October 19, 2024

7:30 pm

"Romeo and Juliet"

Roméo et Juliette, Op. 17
Prelude: Montagues and Capulets
Romeo Alone; the Ball at the Capulets' House
Love Scene
Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

Les Troyens, Op. 29
Royal Hunt and Storm
Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

INTERMISSION

Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22
Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

Lucille Chung, piano

Overture to *Rienzi*
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Hector Berlios was the eldest of six children. His birthplace was the family home in the commune of La Côte-Saint-André around Isère, in southeastern France.

Music did not feature prominently in young Berlioz's education. Yet, his father gave him basic instruction on the flageolet (similar to a recorder), and he later took flute and guitar lessons with local teachers. He never studied the piano, and throughout his life never played well. Still Berlioz became an outstanding orchestra conductor.

The son of a physician, Berlioz was expected to become a medical doctor just like his father, and he attended medical school before focusing on music for his career. His refusal to follow long-held composition rules made him unwelcome in the conservative musical groups of Paris. However, he did win France's premier music prize – the "Prix de Rome" – in 1830.

Roméo et Juliette, Op. 17
Prelude: Montagues and Capulets
Romeo Alone; the Ball at the Capulets' House
Love Scene

The score is written for three flutes (3rd playing piccolo), two oboes (and English Horn), two clarinets, four bassoons, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, two timpani and four percussion instruments, two harps, and strings.

Berlioz developed a great fondness for Shakespeare's plays. He writes in his ***The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz,*** "This Romeo is worthy of Shakespeare's genius! What a subject for an opera or a dramatic symphony! How it lent itself to music! To begin with, the dazzling ball at the Capulets', where amid a whirling cloud of beauties the young Montague first sets eyes on 'sweet Juliet' … the glorious night scene on Juliet's balcony, the lovers' voices 'like softest music to attending ears', uttering an ecstasy as radiant as the watchful moon."

After spending time imaging what the opera or dramatic symphony could be like, and then actually starting work on the composition, he writes that he took seven months to write ***Roméo et Juliette***.

"In his symphony Roméo et Juliette both lovers are silent throughout, yet in the great love scene their presence is strongly felt, and their passion vividly depicted," reads the program notes of a Los Angeles Philharmonic performance.

Roméo et Juliette was given its first three performances at the Paris Conservatoire at the end of 1839, the composer conducting. It was a pinnacle of French Romanticism and a brilliant example of Berlioz's orchestral mastery, as many then present were aware. One of them was Wagner, who had recently arrived in Paris for the first time and who was deeply impressed by the symphony.

Hugh Macdonald, general editor of *The New Berlioz Edition* and a professor of music at Washington University in St. Louis, writes that "Berlioz was never able to present the full work again in Paris. The only other complete performances in his lifetime were given abroad: in Vienna and Prague in 1846, in St Petersburg in 1847 and in Weimar in 1852. But he often extracted the instrumental movements (Nos. 2, 3 and 4) for his concerts in Paris and abroad, a practice that allows those movements to be more frequently heard."

In its complete form ***Roméo et Juliette*** is one of the most original conceptions of the nineteenth century: deftly poised between symphony and stage drama, it is fed by a passion for the subject that seems to spring from every page.

Berlioz also authored a highly respected ***Treatise on Instrumentation,*** which often reflected his orchestration practices. Richard Strauss, a German composer (1864-1949), updated the document to bring to light new developments in the instruments, the performance on certain instruments, and advances in musical trends.

Strauss writes in the Foreword to ***Treatise on Instrumentation***, "Berlioz was the first to arrange and organize this complicated subject. He not only treated questions of mechanics but stressed above all the esthetic aspects or orchestral technique."

Using a sample out of ***Romeo and Juliet*** - ***the Ball at the Capulets' House*** by Berlioz, Strauss writes that at the beginning of a chromatic phrase (in which each note is just a half-step apart and played fast), a separate finger was needed for each note in the violins – no sliding between notes."

