May 6, 2023

7:30 pm

"Springtime in Paris"

March Militaire
Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)

"Marche Militaire Française" from *Suite Algerienne, Op. 60*
Camile Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921)

Wannabe Conductors

Piano Concerto in G Major
Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937)

I. Allegramente
II. Adagio assai
III. Presto

Michelle Cann, piano

INTERMISSION

Symphonie Fantastique
Hector Berlioz (1803 – 1869)

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"Springtime in Paris"

March Militaire

Franz Schubert (b. Vienna, Austria, January 31, 1797; d. Vienna, Austria, November 19, 1828)

The *Three Marches Militaires*, Op. 51, D. 733, are pieces in march form written for piano four-hands by Franz Schubert. The first of the three (the work performed this evening) is far more famous than the others. It is often simply referred to as "Schubert's Marche Militaire." This march has been arranged for full orchestra, military bands, and many different combinations of instruments. Recordings of the original piano four-hand version include those by pianists Christoph Eschenbach and Justus Frantz, Radu Lupu and Daniel Barenboim, Robert Levin and Malcolm Bilson, Evgeny Kissin and James Levine, and Artur Schnabel and Karl Ulrich Schnabel - all fine pianists.

Franz Schubert was an Austrian composer who bridged the worlds of Classical and Romantic music, and noted for the melody and harmony in his songs and chamber music. Growing up, his family was musical and cultivated string quartet playing in the home, with young Franz playing the viola. He received the foundations of his music education from his father, continuing later with organ playing and music theory under the instruction of the parish church organist.

In 1808 he won a scholarship that earned him a place in the Imperial Court Chapel Choir and an education at the Stadtkonvikt, the principal boarding school for commoners in Vienna, where his tutors were the Imperial Court organist and, later, the composer Antonio Salieri, then at the height of his fame and an associate of Mozart's. In fact, besides Schubert, composers Franz Liszt, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Johann Nepomuk Hummel were among the most famous of his pupils. LSO audiences will remember that we heard Hummel's bassoon concerto in the 2022 Rising Stars Concert.

Schubert played the violin in the students' orchestra, was quickly promoted to concertmaster, and at times, conducted. He also sang in the choir and, with his fellow pupils, cultivated chamber music and piano playing. Schubert entered a teachers' training college in Vienna. Rejected for military service because of his short stature, he worked as a schoolmaster until 1818.

Franz Schubert

Wannabe Conductor

"Marche Militaire Française," from *Suite Algerienne, Op. 60*

Camile Saint-Saëns (b. Paris, France, October 9, 1835; d. Algiers, December 16, 1921)

The work is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, triangle, tambourine, cymbals, bass drum, and strings. Approximate performance time is four minutes.

Camile Saint-Saëns was a French composer, organist, conductor and pianist who frequently wintered in Algiers. He was a musical prodigy, making his debut at the age of ten. After studying at the Paris Conservatoire he became a church organist. Twenty years later, he was a successful freelance pianist and composer, in demand in Europe and the Americas with a long and productive career – he composed music for 83 years, according to *Listen to the Music* by Jonathan Kramer.

This *Marche Militaire Française (Allegro giocoso* in C major) is the fourth movement of *Suite Algérienne***.** The whole suite had its first performance in Paris on December 19, 1880, with Édouard Colonne conducting. The audience loved it, and the composition was published the next year with a dedication to Albert Kopff, a friend of Saint-Saëns.

Camille Saint-Saens

Wannabe Conductor

Piano Concerto in G Major

Maurice Ravel (b. Ciboure, France, March 7, 1875; d. Paris, France, December 28, 1937)

I. Allegramente
II. Adagio assai
III. Presto

Michelle Cann, piano

This work requires two flutes (with piccolo), two oboes (with English horn), two clarinets (with E-flat clarinet), two bassoons, two horns, one trumpet, one trombone, timpani, percussion (triangle, snare drum, cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, wood block, whip), harp, and strings. Duration is 23 minutes.

Maurice Ravel was an Impressionist composer whose musical education and intellect guided him in creating works superb in craftsmanship. Born in France near the Spanish border, his father was French-Swiss and his mother was Basque.

As a student at the Paris Conservatory, he studied with the famous composers Bériot and Fauré.

Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G major* was composed between 1929 and 1931. The concerto is in three movements. Ravel said that in this piece he was not aiming to be profound, but to entertain. Among its influences are jazz and Basque folk music. Ravel was a good pianist who on occasion performed his concerto as the soloist. In fact, he had intended to be the soloist in the first public performance of this new work, but poor health ultimately led him to offer the premiere to pianist Marguerite Long, to whom he dedicated the concerto.

The first performance was given in Paris on January 14, 1932, at the Salle Pleyel with the Orchestre Lamoureux conducted by the composer.

Michael Steinberg in *The Concerto* writes, "Within the next four months the work was heard in the major cities of Europe including Brussels, Vienna, Prague, London, Warsaw, Berlin, Amsterdam, and Budapest. A recording was made by Columbia with Long as soloist." The work has been recorded many times by pianists, orchestras, and conductors from all over the world.

Charles Rosen, pianist and author, writes in his book, *Piano Notes – The World of the Pianist,* "the way one sits at the keyboard has had an influence on the music that the composer-pianist writes as well as on performance. Ravel sat very low, for instance, and in his music, there are no examples of loud unison octaves in both hands which are the trademark of so many nineteenth-century artists, particularly the School of Liszt, and which account for the main excitement in the concertos of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov. This 'Lisztian' style of octaves demands a play of the back and shoulder muscles more difficult to manage from a low position. Ravel's works do not require a raised position of the arms which the 'Lisztian' style does."

John Gillespie writes in *Five Centuries of Keyboard Music*, "Through his mother, Ravel had a sympathetic link to Spain, which may account for his preoccupation with Spanish motifs, Spanish titles, Spanish rhythms, and imitations of Spanish instruments. Yet pure Impressionism is essentially French, and Ravel – along with Debussy – remain the finest authors of this unique musical language."

Rosen continues in *Piano Notes – The World of the Pianist, "*It is with the work of Ravel that the writing for piano almost always gives the effect of being heard at a distance. In his work, the dissonances are hidden in the center of the harmonies as in a cluster."

Many pianists enjoy playing music by Ravel. For instance, virtuoso pianist and conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy in his book *Beyond Frontiers* writes, "I am drawn to music which is full of passion, color, and commitment." Among his many favorites are Ravel and Debussy.

Another solo pianist who frequently performed Ravel's *Concerto for the Left Hand*, Leon Fleisher, writes similarly in *My Nine Lives: A Memoir of Many Careers in Music* that "Ravel brought colorings to music,

and a sensuality, that I found intoxicating. He wrote music that was languid, succulent, oozing the most sensual of harmonies."

Fleisher continues, "'Color,' in music, refers to the different kinds of sounds that different instruments can make. Ravel focuses and luxuriates in the range of possibilities in the way that sounds touch your ear. Since Ravel's concept of sound is so different from that of Mozart or Beethoven, as a pianist you often must use a different kind of attack, a different way of starting phrases and putting your fingers on the keys. While Mozart and Beethoven generally want definite beginnings, Ravel is different. With Ravel you often have to slow down and soften the way you start the notes, so that you just waft in, joining the flow of the music rather than defining it."

"Ravel loved color and warmth, the sunniness of Spain" – (just like Falla – LSO audiences recently heard in his *Three-Cornered Hat*) – "and the rhythms of jazz," continues Fleisher. "Ravel was fascinated by jazz. A trip to the United States he made in 1928 gave him some direct exposure to American jazz, and its influence shows up in several of his pieces."

Writing in *Lectures on Modern Music*, internationally acclaimed composer, music professor, and lecturer Nadia Boulanger states, "Whatever task he sets for himself – whether it is a virtuoso work for full orchestra, an unaccompanied piece, a song, or piano solo – Maurice Ravel accomplishes it with astonishing ease and mastery. Moreover, his command over the manifold resources of the orchestra is prodigious and he moves with facility and evident delight in the most 'dangerous' realms of orchestral virtuosity." Boulanger concludes, "Ravel tends to be objective and the beauty of his music, resides in the style itself."

Victor Seroff in his biography entitled *Maurice Ravel*, writes that Ravel's father was a mechanical engineer holding several patents for "a steam generator heated by oil and applicable to automotive locomotion on regular roads." The senior Ravel was certainly one of the pioneers in the automotive industry. His invention consisted of a two-cylinder reciprocating steam engine, similar to the present automobile gasoline engine – the internal combustion engine. The two cylinders activated the rear axle of the car.

