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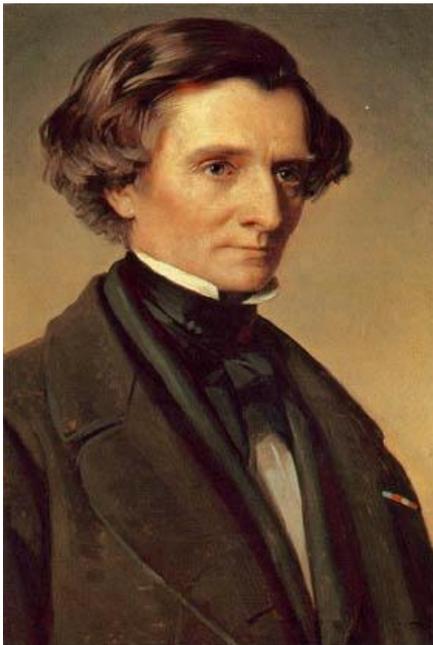


*Programme Notes 23rd August, 2019*

## *Louis-Hector Berlioz*

*Born: 11 December 1803,  
La Côte-Saint-André, France*

*Died: 8 March 1869,  
rue de Calais, Paris, France*



*A relatively unknown composer during his lifetime and yet one of the most creative and innovative of his generation. A "late starter" - it was not before the age of 20 that he fully embraced the idea of a musical career, far later than his illustrious contemporaries including Liszt, Mendelssohn, and Chopin.*

*Like any good father figure of his time, Louis Berlioz took the education of his son Hector into his own hands. He taught him history, literature, geography, and due to the great interest shown by the young boy in the flageolet [a small whistle flute], dedicated several hours to his son's musical education. The young Hector was intended by his family to become a doctor, following his father's footsteps. For this purpose they sent him to Paris in 1821 to pursue a "serious" education, only for the young lad to skip medical lectures for the Paris conservatorium library. It was here, and on occasion at the opera, that Berlioz discovered the great art of composition and where he was to meet students of Jean-François Lesueur, his future professor of composition.*

## Prix de Rome

As a student at the conservatoire, the young Berlioz's sole aspiration was to win the famous Prix de Rome. Why such an obsession? Prestige, first of all, but also as means of proving to his family that he was ultimately right to have chosen composition. Finally, the financial aspect obviously was not to be ignored, offering "the artist a yearly pension of three thousand francs for five years" (Berlioz, *Mémoires*). Such an income would also help convince the family of the woman he was in love with at the time that he was financially able to support her. He went on to win the prize at his fifth attempt.



In Rome 1832

## Inspired by Literature

Like many of the romantic period musicians, Berlioz found much of his inspiration through literature. Goethe and Shakespeare soon became his spiritual and artistic masters. "I recognised the meaning of real grandeur, real beauty, and real dramatic truth", wrote Berlioz after attending a performance of Hamlet for the first time. His life and work was to prove nothing but spectacular and grandiose. Through symphonies, religious music and lyrical works Berlioz took an interest in works for large ensembles, revolutionising the classical orchestra by adding new instruments and new methods of expression.

## Hector Berlioz's compositions by musical category.

### Symphonies 16%

Berlioz's four symphonies could hardly be more contrasted, ranging from the crazed imaginings of the *Symphonie Fantastique* to the enraptured drama of *Roméo Et Juliette*.



Cartoon of Berlioz published in 'Wiener theaterzeitung' in 1846

The other two are 'Harold in Italy' and *Symphonie Funebre et Triomphale*.

All four of Berlioz's symphonies differ from the contemporary norm. *The Symphonie fantastique* (1830), is purely orchestral, but the work tells a story, graphically and specifically. *Harold in Italy*, despite its subtitle "Symphony in four parts with viola principal", is a hybrid of symphony and concerto. *Roméo et Juliette* (1839), is still further from the traditional symphonic model. The episodes of Shakespeare's drama are represented in orchestral music, interspersed with expository and narrative sections for voices. The last of the four symphonies is the *Symphonie Funebre et Triomphale*, is for giant brass and woodwind band (1840), with string parts added later, together with optional chorus.

## Opera 31%

Berlioz wrote five pure operas but only fragments of *Les Francs-Juges* survive; and *La Nonne Sanglante* was left unfinished. None of Berlioz's three completed operas were written to commission, and theatre managers were not enthusiastic about staging them. The three operas contrast strongly with one another.

