

Cologne Phil with French conductor to have a concert in Korea

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The Cologne Philharmonic Orchestra is famous for having the "German sound," which is now fading away. Ironically, its conductor is from Paris.

The Cologne Philharmonic led by François-Xavier Roth, 46, will have a concert at Seoul Arts Center on Friday. The orchestra had its first concert in Korea in 2014 with conductor Markus Stenz, who is now a conductor-in-residence of the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra. This reporter contacted Roth who joined the orchestra in 2015 via email.

"I accepted the position after being impressed by the long history of the Cologne Philharmonic and the dynamic power and flexibility of the orchestra members," Roth said. "When I first met them, I got an impression that all of them had a strong sense of duty in music."

The Cologne Philharmonic has 190 years of history since its creation in 1827. It premiered Mahler and Strauss and also premiered the Double Concerto, the last piece of Brahms, which was conducted by Brahms himself. It was ranked eighth among German orchestras selected by the German magazine Focus in 2009.

"I'm trying to create our own unique music at the Cologne Philharmonic," the conductor said. "Furthermore, I want to share this with many people around the world."

He said about what he thinks about a French being a conductor of an orchestra famous for the German sound: "For Parisians, music is like perfumes in the air. Meanwhile, music is more substantial and practical in the German culture including Cologne. I am honored to learn from them."

He is famous for his unique way of interpreting notes, boasting a wide range of repertoires from the 17th century music to modern music. He was well received after he conducted in a new way whenever he was a guest conductor of renowned orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and the Boston Symphony.

"I am inspired a lot by the environment," he said. "Many cities that I visited as well as orchestras that I conducted and people that I got to know there have an impact on me."

He said he was attracted by the Korean culture when he visited Korea to conduct the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra in 2007.

"I am a big fan of Korean cuisine," the conductor said. "Whenever my friends recommend great Korean restaurants across Europe from my friends, I look forward to going there."

In this concert, he and the Cologne Philharmonic will perform Webern's Passacaglia, Beethoven's Violin concerto and Brahms's Symphony no.2. Norwegian violinist Vilde Frang will collaborate with them.

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