



## JACQUES IBERT (1890-1962)

Flute Concerto  
Louisville-Concert, Suite Symphonique, Flute  
Concerto\*, Symphonie Marine, Escales

Helen Dabringhaus\* (flute)  
Brandenburger Symphoniker  
Peter Gülke (conductor)

Performance: ★★★★★  
Sonics (Multichannel): ★★★★★  
(of 5 Stars)

MDG 901 2185-6 (SACD) 2020.

For a composer whose music is impeccably crafted, always ingenious and deftly scored, the orchestral compositions of Jacques Ibert have, on the whole, not been that well represented on disc, which makes this beautifully recorded and generously filled (78'26) SACD from MDG most welcome. The orchestra here, the Brandenburger Symphoniker, is likely to be unfamiliar to many listeners. Founded in 1810 it is the oldest existing orchestra in Brandenburg and on this splendid SACD is directed by Peter Gülke who was their chief conductor from 2015 to 2020. Whilst perhaps they might not have quite the level of polish and sophistication of other more prestigious orchestras residing in the Berlin region their enthusiastic commitment, displayed in music that is probably fairly unfamiliar to them, is beyond reproach.

Though a couple of Ibert's most popular works – 'Escalaes' and his 'Suite Symphonique Paris' – are duplicated on the recent all Ibert release from Neeme Järvi and the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande [Neeme Järvi conducts Ibert](#), this MDG disc includes two important works making their debuts in hi-res sound. The first of these, the 'Louisville-Concert' (1953) that opens the programme, was a commission from conductor Robert Whitney and the Louisville Orchestra in Kentucky. It is an exuberant and jazzy show-piece for orchestra that gives the players many opportunities to display their virtuosity. Though it makes a nod at Gershwin's 'An American in Paris' its occasional touch of astringency suggests something more akin to a Parisian in America.

Paris is again the subject of the delightful six movement 'Suite Symphonique' (1930) that the composer adapted from his incidental music for 'Donogoo-Tonka' a satirical comedy by Jules Romains that in 1936 was made into a German film of the same name. The composer's vivid pictorial evocation of aspects of his home city – Le Métro, Restaurant au Bois de Boulogne, Le Paquebot "Ile-de-France etc.– clearly explains the considerable success of his many film scores. Gülke and his players relish each of the, often uproarious, movements to the full.

Ibert's fascination with the colours and timbres of wind instruments is exemplified by his witty Flute Concerto of 1934. It is already well represented on SACD by four recordings each of which is part of a mixed programme rather than, as here, one item on an all Ibert disc. The demanding solo part is performed with complete assurance by Helen Dabringhaus. Whether in the rapid passagework of the two outer movements or in the sustained lyrical interludes in the evocative middle movement, the clarity and tonal beauty of her playing is a delight.

'Symphonie Marine' is a strangely enigmatic piece that is apparently related to his score for a short film entitled 'S.O.S. Foch' (1931) For some mysterious and unknown reason Ibert did not want this work to be performed during his lifetime and it was only published under the title 'Symphonie Marine' in 1964 after having been premiered in Paris on October 6, 1963 by Charles Munch and the Lamoureux Orchestra a year after the composer's death.

'Escalaes'(1922) that completes the programme needs little introduction as it remains Ibert's best known orchestral score. Although the three movements are simply marked I Calme, II Modéré, très rythmé and III Animé, Ibert later revealed that the 'Ports of Call' of the title were respectively Palermo, Tunis and Valencia that the recently married composer and his wife visited on their honeymoon cruise. Gülke's relaxed account is most persuasive with crisply focused and immediate sound and it compares most favourably with the recent characterful versions from Neeme Järvi and John Wilson.

The recordings on this 5.1 multi-channel SACD were made in the Brandenburg Theater (January 14-17, 2020) and its clear acoustic, allied with the skill of the MDG engineering, allows details to emerge that are sometimes lost in the more reverberant venues enjoyed by the versions mentioned above. In every respect this is a more than worthy addition to the extensive catalogue of this distinguished audiophile label.

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