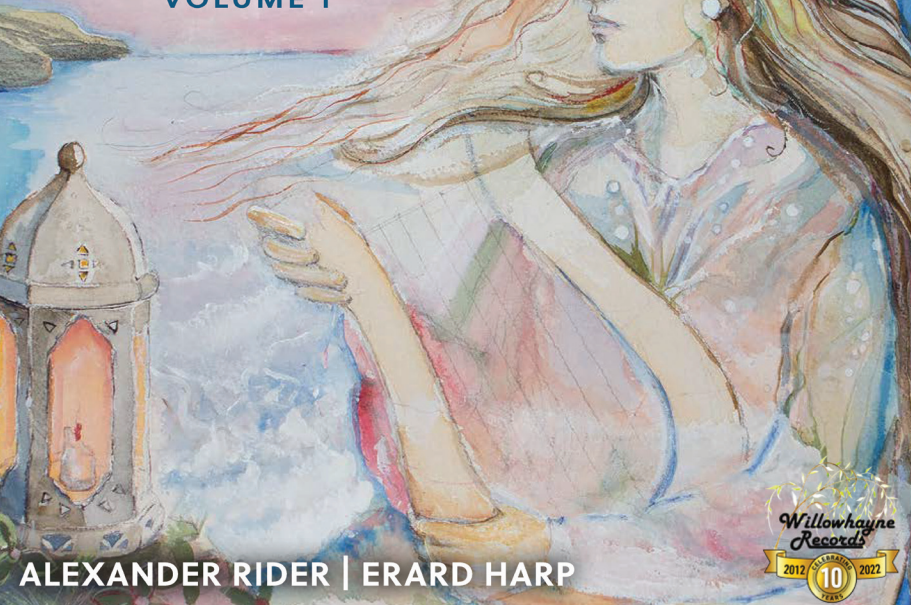


FRESQUE MARINE

FORGOTTEN FRENCH
TREASURES FOR HARP

VOLUME 1



ALEXANDER RIDER | ERARD HARP



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ALEXANDER RIDER | ERARD HARP

AUGUSTE CHAPUIS (1858-1933)

- | | |
|-------------------------|------|
| 1. Harpe Éolienne | 3:22 |
| 2. Carillon | 2:53 |
| 3. David devant l'Arche | 2:20 |

HENRIETTE RENIÉ (1875-1956)

Promenade Matinale 10:05

- | | |
|--|------|
| 4. I. Au loin, dans la verdure, la mer calme et mystérieuse... | 4:37 |
| 5. II. Dans la campagne ensoleillée, la rosée scintille... | 5:28 |

HENRI BÜSSER (1872-1973)

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------|
| 6. Impromptu sur des Airs Japonais | 6:11 |
| 7. Ballade in A flat minor, Op. 65 | 7:05 |

MARCEL TOURNIER (1879-1951)

- | | |
|---------------------------|------|
| 8. Fresque Marine, Op. 46 | 5:39 |
|---------------------------|------|

JACQUES PILLOIS (1877-1935) transcr. MARCEL GRANDJANY (1891-1975)

Deux pièces 5:56

- | | |
|--|------|
| 9. I. À la manière de Lully (Gavotte) | 2:38 |
| 10. II. À la manière de Fauré (Romance sans paroles) | 3:18 |

ODETTE DE MONTESQUIOU (1908-2002)

- | | |
|-------------|------|
| 11. Prélude | 5:18 |
|-------------|------|

MARCELLE SOULAGE (1894-1970)

Petites pièces 6:06

- | | |
|---------------|------|
| 12. I. Choral | 4:09 |
| 13. II. Danse | 1:57 |

MARCEL TOURNIER (1879-1951)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| 14. Le Rouet Enchanté, Op. 44 | 5:45 |
|-------------------------------|------|