Strauss also selected a phrase from the ***Romeo and Juliet - Love Scene*** which dealt with the violoncello section playing a phrase "of a *melancholy, veiled, and mysterious character.* The group is split into two parts and the basses are playing a similar third part. Along with the violas, this produces a quartet of low harmonies … *ghostly*!! Strauss emphasizes the mastery of Berlioz.

David Cairn, translator, and editor of ***The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz,*** writes, "Berlioz was an extraordinary human being – exceptionally imaginative. Yet, he could never bring himself to leave Paris – that unique, electrifying city, although he came close to settling in London. The period of his greatest activity as composer and concert-promoter was between 1832 and 1840, and in the 1850s he was at the height of his powers during which time he wrote the opera named ***Romeo and Juliet***."

"*With Berlioz, one always comes back to love. It was the alpha and omega of his existence.*"

From the Forward to *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*

Les Troyens, Op. 29

Royal Hunt and Storm

The score is written for three flutes (3rd playing piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, two timpani and one percussion instrument, and strings.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic presents a review of this work in its program notes. "This 'descriptive symphony' is an entr'acte to be played before Act IV of ***The Trojans***, Berlioz's operatic masterpiece composed in the years 1856-1858. It represents the fateful culmination of the love of Dido and Aeneas, and yet neither of them sings. Berlioz always felt that the orchestra on its own can express as much as, if not more than, the human voice when it comes to powerful dramatic feelings."

"*The Royal Hunt and Storm* follows a precise narrative based closely on Virgil," continues the program notes from the Los Angeles Philharmonic. "He arranged it for concert performance."

Berlioz wrote varying instrumental reviews in his ***Treatise on Instrumentation*** ("In France, as elsewhere, no one disputes my mastery of orchestration, especially since I published a treatise on the subject," writes Berlioz about his high level of experience)***.***

But in his ***Memoirs,*** he also reviews the subject of orchestration and new and improved orchestral instruments. He pens, "That able instrument-maker, Adolphe Sax, who has settled in Paris is now the 'incomparable Adolphe Sax' regarding his design of clarinets. And Adolphe Sax is also making rotary-valve trumpets, large and small, in all possible keys with excellent tone-quality. Adolphe Sax, similarly, makes admirable tubas in Paris as well as having perfected the bass clarinet and other members of the clarinet family." In his opera ***Les Troyens (The Trojans)***, Berlioz likewise included a 'saxhorn' made by Sax.

The epic opera ***Les Troyens (The Trojans)*** was so large in scale that it was never staged in its entirety during his lifetime. However, while it is his most celebrated opera, it has a running time of over five hours and many complex scene changes making it difficult to produce. Thus, it was divided into two separate operas.

"The first complete production of ***The Trojans*** took place in the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden/London in 1957. The performance showing the opera's purposeful beauty and grandeur made us listen to all of Berlioz' music afresh and see his achievement in a new light," continues David Cairn, translator, and editor of ***The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz***. "Showing his originality, we can enjoy him for what he is, a remarkable composer, and one among many."

The range of Berlioz's imagination is a wonder to behold, writes Hugh Macdonald. At the end of his life Berlioz liked to imagine having the opportunity to meet Virgil and Shakespeare, since he felt sure that those long-dead poets would recognize ***Les Troyens*** and ***Roméo et Juliette*** as works worthy of the masterpieces that inspired them. With or without the blessing of the dead, posterity has nodded to the shade of Berlioz with the words that one of his friends used after hearing ***Les Troyens***: 'Well roared, lion!'

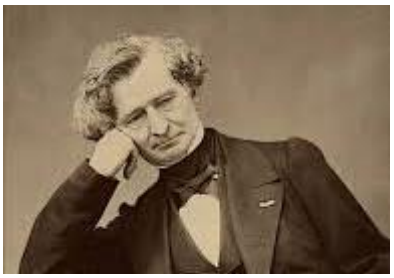
Hector Berlioz

When Berlioz began his ***Memoirs*** in March 1848, he made his intentions perfectly clear. "I would not be writing 'confessions': I would tell only what I wished to talk about in my private life."

