



YOUR
**MARIPOSA
YOSEMITE
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA**

April 27th/28th, 2024
Spring Concert Weekend:

April in Paris

(With apologies to Count Basie and Vernon Duke)

THE PROGRAM:

Hector Berlioz: Overture “Le Carnaval Romain,” opus 9
Maurice Ravel: Valses Nobles et Sentimentales
Hector Berlioz: Symphonie Fantastique, opus 14

Saturday, April 27 at 7 PM – The Grandpa Doug Pearse Student Center at the Mariposa Alternative Education Campus (formerly Mariposa Middle School.) Advance Online Ticket Purchase strongly recommended at \$10/Adults, \$8/Students. Visit www.tinyurl.com/MYSOApril for safe, secure purchase. Rush tickets available at the door at \$15/Adults, \$10/Students

Sunday, April 28 at 2 PM – the Garden Terrace (room) at Yosemite Valley Lodge, Yosemite National Park. No concert admission is charged, but a voluntary donation of \$10 is gently suggested to help defray our costs.

PLEASE NOTE: The usual YNP Gate Entry Admission is required AND in addition, the Yosemite NP Reservations System will be in effect. Vehicles entering Yosemite NP between the hours of 5/AM and 4/PM are required to have an advance, online-obtained Entrance Reservation to access the park. Visit <https://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/reservations.htm> ASAP before that date is sold out.

And now, on to the music.

I'm really excited to offer three works we've never before played. To make it even more intriguing, NO music from the two composers who wrote these masterpieces has ever been on any past MYSO programs either. As for that "Paris" subject line, well – if anywhere, these works represent time spent in Rome, in a bucolic setting, a number of waltzes (not the least of which are Viennese through and through) and even at a witches' Sabbath! BUT: both composers WERE French, and both studied at the famed Paris Conservatoire, though roughly 75 years apart, and the most remarkable piece of the three on our program – the 1830 ***Symphonie Fantastique*** - was premiered at that same Paris Conservatoire first privately and then two years later, publicly as well so – there you go. And it's April, so – April in Paris! But first a biography of the composer of two of this concert's three works.



In my estimation, the three greatest revolutionaries of music are Beethoven, Stravinsky – and Hector Berlioz. Beethoven? That's easy. He grabbed the sound of his teacher Haydn as well as Mozart and wrenched them into the future, most notably with his 1804 third symphony, the "***Eroica***," which we performed back during our 13th season. A stunned Haydn, after experiencing a performance of that work, said only, but prophetically "after this, music will never be the same." And indeed, 20 years later Beethoven's 9th "***Choral***" *Symphony* propelled music even further into the future. Stravinsky blazed another path to tomorrow when, at the 1913 premiere of his ballet "***Le Sacre du Printemps***" (The Rite of Spring,) actual riots broke out in the theatre, and a scandal erupted over the avant-garde nature of both the music and the ballet. But the path was now open, and as with Beethoven, boldness and daring became the hallmarks to follow.

And then there's Berlioz. We'll get around to the remarkable step his "***Symphonie Fantastique***" represents later, but first a bit about the man himself.

He was born into a post-revolutionary France in 1803 (the year before Beethoven's "***Eroica***" was first performed) though political upheaval would continue for nearly another century in France and Europe

itself. Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself Emperor the year after Berlioz's birth, only to be deposed a decade later. This was a world of change, revolutionary re-evaluation of political/social mores, the arts – and certainly the birth of the “Romantic” movement in music, the visual arts and literature. A return to the primacy of the people, first with the American revolution of 1776 which declared the importance of the people over remote colonial domination, and then the French revolution and its overthrow of monarchic whims and traditions. And in the case of France, even its new Restoration regime would itself be tossed out on its ear: the First Empire, Bourbon Rule, Second Empire and even, eventually the Third Empire would all fall by the wayside by 1940. But back to Berlioz himself.

Born Louis-Hector Berlioz on December 11 of 1803 to Dr. Louis Berlioz and wife Marie-Antoinette



Joséphine in La Côte-Saint-André in southeastern France, young Hector was the eldest of the offspring – which would eventually include two sisters, though another three children died in infancy. His father (*at left in 1802 at the time of his marriage to Hector's mother*) was agnostic and his mother Roman Catholic, but they brought the boy up with faith, though that was to fall by the wayside later in life. His parents were relatively young with his father being 27 and his mother 19 at the time of their marriage. No visual representation of his mother seems to have survived.

Ten months after the couple married, Hector was born. His father was a well-to-do doctor, and as the eldest (and only) son, Hector was expected to follow dad into the field. But that was the last thing the kid had in mind; he was fascinated by music from an early age. Father Louis was patient with his son, but did all he could to herd him into his own field of medicine, even to the point of promising the boy that if he would study anatomical renderings (specifically, in this case, of the human skeleton and all aspects of osteology) with him (Dad) – then he (Dad) would buy the boy a new flute from Paris. An up-to-date modern flute with the latest keying developments.

Young Hector apparently made that deal with Dad, but ran off to his room crying at the thought of what he'd have to do to get that new flute.

His personal memoirs, written at the age of 48, present the picture of a kid who even from early adolescence was given to immediately falling in love, being smitten with girl after girl, woman after

woman. Every summer, Adèle) would spend of his mother's father in at the foot of the Alps. the 18-year-old daughter whose summer villa was (*shown center, MUCH* describes it, "like an dazzled by Estelle's pink And no, he wasn't some experienced nearly all speak a word of his when he discovered that was apparently obvious who demonstrated great thought only of this



his mother and two sisters (Nancy and nearly a month near Grenoble at the home a tiny village near the Dauphiné Mountains, One summer the 11-year-old laid eyes on of a certain wealthy Madame Gautier, also located there. Her daughter Estelle (*later in life*) took his breath away – as he electric shock” and he was especially boots, “(which) I had never seen before!” sort of kinky fetishist – the boy just aspects of life with passion. He dared not fixation of Estelle and was truly horrified his puppy-love worship of the young lady to everyone. And especially to Estelle – kindness to the boy. He mooned over her, goddess but also felt the great pain of

knowing he'd never be able to make her his own. And Berlioz was not only started on the path of a lifelong adoration of women nearly at first sight, but he also carried a torch for Estelle to the day he died. This passion for targeted women – as you'll see – would eventually give rise to his *Symphonie Fantastique* – but more about that later.

When Hector was six, his kindly father enrolled his son in La Côte Seminary for his education, but in 1811, after only a year there: the seminary closed and so Dad decided to home-school young Hector himself. Dad was apparently a remarkable polymath, though some subjects were antipathetic to the boy's interests. Young Hector didn't care for the study of Latin, but became hugely interested in geography of the planet beyond France, and – according to Berlioz's autobiography, his father himself purportedly said of his son “He knows the name of each of the Sandwich Islands, the Moluccas, the Philippines; he knows the Torres Strait, Timor, Java and Borneo...” By the age of 11 he had read Virgil in the original Latin and translated the text to French; his father introduced him to Shakespeare, whose plays and sonnets were an inspiration to the boy and would eventually become the basis of some of his adult musical compositions (thanks, Dad!) At 12 he had mastered his first musical instrument: the flageolet, similar to the recorder. And dad was also kind enough to hire a tutor for his 13-year-old son on a subject of which he *knew* not enough: music. And so Berlioz graduated from the flageolet to his tutor's instrument: the flute, which was to be his primary musical instrument – and also made his initial attempts at composing music.

At 14, he had already composed two quintets for flute and strings; under the instruction of his new tutor in 1819, he composed an early opera and also a vocal piece (with guitar accompaniment) called “*I will therefore leave forever*” which will turn up in a decade as part of the opening melody of the first movement of his *Symphony Fantastique* – which is on this concert. Listen carefully during measures

three through sixteen when the violins first come in with a searching, somewhat melancholic melody: that's the reused tune from "*I will therefore...*" composed by a 15-year old!"

In 1821, the seventeen-year-old received his Bachelor of Letters, but here's where things grew a little tense. Though he loved music, his father insisted that Hector now train for a medical degree, which he reluctantly began to do – in Paris, two months before his 18th birthday.

But the move to Paris only made Hector even more determined to pursue music as a career. Here, he was exposed to innumerable opportunities to hear and study music of all sorts; he was also able to access the library at the Paris Conservatoire, where he found scores to the operas of Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714 – 1787) and scrutinized the work of THAT master. Berlioz – though still dutifully engaged in his unwanted medical courses during that crucial 18th year: finally made the decision to make music his life AND career. He began his prolific career at musical critique and analysis writing, with his very first published account appearing in *Le Corsaire* in August 1823 – the newspaper whose name would eventually serve as the title for one of Berlioz's operas.

It was at that time that the 19-year-old visited his parents and declared his intention to leave medicine and instead pursue music; the long-simmering cauldron of disagreement between the young man and his parents over this issue finally boiled over during that visit: though his free-thinker of a father finally gave in to his son's firm choice of a future in music, his strict, dogmatically Roman Catholic mother was furious and refused to accept Hector's decision, actually cursing her son and virtually disowning him on the spot. Returning to Paris, Hector wrote an oratorio titled "*The Passage of the Red Sea*" – which served as both his introduction *and* qualification to study composition privately with the esteemed composer/professor Jean-François Lesueur, who was also a faculty member at the Paris Conservatoire. During the next year (1824) the 20-year-old finally severed all ties to any continued studies or considerations of a medical career; he was now to be a professional musician, and that was that.

