

# Understanding Music

Seventh Edition

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**PEARSON**

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0:57	<i>So lang' dem Wasser Helle, So dacht' ich, nicht gebricht, So fängt er die Forelle Mit seiner Angel nicht.</i> [last two lines repeated]	As long as the water is clear, I thought, and not disturbed, He'll never catch that trout With his rod.
1:17	Piano interlude	
<b>Stanza 3</b> [sudden change of rhythm, harmony, and accompanying figures]		
1:23	<i>Doch endlich ward dem Diebe Die Zeit zu lang. Er macht Das Bächlein tückisch trübe,</i> [diminished sevenths] <i>Und eh ich es gedacht,</i> [suspense gaps in piano]	But in the end the thief Grew impatient. Cunningly he made the brook cloudy,  And in an instant
1:37	<i>So zuckte seine Rute, Das Fischlein zappelt dran,</i> [crescendo] <i>Und ich mit regem Blute</i> [earlier music returns] <i>Sah die Betrog'ne an.</i> [last two lines repeated]	His rod quivered, And the fish struggled on it.  And I, my blood boiling,  Looked at the poor tricked creature.
1:58	Piano postlude	



A pencil drawing of French composer Hector Berlioz (1803–1869), drawn by Ingres, signed and dated 'Ingres del Florence, 1824.'

### Hector Berlioz (1803–1869)

In nineteenth-century France, Romanticism was a vital force, defined by writers such as Madame de Staël, Chateaubriand, and George Sand; poets such as Lamartine and Vigny; novelists and playwrights such as Stendhal, Balzac, and Victor Hugo; and painters such as Anne-Louis Girodet and Eugène Delacroix. No less important than these literary and artistic figures was the French composer Hector Berlioz, who established music as central to the Romantic ideal.

Berlioz was the oldest child of a distinguished French doctor and his strictly religious Catholic wife. As a child, Berlioz read widely; he also took music lessons and, on his own, studied music theory. He began to compose when he was a teenager.

His father wanted him to become a doctor, so Berlioz entered medical school in Paris. But he became more and more interested in music, and more and more horrified by what he saw as a medical student. He finally quit medical school against his father's wishes and supported himself by taking singing jobs and

giving music lessons. Berlioz enrolled at the Paris Conservatory of Music as a composition student at the age of 23.

During the next few years, he wrote several compositions. He had several first-time experiences that were to affect him profoundly: hearing some of the great Beethoven symphonies, coming across a French translation of Goethe's *Faust*, and encountering Shakespeare's plays. He also fell in love with an Irish actress, Harriet Smithson, who was touring with a Shakespearean acting company.

During the 1830s, Berlioz composed two highly original symphonic works: *Harold in Italy*, which was inspired by a reading of the Romantic poet Byron's *Childe Harold*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, which was based on Shakespeare's play. He also wrote a powerful and expressive Requiem Mass, composed in memory of the national heroes of France.

In the 1840s, when Berlioz should have been approaching the peak of his career, he was generally spurned by the French establishment. His music was regarded as too innovative, his forms unconventional, his orchestration too demanding, and the emotionality of his music too direct. "They don't understand me," he said. But throughout the rest of Europe, Berlioz was more appreciated. The great Italian violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini sent him 20,000 francs out of the blue, and Wagner described

*Romeo and Juliet* as a "revelation." He was often invited to conduct abroad, and other conductors, especially in Germany, scheduled performances of his music.

In the 1850s, despite his critics at home, Berlioz poured his energies into producing one of his greatest masterpieces, the five-act opera *Les Troyens* ("The Trojans"). Based on Virgil's *Aeneid*, it tells the story of the escape of Aeneas from Troy and his doomed love affair with Dido, the Queen of Carthage.

For the last part of his life, Berlioz was not in good health, and he felt bitter and depressed. He composed very little music but worked on his memoirs, which make fascinating reading today. Berlioz died in 1869, and his grave may be visited at Montmartre in Paris. In many ways, Hector Berlioz can be seen as the incarnation of the Romantic artist: brilliantly gifted, completely dedicated to his art, yet rejected by society and isolated during his lifetime.

### Berlioz's Music

The most striking aspects of Berlioz's music are its color and atmosphere. He used the orchestra brilliantly, with great sensitivity to the different qualities of sound available from all the instruments. Some of his pieces call for very large performing groups: the Requiem Mass is written for an orchestra of 140 players, a huge chorus, and four groups of brass and timpani

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"Berlioz Les Troyens Love Duet"

Berlioz on his prospects in medicine: "Become a doctor? Study anatomy? Dissect? Take part in horrible operations? Instead of giving myself body and soul to music?"

