

# How Hector Berlioz transformed the conception of the symphony



## **How Hector Berlioz Transformed the Conception of the Symphony**

With his breakthrough symphony “Symphony Fantastique,” Hector Berlioz set the tone for a new type of composing that would amaze the 19th century. With his amazing symphony, he defined the way programmatic music was written. The in-depth story that correlated so well with the music changed the way people viewed composition and the symphony. As influential as this monster symphony was, Berlioz’s catalog contained many other works, all influential in their own ways. It is no secret that Hector Berlioz changed that way that works were composed in the 19th century. What is even more amazing is that he changed the way people listened to works as well.

Over the course of his lifetime, Berlioz composed in many different styles and forms. This ranged from symphonies to overtures to operas. Berlioz presented a style of composing that was before this unheard of. Berlioz sought to portray the widest range of moods possible through his music, much like his idol William Shakespeare did with his literature. For his music, Berlioz enlarged the size of the orchestra to hundreds of people to allow for the wild swings of mood. Berlioz also experimented with new instruments to achieve the range in sounds he desired: the ophicleide, the English horn, the harp, the cornet, and the newly invented saxophone. Berlioz had a very unique approach to musical form and challenged many musical conventions. He rarely used strict sonata-allegro form or theme and variation. Although this was an interesting and innovative measure, other composers of his time were a lot more critical. They spoke out against his pieces, calling them “monstrous” and “bizarre,” and even suggested that Berlioz was insane.

<https://assignbuster.com/how-hector-berlioz-transformed-the-conception-of-the-symphony/>

Some of his most remembered works include “ Les Troyens (The Trojans),” “ La Damnation of Faust,” and “ Symphony Fantastique.” “ Symphony Fantastique,” his most celebrated work, can be considered one of the single most influential compositions of the entire 19th century. Although the form and orchestration were revolutionary, what’s more is the vivid story it tells, and the fact that it’s the first complete program symphony. The story surrounding “ Symphonie Fantastique,” involves Harriet Smithson, one of the many loves of Hector’s life. Berlioz wrote the “ Symphonie Fantastique,” not in the usual four movements of a symphony, but in five, an arrangement that may have been inspired Shakespeare’s use of a five- act format. Movements 1 and 5 balance each other in length and substance, as do 2 and 4, leaving the 3rd movement as the center of the work. Berlioz creates a single melody that reappears as a unifying force, movement after movement a total of 8 times during the symphony. Berlioz takes the technique of Beethoven recalling melodies by recalling it constantly, and associating it with an object - his beloved Harriet. This musical fixation came to be called his *idée fixe* (fixed idea.) As Berlioz’s feelings about Harriet changed from movement to movement, the *idée fixe* changed along with them. “ Symphonie Fantastique” had many things the audience had never heard before December 5, 1830 when it was first played: new instruments, novel playing effects, simultaneous melodies in different keys, and a form that grows out of the events, unlike any other. Throughout the story, “ Symphonie Fantastique” tells the story of unrequited love, attempted suicide, imaginary murder, and hellish revenge. As in “ Symphonie Fantastique,” Berlioz used his uniqueness to create many more musical works, and become somewhat of a ‘ cutting- edge’ composer. Berlioz alters pitches and assigns different

<https://assignbuster.com/how-hector-berlioz-transformed-the-conception-of-the-symphony/>

instruments to play the different pitches, as well as adding different tones, colors, and feelings in all of his compositions. These differences, along with his effort to be unlike those before him, may have been what made Louis Hector Berlioz one of the most important composers of the 19th, or any century.