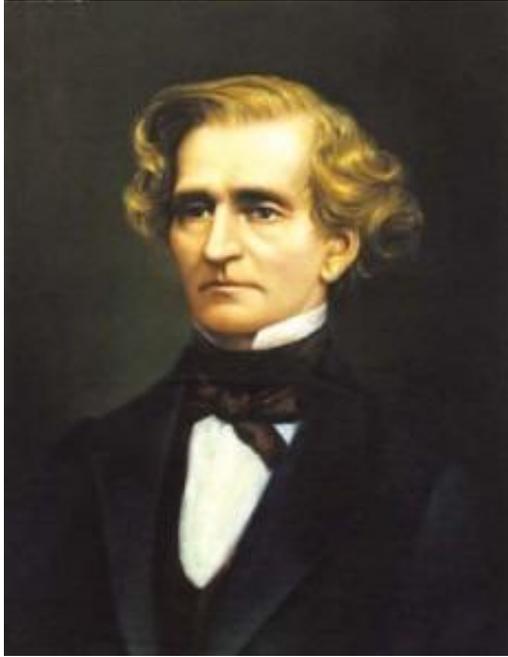
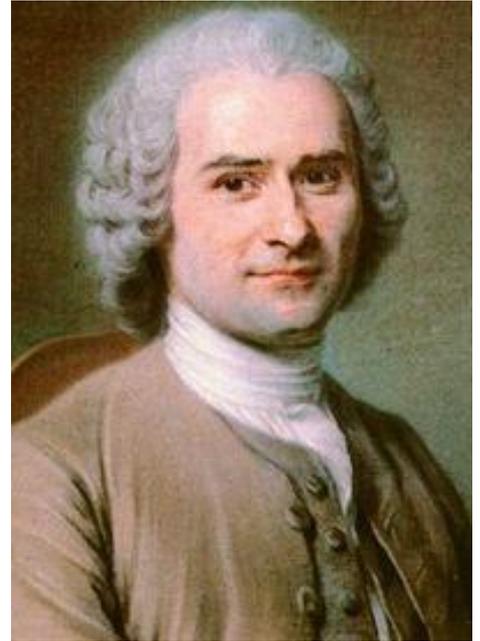




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Berlioz

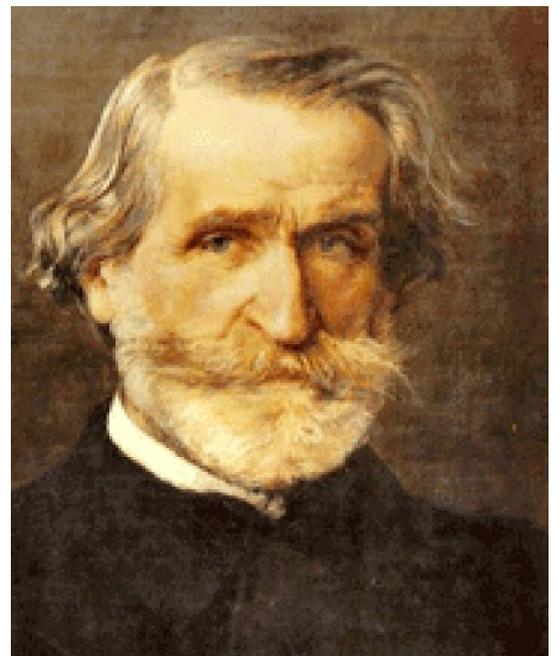


Haydn

Programme Notes 9th April, 2021



Beethoven



Verdi

Today's Selections and Musicians

Hector Berlioz - Overture - *Béatrice et Bénédict*



It's hardly a surprise that some of the greatest operas of all time are based on plays by Shakespeare. What is surprising is that there are so few of those operas.

Actually, composers have cranked out hundreds of Shakespeare operas, but only a few of them truly cut the mustard.

That is, barely a handful of those operas are widely considered worthy of Shakespeare's legacy, and of a regular place in the opera house. Most opera fans would count three of Giuseppe Verdi's operas among them: *Macbeth*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. Others might include Charles Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*, or Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or even Mendelssohn's version, perhaps. And that's pretty close to the end of the list.

