

# François-Xavier Roth: Debussy review/ Javier Perianes: Debussy review

A year of celebrating the works of this revolutionising composer reaches a powerful climax

**Geoff Brown**

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François-Xavier Roth and his period band Les Siècles were the ideal people to shine fresh light on Debussy HOLGER TALINSKI

## **François-Xavier Roth**

Debussy

★★★★★

## **Javier Perianes**

Debussy

★★★★☆

There are only two weeks of 2018 left, but we can't leave it without another salute to the most nourishing and continuously inspiring of the year's anniversary composers. I don't, I'm afraid, mean Leonard Bernstein. My pick is Debussy, who managed the impressive feat of revolutionising 20th-century music without making that music unlistenable. Over the year the Harmonia Mundi label has been issuing new Debussy releases, drawing on its stable of artists, and the series reaches a powerful climax with the two singled out here.

François-Xavier Roth and his period band Les Siècles were the ideal people to shine fresh light on Debussy. Armed, among other things, with flutes and horns from 1900, an even older trombone, and a phalanx of players with gut strings, the musicians act like picture restorers removing the varnish clogging up Old Masters. Colours and textures leap out anew: the dark, slightly husky flute beckoning us into *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*; the sinewy strings from *Nocturnes*; the dancing lines and fragments that make up the ballet *Jeux*. Sleek modern sounds enter only when the female voices of Les Cris de Paris wordlessly contribute to the final Nocturne, singing with modest beauty and flawless intonation: delicate qualities probably beyond the work's early vocalists.

Listening to these superb performances, beautifully shaped and paced by Roth, you newly appreciate Debussy's daring in remodelling the structures and timbres of classical music. Most of the repertoire is also featured on a bonus DVD, filmed at a Siècles concert in Granada.

More wonders arrive with the Spanish pianist Javier Perianes and an album dominated by Debussy's first book of *Préludes*. I am glad he's playing a modern Steinway, because Perianes grabs every benefit possible from the instrument's vast colour range, sustaining pedal, and seamless action. As he navigates a poetic path through these 12 brilliant, sometimes shadowy, miniatures, you realise what Debussy meant when he described his goal as "an emotional transposition of what is 'invisible'".

And what lies in store with the anniversaries of 2019? Berlioz, lots of Berlioz. But Debussy's a tough act to follow. (*Harmonia Mundi*)