

London Symphony Orchestra

LSO/Roth review – After Romanticism gets off to a decent start

3/5 stars

Barbican,

London

Solid Wagner, Camilla Tilling's detailed Berg and some authoritative Mahler set the stage for the orchestra's two-season series



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The pair of concerts that François-Xavier Roth is conducting this month with the London Symphony Orchestra are the first in a series that will stretch across two seasons under the title *After Romanticism*. Wagner is its historical starting point, the Second Viennese School of Schoenberg, Berg and Webern its close, defining an era in which all the certainties of 19th-century music were eroded away, as romanticism slid into expressionism and the foundations of tonality began to crumble.

Roth began at the beginning, with the prelude to the first act of Wagner's *Parsifal*. It's a piece that doesn't quite work in the concert hall, never generating the numinous atmosphere it creates in the opera house, and it failed to do so here, too, despite the solidity of the performance. But it did

set out the stylistic parameters of the concert, and followed by Berg's Seven Early Songs, in which soprano Camilla Tilling was the soloist, conveyed the sense of what this series is going to be all about.

Tilling's account of the songs was beautifully detailed in a neutral, small-scale way. Her voice was occasionally overwhelmed by the orchestra, especially in the final, rather Straussian, Sommertage, but she threaded her way through the shifting harmonic sands of the more forward-looking numbers, such as the setting of Rilke's Traumgekrönt, with great poise as Roth carefully sifted orchestral textures and colours around her.

But Mahler's Fifth Symphony wasn't always as refined as it might have been. The best of it was very impressive – Roth pulled together the elements of the finale in a particularly authoritative way. But the first movement had been rather episodic, with ideas pulled out of the hat rather than placed



more carefully, and some of the solo wind playing in the scherzo was distinctly under par, while, ideally, the strings needed more velvety finesse in the Adagietto than they managed. But a decent start to what promises to be a worthwhile series.

Beautifully sung ... Camilla Tilling Photograph: Mats Widén