Still, there may just be a Shakespeare-based, operatic dark horse that deserves more consideration than it gets. It's an appealing and insightful comedy, called "*Béatrice and Bénédict*", that combines the signature brilliance and bombast of composer Hector Berlioz with the sly, comedic insights of Shakespeare's "*Much Ado About Nothing*".

Yet somehow, the work scarcely registers on many people's operatic radar — maybe because Berlioz is known more for his brilliant orchestral works than for his operas. So it's ironic that it was the composer's instrumental music that gave him the opportunity to write the opera in the first place.



Berlioz in 1832

Berlioz was 23, in the early 1830's, when he saw a series of Shakespeare's plays performed by an English theatre company in Paris. He was overwhelmed by the experience, and began thinking about a musical setting of "*Much Ado About Nothing*". But nothing came of the idea for nearly 30 years.

Then, in the 1850s, Berlioz began presenting summertime concerts in the German spa town of Baden-Baden. The composer was hired by a casino owner to entertain his patrons, and the concerts were a great success. A few years later, the casino owner decided to commission a full-scale opera from Berlioz. The result was "*Béatrice and Bénédict*", which was premiered at a Baden-Baden theatre in 1862.

The Overture to the opera is played by The Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, conducted by Finnish conductor and violinist Mikko Franck, the orchestra's resident conductor since 2015. The orchestra is a French radio orchestra affiliated, as its name suggests, with Radio France. The orchestra performs principally at the auditorium of the Maison de la Radio in Paris, which is where the recording we hear was made.



Ludwig van Beethoven -Symphony No. 4 in B flat major Opus 60

The story of the Fourth Symphony's dedication is tumultuous, confirming historical tales of Beethoven mistreating his dedicatees by switching dedications of works from one patron to another.



The Fourth Symphony was composed at about the same time Beethoven famously parted ways with long-time patron Prince Karl Lichnowsky. Beethoven was composing at the time while staying at Lichnowsky's estate in Silesia. Lichnowsky became an ardent supporter of Beethoven during his early years in Vienna, bestowing on him an annuity from 1800-1807. The relationship was broken when Beethoven refused Lichnowsky's request to improvise at the piano for some dinner guests (French soldiers).

Upon being dismissed by the prince, the composer stormed out of the room, smashing a bust of the prince on the way out. In a reported letter of "apology" to Prince Lichnowsky, Beethoven famously wrote, "Prince, what you are you are through the accident of birth; What I am, I am through myself".

Meanwhile, Beethoven became acquainted with Silesian Count Franz Oppersdorff, who was at that same dinner and had previously heard his second symphony performed by his (Oppersdorff's) own orchestra. The Count was such a fan of this work that he soon paid Beethoven to compose one specifically for him (this perhaps explains the similarity in style between the two symphonies). Beethoven eventually dedicated the Fourth Symphony to Oppersdorff, assuring Oppersdorff of exclusivity for six months, as was the practice. Even so, the first private performance of the work was given at the Lobkowitz Vienna home in March 1807, so a fence must have been mended in the meantime. The symphony received its public premiere the following April in the Vienna Burgtheater.



Count Franz Oppersdorff



The performance we hear is by the Netherlands Radio Symphony Orchestra and forms part of a collection of all of Beethoven's symphonies recorded by the Orchestra and released to YouTube during 2020 in honour of Beethoven's 250th Anniversary. The conductor for this recording is Spanish-born Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos who was principal conductor of the Orchestra from the 2012-14. Having been diagnosed with cancer (his last concert performance was in March 2014), he resigned on the 4th of June 2014 and died one week later. He was 80 years of age. For a recording made with the technology of seven or eight years ago the quality is surprisingly good.

Giuseppe Verdi – Macbeth, Act III: Ballet Music



"This tragedy is one of the greatest creations of man", wrote Verdi to his librettist when he set out to work on his tenth opera, based on Shakespeare's Macbeth, with its unusual subject matter including witches, kings, and 11th Century Scottish castles; and furnished him with a detailed prose draft ... "I've got the general character and the colour of the opera

into my head just as if the libretto were already written," he wrote.

