

3. Berlioz

Harold in Italy: movement III

(for Unit 3: Developing Musical Understanding)

Background information

Biography

- Berlioz was born in 1803 in La Côte Saint-André, a small town between Lyon and Grenoble in France
- In 1830 he wrote his early masterpiece, *Symphonie fantastique*
- In 1830 he won the Prix de Rome composition prize on his fourth attempt, allowing him to spend two years in Italy
- In 1834, he composed *Harold in Italy* - a symphony in four movements with a part for solo viola
- He died in his Paris home in 1869.

Harold in Italy

- The work was inspired by Byron's poem 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage', a 'childe' here signifying a candidate for knighthood
- The poem describes the travels and reflections of a world-weary young man looking for distractions in foreign lands
- Berlioz does not tell the story of Harold in the music, but captures the moods of the traveller.

Concerto or Symphony?

- In Berlioz's day, a concerto was a composition with a solo part, usually virtuosic, accompanied by orchestra
- Berlioz, however, wrote a non-virtuosic solo viola part, even though it was intended for Paganini, the leading virtuoso of the time
- Consequently, Paganini refused to perform the piece as he felt the solo part did not have enough for him to play
- In fact, the work is really a symphony rather than a concerto
- The set work is the third of four movements. In place of a Scherzo of the type composed by Beethoven (one of Berlioz's musical heroes), Berlioz wrote a Serenade, a song by a mountaineer in honour of his mistress
- The influence of folk music from the Abruzzi Mountains is clear in parts of this movement, e.g. use of drones, modal inflections and saltarello rhythms.

Idée fixe

- The *idée fixe* is a theme first heard in the Adagio part of movement I that reappears in later movements, to represent Harold
- At its first appearance in movement III (bar 65, viola solo) it is actually labelled 'Thème de l'Adagio' to acknowledge where it first appeared.

Performing forces and their handling

- Typically for Berlioz, a large orchestra is used in *Harold in Italy*, but there is a reduction in movement III
- In fact the composer employs some rather unusual scoring here, including piccolo, cor anglais, four horns, harp and divided violas (without the heavier brass and percussion)
- Violas (among Berlioz's favourite instruments) are divided at the opening to enable the lower part to play open-string drones while the upper part plays melodic material
- Piccolo and oboe at the opening represent *pifferi* (rustic oboes)
- At the Allegretto (bar 32) the violins and cellos play pizzicato (plucking the string), and there is double stopping (playing two notes at the same time) in the violins. This simulates the sound of plucked instrumental accompaniment (guitar-style) in this serenade 'of a mountaineer...to his Mistress'
- The clarinet uses the (low) chalumeau register with broken-chord figures at bar 48
- At bar 53 all the strings return to 'arco' (playing with the bow)
- For the final very quiet section, the strings play with mutes ('con sord[ini]')
- Here also the harp plays harmonics, indicated by the circles above the notes
- Overall, the technical demands of the solo viola part are fairly limited, the most demanding feature being the semiquaver staccato writing with alternating pitches an octave apart (from bar 99).

Texture

The prevailing texture is melody-dominated homophony, with variations in scoring and layout. The points below give some examples, and also mention some different types of texture:

- The main melodic material in the opening passage (from bar 4) is played in octaves by the 1st oboe and the piccolo (the piccolo sounds an octave higher than written)
- A countermelody is played by the 1st violas.
- The accompaniment (from bar 1) consists of a drone (double pedal) on C and G in long notes in 2nd oboe, clarinets and bassoon. The violas play the same notes, but to a lovely rhythm. The bassoon maintains a pedal C throughout this section

- At the Allegretto (bar 32) the serenade theme is in the solo cor anglais, with strings providing a homophonic accompaniment. This is partly described above, under 'Performing forces', but note also broken-chord figures in the (divided) violas
- At bar 53 the main melody is in the woodwind. Strings play a chromatic countermelody in octaves, while (second) clarinet and (first) horn provide a third part
- At bar 60 the two horns in C play a horn-call version of part of the Serenade theme in 3rds and 6ths. The accompaniment is similar to that of bar 32. The idée fixe in long notes on solo viola provides an additional strand from bar 65
- At bars 79–85 there is brief dialogue between woodwind instruments, beginning with cor anglais and oboe, then clarinet, flute and piccolo, and finally bassoons, playing in octaves
- At the second Allegretto (bar 166) Berlioz combines various themes and ideas previously heard separately (see also under 'Structure'). Note the opening drone accompaniment (in both sets of violas), the idée fixe in the flute (doubled by harp harmonics) in much longer notes than before, and the serenade theme (viola solo)
- At bars 202–206, there is a monophonic statement of the serenade theme in the solo viola.

Structure

The movement replaces the Scherzo movement that was normally included in a symphony in Beethoven's time and afterwards. The scherzo (which had evolved from the Minuet and Trio) usually also had an overall A B A structure.

Berlioz's movement has a broad A B A structure, with the addition of a coda in which elements of both sections are combined, so expanding on the traditional structure.

Bars 1–31: **Section A: Allegro assai**

Drone, saltarello rhythm and 'pifferi' melody in C major

Bars 32–135: **Section B: Allegretto (Serenade)**

32: Melody with irregular phrase structure of 7, 7, 4 and 7 bars.

