

# Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Classical

Hector Berlioz

Berlioz: Symphonies

Idée fixe

## INSTRUMENTAL DRAMA

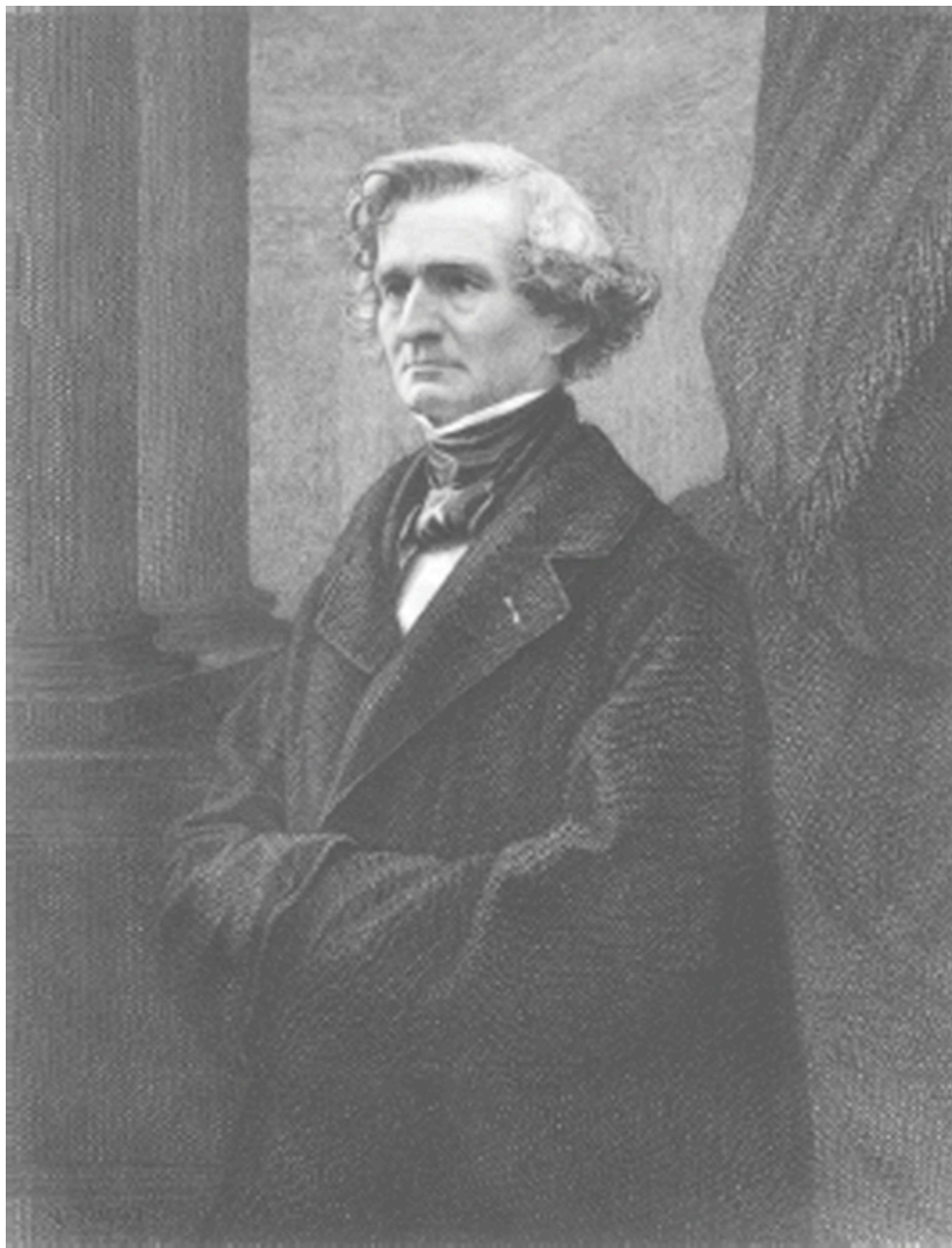
**Chapter:** CHAPTER 6 Critics

**Source:** MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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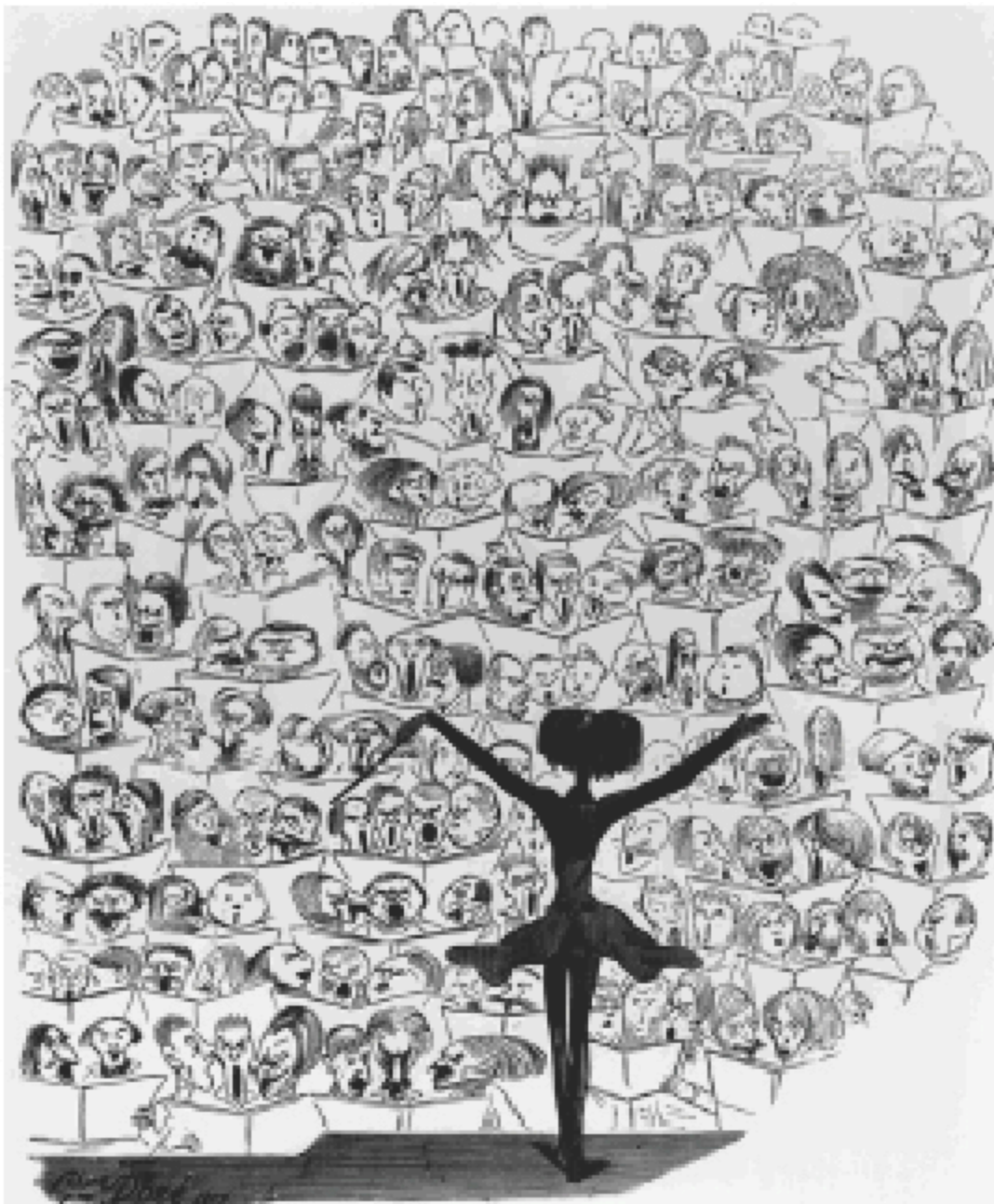
More forthright, less inhibited, in fact downright exhibitionistic (many thought) was the self-dramatizing romanticism of Berlioz, Schumann's closest French counterpart. His was the dynamic, scathing, somewhat scandalous romanticism of Victor Hugo, whose works were known to cause riots in the theater. Civic engagement was what French romantics sought in the afterglow of their heroic revolution, which surrounded the word *citoyen* (citizen) with an aureole. Berlioz the citizen-composer followed in the footsteps of his teacher, Jean-François Le Sueur (1760–1837), who had been the Inspecteur du Conservatoire from the very founding of that great institution in 1795. That job obligated Le Sueur to furnish the grand hymns for mass singing at the yearly revolutionary commemorations (*Fêtes de la Révolution*).

The French tradition of civic ceremonial music reached its very height in Berlioz's *Grande messe des morts*, op. 5 (1837), a colossal requiem Mass for tenor solo, six-part chorus, and orchestra augmented by eight pairs of timpani and four separate brass bands placed at the four corners of the performing space for the Dies Irae sequence, an epic evocation of the last judgment replete with trumpets to wake the dead. It was performed in the mammoth Dôme des Invalides, burial place of France's national heroes, on 5 December 1837 at a commemorative ceremony organized by the July Monarchy's ministry of the interior.



