



SEASCAPES
CLAUDE DEBUSSY
La Mer
ZHOU LONG
The Deep, Deep Sea
FRANK BRIDGE
The Sea
ALEXANDER GLAZUNOV
The Sea (La Mer)

Sharon Bezaly (flute)

Singapore Symphony Orchestra

Lan Shui

BIS- 1447(SACD)

Reference Recording - Bridge: This One

Artistic Quality **9/9** *Sound Quality*

"Sea" compilations aren't all that unusual, but few are as good as this. Lan Shui's La Mer not only shimmers idiomatically, but it has an abundance of personal touches that make it worth hearing even in a crowded field. These include some particularly luscious string playing in the second movement's more lyrical moments (with nice touches of portamento), and a real whopper of a climax in the first part of the finale. Only the slight lack of prominence given the harps and suspended cymbal prevent the performance from being just about perfect, texturally--but this is a very minor point, all things considered.

It's always great to see new recordings of Bridge's The Sea, a beautiful piece that (I know from experience) turns out to be a real crowd-pleaser in concert. This performance arguably is the best one currently available, fully the equal of Charles Groves' estimable EMI version (better played, in fact), and more exciting than the competition on Chandos--as well as sonically superior. Glazunov's The Sea also is a remarkable piece that deserves to be better known. Considering its date of composition (1889) it has some remarkable touches of orchestration, including flutter-tonguing flutes and trombone glissandos, both effects often listed in instrumentation treatises as coming into service much later. And like most of Glazunov's music, it's also very pretty, but it never sounds merely cute or inoffensive.

Zhou Long's The Deep, Deep Sea pays an audible debt to Debussy, particularly in its string writing and even in some thematic material. Written for alto flute alternating on piccolo, along with timpani, harp, and strings, it's a lovely short piece (about 10 minutes long) that, as might be expected, Sharon Bezaly plays with her customary fine tone and high level of virtuosity. It adds an even

more welcome touch of novelty to this intelligently conceived program. BIS's sonics, while still very good and extremely clear, aren't quite as fine as the label's absolute best (a touch dry irrespective of format)--but trust me, you probably won't notice or care. This is just good fun from beginning to end.