

## Susan Graham - Poemes de l'Amour (2005)

Written by bluesever

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- 01 - Ernest Chausson - Poème De L'amour Et De La Mer 1 - La Fleur Des Eaux
  - 02 - Ernest Chausson - Poème De L'amour Et De La Mer 2 - Interlude
  - 03 - Ernest Chausson - Poème De L'amour Et De La Mer 3 - La Mort De L'amour
  - 04 - Maurice Ravel - Shéhérazade 1 - Asie
  - 05 - Maurice Ravel - Shéhérazade 2 - La Flute Enchantee
  - 06 - Maurice Ravel - Shéhérazade 3 - L'indifferent
  - 07 - Claude Debussy - Le Livre De Baudelaire 1 - Le Balcon
  - 08 - Claude Debussy - Le Livre De Baudelaire 2 - Harmonie Du Soir
  - 09 - Claude Debussy - Le Livre De Baudelaire 3 - Le Jet D'eau
- Susan Graham – soprano BBC Symphony Orchestra Yan Pascal Tortelier - conductor

Before we get too many notices on the bulletin board, I had better plead that I have denoted Miss Graham's vocal register as soprano because that is the description given her by Warner on this disc. The tall and elegant Susan Graham is the Octavian de nos jours and is not that role written for a mezzo? Well no actually. In the same way as Mozart didn't differentiate mezzo or soprano for Cherubino, another of Susan Graham's signature roles, neither did Richard Strauss for Octavian. In Der Rosenkavalier, the only difference in the range of the roles of Octavian and the Marschallin, the odd note apart, is the amount of singing in each role that is in the upper regions of the voice. That being said, as soon as Miss Graham starts a phrase in any of these songs with orchestra, her creamy timbre marks her more as a lyric mezzo with a good, but not gleaming top, rather than a lyric soprano with a rich tone.

Susan Graham made her Covent Garden debut as Cherubino in 1994, the same year she first took on the role of Octavian, with Welsh National Opera, and sang it in one performance at the Met to great acclaim. In more recent years she has dipped her toe into the soprano fach with Donna Elvira (Don Giovanni) and Hanna Glawari (The Merry Widow). She is reported also to be thinking about the Marschallin. Despite these excursions, the focus of her repertoire remains

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that of the classic high mezzo plus French song and opera. Her Iphigénie (en Tauride) at Salzburg in 2000 drew high praise with comparisons with that of the British mezzo Janet Baker. Her recordings in the French repertoire including Nuits d'Été (Sony) and French Operetta Arias (Erato) have drawn favourable comparisons with great predecessors. The same will be true of this disc. Inevitably comparisons of her Shéhérazade (trs. 4-6) will be drawn with that of Régine Crespin under Ansermet (Decca) recorded over forty years ago and very much the benchmark. For me, Susan Graham's gentle yearning (tr. 4), with her vital creamy tone allied to vocal clarity and smooth legato, are at the very least the equal of that famous interpretation. Likewise the orchestral accompaniment of Yan Pascal Tortelier who treads to perfection the fine line between glorying in the lustrous orchestral textures and letting them become cloying.

If my comments focus on the central Ravel, it is not to ignore the conductor's fine Interlude (tr. 2) of the Chausson, or in Adams' rarely heard orchestration of four of Baudelaire's poems (trs. 7-10) where he supports Susan Graham's fine expressive singing so impressively. Her command of the language and the idiom of all the works here are outstanding. She can stand as equal among other great and respected interpreters in this repertoire. With the additional advantage of a clear and well-balanced recording catching her voice and the orchestra to perfection, I can envisage this disc scooping up several prestigious awards over the next year or so. Lovers of fine singing in this repertoire need not wait for whatever imprimatur may come, but can purchase without hesitation now and enjoy an outstanding recording and performance. ---Robert J Farr, musicweb-international.com

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