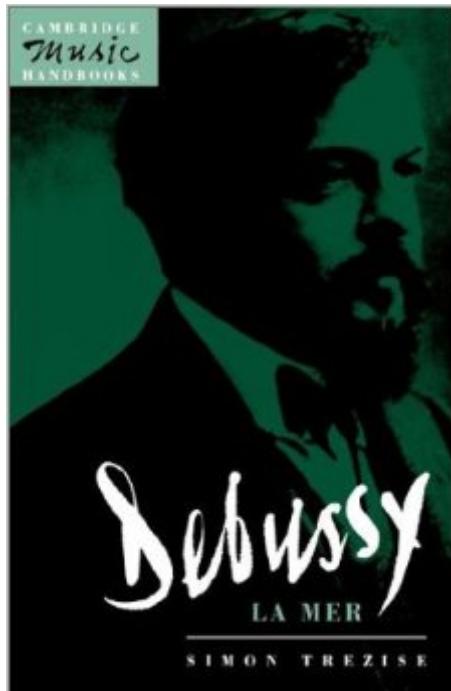


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Debussy: La Mer (Cambridge Music Handbooks)



Synopsis

La Mer stands at the center of Debussy's achievement. Described by the composer as "a seascape without figures," it is arguably the greatest and most original French symphony. In this study, La Mer is considered in the context of Debussy's personal and musical development. Detailed discussion of performance styles draw on current recordings, and two analytical chapters trace the growth of ideas through the work. Studies of rhythm, motif and tonality show how Debussy generates "narratives" across the three movements.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Simon Trezise's study of Claude Debussy's orchestral work "La Mer" appeared in 1994. Like all entries in the Cambridge Music Handbooks series, it is a heady musicological analysis meant for those with at least some training in music theory. You'll also need a copy of the score to make much use of it. Trezise recommends the 1909 Durand score (available in a Dover reprinting), because it is the most reliable of the cheaply available scores. The contents of the book can be broadly divided into context of the work's creation, analysis of the music, and how the work has been interpreted by various performers. Of the context, Trezise sketches Debussy's life in the years leading up to the first performance of "La Mer" and speaks of how he wrote the work at an especially turbulent time in his private life. Trezise also gives much space to the debates of the French musical scene of the time over "absolute" versus "programmatic music". The analysis of the music is deep. Trezise

presents the ways various scholars have tried to break Debussy's fuzzy writing up into blocks, and shows how applying traditional forms to "La Mer" is not always satisfactory. After going through the work bar by bar, Trevize then dedicates individual sections to Debussy's unusual tonality and the use of motifs. He finds Howat's identification of the golden section in "La Mer" to be interesting, but without any proof of Debussy's conscious use of the proportion in the form of sketches or statements. In assessing "La Mer" in performance, Trevize speaks of the work's reception at its premiere and its growing status as a classic over the subsequent decades.

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