

Hector berliozs contribution to the symphony music essay



**ASSIGN
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The French composer Hector Berlioz (1803 - 1869) does not belong to any school. Because of his difference in style he has been criticized by critics, and his contemporaries about his works melodies and formal structures. Berlioz's work could not be influenced by critics, because of the originality and vitality of his ideas as an orchestral innovator; it allowed expression that affected the fundamental elements of the symphony and the instrumental changes themselves. The misunderstanding between Berlioz's work and his critics may be excused, because of the ideas he used in his works, he used it in an unusual extend that unified with literature themes. The themes determined the manner of each work so that there is no defined development from any period. From his early to late style he never repeated inventions, harmonic and melodic nor formal of his predecessors. (Alexander 1989: 143; Hicks 2001: 387; Slonimsky 2001: 314 - 315; Whittall 1987: 55.)

BERLIOZ'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYMPHONY

Berlioz reconceived the symphony as a programmatic work and allowed it to be in an unconventional form to fit the program. Influenced by Beethoven's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, Berlioz shaped his Symphonies around a series of emotions that tell a story. Berlioz was not a pianist and was not influenced by thinking harmonically like a pianist, but was harmonically influenced by guitar playing that was overstated by those who criticized him. (Burkholder 2006: 639; Longyear 1988: 138.)

In 1826 Berlioz entered the Paris Conservatoire; he composed Herminie in 1828 for the Prix de Rome and won the second prize, Berlioz used the *idée fixe* (fixed idea, a medical expression of the new psychology that Berlioz

made into a musical term) of Herminie in his first symphony, the *Symphonie fantastique*. (Downes 1978: 150; Hicks 2001: 386.)

Berlioz was a twenty-six year old conservatorium student when he composed *Symphonie fantastique*. It was his love for the Irish actress Harrieth Smithson that inspired him to compose the *Symphonie fantastique*. He based the story on his own personal experiences with the actress. The *Symphonie fantastique* is much unrelated to the works contemporary with it or the past. It is seen as one of the biggest works that helped developing the symphony to new heights, it gave it's listeners an experience to listen to, until Stravinsky composed *Rite of the Spring*. (Alexander 1989: 146; Burkholder 2006: 639; Downes 1978: 147; Einstein 1957: 163 – 164; Hicks 2001: 386 – 387; Slonimsky 2001: 315; Whittall 1987: 63.)

The *Symphonie fantastique* is not operatic but is seen as a drama. Berlioz decided to integrate the music with a recurring melody known as the *idée fixe* which he used in each movement to represent the image of the hero's beloved to fit the mood and situation of each point of the symphony. After this work Berlioz and the rest of the Romantic Movement struggled to get along with the leitmotif. (Alexander 1989: 146; Burkholder 2006: 639; Einstein 1957: 134; Slonimsky 2001: 315.)

Berlioz made sure that the people who listened to the *Symphonie fantastique* would understand the inspiration that inspired him to compose the Symphony, by giving it the subtitle “*Episode in the Life of an Artist*” and providing it with an autobiographical program, which is being read silently by the listener while the symphony plays. The *Symphonie fantastique* became a

musical autobiography. There are no words sung or read aloud during the performance. The autobiographical document that was provided explained each movement's expressions and moods. (Alexander 1989: 146; Burkholder 2006: 640; Slonimsky 2001: 315.)

The *Symphonie fantastique* is divided into five movements: I. "Dreams and Passions"; II. "A Ball"; III. "Scene in the fields"; IV. "March to Execution"; V. "Dream of a Sabbath Night". The first movement describes a musician that falls in love with a woman he sees for the first time, but his mind cannot stop thinking about her, causing the *idée fixe* to keep on recurring in the movements of the symphony. The first movement have a slow introduction followed by an *allegro* that has the same characteristics as a sonata form, but the development section is interrupted by an three-measure pause announcing the main theme in the dominant, which he keeps doing until *tutti fortissimo* appears in tonic. (Alexander 1989: 147; Burkholder 2006: 640; Downes 1978: 150 – 154; Slonimsky 2001: 315.)

In the second movement the musician goes to a ball, but is troubled because he keeps on seeing images of his beloved in his head. Berlioz replaced the minuet with a waltz, describing the musician at a ball with the *idée fixe* describing the images of the beloved recurring in his head. The third movement is a slow movement which takes place in a country, where he walks and then he hears in the distance two herdsmen piping to their flocks as his mind is distracted by thinking of his beloved. (Alexander 1989: 147; Burkholder 2006: 640; Downes 1978: 150 – 155.)

In the fourth movement the musician is troubled by his rejected love and poisons himself with opium. But instead of the poison killing him he receives dreams that he killed his beloved and is condemned to death. In the end of the march the first four bars of the *idée fixe* returns like a last memory of his beloved. (Alexander 1989: 147; Burkholder 2006: 640; Downes 1978: 150 – 155.)

In the last movement he sees himself at a Sabbath where beasts and witches gather for his burial. The *idée fixe* with two other themes are transformed, first alone then combined. The *Dies irae* is a chant sequence from one of the themes, which is part of the Mass for the Dead. (Alexander 1989: 147; Burkholder 2006: 640; Downes 1978: 150.)

Berlioz hoped for an orchestra of over 200 for the premiere, but never had more than 130 players. The variety of orchestral colours was normally achieved with the list found in the printed score: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 B-flat clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 cornets, 2 trumpets, 2 tubas, 3 trombones, 4 horns, piccolo, E-flat clarinet, kettle drums, bass drum, bells, and the strings. (Downes 1978: 155.)