Clearly, Maurice Ravel inherited the true engineering traits of creativity, problem solving, analytical ability, logical thinking, and attention to detail and applied them to the composition of music!

Ravel composed the *Concerto for the Left Hand* simultaneously and it was, no doubt, an interesting experience to conceive two concertos at the same time. This *G Major Concerto*, is a concerto in the strict sense, written in the spirit of Mozart.

"I believe that a concerto can be both gay and brilliant without necessarily being profound or aiming at dramatic effort," writes Ravel. "The *G Major Concerto* uses certain effects borrowed from jazz, but only in moderation. After an introductory section in the *Concerto*, there comes an episode like an improvisation which is followed by a jazz section. Only afterward is one aware that the jazz episode is built up from these of the first introductory section."

Maurice Ravel

INTERMISSION

Symphonie Fantastique

Hector Berlioz (b. La Cote St. Andre, France, Dec. 11, 1803; d. Paris, France, Mar. 8, 1869)

I. Dreams and Passions
II. A Ball
III. In the Country
IV. March to the Scaffold
V. Dream of a Witches' Sabbath

The score calls for two flutes (one doubling on piccolo), two oboes (one doubling on English horn), two clarinets (B-flat and E-flat), four bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, two tubas, timpani, cymbal, drums, bells, two harps, and strings. Performance time is approximately forty-nine minutes.

It is worthwhile pointing out that Hector Berlioz was a pioneer in augmenting the size and instruments of the orchestra. He is the true founder of the modern orchestra with its increased size of the string sections and winds. The use of an English horn was an innovation. He added two more bassoons than was usual at that time as well as two more horns. Even two cornets and a tuba were added. The percussion section was significantly increased, adding tuned timpani, bass and snare drums, cymbals, and bells. Unusual for the time, two harps were used.

Berlioz wrote music which is so original and so apart from the musical mainstream of his time that occasionally he is misunderstood not only by his contemporaries but also by succeeding generations. He essentially took Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* as a point of departure, according to Rey M. Longyear in his book, *Nineteenth-Century Romanticism in Music*.

Historical Significance

Berlioz was a true child of the French Revolution. Yet planning to study medicine, he still found himself drawn to music, especially works of the earlier great masters. Besides composing music, he was also an author, writing extensively. The catalyst for the *Symphonie Fantastique* was Goethe's *Faust*, which he read in a French translation about 1827.

The world premiere took place at the Paris Conservatoire in December 1830. Franz Liszt, who was present at the premiere of *Symphonie Fantastique*, made a piano transcription of the symphony in 1833, a transcription being a faithful adaptation of the work. In fact, Liszt played an important role in popularizing a wide array of symphonic music by transcribing it for piano. Interestingly, as a child prodigy, Liszt performed for Beethoven who was most impressed. Liszt repaid Beethoven's generosity by popularizing his music (and the music of other composers) in the best way he knew how … by transcribing it for piano. Everyone had a piano in those days!

Timely Background of the Composer's Life

This highly romantic work was prompted by Berlioz' love for the Shakespearean actress, Harriet Smithson. Despite being ignored by his "beloved," he provided a detailed program providing continuity for each of the five movements showing progressive heightening of his fantasies. Berlioz married Miss Smithson in 1833, three years after premiering *Symphonie Fantastique*.

Berlioz was composing music at the same time as Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt. All three masters used similar techniques in their writings including recurring identifying themes, descriptive melodies, and enlarged orchestras. Nevertheless, the idea of a recurrent theme is very old in Western music: the sixteenth century cyclic Mass, the five movements of which often use the same material, is but one example, according to the text, *The Symphony*, by Luise Cuyler, a professor of music at the University of Michigan.

Berlioz was an outstanding master orchestrator and leader in the evolution of the orchestra and its growth in size. As a matter of fact, he was reputedly a fine conductor with a thorough knowledge of the capabilities of all instruments, which qualified him eminently to practice the art of orchestral interpretation.