65: The idée fixe is combined with Serenade material. The music gathers pace from 71 with a semiquaver pattern in the cellos.

upbeat to 100: The serenade theme in D minor.

122: Final references in this section to serenade theme in C major.

Bars 136–165: **Section A: Allegro assai**
An exact repetition of the opening Allegro assai

Bars 166–208: **Extended coda: Allegretto**
A combination of various elements:

- The saltarello rhythm of the Allegro assai is continued and maintained in violas throughout
- The solo viola plays the serenade theme (which is at times quite fragmented)
- The idée fixe is now played by the flute, doubled by harp harmonics, again with long note values.

Tonality

The overall tonality of the movement is C major. There are clearly defined cadences throughout the movement with comparatively limited modulation, something perhaps intended to reflect the folk character of the piece.

- The tonality of the Allegro assai is clearly defined by the constant tonic pedal C in the bassoon and for much of the time by the double pedal (drone) in the second violas (C and G, tonic and dominant)
- Occasional B flats alternate with B naturals. These do not represent F major, but are chromatic notes in C major – or perhaps modal inflections
- The serenade theme is also in C
- There is a brief visit to G major in bars 88–96
- The only strong modulation occurs with the return of the serenade theme at bar 100 in D minor (following an imperfect cadence in that key). This cadence had been preceded by a few bars of music in G major
- From the return of the serenade theme in bar 123 (following an imperfect cadence in that key), the music remains in C major.

Harmony

- The harmonic language is essentially diatonic and broadly functional, with some chromaticism, which may involve occasional diminished seventh chords (as in bar 82)
- The harmony of the opening Allegro assai is built on a tonic pedal C. With pedals there are normally changes of harmony which create dissonance. Here we see, for example, chords IV in bar 14 and V⁷ in bar 19

- In the Serenade section (from bar 32), there are five bars of C major chord I, and there is a perfect cadence in bars 46–47. In between there is a strange progression involving Ic and V in A minor, but no cadence in that key
- The second part of the serenade from bar 51 is more chromatic, especially the very original and striking bars 53–59 (analysis of which is beyond the requirements of AS level!)

Melody

The opening **Allegro assai (Saltarello)** is based on a folk-like melody. Notice the following points:

- Repeated notes
- Conjunct movement
- Range of a 9th, but with no interval greater than a third within phrases
- Grace note As (acciaccaturas) colour the repeated Gs
- The melody is largely centered around the note E
- The B flat can be regarded as a chromaticism or as a (Phrygian) modal inflection
- There are one-bar cells, leading to irregular phrasing
- Some inversion of basic material

The melody of the **serenade (Allegretto)** is in the cor anglais (sounding a fifth below written pitch):

- It opens with an arpeggio figure on the tonic C major chord with the added auxiliary note A
- This is followed by a falling 3rd and a falling 5th – reminiscent of the *idée fixe*, which opens with a falling 3rd and falling 6th
- The falling 5th eventually becomes a falling 6th, as the A resolves to the G sharp. (NB: the sentence above and the music example below refer to *sounding* pitches, not to the transposed pitches of the score)



- There is some melodic chromaticism in the passage beginning at bar 53

The viola introduces the **idée fixe** at b. 65:

- The long note values do not correspond exactly with the theme as presented in movement I, but the melody would have been immediately recognisable to Berlioz's

audiences – who would have been listening to the complete work, not just to movement III.

In the final **Allegretto (coda)**:

- The *idée fixe* is played by the flute and harp, beginning on G instead of D, and with some notes (e.g. the second) longer than before
- The serenade theme is fragmented
- The saltarello theme is absent, but the rhythmic accompaniment in the orchestral violas is also fragmented towards the end (part of a 'dying-away' process in the whole texture)
- The ***ppp*** figure in bars 194-195 sounds even quieter when repeated an octave lower in bars 195-196.

Rhythm and metre

- The metre throughout is compound duple (6/8)
- The tempo of the opening Allegro assai is double that of the Allegretto. In other words, the dotted *minim* of the Allegro assai takes the same time in performance as the dotted *crotchet* of the Allegretto
- The same relationship exists when the repeat of the Allegro assai (bar 136) leads into the second Allegretto at bar 166, but...
- ...the rhythmic pattern in the orchestral violas continues at the same speed as in the Allegro assai, with two bars taking the same time as one bar of the other parts. The notation makes this clear – two 6/8 bars for the orchestral violas occupy the same space on the score as one bar of the solo viola
- In the Allegro assai, the melodic ideas of the piccolo and oboe often have marked accents on the second beat of the bar (e.g. bars 7–8)
- Both 6/8 and 3/4 metres have six quavers to the bar – but the grouping is different. The Serenade theme exploits the possibilities of mixing the two metres. It begins clearly in 6/8, but in the third and fourth bars of the main melody there are characteristic 3/4 rhythms, with minim plus two quavers (see the music example above)
- In bar 132 this 3/4 idea is ornamented with semiquavers
- Semiquavers are also prominent in the clarinet accompaniment at bar 48
- Triplet semiquavers also appear (e.g. bar 77) – sounding almost like mordents
- There is a hint of rhythmic augmentation in the solo viola part at bar 192 as the semiquavers of the final motif (bars 189–191) become quavers, to complete the phrase.