The first, *Benvenuto Cellini* (1838), inspired by the memoirs of the Florentine sculptor, is an "opera semiseria", (an opera semiseria contains elements of comedy but also of pathos, sometimes with a pastoral setting).

The epic *Les Troyens* (1858) is described by some as "incontestably Berlioz's masterpiece". Based the text on [Virgil's Aeneid](#), depicting the fall of [Troy](#) and subsequent travels of the hero, the opera consists of a series of self-contained numbers, but they form a continuous narrative, with the orchestra playing a vital part in expounding and commenting on the action.

The last of Berlioz's operas is the comedy *Béatrice et Bénédict* (1862), written, the composer said, as a relaxation after his efforts with *Les Troyens*. He described it as "a caprice written with the point of a needle". The libretto is based on Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing".

## Choral 35%

Berlioz's choral music is dominated by five grand opuses: the *Messe Solennelle*, *Grande Messe Des Morts*, *Te Deum*, *La Damnation De Faust* and *L'enfance Du Christ*.



Two orchestras, nine choirs: Berlioz' Requiem, performed on 27 May 2018 in Hanover

Berlioz didn't bother with chamber music or small-scale intimate compositions. What he composed, in particular his choral works, may deservedly be called monumental.

His scoring for his Requiem, the "Grande messe des morts", not only included 8 bassoons, 12 horns and 16 timpani but also no fewer than four, offstage brass ensembles. By no means scored on a smaller scale, the "Te Deum" with its already huge orchestral forces as it was, also had twelve (!) harps lending their tonal colours. Deep down it was that he delved into his inexhaustible cornucopia of programmatic coloration in two other works as well: the dramatic legend "La damnation de Faust" (The Damnation of Faust) and the cantata trilogy "L'Enfance du Christ" (The Childhood of Christ).

## Overtures 5%

Although a small part of his musical output, some of Berlioz's most striking orchestral invention is to be found in his seven concert overtures. Of the seven three are introductions for operas, one is actually part of an opera, while the remaining three are independent compositions.

But what is significant is the brilliance of the orchestration, particularly in the rhythmically sparkling *Benvenuto Cellini* (1838) and *Le Corsaire* (1844). Before this pair had come the bold, forceful *Les francs-juges* (1826), which has remarkable brass-writing and a catchy main tune that became famous as the signature theme for a British television show. *Waverley* (1827–28) was inspired by Sir Walter Scott's novel and the Shakespearean *Le Roi Lear* (1831) centres on a portrait of the deranged king, yet musically also remembers his daughter Cordelia.

Possibly the most well known is *Le Carnaval Romain*, also written in 1844 and based on the finale to Act 1 of the opera *Benvenuto Cellini*.

## Songs 12%

The most famous of Berlioz's songs are to be found in the glorious song cycle *Les Nuits D'été*, but he wrote over 30 other settings too.

## Concertante 1%

Almost uniquely, Berlioz left virtually no chamber or solo instrumental music, and just one concertante item, the typically unconventional *Rêverie Et Caprice*.

# Today's Music

## Overture to *Benvenuto Cellini* (Op. 23)

Berlioz composed his opera *Benvenuto Cellini* between 1834 and 1837. The first performance was given on September 10, 1838, in Paris. The overture is scored for two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets and bass clarinet, four bassoons, four horns, four trumpets and two cornets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, cymbals, triangle, bass drum, and strings.



Statue of Cellini in the Piazzale degli Uffizi, Florence

Berlioz always said that he detested Italian music, but some of his greatest compositions were inspired by the fifteen months he spent in Italy in the early 1830s. He was drawn to the landscape and brilliant sunlight, and particularly to the warm and enticing way of life.

Even after he went home to France in 1832, he kept returning to Italian subjects—*Romeo and Juliet*, *Harold in Italy*, and an opera based on the memoirs of the great sixteenth-century sculptor and goldsmith, Benvenuto Cellini.

The overture is a mini-drama, beginning with a spirited fanfare, and developing into music of solemnity, lyricism, passion (recalling Cellini's love for his fiancée Teresa), and sure-fire orchestral brilliance.