For instance, while some of Berlioz' fellow composers used a single harp only sparingly, Berlioz used two harps, writing visible passages for each including stunning virtuosic phrases in the beginning of the second movement. And along with a proliferation of percussion instruments including bells, he opened numerous possibilities for tonal color within the orchestra by creating highly descriptive effects in his *Symphonie Fantastique*.

Some composers, including Berlioz with his *Symphonie Fantastique*, supply a detailed account for the audience of the performance by describing the music as it unfolds. And as such, elaborate directions were designed even for the musicians with considerable frequency by Berlioz including how to strike the two sets of timpani, the kind of mallets and heads to be used, and various ways to play the cymbals. The *Symphonie Fantastique* lives up to its name and a romantic expectation in this most detailed autobiographical fashion.

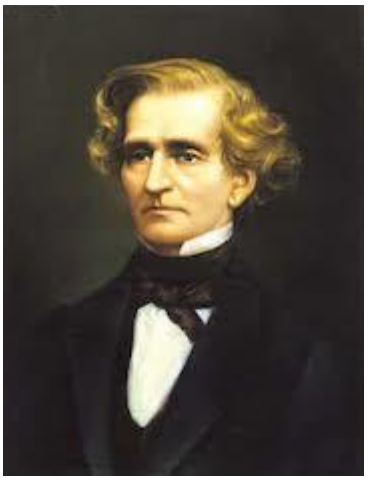
The *Symphonie Fantastique* is simply stunning, allowing the orchestra to shine while achieving a vigorous sound, yet fused with warmth when required and precision throughout. The program created by Berlioz guides us through each of the five movements. First, he dreams about his beloved and next he meets Miss Smithson at a dance. Then he obsesses about her while walking through the picturesque countryside, reminiscent of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*. A nightmare tells him that he has murdered his beloved, after which he is condemned to death at the gallows. The last movement pictures him in the middle of a witches' Sabbath.

The *Symphonie Fantastique* is outstandingly musical and an audiophile's dream sonically. There are fabulous recordings available and some of the best include those conducted by Pierre Monteux, Jean Martinon, and Leonard Bernstein (an exciting performance featuring the orchestra National de France), according to *Stereo Review*.

What to Listen For

It is an interesting challenge to pinpoint all the variations on this theme, the *idee-fixe*, throughout the entire work of five movements. Happily, a review of the *Symphonie Fantastique* for further study can be found at a website created by Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony*: http://www.keepingscore.org/interactive/pages/berlioz/score-idee-fixe*.

- ***Dreams and Passions***: The *idee-fixe,* or recurrent theme, of his beloved is introduced well within the first movement in the flutes and first violins taking about a full 40 seconds.
- ***A Ball***: The second movement highlights the theme as a waltz from the flute and oboe which moves to the clarinet while the flute continues.
- ***In the Country***: The third movement is well under way before the flute and oboe introduce the *idee-fixe*; later in the movement, the English horn plays a detached version of the theme very close to the conclusion of the movement, followed by the roll of thunder in the distance (the timpani) like our thunder and lightning as the storms roll in (and around) here among the Mississippi Bluffs. Berlioz himself writes about this movement in his *Treatise on Instrumentation* saying, "The combination of the low tones of the English horn with those of the French horns during a tremolo of the double-basses produces an effect as characteristic as it is novel. It is particularly well suited to cast a menacing color upon musical ideas in which fear, and anguish predominate."
- ***March to the Scaffold***: The theme is introduced in the fourth movement in free-form fashion in the cellos and basses with an air of foreboding, followed by solo bassoon passages, while tossing the themes back and forth throughout the orchestra. Prominent timpani passages in the same movement are examples of an enlarged tonal range using four kettledrums in which each one is pitched differently. In fact, Berlioz instructs the timpanist on the appropriate kind of mallet to use as well. Listen for the *idee-fixe* in the clarinets followed by the blow of the ax signaling the end!
- ***Dream of a Witches' Sabbath***: Clarinets in a high register have a variation on the theme in dance-like fashion, soft with short little grace notes preceding each note in the theme within the beginning of the fifth movement. The strings have special effects throughout such as pizzicato (plucking the strings) and tremolo (rapidly moving the bow back and forth) to vary the texture. A quasi-religious fervor sets in with the *Dies Irae* portion which pervades the witches' round dance, a fugue-like section.



Hector Berlioz