



Claire Booth's Paris 1913 is always lyrical and crystal-clear

SVEN ARNSTEIN

[Geoff Brown](#) | [Neil Fisher](#) | Tuesday February 04 2025, 12.01am, The Times

This week's best releases

Claire Booth

Paris 1913

★★★★☆

Nimbus/RTF Classical

It's now 20 years since the British soprano Claire Booth burst on to the scene scaling the scariest heights in new scores by Oliver Knussen, Birtwistle and others, delivered with bright purity and passion. Over the years she has proved equally powerful with composers of other stripes, expressing the music's drama as fiercely as the notes themselves. But she has also been compelling in intimate recitals, and the present album with the expressive pianist Andrew Matthews-Owen finds her exploring songs composed, as the title suggests, in and around Paris in the tremulous year of 1913.

That was when Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* had its noisy Paris premiere. The First World War was around the corner. It was also the year of Ravel and Debussy's piquant settings of Mallarmé's elusive poems, of late autumn fruits by Saint-Saëns and Fauré, and quasi-atonal settings of Rabindranath Tagore from the largely forgotten Louis Durey, *L'Offrande lyrique* (the lyrical offering).

Booth's own offering is always lyrical and crystal-clear, even when Mallarmé makes her sing about raspberry laughter, bearded lapdogs and the tawny agony of leaves. And if music and verse threaten to become overly refined, up pops something from pranksters like Georges Auric or Satie, or a little charm bracelet by Cécile Chaminade. Whatever the mood and whatever the composer, Booth and Matthews-Owen always leave the listener pleasantly rewarded and refreshed.