(Acknowledgement: [www.cso.org](http://www.cso.org))

We listen to a performance given by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Lorin Maazel. The YouTube link is:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkV8\\_QPfJt0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkV8_QPfJt0)

## Symphonie Fantastique (Op. 14)



Why is it human nature to want what we can't have?

In 1827, the 23-year-old Hector Berlioz attended a performance of Shakespeare's Hamlet at the Odéon Theatre in Paris; Harriet Smithson, a charismatic Irish actress, was playing Ophelia. Berlioz was smitten and wrote her an impassioned letter – Smithson did not

reply. Undeterred, he continued to bombard her with messages but she left Paris without making contact.

Berlioz wrote to a friend: "You don't know what love is, whatever you may say. For you, it's not that rage, that fury, that delirium which takes possession of all one's faculties, which renders one capable of anything."

The composer had to find an outlet for his obsessive love – naturally, that was music. He formed the idea of a "fantastic symphony" portraying an episode in the life of an artist who is constantly haunted by the vision of the perfect, unattainable woman.

Central to the work is the "idée fixe" ("fixed idea"), a recurring theme of rising longing and falling despair – a depiction of gripping obsession and the epitome of Romanticism. *Symphonie Fantastique* is cast in five movements: the first a dream, the second a ball where the artist is haunted by the sight of his beloved. After a country scene, the fourth movement slips into nightmare: "Convinced that his love is spurned, the artist poisons himself with opium," explained Berlioz.

"The dose of narcotic plunges him into a heavy sleep. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he is condemned, led to the scaffold and is witnessing his own execution."

Now everything descends into the thrillingly horrific Dream Of A Witches' Sabbath, which weaves in the medieval *Dies Irae* plainchant. The artist's perfect beloved transforms into a whore and is cast into Hell



(symbolically, perhaps, for Smithson was rumoured to be having an affair with her manager at the time).

*Symphonie Fantastique* was premiered in 1830 but Smithson did not hear the work until 1832, when she realised she might be the inspiration for it. Intrigued, she agreed to meet the composer and was blown away by the force of his emotion.

Despite neither speaking the other's language, Harriet and Hector married on October 3, 1833. Happy ever after? Sadly, no – the obsession faded and they divorced seven years later.

The London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Simon Rattle plays the 4<sup>th</sup> Movement (March to the Scaffold). The YouTube links is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=598i8b3HGrw>

## **Damnation of Faust** (op. 24)



Berlioz was inspired by a translation of Goethe's dramatic poem *Faust* and set about producing a musical work that, like the masterpiece on which it is based, defies easy categorisation.

*Faust* is a man who is alienated and in a state of deep despair. He contemplates drinking poison, but then Méphistolphélès, the devil personified as a human being, comes to him with a proposition: should *Faust* follow him and forget about life as a scholar, and he will have access to pleasure, happiness and everything he desires. He introduces *Faust* to the beautiful *Marguerite*. They fall in love. But to avoid disgrace and *Marguerite's* mother's fury, they have to part.

Performances of Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust* are a rarity due to its vast staging and technical requirements. It is said that Berlioz never intended for it to be staged. Referring to his work as a 'légende dramatique' (a category he made up), it is part cantata, part opera, and takes its inspiration from a play that was itself billed as 'deliberately unstageable'.

(Acknowledgement: [www.mso.org.au](http://www.mso.org.au))

We listen to three excerpts.....

### **Hungarian March**

(Played by the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Herbert von Karajan).

In Part 1, the ageing scholar *Faust* contemplates the renewal of nature. Hearing peasants sing and dance, he realizes that their simple happiness is something he will never experience. An army marches past in the distance (Hungarian March). *Faust* doesn't understand why the soldiers are so enthusiastic about glory and fame.



The YouTube Link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O32PuoBWKC0>

## *D'amour, l'ardente flame (Of Love, the ardent flame)*

Fast forward to Part 4. Marguerite, who has been seduced by Faust, sings after Faust has abandoned her, that love's amorous flame still burns intensely within her heart. She longingly waits for his return.

