

Music 320

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

Biography

- Born in Lyon, son of wealthy doctor who didn't want Hector to be musician. Hector studied medicine in public, music in secret; eventually overcame parental opposition.
- Attended **Paris Conservatoire**, entered **Prix de Rome** (composition competition that still exists today; eventually won on 4th try; studied in Rome and then Germany).
- Berlioz had many non-compositional accomplishments, esp. literary and conducting efforts.
 - Treatise on Instrumentation (1843) explained concepts of orchestration and was definitive source for teaching orch. through 19th century; still used today
 - Many other literary works including Evenings with the Orchestra.
- Three important events in 1827-28 changed his life (he was 24-25 yrs old)
 - heard Beethoven's 3rd and 5th symphonies for first time
 - read French translation of Goethe's Faust
 - saw his first production of Shakespeare, Hamlet (Charles Kemble played Hamlet, young actress named Harriet Smithson as Ophelia)
- Summation of Berlioz: he was the "leading musician of his age in a country, France, whose principal artistic endeavor was then literary, in an art, music, whose principal pioneers were then German."

Composition Periods

- Works which were composed for Prix de Rome attempts are from his **earliest comp. period**; later he borrowed ideas and themes from these works
- **Second Comp Period** 1830 (Symphonie Fantastique) to 1846 (Damnation of Faust)
 - expanded musical resources;
 - wrote for larger orch, more different wind instruments;
 - exploited some of the new improvements to instruments, such as woodwind fingering systems and brass valves.
- **Final period** is called "neo-classic" in that it is philosophically retrospective especially Humanism

Works

- ***Symphonie Fantastique***, "an episode in an artist's life" has 5 movements that tell a story (but entirely instrumental)
 - Berlioz issued a pamphlet containing program; program went through several versions
 - Central organizing idea is a melody or ***idée fixe***:
 - appears in each movement
 - represents the woman who is the object of adoration of the central character
- "Second Symphony" or *Harold in Italy*: a dramatic orchestral work, also has a solo instrument (viola), makes concerto part of hybrid mix
 - story was well known: based on popular poem Childe Harold's Pilgrimage by Lord Byron. Harold and his naivete are symbolized by an *idée fixe* played by viola
 - Written at request of Paganini
- Other hybrid pieces:
 - ***Lelio*** (sequel to Sym Fant): uses symphony plus chorus and narrator (NOT Programmatic)
 - ***Romeo & Juliet*** has several movements: inner ones are strictly symphonic, but lots of chorus in outer movements; Berlioz called it a "dramatic symphony"
 - ***Damnation of Faust*** has aspects of symphony, oratorio, opera, cantata.... Can't be clearly placed in any one category
- Some true Operas, including ***Les Troyens***; they have very demanding parts for singers, esp. range

Composition Traits

- Melody
 - He liked long, asymmetrical melodies
 - has lowered 6th scale degree
- Form:
 - Berlioz was as likely to use rhythm, tempo, dynamics, etc. to define sections of his pieces as using tonal contrast or themes.
 - Also used very distant key relationships