**fig. 6-7 Hector Berlioz in an engraving by E. Metzmacher after a photograph by Félix Nadar (1857).**

Two years later, Berlioz received another official commission, to accompany the solemn tenth-anniversary commemoration of the July Revolution itself on 28 July 1840. This time Berlioz dispensed with the chorus, aiming in by-then time-honored romantic fashion at the more elemental and “universal” message that the “metalanguage” of instrumental music alone could convey. The result was the *Grande symphonie funèbre et triomphale* (“Grand funeral and triumphal symphony”), scored for an enormous yet ambulatory military band, and performed in procession through the streets of Paris (thanks to which, as Berlioz recalled in his memoirs, the piece turned into an unintentional canon between the front instruments and the rear). The first and last movements are marches, the first lugubrious and the second—headed “Apothéose” (“Apotheosis”), from the Greek for exaltation to godly rank—ebullient. In between came the masterstroke: an “Oraison funèbre,” or eulogy to the revolutionary dead, declaimed by a solo trombone from the steps of the Invalides, to music originally composed for a scene from an abandoned historical opera, *Les francs-juges* (“The judges of the secret court”).



**fig. 6-8 Berlioz conducting massed choruses; caricature by Gustave Doré (1832-1883) in *Journal pour rire*, 27 June 1850.**

Berlioz's seminal work, however, was one in which he summoned all the techniques of public address for the purpose of private disclosure. It is officially titled *Épisode de la vie d'un artiste, Symphonie fantastique en cinq parties* ("Episode in the life of an artist: a fantastic symphony in five movements"). The title may be translated as the "Symphony of Fantasies," but the word *fantastique* also had for Berlioz and his contemporaries a wealth of "Hoffmannesque" resonances, denoting something strange, grotesque, uncanny, unearthly—in short, romantic. The whole symphony was composed in a "mental boil"<sup>20</sup> (as Berlioz later recollected in tranquility) from January to April 1830. Inspired by biographical circumstances comparable to those that surrounded Schumann's *Phantasie*, and perhaps having comparable artistic ends, Berlioz's symphony nevertheless differs so completely from Schumann's work in its artistic means and "ethos" (moral tone) that between them the two works represent a sort of gamut. Comparing them will be an exercise in what the intellectual historian Arthur Lovejoy called "the discrimination of romanticisms."<sup>21</sup>

Like Schumann a few years later, in 1827 Berlioz conceived an all-consuming passion for what then seemed an unattainable object. In September of that year he attended a performance of *Hamlet* by a touring English company performing in the original

language; and, though he knew no English at the time, he was smitten both by Shakespeare, who would thereafter be (with Virgil) his model of all artistic models (thus making Berlioz, like Schumann, a “literary” musician to the core), and by Harriet Smithson, the Irish actress who played Ophelia.

Shakespeare was available for immediate possession: over the course of his career Berlioz composed three major works on Shakespearean subjects—a concert overture, *Le roi Lear* (King Lear, 1831); a “dramatic symphony,” *Roméo et Juliette*, actually a sort of secular oratorio for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, in which all the love music, significantly, is wordless (1839); and finally a comic opera, *Béatrice et Bénédict* (1862), after *Much Ado About Nothing*. Miss Smithson was not available. Berlioz spent the next two years in vain and hopeless pursuit, which culminated (just as it had with Schumann) in a temporary embittered renunciation that bore immediate musical fruit, in Berlioz's case the *Symphonie fantastique*.

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**fig. 6-9 Harriet Smithson as Juliet to Charles Kemble's Romeo, Paris, Odéon Theater, September 1827.**

(Eventually he succeeded, against all expectation, in wooing Miss Smithson. They were married in 1833. But, as his biographer Hugh Macdonald puts it,

for Berlioz there was no clear distinction between the real Harriet Smithson and the idealized embodiment of Shakespeare's heroines.... [A] relationship that had begun on an ideal level could only spoil in the glare of everyday reality, and the wholly Romantic conjunction of the artist with the ideal woman came to a bitter end.<sup>22</sup>

They never divorced, but separated around 1842; she died in obscurity in 1854.)

