



**Susan Bickley / Claire Booth / Andrew Matthews-Owen**  
***Debussy, Fauré, Satie & Dove: Songs and Vexations***

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There are plenty of recordings of French art songs from Fauré up through Satie, but this British release has several special features going for it. First is the presence of two fine contrasting voices, the reedier mezzo soprano Susan Bickley and the more muscular soprano Claire Booth, both expertly accompanied by pianist Andrew Matthews-Owen. Both singers have been around for awhile and are suited to the themes of mature sensuality that pervade the program, and they are nicely deployed: Bickley opens and closes the program with the brashly humorous music of Satie, palate cleansers for the main attractions, and Booth enters with the gorgeous Baudelaire settings of Debussy, the most intricate songs he ever wrote. The program is beautifully coherent, with the Debussy and the modern Letters from Claude of British composer Jonathan Dove bookended by the Satie and the more classical lyricism of Fauré, divided among the two singers. Finally, the Dove Letters from Claude, setting letters directed to his simultaneous squeezes Lilly Texier and Emma Bardac, are fresh and unusual. Both the singers are involved, one each representing each figure. They effectively render the short, fragmentary texts in creative ways, evoking Debussy's musical language but avoiding the trap of sentimentalizing it. Sample the fifth letter (track 14), which uses both singers. Satie returns at the end, and you could go either way on the vocalized Vexations (track 23), although one suspects Satie himself would have been OK with the idea. Highly recommended.