Berlioz's next important work was *Harold en Italie*, with a viola as a solo instrument and orchestra. This was his second symphony. The title was drawn and inspired by Lord Byron's poem; *Childe Harold*. Paganini commissioned it but refused to play it because of the viola part that does not have enough to play. (Burkholder 2006: 641; Downes 1978: 130; Slonimsky 2001: 315.)

Harold en Italie is a picturesque symphony. It does not have a program, but it only has specific titles for each movement: I. “ Adagio – Allegro Harold in the Mountains: Scenes of Sadness, of happiness, and of Joy”. II. “ Allegretto. March of the Pilgrims Singing Their Evening Prayer”. III. “ Allegro assai – Allegretto. Serenade of an Abruzzi Mountaineer to His Mistress”. IV. “ Allegro frenetic. Brigands’ Orgy; Memoirs of Past Scenes”. (Alexander 1989: 152; Downes 1978: 132.)

A reappearance theme in the viola reappears in every movement of the symphony and is combined contrapuntally to each movement. The first movement has an Melancholy opening section that anticipates the principal melody, which represents Harold. It is first presented in a minor key, then the viola takes over playing the melody twice, very soft the second time. The accompaniment is played by the harp. The live part of the movement has an idée fixe symphonic-ally developed in fragments. (Burkholder 2006: 641; Downes 1978: 132.)

In the second movement the strings play a melody, soft at first then it crescendo’s as if the pilgrims is approaching, the it fades away as the idée fixe returns slightly transformed. The third movement after the fast introduction the serenade melody is related to the idée fixe and played by the English horn. Berlioz added colour to this movement by imitating the pifferari. (Allexander 1989: 152; Downes 1978: 132.)

The final movement recalls the themes of the first three movements almost like Beethoven’s ninth symphony, but does not end with a chorale. Between the episodes are rapid modulations, and the viola remains active, so that the

work inverts the heroism of Beethoven's symphonies. Throughout the first three movements a double *idée fixe* accurses: in the first both where in the solo viola and melody, in the second and third instead of becoming the mood it is combined with the music. (Alexander 1989: 152; Burkholder 2006: 641; Downes 1978: 132.)

The printed score has a "...piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 4 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 cornets, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, ophicleide or tuba, triangle, kettledrums, cymbals, harp...". the solo viola part was conceived for Paganini. And the string section: "...15 violins, 15 second violins, 10 violas, 12 cellos and 9 double basses." (Downes 1978: 132.)

Berlioz conducted *Harold en Italie* near the end of 1838 in front of an audience. After the performance Paganini bowed on his knees and claimed Berlioz as the successor of Beethoven, the following day Paganini sent Berlioz money, enabling Berlioz to reduce his journalistic commitments and devote himself to composition. By the end of 1839 he composed and performed *Roméo et Juliette*. (Alexander 1989: 153; Downes 1978: 141.)

Roméo et Juliette is central to his achievements, it is also the first large-scale work that is based on a major work of art. His symphony played its part in the development of the musical language appropriate to the symphonic poem. It influenced Liszt and Wagner, who were at one of Berlioz's performances. Berlioz called this symphony the "dramatic symphony", he combined the orchestra, soloist and chorus into an concert drama. (Alexander 1989: 153; Burkholder 2006: 641; Downes 1978: 140 - 141.)

CONCLUSION

Hector Berlioz was criticized about his works, but because of his unique style he developed the symphony to a new standard that was beyond those of his contemporaries. Berlioz is seen as the father of the symphony, and was influenced by Beethoven's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies. His harmonic influence was developed by guitar playing. (Alexander 1989: 143; Burkholder 2006: 639; Hicks 2001: 387; Longyear 1988: 138; Slonimsky 2001: 314 - 315; Whittall 1987: 55.)

Berlioz invented the term *idée fixe* and used it in his symphonies to showcase a recurring theme that keeps on returning reminding the listener of a previous event. This is an example that Berlioz was indeed an influence on Wagner when you go look at Wagner's works such as his music dramas that contains leitmotiv's that is a theme that recurs the whole time reminding the listener of something, like the ring leitmotive in "The ring of the Nibelungs". (Burkholder 2006: 639 - 641, 693 - 694; Downes 1978: 150; Hicks 2001: 386.)

The *Symphonie fantastique* is just not just an introduction to making a symphony into a narrative or autobiographical purpose, but also Berlioz's skill to compose emotional content for communicational purposes. Berlioz unified the symphony by introducing the *idée fixe* in all five his movements of the *Symphonie fantastique* and in the four movements of *Harold en Italie*, extending the ideas Beethoven had in his fifth, sixth and ninth symphonies. (Burkholder 2006: 641)

Berlioz created a variety by changing his themes by using different instrumental colours that gave a character to each passage. Examples were muted strings, harps, English horns, offstage oboe, snare drum, cymbals, tubular bells, and by letting the violinists play on the wooden side of their bows. Berlioz's creativeness is seen everywhere in his compositions.

(Burkholder 2006: 641)

Berlioz's Symphonies made him the leader of the Romantic movement, all composers of program music would be indebted to Berlioz. He introduced the orchestra with new resources of harmony, colour, expression and form. His orchestration created a new era in which instrumental colour could be used as an expressive tool for composers.

(Burkholder 2006: 641)

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