Where Schumann sought to sublimate the biographical stimulus that motivated the *Phantasie* to the point where it is arguably no longer essential or even relevant to the work's interpretation, and was careful to enfold its subjective content in a sphinxlike sheath that engaged the listener's own subjectivity, Berlioz let everything hang out, leaving nothing, or so it seemed, to the imagination. What was billed as the symphony's motivating scenario was actually distributed to audiences in their program books (hence the word "programmatic" to describe the relationship between the work's verbal and musical dimensions). Although the composer had his qualms and vacillations about the program leaflet (or, simply, the symphony's "program," as we usually say now), rewrote it three times, and occasionally decided not to have it handed out, he eventually had it published in the first edition of the score in 1845, and since then it has been unquestionably (and by the composer's express avowal) as essential a part of the symphony as the libretto is in any opera. An explicit and occasionally detailed narrative, it goes far beyond anything Schumann ever attempted with his titles or headings:

#### NOTE

The composer's intention has been to develop, insofar as they contain musical possibilities, various situations in the life of an artist. The outline of the instrumental drama, which lacks the help of words, needs to be explained in advance. The following program should thus be considered as the spoken text of an opera, serving to introduce the musical movements, whose character and expression it motivates. The distribution of this program to the audience, at concerts where this symphony is to be performed, is indispensable for a complete understanding of the dramatic outline of the work.

#### PROGRAM

1. *Reveries—Passions*. The author imagines that a young musician, afflicted with that moral disease that a well-known writer [Chateaubriand] calls the *vague des passions* ["surge of indefinite passion," roughly, readiness for a big emotional experience], sees for the first time a woman who embodies all the charms of the ideal being he has imagined in his dreams, and he falls desperately in love with her. Through an odd whim, whenever the beloved image appears before the mind's eye of the artist it is linked with a musical thought whose character, passionate but at the same time noble and shy, he finds similar to the one he attributes to his beloved.

This melodic image and the model it reflects pursue him incessantly like a double *idée fixe*. That is the reason for the constant appearance, in every movement of the symphony, of the melody that begins the first Allegro. The passage from this state of melancholy reverie, interrupted by a few fits of groundless joy, to one of frenzied passion, with its stirrings of fury, of jealousy, its return of tenderness, its tears, its religious consolations—this is the subject of the first movement.

2. *A ball*. The artist finds himself in the most varied situations—in the midst of the tumult of a party, in the peaceful contemplation of the beauties of nature; but everywhere, in town, in the country, the beloved image appears before him and disturbs his peace of mind.

3. *Scene in the country*. Finding himself one evening in the country, he hears in the distance two shepherds piping a *ranz des vaches* [Swiss cow call] in dialogue. This pastoral duet, the scenery, the quiet rustling of the trees gently brushed by the wind, the hopes he has recently found some reason to entertain—all concur in affording his heart an unaccustomed calm, and in giving a more cheerful tint to his ideas. He reflects upon his isolation; he hopes that his loneliness will soon be over.—But what if she were deceiving him!—This mingling of hope and fear, these ideas of happiness disturbed by black presentiments, form the subject of the Adagio. At the end one of the shepherds again takes up the *ranz des vaches*; the other no longer replies.—Distant sound of thunder—loneliness—silence.

4. *March to the scaffold*. Convinced that his love is unappreciated [or as the first draft had it, "Convinced not only that his adored one does not return his love, but that she is incapable of understanding it and moreover has become unworthy of it"], the artist poisons himself with opium. The dose of the narcotic, too weak to kill him, plunges him into a sleep accompanied by the most horrible visions. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he is condemned and led to the



scaffold, and that he is witnessing his own execution. The procession moves forward to the sounds of a march that is now sombre and fierce, now brilliant and solemn, in which the muffled noise of heavy steps gives way without transition to the noisiest clamor. At the end of the march the first four measures of the *idée fixe* reappear, like a last thought of love interrupted by the fatal blow.

5. *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*. He sees himself at the Sabbath, in the midst of a frightful troop of ghosts, sorcerers, monsters of every kind, come together for his funeral. Strange noises, groans, bursts of laughter, distant cries which other cries seem to answer. The beloved melody appears again, but it has lost its character of nobility and diffidence; it is no more than a dance tune, mean, trivial, and grotesque: it is she, coming to join the Sabbath [or, according to the first draft, "it is the loved one coming to the Sabbath to attend the funeral procession of her victim; she is now only a prostitute, fit to take part in a debauch"].—A roar of joy at her arrival.—She takes part in the devilish orgy.—Funeral knell, burlesque parody of the *Dies irae* (the hymn sung in the funeral rites of the Catholic Church). Sabbath round dance. The Sabbath round and the *Dies irae* combined.<sup>23</sup>

