Notes and Editorial Reviews

DEBUSSY Danse sacrée et danse profane 1. Petite Suite (arr. Hainen). Sonata for flute, viola, and harp 2. CAPLET Two Divertissements. Conte fantastique 1 • Elizabeth Hainen (hp); 1 Michael Stern, cond; 1 IRIS Read more 2 Jeffrey Khaner (fl); 2 Roberto Diaz (va) • AVIE 2285 (70:04)

Going under the title *Les amis* (The Friends), this enjoyable disc concentrates on the harp music of Claude Debussy and his friend and sometime orchestrator André Caplet (1878–1925). Almost all these pieces are familiar and have been recorded previously, even Caplet’s atmospheric evocation of Poe’s short story *The Masque of the Red Death,* which the composer simply titled *Conte fantastique* . Both that and Debussy’s well known *Dances sacrée et profane* are heard here in their versions for harp and string orchestra.

The unusual items are two Divertissements for solo harp by Caplet––the first *a la française* and the second *a l’espagnol* ––and harpist Elizabeth Hainen’s own arrangement of Debussy’s *Petite Suite* . Caplet utilizes the instrument’s stylistic fingerprints, such as glissandos in the French piece and fast, repeated notes in the Spanish work (where the harp deftly imitates a guitar).

I am not entirely convinced by Hainen’s arrangement of the *Petite Suite* , best known in its original version for piano duet or in Henri Büsser’s orchestration. There are simply too many strands to this music (all of which Hainen manages to incorporate) to allow it to feel intrinsically suited to the instrument. Music written specifically for the harp tends to have more air around it––perfectly exemplified by Debussy in his late Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp.

Hainen plays the whole program with commendable fluency, and the two musicians who join her in the Sonata are similarly adept at capturing that work’s languid beauty. Flutist Jeffrey Kahner has released several notable recital discs on this label. Equally distinguished is the contribution of the American string ensemble, the IRIS Orchestra (named for the state flower of Tennessee and capitalized for branding reasons), under their regular conductor Michael Stern. Their expressive detailing and full tone make *Conte fantastique* a highlight of the program. You should snap up this disc if you are unfamiliar with Caplet’s substantial 17-minute tone poem––it is one of the masterpieces of its era. The IRIS Orchestra strings are far easier on the ear than the strings of the Monte Carlo Opera Orchestra, who accompany Frédérique Cambreling in a 1984 EMI release that is the only other recording of the string orchestra version.

**FANFARE: Phillip Scott**