

HECTOR BERLIOZ

Composer, Writer, Conductor

(La Côte-Saint-André, France, 1803 — Paris, 1869)

ROMAN CARNIVAL OVERTURE, OP. 9

Composed: 1843

Premiered: February 3, 1844 in Paris, conducted by the composer

Duration: ca. 8 minutes

Scoring: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, four bassoons, four horns, two cornets, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion and strings

Overview

Around 1830, when Beethoven's orchestral works were first being heard in Paris, Berlioz wrote a critical appreciation titled *Beethoven's Nine Symphonies and Fidelio — his only opera, and its overtures*. Beethoven, of course, composed four separate overtures to *Fidelio*, three of which are known under the title of *Leonore*. Perhaps with Beethoven's example in mind, Berlioz in 1843 returned to his 1838 opera, *Benvenuto Cellini*, and wrote for it a second overture.

The failure of *Benvenuto Cellini* at its premiere had been nearly complete. Except for the original overture to the opera, everything else, Berlioz reported, "was hissed with admirable energy and unanimity." Five years later, he mined the opera for thematic material for a new overture that he could use either as an independent concert work or as the introduction to the second act of *Benvenuto*. With the flavor of the opera's setting and his own Italian travels as guides, he named it *Roman Carnival*. The Overture had a resounding success at its concert premiere in Paris on February 3, 1844, and it was encored. It immediately joined the *Symphonie Fantastique* as the most popular of Berlioz's music, and it was one of the works he programmed most frequently on the concerts he conducted.

The *Roman Carnival Overture* borrows two melodies from *Benvenuto Cellini*. The slow theme, presented by the solo English horn, is based on Benvenuto's aria *O Teresa, vous que j'aime* ("O Teresa, whom I adore"). This melody was originally composed for the cantata *La Mort de Cléopâtre*, Berlioz's unsuccessful attempt to win the Prix de Rome in 1829. About the Overture's other theme, a bubbling *saltarello* reminiscent of the folk dances he had heard in Rome, the composer had a whole tale to tell in his *Memoirs*:

"Habeneck [conductor of the opera's premiere] could not catch the lively pace of the *saltarello* that is danced and sung in the Piazza Colonna in the second act," Berlioz wrote. "The dancers, put out by his sluggish tempo, complained to me. I kept urging him on, 'Faster, faster! Put more life into it!' Habeneck struck the desk in his annoyance and broke his baton. In the end, after witnessing four or five similar outbursts, I remarked with a coolness that infuriated him, 'My dear sir, breaking fifty batons won't prevent your tempo from being twice as slow as it ought to be. This is a *saltarello*.' At which Habeneck stopped and, turning round to the orchestra, said, 'Since I am unfortunately unable to satisfy M. Berlioz, we will leave it at that for today. You may go, gentlemen.' And there the rehearsal ended.

"A few years later, when I wrote the *Roman Carnival Overture* — the main theme of the *Allegro*

of which is this same *saltarello* that he could never get right — Habeneck was in the artists' room at the Salle Herz on the evening of the first performance. He had heard that at the morning rehearsal we had played it through without the wind instruments (the National Guard having relieved me of part of my orchestra), and he had come to witness the catastrophe. One sees his point. Indeed, when I arrived in the orchestra, all the wind players crowded round me, appalled at the thought of giving a public performance of an overture that was completely unknown to them. 'Don't worry,' I said. 'The parts are correct and you are all excellent players. Watch my stick as often as you can, count your rests carefully, and everything will be all right.'

"Not a single mistake occurred. I started the *Allegro* at the right tempo, the whirlwind tempo of the Roman dancers. The audience encored it; we played it again; it went even better the second time. On my return to the artists' room, I saw Habeneck standing with a slightly crestfallen air, and said casually as I went past, 'That's how it goes.' He did not reply."

What To Listen For

The Overture is in two large sections, preceded by an introductory flourish based on the *saltarello* melody. The theme of the work's first section is presented by the English horn. As it proceeds and is repeated, this lovely strain is wrapped in Berlioz's characteristic, glowing orchestral fabric. (Note, for example, the shimmering gloss applied to the sound by the tambourine and triangle.) Following this love song, the strains of the *saltarello* launch the Overture into a rousing carnival dance. Amid the swirling gaiety of this street festival, the simple strain of the love song from the first section is heard in the rich sonorities of bassoons and trombones. The rollicking exuberance of the *saltarello* soon resumes to close this musical Mardi Gras with some dazzling rhythmic and harmonic surprises.