Berlioz writes in his ***Memoirs***, "I was born on December 11, 1803, in a very small French town. My father, Louis Berlioz, was a doctor. He was a highly respected figure not merely in our little town but in the neighboring towns as well. When I was ten years old, he sent me to a secondary school where I was to begin learning Latin. After a while he brought me back to 'home school me' feeling that he could teach me languages, literature, history, geography, and music better than at the school. He taught me how to read music and gave me guidance in music theory."

"How much tenderness must a man feel for his son to undertake and carry through such a task, and how few fathers would be capable of it!" Berlioz adds.

"Still studying the flute, I was now to study with a second violinist from Lyons who also played the clarinet and, thus, could give me flute lessons twice a day." Berlioz was 13 years old at this point.



Hector Berlioz

INTERMISSION

Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22

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

Lucille Chung, piano

The score is written for solo piano, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings. Performance time is 24 minutes.

Camille Saint-Saëns composed his ***Piano Concerto No. 2*** in 1868 and gave the first performance – he was the piano soloist – at a *Concert Populaire* in Paris on December 13th of that year, with Anton Rubinstein conducting. Rubinstein was a Russian pianist, composer and conductor who lived in Paris for some time.

"In his long career, Saint-Saëns progressed from boy wonder to grand old man," reads ***Composers: Their Lives and Works.*** "He composed in virtually every genre of music known in his time. Saint-Saëns was also an outstanding pianist and organist."

Of interest is the fact that Saint-Saëns was a close friend of Hector Berlioz whose works we just heard performed. ***The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*** reads that Saint-Saëns visited Berlioz regularly when Berlioz was critically ill in early 1869. And Saint-Saëns also states in the forward to ***The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*** that "the least sign of sympathy moved the composer, Berlioz, to tears. He was very sincere."

Saint-Saëns was born in Paris into a middle-class family. An aunt who played the piano gave him his first music lessons when he was three years old, and he immediately showed immense talent. He gave private recitals from the age of five, and at age 10 made his public debut. He continued studying piano and began organ lessons, becoming an outstanding organist later in life.

In addition to being a composer, he held the highly prestigious post of organist at the Church of La Madeleine in Paris for 20 years. His successors at the church's organ included his pupil, Gabriel Fauré, who was organist at the church for ten years.

"His music is noted for its elegance, refinement, and charm – qualities considered to be quintessentially French," continues ***Composers: Their Lives and Works.*** "His best works have stood the test of time and remain much-loved staples of the repertoire."

Saint-Saëns wrote five piano concertos that reflect his own pianism (remember, he was an excellent pianist and organist) often using light pedaling or none. In fact, he is quoted in ***The Pianist's Guide to Pedaling,*** "To play without the pedal calls for a degree of suppleness in the hands."

Richard Nicols writes about his technique in the ***BBC Music Magazine*****:** "This light-fingered keyboard style had the virtue of lending itself to a contrast with the richer, louder orchestral sounds."

Saint-Saëns thought about his "sparkling" ***Second Piano Concerto*** for some time, continues Richard Nicols, and it was written down over a mere 17 days in 1868. Nicols adds, "This concerto has been most popular. The long, freely dramatic piano solo that opens the work originated from one of the composer's organ improvisations in the style of Bach, and provides a comfortable, familiar entrance to the work."

The first theme is borrowed from his student, Fauré. The second theme (*dolce cantabile*) is in the style of Chopin's ***Nocturnes***. The finale, (*accelerando*) is a wild tarantella emphasized by piano trills. Composer Franz Liszt praised this ***Second Piano Concerto*** of Saint-Saëns'. Even Berlioz – whose works we heard earlier this evening – wrote that Saint-Saëns "was as formidable a musical mechanism as I had ever encountered."

British concert pianist and soloist Stephen Hough (born 1961) reports that Saint-Saëns is one of the most pleasurable of composers to play. Hough writes in his book ***Rough Ideas: Reflections on Music and More***, that "having recorded the ***Compete Works for Piano and Orchestra by Saint-Saëns***, he can attest

to the fact that he wrote beautifully for the keyboard, but also wrote difficult 'stuff' so that he could show off!!"

Hough continues, "He recorded a few cylinders in the first decade of the 20th century, from which you can tell that, even as an old man, his playing was incredible – full of dexterity, but also with great elegance and beautiful phrasing. There is also a film of him playing which shows how everything at the keyboard was quite effortless for him."

