

Hector Berlioz



Symphonie fantastique

Le Roi Lear



PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Marek Janowski



Hector Berlioz (1803 – 1869)

Symphonie Fantastique, Op. 14

1 **Rêveries – Passions (Daydreams – Passions)** 14. 15
Largo – Allegro agitato e appassionato assai

2 **Un bal (A Ball)** 6. 05
Valse: Allegro non troppo

3 **Scène aux champs (Scene in the Fields)** 16. 16
Adagio

4 **Marche au supplice (March to the Scaffold)** 4. 51
Allegretto non troppo

5 **Songe d'une nuit de sabbat (Dream of a Witches' Sabbath)** 3. 12
Larghetto - Allegro

6 Dies Irae 1. 54

7 Ronde du sabbat (Witches' Round Dance) 2. 51

8 Dies Irae et Ronde du Sabbat ensemble 1. 55

Le Roi Lear, Op. 4 (King Lear)

Overture for Orchestra

9 Andante non troppo lento, ma maestoso – 14. 51
Allegro disperato ed agitato assai

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

Leader: **Andrés Cárdenes**

Conducted by: **Marek Janowski**

Executive Producer: Job Maarse • Recording Producer: Job Maarse

Balance Engineer: Mark Donahue (Soundmirror, Boston)

Recording Engineers: Dirk Sobotka (Soundmirror, Boston) • Ray Clover (Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh)

Editing: Dirk Sobotka

Recording venue: Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh (live recording, oct. / nov. 2009)

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Total playing time: 66. 22

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“Ma vie est un roman qui m’intéresse beaucoup” (“My life is a novel that greatly interests me”)

The date is September 11, 1827. As is the rest of Europe, Paris is mesmerized at the time by English culture. Among the audience attending a performance Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the Théâtre Odeon is the 23-year-old composer Hector Berlioz, who is subsequently overwhelmed by the perceptive imagination of this dramatic poet. And he discovers the actress Harriet Smithson, who is playing the role of Ophelia, to be at least equally impressive. Thus the young composer is smitten by an all-consuming passion for Shakespeare and the actress alike. Later, he states prophetically that this woman will one day become his wife, and that he will write his greatest symphony based on this drama.

However, not only Shakespeare was the subject of conversation in Paris. Another name on everyone's lips was Beethoven. It so happened that, simultaneously, François Habeneck was for the first time conducting a complete cycle of Beethoven's symphonies at the Conservatoire. Naturally, Berlioz was again among the audience, and expressed his subsequent feelings as follows: “I had just experienced the consecutive revelations of Shakespeare and Weber. Now on the horizon, I could perceive the gigantic stature of Beethoven. The shock was almost as great as the one I had received from the Shakespeare performance. Beethoven opened a new world of music to me, as had Shakespeare previously revealed a new universe full of poetry.”

Together, these ingredients led to a creative impulse that finally resulted in the *Symphonie fantastique*, which Berlioz composed in only three months at the beginning of 1830. In this symphony, the composer attempted to express a dramatic fact within the framework set by Beethoven. Berlioz felt that the symphony should be a total work of art, in which life and art, dream and reality flowed over in each other. He decided to unite everything he

had written so far in this one symphony. Therefore, he gladly also used themes from some of his earlier works, although he elaborated them in a new way. Thus he used a previously composed romance for the opening of the symphony; the continually returning theme meant to represent his beloved Harriet (the so-called *idée fixe*) stems from his cantata *Herminie* and he borrowed the “Marche au supplice” from his interrupted opera project, *Les Francs-Juges*. Furthermore, he also used a melody from the *Messe Solennelle* – which was rediscovered just a few years ago – in the symphony.

For the première performance, Berlioz engaged a huge orchestra consisting of no less than 130 musicians. However, he had not realized that the hall of the Théâtre des Nouveautés would be far too small for the size of his orchestra; after a tumultuous first rehearsal, in which only the second and fourth movements were played through, the concert was cancelled. Subsequently, the disappointed Berlioz wrote as follows in his *Memoires*: “My entire plan failed due to a lack of music stands and a couple of chairs.”

The concert finally took place on December 5, with Habeneck conducting the symphony for the first time in the hall of the Conservatoire. However, that evening Harriet Smithson was on stage in the Opéra, and thus – once again – missed hearing ‘her’ symphony. But that was no longer such a problem for Berlioz, as he had turned his attention in the meantime to another woman, the young pianist Camille Moke. However, she preferred the piano-builder Pleyel and went on to marry him. Blazing with jealousy, Berlioz threatened to kill them both, but, luckily, his friends were able to dissuade him from this plan.

Back in Paris, Berlioz reviewed the symphony and also composed a sequel to the work, which he entitled *Lélio, ou le retour à la vie* (= Lélio, or the return to life). In Paris, he once again set his eyes on Harriet Smithson. By now, she had become the directress of an English theatrical group, which was staging a series of performances in the city. Berlioz was beside himself, and managed via a friend to convince his beloved to attend the Conservatoire on December 9, 1832, where Habeneck was to conduct the *Symphonie fantastique* and *Lélio*. And this time, Berlioz' wish came true; the actress got the message. Berlioz described the evening as follows in his *Mémoires*: “Miss Smithson was thinking ‘My God! [...] There is no doubt possible, it is about me ... he still loves me! ...!’ From that moment onwards it seemed, as she herself has told me many times, that the hall began to spin around; she could no longer hear anything,

and went home like a sleepwalker, without exactly realizing what was going on.”