MAX BRUCH

Composer, Conductor, Teacher
(Cologne, 1838 — Friedenau, near Berlin, 1920)

CONCERTO NO. 1 FOR VIOLIN IN G MINOR, OP. 26

Composed: 1857, 1865-1866

Premiered: April 24, 1866 in Coblenz, with Otto von Königslöw as soloist and the composer conducting

Duration: ca. 24 minutes

Scoring: woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings

Overview

Max Bruch, widely known and respected in his day as a composer, conductor and teacher, received his earliest music instruction from his mother, a noted singer and pianist. He began composing at eleven, and by fourteen had produced a symphony and a string quartet, the latter garnering a prize that allowed him to study with Karl Reinecke and Ferdinand Hiller in Cologne. His opera *Die Loreley* (1862) and the choral work *Frithjof* (1864) brought him his first public acclaim. For the next 25 years, Bruch held various posts as a choral and orchestral conductor in

Cologne, Coblenz, Sondershausen, Berlin, Liverpool and Breslau; in 1883, he visited the United States to conduct concerts of his own choral compositions. From 1890 to 1910, he taught composition at the Berlin Academy and received numerous awards for his work, including an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University. Though Bruch is known mainly for three famous compositions for string soloist and orchestra (the G minor Concerto and the *Scottish Fantasy* for violin, and the *Kol Nidrei* for cello), he also composed two other violin concertos, three symphonies, a concerto for two pianos, various chamber pieces, songs, three operas and much choral music.

The G minor Violin Concerto brought Bruch his earliest and most enduring fame. He began sketching ideas for the piece in 1857, when he was a nineteen-year-old student just finishing his studies with Ferdinand Hiller in Cologne, but they only came to fruition in 1865, at the start of his two-year tenure as director of the Royal Institute for Music at Coblenz. The piece was not only Bruch's first concerto but also his first large work for orchestra, so he sought the advice of Johann Naret-Koning, concertmaster at Mannheim, concerning matters of violin technique and instrumental balance. The Concerto was ready for performance by April 1866 with Naret-Koning slated as soloist, but illness forced him to cancel, and Otto von Königslöw, concertmaster of the Gürzenich Orchestra and violin professor at the Cologne Conservatory, took over at the last minute. This public hearing convinced Bruch that repairs were needed, so he temporarily withdrew the Concerto while he revised and refined it during the next year with the meticulous advice of the eminent violinist and composer Joseph Joachim (who was to provide similar assistance to Johannes Brahms a decade later with his Violin Concerto). Joachim was soloist in the premiere of the definitive version of the Concerto, on January 7, 1868 in Bremen; he received the score's dedication in appreciation from Bruch. The Concerto was an enormous hit, spreading Bruch's reputation across Europe and, following its first performance in New York in 1872 by Pablo de Sarasate, America. Its success, however, hoisted Bruch upon the horns of a dilemma later in his career. He, of course, valued the notoriety that the Concerto brought to him and his music, but he also came to realize that the work's exceptional popularity overshadowed his other pieces for violin and orchestra. "Nothing compares to the laziness, stupidity and dullness of many German violinists," he complained to the publisher Fritz Simrock in a letter from 1887. "Every fortnight another one comes to me wanting to play the First Concerto; I have now become rude, and tell them: 'I cannot listen to this Concerto any more — did I perhaps write just this one? Go away, and play the other [two] Concertos, which are just as good, if not better.'" Bruch's vehemence in this matter was exacerbated by the fact that he had sold the rights to the G minor Concerto to the publisher August Crazz for a one-time payment, and he never received another penny from its innumerable performances. In a poignant episode at the end of his life, he tried to recoup some money from the piece by offering his original manuscript for sale in the United States, but he died before receiving any payment for it. The score is now in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

What To Listen For

The G minor Violin Concerto is a work of lyrical beauty and emotional sincerity. The first movement, which Bruch called a "Prelude," is in the nature of an extended introduction leading without pause into the slow movement. The Concerto opens with a dialogue between soloist and orchestra followed by a wide-ranging subject played by the violinist over a pizzicato line in the

basses. A contrasting theme reaches into the highest register of the violin, and is followed by scintillating passage work of scales and broken chords for the soloist. A stormy section for orchestra alone recalls the opening dialogue, which softens to usher in the lovely *Adagio*. This slow movement contains three important themes, all languorous and sweet, which are shared by soloist and orchestra. The music builds to a passionate climax before subsiding to a tranquil close.

