

Marlow U3A Music Appreciation Group, March 2011

(Louis)-Hector Berlioz



Le Carnaval Romain – Roman Carnival Overture

- ♪ Composed in 1843 and first performed in Paris on 3 February 1844
- ♪ A stand-alone overture intended for concert performance, made up of material and themes from Berlioz's opera *Benvenuto Cellini*, including some music from the opera's carnival scene - hence the overture's title. It is scored for large orchestra and features a prominent and famous solo for the cor anglais.

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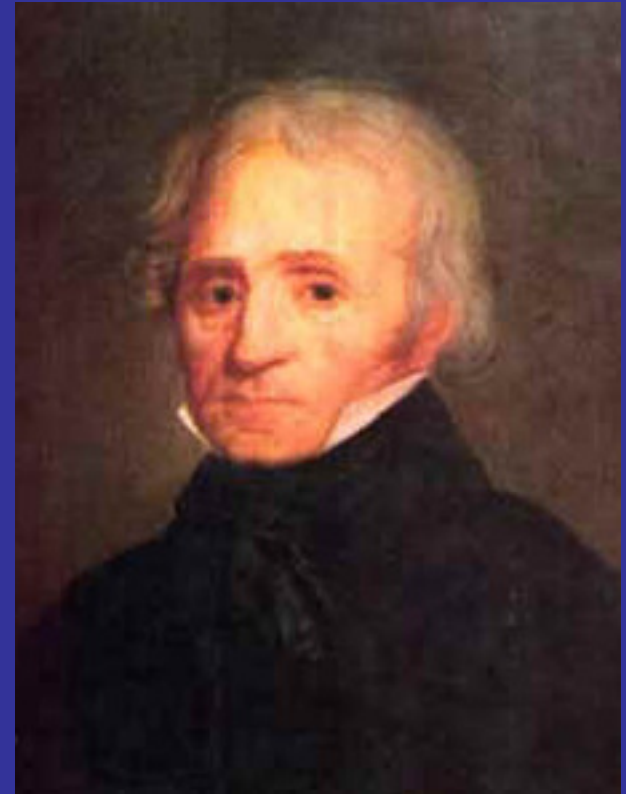
- ♪ **Greatest musical figure of French Romantic movement**
- ♪ **Romanticism expressed itself all through his life in a series of love affairs**
- ♪ **Romantic sensibility began in childhood – he would weep at a touching phrase in Virgil**



Lithograph of Berlioz 1845

Biography

- ♪ Born 1803 on 11 December, Côte-St-André, nr Grenoble, son of doctor who taught him flute
- ♪ took up guitar, never became fluent on any instrument – unusual in composer
- ♪ at 12 was in love with 18-year with pink shoes, called Estelle Duboeuf!



Berlioz's father

- ♪ **1821: sent to Paris to study medicine; found it distasteful and rebelled;**
- ♪ **joined ranks of Romantic movement;**
- ♪ **friend of writers Hugo, Dumas, Gautier, Balzac, etc., painters e.g. Delacroix; musicians Chopin, Liszt.**

♪ visited Paris Opéra and Conservatoire library, etc.;

♪ 1823: composed several works and started studying music privately;

♪ 1824: abandoned medicine for music; parents disapproved; more compositions;

♪ 1826: entered Paris Conservatoire to study composition.



Paris Opéra

♪ 1827: became infatuated with Irish actress Harriet Smithson; sent passionate letters, but she rebuffed him;

♪ 1827-1830: attempted Prix de Rome:

bursary entitling winner to free study in Rome. Father withdrew financial support. Wrote '*Symphonie Fantastique*', inspired by Harriet.



Harriet Smithson as Ophelia

♪ 1830: When about to leave for Rome, he became engaged to Marie Moke.

MARIE MOKE PLEYEL, PIANIST VIRTUOSO



- ♪ **He didn't like Italy: received news there that Marie was to marry Camille Pleyel; furious, he set off for Paris, in disguise, intent on murder and suicide;**
- ♪ **He relented and returned to Rome and travelled widely.**

♪ **1832: returned to Paris: Harriet was also there and he wrote in his memoirs:**

1832: "A hidden impulse moved me to take rooms in 1 rue Neuve Saint-Marc, which Miss Smithson had at one time occupied."