In the following year, he composed his "*Messe Solennelle*" or – *Solemn Mass*. The piece was successfully performed to a very positive reaction on July 10th of 1825 in Saint-Roch in Paris, but after a second performance two years later at the very prestigious Cathedral Saint-Eustache (also in Paris) – Berlioz destroyed the score and the piece was lost. But lost only for the next 166 years – somewhat amazingly, a copy of this believed-lost early masterwork was accidentally discovered in a chest in a church in Antwerp, Belgium – and received its third performance, after all those decades of years - in 1993, and its first recording. Its fourth movement – the *Gratias* – however, had been heard in part



for nearly the last two hundred years, though – as the melody from that Mass’s movement turned up recycled as the main theme of the *Symphonie Fantastique’s* third movement, “*Scène aux Champs.*” The young man continued to hone his skills, and finally applied for and was accepted to the Paris Conservatoire in 1826 (*shown previous page, circa the 1820s*) – where he would continue his studies with his now-formerly private-instructor Jean-François Lesueur, as well as Anton Reicha – the great Czech-born, naturalized French composer, professor – and lifelong friend of Beethoven.

There were at least two life-altering events which occurred in 1827 – and musically, a third. First, his father reduced Berlioz’s monthly allowance, and Berlioz began singing in the chorus of the Théâtre des Nouveautés because he really needed the money; second: as far as that “musical” event, Beethoven died aged 56 – and his death, and the end of HIS revolutionary era is really important to keep in mind, again: as I’ll note in my writing on



Symphonie Fantastique. But third, and perhaps most important, and a thing which was also critical to the symphony AND in keeping with Berlioz’s long history of falling madly in love with unattainable women: he went to the theatre to see two Shakespearean play productions, IN English, with a visiting English theatre company. There, first on September 11 and later with more performances, he experienced the star Irish actress Harriet Smithson in the roles of *Hamlet’s* ill-fated galpal Ophelia, and also as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet.* And the 23-year-old was smitten with her to the very depths of his heart and soul – passionately in love with this renowned 27-year-old English-speaking stage actress (*shown at left at the time of her tour to Paris, aged yes: 27.*)

And with his usual lack of aplomb in such matters, he worshipped this goddess of the boards, writing at the time that “...it was too much. By the third act, hardly able to breathe – as though an iron hand gripped me by the heart – I knew that I was lost.” His infatuation with her gave rise to the most famous piece he ever wrote – just think: if he had never gone to the theatre, just think if his father had never introduced him to Shakespeare, giving the lad a lifelong love of the Bard! But here again: I’ll curtail further writing on this specific subject and period as it’s more closely related to my notes on the 1830 “*Symphonie Fantastique,*” as you’ll read below.

So – the young man during this time wrote, wrote, pursued – and wrote more. He tried his hand at opera, composing the now-lost “*Estelle et Némorin*” and “*Les Francs-Juges.*” That latter was never performed as it was refused by the Paris Opera – so Berlioz scavenged bits and pieces from it, pieces which would turn up in later works including the “*Fantastique.*” The *Les Francs-Juges Overture,* however – did survive and become a favorite of its composer, who conducted that overture many times throughout his career on the podium. He also composed choral/orchestral works, cantatas, concert overtures and as a student of the Conservatoire, he submitted his works for the all-important, career-

making *Prix de Rome*. In 1826 – he was knocked out during the preliminaries, failing in the music theory portion of fugue composition. In 1827 his cantata “*La Mort d’Orphee*” was declared unplayable by the judges, but in 1828 his cantata “*Herminie*” won second prize. Not relevant to the *Prix*, but important nonetheless: after discovering Johann Goethe’s 1806 masterpiece of theatre *Faust, Part One* in an apparently-excellent French translation, Berlioz composed his “*Eight Scenes of Faust*,” but withdrew it, later working it into the dramatic (and truly phenomenal!) cantata “*Damnation of Faust*.” He wrote and wrote and wrote – but achieved only minor success with his works of this brief period. In 1829, he entered the *Prix* yet again, this time with his new cantata “*Cleopatra*” but again lost. During the following year, he would both begin an affair with a young pianist named Marie-Félicité-Denise Moke – and later become engaged to her, to the consternation of her mother. The young lady would become one of the elite few female concert performers of the piano who would be celebrated by critics and audience members alike. After about a year of sitting on the idea and slowly simmering it, Hector would also compose the *Symphonie Fantastique* in the early months of that year (1830) while he was only 26. He would also meet Franz Liszt, beginning a long friendship with the composer and piano virtuoso after Liszt attended the December 5, 1830 premiere performance of Berlioz’s *Symphonie* – but aside from the creation of that work, the most important event in Berlioz’s still-early life was: he FINALLY won the coveted First Prize in the *Prix de Rome*! After FIVE years’ entries, he finally took home the top prize, and it was with the submission of his cantata *Sardanapale* - which Berlioz himself thought to be only mediocre work. Its composition was inspired by an 1827 painting by Eugène Delacroix called *La Mort de Sardanapale (The Death of Sardanapalus)* - but in his memoirs Berlioz describes destroying his cantata years after it won him that long-aspired-to *Prix*. 197 bars still remain – about 5 minutes’ worth of music, which come from the final scene comprising (in part) Sardanapalus’ third aria and the incendie, in which (Syrian) King Sardanapalus dies in a fire, along with all his precious treasures. Berlioz won the *Prix* in July, and that cantata also showed up on that December 5th (1830) concert in the Salle du Conservatoire alongside the *Symphonie*, a little more than four months later. In his memoirs, Berlioz notes that he was one of the first to publicly condemn the *Prix de Rome*, even as he valued what a win meant. And he was particularly hard on the jury: 40 members, but of those, only five were musicians!

Aside from the cash, the *Prix* also awarded (or demanded) that the first place recipient continue studying in Rome for two years, with living expenses covered by the *Prix*, though many of its recipients stayed for a far briefer period, including Berlioz. And so, three months after that December, 1830 premiere of the *Symphonie*, Berlioz arrived at the Villa Medici in Rome. His 27-year-old eyes were opened to sights, sounds – and persons who would have a profound effect on the young man, from meeting Mendelssohn and painter Ernest Legouvé, to travels by carriage AND foot to Nice, Florence, Tivoli, Subiaco, Naples, Pompeii, Milan and Turin; while in Nice, he received a letter from the mother of Marie-Félicité-Denise Moke informing him that the engagement between her daughter and Berlioz was now broken, and to make things even worse, she rubbed salt in his wounds by telling Berlioz that her daughter had already married the well-to-do influential piano maker Joseph Étienne Camille Pleyel – who was a “mere” 23 years older than his young bride. Instruments from *Pleyel et Cie* were considered

to be among the best of their day, and were used by many concert artists during this time when recitals and concerti were beginning to dominate.

The emotional Berlioz immediately reacted to this news by deciding he MUST kill Marie-Félicité-Denise, her husband Camille – and of course: the mother of Marie. He planned an elaborate process by which he would personally carry out these murders himself, and in fact bought himself an array of poisons, pistols and even an expensive, complicated disguise, bought himself passage back to Paris and actually made it all the way out of Italy to Nice – but the soothing effect of being in that beautiful seaside area would eventually cause him to give up this plan (he had already been through a similar “female betrayal” over the previous two years by that actress Harriet Smithson – who had ignored his efforts to meet her; more below in my *Symphonie Fantastique* notes.) But I would imagine that after THIS latest affront, Berlioz refused to play or even have in his possession a Pleyel piano!

