

In 1831-32, Berlioz created a sequel. He originally called this six-scene melodrama *Le retour à la vie* ("The Return to Life"). It was his intention that the works be paired under the title "An Episode in the Life of an Artist." Although Berlioz stressed its importance to his concept, the sequel, renamed *Lelio* upon its revival in 1855, is all but unknown today. The impassioned romanticism of Berlioz' expression is quite evident in his famous description of the work, reprinted here in an English translation by Harry Brett:

PROGRAM OF THE SYMPHONY - A young musician of unhealthily sensitive nature and endowed with vivid imagination has poisoned himself with opium in a paroxysm of lovesick despair. The narcotic dose he has taken was too weak to cause death, but it has thrown him into a long sleep accompanied by the most extraordinary visions. In this condition his sensations, his feelings and his memories find utterance in his sick brain in the form of a melody in his mind, like a fixed idea which is ever returning and which he hears everywhere.

I. Reveries, Passions "At first he thinks of the uneasy and nervous condition of his mind, of somber longings, of depression and joyous elation without any recognizable cause, which he experienced before the Beloved One had appeared to him. Then he remembers the ardent love with which she suddenly inspired him; he thinks of his almost insane anxiety of mind, of his raging jealousy, of his reawakening love, of his religious consolation.

II. A Ball "In a ballroom, amidst confusion of a brilliant festival, he finds the Beloved One again.

III. Scene in the Meadows "It is a summer evening. He is in the country, musing, when he hears two shepherd lads who play, in alternation the *ranz des vaches* (a tune used by Swiss shepherds to call their flocks). This pastoral duet, the quiet scene, the soft whisperings of the trees stirred by the zephyr wind, some prospects of hope recently made known to him, all these sensations unite to impart a long-unknown repose to his heart and to lend a smiling color to his imagination. And then She appears once more. His heart stops beating, painful forebodings fill his soul. 'Should she prove false to him!' One of the shepherds resumes the melody, but the other answers him no more...Sunset...distant rolling of thunder...loneliness...silence...

IV. March to the Scaffold "He dreams that he murdered his Beloved, that he has been condemned to death and is being led to execution. A march that is alternately somber and wild, brilliant and solemn, accompanies the procession...The tumultuous outburst is followed without modulation by measured steps. At last the fixed idea returns, for a moment a last thought of love is revived -which is cut short by the deathblow.

V. Dream of a Witches' Sabbath "He dreams that he is present at a witches' revel, surrounded by horrible spirits amidst sorcerers and monsters in many fearful forms, who have come together for his funeral. Strange sounds, groans, shrill laughter, distant yells, which other cries seem to answer. The Beloved melody is heard again but it has lost its shy and noble character; it has become a vulgar, trivial, grotesque dance tune. She it is who comes to attend the witches' meeting. Riotous howls and shouts greet her arrival. She joins the infernal orgy, bells toll for the dead, a burlesque parody of the *Dies Irae*, the Witches' round dance. The dance and the *Dies Irae* are heard together."

At the first performance of this symphony, Berlioz circulated a handbill with the following: "The composer knows quite well that music is a substitute neither for speech nor for the art of drawing. He has never had the absurd pretension of reproducing abstract ideas or moral qualities, but only passions and impressions...If the composer held the ridiculous and exaggerated views which are imputed to him, he would certainly not have supplied a program; for on those views he would necessarily consider the program a useless substitute."



Program Notes "A Halloween Spooktacular" Friday, October 30, 2009

Modest Mussorgsky - *Night on Bald Mountain*

Born in Karevo, Russia, March 9, 1839; died in St. Petersburg, Russia, March 16, 1881

Mussorgsky sketched his original version of the piece he called *St. John's Night on Bald Mountain* in the spring of 1866 and completed the orchestration in June 1867 (actually on St. John's Eve, June 23); it was apparently never performed in his lifetime, but he adapted the music for use in other forms, as detailed below.

Mussorgsky's best-known concert work, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, was actually composed for piano solo, but has become far more familiar in the orchestral setting by Maurice Ravel. His operas have been orchestrated by Rimsky-Korsakov, Liadov, Shostakovich and Karol Rathaus, among others--though the original version of *Boris Godunov* has begun to enjoy more frequent productions in the last few decades. He completed only two concert works for orchestra without assistance from one of his colleagues: an *Intermezzo in modo classico* which he orchestrated from a piano original and dedicated to Borodin in 1867, and the work that opens the present concerts, which, like the *Pictures*, has become a staple of the orchestral repertory, but in a version orchestrated by another composer.

