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PRESENTS

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MAX BRAGADO-DARMAN *Music Director*
SUNSET CENTER, CARMEL 2019–2020

CONCERT 1 PROGRAM NOTES

by Alicia Mastromonaco ★

HECTOR BERLIOZ (1803–1869)

LE CARNAVAL ROMAIN, H. 95

After the wild success of his *Symphonie fantastique*, which will be performed later on this program, French composer Hector Berlioz achieved greater fame, including earning the *Prix de Rome*, which granted him a stipend to live and work in Italy. During the composer's time in Italy, Berlioz wrote his first opera, loosely based on the life of the Florentine sculptor, the title character Benvenuto Cellini. By most accounts of the premiere of *Benvenuto Cellini*, the opera was a flop. However, Berlioz believed the music was good, and decided in 1843 to thread themes from the opera into a new concert overture. This *ouverture caractéristique*, or programmatic overture that can be used as a standalone piece, would become the *Roman Carnival Overture*.

The *Roman Carnival Overture* received a positive reception at its premiere, a boon for Berlioz after suffering through the humiliating failure of *Benvenuto Cellini* in 1839. Berlioz felt that one of the main reasons for the opera's failure was not the music, but rather, conductor François Antoine Habeneck, who led the Paris Opera at the time. Berlioz wrote that the conductor had taken the music, particularly the saltarello (a lively Italian dance) far too slowly. He incorporated the saltarello into his overture because he wanted the audience to hear it in a fresh light, and conducted the premiere of the *Roman Carnival Overture* at Salle Herz in Paris on February 3, 1844. The audience was enthralled by the new overture and immediately demanded an encore. In Berlioz's famous *Memoirs*, he recalls seeing Habeneck after the performance, "standing with a slightly crestfallen air, and said casually as I went past, 'That's how it goes.' He did not reply." Although he was perhaps overly smug, Berlioz finally received the praise he so desperately wanted for *Benvenuto Cellini*.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)

ROMANCE IN F MINOR, OP. 11 (1877)

Berlioz and Dvořák had very different upbringings and very different lives, but they shared some common traits: both defied their fathers' expectations to follow in the family business in order to become composers. Berlioz notably did not become a doctor, and Dvořák moved away from home at thirteen to avoid becoming a butcher. The two composers also overcame setbacks by audiences who did not appreciate or understand their music, and managed to find popularity by reworking the very same music that had previously been panned.

In 1873, Dvořák composed his fifth string quartet in F minor, op. 9, but the group he wrote the quartet for did not want to play it, and the piece remained unpublished during his lifetime. In fact, the string quartet would not be premiered until 1930, well after Dvořák's death. Dvořák decided to excerpt parts of the slow movement with a few new themes, and rescore it for solo violin and piano. He also orchestrated the work for solo violin accompanied by strings and pairs of winds. *Romance* was finished in 1877, and although it would take until 1879 to be published, it was premiered in December of 1877 by Josef Markus, the concertmaster of the Prague Provisional Theatre Orchestra. Dvořák's original arrangement for violin and piano was not published until 2015, but Dvořák's friend Josef Zubatý published a reduction the same year as the orchestra version.

HECTOR BERLIOZ (1803–1869),

SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE (1830)

How many other pieces in the canonical orchestra repertoire focus on the semi-autobiographical tale of a love-sick musician's opium-fueled tale of unrequited love for an ever-idealized woman that leads him through the dreamscapes of attending a masked ball, traveling through a field (complete with shepherds and thunder), to the musician's eventual march to and subsequent beheading at the scaffold, followed by a witches' Sabbath and round dance? By my count, there is only one: Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*.

