

PROGRAM

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIRST SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Riccardo Muti Music Director

Pierre Boulez Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus

Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

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Thursday, January 5, 2012, at 8:00

Friday, January 7, 2010, at 8:00

Tuesday, January 10, 2012, at 7:30

Sir Mark Elder conductor

Lawrence Power viola

Chicago Shakespeare Theater guest artists

Barbara Gaines artistic director

Brendan Marshall-Rashid actor

Susan Shunk actor

Berlioz

The Corsair Overture, Op. 21

Readings from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (ed. Garrick)

BRENDAN MARSHALL-RASHID

SUSAN SHUNK

Berlioz

From *Romeo and Juliet*, Op. 17

Queen Mab, the Dream Fairy (Scherzo)

Readings from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (ed. Garrick)

BRENDAN MARSHALL-RASHID

SUSAN SHUNK

From *Romeo and Juliet*, Op. 17

Romeo at the Tomb of the Capulets: Invocation—Juliet's awakening. Delirious joy,
despair, final agony and death of the two lovers

INTERMISSION

Berlioz

Harold in Italy, Op. 16

In the Mountains: Scenes of Melancholy, Happiness, and Joy (Adagio—Allegro)

March of the Pilgrims Singing the Evening Hymn (Allegretto)

Serenade of an Abruzzi Mountaineer to His Sweetheart (Allegro assai)

Orgy of the Brigands (Allegro frenetico)

LAWRENCE POWER

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Hector Berlioz

Born December 11, 1803, Côte-Saint-André, France.

Died March 8, 1869, Paris, France.

The Corsair Overture, Op. 21

In 1844, Hector Berlioz went to Nice for a much-needed rest. He had recently separated from his wife, the Irish actress Harriet Smithson, who first taught him about the fire of passion, inspiring the *Symphonie fantastique* in the process, and then about the agony of a bad marriage. He also was exhausted from a “monster” concert he had produced for a Festival of Industry in Paris that netted him 800 francs, but left his nerves frazzled. He spent a month in Nice, revisiting favorite spots from his last trip there thirteen years before, exploring the rocky hills and swimming daily in the sea. When he learned that the room he had rented in 1831 (he wrote the *King Lear*

Overture there) was now occupied by an English family, he settled higher up, in a tower perched “on a ledge of the Ponchettes rock, and feasted myself on the glorious view over the Mediterranean and tasted a peace such as I had come to value more than ever.”

Music came to Berlioz in Nice again on this trip—a brilliant overture he originally named after his new lodgings: *The Tower of Nice*. He conducted it shortly after he returned to Paris, rested, reinvigorated—and relieved of his 800 francs. But when he directed it again two years later, he called it *Le corsaire rouge*, after James Fennimore Cooper’s novel *The Red Rover*. (Berlioz was a great fan of

COMPOSED

1844, later revised

FIRST PERFORMANCE

January 19, 1845, Paris. The composer conducting

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

November 27, 1896, Auditorium Theatre. Theodore Thomas conducting

MOST RECENT CSO SUBSCRIPTION CONCERT PERFORMANCE

November 12, 2005, Orchestra Hall. Daniel Harding conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets and two cornets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

9 minutes

CSO RECORDING

A 1991 performance with James Levine conducting was released on *From the Archives*, vol. 18.

Cooper's works, which appeared in French translation sometimes within weeks of their original publication.) When he got around to publishing the overture (in a slightly new form), Berlioz settled on *Le corsaire* as the title, the omission of a single word now identifying the score with the great English poet Lord Byron instead of the American novelist. From then on, audiences have listened for Byron's Corsair in music originally inspired by nothing more dramatic than hilltop views of the Mediterranean.