The German author and poet Heinrich Heine also attended this concert and described the event in a considerably less poetic manner in a report on music life in Paris dating from 1838. “The fellow sitting next to me in the lodge, a talkative young man, pointed out to me the composer, who was playing the kettledrum at the edge of the orchestra at the far end of the hall: for the kettledrum is his instrument. ‘Can you see that plump Englishwoman in the stage box?’; said my neighbour. ‘That is Miss Smithson; Monsieur Berlioz has been wildly in love with her for the past three years, and it is to this passion that we owe the wild symphony you are listening to here this evening.’ Indeed, the famous actress from Covent Garden was sitting in the stage lodge; Berlioz had fixed his stare on her, and every time his eyes met hers, he rolled the kettledrum, as if furious. “The result was that Berlioz and Harriet Smithson were married on October 3, 1833. Their witnesses were Franz Liszt, Ferdinand Hiller and Heinrich Heine.

Berlioz’ *Symphonie fantastique* heralded the era of Romantic orchestral music. For the first time, a symphony was presented to the audience together with a printed programme in which the ‘story’ of the music was described “as the text of an opera, serving to add to the various pieces of music of which it forms the basis of the character and expression.”

In short, this programme contains the following: a young musician, who is morbidly oversensitive and possessed of a rich imagination, poisons himself with opium in sudden desperation. [It is indeed well-known that Berlioz himself regularly took opium – RV.] The dose ingested induces a deep sleep with violent dreams and strange visions. The beloved comes to him in the form of a seductive melody (*idée fixe*), which refuses to let him go.

1. Dreams – Passions. He remembers first the dejection, the indefinable longing, the fits of melancholy. Then comes the frenzied love, which suddenly overwhelms him.

2. A Ball. He encounters his beloved again at a ball, caught up in the pandemonium of a magnificent party.

3. Scene in the Fields. On a summer’s evening, he hears two shepherds singing, in turn, a pastoral song. All this helps to bring an unusual sense of peace to his heart. But then the beloved appears once again ... his heart sinks. What if she is cheating on him! One of the shepherds resumes his song. In the distance, thunder can be heard. Loneliness.

4. The March to the Scaffold. In an opium-induced dream, he believes he has been sentenced to death after killing his beloved, and is now being led to the place of execution. The *idée fixe* reappears as a last thought of love, interrupted by the falling of the blade of the guillotine.

5. Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath. He sees himself at the sabbath gathering. Once again, the beloved melody can be heard, but has now lost its shy, yet noble character. Now it is just a vulgar little dance, commonplace and grotesque. It is his beloved appearing at the witches’ sabbath! The death-knell rings out, a burlesque parody of the *Dies Irae*. Witches’ Round Dance.

Berlioz turned his story into music in a literally unheard-of manner. Thus he uses a large orchestra with a number of ‘new’ instruments. The orchestration of the work is no less than revolutionary, and is entirely at the disposal of the various sound effects he wished to create. Thus, this symphony has become a highly personal document, rather than just a tone-painting composition.

The structure of the work is based on Ludwig van Beethoven’s Symphonies Nos. 5 & 6. Like Beethoven in his Symphony No. 6, Berlioz also places an extra movement between the third movement and the Finale; in this case, the March. He must have been inspired by the ‘Scene am Bach’ from Beethoven’s Sixth to include in the work a ‘pastoral’ movement, with all the accompanying tone-portraits. After all, the beat-motif from Beethoven’s Fifth, which returns in all movements, was undoubtedly an important source for the development of the *idée fixe*: the musical portrait of his beloved, which runs through all movements of the symphony like some kind of leitmotif.

The specific line of the story is represented at various levels. Only in a few places does he provide an actual tone-portrait. Examples of this include the melody of the shepherd’s shawm, the rolling of the thunder and the falling of the blade of the guillotine, followed by the crude bouncing of the head into the basket and the cheering of the crowd. Furthermore, Berlioz also makes very clever use of references to and quotes from other musical genres and styles. Thus, in the nineteenth century, the waltz was automatically associated with the hubbub of a party or ball scene, whereas a slow march was used to depict a funeral. The quote from the Gregorian *Dies Irae*, the hymn portraying the last judgement in the Roman-Catholic requiem, was of course immediately understood in the nineteenth century to be a reference to the resurrection of the dead (in this case, not at the Last Judgement, but during the witches’ sabbath).

Thanks to the structure of the form, the numerous tone-portraying instrumental effects and, of course, the programmatic content, the *Symphonie fantastique* became the revolutionary work that Berlioz had in mind. And critics were quick to attack the composer. As Rossini wrote, for example: “It is a good thing that this is not music.” Looking back from the perspective of the 21st century, we realize that there would have been no Liszt, neither Wagner or Stravinsky, nor any film music without

the *Symphonie fantastique*; that the work heralded a new era in the history of music.

