

## 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

One of today's most imaginative conductors and programmers, François-Xavier Roth is a charismatic communicator with a voracious intellectual curiosity. He brings fresh perspectives to every kind of classical music, whether performing Baroque music and Stravinsky on original instruments, leading large-scale iconic modern masterpieces, or presenting standard favourites.

Constantly searching for ideas that illuminate classical music and its cultural importance, Roth relishes musical connections. With Les Siècles, he recently programmed Rameau alongside Mahler and Ligeti with Mozart, and for London Symphony Orchestra, he juxtaposed Beethoven with music of today, to highlight Beethoven's own radicalism.

Roth founded Les Siècles in 2003 to explore such links and to perform wide-ranging repertoire on the instruments for which it was composed, offering thrilling revelations about different sound worlds. Projects included recreating the original sound of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* and Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. He and the orchestra toured Europe, China and Japan, appearing at the Berlin Musikfest, BBC Proms, Edinburgh and Enescu festivals. They celebrated their 20th anniversary in the 2023–24 season with several tours and special projects.

Through nurturing long-term musical partnerships, Roth pursues his vision of developing distinctive orchestral sounds and engaging with local audiences, a goal which he has achieved with successive orchestras. Alongside Les Siècles, he served as General Music Director of Gürzenich Orchestra and Oper Köln from 2015 to 2024, building on the orchestra's pioneering heritage of having given premieres by Mahler, Brahms and Richard Strauss by premiering many new works. From 2011 to 2016 he served as Chief Conductor of SWR Sinfonieorchester Freiburg & Baden-Baden, and becomes Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of its successor SWR Symphonieorchester in September 2025. He has served as Principal Guest Conductor of London Symphony Orchestra since 2017.

Roth brings his charisma and command to collaborating on ambitious and impactful projects. In recent years these have included Bernd Alois Zimmermann's epic *Die Soldaten*, directed by Calixto Bieito, and Philippe Manoury's large-scale spatial triptych *Köln Trilogie*. In 2023 he spearheaded celebrations for Ligeti's centenary year, curating a two-week festival at Maison Radio France, including Ligeti's thought-provoking masterpiece *Le Grand Macabre*. In 2025 Roth marks the centenary of his mentor Pierre Boulez, devising concerts and events around Europe to celebrate his music and recognise the influence of his ideas on today's musical life.

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 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. He has a leading role in the LSO's Panufnik Composers Scheme, mentoring young emerging composers.

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.

He was made a Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur in 2017 and given the Royal Philharmonic Society Conductor Award in 2024, with the jury citation describing him as a 'modern-day musical Midas'.

## Awards

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**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