Hector Berlioz was a true nineteenth-century Romantic. An avid theater-goer, Berlioz discovered Shakespeare's plays when he moved to Paris, even though he spoke hardly a word of English. It was at a performance of *Hamlet* that he first laid eyes on British actress Harriet Smithson, playing the role of Ophelia. He immediately fell deeply in love with the woman, whom he would eventually marry, although her drinking and his infidelity hastened the breakdown of their marriage. It was the saga of Berlioz's obsession with Smithson that inspired the composer to write *Symphonie fantastique*, today one of his most famous orchestral works.

Symphonie fantastique, originally titled by Berlioz, "Episode in the Life of an Artist, Fantastic Symphony in Five Parts" found immediate success for several reasons. In addition to the salacious plot-line (known as the "program") behind the piece, Berlioz utilizes the same melody, called the *idée fixe* (or "fixed idea") in each movement to tie together the musical narrative, and utilizes it along with innovative orchestrations, extended techniques, and non-traditional movement structures. The *idée fixe* represents the image of the Artist's love object, and is modified in each movement to reflect the mood of that particular section.

Berlioz wrote a program to accompany the piece, one that is punctuated by CAPITAL LETTERS and exclamatory phrases. His preface reads, "The composer's aim has been to develop, to the extent that they have musical possibilities, various situations in the life of an artist. The plan of the instrumental drama, which is deprived of the help of words, needs to be outlined in advance. The following program should therefore be thought of like the spoken text of an opera, serving to introduce the musical movements, whose character and expression it calls into being."

In short, Part One opens with a young musician “afflicted” by his love for an ideal woman, whom he sees from afar. The music surges between quiet reflection and unbridled passion. Part Two finds the Artist at a ball, in the midst of “THE TUMULT OF A FESTIVITY,” noting that whether the Artist is in the middle of a city or out in the countryside, the image of his beloved follows him everywhere. In Part Three, the Artist experiences simultaneously the calm joy of being out in the countryside and the fear of perhaps not being able to be with his beloved. He hears the *ranz des vaches* (a Swiss shepherd tune) from an oboe and English horn, and the peal of thunder in the distance. In Part Four the Artist, concluding that his love will never be requited, dreams that he has killed his own beloved and is condemned to be beheaded. This is the “March to the Scaffold,” where he witnesses his own execution, complete with head bouncing down the scaffold (in pizzicato strings) post-execution. Finally, in Part Five, the Artist dreams of a Witches’ Sabbath, with “strange noises, groans, outbursts of laughter, distant cries which other cries seem to answer.” Berlioz warps the *idée fixe* into the cackling of witches’ voices, and includes the *Dies Irae* tune, part of the Mass for the Dead. Notably, Berlioz scores the *Dies Irae* for serpent and ophecleide, two now-obsolete bass instruments, horns, and bassoons, unsanctimoniously warping the sacred solemnity of the mass for the dead in favor of the raucous cacophony of low brass and double reed instruments, particularly in early nineteenth-century Paris, when brass valves had only recently been invented.

Berlioz’s boldness in extending programmatic music beyond what was common, or even acceptable at that time, paid off. *Symphonie fantastique* not only launched the composer into a long and varied career, but also paved the way for other composers to follow suit and extend program music’s possibilities and acceptance in polite musical society, despite the rather impolite nature of the piece’s program. ★



ALICIA MASTROMONACO

Alicia has played with the Monterey Symphony since 2007. She is also a member of the Carmel Bach Festival and Marin Symphony. A San Francisco native, she began her music studies at age seven on the piano, and took up the horn after switching from the trumpet in her middle school band program. She earned Bachelors of Music

degrees in Horn Performance and Musicology from Boston University, and did graduate work at the Universität der Künste Berlin before returning to California to continue her studies. She earned a Masters of Music degree at UCLA in Horn Performance, a Masters of Arts degree in Musicology at UCSB, and is currently working on her PhD at UCSB. Alicia's dissertation is focused on the daily lives of orchestral musicians and the organizations in which they play, and she is using her dissertation to explore the relationships between regional orchestras and their communities. Alicia is also an avid outdoorsperson and animal lover. ★