We listen to part of her song sung by mezzo-soprano Joyce di Donato accompanied by the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Sir Simon Rattle. The text of the song is:

Loves fiery flame, Consumes my beautiful days. Ah! The peace of my soul has fled forever! His departure, his absence Is the death of me, And away from his presence, Everything seems in mourning. So my poor head is soon driven mad, My weak heart stops Then ices over immediately.	I admire his strong gait, Its carriage so graceful, His mouth's sweet smile The charm of his eyes, His enchanting voice, He sets me ablaze, His hand, caress, Alas! His kiss Of one amorous flame consumes my days! Ah! The peace of my soul has fled forever!	I am at my window, where outside, all day – This is the view I wish to see him appear, Or hasten his return. My heart beats and presses Whenever I feel he is coming. According to my affection I will always remember him! O the flame caresses! I would one day See my soul exhale In his kisses of love!
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The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4i1C2yETNWU>

## *In Heaven*

Marguerite having accidentally given her mother too much of a sleeping potion, killing the old woman, will be hanged the next day. Faust panics, but Méphistophélès claims he can save her—if Faust relinquishes his soul to him. Unable to think of anything but saving Marguerite, Faust agrees. The two ride off on a pair of black horses.



Thinking they are on their way to Marguerite, Faust becomes terrified when he sees demonic apparitions. The landscape becomes more and more horrible and grotesque, and Faust finally realizes that Méphistophélès has taken him directly into hell. Demons and damned spirits greet Méphistophélès in a mysterious infernal language and welcome Faust among them.

Hell has fallen silent after Faust's arrival—the torment he suffers is unspeakable. Marguerite is saved and welcomed into heaven. (Acknowledgement: Wikipedia).

Sir Simon Rattle conducts the London Symphony Orchestra as the London Symphony Chorus and the Tiffin Children's Choir sing of Marguerite's entry to heaven.

The YouTube link is:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s\\_VhntYN1ew](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_VhntYN1ew)

## Les nuits d'été (Op. 7)



Berlioz composed *Les nuits d'été*, ("Summer Nights") a set of six songs to texts by Théophile Gautier, for mezzo-soprano or tenor with piano accompaniment, in 1840–41. (He made up the title himself, with Gautier's blessing, as well as those of the individual songs.)

It's odd that Berlioz, normally the most talkative, opinionated, and revealing of musicians (he was the first major composer to write his memoirs) had so little to say about these extraordinary songs. We don't know why he composed them or for whom—evidently they weren't written on commission or for any specific occasion. but the attraction of Gautier's texts does suggest unrest in his marriage to Harriet Smithson, and the sense of a great love that has gone cold.

Unlike Berlioz's best-known and most characteristic compositions, these are private, even personal works, and he seemed reluctant to put them in the public spotlight. He wrote them first for voice and piano, which only underscored their intimacy—particularly since they were composed right on the heels of the three-movement *Grand symphonie funèbre et triomphale*, an over-the-top, government-commissioned extravaganza for a military band of two hundred players.

Berlioz is not remembered as a song composer, but he wrote more than fifty songs, many of them supreme examples of his unsurpassed gift for melody. These six Gautier settings are the only songs Berlioz published as a group.

*Le Spectre de la rose*, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the six songs, is the masterpiece of the cycle. A rose has died so that his spirit can adorn the dress of a young lady as she attends her first ball. The long, slow flute and clarinet melismas in the introduction plunge us into a heady, perfumed atmosphere (melismas are groups of notes that are sung or played to one syllable of text).



Berlioz writes in long, voluptuous arcs of melody, full of sensual ardour. Harp tremolos – the only time the instrument features in the cycle – represent the rose's fragrance, tingling, anticipating the erotic rapture of the declaration "J'arrive du Paradis" as the rose is resigned to its fate. (Acknowledgement: bachtrack.com).



We listen to *La Spectre de la Rose* sung by Mezzo-soprano Joyce di Donato accompanied by (I assume) The Philharmonia Orchestra of London conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen. The Youtube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AF8mds4VULE>

## Harold in Italy (Op. 16)

At an early performance of his *Symphonie Fantastique* in 1833 Berlioz was approached by a tall cadaverous man who showered praise on him. It was the great virtuoso, Nicolo Paganini, of whom Berlioz only knew by repute. Some weeks later Paganini showed up at his door with a request. The great violinist had just purchased a Stradivarius viola and asked Berlioz if he would write a work that he could use to play in concert. Berlioz demurred at first, pointing out that a great work for viola should be written by someone who could actually play the instrument. Paganini disagreed and overrode the composer's objections.



