

François-Xavier Roth

Conductor

'If he hasn't already got the nickname Special FX, then Roth should adopt it ... empathetic musicality and flair for colour, sometimes conjuring up such startling touches that the players look stunned'

Neil Fisher, The Times

François-Xavier Roth is one of today's most imaginative conductors and programmers, whether in his roles as General Music Director of the City of Cologne and founder of Les Siècles, or with leading orchestras such as the London Symphony Orchestra, of which he is Principal Guest Conductor. A born communicator, he is a charismatic and persuasive advocate for classical music of every description.

In Cologne, where he has directed both the Gürzenich Orchestra and the Opera since 2015, his programming is notable for its breadth and depth, including new commissions alongside Baroque and Romantic music. Roth upholds the orchestra's pioneering heritage, which includes having given the world premieres of Mahler's Third and Fifth Symphonies, the Brahms Double Concerto, Strauss's *Don Quixote* and *Till Eulenspiegel*, and Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten*. For Cologne Opera he has led new productions of *Benvenuto Cellini*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Salome*, *Béatrice et Bénédicte* and *The Flying Dutchman*.

His sense of musical exploration led him in 2003 to found Les Siècles, which performs contrasting programmes on modern and period instruments, often within the same concert. Together, they have toured Europe, China and Japan, appearing at the Berlin Musikfest, BBC Proms, Edinburgh and Enescu festivals. In 2019, Les Siècles became resident orchestra of Atelier Lyrique de Tourcoing, where Roth is also Artistic Director, and in 2022 they took up their new residency at Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Projects have included recreating the original sound of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* and Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Currently, Les Siècles are celebrating their 20th anniversary with a series of European tours.

Roth is a champion of new music and has premiered works by Georg-Friedrich Haas and Hector Parra, and collaborated with composers such as Pierre Boulez, Wolfgang Rihm, Jörg Widmann, Helmut Lachenmann and Philippe Manoury. He has a leading role in the LSO's Panufnik Composers Scheme, mentoring young emerging composers.

Engagement with new audiences is an essential part of Roth's work, whether speaking from the podium or working with young people and amateurs. With the Festival Berlioz and Les Siècles, he founded the Jeune Orchestre Européen Hector Berlioz, which has its own collection of period instruments and last year performed *Les Troyens à Carthage* in Berlioz's birthplace. In Cologne he has initiated a community orchestra and his *Ohrenauf!* youth programme was recipient of a Junge Ohren Produktion Award. His television series *Presto!* attracted weekly audiences of over three million in France.

Roth's prolific award-winning discography includes the complete tone poems of Richard Strauss, Stravinsky ballets, Ravel and Berlioz cycles, Bruckner, Mahler and Schumann symphonies, and albums commemorating Debussy's centenary. He was awarded the German Record Critics' Honorary Prize 2020, the youngest conductor ever to receive it. For his achievements as musician, conductor, music director and teacher, François-Xavier Roth was made a Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur.

Appointments

General Music Director, City of Cologne (2015–present); Principal Guest Conductor of London Symphony Orchestra (2017–present); Founder and Artistic Director of Les Siècles; Artistic Director of Atelier Lyrique de Tourcoing (2019–present); Chief Conductor and Artistic Director, SWR Sinfonieorchester (from 2025)

Guest conducting appearances (2023–24)

Berlin Philharmonic, Sinfonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Orchestre National de France, SWR Sinfonieorchester, Boulez ensemble

Opera productions (2023–24)

Mozart: *Die zauberflöte*, Humperdinck: *Hänsel und Gretel*, Gounod: *Faust*, Ondrej Adamek: *Ines* (world premiere)

Awards

Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur (2017); German Record Critics' Honorary Prize (2020).

With Les Siècles: Franco Abbiati Record Critics' Award – IV edition 2022, Edison Klassiek Prize 2022; Presto Music Recording of the Year 2020; German Record Critics' Prize 2016, Gramophone Awards Orchestral Album of the Year 2018; Victoires de la Musique Classique Recording of the Year 2018

Recent recording releases

Ravel: Bolero and L'heure espagnole with Les Siècles (Harmonia Mundi)
Ligeti: Kammerkonzert with Les Siècles (Harmonia Mundi)
Mahler: Symphony no.4 with Les Siècles (Harmonia Mundi)
Ravel: Piano Concertos and Melodies with Les Siècles (Harmonia Mundi)
Debussy: Pelléas et Mélisande with Les Siècles (Harmonia Mundi)
Bruckner: Symphony no.7 with Gürzenich Orchestra (Myrios Classics)
Saint-Saëns: Symphony no.3 and Piano Concerto no. 4 with Les Siècles (Harmonia Mundi)
Strauss: Don Quixote and Til Eulenspiegel with Gürzenich Orchestra (Harmonia Mundi)
Schumann: Symphonies nos.1 and 4 with Gürzenich Orchestra (Myrios Classics)
Beethoven: Symphony no.3 and Méhul: Overture, Les Amazones (Harmonia Mundi)

Beethoven: Symphony no.5 and Gossec Symphony in 17 Parts (Harmonia Mundi)
Debussy/Ravel with London Symphony Orchestra (LSO Live)
Mussorgsky/Ravel with Les Siècles (Harmonia Mundi)
Saint-Saëns: Le Timbre d'argent with Les Siècles (Palazzetto Bru Zane)
Panufnik Legacies III with London Symphony Orchestra (LSO Live)

Like the difference between a sparkling fruity champagne and an old, long stored red wine ... a seductive bouquet of strong, warm and velvety nature smells, noble woody notes and dark, full colours.

Remy Franck, Pizzicato, Ravel: Daphnis & Chloé CD

Reviews of François-Xavier Roth's regularly praised recordings in our pages all hint at one thing: there's never anything routine about his approach, the sound or the vision.

Mark Cullingford, The Gramophone

Raw, radical and revelatory as Roth's period band thrills...His vibrant interpretations are radical, crafted by expressive, fluttering hand movements and backed up by eloquent body language.

Clive Paget, The Guardian