"Next day, meeting the old servant who had for many years been housekeeper to the establishment, I asked what had become of Miss Smithson and whether she had heard any news of her. 'But sir, didn't you...She's in Paris, she was staying here only a few days ago. She left the day before yesterday and moved to the rue de Rivoli. She was in the apartment you have now. She is director of an English company that's opening next week.'"

♪ Harriet attended the second performance of *Symphonie Fantastique*;

♪ introduced to Harriet; feverish courtship; he spoke no English, she no French, but in 1833 they married

♪ became newspaper music critic (lasted 25 years) to pay his and Harriet's debts; started writing books on music and eventually own memoirs;



Harriet c. 1819

♪ 1834: much-loved son Louis born;



Louis Berlioz

- ♪ **marriage unsuccessful; they lived in poverty;**
- ♪ **he started conducting his own and other composers' works - lucrative and creatively rewarding**



- ♪ 1841: began liaison with second-rate singer Marie Recio;
- ♪ European travel;
- ♪ 1844: separated from Harriet, lived with Marie Recio;
- ♪ continued to provide for Harriet; never quite forgot her; solicitous and tender when she became invalid.



Marie Recio

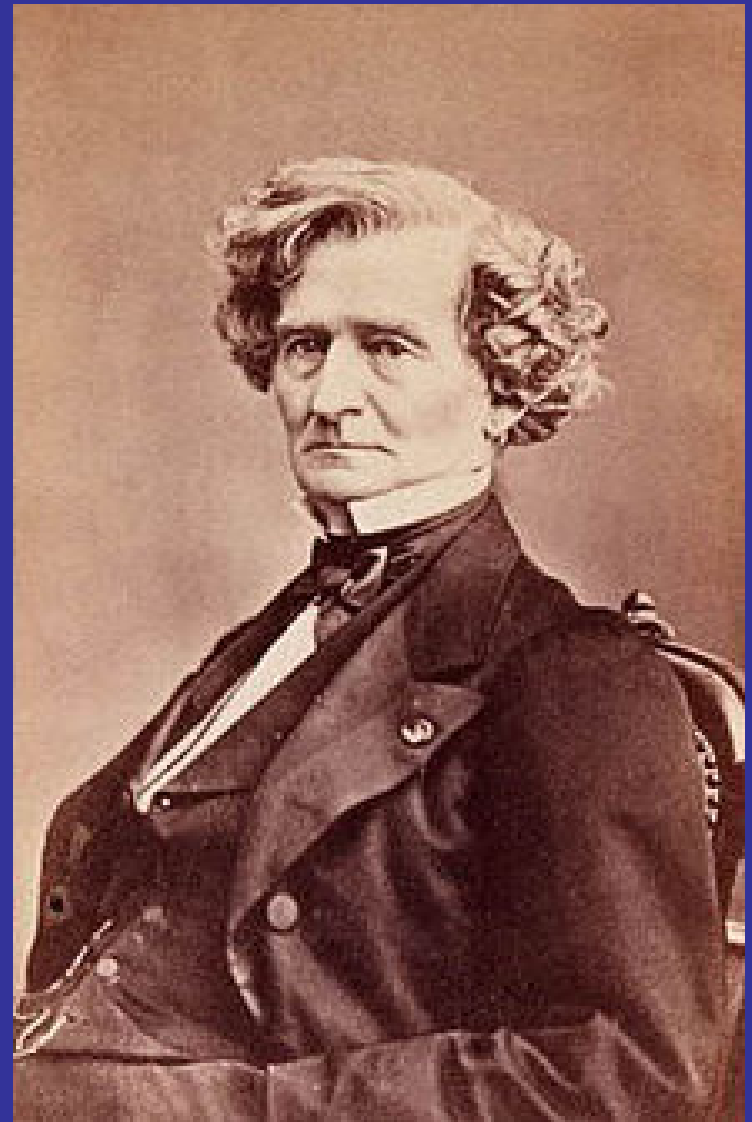
🎵 1854: Harriet died; Berlioz wrote after her death:

"I have nothing more to say of the two great loves that have had such deep and lasting influence on my heart and mind. One is a childhood memory ... the other came to me with Shakespeare ... A voice out of the burning bush, among the lightning flashes and thunderclaps of poetry that was new to me. It struck me down; my heart and whole being were possessed by a fierce, desperate passion in which love of the artist and of the art were interfused, each intensifying the other."