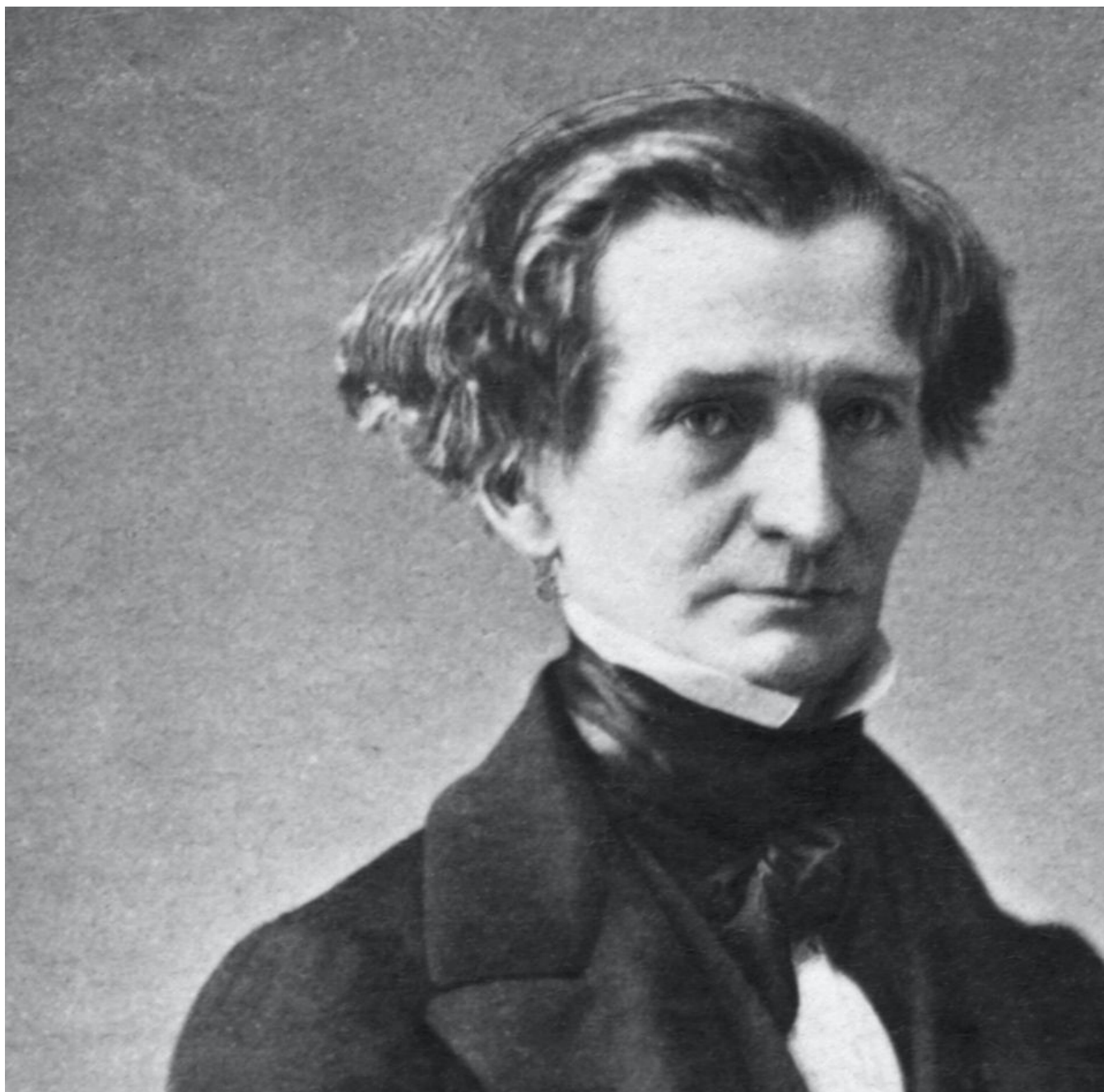


His “two-year” stay in Rome would be over after only 14 months, but he had been very creative during this time, and the influence of Italy would be felt in later works. (At left, the 28-year-old composer captured by Émile Signol while both were in Rome; Signol was younger by a year than Berlioz. The look on the composer’s face might be an expression reflecting his mood after just having read that “Dear John” letter from his intended’s mother!) Among those works he completed or began in Rome were the song “*La Captive*,” based on a poem by Victor Hugo in his *Orientales*. This original version of that song for soprano and piano became an immediate success in Subianco (where he was staying at the time, and which was reported to be a favorite location during Berlioz’s Italian sojourn.) He also composed two works to fulfil his obligations as a Prix winner, though their sources aren’t Italian (nor need they have been) but

Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott: Berlioz’s *Le Roi Lear (King Lear) Overture*, the *Rob Roy Overture* (originally called *Intrata di Rob-Roy MacGregor.*) There was also a very intriguing piece he initially called *Le Retour à la Vie – (The Return to Life)* but which he’d later rename as (ready?) “*Lélio; Monodrama lyrique; Deuxième partie de l’Épisode de la vie d’un artiste*” though it’s known today as “*Lélio, ou Le retour à la vie*” or simply: *Lélio*. THAT piece would be published as his opus 14b in 1855. There’s a reason for that opus designation: the *Symphonie Fantastique* would be published in 1845 as his opus 14 – and in *Lélio*, Berlioz created a sequel to the *Symphonie*, originally intended to be performed as immediate programming conjunctions of the *Symphonie*, the full title of which is, of course: *Symphonie fantastique: Épisode de la vie d’un artiste en cinq parties* – the piece which ends with the ---- well, never mind. I don’t want to ruin your reading of my program notes of that magnificent *Symphonie Fantastique* until you’ve had the chance to take in its story below.

Among later Italian-influenced works was his glorious 1834 symphony for viola and orchestra “*Harold*

en Italie,” based on Lord Byron's "*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*" and composed by commission of violin/viola super-virtuoso Niccolò Paganini. No doubt his time in various Italian towns and the country itself were helpful when he'd compose his great *Roméo et Juliette*: a seven-movement *symphonie dramatique* for orchestra, chorus and soloists. As well as his opera *Béatrice et Bénédict*, based upon Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing*, the locale of which is Italy - or rather the port city of Messina on Sicily.



(Above: the middle-aged Berlioz yet to come.) So – in May 1832 he returned to Paris and submerged

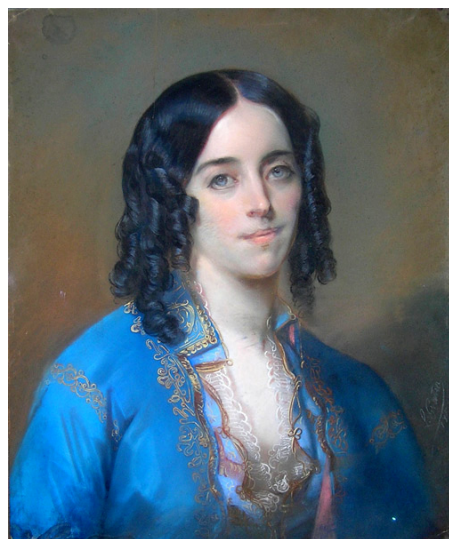
himself in work. At 29, he was a surprisingly seasoned, somewhat-traveled, highly-trained award-winning musician. He continued to compose, write literary criticism and other works both on music and not – and worked non-stop to promote his greatest possession: himself. He put together what would count as his first true “public” concert on December 9, 1832 featuring both his (55-minute, highly-revised) *Symphonie Fantastique* and its even more-lengthy sequel (at 70 minutes!) *Lelio* as well as his *Les Franc-Juges Overture* - making for a concert filled with a near two-and-a-half hours of music alone, not counting intermission(s)!



This concert, led by violinist and conductor of all student concerts at the Conservatoire since 1806, was François-Antoine Habeneck (*at right,*) who HAD conducted that in-house performance of *Fantastique* two years earlier. I can't overstate what a vastly-important event for the young composer - about whom a buzz had already developed – this would be. It could make Berlioz's career, or set it back to a point past recovery.



In the audience were - among others - Franz Liszt (*left,*) Frédéric Chopin (*right*) and Chopin's lover George Sand (*below left*) – the nom-de-plume for the brilliant novelist/journalist/memoirist Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin de Francueil.



Also in attendance were Victor Hugo, Paganini, Alexandre Dumas (Père) and many others from the elite of Paris arts and high culture societies. But perhaps most importantly and FINALLY present: the Irish actress Harriet Smithson, who – though the *Symphonie* was dedicated to Nicholas I of Russia - had herself served as the muse for Berlioz when he ferociously wrote the piece in a mix of love and vengeance. And a few days later, they finally met, face-to-face. But – more about that below!

As for that 1832 concert? A rousing success. A HUGE success for Berlioz, despite the fact that (as I'll expand below) conservative Paris was never very receptive to his more outré music, and especially not in his early years. But – this particular concert WAS a triumph – according to More on THAT below, as well.

From here on out, he was a well-known commodity, and an international one as well. He produced his first brief autobiography (in a somewhat comic/cynical/sardonic fashion) after being asked to do so just after that December 9, 1832 concert by his friend Joseph d'Ortigue, for publication in the December 22, 1832 edition of the *Revue de Paris*. And so it went. He was “made.” THAT concert established Berlioz as THE new voice of French “classical” music – though again, he was harshly opposed by many in the old guard who just didn't understand or appreciate the young man's inventiveness, sheer brilliance and skills in creating a whole new path, showing what COULD be done with music and if they wanted to turn their stuffy noses up at it, well: that was THEIR problem. Either learn or get out of the way – which in many ways became the mantra for many other youthful, progressive composers throughout the Western world during the first two-thirds or so of the 19th century.

By 1835, he had taken on the role of music critic at a hefty salary for the *Journal des Débats*, and along with it came prestige and power. His critical writings could be fiercely biting; when he didn't like something, look out! (He remained in that position for nearly 30 years, only resigning in 1864.) While continuing to compose (with now, very few refusals by ANY opera house or producer,) he also began a whole new side career as a conductor in 1835, and from this point on became the nearly-sole interpreter of his own music, conducting it wide and far. At his own demands, those orchestras sometimes exceeded 1,000 musicians.

His esteem as a composer had grown so high that in 1837 he was approached by Adrien de Gasparin, the Minister of the Interior of France. Berlioz was commissioned by the French Government of the July Monarchy – the liberal 1830's-1840's constitutional monarchy under Louis Philippe I to compose a Requiem Mass in memory of the French soldiers who had perished during the July 1830 revolution which had ended the rule of the House of Bourbon and brought about: The July Monarchy's 19-year reign. The result of that commission was a massive work, even judged by the Berlioz scale: the **Grande Messe des Morts**, Op. 5 – the **Mass of the Dead**. And it IS a remarkable work in ten movements, and with Berlioz's instructions that “*in the event that the chorus alone numbers over 700*” only 400 choristers should sing in certain movements! As you might imagine, it also requires a massive orchestra including quadruple woodwind (and EIGHT bassoons,) 12 French horns, 4 onstage cornets and 4 tubas, with a total of 16 timpani, 2 bass drums, 10 pairs of cymbals, 4 tam-tams, at least 100 string players, and an ADDITIONAL four brass choirs totaling 38 more cornets, trumpets, trombones, tubas and ophicleides, arranged in the compass points of the concert hall/performance space in which the performance is to be held. As I remember VERY well from participating on cornet – along with our principal cellist Michael McLane – in a massive performance all conducted by the late Jack Fortner in the Saroyan Theatre of the Fresno Convention Center 50 YEARS ago, when I was still a school kid and

Mike scarcely older. I'll never forget the sight of the late, great, internationally-renowned CSUF piano professor/concert performer Philip Lorenz whacking the hell out of a tam-tam and nearly falling over as he did so! But – sidebar over...and this work, along with so many of his others, cemented Berlioz's fame and reverence as a massively talented and major composer, regarded by some as France's greatest.



Above: *Liberty Leading the People* (1830) by Eugène Delacroix, commemorating the 1830 July Revolution that unseated King Charles X – and NOT, as often used – as representative of the 1789 French Revolution or Napoleon in any way – HE had been deposed and died in 1821.