Byron had long been one of Berlioz's favorite poets. One of the few pleasures of his stay in Italy in 1831, after winning the Prix de Rome, had been to slip into an empty confessional in Saint Peter's and read a volume of Byron, away from the heat and noise of the city. "I followed the Corsair across the sea on his audacious journeys," he wrote of the experience. "I adored the extraordinary nature of the man, at once ruthless and

of extreme tenderness, generous-hearted and without pity, a strange amalgam of feelings seemingly opposed: love of a woman, hatred of his kind."

The Corsair

Overture, likewise, is music of extremes.

Berlioz begins, as he loved to do, with an explosion

of sound—a seemingly untamed rush of string scales and chattering winds. A lovely, gracious adagio follows, gathering energy and speed and leading straight into the fiery main allegro. The very end is a typical Berlioz shocker, with a couple of surprising twists and turns before the final curtain. ■



A portrait of Harriet Smithson



Hector Berlioz

Two Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*, Op. 17

Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* struck Paris like a thunderbolt in 1839. Of all Berlioz's major works, including his runaway hit, the earlier *Symphonie fantastique*, it's the one that remains outside the standard repertoire—it's a work without precedent on one hand, and without direct descendants on the other, since it inspired no sequels, spin-offs, or imitations. But it wasn't without influence. In fact, it was Berlioz's score, along with its one conceivable forerunner, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, that introduced Wagner to the central issues of his career—the relationship between music and drama, and the expressive potential of orchestral music. In that sense, as in many others, Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* was a visionary work, and it raised issues for the rest of the nineteenth century to face.

The origins of this extraordinary work date from two decisive events in Berlioz's creative life. The first was the Shakespeare season in the fall of 1827 at the Odéon Theater in Paris, presented by an English company and starring a young Irish actress named Harriet Smithson. "The impression her outstanding talent made on my heart and mind," Berlioz later wrote, "is only comparable to the upset which I suffered from the poet whose worthy interpreter she was." After he saw her in *Romeo and Juliet*, he's reported to have said, "I shall marry Juliet and I shall write my biggest symphony on the play." But, although he both married Harriet (some six years later) and wrote a grand *Romeo and Juliet* symphony (completed another six years later), Berlioz denied ever making the remark.

COMPOSED

January 24–September 8, 1839

FIRST PERFORMANCE

November 24, 1839, Paris.
The composer conducting

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE OF MUSIC FROM *ROMEO AND JULIET*

January 1, 1892, Auditorium Theatre. Theodore Thomas conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCE

April 5, 2008 (complete),
Orchestra Hall. Valery Gergiev conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes and piccolo, oboe and english horn, two clarinets, four bassoons, four horns, two trumpets and two cornets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, two harps, strings

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

17 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1969. Carlo Maria Giulini conducting (excerpts). Angel

A 1959 performance of excerpts conducted by Fritz Reiner was released on *From the Archives*, vol. 11 and a 1988 performance of part 2 conducted by James Levine was released on *From the Archives*, vol. 18.

In fact, it's unlikely he was even thinking about composing a symphony until after the second dramatic event, in March 1828, when he heard performances of Beethoven's Third and Fifth symphonies. "Beethoven opened before me a new world of music, as Shakespeare had revealed a new universe of poetry," he later recalled.

It's those two artistic influences, fueled by his passion for Harriet, that ignited Berlioz's creative fires. *Romeo and Juliet* wasn't the first product of this artistic liaison, but it's the one that links all three in a single score. In fact, the unconventional mix of genres and styles that characterizes *Romeo and Juliet* is the logical outgrowth of his admiration

SHAKESPEARE AND MUSIC

There was music in Shakespeare's plays right from the start. The texts include some one hundred songs and many cues for instruments—a march, a dance, and sometimes simply the direction: music. Since the poet's death nearly four hundred years ago, his works have enticed composers time and time again into the tough and often treacherous challenge of writing music to accompany, illustrate, or replace his words. *A Shakespeare Music Catalogue*, published in 1991, lists 21,362 pieces of music written to Shakespearean works—operas, songs, overtures, symphonies, tone poems, and, of course, incidental music designed to fulfill the numerous cues for music in the plays.