Rimsky-Korsakov, who is sometimes criticized for his smoothing out some of the individuality in Mussorgsky's operas *Boris Godunov* and *Khovanshchina*, nevertheless deserves our gratitude for making it possible to perform those works (the latter in particular) and others. After Mussorgsky's death, Rimsky actually set his own work aside for some time in order to collate, assemble, edit and orchestrate several of his late friend's compositions. It is Rimsky's edition of *Night on Bald Mountain* that has taken its place in the "standard" repertory, just as it is Ravel's of the *Pictures*. And, as with Ravel in respect to the latter work, Rimsky was not the only one to give *Night on Bald Mountain* a try: there have been other orchestrations of the piece by the composer Gottfried von Einem and the conductors Leopold Stokowski (who also orchestrated the *Pictures*) and René Leibowitz.

Stokowski conducted his version in Disney's classic animated film *Fantasia* a little more than 60 years ago. The screen interpretation was reasonably faithful to Mussorgsky's concept: a wild convocation of witches and demons on Bald Mountain (otherwise known as Mount Triglav in the Julian Alps, the highest peak in Slovenia) on St. John's Eve, in which Satan, in the form of Tchernobog (literally, the "black god"), is master of the revels. Mussorgsky's first thoughts on composing such a piece came to him as early as 1860. His original inspiration, he advised, was not Gogol's tale *St. John's Eve*, but Baron Mengden's drama *The Witch*. He wrote to Balakirev in September of that year that he contemplated "a complete act on Bald Mountain--the witches' sabbath, separate episodes of sorcerers, a solemn march for all this trash, a finale--glorification of the sabbath, personified in Mengden by the sovereign of the whole festival on Bald Mountain..."

Nearly six full years passed, however, before he was able to report to Balakirev, in April 1866, that he had conceived an outline for an orchestral piece, and yet another year before he actually went to work on it, in June 1867.

He worked with exceptional speed, directly in full orchestral score. Balakirev had some criticisms of the piece, and it was not performed. Five years later, however, when Mussorgsky joined with Balakirev's the three other junior members of Balakirev's group--Borodin, Cui and Rimsky-Korsakov--to compose the composite opera-ballet *Mlada*, his assignment was just such a scene as he had depicted in his as yet unperformed work, so he proceeded to flesh it out with choral parts. Eventually, that composite effort was scuttled and Rimsky composed a new version of *Mlada* by himself, but five years later still, in 1877, Mussorgsky undertook his final operatic effort, *The Sorochintsy Fair*, which he indeed based on Gogol's tale, and in which he recycled a good deal of the music he had composed for *Mlada*. This time he set his *St. John's Night* as an intermezzo in which a peasant lad dreams of the scene on Mount Triglav. He never quite completed this opera; Anatoly Liadov orchestrated parts of it, and after him both Vissarion Shebalin and Nikolai Tcherepnin tried their hands at revising and reorchestrating it.

In the meantime, the various concert versions of *Night on Bald Mountain* appeared. Mussorgsky's original, though unperformed and unpublished, had not entirely disappeared--the Russian conductor Nikolai Malko, after leaving the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, was able to perform it in England--but it was not until a hundred years after Mussorgsky completed his own version that his latter-day compatriot Georgy Vasilievich Kirkor (1910-1981) got hold of the manuscript of the full score in the St. Petersburg (at that time Leningrad) Conservatory and prepared the "critical edition" which has been making its way into the repertory in the last 30 years. Mussorgsky himself provided the indisputably authoritative program note in a letter to his friend Vladimir Nikolsky (the Pushkin scholar who suggested the project that became *Khovanshchina*), dated July 12, 1867, less than three weeks after the score was completed. The following translation, by Robert W. Oldani, is from the introduction to the Kirkor score in its second printing.

The Witches is the vulgar title or, so to speak, the nickname of my composition; in actuality it is *St. John's Night on Bald Mountain* and is, as you see, a hallowed little thing. If memory does not deceive me, the witches used to assemble on this mountain... , there to gossip, play lewd pranks, and await their superior--Satan. Upon his arrival, they...would form a circle around his throne, where he sat in the guise of a he-goat, and would sing glory to their chief. When Satan became frenzied enough at the witches' glorification, he would order the start of the Sabbath [selecting the witches who had caught his fancy to satisfy his needs]... In the title of the composition I have indicated its content: 1) assembly of the witches, their chatter and gossip, 2) procession of Satan, 3) vile glorification of Satan, and 4) Sabbath. If my composition is performed, I would want the *affiche* to indicate this content, for the understanding of society. The form and character of my composition is *Russian and original*. Its tone is hot and disorderly. In fact, the Sabbath starts from the appearance of the little imps, because (according to legend) the vile glorification was included in the body of the Sabbath, but I have titled the episodes... separately for greater ease in conveying this musical form--since it is new... You know something of my musical convictions, that for me an important matter is the true representation of folk fantasy, wherever it appears, of course accessible only to musical creation...