Camille Saint-Saëns

Overture to *Rienzi*

Richard Wagner (b. Leipzig, Germany, May 22, 1813; d. Ca' Vendramin Calergi, Venice, Italy, February 13, 1883)

The score is written for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, four trombones, one tuba, timpani and four percussion instruments (bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tenor drum, and triangle), and strings. Performance time is 12 minutes.

Based on Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel, ***Rienzi, the Last of the Roman Tribunes***, Richard Wagner's opera of the same name tells the story of Cola di Rienzi (1313–1354), a late medieval citizen of Rome who rose to prominence by promising to crush the nobles and their followers and make Rome great again by returning power to the people.

Rienzi was Wagner's third completed opera, composed between 1838 and 1840, and first performed on October 20, 1842, in Dresden, to tumultuous popular acclaim. Rienzi was also the last of Wagner's operas wherein the influence of the Italian or French "grand opera" tradition is clearly evident.

At the time of composition, Wagner was living in France, according to author Martin Geck's biography, ***Richard Wagner: A Life in Music***. Geck continues, "For Richard Wagner, Paris was not a comfortable place for him to live, when in 1839, at the age of 26, he yet settled in the French capital, accompanied by his first wife, Minna. His dream was to have an opera produced by one of the great Paris houses, which would assure him access to Europe's other major stages."
The ambitious young composer had no money and few prospects, spoke next-to-no French, and had no friends of sufficient influence to gain him entry into the halls of music/operatic power. Yet, Geck adds,

"After reading Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Wagner felt compelled to turn it into a new 'grand heroic-tragic opera."

"He now set about working it up into a libretto and setting it to music. By the time he arrived in Paris in September 1839, two of the opera's five acts were essentially complete. Wagner then had in his hands his certain ticket to the bigtime: ***Rienzi, der Letzte der Tribunen*** (Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes). Wagner completed ***Rienzi*** in Paris in the fall of 1840, but initially found no sponsorship takers. Since he was now in Paris, he had the libretto of translated into French while he was still working on the score. He even took French language lessons himself.

It should be noted, however, that "anyone wanting to gain a foothold as an opera composer in what was then the cultural capital of Europe could not expect on doing so overnight," adds Geck.

After long negotiations and many revisions ***Rienzi*** was finally accepted by the Dresden Court Opera and presented in his native Saxony, to great acclaim, in October of 1842. He left Paris and returned to Dresden without any money and his relatives had to advance his travel expenses.

This ***Opera Overture to Rienzi*** features a festive theme and became a favorite of orchestras long before and after the full opera, as originally written, practically disappeared from the stage. Martin Geck's biography, ***Richard Wagner: A Life in Music*** points out that the character of "Rienzi" is a fantastic tenor role! Though rarely performed in its entirety today – after all, it lasts almost five hours – most performances of the opera ***Rienzi***, have been based on a score, published in 1898-99, by Cosima Wagner (Richard's second wife) and conductor Julius Kniese. They made numerous unauthorized edits and stylistic changes to conform it more to Wagner's later music-drama aesthetic.

The overture begins slowly – with a fanfare trumpet followed by the strings playing the opera's best-known aria. The melody is repeated throughout the orchestra. A second phrase emerges with a counter tune in the trombones. A brassy military march brings the overture to a brilliant close.

Ultimately best known for the challenging four-opera cycle ***The Ring of the Nibelung***, Richard Wagner was a conductor, librettist, theater director, and essayist, in addition to being the composer of some of the most enduring operatic works in history, such as ***The Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser, and Tristan and Isolda.***

"Richard Wagner was the youngest of nine children," reads ***Composers: Their Lives and Works.*** "Originally attracted to writing drama, around the age of 15 Wagner discovered his musical vocation – inspired by hearing Beethoven's ***Ninth Symphony***. Studying composition in Leipzig, he wrote his first 'youthful' symphony and various keyboard works, but his ambitions soon focused exclusively on opera." Ultimately, Richard Wagner had a profound influence on Western music.

Richard Wagner