TOTAL TIME: 60:42

Front Cover Painting: Camilla Hassenberg - *Infinite Dawn*

As cloth is woven of many strands, so this album, *Fresque Marine*, is made up of a diverse palette. Firstly, the instrument upon which I have performed this music, an Erard concert harp, built in 1902 and in remarkable condition, lends its subtly inflected voice to each composition and allows us to share in the sound-world the composer experienced internally. Secondly, to play music that has been somewhat hidden, as well as the opportunity to share the music of three female composers. Unsurprising perhaps, that an instrument so associated with women performers should give rise to music by women composers; untenable is the neglect of their music. Thirdly is the devotion and pride of the artists this music represents, composers and harpists both; particularly Henriette Renié (1875-1956) to whom much of this music owes its creation, be it her own compositions, pieces written for her, or music which is connected to her legacy of outstanding pupils.

Auguste Chapuis (1858-1933) a protégé of César Franck, was a composer and editor of earlier works, who dedicated numerous solo pieces to his friend Henriette Renié. Three are presented here, all dating from the early 1920s when Renié was at the height of her powers as a performer and her art had been long since recognised as incomparable. Daniel Barenboim wrote that there are two kinds of music, that which interrupts silence and that which grows out of it. Chapuis' *Harpe Éolienne* (1923) is certainly music of this latter type: an almost indefinable attack at the first note, followed by delicately draped, detailed structures and unconventional accentuation that leave gentle resonances hanging in the air. It is an evocation of what happens when the breeze acts on the strings of the harp resulting in a dreamy, elemental glowing – the so-called 'Aeolian harp'.

By way of preface, Chapuis writes:

'In this piece of special character, the author wishes to suggest the poetic idea of an instrument, the strings of which are brushed and caressed by a mysterious breeze, making one hear fragments of melody, tentative rhythms and undulating arpeggios that are borne out and fade away by turn, in a sort of fantastical improvisation that observes no musical form and yet is governed by a certain order. Indefinable but real, imprecise and elusive... like a dream.'

Carillon calls for a different kind of virtuosity altogether, but a no less varied palette of colours. Its joyous depiction of mechanical ideas and of clockwork calls for motoric rhythm and sparkling articulation. In her method, Renié uses examples from the piece to demonstrate the sheer variety of touch one needs at the harp and advises the student on ways in which to make use of the wrist in 'picked' notes and staccati.

The piece is, in Chapuis' own words

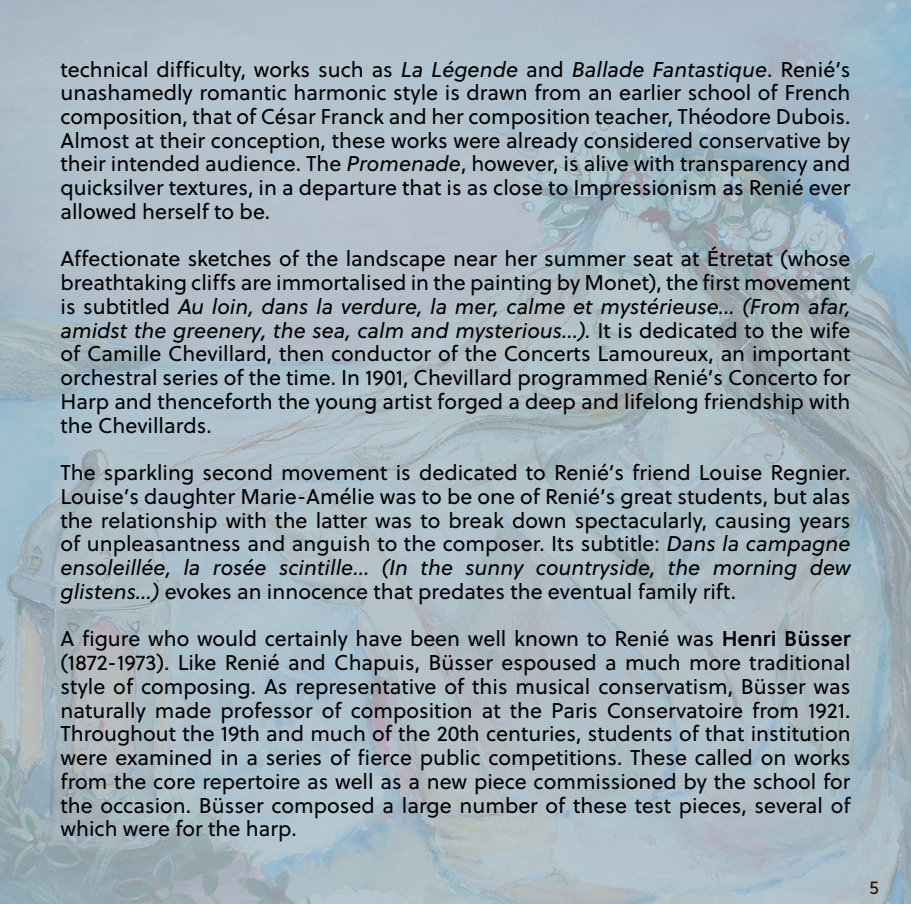
'A picturesque evocation of the pealing, spirited voice of the Carillons of Northern France, gaily volleying their crystalline notes and unstable harmonies in the grey light and circumspection of twilight.'

