SCOTTISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA **ROBIN TICCIATI**

HECTOR BERLIOZ *Symphonie Fantastique*

HECTOR BERLIOZ (1803–1869)

Symphonie Fantastique

Symphonie Fantastique, Op. 14

① Rêveries — Passions 15.12
② Un bal 6.20
③ Scène aux champs 16.17
④ Marche au supplice 6.35
⑤ Songe d'une nuit de sabbat 10.21

Béatrice et Bénédict

⑥ Overture 8.14

TOTAL TIME: 63.12

SCOTTISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
ROBIN TICCIATI conductor

Scottish
Chamber
Orchestra

Recorded at Usher Hall, Edinburgh UK
from 7th – 10th October 2011
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Engineered by Philip Hobbs & Calum Malcolm
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Post-production by Julia Thomas, Finesplice, UK
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The 'Overture' from Béatrice et Bénédict is published by
BÄRENREITER-VERLAG, KASSEL

This recording was made possible with support from the SCO Sir Charles Mackerras Fund

Symphonie Fantastique (1830–1832)

FOR A LONG TIME the controversy surrounding the *Symphonie Fantastique* prevented a thorough and sensible examination of the music itself – a serious analysis of what was in it and how it was put together. Yet Berlioz was certainly not the first or the last composer to re-use existing material (think of Beethoven, think of Brahms) – or to find musical stimulus in literary sources: in this case, the writings of Chateaubriand, Goethe and Victor Hugo. In one of the poems in Hugo's *Odes et Ballades* the striking of midnight on a monastery bell precipitates a hideous assembly of witches and half-human, half-animal creatures who execute a whirling round-dance and perform obscene parodies of the rituals of the church, an image that Berlioz transmutes into his highly original and skilfully constructed finale. Hugo's passionate fictional tract against capital punishment, *Le dernier jour d'un condamné*, which Berlioz read shortly before he began to compose the symphony, was another source. There we find the phrase 'an *idée fixe* haunting the mind every hour, every moment', and, as the chained convicts dance in a ring in the prison courtyard, 'the clash of their chains' serves as 'orchestra to their raucous song', the whole picture being the 'image of a witches' sabbath'.

None of this in any way militates against the symphony's claim to be a coherent work of art. As always, what matters is not what may have gone into the making of a work but what comes out. Modern commentators and critics have decisively vindicated the integrity of the *Symphonie Fantastique* – what Wilfrid Mellers calls its 'taut design' and Edward Cone the unity that 'goes much deeper than the mere recurrence of the *idée fixe*'.

The work used to also be treated as a completely unheralded event in the history of music, coming out of nowhere – the most miraculous birth, it was said, since Athena sprang fully armed from the head of Zeus. That is no more than at best a half-truth. With all its innovations – including the introduction of instruments, textures and rhythms new to symphonic music – the *Symphonie Fantastique* has roots, deep roots, in other music, past and present: not least the music of Gluck and Spontini, which was for several years Berlioz's main diet and whose melodic style he absorbed into his innermost being when he first came to Paris in 1821, a boy of seventeen who had never heard an orchestra.

A few years later, the discovery of Weber, and still more of Beethoven at the Conservatoire concerts in 1828, 1829 and 1830 (paralleling his discoveries of Goethe and Shakespeare), had an even more profound effect on the young musician till then reared on French classical opera. The *Fantastique* is unthinkable without Beethoven's Pastoral and Fifth, and without *Der Freischütz*. Above all, the revelation of the symphony as a dramatic form par excellence, and of the orchestra as an expressive instrument of undreamed richness and flexibility, became, for Berlioz, the springboard for a leap into unknown territory. It opened before him a new world which he must at all costs enter and inhabit.

On the point of starting to compose the *Fantastique*, in January 1830, he told his sister Nancy: 'Ah, my sister, you can't imagine what pleasure a composer feels who writes freely in response to his own will alone. When I have drawn the first accolade of my score, where my instruments are ranked in battle array – when I think of the virgin lands which academic prejudice [in France] has left untouched till now and which since my emancipation I regard as my domain – I rush forward with a kind of fury to cultivate it'.

Already, in a letter written to a friend a year earlier, when ideas for the symphony had begun to take shape in his mind, we get a sense of Berlioz's intense excitement: 'Now that I have broken the chains of routine, I see an immense territory stretching before me which academic rules forbade me to enter. Now that I have heard that awe-inspiring giant Beethoven I realise what point the art of music has reached. It's a question of taking it up at that point and carrying it further – no, not further, that's impossible, he attained the limits of art, but as far in another direction'.

