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Roger Désormière Debussy Pelléas et Mélisande

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"The singers read through *Pelléas* at my house, with no one else present. Debussy played his score on the piano, singing all the roles in that deep, cavernous voice of his which often meant transposing lines an octave down, but whose delivery gradually became irresistible. The impression produced by that music on that occasion was, I believe, unique. To begin with there was a kind of mistrust, a resistance, then an ever closer attention, with the emotional temperature rising until the last notes of 'Mélisande's death', which fell amid silence and tears. At the end all of us were carried away with excitement, burning to get down to work as soon as possible.

During the weeks that followed, rehearsals took place amid growing enthusiasm; each scene was gone over twenty times without any of the singers showing the least sign of temper in the face of the composer's demands - and he was very difficult to satisfy. With the first orchestral read-through began a series of gloomy days and discouraging rehearsals. Debussy had had the generous but unfortunate idea of getting the orchestral material copied by a friend who was hard up, but who was a mediocre copyist and a somewhat rudimentary musician, and it took three or four rehearsals simply to get the corrections sorted out. In the meantime a new difficulty had arisen, of some seriousness, to do with the changes of scene. Although the stage of the Opera-Comique looks fairly large, it has such small exits and such narrow wings that it is impossible to manoeuvre even a flat through them, and we were having to make on average three rapid changes per act! Debussy, imagining that these changes would be more or less instantaneous, had linked the different scenes with music that was far too short. He had to return to work, grumbling and raving, and I went to see him every day to snatch away the notes he had written between one rehearsal and another; that is how he wrote the wonderful interludes which provide such a moving commentary on the action."

Andre Messager, 'Les premières représentations de *Pelléas*,' ReM, 7, 1 May 1926, pp. 110-12

Messager, as conductor at the Opera-Comique, was largely responsible for persuading the director, Albert Carré, of the value of Pelléas. Messager conducted the premiere of the opera on 30 April 1902.

Recording and restoration notes

This recording was one of a number suggested and supplied to me by devoted collector John Philips, and I'm grateful to him for an excellent, near-mint set of French EMI LPs to work from. It's not unusual for LP reissues to provide excellent source material for 78rpm remastering, especially where the LPs were made using the best possible transfers from original metal master parts and then not subjected to major processing. This is the happy case here - the EMI transfers were generally very well carried out, with perhaps two sides falling down slightly quality-wise across the entire opera. At times I've had to deal with varying amount of swish, but overall the sound quality has been excellent, especially after re-equalisation in the XR remastering process. This tonal correction has completely transformed what is already regarded as the reference performance of this opera. I've also been able to correct the tendency on some sides for the pitch to gradually drift downwards, using Capstan technology to eliminate wow and make other general pitch corrections. The end result is a full-sounding 1941 recording, with real depth and an extended upper range, that is a far cry from its dim, thin and somewhat sharp (A4=450Hz) starting point.

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DESORMIERE

conducts

DEBUSSY

Pelléas et Mélisande

Jacques Jansen Pelléas
Irène Joachim Mélisande
Henri Etcheverry Golaud
Germaine Cernay Geneviève
Paul Cabanel Arkel
Leila Ben Sedira Yniold
Emile Rousseau Le berger
Armand Narçon Le médecin

Chorus Yvonne Gouverne
Orchestre Symphonique

La voix de son maître - studio recording, 1941

- 1 Act 1 - Scene 1 - Je ne pourrai plus sortir de cette forêt (*Golaud*) (3:50)
- 2 Pourquoi pleures-tu? (*Golaud, Mélisande*) (6:35)
- 3 Je suis perdu aussi (*Golaud*) (3:24)
- 4 Scene 2 - Voici ce qu'il écrit à son frère Pelléas (*Geneviève*) (2:44)
- 5 Qu'en dites vous? (*Geneviève, Arkel, Pelléas*) (6:00)
- 6 Interlude (1:25)
- 7 Scene 3 - Il fait sombre dans les jardins (*Mélisande, Geneviève, Pelléas*) (2:43)
- 8 Hoé! Hisse Hoé! (*Marins, Mélisande, Pelléas, Geneviève*) (4:15)
- 9 Act 2 - Scene 1 - Vous ne savez pas où je vous ai menée? (*Pelléas, Mélisande*) (3:23)
- 10 C'est au bord d'une fontaine (*Pelléas, Mélisande*) (2:38)
- 11 Interlude (3:36)
- 12 Scene 2 - Ah! Ah! Tout va bien (*Golaud, Mélisande*) (8:23)
- 13 Voyons, donne-moi ta main (*Golaud, Mélisande*) (2:52)
- 14 Interlude (2:21)
- 15 Scene 3 - Oui, c'est ici, nous y sommes (*Pelléas, Mélisande*) (4:26)
- 16 Act 3 - Scene 1 - Mes longs cheveux descendent (*Mélisande, Pelléas*) (5:53)
- 17 Je les tiens dans les mains (*Pelléas, Mélisande*) (4:52)
- 18 Que faites-vous ici? (*Golaud, Pelléas*) (3:37)
- 19 Scene 2 - Prenez garde; par ici, par ici (*Golaud, Pelléas*) (3:09)
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XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Front cover artwork based on a photograph of **Mary Garden** as Mélisande in the première, 1903

Rear cover artwork based on a photograph of **Debussy**

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