The degree to which this program was truly autobiographical is of course unknowable, and (many would say) irrelevant. Berlioz, to begin with, is not known to have been a "substance abuser," but he is known to have been fascinated with Thomas De Quincey's pseudo-autobiographical *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822), a novel replete with dream visions every bit as bizarre and spectacular as the composer's. (Berlioz read it in Alfred de Musset's translation in 1828.) Besides, the program follows too many literary and dramatic conventions to have been wholly spontaneous or life-prompted. (In any case, the most spontaneous moments in the first draft—namely the misogynistic outbursts against the beloved, here most clearly identifiable with the actual Harriet Smithson who had wounded the actual Hector Berlioz—were removed on reflection.) The five-movement format is often traced back to Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony, also a descriptive work (though on nothing approaching such a level of detail). It may indeed have served as a model—or a "validator," as Beethoven so often served his varied progeny. The Beethoven symphony is neither narrative nor enactment, however, but a series of mood pictures in the eighteenth-century tradition of the *sinfonia caratteristica* ("characteristic" or descriptive symphony). There really was no musical precedent for a scenario-symphony such as Berlioz was offering, and so it may be more appropriate to seek its precedent in the contemporary theater, where the five-act "Shakespearean" tragedies and histories of Hugo, Berlioz's almost exact contemporary, were setting the pace. The incipient *grand opéra* was also a five-act affair, and it seems right to regard the *Symphonie fantastique* as a sort of opera—or "instrumental drama," as Berlioz calls it himself—for orchestra.

But what an orchestra! Whether in terms of sheer size or diversity of timbres, this was at the time the biggest band ever assembled outside an opera house (though Berlioz himself would exceed it in his choral works). To balance the unprecedented twenty-three wind and brass players (including parts for two ophicleides, now played on tubas), Berlioz specified a minimum of sixty strings. In addition the score calls for two harps and five percussion players, four of whom must simultaneously produce timpani rolls at the end of the third movement, with its famous depiction of distant thunder. (They also perform on two other kinds of drum, cymbals, and tubular chimes; all five players have their hands full at the end of the fourth movement.)

Thus a total of not less than 91 musicians is called for, including the virtuoso conductor. At the first performance, Berlioz had hoped for about 220 but settled for 130. The mastery—not only of mass but of detail—with which he handled this gargantuan band, even at this early stage of his career, has unquestionably been his greatest legacy. "Berlioz's sound," as Edward T. Cone, a later composer-critic, put it, "has been in the ears of composers ever since, even when they have reacted most strongly against it," or when they felt (as many people once felt about movies, and some still do about TV) that its colorfulness and realism preempted, and thereby stunted, the listener's imaginative faculties.<sup>24</sup>

The first performance was conducted by François-Antoine Habeneck (1781–1849), an old-fashioned violinist-conductor, who beat time with his bow. Dissatisfied, Berlioz resolved to learn to conduct himself, and became one of the earliest virtuoso baton conductors. The orchestra, in fact, was the only instrument he played well. Almost alone among major composers in having virtually no keyboard skills, he was most competent on flageolet (or whistle-flute) and guitar, both instruments associated mainly with nonliterate repertoires, and both as a result instruments for which he never had occasion to write. Thus Berlioz, far more than pianistically skilled composers, had to think directly in terms of orchestral colors, for which he developed an unparalleled ear.

As a result, however, his manner of writing often transgressed the usual rules of voice leading, traditionally learned at the keyboard. Because of his huge ambition in the face of seeming technical liabilities, Berlioz could never entirely shake the reputation of a crank, or of flaunting his "originality in italics," as the fastidious Mendelssohn put it.<sup>25</sup> As if to compensate for his

lack of more traditional skills, Berlioz's expertise in the newest techniques of orchestration and conducting was phenomenal, and pathbreaking. In 1843 he published a textbook on orchestration, only the third book of its kind and the first to give a full description of all contemporary instruments and their possibilities, many of them pioneered in his own work. As updated by Richard Strauss in 1904 the book is still in print. Berlioz, in short, was the prototype of the avant-garde or antitraditional composer. (Not that he, a worshipper of Beethoven and Gluck, would have so characterized himself.) If the size and timbral variety of the orchestra in the *Symphonie fantastique* is another reason for associating it conceptually with dramatic rather than traditionally "symphonic" music, the really decisive reason for doing so is the way in which Berlioz adapted the specifically operatic device of the "reminiscence motif" to organize the symphony in both narrative and formal dimensions. As the program states, the image of the beloved haunts the symphony from start to finish in the form of an obsessively recurring melody, which Berlioz, using a phrase we have already encountered in Schumann (though not as a musical term), called the *idée fixe*. It is, in short, a musical symbol that could perhaps be compared, not only in its deployment but in its object of depiction, with Schumann's symbolic quotation from Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* in his *Phantasie*.