—Berlioz after Harriet's death, March 1854

- 🎵 later the same year, married Marie Recio; not successful marriage either;
- 🎵 1862: Marie died, aged 48; sought out Estelle and proposed but she refused;
- 🎵 other minor romances.

- ♪ suffered much ill health in latter years;
- ♪ 1867: devastated by son's death; burnt documents and mementos; wrote will;
- ♪ last days empty and solitary.



- ♪ **1869: died in Paris on 18 March; buried in Montmartre Cemetery with both wives**
- ♪ **Own epitaph from Shakespeare:**
“a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”.
- ♪ **After a colourful, but sad, life, he left an exciting and enduring musical legacy.**

Symphonie Fantastique: subtitled 'Episode in the Life of an Artist'

- ♪ Autobiographical work**
- ♪ Purely instrumental and programmatic, ie it tells a story**
- ♪ Features recurring melody 'idée fixe' , representing Harriet in real and imagined situations.**

Symphonie Fantastique: subtitled 'Episode in the Life of an Artist'

- ♪ First performance caused uproar; people aghast he'd composed something so explicitly autobiographical.**
- ♪ The symphony is one of the most important and representative pieces of the early Romantic period.**

1st movement: Rêveries – Passions (Daydreams – Passions)

- ♪ Harriet theme ('idée fixe') is introduced by the flute and first violins
- ♪ Theme occurs five times in all



Harriet Smithson, 1832. Unknown artist.

1st movement

The image displays a musical score for the first movement of a piece, consisting of six staves of music. The notation is written in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The score is characterized by a melodic line in the upper staves and a more rhythmic, accompanimental line in the lower staves. The upper staves feature a series of notes, often grouped by slurs, suggesting a flowing melodic line. The lower staves provide a steady accompaniment, with notes often beamed together in groups of four or six, creating a rhythmic pattern. The overall style is that of a classical or romantic-era piece, possibly a sonata or a concerto movement. The notation includes various note values, slurs, and articulation marks, indicating a specific performance style.

2nd movement: Un bal (A ball)

- ♪ introduction creates atmosphere of impending excitement, followed by two-harp passage
- ♪ harps provide glamour and sensual richness of ball
- ♪ flowing waltz theme appears, derived from the *idée fixe*

2nd movement: Un bal (A ball)



3rd movement: "Scène aux champs" (Scene in the Countryside)

- ♪ conversation between two shepherds
(cor anglais and offstage oboe)**
- ♪ duet and setting give him hope and
calm him – happier thoughts**
- ♪ he's lonely but hopes he'll no longer be
on his own**
- ♪ but what if she betrayed him!**

3rd movement: "Scène aux champs" (Scene in the Countryside)

- ♪ hopes, fears and ideas of happiness, disturbed by dark premonitions, subject of adagio
- ♪ thunder (innovative passage for four timpani) solitude – silence
- ♪ *Idée fixe* is played on oboe and flute in this movement



4th movement: “Marche au supplice” (March to the Scaffold)

- ♪ artist poisons himself, but it doesn't kill him; heavy sleep with strange visions**
- ♪ dreams he's killed beloved, condemned, led to scaffold, witnesses own execution**
- ♪ procession advances - march (horns, rushing passages, scurrying figures)**

4th movement: “Marche au supplice” (March to the Scaffold)

- ♪ at end of march, first 4 bars of idée fixe (clarinet) reappear
- ♪ interrupted by fatal blow (single short chord) of guillotine blade
- ♪ head bounces down steps (pizzicato notes)
- ♪ final 9 bars intended to convey cheering of onlooking throng

4th movement: “Marche au supplice” (March to the Scaffold)



5th movement: "Songe d'une nuit de sabbat" (Dreams of a Witches' Sabbath)

- ♪ artist sees himself at witches sabbath among sorcerers and monsters gathered for his funeral**
- ♪ strange sounds, groans, outbursts of laughter**
- ♪ the beloved melody appears (shrill piccolos and clarinet) but now vulgar dance tune**

5th movement: "Songe d'une nuit de sabbat" (Dreams of a Witches' Sabbath)

- ♪ she is coming to the sabbath and joins the diabolical gathering
- ♪ the funeral knell tolls, the witches dance.