The influence of Beethoven, however, could only be general, not specific; it was a matter of inspiration, not imitation. Without doubt there are sounds and colours and gestures in the work that are indebted to Beethoven's example. One can cite the emancipation of the timpani, used as an independent instrument, not just as reinforcement of the tuttis; the macabre, grotesque effect of bassoons in the high register in the 'Marche au supplice', inspired by the scherzo of Beethoven's Fifth; in the third movement, the 'Scène aux champs', certain country images like the cry of the quail (from the Pastoral) and, in the movement's great central crisis and its resolution, the successive fortissimo diminished sevenths of the Fifth's first movement and the irregular diminuendo chords of Florestan's aria in *Fidelio*. But the form of the work is Berlioz's and no one else's. So, though he is deeply concerned with issues of musical architecture, he works out his own salvation. Though he will learn from Beethoven's technique of thematic transformation, he will not use it as a model. He composes in melodic spans rather than in motifs. The work's recurring melody – the *idée fixe* – is forty bars long; and its repetition two thirds of the way through the first movement represents not a sonata reprise but a stage in the theme's evolution from monody to full orchestral statement.

No one – not least in France – had composed symphonic music or used the orchestra like this before. As Michael Steinberg says, 'no disrespect to Mahler or Shostakovich, but this is the most remarkable First Symphony ever written'. It was typical of Berlioz's boldness and freedom of spirit that his first major orchestral work comprised a mixture of genres analogous to what the Romantic dramatists were attempting after the example of Shakespeare – bringing the theatre into the concert hall – and that in doing so he should override the normal categories of symphonic discourse and create his own idiosyncratic version of classical form in response to the demands of the musical drama: the 'Episode in the Life of an Artist' that is the work's subtitle.

Yet the score given at the Conservatoire Hall in December 1830 was, to him, a logical consequence of the Beethovenian epiphany that he had had two years earlier in the same hall. It was addressed to the same eager young public and performed by many of the same players, under the same conductor, François Antoine Habeneck.

It might embody autobiographical elements: not just his much publicised passion for the Shakespearean actress Harriet Smithson, but his whole emotional and spiritual existence up till then – as he wrote at the front of the manuscript, quoting a poem by Victor Hugo, 'All I have suffered, all I have attempted … The loves, the labours, the bereavements of my youth … my heart's book inscribed on every page'. For Berlioz, however, all this was not essentially different from what Beethoven had done in his Fifth and Sixth symphonies. Carrying on from him, he could use intense personal experience, and movement titles, to bring music's inherent expressivity still further into the open and, at the same time, extend its frame of reference and blur still more the distinction between so-called 'pure music' and music

associated with an identifiable human situation. All sorts of extra-musical ideas could go into the composition, yet music remained sovereign. It could describe the course of one man's hopeless passion for a distant beloved and still be – as Beethoven said of the Pastoral – 'expression of feeling rather than painting', the whole contained within a disciplined musical structure.

The literary programme offered to the Conservatoire audience gave the context of the work; it introduced the 'instrumental drama' (to quote Berlioz's prefatory note) whose 'outline, lacking the assistance of speech, needs to be explained in advance'. It is not this that holds the symphony together and makes it a timeless record of the ardours and torments of the young imagination. The music does that.

The five movements may be summed up as follows:

1 Slow introduction; sadness and imagined happiness, creating out of a state of yearning an image of the ideal woman, represented (Allegro) by the *idée fixe* – a long, asymmetrically phrased melodic span, first heard virtually unaccompanied, then gradually integrated into the full orchestra. The melody, in its alternate exaltation and dejection, its fevers and momentary calms, forms the main argument. At the end, like a storm that has blown itself out, it comes to rest on a series of solemn chords.

2 A ball, at which the beloved is present. Waltz: at first dreamlike, then glittering, finally garish. Middle section with the *idée fixe* assimilated to the rhythm of the dance.

3 A shepherd pipes a melancholy song, answered from afar by another. Pastoral scene: a long, serene melody, with similarities of outline to the *idée fixe* and, like it, presented as monody, by flute and first violins, then in progressively fuller textures. Agitated climax, precipitated by the *idée fixe*, which later takes on a more tranquil air (without its characteristic sighing fourth). Dusk, distant thunder. The first shepherd now pipes alone. Drums and solo horn prepare for:

4 'Marche au supplice'. The artist, under the influence of opium, imagines he has killed the beloved and, accompanied by noisy crowds, is being marched through the streets to execution. The dreams of the first three movements are now intensified into nightmare and the full orchestral forces deployed: massive brass and percussion, prominent and grotesque bassoons. The *idée fixe* reappears pianissimo on solo clarinet, but is cut off by the guillotine stroke of the whole orchestra.