Many composers have tried their hand at writing incidental music for Shakespeare's work—Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich for *Hamlet*, Sibelius and Sir Arthur Sullivan for *The Tempest*, Mendelssohn for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Humperdinck for *Twelfth Night*, Flotow for *A Winter's Tale*, and Korngold for *Much*

Ado About Nothing. But none of these are regularly performed in the theater, and only Mendelssohn's has become a concert-hall staple.

It is remarkable how few good operas have been made from Shakespearean drama. But as Anthony Burgess has pointed out, "take the poetry and the incredible psychological insight away, and you have artificial plots that were not Shakespeare's own to start with, full of improbable coincidences and carelessly hurried fifth-act denouements." Many composers, however, have been unable to resist the challenge, and a few have written works that achieved modest, though usually not enduring popularity, such as Thomas's *Hamlet*, Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*. Only Giuseppe Verdi, who loved Shakespeare above all writers, was able to make

the translation from play to opera successfully (with the inspired help of his librettist, Arrigo Boito), and his *Otello* and *Falstaff* are among the great treasures of opera.

The increasing interest in Shakespeare in the early nineteenth century coincided with the rise of programmatic music, a movement that inspired some of the finest Shakespearean treatments including Berlioz's dramatic symphony, *Romeo and Juliet*; and Tchaikovsky's Fantasy-Overture, *Romeo and Juliet* (which Mark Elder and the CSO perform next week). The twentieth century has continued to add to the list, with works as



William Shakespeare

different as Prokofiev's ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, William Walton's film scores (for *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, and *Richard III*, all with Lawrence Olivier), and Elgar's brilliant and too-little-known symphonic study of Falstaff (also on next week's program).

—P.H.

for Beethoven's music—the Ninth Symphony in particular, with its pioneering mixture of voices and instruments—and Shakespeare's plays, with their interplay of shadow and light, comedy and tragedy.

The blueprint for *Romeo and Juliet* crystallized when Berlioz realized that for Beethoven “music is the be-all and end-all,” and that his symphonies were dramas told in the language of instrumental music. That suggested the scheme for *Romeo and Juliet*, where words and music together set the stage, but orchestral movements alone capture the emotional essence of the drama. Berlioz was certainly aware of the novelty of his concept: “These are the scenes,” he wrote, “which the orchestra, exploring uncharted ways, will try to translate into music.”

Berlioz worked on nothing but his new Shakespearean symphony for seven months, beginning in January 1839. He had toyed with the idea of composing a piece based on Shakespeare's play for more than a decade before he wrote a note, and even after he completed the score in September 1839, he continued to make adjustments up to the time of publication in 1847. From start to finish, *Romeo and Juliet* occupied him for the better part of two decades. The premiere was a triumph—one of the greatest of Berlioz's career—and he was shrewd enough to schedule two more performances over the next two weeks—a run of first performances that was highly unusual for the time. The new work stirred extraordinary interest in Paris's intellectual and artistic circles—“the brain of Paris,” as Balzac put it, turned out for the

concert. Few came away unmoved, and for some, such as Wagner, it was a transforming experience.

Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* is best known to concertgoers not complete but in excerpted movements—it was the composer himself who first programmed a “highlights” version—something that can't be said of any other symphony in the active repertoire. This week's performance offers two movements, each prefaced by readings from the play, in David Garrick's once-standard version.

The Queen Mab scherzo, prestissimo and pianissimo from the first measure, is one of Berlioz's greatest orchestral triumphs—a landmark of inventive orchestration and delicate coloring (the score calls for tuned antique cymbals, which Berlioz had discovered in Pompeii). Years before he composed this music, Berlioz mentioned to Mendelssohn his idea of writing a scherzo based on Mercutio's Queen Mab speech. Here, in this brilliant display of lighter-than-air fireworks, Berlioz beats Mendelssohn at his own game. (Mendelssohn's beloved Shakespearean scherzo, from his incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was composed four years after Berlioz's.)

