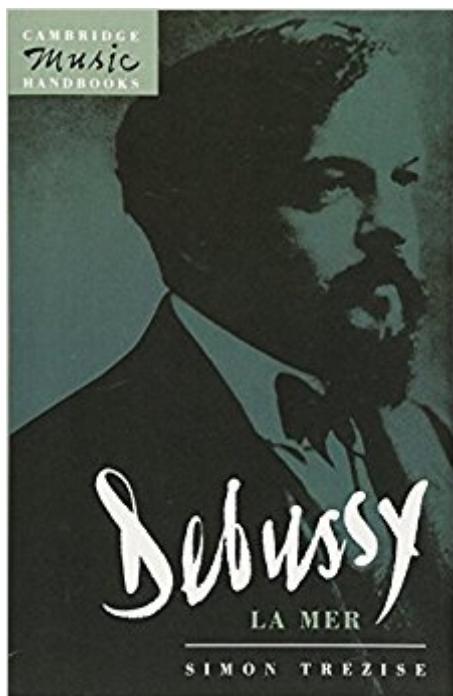


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Debussy: La Mer (Cambridge Music Handbooks)



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.

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Customer Reviews

"With its many examples of music, six pages of footnotes, and select bibliography, this is a very rewarding study of a complex work that has profoundly affected the music of our century."

Choice "This book certainly will appeal to the audience of knowledgeable music lovers for which it is intended, and it should be required reading for conductors. For this reason it will be of interest to general libraries and music-trade professionals." Richard S. Parks, Book Reviews

Arguably the greatest and most original French symphony, La Mer is considered in the context of Debussy's personal and musical development. Detailed discussion of performance styles draws on current recordings; studies of rhythm, motif and tonality show how Debussy generates "narratives" across the three movements.

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. He examines 10 recorded performances of the work from Coppola's 1932 recording to Solti's in 1991. Unfortunately, the book appeared before Boulez's 1995 Deutsche Grammophon recording which is admirable both for its fine sound quality and its faithfulness to the score. In order to help the listener follow a score and a recording in tandem, Trezise gives timings from Karajan's 1964 recording. Some of the Cambridge Music Handbooks, such as David Cooper's Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, are useful for a wide audience, including home listeners as much as scholars. Trevize's book about Debussy's "La Mer", however, is one of the more demanding of the series. Nonetheless, those who enjoy the intellectual study of music will find much goodness here.

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