"If we can't make something great out of it let us at least try to do something out of the ordinary". But what was perceived to be even more unusual was that Verdi's had written an opera without a love affair – something absolutely odd in the minds of audiences of the day. How could there be opera without lovers who must go through hurdles to consummate their love? Macbeth was additionally an odd choice, not only for the lack of a couple in love, but also for its focus on the main character. The themes of political corruption, tyrannical rule, longing for freedom, and plea for liberation appealed to Verdi on a personal level—Italy was still a fractured country and his operas helped foster the ever-increasing revolutionary activities of the political and social movement of the time that was working for the unification of Italian states into a single kingdom.

Verdi, being Italian and writing first of all for Italian audiences, maintained the traditional grand arias and great choruses, but he designed them around a tightly paced drama. But when he received an invitation to have Macbeth performed in Paris, there was a hitch: not only had the libretto to be translated into French, Parisian operatic audiences expected there to be a ballet sequence in any opera they saw.

And thereby hangs a taleVerdi seized on the opportunity to make some necessary revisions. He wrote to his producer in France: "I have looked through Macbeth with the aim of writing the ballet music, but alas!, on reading through this music I was struck by things that I would not have wished to find. To say it all in a word, there are certain numbers that are either weak or lacking in character, which is worse still".

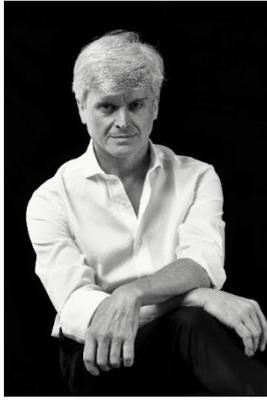
As the above letter indicates, the task turned out to be far greater than Verdi had anticipated. In the end, he revised or retouched or composed new texts and music for some eight out of the fourteen musical numbers of the opera. (Bertelsmann – an international media company – and the The Archivio Storico Ricordi in Milan).

All that as well as adding a witches' ballet in the beginning of act III..... which is the music that forms part of our programme this morning.

If you've seen a production of Verdi's Macbeth but can't recall a ballet scene, that's because it's now omitted in most productions.



Giuseppe Verdi



The performance we witness is by the WDR Rundfunk Orchester – a Radio Orchestra based in Cologne, West Germany. It was founded post-second World War by the Allied occupation forces and became particularly known for its performances of 20th-century and contemporary music.

The conductor on this occasion is Italian Massimo Zanetti, mostly known for his association with the world of opera and internationally renowned for his energetic conducting. Although he has performed with many orchestras in Europe and the USA, he is currently Music Director of the Gyeonggi Philharmonic, one of the major symphonic orchestras in South Korea.

Zanetti visited Australia in 2019 when he conducted the orchestra for the opening of Opera Australia's 2019 digital season in Sydney with a performance of "Madama Butterfly".

Jean Fére Rebel - Les Éléments

There is a claim that Jean-Féry Rebel's revolutionary "Les Éléments" still stands, nearly three centuries after its composition, as man's supreme artistic attempt to imagine chaos and creation, and the beginning of time itself.

The Ancient Greeks held three notions about the nature of the universe that held sway for centuries over Western scientific and religious thought. The first was that the world was composed of basic elements—earth, fire, air, and water. The second was that a state of chaos preceded creation; and third: the sun, moon, stars, and planets revolved around the Earth in proportions that reflected musical intervals, a theory articulated by the philosopher and mathematician, Pythagoras. (It was even said that Pythagoras himself could actually hear this celestial music).

In 1687, the English poet John Dryden composed "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day," in honour of the patron saint of music. Reflecting the ideas of the Ancients about a primordial state of chaos and creation as music itself, Dryden described the creation of the world as the arrangement of nature's "jarring atoms" into a "Heav'nly harmony" by a "tuneful voice... heard from high".



Painting "The Big Rip" by Nicolle R. Fuller
Illustrating the Four elements of nature

The text of Dryden's poem is:

"From harmony, from Heav'nly harmony
This universal frame began.
When Nature underneath a heap
Of jarring atoms lay,
And could not heave her head,
The tuneful voice was heard from high,
Arise ye more than dead.

Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,
In order to their stations leap,
And music's pow'r obey.
From harmony, from Heav'nly harmony
This universal frame began:
From harmony to harmony
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
The diapason closing full in man".

Dryden's poem would be set to music by the German-born (but Anglicized) composer, Georg Friedrich Händel, in 1739. But a mere two years prior to Handel's rather conventional cantata appeared a most remarkable piece of music by the French Baroque composer, Jean-Féry Rebel: "Les Éléments" (The Elements).



Jean-Fery Rebel (1666–1747)

Jean-Fery Rebel belonged to the middle of three generations of musical Rebels. His father and uncle were both musicians connected to the royal household of France, and his sister was a singer. His son François, eventually assumed directorship of the Paris Opéra.

Rebel was primarily an instrumental composer and was particularly associated with dance music. He was part of the first group of French composers to write sonatas, of which he published several, but he was most successful as a composer of dance music. He wrote dance suites and, in particular, produced innovative music for several choreographed "symphonies."

Jean-Fery held a variety of posts over the course of his life including forty years of involvement with the Académie Royal de Musique in various capacities, an instrumentalist at Paris Opéra, a member of the elite 24 Violons du Roi, and a musician of the royal chapel, later succeeding his brother-in-law as master of the king's chamber music.



The recording we listen to is by Ensemble Tourbillon conducted by Petr Wagner in a performance given in 2010 in St Simon and St Jude Church, Prague.



Ensemble Tourbillon was founded in 1998 by Czech gambist and conductor Petr Wagner and brings together outstanding musicians from across Europe. Under Wagner's leadership typical programmes revel in the combination of virtuoso performances of well-loved masterpieces with a persistent curiosity to discover new repertoire and fresh new approaches.

Its formation ranges from four musicians (two violins, viola da gamba, theorbo or harpsichord) to large instrumental and vocal forces that enable the ensemble to perform larger secular and sacred vocal repertoire.

And so to the Music itself.....

Hector Berlioz - Overture to *Béatrice et Bénédict*



The Gospel saying that “No prophet is accepted in his own country” was certainly true of Hector Berlioz. Though his unique and innovative music was championed in Germany, France never fully recognized him in his own lifetime. *Béatrice et Bénédict*, his final completed work, would be premiered not in Paris, but in Baden. Composed between 1860 and 1862, this comic opera dates from a difficult period in the composer’s life, but despite his disappointments and increasing ill-health, the work is one of his lightest, most delightful creations.

The opera’s plot is a simplified version of “*Much Ado about Nothing*” by Shakespeare, one of Berlioz’ chief sources of inspiration. Beatrice and Benedict cannot stand each other, so on a lark their friends and families decide to get them together through a series of deceptions (the basic outline of the romantic comedy has changed little in 400 years).

The overture brims with life and comedic touches. It takes melodies from arias and ensembles later in the opera, but arranges them in such a way that the piece never becomes a simple hash-out parade of tunes.

It begins with music taken from the opera’s ending in which Beatrice and Benedict get married, playfully hurtling verbal barbs at one another, singing “Love is a torch...Love is a flame... today the truce is signed; we will become enemies again tomorrow!” The fast triplets of the opening theme illustrate these flames of love:

It’s a musical cat and mouse game which is constantly throwing us witty curve balls. We hear this “needling” opening motive throughout the overture, sometimes as teasing and taunting background interjections (listen around 4:12 and 6:13). The music which follows suggests the farcical trickery of the plot, which includes “accidentally” overheard conversations. But we also get a sense of the supernatural lurking underneath...the mystery and eternal beauty of a still summer night and a hint of “*Nuit paisible et serene!*” (“Peaceful and Good Night!”), the nocturne duet which concludes the first act.

Just as the overture seems to get going, it stops; the music slows and it becomes clear that the opening was merely the introduction to the introduction. After a yearning string melody, the fiery music resumes as the main body of the overture begins in earnest. Brassy fanfares lead to a more lyrical theme as the “flames of love” recede into the background of the orchestral texture. Like many opera overtures, this one eschews an extended development and moves directly into a reprise of the main themes (although Berlioz does introduce some daring harmonies into the transition between them). The overture ends with orchestral laughter, preparing the way for the Shakespearean comedy that follows.