5 Strange mewings, muffled explosions, distant cries, as a throng of demons and sorcerers, summoned from far and wide, gather to celebrate Sabbath night. The executed lover witnesses his own funeral. The beloved melody, now a lewd distortion of itself – a vulgar, cackling tune on a shrill E flat clarinet – joins the revels. *Dies irae*, parody of the church's ritual of the dead. Witches' round dance. The climax, after a long crescendo, combines round dance and *Dies irae* in a tour de force of rhythmic and orchestral virtuosity.

'Overture', Béatrice et Bénédict

BERLIOZ HAD OFTEN THOUGHT of composing an opera on *Much Ado about Nothing*. When eventually he decided to do so – for the opening season of the new theatre in the German spa town of Baden-Baden – he deliberately limited his ambitions: the libretto – based closely on the text of the play but written by the composer – removes Don John and his sinister intrigue against Hero altogether and sets only a part of Shakespeare's tragi-comedy, confining the action almost entirely (in Berlioz's words) to 'persuading Beatrice and Benedick that they love each other'. Though still only in his late 50s, Berlioz was in nearly constant pain (from what his doctors called 'intestinal neuralgia' but what was probably Crohn's Disease) and with no illusions about his career in his native France.

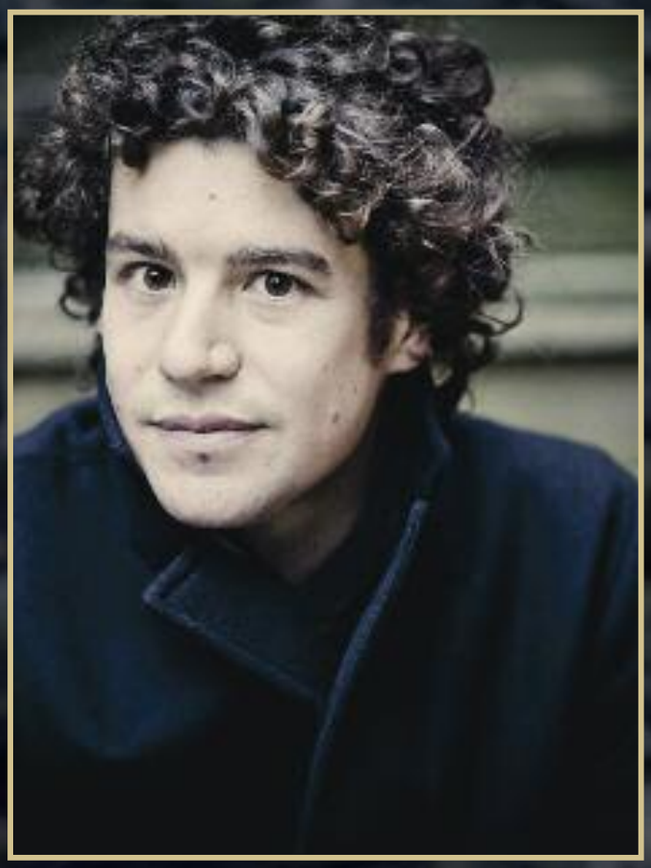
The prodigality of ideas and unstoppable energy found in Berlioz's earlier Italian comedy, *Benvenuto Cellini*, give way here to an extreme economy and a demonstration of the expressive possibilities in the basic means of music, notably the scale. Writing the work was, he said, 'a relaxation from *The Trojans*', the epic five-act opera he had recently completed, which he knew was his magnum opus but for which there was no prospect of a production. It was symbolic of the state of his career that what would be his last major work was written not for Paris but for a German provincial town.

Yet the music of the work – 'a caprice written with the point of a needle', Berlioz called it – has no trace of bitterness and, on the contrary, has wit and grace and lightness of touch. It accepts life as it is. The opera is a divertissement, not a grand statement. It celebrates love not – as in *The Trojans* – as a devouring, all-consuming passion but as 'a flame, a will o' the

wisp, coming from no one knows where, gleaming then vanishing from sight, for the distraction of our souls'. Mad, perhaps; but 'madness is better than stupidity' – words that all come from the final number of the opera, where Benedick and Beatrice play at hiding their recognition of twin natures.