Again, though, it should be kept in mind that what in Schumann was a nebula (or "stew") of potential meanings becomes with Berlioz an explicit, sharply focused image whose unequivocal referent is given within the work itself—signaled first in the program, then corroborated in the music—and which may be apprehended "objectively" by the beholder. Indeed, thanks to Berlioz's orchestral skills, our first experience of the *idée fixe* is almost physically palpable. The best entrée into the symphony, both as an object and as an idea, would be to trace its peregrinations through the work, much as one might trace a character's appearances in a drama or even a novel.

The first presentation of the *idée fixe*, given in Ex. 6-6 in Franz Liszt's concert transcription, is a most graphic piece of "body portraiture," and the body portrayed is not "hers" but "his," that is, the smitten "artist's." It is the physiological reaction—the irregular heartbeats or "palpitations" in the accompanying parts—rather than the melody itself that is the real tour de force of "imitation" here, reminding us that before taking courage and staking everything on his musical vocation Berlioz had spent two years, at his father's behest, as "a reluctant and unsatisfactory medical student" (in the words of his biographer D. Kern Holoman).<sup>26</sup>

First system of a piano score. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The music features a series of chords and single notes. Dynamic markings include *ff*, *p*, *pp*, *ff*, *p*, and *pp*.

Second system of a piano score. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with triplets. The lower staff has a bass line. Dynamic marking is *ppp*. Above the system, the text reads: *mf espressivo con passione* and *Violons et flute*.

Third system of a piano score, starting at measure 5. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with slurs. The lower staff has a bass line with eighth notes. The text *agitato, sotto voce* is written below the system.

Fourth system of a piano score, starting at measure 11. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with slurs and a fermata. The lower staff has a bass line. Dynamic marking is *f*. The text *sempre dolce e andante* is written below the system. A section marker 'A' is placed above the final measure.

Fifth system of a piano score, starting at measure 17. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with slurs. The lower staff has a bass line with eighth notes. The text *cresc. poco a poco* is written below the system.

Sixth system of a piano score, starting at measure 23. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line with slurs. The lower staff has a bass line with eighth notes. The text *bd.* is written above the first measure.



**ex. 6-6 Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, the *idée fixe* in Liszt's transcription**

Or rather, we have here a fairly complicated interplay between an abstract and arbitrary symbol (the *idée fixe* melody) and the realistic imitation of nature (the palpitating accompaniment). Berlioz's music will play on the blurry cusp between these two types of representation throughout the symphony. That is what lends it such fascination. The “beloved” melody, which needs to be instantly recognized on every recurrence, is given a very distinctive, arching profile, rising up in quick fitful leaps, then making slow, smooth, syncopated descents that seem to hover out of time. In its skittish avoidance of surface symmetries, in its rhythmic contrasts, and in its slow, laborious progress to its climactic high C, this forty-bar ariallike melody is plainly intended as a sort of stylistic archetype, in keeping with its role as romantic “ideal.” The whole first movement in which this instrumental aria occurs is a C-major sonata allegro thoroughly recast in operatic terms. The extended slow symphonic introduction in the parallel minor, evidently intended as a representation of the *vague des passions*, is in fact a little *da capo* aria with coda whose melody was originally that of a song Berlioz had composed at the age of twelve in response to his own first passionate stirrings; its “objective” suitability to the expressive purpose was thus putatively assured. The coda, in a technique well-learned from Beethoven, is built over a submediant pedal that will resolve to the Allegro as a “flat” submediant.

The exposition begins (as the program states) with the *idée fixe*. Its melody, too, was adapted from an older, discarded vocal composition: *Herminie*, a cantata Berlioz had composed to a prescribed “neoclassical” text in 1828 in an unsuccessful bid for the Prix de Rome, a stipend given by the government to support promising young musicians during a two-year creative sojourn in Italy. (Berlioz won it in 1830 with another neoclassical cantata, *Sardanapale*.) In its original context, the melody that symbolized an idealized Harriet Smithson had expressed the hopeless love of Erminia, a Saracen woman, for the Christian knight Tancred, as related in *Gerusalemme liberata* (“Jerusalem delivered”), Torquato Tasso's sixteenth-century epic of the Crusades.