There's simply too much more to go into; the important period was the struggle to GET to the top, and the one piece which was integral to his success – for our immediate interests: the ***Symphonie Fantastique*** (see below.) Over the years, there were separations, international concert tours, time lived in London and especially the seven months he spent as conductor of the Theatre Royal - Drury Lane, separations, affairs, heartbreak, joy, deaths of his first wife in 1854 and then his second in 1862, and tragically his son in 1867, and sadly: eventually going from brilliant young revolutionary of music to yesterday's news. He spent 1850 – 1869 as Librarian of the *Paris Conservatoire* – his only official position and one which brought him a steady income for the rest of his days. But he had so much more within him during those 35 years before his 1869 death; so many more important works and writings – including the massive operas “***Les Troyens***” (***The Trojans***), ***Benvenuto Cellini***, the afore-mentioned (equally massive and phenomenally impressive) “scenic cantata” ***Le Damnation de Faust***, the yet-to-come outside-the-box symphonies to join ***Harold en Italie*** and the ***Fantastique*** were the amazing seven-movement ***Roméo et Juliette*** for orchestra, chorus and soloists and the outdoor, massive chorus/military band/winds-only ***Grande symphonie funèbre et triomphale***. And aside from ***Harold***, they all call for a huge orchestra in addition to the two calling for a large chorus, too. And there were a couple other Shakespearean works, too: the cantata ***La Mort d'Ophélie***, and the ***Marche funèbre pour la dernière scène d'Hamlet*** (***Funeral March for the final scene of Hamlet***.) And he arranged – to my opinion the best version before or ever since, the French National Anthem: Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle's 1792 "***La Marseillaise***" (aka

Chant de guerre pour l'Armée du Rhin, or *War Song of the Army of the Rhine*) which Rouget de Lisle composed in response to Austria having declared war on France midway through the 1789-1799 French Revolution. Again: what if! What if Austria hadn't sought to quell revolution in France before it spread to THEIR empire; what if Rouget de Lisle hadn't composed that compelling tune, which served and continues to serve as a rallying cry for the French nation, and especially so for the Free French during WWII? What if...but again, I'm off track.

Despite the fact he found writing prose to be unpleasant work, Berlioz's literary genius is found in his magnificent *Treatise on Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration* (which of course sits in my library, along with the 800+ page *Catalogue of the Works of Hector Berlioz*), the autobiographical materials – including that early one as well as the later *Memoires de Hector Berlioz* and many biographic ones founded on his writings as well, and



literally scores *of* scores of his works. Along with much of his extant musical criticism and other literary writings.

In 1867 he suffers one of the greatest losses of his life when his son Louis (*shown above*), a mariner in command of a merchant ship – contracts yellow fever in Havana and dies there. Berlioz, who had described their relationship as “we are like two twins!” will never really recover from that loss, which will color his



remaining life. Getting on now, in early 1868 he returned home to Paris after a grueling three-month Russian tour during which he saw his 64th birthday occur during December of the previous year while he abroad. And he's now: simply worn out. In one of his letters from this period, he wrote “I feel I am dying...I no longer believe in anything.” Including his faith, and to a great extent, the demands of composing music, which no longer inspired him. He has medical complications after two falls while visiting Nice; just about one year later, on March 8th of 1869, the 65-year-old composer dies, having outlived his two wives (*the first – HS* – above left, and the second – Marie Recio at right*), his son – and so many friends and other family members. His well-attended funerary services were held at the recently completed Église de la Trinité, with a large procession on the way, including a full National Guard company. Three days after his death, his body is interred wan



Montmartre Cemetery, resting place of his two wives. Not in revered-enough placements, both were exhumed and re-buried next to him.

And what are his purported final words as he lay dying on that afternoon of March 8th? “*Enfin, on va jouer ma musique*” (“*At last, they are going to play my music.*”)

Indeed. And we haven’t slowed down in the ensuing 155 years, mon ami respecté, nor will we ever.

*See my notes on *Symphonie Fantastique*, below – for her identity.

So finally, NOW the music.

Hector Berlioz (1803 – 1869) Overture to “Le Carnaval Romain” (Roman Carnival) opus 9, 1844

This piece is, of sorts: an afterthought, though it’s become one of Berlioz’s most popular concert works. And this overture is a direct offspring of the troubled, never-successful (in his lifetime) opera *Benvenuto Cellini*, after the 1500 – 1571 life of that real-life Florentine sculptor – an opera which has its own overture, and not a bad one at that.

Berlioz himself unfortunately realized in retrospect that while Cellini’s memoirs are vastly entertaining to read, they don’t serve as the great starting point of an operatic libretto he initially thought them to be. The opera’s first libretto, in an opera-comique form, was refused by the Paris Opéra-Comique. That libretto was then rewritten in a semi-seria form, and offered to the Paris Opéra, which accepted it, meaning that Berlioz now had to composed the music in that stricture. He did so, and it was finally premiered at the Paris Opéra on September 10, 1838, conducted by the previously-mentioned François-Antoine Habeneck. That premiere (facing an apparent anti-Berlioz clique) received negative reactions including loud hisses not long after the opera began. But Berlioz blamed the failure on Habeneck – the conductor who had been so important in bringing the *Symphonie Fantastique* into the world. In particular, Berlioz noted in his memoirs his dismay and even anger when he heard Habeneck conduct the (should-have-been-lively) Saltarello which ends Act II. And he didn’t mince words when he railed into Habeneck at the end of the rehearsal. But Habeneck? Berlioz reported that he reacted with hostility in return, and then calmly told Berlioz, “*Unhappy composers! Learn how to conduct...for do not forget that the most dangerous of your interpreters is the conductor himself!*” Berlioz worked on numerous rewrites, and 13 years later, in 1851 Liszt arranged for a production of the opera – with changes – in Weimar the following year. That 1852 German production wasn’t particularly happily received, and ditto when it was next performed in London in 1853, and then again back in Weimar in 1856. And that was pretty much the end of that opera in Berlioz’s lifetime.

But as early as 1843 Berlioz began to scavenge parts of the opera for other uses, including that Saltarello which Habeneck infused with very little excitement, and which became the major portion of a stand-alone concert overture he called *Le Carnaval Romain* – or *The Roman Carnival*. The work would



The phisharmonica was invented in 1818 in Germany and its use was largely confined to Germany as well. Its keyboard was fitted to a series of reeds, in order that it might approximate clarinets, oboes, bassoons, etc. The foot pedals powered a bellows and the descriptions I've read of the actual sound appear for it to have been little other than a muffled, indistinct primitive Hammond organ...

finally be completed in January of the following year, and was successfully premiered soon after, on February 3rd, 1844, with Berlioz conducting. At that time the reaction to the piece was so great that it had to be encored.

Here's a bit about the Roman Carnival Overture in his own words, from Berlioz's Memoires:

"Of all my compositions, the Roman Carnival Overture was for a long time the most popular in Austria, it was played everywhere. I remember that during my stay in Vienna it caused various incidents which are worth recounting. The music publisher Haslinger gave a musical evening, in which, among other things, this overture arranged for two piano four hands and a phisharmonica was to be performed.

When the turn for this piece came in the concert, I found myself near a door leading into the living room where the five performers were. They begin the first allegro in a movement that is much too slow. The andante goes as well as it does. But the moment they resume the allegro in an even more dragging manner than the first time, the blood rushes to my

head, I turn red, crimson, and unable to contain my impatience, I shout to them: "But this it's not carnival, it's Lent, it's Good Friday in Rome that you're playing there!" I suggest the hilarity that this exclamation excited in the audience. We could not restore silence, and the overture ended amidst the laughter and conversations of the assembly, always quietly and without anything succeeding in disturbing the peaceful pace of my five interpreters.

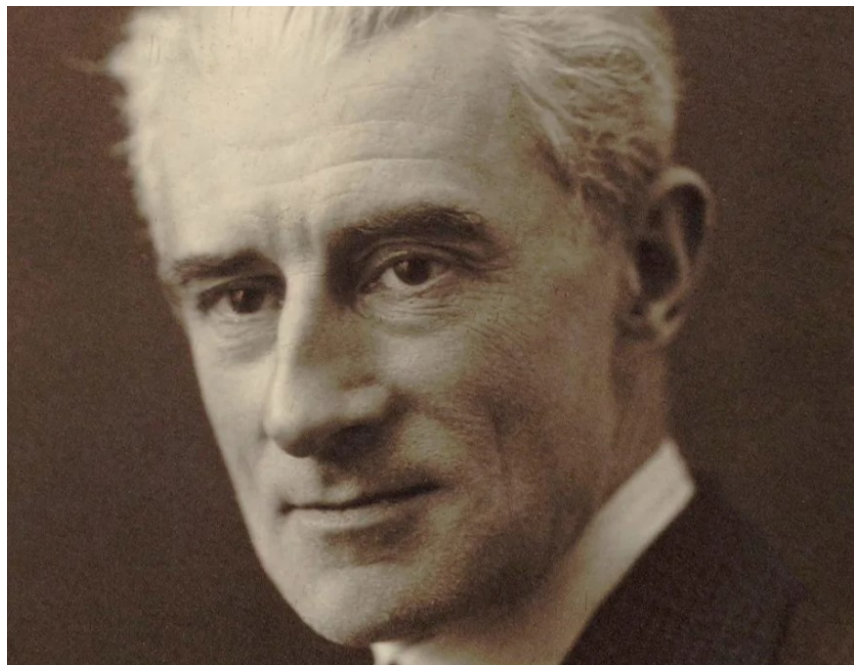
A few days later, Dreyschok giving a concert in the Conservatory hall, asked me to conduct the performance of this same overture which appeared in his program. "I want to make you forget," he said to me, "the Lent of Haslinger's evening. » He had hired the entire Kerntnerthor orchestra. We only did one rehearsal. As we were about to begin it, one of the first violins who spoke French said in my ear: "You will see the difference between us and those little oddballs from the theater an der Wien" (the Pockorny theater where I gave my concerts). Of course, he was right. Never has this opening been executed with more fire, precision, brilliance, and well-regulated turbulence. And what an orchestral sound! What harmonious harmony! This apparent pleonasm alone can convey my idea. Also on the evening of the concert, it burst like a handful of serpents in a fireworks display. The audience made her start again with shouts and stampings that you only hear in Vienna. Dreyschok, whose untimely enthusiasm was disturbing his personal success, tore his gloves in fury and said naively: "If I ever get caught playing overtures in my concerts!..." He looked at me with an angry look, as if I would have been guilty of an unworthy act towards him. This comical bad mood, I must quickly say, was short-lived, and did not prevent him, a few weeks later, from showing himself in Prague full of cordiality towards me."