In *David devant l'Arche*, Chapuis explores themes much admired by French artists and composers in the early part of the last century. They sought to evoke a mysterious, vanished world of saints and of the ancients, of which Debussy's incidental music for the play *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* is a good example. In *David devant l'Arche*, the heroic King David is depicted in an extrovert work that evokes religious ecstasy. Only the solemn, dance-like, modal figures in the central section bring us back to the innocence of the shepherd boy David. This work could be truly said to portray the essential nature of its dedicatee, Renié. A deeply religious person, who filled pages of notebooks with mystical, spiritual meditations, Renié considered playing the harp to be a sacred act.

Again Chapuis leaves us in no doubt as to his narrative:

'A theme of liturgical character and a more rhythmical pattern alternate and superimpose upon one another, expressing the rapture of the Prophet-King, exalting in his mystical fervour, in simultaneous accord with both a devotional hymn and ritual dance.'

Dating from the same period is **Henriette Renié's** own *Promenade Matinale* (1923). In it, she presents material that is in marked contrast to her celebrated solo works of the early 1900s. Up until this point, Renié had made use of ultra-gothic poetical themes to create virtuoso works of large scale and ferocious



technical difficulty, works such as *La Légende* and *Ballade Fantastique*. Renié's unashamedly romantic harmonic style is drawn from an earlier school of French composition, that of César Franck and her composition teacher, Théodore Dubois. Almost at their conception, these works were already considered conservative by their intended audience. The *Promenade*, however, is alive with transparency and quicksilver textures, in a departure that is as close to Impressionism as Renié ever allowed herself to be.

Affectionate sketches of the landscape near her summer seat at Étretat (whose breathtaking cliffs are immortalised in the painting by Monet), the first movement is subtitled *Au loin, dans la verdure, la mer, calme et mystérieuse... (From afar, amidst the greenery, the sea, calm and mysterious...)*. It is dedicated to the wife of Camille Chevillard, then conductor of the Concerts Lamoureux, an important orchestral series of the time. In 1901, Chevillard programmed Renié's Concerto for Harp and thenceforth the young artist forged a deep and lifelong friendship with the Chevillards.

The sparkling second movement is dedicated to Renié's friend Louise Regnier. Louise's daughter Marie-Amélie was to be one of Renié's great students, but alas the relationship with the latter was to break down spectacularly, causing years of unpleasantness and anguish to the composer. Its subtitle: *Dans la campagne ensoleillée, la rosée scintille... (In the sunny countryside, the morning dew glistens...)* evokes an innocence that predates the eventual family rift.

