

JACQUES IBERT

***Escales* ("Ports of Call")**

BORN: August 15, 1890, in Paris

DIED: February 5, 1962, in Paris

WORK COMPOSED: 1922

WORLD PREMIERE: January 6, 1924, in Paris. Paul Paray conducted the orchestra of the Concerts Lamoureux.

This music is close in style to Ravel and Debussy. Its melodies are supple, its harmonies lush and allusive in the Impressionist manner, and its orchestration yields a rich array of colors and certain exotic details that help identify each port of call.

Jacques Ibert's *Escales* belongs to a species of work long cultivated by French composers: the musical travelogue, which evokes particular lands through suggestive melodies, rhythms and instrumental colors. Its title means "ports of call," and its three movements are poetic evocations of several Mediterranean coastal cities: Palermo, in Sicily; Tunis and Nefta, on Africa's northern shore; and Valencia, in Spain. Ibert had first-hand knowledge of these ports, having served in his country's navy.

The first movement begins with shimmering textures and fluid melodic lines indicating a seascape. Hearing them, one can easily imagine oneself aboard a ship approaching Palermo on a calm evening, the city slowly emerging into view through the dusk. Accelerating figures bring us to the main body of the movement, though Ibert briefly returns to the placid material of the opening section before closing this initial part of the work.

The second stop on Ibert's sea voyage features a melody whose sinuous contour and suggestion of an arabic scale, coupled with the timbre of solo oboe, leave no doubt that we are on African shores. The finale takes us to Spain. Here the lively opening and closing sections frame a languorous central episode. Castanets and Spanish rhythms contribute to the Iberian atmosphere.

Scored for 2 flutes, the 2nd flute doubling piccolo, and piccolo; 2 oboes and English horn; 2 clarinets; 3 bassoons; 4 horns; 3 trumpets; 3 trombones; tuba; timpani and percussion; 2 harps; celeste; strings.

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