The finale begins with eighteen modulatory bars containing hints of the upcoming theme before the soloist proclaims the vibrant melody itself, enriched with copious multiple stops. A broad melody, played first by the orchestra alone before being taken over by the soloist, serves as the second theme. A brief development, based on the dance-like first theme, leads to the recapitulation. The coda, with some ingenious long-range harmonic deflections, recalls again the first theme to bring the work to a rousing close. Though a true showpiece for the master violinist, the G minor Concerto also possesses a solid musicianship and a memorable lyricism that make it a continuing favorite with both performers and audiences. Sir Donald Tovey succinctly summarized the talent of the composer of this work by simply saying, “It is not easy to write as beautifully as Max Bruch.”

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Composer

(Vienna, 1797 — Vienna, 1828)

SYMPHONY NO. 8 IN B MINOR, D. 759, “UNFINISHED”

Composed: 1822

Premiered: December 17, 1865 in Vienna, conducted by Johann Herbeck

Duration: ca. 25 minutes

Scoring: pairs of woodwinds, horns and trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings

Overview

The mystery surrounding the composition of the “Unfinished” Symphony is one of the most intriguing puzzles in the entire realm of music. The work was left incomplete not because Schubert’s death intervened, as happened with Mozart’s *Requiem*, Bartók’s *Viola Concerto* or Puccini’s *Turandot*. Indeed, the Eighth Symphony occupied Schubert fully six years before his death at the pathetically early age of only 31. It is known that Schubert composed the first two movements of this “Grand Symphony,” as he referred to it, in the autumn of 1822, and then abruptly stopped work. He sent the manuscript to his friend Anselm Hüttenbrenner, who was supposed to pass it on to the Styrian Music Society of Graz in appreciation of an honorary membership that that organization had conferred upon Schubert the previous spring. Anselm, described by Schubert’s biographer Hans Gal as a “peevish recluse,” never sent the score. Instead, he squirreled it away in his desk, where it gathered dust for forty years. It was not until 1865 that he presented it for performance to Johann Herbeck, director of Vienna’s *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde*, in return asking that one of his own tedious overtures also be included on the concert. Schubert’s magnificent torso was an immediate success at its premiere, and has since maintained its position as one of the most popular symphonic pieces ever written.

Lacking conclusive evidence, writers on Schubert have advanced a fascinating variety of explanations as to why the young composer never completed the last two planned movements of this Symphony. Among others: he was too ill with syphilis; he could not be bothered with the labor of writing down the last two movements; his friends believed he was basically a song composer rather than an instrumental composer, and their arguments caused him to lose faith in this large work; the last two movements were lost; he despaired of ever having a work of this scale performed; a new commission intervened; Hüttenbrenner's servant used the manuscript to start a fire. All of these have been proven false. The truth is that, despite exhaustive research, there is no conclusive evidence to support any single theory. The explanation currently given the greatest credence is that Schubert thought he could not match the wonderful inspiration of the first two movements in what was to follow, so he abandoned this Symphony for work on another project and simply never returned to complete it.

What To Listen For

Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony is notable for the beauty of its themes, the richness of its orchestration, the sincerity of its emotional expression, and the clarity of its structure. The first movement is a sonata-allegro form that begins without introduction. The first theme, in the dark tonality of B minor, is made up of three components: a brooding, eight-measure phrase heard immediately in unison cellos and basses; a restless figure for violins; and a broad melody played by oboe and clarinet. As the music grows in intensity and dynamic level, it modulates to the key of the second theme, the bright, contrasting tonality of G major. This theme, one of the most famous melodies ever written for orchestra, is played by cellos over a syncopated accompaniment in violas and clarinets. A series of decisive chords and a tossing-about of fragments of the second theme bring the exposition to a close. The development, based entirely on the movement's opening phrase, begins softly in unison cellos and basses. This lengthy central section rises to great peaks of emotional tension before the recapitulation begins with the restless violin figure of the first theme. The oboe-clarinet theme is heard again, as is the renowned second theme, before the movement ends with restatements of the cello and bass phrase that began both the exposition and the development. The second movement is in the form of a large sonatina (sonata form without a development section) and flows like a calm river, filled with rich sonorities and lovely melodies. Of it, Alfred Einstein wrote, "The whole movement in its mystery and unfathomable beauty is like one of those plants whose flowers open only on a night of the full moon."