Structurally, it's quite simple: the overture begins with a boldly-stated theme which comes from the Act II revelry, canonically answered by the woodwinds before coming to a sudden halt – then trills in the strings and a spritely response from the woodwinds and cornets ends the opening with a held note in the third French horn, which is then answered with another held note by the clarinet, modulating us from A Major to C Major, just like that – and the beautiful English horn now takes over, with a gentle tune which is based on Cellini's Act I love duet with the character of Teresa. The English horn is the oboe's "big brother" and figures strongly in the middle movement of the *Symphony Fantastique* as well.

But no, this is not to be merely a serenely pastoral piece alone: there are three chromatic flourishes in this masterpiece of orchestration demonstrating just how fast woodwind instruments can play – almost as if three sudden gusts of wind blow through, and: we're now off and running with that Saltarello (an Italian dance similar to a Tarantella) from the end of Act II of the opera combined with the love themes from the Act II love duet. It all builds and builds to a frenzied finale and it's easy to see why this melodic, exciting overture was an immediate success. Berlioz recommended that future performances of his opera *Benvenuto Cellini* include the *Roman Carnival Overture* as a prelude to Act II – which is how the opera is frequently performed – when it's performed at all!

Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937) “*Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*” (*Noble and Sentimental Waltzes*)1912

Maurice Ravel is – along with Claude Debussy: often described as the musical representation of “impressionism” in music, just as Édouard Manet and Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro and Edgar Degas – along with the American Mary Cassatt and quite a few others – are considered the prime exemplars of that style in the visual arts. Except for the fact that Debussy and Ravel disliked and rejected that term being applied to their music or: themselves. There was rivalry between the two which sometimes boiled over, but the two were friends of a sort for about ten years; Ravel



was Debussy's junior by 12 years. As for that term they both sought to distance themselves from: Debussy noted in a 1908 letter that “*imbeciles call (the music he was composing for his Images) ‘impressionism,’ a term employed with the utmost inaccuracy, especially by art critics.*” While Ravel for HIS part said that the term could not be adequately applied to music at all – and then went on to

insult Debussy in the best way he knew, by attacking his use of the orchestra. “*If I had the time, I would reorchestrate (Debussy’s) La Mer*” but each largely admired the others’ music. Ravel pooh-poohed all attempts to categorize him as anything but what he himself offered: “I am of the same type as the Romantics – but one doesn’t need to open one’s chest to show that one has a heart.” Though he lived until 1937, he never embraced avant-gardism or trendy approaches to composing music: like Rachmaninoff (who might have made an interesting visual comparison to Ravel’s 5’3” height as Rachmaninoff stood 6’6”) his sound, and technique was bound up with those who lived and composed largely from the time of Beethoven until the Stravinsky school – and the unfortunate effects of the second Viennese school began to erase the sound of the Romantics. That was his style, but Ravel established and maintained his own personal idiom – though there were some who accused Ravel of leaning too heavily upon the specific sound of Debussy.

To describe the man Ravel, I’d have to say, off the cuff – that he was dapper, suave to the point of perhaps “prissiness,” aloof, compact (at only 5’3”) – above all: mysterious to the point that we know very little of his personal life. He always dressed impeccably, with a predilection for black patent leather shoes. He had no close friends, he never married – and he was once described by Stravinsky as “the most perfect of Swiss clockmakers” – I’m not sure if Igor meant that as a compliment or not. Ravel found comfort in the company of animals, and particularly cats; he was fond of children but only if they belonged to others and could be conveniently removed when he tired of them. He loved being in nature – and perhaps because he was born to an engineer of a father, he loved mechanical objects of all types, but especially mechanical toys. He never entered into any sort of intimate relationship with anyone – to do so, as he once noted, would be “distasteful.” He was always cordial and displayed great politeness with other people, but – always as a somewhat remote entity. While there were great (apparently unfounded) rumors about his sexual being and preferences, there’s no evidence whatsoever to indicate that he was anything but asexual. This implacable exterior, though – hid a passionate, complex human being – and that is more than reflected in his music. He (and I agree with him 100% on this, as the musicians of this orchestra know:) stated that “music, I feel, must be emotional first and intellectual second” and “we should always remember that sensitiveness and emotion constitute the real content of a work of art.”

Perhaps most tellingly, though – late in life he admitted that “the only love affair I ever had was with music.”

And so it was with not only the man, but with his perfectly-tailored, wildly colored music, too.

He was born on March 7, 1875 in Ciboure, France – and named Joseph-Maurice Ravel. Three months later, father Pierre-Joseph Ravel, mother Marie (née) Delouart and their first-born moved to Paris, where both parents had spent portions of their lives, off and on. His doting mother was Basque and his father Swiss though both parents had spent time in Madrid so it’s easy to understand why so much of his music is overtly Spanish: the sounds of Basque Spain particularly were inculcated into him by his mother.

Both parents had a great love for the arts, and the child's musical talents were recognized early in life. Ironically, young Maurice was not academically adept or even a decent pianist (his primary instrument.) It therefore may seem to be somewhat surprising that at 14 he became one of the youngest students ever admitted to the Paris Conservatoire, in 1889.

But first a little about that fascinating father, prior even to his marriage with Marie. Not only was Pierre-Joseph Ravel a trained civil engineer who had directed the construction of a railroad line from Madrid to Irus, but he was also an inventor, and but for an incident in 1870, he might even be considered to be the father of the automobile. In 1868, seven years before his son's birth, he had actually filed a patent for a "steam generator heated by oil, applied to locomotion" – i.e., an auto-mobile. And yes, it wasn't just a theoretical patent: the elder Ravel built his steam-powered auto and was known to have frequently driven it in the industrial areas on the outskirts of Paris. He also invented a supercharged two-stroke engine. But as for "that incident"? At one point during the 1870 Franco-Prussian War fortifications were built to defend Paris – and they were built directly upon the warehouse in which Ravel's prototype was stored. The entire building and its contents were destroyed, Pierre-Joseph was ruined and he returned to Spain to continue building railroad lines. But after meeting Marie Delouart in Aranjuez some years later, they were married in Paris in 1873 and after their son's 1875 birth - three months after, as noted: they returned to life in Paris. The inventions DID keep flowing, and Maurice's younger brother Edouard (1878-1960) followed their father's profession, becoming an engineer and would develop inventions with the elder Ravel. Among those many later interesting patents was one for an automobile which could turn somersaults. Why? Why not! It was built – including an immense wooden framework, and actually became a part of Barnum & Bailey's Circus from 1906-1907 in the US, until an accident occurred, killing the driver. After that, the "Vortex of Death" as it was known – pretty much disappeared.

Father Pierre-Maurice had – as a young man, wanted to become a concert pianist, and had studied intensively, until he decided upon that more reliable career as an engineer. Though they were far from wealthy, both parents encouraged their elder son's music interests and hired private tutors in various music disciplines including piano and composition studies, beginning at age six.

I think it's easy to project that sort of left/right brain cooperation from father to son Maurice Ravel, too – the absolutely punctilious man who carefully crafted every note, every dynamic, every articulation – combined with one whose emotional expression was simply limitless. Just listen to his ballet *Daphnis et Chloe*, which is one of my favorite pieces of music by anyone – and you'll see what I mean. Unbridled joy, savagery, pensiveness, passion and one of the most ravishing depictions of dawn by ANY composer – and it'll help you to understand this man.

In his own words, "throughout my childhood I was sensitive to music. My father, much better educated in this art than most amateurs are, knew how to develop my taste and to stimulate my enthusiasm at an early age." Maurice was extremely close to his mother, and he recalled her singing folk songs to him

among his earliest memories. Home-schooled (like Berlioz,) he received his education from his father. Though he learned the fundamentals of music from his tutors.

And it was that amazing ability to compose music which secured him a place in the Conservatoire at only age 14 – music which was totally original, music which perhaps was perplexing to the academes who try to teach that there was only ONE way to compose music, but music which was an honest expression of what was in the boy’s – and later the man’s heart AND mind. But just don’t call it “impressionism!”

But let’s also get one thing out of the way, that massive 800-pound gorilla sitting over there: “**Bolero**.”



That’s the piece which is immediately recognized by nearly anyone. And not just for its use in the 1979 Blake Edwards film “10” starring Bo Derek and Dudley Moore. A film which was released the year before “*The Shining*” – mere coincidence?! In any event, **Bolero** is merely 15 minutes of a repetitious tune, a very simple tune, changing only in its instrumentation as we hear it move on and on – and while Ravel does call for a massive orchestra, they’re not heard altogether until the end. How can tension and interest be sustained with a

piece of music which just repeats and repeats and repeats? The answer is, that besides the one modulation near the end: he does so with orchestral color. Ravel, like Berlioz: was a master orchestrator and in fact, another immediately-recognizable piece of music is “**Pictures at an Exhibition**,” which ISN’T by Ravel, but by the Russian Modest Mussorgsky – decades after Mussorgsky drank himself to an early death, Ravel took Mussorgsky’s piano set and orchestrated it incredibly well, though some feel it’s a little too French in sound and not quite Russian enough. But there you are: the power of orchestration. There are at least 30 or more orchestrations of the piano work, but Ravel’s is the stand-out and the one which is usually played. But he also pulled off the orchestral tone-painting with unbelievably complex works as well – not merely simple ones.