The passion felt by Berlioz for Shakespeare’s oeuvre resulted in his writing a number of compositions, among which his ‘dramatic symphony’ *Romeo et Juliette* (1839), and his opera *Béatrice et Bénédicte* (1860 – 1862). He wrote his Overture *Le Roi Lear*. This was his longest overture, the major part of which was created in 1831 during a relaxed stay in Nice, where the composer would go for walks in the orange groves, bathe in the sea, catnap in the heather-covered hills, and play billiards in the local café with two officers from the local garrison. In his memoirs, Berlioz even goes so far as to call this “the happiest week of my life.”

However, this happy period ended abruptly when the head of the Nice police force began investigating the composer’s clearly ‘suspicious’ behaviour. A young musician who prefers to play billiards with soldiers, rather than attend the performances of Rossini’s opera *Matilde di Shabran*? He has to be a spy! And during questioning, Berlioz again added fuel to the fire, after the head of police asked him why he always carried a notebook. The composer answered that he had made a sketch for an overture on King Lear, and that he had already completed the instrumentation. “I believe it will cause quite a stir when King Lear turns up,” he added. “Turns up?”, the officer asked: “Who is this King Lear?”. “Oh, a poor old English king,” Berlioz answered. However, he would have done better not to mention the word ‘English,’ as the officer was now truly convinced that he was talking to a traitor preparing for a revolution. Not even the explanation furnished by Berlioz helped the situation: after all, which composer walked on the beach with a sketchbook? Everyone knew that a composer carried out his work at the piano! And that was that. Berlioz received a cordial, yet insistent request to leave Nice by the following day.

The Overture *Le Roi Lear* closely follows the events in Shakespeare’s play, in which the noble bass theme represents the old king and Cordelia’s theme is played by the oboe. At the end of the overture, the composer portrays Lear’s madness in an extraordinarily dramatic manner, after which his theme disintegrates in the coda and the music gasps out its final breath.

Ronald Vermeulen

English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

Marek Janowski

Artistic and music director of the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

The German conductor Marek Janowski studied in Germany and Italy. In his early career he was appointed music director of the opera house in Freiburg im Breisgau and also in Dortmund (1973-1979). Then from 1986 to 1990 he held the same position with the Gürzenich Orchestra in Cologne.

In 1984 Marek Janowski was appointed music director of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France in Paris. During the sixteen years of his term in Paris he transformed the orchestra into an internationally renowned ensemble. Janowski was also principal guest conductor for two years of the German Symphony Orchestra Berlin and conducted in opera houses throughout the world (Vienna, Munich, Berlin, Dresden, Paris, San Francisco, New York, Chicago and elsewhere). From 2000 to 2005 he was artistic and music director of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo and in the same period, from 2002 held the post of music director of the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra.

Marek Janowski has worked closely with the symphony orchestras of Boston and Pittsburgh, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, the radio orchestras of Hamburg and Denmark as well as the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra. He has also enjoyed considerable success with the Berlin Philharmonic, the Munich Philharmonic, the Oslo Philharmonic, the Philharmonia Orchestra London, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Symphony Orchestra of NHK Tokyo and with the Orchestre de Paris.

Marek Janowski's recordings include Wagner's *Ring* with the Staatskapelle Dresden, Weber's *Euryanthe* and Richard Strauss's *Die schweigsame Frau*. Janowski has recorded Bruckner's 4th and 6th symphonies and a highly acclaimed version of Messiaen's 'Turangalila' Symphony with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. Janowski's recording of Roussel's four symphonies was awarded the *Diapason d'or* in February 1996.

Marek Janowski has been artistic director since September 2004, and since 1 September 2005 also music director of the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande.

The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

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Heading the list of internationally recognized conductors who influenced the development of the Orchestra is Victor Herbert, who was Music Director between 1898 and 1904. Otto Klemperer was critical to the Orchestra's solidification as an American institution in the late 1930s. Under the dynamic directorship of Fritz Reiner, from 1938 to 1948, the Orchestra embarked on a new phase of its history, taking its first foreign tour and making its first commercial recording.

In the more recent past, the Orchestra's high standard of excellence was maintained and enhanced through the inspired leadership of William Steinberg during his quarter-century as Music Director between 1952 and 1976. André Previn, during his music directorship between 1976 and 1984, led the Orchestra to new heights through accomplishments on tours, recordings and television, including the PBS series "Previn and the Pittsburgh." Lorin Maazel had a formal affiliation with the Orchestra beginning in 1984 when he became Music Consultant. From 1988-89 through 1995-96, Maestro Maazel was Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony, molding it into one of the finest orchestras in the world. Mariss Jansons became Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony in the 1997-98 season and concluded his tenure in Pittsburgh at the end of the 2003-04 season. In January 2007, the Pittsburgh Symphony announced Manfred Honeck as the new Music Director.

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