Ludwig van Beethoven Symphony No 4 in B flat major Opus 60

Robert Schumann had an affinity for Symphony No. 4. Unfortunately, his famous description of the work as “a slender Greek maiden between two Norse giants” in his book *On Music and Musicians* (ca. 1840), set forth an idea which would become the stereotype: Beethoven’s Symphony No. 4 is overshadowed and diminished in importance, sandwiched between the monumental *Eroica* and Fifth Symphonies. While it may not have the fame of its bookends, Schumann recognized that the Fourth shines forth in a noble simplicity that the Romantic period inherited from the Enlightenment.

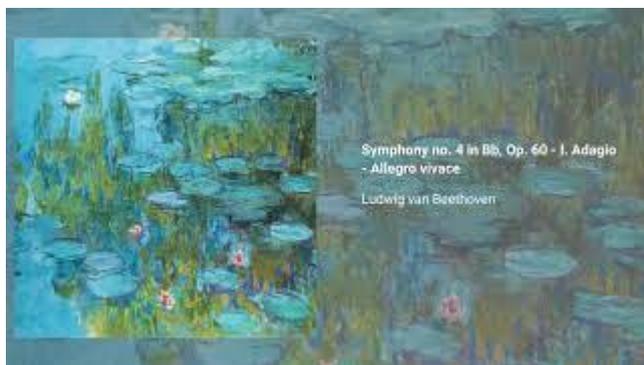


In terms of its proportions, it is well-made and beautifully wrought—“Greek” in its focus on beauty and artistic skill, and “slender” in its economy of materials and marvellously understated proportions. Hector Berlioz would later say, “Here, Beethoven entirely abandons ode and elegy, in order to return to the less elevated and less sombre, but not less difficult, style of the Second Symphony.”

The general character of this score is either lively, alert, and gay or of a celestial sweetness.” Although many fans of Beethoven’s symphonies may still think this symphony is a kind of regression towards musical styles of the past, Schumann and Berlioz recognized that it holds a unique and independent position between the Third and Fifth Symphonies, standing on its own as a masterpiece worthy of the master symphonist.

Beethoven’s Fourth spans four movements and has a performance time of about 35 minutes. The work begins with a slow introduction before the main theme is introduced punctuated by timpani rolls. A hushed passage before a crescendo announces the return of the main theme in a buoyant rousing conclusion to the movement.





The second movement Adagio is an expressive rondo, with a smoothly sustained melody over an accompaniment in a sharply defined, military-style rhythm. The rhythm pauses for the theme's continuation, but it returns in the closing bars of the movement, where the spotlight falls once more on the timpani.

A scherzo with a five-part structure (rather than the traditional three parts) follows: the first section, heard three times, is bounding and dance-like, while the slower second section, played twice, lilts along in the winds and strings.

A dazzling perpetual motion finale then takes over, strong despite its lightness, and races toward the stirring conclusion of this small but mighty symphony.



It's the story of a brave Scottish general named Macbeth who receives a prophecy from a trio of witches that one day he will become King of Scotland. Consumed by ambition and spurred to action by his wife, Macbeth murders King Duncan and takes the Scottish throne for himself. He is then wracked with guilt and paranoia.



Macbeth



Banquo



Lady Macbeth



MacDuff

Act I In Scotland. Macbeth and Banquo, leaders of the Scottish army, meet a group of witches who foretell the future. They address Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland, and tell Banquo that he will be the father of kings. The two men try to learn more, but the witches vanish. Messengers arrive with news that Duncan, the current king of Scotland, has made Macbeth Thane of Cawdor. The first part of the witches' prediction has come true. Duncan visits Macbeth. At the instigation of his wife Macbeth kills Duncan. Macbeth assumes the throne as king of Scotland. Meanwhile the Scottish nobleman MacDuff discovers the murder and vows vengeance on the "unknown" assassin.

In Act 2 Worried about the prophecy that Banquo's children will rule, Macbeth and his wife now plan to kill him and his son and so make the throne secure. Banquo is duly assassinated but his son escapes. Macbeth becomes terrified as his conscience kicks in, and as.....