I wrote *St. John's Night* very quickly, directly in a clean copy in orchestral score; I wrote in in about 12 days...I didn't sleep at night and finished the job, as it happened, exactly on the eve of *St. John's Day*; something so boiled up in me that I simply didn't know what was going on with me--that is, I knew, but it isn't necessary to know this, for otherwise one may grow conceited. In the Sabbath I did the orchestration in scattered separate parts that will be grasped easily by the listener since the coloration of the winds and strings produces sufficiently perceptible contrasts.

I think the character of the Sabbath is thus, i.e., scattered in a continuous roll call until the final binding together of the whole witch rabble; thus at least the Sabbath was carried out in my imagination...I see in my sinful pranks an original Russian work, not deriving from German profundity and routine but...springing from our native fields and nourished with Russian bread.

**Hector Berlioz - *Symphonie Fantastique*, Op. 14
Born in la Côte-St. Andre, France, December 11, 1803; died in Paris, March 8, 1869**

In many ways the quintessential Romantic composer, Berlioz stuns with the brilliance and originality of his music. His *Symphonie fantastique* of 1830, revolutionary in its day, retains its novelty and vigor even to the ears of the 20th-century. Written only four years after the first performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 (at this point, Berlioz had only heard the Third and Fifth Symphonies), the *Symphonie fantastique* expands upon Beethoven's classic orchestra, revealing new realms of coloristic and dramatic potentials within symphonic form. Berlioz once said: "Beethoven opened before me a new world of music, as Shakespeare had revealed a new universe of poetry." As Hugh MacDonald observes in *The New Grove Dictionary*: "That Berlioz wrote symphonies at all is entirely due to his obeisance to Beethoven, and the *Symphonie fantastique* can be seen as a deliberate and conscious attempt to work out dramatic and poetic ideas in the framework of a Beethoven symphony. More important, Berlioz discovered that instrumental music has an expressive and articulative force far more penetrating than vocal setting...Just as Berlioz hardly set any of Shakespeare's poetry to music, similarly Berlioz rarely adopted the precise tone and timbre of Beethoven. He absorbed this impact at a deep level, seeing Beethoven as a supreme dramatist in music, more poet than craftsman."

Berlioz' parents wanted him to follow in his father's footsteps as a physician; the young man dutifully took a bachelier des sciences physiques in January of 1824. When he announced that he intended to become a composer, Berlioz confronted severe opposition and was virtually disinherited. Returning to study at the Paris Conservatory, Berlioz endured a long period of privation.

In September of 1827, Berlioz attended a production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* starring the Irish actress, Harriet Smithson. He recalled: "The impression made on my heart and mind by her extraordinary talent, nay her dramatic genius, was equaled only by the havoc wrought in me by the poet she so nobly interpreted." The fact that she spoke no French and he spoke no English did not deter the romantic composer from bombarding her with passionate letters. Mentioning that he called her his "Ophelia, or Juliet, or Desdemona," MacDonald continues: "His emotional derangement was immediate and violent. For the next two years he pursued her remorselessly, waiting for her return to Paris, vainly seeking a means to approach her. When in 1830 it seemed that his love for her had turned sour, the accumulation of emotional tension broke out in the *Symphonie fantastique*, which describes and transmutes into artistic form the artist's passions, dreams and frustrations. For Berlioz there was no clear distinction between the real Harriet Smithson and the idealized embodiment of Shakespeare's heroines, so that when, later, he was to secure an introduction to her and ultimately marry her, a relationship that had begun on an ideal level could only spoil in the glare of everyday reality, and the wholly Romantic conjunction of the artist with the ideal woman came to a bitter end."

One of the revolutionary aspects of the five-movement *Symphonie fantastique* is Berlioz' use of a recurrent theme or *idée fixe*, which, in varying forms, is heard in every movement of the work "according to the nature of the changing scene." The theme itself, first quoted by flute and first violins after the introduction and later presented by the clarinet, was adapted by the composer from his earlier cantata, *Herminie*.