A figure who would certainly have been well known to Renié was **Henri Büsser** (1872-1973). Like Renié and Chapuis, Büsser espoused a much more traditional style of composing. As representative of this musical conservatism, Büsser was naturally made professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire from 1921. Throughout the 19th and much of the 20th centuries, students of that institution were examined in a series of fierce public competitions. These called on works from the core repertoire as well as a new piece commissioned by the school for the occasion. Büsser composed a large number of these test pieces, several of which were for the harp.

The curious *Fantaisie sur des Airs Japonais* was originally composed for the 1915 examination of the chromatic harp class at the Paris Conservatoire. The chromatic harp, which substitutes Erard's pedal mechanism for a particularly complex chromatic crossed stringing, never superseded the pedal harp and Büsser shrewdly redesigned the work for the latter instrument. In doing so, he excised passages of chromaticism and replaced them with washes of harmonic colour such as the pedal harp creates with great ease. Büsser does not exactly devote himself in *hommage* to the indigenous music of Japan. He works a number of themes into the fantasy, most notably *Kimigayo* (the Japanese national anthem), the well-known *Sakura* tune and *Momotaro* (an example of Japanese *nagauta* music). All this he did with amendments that make the original models difficult to identify. However, from the point of view of the harp it is written with great flair and sympathy for the instrument's qualities.

Just a few years later, for the examinations at the end of 1918, Büsser produced his lovely *Ballade*, this time for the pedal harp. A solemn theme in octaves moves through richly variegated material, with use of lyrical lines, luscious chords and a triumphal final theme. The work has enormous charm as a showpiece for the harp, even if it is rather less adventurous than the *Fantaisie*!

In 1912, having been appointed professor of harp at the Conservatoire on the death of the legendary but authoritarian Alphonse Hasslemans (1845-1912), **Marcel Tournier** (1879-1951) ceased much of his performing activity. Instead, he began to devote his inner creative life to composing. He was already respected as a composer, having placed second in the *Prix de Rome* for his cantata *Laure et Pétrarque*. In Tournier's day, to have competed in the *Prix de Rome* was considered the best entrée into the highest echelons of French musical life. Having been immersed as a performer in the music of such composers as Debussy and Ravel, Tournier sought to translate their painterly aesthetic to the harp in a way that was totally idiomatic to the instrument, whilst pushing its technical boundaries.

While his works remain hugely popular among harpists, some of his virtuoso works have slipped into obscurity. One such is the central work of this recital,

Fresque Marine. Marked 'by turns calm and tumultuous', the piece portrays the temperament of the gifted Doïna Nora Mihailescu (Mihăilescu). Born in 1921, Doïna's family was a musical one (her mother Margareta was also a harpist) and she drew early notice as a prodigy in Romania and later in Paris, where it seems likely that she was a student of Tournier and possibly Renié. She died in 1941, aged just twenty. The exact circumstances of her tragic death have been difficult to determine, but the Franco-Romanian composer Stan Golestan (1875-1956), who dedicated his *Ballade Roumaine* for Doïna, cites in the dedication that it was in the course of war work for the Red Cross that she met her untimely end.

At any rate, her shocking loss prompted Tournier to dedicate this lovely, complex piece to 'a great musical soul'. A work full of fascinating, subtle changes of mood and colour, one is reminded of a watercolourist who, as he cleans his brushes, again and again alters the hue and transparency of the water in the glass as he works.

The thread of Renié now weaves itself through this disc in the form of her many pupils, or as they happily referred to themselves, her 'disciples'. **Marcel Grandjany** (1891-1975), raised by his cousin in a musical household, showed early promise on the piano, causing his cousin to bring him to her friend and former classmate, Renié, in want of harp lessons. After Renié ably prepared him to enter the Paris Conservatoire system (where he was somewhat brutalised by the style of instruction there), Grandjany emerged with a brilliant *Premier Prix* at the age of 13. Possessed of deep musicianship as well a gentle and giving nature, he quickly gained a reputation as a master teacher. Involvement with the American Conservatoire at Fontainebleau exposed him to many young harpists from that country (often from well-to-do and influential families) who encouraged him to teach and perform in the United States. By the 1930s Grandjany was professor of harp at the Juilliard School in New York where he remained until the end of his life.