(Sidebar: “**Bolero**” – which is actually an ancient dance form, was composed by Ravel in 1928 as a commissioned ballet from Ida Rubenstein, and its premiere resulted in both ecstatic cheers and cries of “Madman! Rubbish! He’s a Madman!” Ravel was more gratified by the cries of the latter, stating simply that those who thought him to be mad were the ones who had truly understood the piece. Whatever the case he considered it to be among his least important works and frankly, resented its popularity. To his thinking, its obsessive quality and sexual undertones were what appealed to so many. Imagine his pained surprise if he knew that it would become – rightfully or wrongly – his most-well-known musical composition, mostly due to a film that would be released a little more than four decades after his death!)

But back to young Ravel. So – he entered the Conservatoire in 1889, but was not a very good student – mostly because his progressivism just didn't fit in. The Conservatoire was – well, quite Conservative, and Ravel – young as he was, didn't really appreciate his independent creativity being stifled. Unable to truly apply himself, he was initially dismissed in 1895. Two years later he returned, studying composition under Gabriel Fauré and counterpoint with André Gédalge. Ravel and Fauré got along very well, with Fauré being a very encouraging instructor who respected Ravel's personal path. But after only another three years, he was again dismissed by the school administration – in 1900, at age 25. He was still able to enter the *Prix de Rome*, but – his treatment by the school leadership and *Prix* panel was so dismissive and scornful, and by now he had built up such an important public following due to so many publicly-performed works such as the gorgeous *Pavane pour une Infante Défunte*, *Jeux D'eau*, his (sole) *String Quartet* and his *Shéhérazade* orchestral song cycle.

The school now operated under the leadership of the hyper-conservative Théodore Dubois, and for year after year, Ravel had entered, but had never won that top prize, despite all his public recognition. Finally, when – in 1905, he entered but was disqualified in the preliminaries, and it was revealed that Dubois had actually warned Ravel with the comment “Ravel may look upon us as old fogies if he pleases, but he will not make fools of us with impunity.” Well, the public response was sheer outrage, and the Conservatoire's behavior backfired, resulting in what was called the “Ravel Affair.” Consequently, Dubois was forced to resign from the directorship of the Conservatoire, and Faure was appointed as his replacement. Little matter, though: Ravel's craftsmanship and frankly gorgeous music had secured for him great public favor outside of the Conservatoire before he turned 30. At this point, he composed – without continuing academic studies that frankly at that time of his career: were no longer necessary or helpful. His meticulous craftsmanship meant that he usually spent a great deal of time perfecting his pieces, reducing their eventual quantity in his catalogue.

When the grumblings about Ravel having borrowed a little too heavily from Debussy began to grow louder, Ravel cleverly created an anonymous 1911 premiere for the original piano version of *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales*: the piece was performed with no composer attributed, and the distinguished music critics present were then asked to submit their guesses as to who the composer might have been. Nearly no one guessed Debussy – with nearly all perplexed – while making a wide range of outlandish guesses though a slight majority did correctly guess that the composer was, in fact: Ravel. The grumblings ceased.

With the onset of war in 1914, Ravel was highly disappointed when he was turned down due to his height. He was able to drive military vehicles, most notably at the front during the Battle of Verdun. The war devastated him and he was unable to write for quite a while. He was further affected by the 1917 death of his mother and Debussy's passing the following year, eight months before the war ended. The 1920s were largely spend concertizing more than composing; he made a memorable and very lucrative five-month concert trip to the United States in 1928, where he became enamored by jazz, and also struck up a friendship with George Gershwin. Gershwin was a huge fan of Ravel's music – and



Ravel felt the same way about that of Gershwin. When the younger man begged to study with the older composer, Ravel – who had just seen a performance of Gershwin’s musical “Funny Face” on Broadway – replied “but why would you wish to write bad Ravel when you already write such wonderful Gershwin?” Gershwin took Ravel to Harlem to hear jazz, and Ravel’s music began to incorporate elements of jazz within it, notably in the G-Major piano concerto completed in 1931.

(Above, what an amazing 53rd birthday celebration THAT must have been, and in America at that! Here, Ravel is seated at the piano in Manhattan on March 8, 1928 with, among others: George Gershwin standing at far right – during Ravel’s American concert tour.)

(At right, Ravel 16 years earlier, in 1912 – the year he orchestrated the Valses)

The composer began to slow when, in 1932 he struck his head during a taxi accident and began having memory issues. His health was further compounded by additional brain “malfunctions” which are believed to have been the result of the neurological disorder known as Pick’s Disease; these malfunctions began to devastate his speech and movement. This lack of control over his motor functions progressed to the point that he couldn’t compose in his latter years, and by 1935 he was no longer able to communicate.



Two years later – following an unsuccessful surgery: Ravel died three days after Christmas, 1937.

Valses Nobles et Sentimentales, Original piano version 1911; Orchestrated by the composer – 1912

The title is a sort of homage to Franz Schubert (1797-1828) who himself composed a set of ***Valses Nobles*** and another – a set of ***Valses Sentimentales***. I



always enjoy sharing what composers themselves wrote of their own music, and as Ravel shared in an autobiographical blurb:

“The title Valses nobles et sentimentales sufficiently indicates my intention of composing a series of waltzes in imitation of Schubert. Here we have a markedly clearer kind of writing, which crystallizes the harmony and sharpens the profile of the music.”

This set consists of seven different waltzes, as well as a concluding one as an epilogue. Upon being published in 1911 in its original piano solo form, the score included a quote from Henri de Régnier:

“le plaisir délicieux et toujours nouveau d’une occupation inutile” – or: *“the delicious and ever-new pleasure of a useless occupation.”*

In 1912, Ravel orchestrated ***Valses nobles et sentimentales***, as a brief ballet of less than 20 minutes with a scenario by the composer himself – that the orchestral version premiered on April 22, 1912 – 112 years nearly to the day of our own MYSO performances of the piece. (Photo at top of page is from the 1912 premiere.) The ballet was called ***Adélaïde, ou le langage des fleurs (Adelaide: The Language of Flowers)*** and it’s set in 1820s Paris, based upon *La Dame aux Camélias*, the novel and (later) play by Alexandre Dumas (fils) which was also the source material for Giuseppe Verdi’s great opera ***La traviata***. Ravel’s use of the plot is considerably shorter than that of Verdi! The ballet takes place at the home of courtesan Adélaïde, and is the story of Adelaide and her two vying suitors, Lorédan and the Duke. The flowers of the title symbolize the characters’ emotions, primarily love, rejection, hope, etc. All of which come through brilliantly thanks to the sensitivity, passion and meticulous craftsmanship of Maurice Ravel.

Hector Berlioz “*Symphonie fantastique: Épisode de la vie d'un artiste en cinq parties*” (Fantasy Symphony: Episode in the life of an artist in five parts) best known simply as “*Symphonie Fantastique*” opus 14, 1830

After presenting my biographical accounting of the life of Berlioz at top, let's jump right into the music, with only a few diversions into Berlioz's life – due to their profound relevance to the birth of this piece.

You'll remember I left something of a gap following Berlioz's trip to the theatre in 1827 and follow-up visits during which he was smitten with the Irish actress Harriet Smithson, when the composer was 23 and the actress was 27. He was at the height of young passion, and his physical appearance matched his emotions: he had wild, flaming red hair, and was already known throughout Paris as something of a hopeless romantic, as well as an upstart musician. In addition to what I've quoted above, here's a bit more from his Memoirs:



"I come now to the supreme drama of my life. An English company had come over to Paris to give a season of Shakespeare at the Odeon. I was at the first night of Hamlet. In the role of Ophelia I saw Harriet Smithson. The impression made on my heart and mind by her extraordinary talent, nay, her dramatic genius, was equaled only by the havoc wrought in me by the poet she so nobly interpreted. That is all I can say."

"I was so shaken by what I had experienced, that I determined never again to expose myself to the fire of Shakespeare's genius"

And: *"That woman shall be my wife, and on that drama I shall write my greatest symphony!"*



He was totally smitten with her, this leading actress of the English troupe. He fell in love with her slender figure, with her fiery compelling eyes which he felt stared directly at and through him. He KNEW they were meant for each other – this celebrated star of the British stage, and he – the young composer who would, who MUST be: the savior of music, unknown that he was.

He sent notes to the theatre begging to meet her, and made every OTHER effort to do so. All resulting in failure. Her responses to this creature she'd never heard of were blasé or non-existent. After all, she received legions of love letters from the unknown. And she DID get back to him in a somewhat derisive manner, and rather than the perfection of womanhood he felt her to be, there WERE those whispered rumors of Harriet's sexual adventures in London, of lasciviousness, of quick affairs,

of lewd behavior. And that was that. *(She's shown above circa 1827-28, at the height of her powers and transcontinental fame.)* The tour from England to France ended, Smithson left France – and Berlioz was left mooning over her. But was he mooning over a glowing angel or a filthy devil? Before, in time – that mooning turned to irritation, then anger – and finally, a certain level of antipathy which might have even approximated cold, bitter hatred for this actress who had never afforded Berlioz so much as the courtesy of a chance to meet face-to-face. He even took an apartment near hers so he could watch her

activities, sent her flowers and notes constantly – in short, he became her stalker. But from her? Only the most negative of responses, if that.

The more he thought, the more he fumed; he eventually began his rebound affair with Marie-Félicité-Denise Moke which turned into the engagement with the young lady which eventually turned into yet ANOTHER rebuff by a female when her mother informed Hector in Italy that not only was their engagement off, but that her daughter had already married the wealthy, successful Camille Pleyel. And so he decided to kill the three of them: Camille, Camille and that old cow of a mother, though fortunately, he came to his senses and the possibility of ending up in the guillotine had he carried out that murderous plot. Before eventually abandoning Italy and prematurely returning to Paris.

And beyond all THAT, his career wasn't going great guns either. And then 1830 rolled in.