Berlioz determined on a heavily modified symphony inspired by poetic memories formed from his wanderings in southern Italy and by Byron's "Childe Harold", in which the orchestra would be one protagonist and the solo viola the other. The viola was not intended to play continuously but would interact with the orchestra, which in turn would not merely be an accompaniment.

When Paganini checked up on progress he was sorely disappointed, declaring that he wanted to be playing throughout the work and that it wasn't showy enough. Berlioz, having then suggested to Paganini that he should write the work himself, parted company with Paganini and pressed on. Berlioz described the work as "a series of orchestral scenes, in which the solo viola would be involved, to a greater or lesser extent, like an actual person, retaining the same character throughout."

Although premiered in November 1834, Paganini first heard it in December of 1838. Already ailing from the throat cancer that was to carry him off two years later, he could not speak, but at the end of the performance pulled Berlioz onto the stage, knelt and kissed the composer's hand. A few days later, Paganini sent a congratulatory letter and a cheque for 20,000 francs.



The work is in four programmatic movements. The first, entitled *Harold in the mountains*, scenes of melancholy, happiness and joy, introduces the Harold theme.. The second movement, entitled *March of the pilgrims singing their evening prayers* depicts the approach and passage of a group of pilgrims. The *Serenade of an Abruzzi mountaineer to his mistress* wonderfully interweaves the mountaineer's love song with the Harold theme. The last movement, *Orgy of the brigands*, recollections of the preceding scenes, revisits each of the previous movements and then surges on with Harold making one final quiet appearance before the spectacular conclusion.

We hear the third movement played by The Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Elisha Inbal. The violist is Antoine Tamestit. (Acknowledgement: victoriasymphony.ca)

The YouTube link (for the complete opera) is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4NC4E5RXik&t=1840s>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> movement commences 23 minutes 13 seconds in.

## L'Enfance du Christ (Op. 25)

Of all the great composers, Berlioz certainly isn't remembered as a man of faith, despite his strict catholic upbringing. And yet, three of the composer's most important and substantial works have a religious basis. (Requiem, TeDeum, L'Enfance du Christ)



Four years in the making, L'Enfance du Christ is a creation of supreme beauty. The best-known section, The Shepherds' Farewell, is a glorious blend of warm woodwind sounds, sublime choral harmonies and sensitive orchestral accompaniment. Berlioz was certainly a passionate composer, with a love of writing very red-blooded, romantic music. He was also clearly capable of creating music with a sense of complete serenity, touching simplicity, and ethereal beauty. (Acknowledgement: [classicism.com](http://classicism.com)).

We listen to the Shepherd's farewell. As best I can discover, the recording is by the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus conducted by (a then somewhat young) Colin Davis. The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp45bQkRLGM>

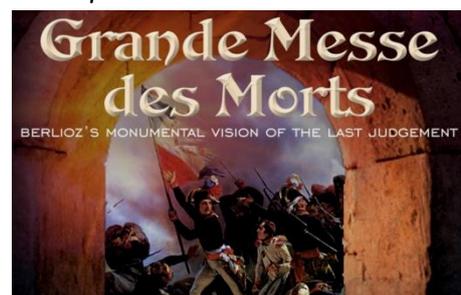
## Grande Messe des Morts (Op. 5)

Berlioz' Requiem (1837) - La Grande Messe des Morts - was his epic response to a commission to write a setting of the Requiem Mass in commemoration of soldiers who had perished during the Algerian campaign in the 1830 French Revolution.

Despite being only his fifth published work, the key word in its title is 'grande', as it utilises forces on a scale unprecedented in 1837 and almost never equalled since. Berlioz' orchestral line-up is huge enough by itself, including 8 bassoons, 12 horns, 16 timpani, 10 cymbals, 4 tamtams, and a string section of 108, but this is expanded further with four separate off-stage brass bands (38 extra players) distributed around the performance space; the addition of a choir numbering at least 200 makes for an assembly of performers rather mind-boggling to imagine. (Acknowledgement: [sagainst4.com](http://sagainst4.com))

And imagine is what most people have to do with this piece; in that it constitutes one of the most brilliantly effective and radically imaginative settings of the Requiem ever written. Imagine also, because a requiem seems an improbable attraction for a composer who considered himself an agnostic.

Although Berlioz retained warm memories of his religious upbringing, he referred to God as "standing aloof in his infinite unconcern", dismissed worship as "revolting and absurd", called Catholicism "charming now that it no longer burns people", and belittled Michelangelo's colossal Last Judgment as a total disappointment: "All I can see in it is a scene of torture in hell but nothing resembling the final gathering of humanity".