Romeo at the Tomb of the Capulets, closely synchronized to the dénouement of the Garrick version of the play, is Berlioz's most literally programmatic music: it is so specific and carefully detailed it could be mimed. Every turn of events is mirrored in the score, from Romeo's hysteria before Juliet's tomb to her awakening, the lovers' joyous reunion, and finally, their deaths. ■



Hector Berlioz

Harold in Italy, Op. 16

At one of the first performances of his *Symphonie fantastique*, Hector Berlioz noticed that a man stayed behind in the empty concert hall after the ovations had ended and the musicians were packing up to go home. He was, as Berlioz recalls in his *Memoirs*, “a man with long hair and piercing eyes and a strange, ravaged countenance, a creature haunted by genius, a Titan among giants, whom I had never seen before, the first sight of whom stirred me to the depths.” The man stopped Berlioz in the hallway, grabbed his hand, and “uttered glowing eulogies that thrilled and moved me to the depths. It was Paganini.”

Paganini, is, of course, Italian-born Nicolò Paganini, among the first of music’s one-name

sensations. In 1833, the year he met Berlioz, Paganini was one of music’s greatest celebrities, known for the almost superhuman virtuosity of his violin playing as well as his charismatic, commanding presence. He was even a successful composer, whose signature caprices for unaccompanied violin had already been transcribed by Schumann and would later be given new life by Liszt, Brahms, Rachmaninov, and Lutosławski. A few weeks after the 1833 concert, Paganini went to see Berlioz. He had a marvelous new instrument, he said—a Stradivarius viola—which he wanted to begin playing in public. Would Berlioz compose a piece for his viola? “I replied that I was more flattered than I could say,” Berlioz recalled. “But that to

COMPOSED

1834

FIRST PERFORMANCE

November 23, 1834, Paris

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

March 11, 1892, Auditorium Theatre. August Junker, viola; Theodore Thomas conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCE

June 8, 2008, Orchestra Hall. Pinchas Zukerman, viola; Leonard Slatkin conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

solo viola, two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets, four bassoons, four horns, two cornets and two trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, snare drum, triangle, cymbals, harp, strings

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

42 minutes

live up to his expectations and write a work that showed off a virtuoso



Lord Byron, whose hero Childe Harold gave Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* both its sensibilities and its title

such as he in a suitably brilliant light, one should be able to play the viola, which I could not." But Paganini insisted, and even Berlioz, already one of the most powerful figures in music, found that he couldn't say no to Paganini.

What Berlioz began

to envision, typically, was novel in form—a work for viola with orchestra that was neither concerto nor symphony, but, rather, a bit of each. Even though the orchestra would have a role more significant and commanding than that of mere accompanist, Berlioz was certain that “by the incomparable power of his playing, Paganini would be able to maintain the supremacy of the soloist.” But when Paganini saw an early version of the score, with so many rests in the solo viola part, he said, “That’s no good. There’s not enough for me to do here. I should be playing all the time.” “What you want is a viola concerto,” Berlioz replied, “and in this case only you can write it.” Paganini did not answer, according to Berlioz: “He looked disappointed, and went away without referring to my symphonic fragment again.”

Freed from the burdens of pleasing Paganini and treating the viola like a scene-stealing, showstopper virtuoso, Berlioz returned to work on what would become one of his greatest and most ingenious compositions—“a series of orchestral scenes in which the solo viola would be involved, to a greater or lesser extent, like an actual person, retaining the same character throughout.” As in the groundbreaking *Symphonie fantastique*, there is a motto theme that recurs throughout the piece; but, unlike the symphony's *idée fixe*, which “keeps obtruding like an obsessive idea on scenes that are alien to it and deflects the current of the music,” the viola's theme here is “superimposed on the other orchestral voices so as to contrast with them in character and tempo without interrupting their development.” Berlioz began to think of the contemplative solo viola role as a kind of melancholy dreamer, in the style of Lord Byron's wandering poetic hero Childe Harold, which gave the piece both its overall sensibilities and its title. By extension, the piece also became a reflection on Berlioz's own happy travels through Italy, just as Byron's Harold was partly autobiographical.