The witches dance around the cauldron

Act 3 opens on a stormy night, the witches invoke evil spirits as they brew their magic potions. Macbeth arrives and asks them to prophesy his destiny. In response they conjure up three apparitions who, in turn, warn him to beware of Macduff, and that he will be invincible until Birnam Wood marches on his castle.

The witches then summon the apparition of eight kings who pass Macbeth, followed by Banco carrying a mirror. Terrified, Macbeth recognises them as Banco's descendants. Macbeth faints and the witches dance round him, then disappear, It is the music accompanying the witches dancing which form the ballet music of the opera.....and, as I indicated, omitted now in most productions. There are three short movements simply known as 'movements 1, 2, & 3, of approximately 2 minutes , 5 minutes and 3 minutes duration respectively.

For the record Malcolm, son of Duncan, arrives with an English army. Lady Macbeth, appalled at the atrocities takes her life, Macbeth is killed by McDuff and Malcolm assumes the throne, as all the prophecies of the witches come true.....



Witches

Jean Féry Rebel - Les Elemens

Rebel began his "new symphony" as a dance suite, to which he appended a revolutionary six-minute movement, called "Chaos," which employs the technique of musical dissonance (until then nearly unknown in music) to depict the disorder that preceded creation. One might easily mistake this movement for the atonal work of an avant-garde, twentieth-century composer; yet it is the shockingly original work of a seventy-one-year old, Baroque composer whose previous compositions had been lauded for their "taste and tenderness" and their eschewal of the "frightening and monstrous".

Rebel himself described "Chaos" this way:



Le Creation du Monde by Marc Chagall

"The introduction to this Symphony is Chaos itself; that confusion which reigned among the Elements before the moment when, subject to immutable laws, they assumed their prescribed places within the natural order. This initial idea led me somewhat further. I have dared to link the idea of the confusion of the Elements with that of confusion in Harmony.

I have risked opening with all the notes sounding together, or rather, all the notes in an octave played as a single sound. To designate, in this confusion, each particular element, I have availed myself of some widely accepted conventions. The bass expresses Earth by tied notes which are played jerkily. The flutes, with their rising and falling line, imitate the flow and murmur of Water. Air is depicted by pauses followed by cadenzas on the small flutes, and finally the violins, with their liveliness and brilliance represent the activity of Fire. These characteristics may be recognized, separate or intermingled, in whole or in part, in the diverse reprises that I have called Chaos, and which mark the efforts of the Elements to get free of each other. At the 7th appearance of Chaos these efforts diminish as order begins to assert itself."

The elements in Rebel's composition are arranged (in the recording we hear) as follows:

1. Le Cahos
2. Loure - Air pour les Violins: La Terre Et L'Eau [Earth and Water]
(A "Loure" is a slow gigue—a kind of French baroque dance)
3. Chaconne: Le Feu [Fire] (A "Chaconne" is an ancient fiery dance of Spanish origin)
4. Ramage L'air (Ramages are Bird Songs)
5. Rossignols (Nightingales)
6. Rondeau: Air Pour L'Amour
9. Caprice (a loosely structured musical composition that is often humorous in character)
7. Loure - La Chasse (The Hunt)
8. Sicilienne (An instrumental movement normally in slow 6/8 or 12/8 time)
10. Tambourins I & II (Lively old Provençal dance originally with tambourin accompaniment)

The later numbered pieces in Les éléments, were composed and danced a few months before Chaos was added to the suite.

From our vantage point, it is tempting to view Chaos as "modern" in conception, but Rebel would have thought such a label nonsensical. He was not attempting to point music in a new direction; he was just depicting chaos. If anyone had told him that some composers two centuries later would routinely write music that sounded like his Chaos, he would have laughed.



The Creation of Adam by Michelangelo

Acknowledgment of Sources

Berlioz: Overture – Béatrice et Bénédict

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Rebel: Les Éléments

Stephen M. Klugewicz in “The Imaginative Conservative”, September 2015

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YouTube Links to Recordings

Berlioz: Overture – Béatrice et Bénédict

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxCNTyw8SQA>

Beethoven: Symphony No. 4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrAEj7asHA&t=102s>

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