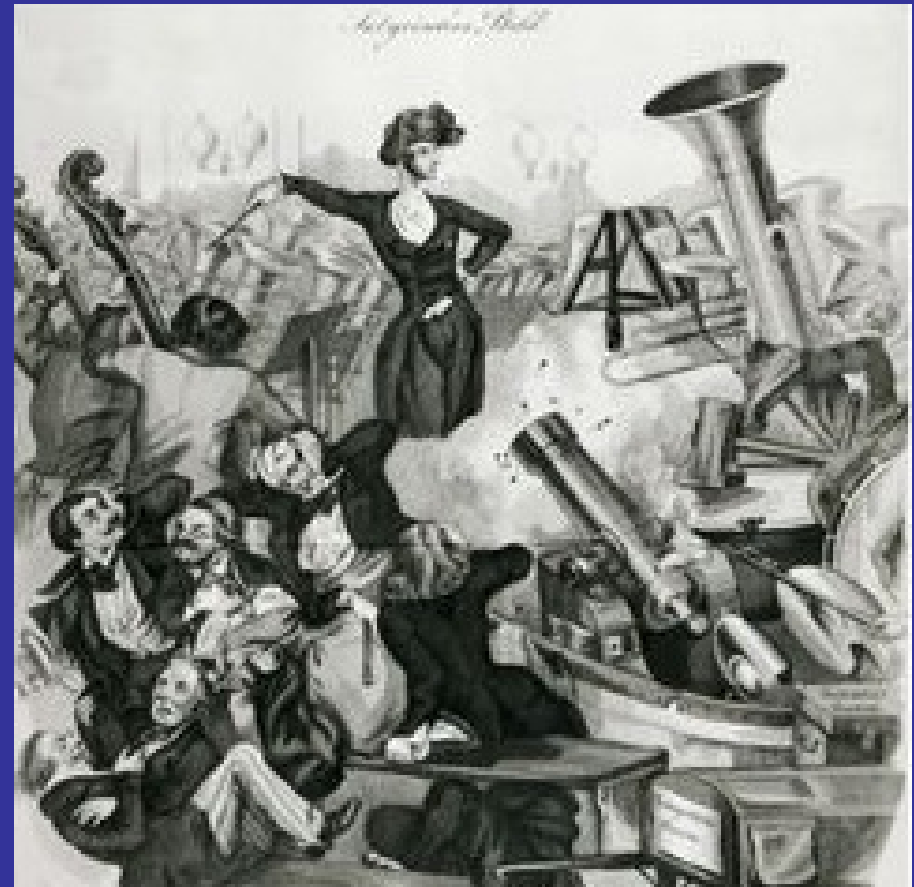
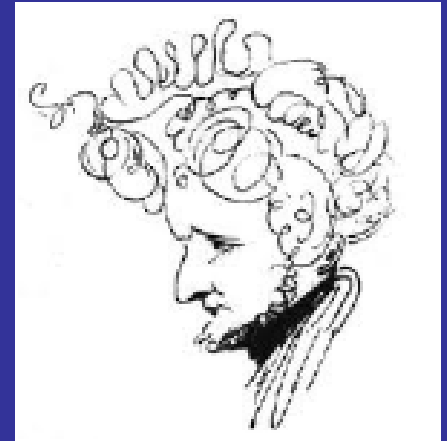
Note: we will have another witches' dance next month!