Berlioz – over the previous year, had been thinking – he had been hatching an idea, slowly. And that idea was this:

Yes, he WOULD compose a piece of music, but its purpose would be to publicly shame that... that...ACTRESS who had scorned him, who had wronged him by never comprehending his heart-felt entreaties. He'd create a musical work – a SYMPHONY, a PROGRAM symphony which would expose her for the selfish, terrible wretch she surely was. He'd hold her up to ridicule; he'd teach her a lesson. And THEN – well...maybe...she'd love him! Sure! That'd do the trick!

And so, from February through April of 1830, he WROTE that symphony. That symphony with an unconventional FIVE movements - well, yes, Beethoven had already composed a five-movement symphony 22 years earlier, in 1808 – with his 6th Symphony, the “Pastoral” but – that was beside the point. And yes, the Pastoral WAS a program symphony – one telling a story instead of merely following a technical form – but: a mere three years after Beethoven's 1827 death; just 8 years after Beethoven had composed his final symphony – his 9th in d-minor with the chorus and the soloists, and all that – and while the mighty, revered Beethoven HAD opened the door to the idea of a symphony presenting a programmatic story, or philosophy – well, thank YOU! That's the way, the route for the future but this would be DIFFERENT. No singers – but it would be an overt demonstration of movements modeled after classical instrumentation, and ones which would be an entirely NEW orchestra. Berlioz would include an English horn! And he'd even throw in not one but TWO Ophicleides! Those huge, unwieldy deep-pitched brass instruments. And four bassoons! He would have two cornets and two trumpets, but he wouldn't even use the trumpets until the final two movements, or the trombones or ophicleides, and he'd throw in not one but TWO harps, but he'd fix 'em by only having them play in the second movement, but then they'd have to sit there throughout the entire four OTHER movements...and – well, he'd do ALL this, and he was only 29 years old! And Beethoven had only been dead for three years and Schubert for two, but this was TOMORROW! He would build on Beethoven – and he'd bridge the orchestra of orchestra and create the orchestra of TOMORROW, the new Romantic-era symphony orchestra and THEN he'd show 'em, but most

important:

He'd show **HER**.

He even wrote that she **MUST** attend that 1830 premiere, in order that everyone would know, and that she would then be publicly humiliated:

"I hope that wretched woman will be there, (though) I do not believe it...she will surely recognize herself in reading the programme of my instrumental drama and she will make sure not to appear (at the concert.)"

And here's where I'll let Berlioz tell you what it all means, in his own words – the programme of the piece. This is the story of the symphony, his synopses of each of the five movements, just as it appeared not only in advance, but then again in the premiere programs first at the Conservatoire's private student concert on December 5, 1830 – and then later, after he had revised the symphony (the biggest change: he reversed the second and third movements; ***Scene Aux Champs*** had originally been the second movement) when it was offered, on December 9, 1832 - again at the Conservatoire but as a regular, fully-public event.

A few advance explanations: the "Parts" below are the five movements. First he lists his movement headings and then explains or elaborates them below. The "Fixed Idee" is the "Idee Fixé" – or a brief motif he composed to represent the "beloved." THAT woman. That motif appears in each of the five movements, and in some – most notably the final movement – it's contorted and perverted from something lovely into something mocking, ugly. At the conclusion of the fourth movement, not only does Berlioz depict the great slam as the guillotine blade severs the head of the hallucinating artiste, but that's quickly followed by three string pizzicati, which represent the sound of the severed head falling into the basket. In the final movement, about one-third of the way into that movement, he first states the Latin Chant "Dies Irae," preceded by deep church bells – which is something you should immediately recognize from its use in the 1980 film "*The Shining*" – as well as many other popular culture usages. Then – you'll hear the "Ronde du Sabbat" or the sound of the Dance of the Witches' Sabbath, and then he ingenuously combines the two.

*François-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand (September 4, 1768 – July 4, 1848) – who envisioned himself as France's greatest writer, poet, philosopher and lover of his day – and actually, probably WAS. At least the first three categories. His travels to America in 1791 were actually laden with amazing experiences, and many of his ensuing writings were infused with a sense of that early American eye-opening trek. When Berlioz mentions Chateaubriand's 1802 novella ***René***, it's with good reason. Like much of Chateaubriand's work, René helped to define and usher in French literary Romanticism – it's a thinly-veiled autobiographic fictional work which recounts the central character's time among the native Americans and the people of the natchez Louisiana. Like a good sturm und drang story, it's wistful, melancholic, unhappy and dark, and ends as it should: with the death of

René's beloved sister Adèle – and then, we're told: he himself...

†a herd of cows.

So: did he show HER? Did he teach her a lesson? Did he strike back at the very heart of that thoughtless creature, that – that – ACTRESS?

Well...no. That in-house, private performance DID create a real buzz, but – nothing out of Harriet Smithson, who was back in England, and probably not even aware of Berlioz other than – if she recalled his name at all, it would have been because of those letters some whack job sent her back in 1827.

So – he forgot about her – or so he thought; the imprint had been made and it was a very deep one. He revised the piece, and then it made its PUBLIC debut at that concert on December 9, 1832 – two years later. The concert attended by those many dignitaries and so many famous members of the arts and cultural communities.

Here's part of a letter Hector sent to his father the very next day, after that second (and now public) performance at which not only the revised *Symphonie* but also the new *Lélio* had been performed – “Camille” was how his then-fiancée was known rather than by her full, formal name “Marie-Félicité-Denise” Moke. Which – considering that she married Camille Pleyel, must have made for some mighty funny shenanigans around their home if anyone ever said anything insulting about “Camille” but they wouldn't know just WHICH “Camille”...

I have only had time to write you a short note; my concert took place yesterday with extraordinary success. The Symphonie fantastique was greeted with shouts and stamping of feet; the public asked for the Marche du supplice to be encored, but as it was very late and the Songe d'une nuit du sabbat is a long piece, Habeneck did not want to repeat the movement; it was pointed out that it would be too much, and the public did not insist.

Camille [Moke] and her mother were there, they were scared to death by what Mme Moke was calling my extravagant programme; they were overcome with emotion, Camille was saying to me yesterday evening: « No, I would never have imagined that an orchestra could produce such effects. Oh! how I now detest my piano music, how poverty-stricken and mean it is! »

Mme Moke was in a state of extraordinary agitation.

Pixis, Spontini, Meyerbeer and Fétis were cheering furiously, and on hearing my Marche du supplice Spontini exclaimed: « There has only been one man capable of writing such a piece, it is Beethoven; it is prodigious! »

Pixis embraced me, and so did more than fifty others. It was a furor. Liszt the celebrated pianist dragged me home by force as it were to dine with him, and overwhelmed me with the most energetic displays of enthusiasm. Poor M. Lesueur was still unwell and was unable to come, but these ladies were present and are delighted. [...]

The one person Berlioz didn't name when telling his father about all those who had been present?

Harriet Smithson. Herself. In da flesh, in poison. Because she HAD heard about this madman who had written a symphony which might have somehow, been about HER. And the performance confirmed those intimations that it was she, Harriet – upon whom this symphony was based, first the “beloved” and finally – the prostitute of a witch which she finally is shown to be in the fifth movement. And just in case she HAD missed that point, in *Lélio* there's this line from the male ACTOR, not singer – who delivers these lines as Berlioz specifies:

“Oh! Why can't I find this Juliette, this Ophelia, whom my heart calls! Why can't I get intoxicated with this joy mixed with sadness that true love gives; and one autumn evening, rocked with her by the north wind on some wild heather, I would finally fall asleep in her arms with a melancholy and last sleep!”

Well, there was no way of getting around THAT, was there? And apparently, that's the moment when Harriet Smithson realized that not only WAS she the subject of the *Symphonie*, but also that Berlioz – in *her* mind: was still in love with her, just as he had professed to be in those letters he sent her in 1827..

But to be perfectly blunt, she was not the Harriet Smithson she had once been. Though only five years had passed since Berlioz first saw her on the stage, her career had taken something of a downward spiral. Now, at 32: she was considered to be something of a washed-up yesterday's ingénue. And in fact, a mere THREE years after Berlioz had become enraptured, and ironically on the very same night of the *Symphonie*'s private premiere at the Conservatoire (December 5, 1830) Harriet had been the grateful recipient of funds raised from a benefit that evening expressly arranged to help her out in her now somewhat-desperate straits. And now, five years after that first rush of infatuation *from* Berlioz, and just after that concert in which she experienced “her” piece and its follow-up composition in its public premiere: it was received by both (most) critics and audience alike as a huge success. Berlioz was lauded. His symphony was celebrated both that first night and immediately after. The deed was done, and she had witnessed it in person. It was almost like some strange consummation of an affair AND a reversal of their roles. And ironically, the star-crossed lover Romeo who had been infatuated with his Juliet now became the Hamlet who scorns his Ophelia. Now HE was the star and she was one the

outside, looking in. Not long after that concert, the 29-year-old triumphal Berlioz received a letter from the 32-year-old Harriet Smithson, asking that they might meet.

Yes, she asked to meet HIM. Karma, anyone?

And so, they met. For the first time, finally. After EVERYTHING – the infatuation, the unanswered letters to her, those which HAD received her mocking response, the anger, the creation of this damning indictment of her thoughtlessness – which EVERYONE understood fully, and especially in realizing just who the object of the artiste’s desire *was* in real life. And there, finally:



She sat.

NOW what?

Well: his cold, frozen and retributive heart melted away, the sap. There she was: HARRIET SMITHSON, the object of his infatuation. And in true Romantic-era style, they enjoyed each others’ company. They became lovers.

**And then –
THEY.
GOT.
MARRIED.**

Yup – Berlioz eventually, just as he had predicted years earlier – married his Juliet, his Ophelia. It was simply destined to be, and through the extraordinary inspiration and hard work of creating this revolutionary,

vengeful symphony, they got married, over the objection of both sets of parents. Like Romeo and Juliet.

