

## Music

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Monday 15 July 2013 15.14 BST

### Prom 4: Les Siècles/Roth - review

Royal Albert Hall, London



Francois-Xavier Roth keeps time as Lully did. Photograph: BBC/Sisi Burn

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[Andrew Clements](#)

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There may be countless period-instrument orchestras nowadays, but [Les Siècles](#), founded by conductor [François Xavier-Roth](#) 10 years ago, is a very distinctive one. Their ethos of presenting music on instruments as close as possible to those for which it was conceived, may be familiar enough, but Roth and Les Siècles go farther than most, treating works from four different centuries in that way.

Their debut at the Proms together was both a demonstration of how that principle is applied, and a celebration of one of this year's [musical centenaries](#). A stylishly

played sequence of French ballet music began with Lully's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* of 1670, in which Roth kept time as Lully did, by banging a staff on the ground, and ended with Massenet's *Le Cid* of 1885, taking in Rameau's *Les Indes Galantes* and Delibes' *Coppélia en route*. That was the prelude to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*: a performance that was not only the first in Britain on instruments similar to those used at the notorious Paris premiere in 1913, but used the same version of the score, too, without any of the later revisions.

It may not have been the most thrilling Rite the year will produce - Roth kept things on too tight a rein and inserted too many self-conscious pauses for that - but it was full of subtly shifted perspectives. With such an orchestra, the whole score seemed lightened, lifted and less remorselessly machine-like than it can be. From the reediness of the opening bassoon solo onwards, details acquired a wholly new dimension: the raw, primeval sound of the horns in the Procession of the Sage, the bass trumpet adding a querulous edge to the Ritual Action, the strings alternating bowed and pizzicato chords in the final Sacrificial Dance. Fascinating.

*Broadcast on BBC Four on Sunday and also [available on BBC iPlayer until then](#).*

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