The 'Overture', which was composed last, and which bears the date '25 February 1862' and 'The End' (in English), sums up the work. Racy, headlong yet poised, exuberant, ironic, brilliant but touched with warmth of heart, it breathes a single atmosphere while drawing on half a dozen different numbers from the opera: the wide melodic spans of Beatrice's aria, the magical pianissimo conclusion of the 'Nocturne', the triumphant but rather empty tuttis of the conventional Hero's aria, the long descending and ascending melody of the 'Wedding March', the men's trio's conspiratorial humour, above all the motif of the final 'Scherzo-Duettino', whose nimble triplet rhythm and angular dotted phrase work their way in everywhere and spread their gleeful mirth across the whole texture of the orchestra.

Robin Ticciati CONDUCTOR



ROBIN TICCIATI is Principal Conductor of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of the Bamberger Symphoniker and Music Director Designate of Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

As guest conductor, he works with world-class orchestras on both sides of the Atlantic, including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra, the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Rotterdam Philharmonic, the Filarmonica della Scala, the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks Munich, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Robin Ticciati balances orchestral engagements with extensive work in some of the world's most prestigious opera houses and festivals, including Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Salzburg Festival, Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera House, Teatro alla Scala, and Opernhaus Zürich. In July 2011, he was appointed Music Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera from January 2014.

Born in London, Robin Ticciati is a violinist, pianist and percussionist by training. He was a member of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain when he turned to conducting, aged 15, under the guidance of Sir Colin Davis and Sir Simon Rattle. Following a conducting debut in Brussels

in 2004, aged just 19, Robin Ticciati's career developed rapidly. In June 2005, he became the youngest conductor to appear at La Scala, Milan, and his 2006 appearance at the Salzburg Festival, conducting Mozart's *Il Sogno di Scipione*, saw him become the youngest conductor in the history of the festival. That performance was later released worldwide on DVD by Deutsche Grammophon. He was then appointed Chief Conductor of the Gävle Symphony Orchestra (2005-2009) and Music Director of Glyndebourne on Tour (2007-2009).

Robin Ticciati's debut CD recording, featuring choral works by Brahms (*Nänie*, *Gesang der Parzen*, *Alto Rhapsody*, *Schicksalslied*) with the Bavarian Radio Chorus and Bamberger Symphoniker, was released in Autumn 2010 to universal critical acclaim, attracting Germany's coveted Echo Klassik award.

Scottish Chamber Orchestra

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The Scottish Chamber Orchestra (SCO) was formed in 1974 with a commitment to serve the Scottish community, and is amongst Scotland's foremost cultural ambassadors. One of Scotland's five National Performing Arts Companies, it is internationally recognised as one of the finest chamber orchestras in the world.

The Orchestra performs throughout Scotland, including annual tours of the Highlands and Islands and South of Scotland, and appears regularly at the Edinburgh, East Neuk, St Magnus and Aldeburgh Festivals and the BBC Proms. Its busy international touring schedule, supported by the Scottish Government, has recently included many European countries as well as India and the USA. The Orchestra appointed Robin Ticciati to the post of Principal Conductor from the 2009/10 Season. Since then, Ticciati and the Orchestra have appeared together at the Edinburgh International Festival and have toured to Italy, Germany and Spain. They have received considerable acclaim for their programming and performances together:

> *'The Scottish Chamber Orchestra and its Principal Conductor, Robin Ticciati, have already become one of the great partnerships in British music.'*
> Daily Telegraph

The SCO's long-standing relationship with its Conductor Laureate, the late Sir Charles Mackerras, resulted in many exceptional performances and recordings, including two multi award-winning discs of Mozart symphonies (Linn Records).

The SCO works regularly with many eminent guest conductors including Conductor Emeritus Joseph Swensen, Richard Egarr, Olari Elts, Andrew Manze, John Storgårds, Thierry Fischer, Louis Langrée, Oliver Knussen and Nicholas McGegan; regular soloist/directors include Christian Zacharias, Piotr Anderszewski and Alexander Janiczek.

The Orchestra has commissioned more than a hundred new works, including pieces by Composer Laureate Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Martin Suckling, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Judith Weir, Sally Beamish, Karin Rehnqvist, Lyell Cresswell, Hafliði Hallgrímsson, Einojuhani Rautavaara, Stuart MacRae and the late Edward Harper.

The SCO has led the way in music education with a unique programme of projects. SCO Connect provides workshops for children and adults across Scotland and has attracted interest and invitations from overseas. The Orchestra broadcasts regularly and has a discography now exceeding 150 recordings.

The Scottish Chamber Orchestra receives funding from the Scottish Government.

This CD is the fifteenth in a series of recordings which the SCO is producing in partnership with Linn Records, and the first conducted by Principal Conductor Robin Ticciati.

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Scottish Chamber Orchestra

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HECTOR BERLIOZ Symphonie Fantastique

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