Harold in Italy, Berlioz's new “symphony in four parts with solo viola,” was premiered in Paris in November 1834, without Paganini. The soloist was Chrétien Urhan, well-known in Parisian musical circles, but no Paganini. The conductor, Narcisse Giraud, apparently wasn't up to the challenge of Berlioz's complex,

large-scale structures—the finale nearly fell apart. The first review was brutal. “On the morning after the appearance of this article,” Berlioz later wrote, “I received an anonymous letter in which, after a deluge of even coarser insults, I was reproached with *not being brave enough to blow out my brains!*”

Despite his role in the creation of *Harold in Italy*, Paganini didn’t hear the piece until December 16, 1838, in a concert Berlioz conducted that also included the *Symphonie fantastique*. By then, Paganini had lost his voice to the disease of the larynx that would eventually kill him. He came to see Berlioz after the concert, accompanied by his young son. “My father bids me tell you, sir, that never in all his life has he been so affected by any concert,” the boy said. “Your music has overwhelmed him, and it is all he can do not to go down on his knees to thank you.” Paganini then took Berlioz by the arm and led him back onto the stage, where many of the players lingered. “There he knelt and kissed my hand,” Berlioz recalled in his *Memoirs*. “No need to describe my feelings: the facts speak for themselves.”

A few days later, Paganini sent Berlioz a congratulatory letter (“Beethoven being dead, only Berlioz can make him live again”) and a check for 20,000 francs, a gift that ended up paying for the composition of Berlioz’s “dramatic symphony” *Romeo and Juliet*. The score of that work, dedicated to Paganini, was on its way to the great performer when he died in May of 1840. (Although Paganini

never performed *Harold in Italy*, the solo part was eventually played on the Stradivarius viola for which he commissioned the work, an instrument that is now in the collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.)

The tale of *Harold in Italy* is told in four descriptively titled chapters. The first, which opens with a chromatic fugue, introduces the simple, square-cut melody that is Harold’s recurring theme. Several of the ideas in this movement are recycled from Berlioz’s *Rob Roy*



Violinist Nicolò Paganini, who asked Berlioz to write a work for viola and orchestra

Overture, a remnant of his earliest plan for *Harold in Italy* as a work based on *The Last Moments of Mary Stuart*, a then-popular play running in Paris. The second movement, which, according to

Berlioz, he originally improvised in a couple of hours one evening by the fire and then spent another six years fine tuning, depicts the approach and passing of a group of pilgrims. The sound of convent bells is suggested, as Berlioz the great orchestrator boasted, by “two harp notes doubled by the flutes, oboes, and horns.” This movement was repeated, by demand, at the Paris premiere.

The Abruzzi mountaineer of the third-movement serenade sings to his beloved with the voice of an english horn, in a tune that is eventually combined with the viola’s theme. With a flair for language matched only by his gift for descriptive music, Berlioz described the orgiastic finale as a movement “where wine, blood, joy, and rage mingle in mutual intoxication and make music together, and the rhythm seems now to stumble, now to rush furiously forward, and

the mouths of the brass to spew forth curses, answering prayers with blasphemy, and [the brigands] laugh and swill and strike, smash, kill, rape, and generally enjoy themselves.” Each of the previous three movements is recalled, as in the finale of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, another groundbreaking work, itself less than a decade old. If Berlioz was the first—though hardly the last—composer with the nerve to imitate Beethoven’s novel masterstroke, he was also the rare genius with the brilliance, imagination, and panache to pull it off. Harold makes one last, quiet cameo appearance before the symphony’s riotous conclusion. ■

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.