The second theme is a long while a-borning, but makes its decisive cadence on the dominant exactly where Berlioz marks the first ending. The two themes of the exposition, the “instrumental drama's” protagonists, stalk one another through the rather meandering development section. The process of the meandering seems, incidentally, to have been modeled directly on the

beginning of the development section in the first movement of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony, first performed in Paris under Habeneck only two years earlier: compare Berlioz's modulations by ascending half steps at measures 168 ff, each stage prepared by a flat submediant, with Beethoven's right after the first movement's double bar (Ex. 6-7). The technique of modulation by half step, only a starting point for Beethoven, is maintained by Berlioz through the development section with unprecedented consistency. Rarely if ever had a stretch of music of comparable length so relied on half-step rather than fifth relations for its harmonic coherence.



ex. 6-7a Ludwig van Beethoven, *Symphony no. 3, I*, mm. 182-90

ex. 6-7b Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique, I*, mm. 168-81

This is a purely thematic development on the new textbook model, which Berlioz must have learned from Anton Reicha, his conservatory professor, who had literally “written the book” on the subject. Its technique of constant half-step motion precludes the reaching of any well-defined FOP (harmonic “far out point”), nor is the retransition defined by much of a dominant pedal (just four bars, mm. 408–411). There is a completely unexpected (and, in terms of “normal” sonata procedure, unexpected) reprise of the *idée fixe* in the dominant right in the midst of things, and a double return that comes not as the resolution of a long-building tension but as the culmination of another series of ascending half steps, intensified by the use of a motivic sequence and a long crescendo, both long-established devices for producing operatic climaxes.

Lastly, when it comes time to wind things down for the “religious consolation” at the end, the half steps turn around and begin descending through another motivic sequence ingeniously derived from the *idée fixe* by flattening out its rhythmic design into undifferentiated quarter notes. The crescendo becomes a diminuendo, and the tempo gradually slackens into long-sustained chords played “by the whole orchestra as softly as possible.” The theme-based development, while it no longer betrays its genetic

link to the binary dance form of old and no longer charts a compelling tonal course, acquires in compensation a new narrative flexibility. At the very least it effectively indoctrinates the audience to respond like the artist himself to every strategic recurrence of the *idée fixe*. From here on to the end of the symphony, the general tactic will be to have the *idée fixe* impinge upon a new dramatic “terrain,” in each case evoked by the use of “characteristic” music—that is, generic music associated “in life” with a specific place or function. The function of the *idée fixe* in every case except the last will be to make a familiar environment seem suddenly strange, transformed by the injection of strong emotion. In the last case, the process will work in the opposite way, the environment (not familiar this time but “fantastic”) serving to transform the *idée fixe*.

Thus, in the second movement or “act,” the ball scene is evoked in the most direct way possible, by the use of actual ballroom music, in this case a waltz (by then a commonplace in operatic ballets). The harp music, too, is an element of characteristic “setting.” A ubiquitous instrument at domestic soirées and parties (especially in France), and lately a standard presence in the theater, the harp was making its symphonic debut in this movement. (As a concerto soloist it had a minor eighteenth-century history, again mainly French.) As late as 1886, César Franck's use of the harp in a nonprogrammatic symphony gave rise to controversy.



**fig. 6-10** Double-action harp by Erard, ca. 1860.

The *idée fixe* occurs twice in the movement, with strikingly different dramatic effects. A sudden modulation to—where else?—the flat submediant prepares its first appearance, and the cellos and basses react, as before, with palpitations. These, however, are quickly subsumed into the waltz figuration and the oompah-pah accompaniment; the beloved is spotted dancing from afar. Toward the end, however, the artist and his beloved come suddenly face to face, and the surrounding music suddenly disappears (save a slight ripple of half-heard harp music, inserted for verisimilitude). It is a classic “moment out of time” of a type we have encountered before in instrumental music only in Schubertian trances, represented here by the usual dip into the flat submediant, and also by some “uncountably” sustained tones in the flute and horn. In opera, of course, juxtapositions of “real time” and “stop time” had been of the essence from the very first.

In the third movement, the ambient sounds are provided by the “pipers” (oboe and English horn), and the thunder (timpani and tremolando strings). There is a long rounded aria that represents the artist's presence, even though it is not always in “his” vocal range. (Compare the movement titled “Roméo seul”—Romeo alone—in the *Roméo et Juliette* symphony.) It is first sung by the first violins and flute in unison; its reprise in the dominant (mm. 69 ff) takes place an eleventh lower, strategically placed in the “male” register so that when interrupted by the *idée fixe* it can continue to play “the artist” in reaction to it. Their collision comes somewhat in advance of the beloved's actual musical appearance, signalled by the artist's agitation at the thought of her. Berlioz marks a *tremolo très serré*—“very close” or “unmeasured” tremolo—and in so doing once again becomes one of the first to transfer an orchestral effect from the opera house (where its history goes back seventy years to the days of Gluck and Piccinni) to the “pure” instrumental domain (Ex. 6-8).