He also composed and arranged prodigiously for the harp, his works still at the core of the standard repertoire. His transcription of two charming pastiches by Jacques Pillois (1877-1935), *à la manière de Lully*, and *à la manière de Fauré*

date from his time teaching at Fontainebleau. Pillois and his wife were friends of Grandjany, as his American pupil, the aptly named Jane Wyeth-Musick was to recall:

'It was the wife of the composer Jacques Pillois, a composer friend of the Grandjany's, who [whilst at Fontainebleau] gave our family French lessons, serially, in the neat salon where a pile of La Vie Parisiennes enlivened our waiting.'

Unlike Tournier, Renié never gained the teaching position at the Paris Conservatoire that many thought her due. As such, her early pupils came from wealthy or aristocratic families. In contrast with the outstanding Grandjany, this usually meant a lack of professional ambition that frustrated Renié. However, with many of them she formed deep, meaningful friendships. **Odette de Montesquiou** (1908-2002) was from one such aristocratic family and later became a Baroness upon her marriage. By her own admission, Odette became infatuated by the harp in her early childhood. Her mother sought advice from a family friend, Nicole Delorme (1889-1938). Nicole was herself from an influential family and was a longtime pupil of Renié. This led to a meeting that was to change the course of young Odette's life:

'When she came into the room where we waited, I was impressed at once by her strong personality. Her voice and her gaze revealed a warm vibrant being. [...] In spite of our great difference in age, this was the beginning of an immediate understanding that would develop over the years' - from The Legend of Henriette Renié by Odette de Montesquiou (ed. Jaymee Haefner; trans. Robert Kilpatrick).

Inspired perhaps by the energetic composing activity of this great teacher, Odette wrote at least two beautiful solos and dedicated them to Renié. The *Prélude* heard in this recital is in a profound vein, full of adventurous harmonies and supple moving figures. The mood is tender and speaks of a personal connection that is beyond words.

Despite being, in a sense, outside of the 'establishment', Renié did create an

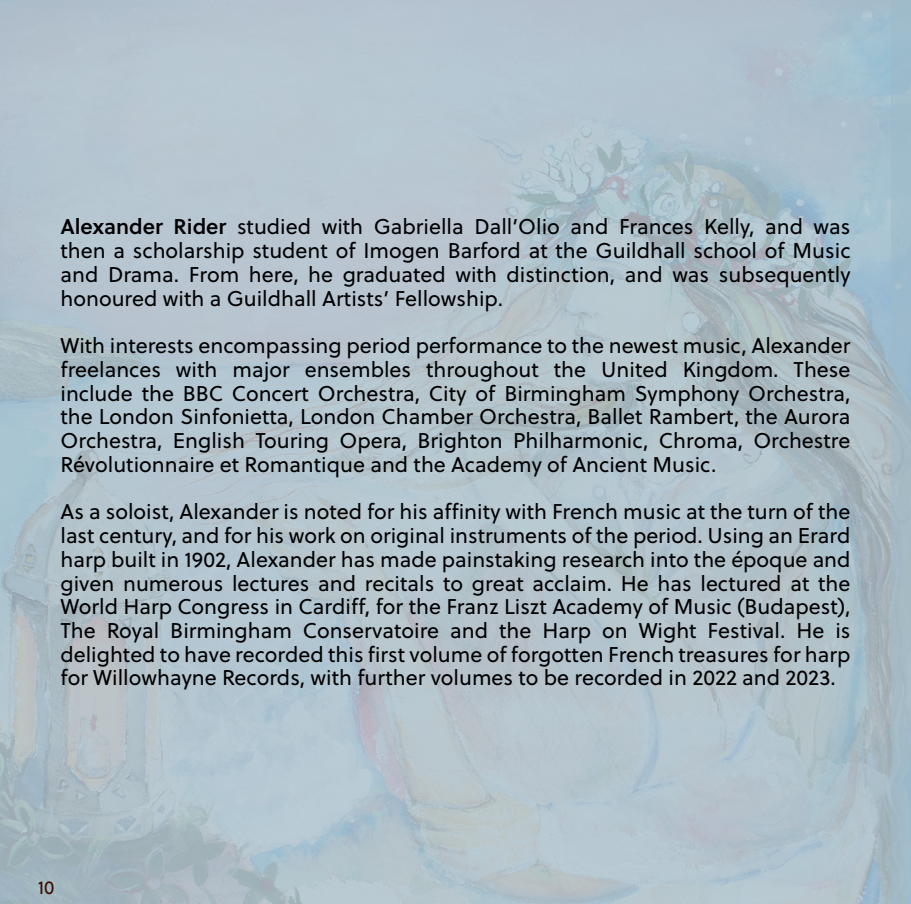
outstanding school of her own. Her lovely, supple playing and inspirational teaching drew many fine young players into her orbit. The great French harpist Lily Laskine reflected that

