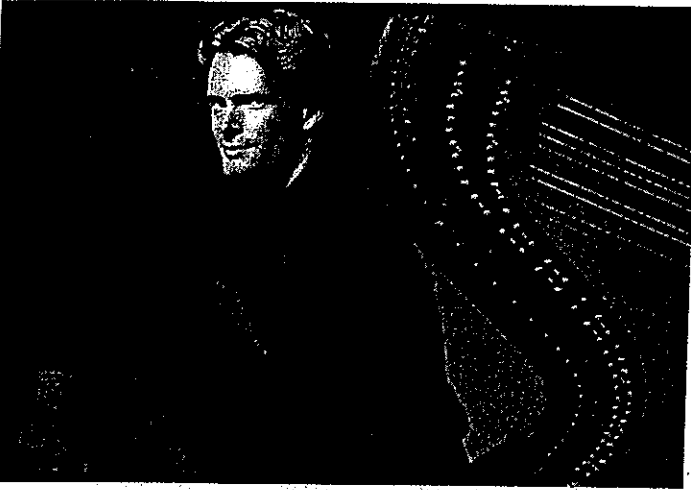


RISING STAR GREAT ARTISTS OF TOMORROW

XAVIER DE MAISTRE

Harpist

Why stick to traditional repertoire, asks the French harpist, when you can borrow it from other instruments instead?



STRINGING THE CHANGES: 'glissandos and arpeggiandos are a bit cliché'

'PEOPLE THINK THE HARP IS SOMETHING for beautiful girls in long dresses,' says French harpist Xavier de Maistre. 'I want to give the harp another image.' And to begin his campaign this 35-year-old musician has made his first CD for Sony BMG. Moving away from traditional harpists' fare – he describes glissandos and arpeggiandos as 'a bit cliché' – de Maistre has opted to play some of Debussy's most well known piano music. 'I chose some of the Préludes where I thought the colours of the harp would bring a new dimension – like 'Voiles' and 'La fille aux cheveux de lin'; he explains. 'Debussy encouraged harpists to play them – it was just more convenient for him to write for the piano as he was a pianist.'

Recording Debussy's music has been a long-held ambition for de Maistre, but he previously turned down several offers to record the *Danse sacrée et danse profane*, a cornerstone of the harp repertoire, for being too traditional. However, his innovative idea of borrowing piano music led to some problems in practice. 'Playing 'Passepied' from *Suite bergamasque* was a huge

challenge,' says de Maistre. 'It's a staccato piece, so you have to play everything twice – you play the note once and then muffle it. I never thought I would make it!'

From the age of nine, when he began to learn the harp, de Maistre knew he wanted to play professionally. But wanting to explore other interests first, he studied political science at the Parisian university, Sciences Po, and lived in London for a year, studying at the London School of

Economics. 'I realised I had to become a musician because I was queuing every night at Covent Garden or to get into concerts,' says de

'I had to become a musician – I couldn't live without my harp'

Maistre. 'And I couldn't live without my harp.' Straight after university, he walked into a job with the Bavarian Symphony Orchestra before moving to his current orchestra, the Vienna Philharmonic. So what's the next step in changing the harp's image? 'I've just finished a recording of Haydn keyboard concertos. And really, the sound of the modern piano is as far from the harpsichord as the harp,' he says. 'And it's never been done before.'

Interview by Rebecca Franks

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