

Classical Music

LSO/Roth at the Barbican

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François-Xavier Roth has remarkable imagination and skill as a programmer and a performer. Conducting without a baton, even in the boisterous sprawl of Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*, he shapes and balances the music between his hands in a clear, centred and supple space.

His interpretations of everything from Lully to Stravinsky are consummately thought through and executed with elegance. With London's most balletic orchestra and a soloist as sophisticated as violinist Renaud Capuçon working with him, the silences were as expressive as the music in the second concert of his *After Romanticism* series with the London Symphony Orchestra.

This was chamber music on a grand scale, exquisitely and coolly shaded in the classic French style and chosen to illustrate the final shudder of an aesthetic that had begun to dissolve and fragment under the weight of its own opulence.

A spoonful of Webern in Sunday's programme was enough to scare off the fidgeters and the sweet-toothed. Although *Im Sommerwind* (1904) barely hints at the rigour to come in Webern's later work in the chill brush and hush of pianissimo strings and the sharp flavour of certain chords.

Berg's Violin Concerto was played with a beautifully nurtured cantabile tone and clean double-stopping by Capuçon, its poignancy intensified through his understatement and the intelligence and sensitivity of the LSO woodwind.

Strauss's shrill musical portrait of sniping critics in *Ein Heldenleben* was almost flattering in this reading, although the splashy Barbican acoustic warped the deep gleam of timpani, double basses and harps into an oily, boomy stew.

Played by the leader, Roman Simovic, the "hero's companion" of the third movement sounded less like a neurotic wife than a lothario wearing too much cologne. Simovic's characterisation was more tender and feminine in the final movement as Roth again coaxed the LSO into deliquescence.