PAUL HINDEMITH

Composer, Conductor, Teacher, Writer
(Hanau, near Frankfurt, 1895 — Frankfurt, 1963)

SYMPHONIC METAMORPHOSIS OF THEMES BY CARL MARIA VON WEBER

Composed: 1822

Premiered: December 17, 1865 in Vienna, conducted by Johann Herbeck

Duration: ca. 25 minutes

Scoring: pairs of woodwinds, horns and trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings

Overview

Paul Hindemith was among the most prodigiously gifted musicians of the 20th century. Besides being one of the greatest composers of the age, he was a conductor, writer, theorist, teacher, master performer on viola, cartoonist, and scholar. His knowledge of music from all periods was encyclopedic. He was so intimately familiar with the technique of Bach's works, for example, that it served as the foundation for his own compositional style. His knowledge of early music was extensive enough that he successfully directed Yale University's early music ensemble during his years on the faculty of that great institution. And his research into 19th-century music led to the discovery of some little-known piano works by Carl Maria von Weber, a seminal figure in German Romantic music, that became the basis of the popular *Symphonic Metamorphosis*.

Hindemith first explored the idea of using Weber's themes in 1940, when he was planning a ballet in collaboration with the legendary choreographer Leonide Massine. Hindemith sketched out some ideas based on Weber's music, but Massine found them "too personal," and the composer himself had misgivings about the project when he found out that Salvador Dali would be designing the production. Dali, it seems, had been responsible for a staging for Massine of the *Bacchanale* from Wagner's *Tannhäuser* filled with "a series of weird hallucinatory images" that Hindemith felt were "quite simply stupid." By mutual consent, composer and choreographer abandoned the plan. Practical musician that he was, however, Hindemith did not let the work done on the ballet come to nothing. Perhaps prodded by his publisher, B. Schott, who was looking for a composition that would appeal to the prevailing American taste for colorful orchestral showpieces, he again took up the sketches in 1943 and gave them final form as the *Symphonic Metamorphosis*.

What To Listen For

The work's four movements are organized loosely around the traditional symphonic model. Each is based on a separate theme of Weber: three on miniatures for piano duet and one on an Oriental tune from incidental music for a play. Hindemith kept largely intact the melodies and structures of the originals, but expanded them considerably in harmony, rhythm and tone color. In assessing the composer's attitude toward his models, Ian Kemp wrote, "Weber is treated neither with reverence nor with condescension." It was in this same spirit that Hindemith transformed one of Beethoven's little military marches in his *Symphonia Serena* of 1946.

The first movement is based on the fourth of Weber's *Huit pièces* for Piano Duet, Op. 60. Vigorous and straightforward, the music preserves the Gypsy spirit of the original, marked "*All' Ongarese*."

The second *Metamorphosis* is a scherzo using a melody from the overture Weber contributed to the incidental music for Schiller's play *Turandot*. Just as Schiller's drama was an adaptation of Carlo Gozzi's 18th-century play (which was also the source for operas by Puccini and Busoni), so Weber borrowed his theme from an earlier source, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 1767 *Dictionnaire de musique*. Rousseau in turn got it from a noted Sinologist, Father Jean Baptiste

Duhalde, who brought it back as a souvenir of his travels in China. With laudable insight, Rousseau disclaimed responsibility for the accuracy of this and the other Oriental melodies he passed along, noting, “In all these pieces will be found a conformity to the Modulation of our Music, in which some may admire the rightness and universality of our [European] rules, but which may cause others to suspect the intelligence or fidelity of those who have transmitted these tunes.” In Hindemith’s *Metamorphosis*, the melody is first given simply in moderate tempo by the woodwinds. There follows a series of variations that gradually build in intensity until the entire orchestra is summoned to provide a brilliant climax. The movement’s central section is an orchestral greeting card in which all the instrumental choirs are introduced with consummate contrapuntal mastery. First the brasses come to call, and then the woodwinds. The shimmering percussion instruments arrive, and soon all of the orchestra takes up the *Turandot* theme again for the closing variations. Last to be heard are the tinkles and taps of the percussion, which spread an atmospheric Oriental tonal mist over the closing pages of the movement.

The haunting theme of the third movement, an arrangement of a gentle *siciliano* from Weber’s *Six Pièces* for Piano, Four Hands, Op. 10, No. 2, is first sung by clarinet. The central section is marked by a simple, lyrical strain from cellos and clarinets played against an undulating accompaniment. The opening theme returns, decorated with elaborate arabesques in the flute. The vibrant closing movement, derived from No. 7 of Weber’s *Huit pièces*, Op. 60, is one of the most stirring marches in the entire orchestral repertoire.

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