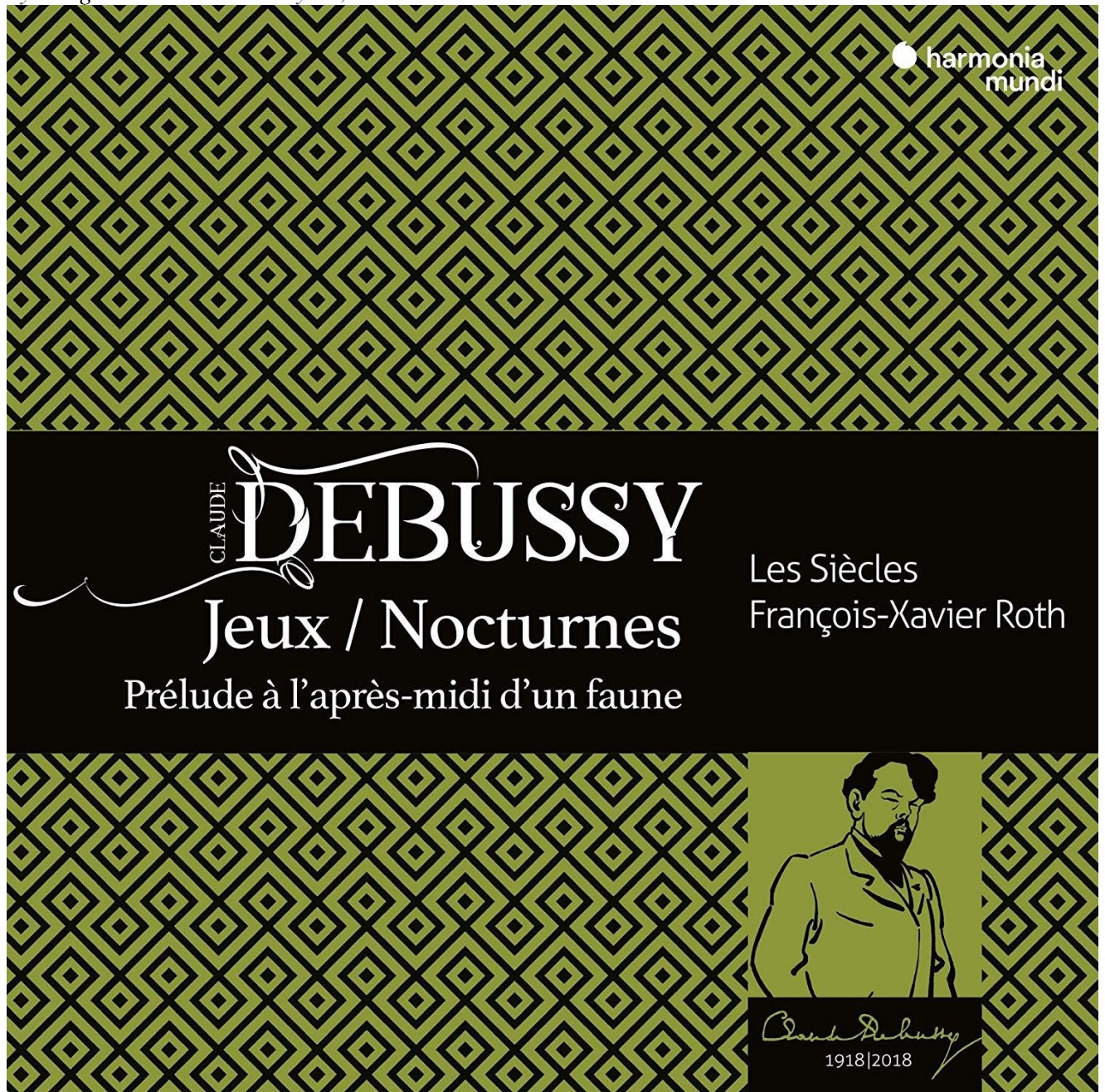


DEBUSSY: NOCTURNES, JEUX (LES SIÈCLES/FRANÇOIS-XAVIER ROTH)

FX Roth and his band blow hot and cold most beautifully.

by Greg Keane on February 14, 2019



Debussy must be the ultimate genius of elusiveness, even when he's at his most descriptive, not so much in terms of musical utterance but of mood and ambience. In no work is this more apparent than in his 'Poème-dansé' *Jeux* (Games). Rarely heard in the concert hall, it offers a blend of mystery, initially slightly sinister, and

evanescent eroticism, despite the admittedly banal story of a boy and two girls chasing a tennis ball, then each other. In this, Debussy's last completed score, Roth's forces, especially the *fin-de-siècle* woodwind, create magnificently diaphanous textures, somehow also managing to convey the athleticism of the participants.

The *Prélude à L'Après-midi d'un Faune* Debussy has become Roth's speciality, and you couldn't ask for a more coolly sensual reading, the flute playing sensuous but cool is simply out of this world. The other major work is *Nocturnes*, inspired by Whistler's paintings. *Nuages* (Clouds) is a wonderful chiaroscuro study, a sort of musical equivalent of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *Fêtes* (Festivals) is more earthly with vivid colour and movement where Roth and his players capture the passing parade and its gradual disappearance. Curiously, his steady tempo here is slower than a mid-50s recording with Otto Klemperer (of all people). Roth has the few singers in *Sirènes* interspersed among the orchestra (as Debussy requested.) The effect is magical and produces just the chemistry (Debussy's own word) the composer wanted.

Composer: Debussy

Composition: *Trois Nocturnes, Jeux, Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*

Performer: Les Siècles/François-Xavier Roth

Catalogue Number: Harmonia Mundi HMM905291