

“SALUTE TO FRANCE”

Music & Arts CD 649

HARMONIE ENSEMBLE/NEW YORK

Steven Richman, conductor

James Kreger, cello; Ralph Votapek, piano

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One would appreciate it if French ensembles with varying instrumentation of the same type would more often present such alluring curiosities.

Who today in France plays *Le Bal de Beatrice d’Este* by Reynaldo Hahn, an elegant suite of dances displaying a subtle and refined neo-classicism? Or the *Symphonic Suite “Paris”* by Ibert, a curious album of colored picture postcards (the metro, the suburbs, the Bois de Boulogne, the mosque...yes, indeed)? In a more serious vein, the concerto for Cello by Ibert, where a sole string instrument audaciously confronts ten wind instruments, or even Poulenc’s *Aubade*, which is no longer in the current repertoire. Why? This is a question that was apparently asked in New York, and answered with a great deal of class. The interpretation is fresh, without bombast, always finding just the right style. A remarkable piece of work, and for us, the French, carelessly forgetful of our patrimony, certainly an object lesson.

Laurent Barthel

Technical: transparent recording, with respect for sonority, with a generally dry, but natural acoustic.