Berlioz composes by splashing his pen all over the manuscript and leaving the result to chance.  
—Fryderyk Chopin

## PERFORMANCE IN CONTEXT

### The Paris Conservatory

The Paris Conservatory has been at the heart of French music since the founding of the school in 1795. It would be hard to find a famous French musician from the past 200 years who has not passed through its doors, either as a student, member of the faculty, or performer. The Conservatory Hall's acoustics were the best in Paris for orchestral music: rich and lush, but without the echo of an opera house or church hall. Berlioz, a graduate of the conservatory, naturally chose it for the premiere of his *Symphonie Fantastique*. Many of the orchestra members were also students at the school. A small sampling of the Conservatory's many famous graduates includes Georges Bizet, Claude Debussy, Olivier Messiaen, and Brigitte Bardot. The old conservatory building is located in Paris on the Right Bank, near the famous Palais Garnier opera house. The music program has moved to a new campus, but the old hall is still used by the Conservatory's theatre program.



Entrée du Conservatoire de musique et de déclamation.

My life is to me a deeply interesting romance.

—Hector Berlioz

placed at the four corners of the performing space; the *Te Deum* calls for a solo singer, a large orchestra, an organ, two choirs of 100 singers each, and a choir of 600 children!

But even more fascinating than these gigantic effects are those quiet places where Berlioz conjures up an unforgettable atmosphere with completely original orchestration. In the Requiem, for example, he uses violas, cellos, bassoons, and English horns in simple, long phrases for a passage of penitence and introspection. And his *Symphonie fantastique* is full of wonderful atmospheric moments: an echoing song between solo oboe and solo English horn; the quiet rumble of distant thunder on four timpani; and an eerie, menacing march on muted horns and plucked double basses.

The *Symphonie fantastique* (“Fantasy Symphony”), Berlioz’s best-known work, is one of the earliest examples of Romantic program music. The piece, Berlioz said, describes various situations in the life of a young musician who falls desperately in love at first sight. The symphony depicts his dreams, despairs, and fantasies. Clearly the symphony is autobiographical.

Like many other composers, Berlioz felt ambivalent about tying a musical work to a specific verbal narrative. He wanted to explain the ideas behind his music to his audience, but he also felt that the music ought to be able to stand alone.

### Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Mendelssohn is one of the two composers in this period (the other being Gustav Mahler) who illustrate the uncomfortable position occupied by Jews in nineteenth-century Europe. His grandfather had been the famous Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. His father was a banker, a prominent member of German middle-class society. His mother was also from a distinguished family; she was cultivated and very musical. In 1811 the Mendelssohn family was forced to flee from Hamburg to Berlin for political reasons, and when Felix was seven years old, his father had the children baptized; a few years later, his father converted to Christianity himself. Despite the increasing tolerance of nineteenth-century society, it was still easier to make your way in an “enlightened” age if you were not Jewish.

After their conversion, the family enjoyed increasing prosperity and social status. The Mendelssohn home was a focal point for writers, artists, musicians, and intellectuals in Berlin society. Chamber concerts were held every weekend, and under the tutelage of their

Art and Life are not two different things.

—Felix Mendelssohn

Ever since I began to compose, I have remained true to my starting principle: not to write a page because the public or a pretty girl wanted it a certain way, but to write solely as I thought best.

—Felix Mendelssohn



Felix Mendelssohn about 1829.

mother, Felix and his older sister Fanny soon proved to be especially gifted in music. (About Fanny we shall say more later.)

Felix was precocious in everything he undertook. At the age of 10, he was reading Latin and studying arithmetic, geometry, history, and geography. He played the piano and the violin, and he started music theory and composition lessons. He began to compose, write poetry, and paint. Several of his early compositions were performed at the Sunday concerts in his parents’ home.

As a youth, Mendelssohn was introduced to the most famous literary figure in Germany, Goethe, and a great friendship developed between the old man and the gifted teenager. Mendelssohn also traveled widely in Europe, either on holidays with his family or in the company of his father. Throughout this time, Mendelssohn was composing prolifically. By the time he was 20 he had written more than 100 pieces.

Mendelssohn was very interested in music of the past. At the age of 20, together with a family friend who was a professional actor, he arranged for a performance of one of the