This musical score is for an instrumental drama, featuring a variety of instruments. The woodwind section includes Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), and Bassoon (Bn.). The string section consists of Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The brass section includes a Trombone (Bn.).

The score is divided into three measures. The first measure shows the woodwinds and strings playing a rhythmic pattern, with the bassoon and cello/contrabass parts marked *f* and *ff*. The second measure features a dynamic shift to *dim.* and a tempo change to *poco a poco*. The third measure is marked *Solo I* and *f*.

Key performance instructions include:

- unis.* (unison) for the woodwinds in the first measure.
- tremolo très serré* (tremolo very tight) for the strings in the first measure.
- dim.* (diminuendo) and *poco a poco* (gradually) for the dynamic and tempo changes in the second measure.
- Solo I* for the woodwinds in the third measure.

ex. 6-8 Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, III, mm. 87-92

The thunder, we are thus given to understand, has gone “within.” The impassioned duet between the *idée fixe* and the rhythmically erratic interjections of the panting, stammering protagonist is violently cut off on a note of irresolute despair—literally a chromatic note (cf. m. 24 in Ex. 6-6) that allows the harmony to veer off in a dangerously flatward direction before equilibrium is laboriously regained. At the recapitulation, Berlioz succeeds in investing timbre alone with representational significance. The pizzicato strings play an embellished reprise of the opening aria, while the flute and clarinet, the instruments that had just played the *idée fixe* in unison, contribute counter melodies.

To speak the language of the program, hope gains the upper hand over fear at the beginning of the coda, where motives from the protagonist’s aria in the strings are allowed to coexist in harmonically peaceful counterpoint with motives from the *idée fixe*, still in the flute and clarinet. But the equation of inner and outer turmoil through the use of tremolo reintroduces a note of forlorn disquiet when the English horn resumes the *ranz des vaches* and is answered not by the oboe, its erstwhile partner (identified since then with the *idée fixe*, another absent partner), but by the distant thunder of the four timpani.

The fourth movement, the “March to the Scaffold,” enjoyed a separate popularity during the nineteenth century as an orchestral showpiece in its own right, which seems fair enough given the frequency with which colorful orchestral excerpts from operas are performed at concerts. (But many nonprogrammatic symphonic movements were similarly extracted in those days: a special favorite, as already implied in an earlier chapter by Lami’s painting [Fig. 2-7], was the Allegretto from Beethoven’s Seventh



Symphony, which Berlioz himself first encountered as the slow movement of the Fifth, thanks to Habeneck's substitution.) In fact, the movement began life as an operatic excerpt. Like the middle movement of the *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale*, it was lifted from the abandoned score for *Les francs-juges*.

All Berlioz had to do in order to adapt it to its new purpose was change the ending, which now contains the movement's single fleeting reference to the *idée fixe* (Ex. 6-9). What follows is perhaps the most explicitly illustrative music in the score: the short sharp shock of the guillotine blade in m. 169; the head rolling into the basket (*pizzicati* in the same measure); and the hats-in-the-air fanfare to conclude, reminding us that public executions were once a form of popular entertainment. Like the similarly literalistic representation of the plagues in Handel's oratorio *Israel in Egypt*, this is inevitably a moment of high comedy despite the grisliness of the subject and the ostensible seriousness of the program.

## Notes:

(20) Hector Berlioz, *Correspondence générale*, Vol. I, ed. Pierre Citron (Paris, 1972), p. 182.



(21) See Arthur O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America* XXIX (1924); reprinted in *Essays on the History of Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948).

(22) Hugh Macdonald, "Berlioz," in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. III (rev. ed., New York, Grove, 2001), p. 386–87.

(23) Hector Berlioz, *New Edition of the Complete Works*, Vol. XVI, trans. Piero Weiss (adapted) (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1972), pp. 3–4.

(24) Berlioz, "The Composer and the Symphony," in *Fantastic Symphony*, ed. Edward T. Cone (Norton Critical Scores; New York: Norton, 1971), p. 9.



(25) Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Briefe einer Reise durch Deutschland, Italien und die Schweiz* (Zürich, 1958), p. 124; quoted in David Cairns, *Berlioz: The Making of an Artist* (London: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1989), p. 489.

(26) D. Kern Holoman, *Berlioz* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).



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