(Acknowledgement: "classical notes.net")

Another interesting aspect is that the Requiem was the only work Berlioz permitted to be published without any revision. His own account of the first performance was as follows: "The effect on people of contrasting sensibility and disposition was overwhelming. The priest wept for a quarter of an hour at the altar after the ceremony and embraced me in tears in the sacristy; the impact of the five orchestras and eight pairs of timpani in the 'Tuba mirum' was indescribable. A female member of the choir had a nervous breakdown. It was a truly awesome experience".

(Acknowledgement: <http://arthaus-musik.com>)

We listen to but a tiny portion of the Requiem – the Sanctus – tiny, because the setting is "Grande" also in the sense that the whole work lasts, musically, for an hour and a half. The Sanctus lasts for a mere 9 minutes and 15 seconds.



We hear the Sanctus sung by the American tenor John Irvin at his European debut in 2016 together with the Bochum Symphoniker and the Philharmonic Choir of Bochum conducted by Steven Sloan.

The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hewRLPFy5UE>

## **Romeo et Juliette** (op. 17)

Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* (1839) is a dramatic symphony for soprano, tenor, bass, chorus, and orchestra. It came about because the 20,000 francs Paganini gave Berlioz after listening to Harold in Italy gave him the freedom to do something he wanted to. Subsequently, Berlioz dedicated this work to Paganini.

In his preface Berlioz indicates that the genre of this work is a choral symphony, emphasizing the instrumental aspect of "symphony." Indeed, neither Romeo nor Juliet are represented by the soloists; the orchestra play the central role of enacting the story, and therefore this work is not an opera or oratorio, in which voices play characters and sing or speak dialogues.

(Acknowledgement: [libertyparkmusic.com](http://libertyparkmusic.com))

The symphony does not enact the drama in detail and many episodes are omitted, but the resources of voices and orchestra allowed Berlioz to combine the dramatic immediacy of sung words with the infinite expressive power of instrumental music, without voices.

In particular Berlioz felt it was necessary to explain in a preface why he did not set the famous balcony scene as a love duet, perhaps for soprano and tenor soloists. His reasons were threefold: first, this is a symphony and not an opera; second, love duets already exist in profusion while programmatic symphonic movements were new; and third, words are too precise to express the very sublimity of this love: only music can attempt to paint its true intensity.

(Acknowledgement: [chandos.net](http://chandos.net))



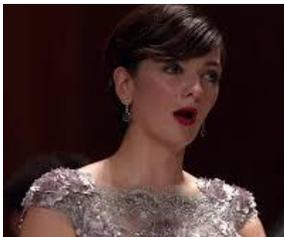
The work is also not a complete representation of the literary work; it instead captures the composer's reaction to the story.

Having said all that the portion we hear is for voice:– a strophic song from early on in the work where the contralto soloist invokes the pains and delights of young love.

The text (not from Shakespeare, but by another devotee of Shakespeare, Emile Deschamps) is as follows:

First transports that no one forgets!  
First confessions, first oaths  
Of two lovers under the stars of Italy;  
In that hot air, without zephyrs  
That the orange tree  
    in the distance perfumes,  
Where the nightingales stifle in long sighs!  
What art in his chosen language  
would make your celestial appas? (charms)  
First love, are not you  
    higher than any poetry?  
Or would you not, in our mortal exile,  
This poetry itself,  
Whose Shakespeare alone  
    had the supreme secret  
And that he won in heaven!

Living both of one soul,  
Hide the good  
under the blooming shadow,  
That divine fire that sets you alight,  
So pure ecstasy  
    that his words are crying!  
What king of your chaste delirium  
Would he believe to equal transport?  
Happy children! and what treasures  
would pay for one of your smiles?  
Ah! savor for a long time  
    this cup of honey,  
More sweet than the chalices  
Where the angels of God,  
jealous of your delights,  
Draw happiness in the sky.



