



Les Siècles/Roth review - translucency and pliancy with Debussy and Ravel

Royal Festival Hall, London Period band re-create early 20th-century soundworlds with growling winds and snarling brass and distracting, if witty, animations

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Francois-Xavier Roth and Les Siècles, the period-instrument band he founded 13 years ago, have appeared in London at the Proms - a memorable performance of *The Rite of Spring*, in the work's centenary year - and held a residency at this summer's Aldeburgh festival. But this was the orchestra's debut at the Southbank Centre - a programme of Debussy and Ravel, drawn from the very heart of its four-century-wide repertoire.

Les Siècles was founded to perform French music from the turn of the 20th century using the instruments on which it was first heard. The characteristic soundworld of that period came through very clearly in the Festival Hall - the translucency of the strings and pliancy of the woodwind in Debussy's *Jeux* and *La Mer*, the growling low woodwind and snarling brass in Ravel's *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand*, the brittle dabs of colour in Ravel's *Mother Goose*.

Roth's performances didn't always flow as naturally as they might have done. Some of the quick-witted fantasy in *Jeux* was toned down, *La Mer* didn't sweep forward as irresistibly as it can do and his performance of *Mother Goose* (the complete ballet) had to compete with accompanying animations created live on stage by Grégoire Pont, which were elegant and witty but hopelessly distracting. Jean-Efflam Bavouzet was the soloist in the concerto, making full use of the sharply differentiated registers of his handsome early 20th-century piano - a Pleyel, apparently, though frustratingly there was no information about the instrument in the programme.

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