And they lived happily ever after.

Actually, I’m lying. Their marriage, despite the birth of their one-and-only child – a son they named Louis-Clément-Thomas Berlioz: began happily, but within a few short years, became a miserable one. A terrible union. Harriet – who, again: was on the decline (*picture above of Harriet in 1835, career nearly over*) and no longer enjoyed the rapture of crowds or love of audiences – began to resent her

husband's success, and success it WAS. She resented the fact he was four years her junior, making her feel even older. She began to drink. She no longer took care of herself. She became not only jealous of her husband, but possessive, nearly to the point of being a strangling psychopath. Her drinking binges were constant, and nearly epic. She became both verbally and physically abusive of this man who had once been obsessive of HER. She finally retired in 1836, and though they could no longer live with one



another, couldn't divorce due to their Roman Catholic tradition and family faith, despite the fact Hector had long earlier become agnostic. Her husband, now pushed beyond his limit, took a mistress in 1841 – an operatic singer named Marie Recio (*shown at left.*)

Finally, in 1843 Harriet walked out – and only five years later, began to suffer a series of strokes and other medical challenges which eventually left her essentially paralyzed. Hector continued to take care of Harriet financially, paying for the live-in nurse she now required, and visiting her constantly – through illness and finally, Harriet's death in 1853, ten years after their union ended informally. Hector stipulated in his will that after his own death, Harriet should be buried next to him.

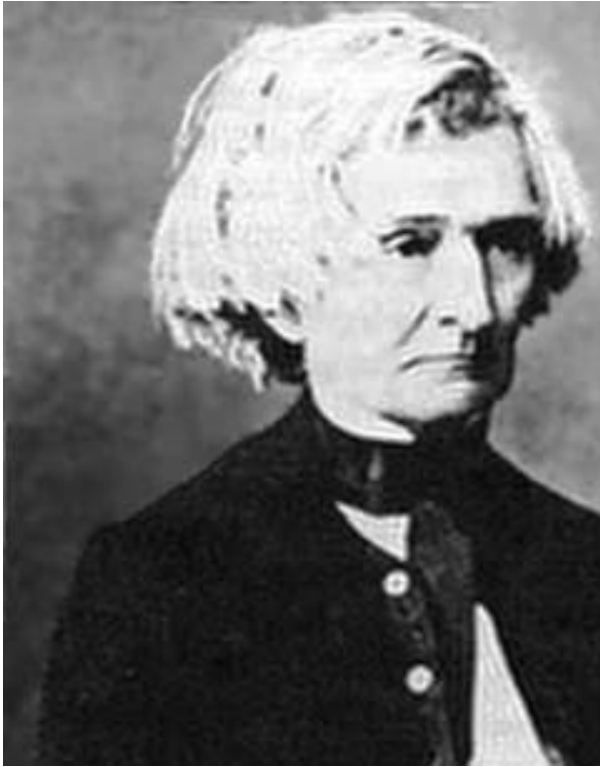
Romanticism carried to an incredible extreme!

Love at first sight, infatuation with this stunning star of the stage who scorned him, then – five years later, that same famed talented beauty began to finally return his affection (after she had nearly killed it off!)

and then they joyously made this fairy tale union take wing despite and over the opposition of their relatives – and then, it slowly died through jealousy, heartbreak and hatred – though in the end, they were to remain together forever. Just can't make this stuff up.

Now that death had freed him from his wedding vows, Hector was able to marry Marie Recio – which resulted in the wonderful, happy marriage he hadn't sustained with Harriet. And in a strange bit of a love triangle amongst the dead, Berlioz also stipulated that should he survive HER, he wanted Marie to ALSO be buried at his side. And so – that all came to be – Marie died suddenly in 1862, and Berlioz took care of *her* mother, who moved in with him as each tended to each other in a wonderful platonic relationship they had shared from their first meeting. After Marie's death, Berlioz met a charming

young woman named Amélie – and it's believed that had a romance despite her being in her twenties – and Berlioz – NOT being in his twenties but a man just short of 60. Their relationship didn't last a year, but not many months after they had gone their separate ways, Berlioz was shocked to discover quite by accident that Amélie had died at 26. He was at this point so melancholic that he sought out and found



that object of his very first love, back when he was 11: Estelle, she of the pink boots. She had been married but her husband had died, and now, at 67 (and Berlioz at 60,) they rekindled their youthful friendship, and Berlioz would visit her every summer and they'd write constantly in between. But – and as can be seen at left, he was not a happy man in the least. Remember his two younger sisters Nancy and Adèle? They had remained constant presences in his life, but when, in 1863 he turned 60, he – as he wrote, was overwhelmed by “*despair and disillusionment of appalling intensity.*” Gone from his life were both sisters and both wives – and he was now consumed by the haunting thoughts that he would be next. As he wrote in 1864, “*I am in my 61st year; past hopes, past illusions, past high thoughts and lofty conceptions. My son is almost always far away from me. I am alone. My contempt for the folly and baseness of mankind, my hatred of its atrocious cruelty, has never been so intense. And I say*

hourly to Death: 'When you will.' Why does he delay?'”

Hector Berlioz doted upon his son, who – just like his father, had been born 10 months after his parents' marriage. And Louis returned his father's deep affection, cheering him on and making him proud as Hector aged. Louis became a merchant marine captain, but in 1867 the father was informed that his son – just like that: had died of yellow fever in Havana.

That loss struck Berlioz VERY deeply and he never really recovered from it. And beyond his mental depression, he was plagued by health problems – chief among them being intestinal neuralgia, which was the bane of his final years of life, from the age of 59. His pain increased as he aged, and he began to treat the pain with laudanum, which was *the* addictive pain blocker of its time. Laudanum itself led to other problems which in many cases during the 19th and early 20th centuries, could themselves lead to death.

In his last years, having survived those who meant the most to him, he resided in his home along with Marie Recio Berlioz's mother, who served as something of a caretaker to the composer. He made a major final revision to his *Mémoires*, but when it came to composing and (otherwise) literary writing, he

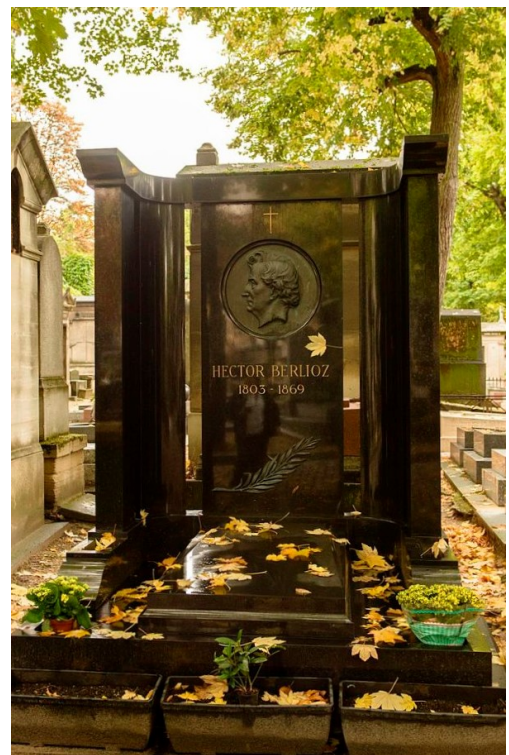
was done. That was that. He did continue to correspond with Estelle, and was uplifted when her letters arrived. His revision of the *Mémoires* closed with a tribute to Estelle – and a near- in memoriam to himself as he knew that death was ever-closer:

“Love or music, which power can uplift man to the sublimest heights? It is a large question, yet it seems to me that one should answer it in this way; love cannot give an idea of music, but music can give an idea of love. But why separate them? They are the two wings of the soul.”

Just before his son died, Berlioz had been signed to conduct a series of concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg; with the death of his son he was even LESS inclined to carry out that tour (he had never really been in favor of it, but the money was good) and with only a total of eight concerts to conduct, he ultimately decided to go anyway. The tour was successful – with Berlioz conducting four Beethoven symphonies and the music of Christoph Wilibald Gluck among others. And though Berlioz really didn't want to conduct his own music, he did perform the ***Symphonie Fantastique***, sections of ***Damnation of Faust***, and ***Romeo and Juliet***, as well as the last music he conducted in his life: his ***Harold en Italie*** – that marvelous symphony with viola soloist he had composed in the 1830s.

The tour over, he took his time returning from Russia, and while spending some time in Monte Carlo, he fell and struck his head. A few days later he fell again, and was injured more seriously than he had been in that first fall. He suffered from “cerebral congestion” and was restricted to bedrest for a few days, until it was felt he could return home to Paris. Once there: friends noticed he seemed different. He seemed to have lost his will to live, and began to suffer a series of strokes. The first one resulted in Berlioz becoming partially paralyzed; the second not long thereafter was far more severe took away his ability to speak. Following that one, he could only (barely) smile and lift himself up when visitors called. Finally, in early March of 1869 he left consciousness – falling into a deep coma which presaged the end. That end came on March 8th.

On March 11, his memory was observed as his coffin was removed from his house to begin a funerary procession to the new *Eglise de la Trinite*, accompanied by music from the first part of his own ***Symphonie Funebre et Triomphale***. Notables, colleagues and friends offered speeches while more music was played – by Cherubini, Beethoven, Mozart, and music from his own ***Grande Messe des Mortes***. He was finally buried in the *Cimetière de Montmartre* (established in 1825 and known officially as *Cimetière du Nord*.) along Berlioz Avenue – in a grave where his two late wives would





later join him, as he had stipulated. (*At left: Marie and Harriet rest with their husband, whose large marker (previous page) is to the right.*)

And thus – this incredible revolutionary whose impact on music would last forever, who had slowly become outpaced within his own lifetime: was no more. But his music, and particularly the two pieces I’ve programmed for our concert weekend – *will* last forever.