The soloist we hear is Marianne Crebassa with Daniele Gatti conducting The National Orchestra of France. The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsjjao0aYwY>

### **Reverie et Caprice (Op. 8)**

Following the composition of Harold En Italie for Viola and orchestra in 1834, Berlioz began work on the opera *Benvenuto Cellini*, which subsequently failed on its first performances at the Paris Opera in 1838. Berlioz withdrew the opera for substantial revision, and from some of the discharged material he later fashioned this *Reverie Et Caprice* (in versions both for Violin and orchestra and Violin and Piano). Dedicated to Berlioz's violinist friend Alexandre-Joseph Artot, the piece was quickly taken up by several celebrated violinists of the time, and was played all over Europe. (boosey.com)

The violinist is Augustin Dumay, and the Orchestra Sinfonica di Torino della RAI is conducted by Emil Tchakarov. The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mn4g2OpMleg>



## **Les Troyens** (Op. 29)

Five acts, nine scenes, an omnipresent chorus, a plethora of roles, a monumental orchestra... Hector Berlioz, acting as a demiurge, has created his own version of Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid*. For a long time *Les Troyens* was considered a musical behemoth and was divided into two distinct evenings (*Les Troyens à Carthage* and *La Prise de Troie*). It illustrates the wild ambitions of the French composer, who produced a historical tableau commensurate with his genius.

The work is based on an idea that haunted him from his early childhood and of which he would say after its completion: "I have spent half my life among the demigods; I figure they knew me as much as I know them." At times epic, poetic and intrepid, full of brio and supported by a keen sense of tragedy, *Les Troyens* forms a flamboyant ensemble. One is taken in by the pomp of its marches, its bellicose scenes, the prophetic curses of Cassandra and Dido and perhaps, as well, the headiness of one of the most beautiful love duets in the repertoire.

### **Summary**



Production of *Les Troyens*  
Royal Opera House 2012

The story takes place in the ancient city of Troy. Cassandra foresees a threat to her people. Despite the fact the Greeks have retreated, she predicts the imminent fall of the city. In fact, the Greeks have surreptitiously entered the city inside a wooden horse left behind as a gift.

As they ransack the city, Cassandra and the women of Troy prefer to commit mass suicide rather than surrender to the Greeks. Prince Aeneas manages to flee Troy with his fleet and sets sail for Italy. However, a violent storm causes him to land at Carthage, a city founded and governed by Queen Dido. The latter falls in love with Aeneas and accepts his help in fighting off the Numidians. Aeneas repels the enemy from Carthage and wins the heart of Dido as well. But their love has no future. Aeneas must obey the gods and found a new city of Troy. He leaves Dido who threatens him at first, but then is overwhelmed with despair. The Queen of Carthage kills herself, after predicting the fall of her realm.

We listen to the love duet between Dido and Aeneas: "Nuit d'ivresse et d'extase infinie" (Night of drunkenness and infinite ecstasy!). The soloists are Susan Graham and Gregory Kunde and the YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aP7G6wO6YuM>

## **Symphonie Funebre (Op. 15)**

The “Grande Symphonie funèbre et triomphale,” to use its full title, was Hector Berlioz’s fourth and last symphony. Commissioned by the Minister of the Interior for the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the three-day revolution of July 1830, Berlioz initially balked at the idea of writing a work for the erection of the July Column in the Place de la Bastille. However, he quickly changed his mind when he was offered 10,000 francs!.



The July Column

Putting together a number of ideas from unfinished works, Berlioz stated that he completed the entire score in just 40 hours.

Originally, it was scored for a wind band of 200 players, who would march alongside the remains of those who had died in the 1830 fighting. The actual marching performance turned out to be predictably chaotic, but the work was an immediate success.

Berlioz revised the score in 1842, adding optional parts for strings and a final chorus to a text by Antony Deschamps. And when Richard Wagner heard this new version at the Salle Vivienne on 1 February 1842, he wrote to Robert Schumann “that he had found passages in the last movement so magnificent and sublime that they can never be surpassed.”

(Acknowledgement: interlude.hk)

We listen to a short excerpt of 3 minutes from a promotional video posted on their website by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. The conductor is Sir Simon Rattle and the YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2xH3LZkCDc>

### **Berlioz was a big fan of the Octobass**



Even now in lists of ridiculous instruments from throughout the ages, the Octobass makes its presence felt. This insanely large double bass that needs to be played on a stepladder and preferably with a harness and comprehensive health insurance was initially championed by old Hector, who proposed that it become a standard instrument in orchestras across the world.

Didn't catch on, though. Can't think why. (classicfm.com)