

Principal Works

Orchestral music, including overtures *Waverley* (1828), *Rob Roy* (1831), *Le roi Lear* (*King Lear*, 1831); and program symphonies *Symphonie fantastique* (1830), *Harold en Italie* (*Harold in Italy*, 1834), *Romeo et Juliette* (1839)

Choral music, including a Requiem Mass (1837), *Te Deum* (Hymn of Praise, 1849), *La damnation de Faust* (*The Damnation of Faust*, 1846), and the oratorio *L'enfance du Christ* (*The Childhood of Christ*, 1854)

3 operas, including *Les Troyens* (*The Trojans*, 1858) and *Béatrice et Bénédicte* (1862)

9 solo vocal works with orchestra

Writings on music, including an orchestration treatise (1843/55)

Vocal works

Byron; and Shakespeare is the source for the overture *King Lear* and for the dramatic symphony *Romeo and Juliet*. Berlioz's most important opera, *The Trojans*, on his own libretto after the ancient Roman poet Virgil, has been successfully revived in recent years. His sacred vocal works, including the Requiem and the *Te Deum*, are conceived on a similarly grandiose scale.

It was in the domain of orchestration that Berlioz's genius asserted itself most fully. His daring originality in handling the instruments opened up a new world of Romantic sound. His scores, calling for the largest orchestra that had ever been used, abound in novel effects and discoveries that would serve as models for all who came after him. Indeed, the conductor Felix Weingartner called Berlioz "the creator of the modern orchestra."

Symphonie fantastique

Berlioz wrote his best-known program symphony when he was twenty-seven years old, drawing its story from his personal life. "A young musician of morbid sensibility and ardent imagination, in . . . lovesick despair, has poisoned himself with opium. The drug, too weak to kill, plunges him into a heavy sleep accompanied by strange visions. . . . The beloved one herself becomes for him a melody, a recurrent theme that haunts him everywhere."

Idée fixe

The symphony's recurrent theme, called an *idée fixe* (fixed idea), symbolizes the beloved; it becomes a musical thread unifying the five diverse movements, though its appearances are varied in harmony, rhythm, meter, tempo, dynamics, register, and instrumental color. (See Listening Guide 25 for theme and analysis.) These transformations take on literary as well as musical significance, as the following description by Berlioz shows.

I. *Reveries, Passions*. “[The musician] remembers the weariness of soul, the indefinable yearning he knew before meeting his beloved. Then, the volcanic love with which she at once inspired him, his delirious suffering . . . his religious consolation.” The Allegro section introduces a soaring melody—the fixed idea.

II. *A Ball*. “Amid the tumult and excitement of a brilliant ball he glimpses the loved one again.” This dance movement is in ternary, or three-part, form. In the middle section, the fixed idea reappears in waltz time.

III. *Scene in the Fields*. “On a summer evening in the country he hears two shepherds piping. The pastoral duet, the quiet surroundings . . . all unite to fill his heart with a long absent calm. But she appears again. His heart contracts. Painful forebodings fill his soul.” The composer said that his aim in this pastoral movement was to establish a mood “of sorrowful loneliness.”

IV. *March to the Scaffold*. “He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he has been condemned to die and is being led to the scaffold. . . . At the very end the fixed idea reappears for an instant, like a last thought of love interrupted by the fall of the axe.”

V. *Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath*. “He sees himself at a witches’ sabbath surrounded by a host of fearsome spirits who have gathered for his funeral. Unearthly sounds, groans, shrieks of laughter. The melody of his beloved is heard, but it has lost its noble and reserved character. It has become a vulgar tune, trivial and grotesque. It is she who comes to the infernal orgy. A howl of joy greets her arrival. She joins the diabolical dance. Bells toll for the dead. A burlesque of the *Dies irae*. Dance of the witches. The dance and the *Dies irae* combined.”

We will hear the fourth movement, a diabolical march in minor, which exemplifies the nineteenth-century love of the fantastic. The theme of the beloved appears at the very end, on the clarinet, and is cut off by a grim *fortis-*

First movement

Second movement

Third movement

Fourth movement

Fifth movement



Francisco Goya (1746–1828) anticipated the passionate intensity of Berlioz’s music in this painting of the Witches’ Sabbath, c. 1819–23. (Museo del Prado, Madrid)

simo chord. In the final movement, Berlioz enters into a kind of infernal spirit that nourished a century of satanic operas, ballets, and symphonic poems. The mood is heightened with the introduction of the traditional religious chant *Dies irae* (Day of Wrath) from the ancient Mass for the Dead.

There is a grandeur of line and gesture in the music of Berlioz, and an abundance of vitality and invention. He is one of the major prophets of the era.

Listening Guide 25

CD: Chr/Std 5/31–36, Sh 3/30–35

Cassette: Chr/Std 5B/1, Sh 3B/1

BERLIOZ: *Symphonie fantastique*, Fourth Movement

(4:46)

Date of work: 1830

Genre: Program symphony, 5 movements

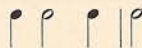
Program: A lovesick artist in an opium trance is haunted by a vision of his beloved, which becomes an *idée fixe* (fixed idea).

Movements:

- I. *Reveries, Passions*: Largo, Allegro agitato e appassionato assai (Lively, agitated, and very impassioned); introduces the main theme, the fixed idea
- II. *A Ball*: Valse, Allegro non troppo (Waltz, not too fast); A-B-A form, triple-meter dance
- III. *Scene in the Fields*: Adagio; A-B-A form, 6/8 meter
- IV. *March to the Scaffold*: Allegretto non troppo; duple-meter march, in minor mode
- V. *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*: Larghetto-Allegro; diabolical dance with *Dies irae*

IV. *March to the Scaffold*

- [30] 0:00 Opening motive: muted horns, timpani, and pizzicato low strings, forecasts syncopated rhythm of march (theme B):



- [31] 0:27 Theme A—an energetic, downward minor scale, played by low strings, then violins:



- [32] 1:39 Theme B—diabolical march tune, played by brass and woodwinds:



Opening section repeated.

- 33 2:04 Developmental section:
 Theme B—in brass, accompanied by strings and woodwinds.
 Theme A—soft, with pizzicato strings.
 Theme B—brass, with woodwinds added.
 Theme A—soft, pizzicato strings, then loud in brass.

- 34 3:15 Theme A—full orchestra statement in original form, then inverted (now an ascending scale).

- 35 4:15 *Idée fixe* (fixed idea) melody in clarinet (“a last thought of love”), marked “*dolce assai e appassionato*” (as sweetly and passionately as possible), followed by loud chord that cuts off melody (“the fall of the axe”):

Loud forceful chords close movement.



49

Musical Nationalism

“I grew up in a quiet spot and was saturated from earliest childhood with the wonderful beauty of Russian popular song. I am therefore passionately devoted to every expression of the Russian spirit. In short, I am a Russian through and through!”

—PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

In nineteenth-century Europe, political conditions encouraged the growth of nationalism to such a degree that it became a decisive force within the Romantic movement. The pride of conquering nations and the struggle for freedom of suppressed ones gave rise to strong emotions that inspired the works of many creative artists.

The Romantic composers expressed their nationalism in a number of ways. Some based their music on the songs and dances of their people: Chopin in his mazurkas, Liszt in his *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, Dvořák in the *Slavonic Dances*. A number wrote dramatic works based on folklore or peasant life, such as the Russian fairy-tale operas and ballets of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. Others wrote symphonic poems and operas celebrating the exploits of a national hero, a historic event, or the scenic beauty of their country; Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture* and Smetana’s *The Moldau* exemplify this trend.