mezzo-soprano Vocals – Ann Murray, Nathalie Stutzmann Narrator – Leslie Caron Orchestra – London Symphony Orchestra Soprano Vocals – Sylvia McNair

That Le martyre de St Sébastien is rarely heard, let alone performed, is not the fault of the composer, for it contains some of Debussy's very finest music. The French Parsifal (as it has rather misleadingly been called) in part recalls the luminous worlds of La damoiselle élue and Les chansons de Bilitis (as opposed to the shadowy Pelléas et Mélisande) but is also cast in the meditative and stark idiom of the Préludes, with that almost painterly and abstract spaciousness. Part of the problem with the work is its dramatic incoherence: the music comprises barely a fifth of what was originally a five-hour theatrical extravaganza conceived by the Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio for the dancer Ida Rubinstein. The greater problem lies in D'Annunzio's text itself; its over-heated symbolism, self-conscious paganisms and embarrassingly masochistic Sebastian would be enough to make even Wilde's (or Strauss's) Salome blush. Some have tried to evade these pitfalls by creating an orchestral suite, or, as in

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Ernest Ansermet's 1953/4 version with the Suisse Romande Orchestra, by simply excising the accompanied narration. But this remarkable new account by Michael Tilson Thomas with the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus triumphs against the odds, partly by communicating the motivic coherence of Debussy's music, but mainly by the sheer quality of the performances. The speaking role of the saint is heroically taken by the actress Leslie Caron, whose beautifully inflected voice, always sensitive to the music, steers round the potential abyss of kitsch by avoiding too declamatory a delivery. In the singing roles, Ann Murray and Nathalie Stutzmann as the martyred twins are strikingly intense, and elsewhere Sylvia McNair is sweetly other-worldly, most movingly in the final scene, where the risen Sebastian is given a singing voice for the first time. Both the orchestra and chorus, aided by Sony's high-quality recording, convey the translucent qualities of Debussy's score, from the austere musical preludes, the gorgeous fanfares announcing the Emperor Augustus, to the final triumphant choruses in paradise. --- William Humphreys-Jones, BBC Music Magazine

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