

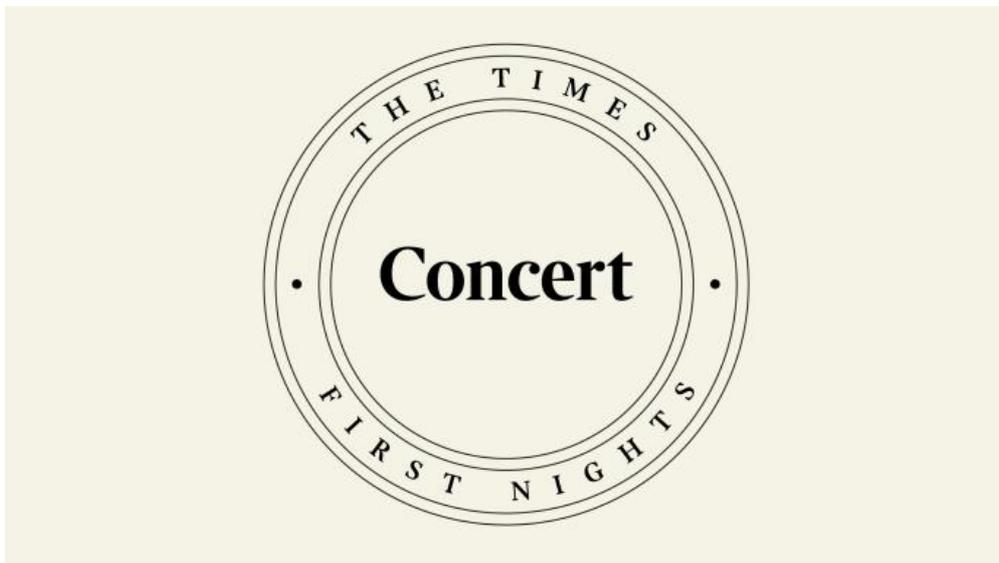
FIRST NIGHT: CONCERT

Review: London Symphony Orchestra/Roth at Barbican

Roth led a theatrical, pungent reading of Richard Strauss that alternated between bombastic climaxes and treacherously exposed section work

Neil Fisher

November 15 2018, 5:00pm, The Times



Share



Save

★★★★☆

We could do with Superman right now: faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, perhaps even able to speed-read a 585-page Brexit withdrawal agreement *and* face down a mutineering cabinet. Failing the arrival of the Man of Steel in the UK, however, at least Nietzsche's Übermensch touched down in the City of London in a performance of Richard Strauss's mildly ludicrous but satisfying *Also sprach Zarathustra*, a translation into tone-poem form of the German philosopher's cri de coeur that mankind should transcend its limitations and achieve total mastery over itself.

Opportunities to hear the work live don't come up that often. So a shiver ran up my spine when Francois-Xavier Roth cued in the gravelly double basses and low organ grumble, the tremors that lead to the great eruption of *Sunrise*. Mankind then jumps through various elaborate Straussian hoops on the road to self-actualisation.

Roth, his tempos fleet but fluid, led a theatrical, pungent reading that alternated between bombastic climaxes and treacherously exposed section work, with the heady waves of increasingly ecstatic woodwind — the LSO's winds are on magisterial form — especially evocative. Towards the end of the piece, after a dizzying waltz, the violinists Roman Simovic and Clare Duckworth took flight in a rapt duet, the silken delicacy of which stayed in the mind longer than anything else in Zarathustra or Strauss's manifesto.

There wasn't much to link the Strauss with the two other works performed, although Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and Dvorak's Cello Concerto, when done with conviction, pulse with an exhilarating life-force as strong as Strauss's didactic splurge. The flautist Gareth Davies stole into the *Prelude* with a sultry glint and Roth — a Debussy specialist — led a performance imbued with voluptuous flair. The Dvorak was notable for the evenness of balance between orchestra and soloist, Jean-Guihen Queyras, but the French cellist, although he phrases lyrically and makes a noble sound, was altogether too self-effacing. He needed to find his inner Superman.

[Music](#)[Opera](#)[Brexit](#)[Rugby Union](#)[Share](#)[Save](#)

Comments are subject to our community guidelines, which can be viewed [here](#).

GET IN TOUCH

[Contact us](#)

[Help](#)

[The Times Editorial Complaints](#)

[The Sunday Times Editorial Complaints](#)

[Place an announcement](#)

[Classified advertising](#)

[Display advertising](#)

[The Times corrections](#)

[The Sunday Times corrections](#)

MORE FROM THE TIMES AND THE SUNDAY TIMES

[The Times e-paper](#)

[The Sunday Times e-paper](#)

[Times Currency Services](#)

[The Sunday Times Wine Club](#)

[The Times Academy](#)

[Times Print Gallery](#)

[Times Crossword Club](#)

[Sunday Times Driving](#)

[Times+](#)

[The Sunday Times Rich List](#)

[Insider City Guides](#)

[Good University Guide](#)

[Schools Guide](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Best Places to Live](#)

[Best Places to Stay](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Times Appointments](#)

[Encounters Dating](#)

© Times Newspapers Limited 2018.

Registered in England No. 894646.

Registered office: 1 London Bridge Street, SE1 9GF.

[Privacy & cookie policy](#)

[Licensing](#)

[Cookie settings](#)

[Sitemap](#)

[Topics](#)

[Commissioning terms](#)