- ♪ **arch-Romantic composer, who profoundly influenced modern orchestral sound;**
- ♪ **influenced by Beethoven, Shakespeare, Scott, Byron and Goethe;**
- ♪ **influenced other composers such as Wagner and Tchaikovsky;**
- ♪ **believed in principle of direct reaction to feeling;**

- ♪ **passionate, ecstatic, melancholic, eccentric, excessive and egotistic; colourful life is reflected in his music;**
- ♪ **use of colour;**
- ♪ **wonderful, tuneful melodies;**
- ♪ **programme music his greatest influence and success;**
- ♪ **Idée fixe;**
- ♪ **inventiveness: new instruments and large-scale works with huge orchestras;**

♪ excesses caused ridicule
from critics and
caricaturists



Miserable last years

- ♪ no cult following, little recognition, difficulty getting works performed;
- ♪ believed he was a failure as composer and conductor in France;
- ♪ depressed his most productive days were over;

Miserable last years

- ♪ health deteriorated;
- ♪ marriage unhappy;
- ♪ final straw was death of son;
- ♪ not recognised as great composer till after his death.



Major Works

- ♪ 'Waverley' overture (1828)
- ♪ 'Symphonie Fantastique' (1830)
- ♪ 'King Lear' and 'Rob Roy' overtures (1831)
- ♪ 'Leilo (1832) – lyric melodrama, intended as sequel to 'Symphonie Fantastique'
- ♪ 'Harold in Italy' (1834) – symphony for viola and orchestra

Major Works

- ♪ **'Benvenuto Cellini' (1834-7) - opera**
- ♪ **'Les francs-juges' (1836) – intended as opera but abandoned after overture**
- ♪ **'Grande messe des morts' (1837)**
- ♪ **'Romeo and Juliet' (1839) – dramatic symphony for soloists, chorus and orchestra, in which he relived his first feelings of love on seeing Harriet**
- ♪ **'Les nuits d'été' (1841) – settings of poems by Gautier, for solo voice**

Major Works

- ♪ **'Roman Carnival' and 'Corsair' overtures (1844)**
- ♪ **'Damnation of Faust' (1845-6) – opera (“dramatic legend”)**
- ♪ **'La Marseillaise' (1848) – bombastic setting of national anthem**
- ♪ **'Te Deum' (1849) – massive choral work for 3 choirs**
- ♪ **'l'Enfance du Christ' – choral work**
- ♪ **The Trojans' (1856-8) – opera**

Harold en Italy

(Symphony in Four Parts with Viola Obligato)

- ♪ Paganini had acquired a superb viola and after hearing 'Symphonie fantastique' asked Berlioz to write a solo for him
- ♪ Inspiration was Byron's poem 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage', but he wrote a symphony with viola obbligato.
- ♪ Paganini expected virtuoso piece and on seeing sketch refused to play it.

Harold en Italy

(Symphony in Four Parts with Viola Obligato)

- ♪ Berlioz finished it and Paganini didn't hear it until three years later.
- ♪ So overwhelmed he dragged Berlioz on to the stage, knelt and kissed his hand before a cheering audience and applauding musicians.
- ♪ A few days later he sent Berlioz letter of congratulations, enclosing a bank draft for 20,000 francs.

Harold en Italy

(Symphony in Four Parts with Viola Obligato)

- ♪ Berlioz was able to pay off debts he and Harriet had accrued.
- ♪ The viola represents Harold's character and this piece again makes use of the '*idée fixe*', although there is more than one theme.

Rivka Golani



Harold en Italy

(Symphony in Four Parts with Viola Obbligato)

- ♪ **1st movement: “Harold aux montagnes” refers to the scenes Harold, a melancholic character, encounters in the mountains.**

Harold en Italy

(Symphony in Four Parts with Viola Obbligato)

♪ 2nd movement: “Marches des pèlerins”
(Pilgrims' March). Harold accompanies
a group of pilgrims.

Harold en Italy

(Symphony in Four Parts with Viola Obbligato)

♪ 3rd movement: "Sérénade" involves a love scene with someone playing serenade to his mistress.

Harold en Italy

(Symphony in Four Parts with Viola Obbligato)

- ♪ 4th movement: "Orgie de brigands".
Tired and depressed, Harold seeks
comfort among wild and dangerous
company.

Les francs-juges

- ♪ **Unfinished opera never performed and abandoned by Berlioz**
- ♪ **He destroyed most of the music.**
- ♪ **Only the overture remains, though he used some other fragments in later works.**
- ♪ **First composition solely for orchestra.**
- ♪ **One of the earliest which has been retained in the repertoire.**

The Shepherds' Farewell from *L'enfance du Christ*