"because of his [Hasselmans'] personality, his lack of human warmth, many of his first prize students did not continue to work with him. Most went to Renié, who had a great reputation as a teacher."

One such graduate was Yvonne Schwartz, to whom **Marcelle Soulage** (1894-1970) dedicated her *Choral*. Commended in early reviews for her 'excellent sonority', this may account for the large, sonorous chords of the music Soulage has written for her. *Danse*, written for Schwartz's younger classmate Marie-Jeanne Schlesinger, begins in genteel spirit before the 'wild' and harmonically adventurous mid-section. Touchingly, both of Soulage's pieces are dated. The mood of *Chorale*, marked 29 January 1916, is sombre. It seems to speak of the chilly dawn of a new year under the shadow of the ongoing world war.

In *Le Rouet Enchanté*, Tournier draws upon the beloved fairytale theme of a spinning wheel under enchantment. It was written for Tournier's great pupil Bernard Zighera (1904-1984). Born in Paris and of Romanian descent, it is thought Zighera began his harp studies privately with Yvonne Schwartz (dedicatee of the aforementioned *Choral* of Soulage) before entering Tournier's class at the conservatoire. His early brilliance became known to Tournier's American pupils, such as Lucile Johnson. In this way he was recommended by Johnson to her friend Sergei Koussevitsky who in turn hired Zighera as harpist to the Boston Symphony. There he remained for 54 years. Furthermore, Zighera was an outstanding pianist; Koussevitsky was not. He would have the young harpist come and play through scores at the piano so that the maestro could learn the music he was to conduct. Zighera was known furthermore as a harsh and unrelenting teacher and this music calls not only for devastating technique but portrays the fiery and capricious nature of its dedicatee. One can almost see the strands of gold being woven by the furious turning of the magical wheel; a likely metaphor for the harpist, who draws from the harp the eloquence locked within its strings.

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Alexander Rider studied with Gabriella Dall'Olio and Frances Kelly, and was then a scholarship student of Imogen Barford at the Guildhall school of Music and Drama. From here, he graduated with distinction, and was subsequently honoured with a Guildhall Artists' Fellowship.

With interests encompassing period performance to the newest music, Alexander freelances with major ensembles throughout the United Kingdom. These include the BBC Concert Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the London Sinfonietta, London Chamber Orchestra, Ballet Rambert, the Aurora Orchestra, English Touring Opera, Brighton Philharmonic, Chroma, Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique and the Academy of Ancient Music.

As a soloist, Alexander is noted for his affinity with French music at the turn of the last century, and for his work on original instruments of the period. Using an Erard harp built in 1902, Alexander has made painstaking research into the époque and given numerous lectures and recitals to great acclaim. He has lectured at the World Harp Congress in Cardiff, for the Franz Liszt Academy of Music (Budapest), The Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and the Harp on Wight Festival. He is delighted to have recorded this first volume of forgotten French treasures for harp for Willowhayne Records, with further volumes to be recorded in 2022 and 2023.





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WHR074

Recorded at 24-bit 192KHz resolution

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