

3. Berlioz

Harold in Italy: movement III (for Unit 6: Further 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 1821 he moved to Paris to study medicine.
- In 1822 he started to study music, abandoning his medical studies in 1824.
- Unusually, he lacked the traditional keyboard skills of his contemporaries and famous composers of the Classical and Baroque eras.
- 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 established a reputation as an orchestral conductor and was the author of an important Treatise on Instrumentation.
- He died in his Paris home in 1869.
- He was strongly influenced by Beethoven, who "opened up a new world of music, as Shakespeare had revealed a new universe of poetry."

Influence

He exerted a strong influence on the new Romantic movement:

- Use of literary themes as the basis of composition (programme music).
- The use of a recurring theme (*idée fixe*), representing a character or important item in the musical programme (similar to Wagnerian *leitmotif*).
- He expanded the size of his orchestra, broadening the range of instrumental colours available to composers.

Harold in Italy was inspired by:

- Byron's '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.

- He does not tell the story of Harold in the music but merely captures the mood of the traveller.

Concerto or Symphony?

- A concerto is 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.
- This is the third of four movements, and in place of the Beethovenian Scherzo, 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

This theme is announced in the first movement.



Unlike the idée fixe in *Symphonie fantastique*, it does not go through any formal transformations but recurs superimposed over various orchestral textures.

Performing forces and their handling

In this movement, Berlioz uses an unusual combination of instruments from the Romantic era symphony orchestra such as piccolo, cor anglais, harp and four horns but he does not use trumpets, cornets, trombones and percussion.

The horns are in different keys to enable both transposition and chromatic chords (e.g. the diminished chord in the horns at b. 103):

- first and second in C (sounding an octave lower than written)
- third in F (sounding a fifth below)
- fourth in E (sounding a minor 6th below).

The cor anglais transposes to sound down a perfect 5th.

The piccolo sounds an octave higher than written.

Violas are divided at the opening to enable the lower part to play open string drones with the upper part playing melodic material.

Piccolo and oboe at the opening represent pifferi (rustic oboes). These instruments can still be heard in Italian folk bands today.

At the Allegretto the violins and cellos play pizzicato (plucking the string) with double stopping (playing two strings at the same time) in the second violin. This simulates the sound of plucked instrumental accompaniment (guitar-style) in the serenade.

The clarinet uses the (low) chalumeaux register with broken chord figures at b. 48.

At b. 53 all the strings return to arco (playing with the bow).

For the final section the strings also play with mutes (con sordini).

Here the harp plays harmonics indicated by the circles above the notes.

The solo viola does not play until b. 65 when it plays the *idée fixe* in longer note values.

Overall, the technical demands of the solo viola part are relatively simple, the octave passages from b. 99 being the most demanding feature.

Texture

The prevailing texture is melody-dominated homophony, with variations in layout:

- The opening of the piece starts with a drone (double pedal) on C and G in long notes in 2nd oboe, clarinets and bassoon. The violas play the same notes with a rhythmic figure. The main melodic material is played in octaves by the 1st oboe and the piccolo (the piccolo transposes/sounds an octave higher than written). A counter melody is played by the 1st violas. There are minor changes within the other parts but the bassoon maintains a pedal C throughout this section.

- At the Allegretto (b. 32) the strings play a homophonic accompaniment to the cor anglais solo/serenade theme. The violins and cellos play pizzicato (plucked) while the violas maintain a broken chord figure.
- At b. 53 the strings play in octaves a chromatic counter melody to the woodwind, while a third part appears in clarinet and horn.
- At b. 60 the two horns in C play a horn call version of part of the Serenade theme in 3rds and 6ths .
- The idée fixe in long notes on viola provides an additional strand from b. 65.
- At b. 71 the harp takes over from the violin pizzicato in providing a chordal accompaniment while the strings all play sustained chords with semiquaver figures in the cellos.
- At b 79-80 there is brief dialogue between cor anglais/oboe, clarinet, flute/picc and bassoons, playing in octaves
- At b. 166, the main themes are layered above the continuing saltarello rhythm, but without the pifferi melody. Upper strings and cello sustained chordal with occasional supporting notes on double bass.
- At bars 202-206, there is a monophonic statement of the serenade theme on the solo viola.

Structure

The movement replaces the traditional Scherzo movement in the standard symphony (which in turn had evolved from the Minuet and Trio). The scherzo usually had an overall structure of ABA with subdivisions of A = ABA, B(trio) = CDC.

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

The overall structure is as follows:-

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.

Though still based in C, there is a broader harmonic and tonal range than previously.

65: Harold theme (idée fixe) superimposed on Serenade material. The phrase originally in b. 48-52 is loosely developed at b. 72 and hints at C minor in passing. There is here increased rhythmic elaboration involving triplets and semiquavers.

100: the serenade theme in d minor again played by horns with the answering phrase now played by oboe, flute and piccolo.

111: further use of motif from b. 48, leading to restatement of material from b. 53 closing with V^7 of C, ready for

122: final references in this section to serenade theme in C major)

Bars 136-165 Section A

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 maintained in violas throughout.
- The viola plays the opening of the serenade theme
- The idée fixe is now played by the flute, doubled by harp harmonics, again with long note values.
- The serenade theme is broken up with the first two bars repeated in a different part of the bar starting a tone higher.
- Then he uses the second half of the theme, broken into short phrases, before using the contrasting material from b. 48.
- 193: the texture is reduced to violas playing saltarello rhythms then, at b. 197, the drone with acciaccaturas.
- 202: final statement of the serenade theme on solo viola.

Tonality

The overall tonality of the movement is the key of C. There are clearly defined cadences throughout the movement with comparatively limited modulation, reflecting the folk character of the piece.

- The tonality of the Allegro assai is clearly defined by the constant tonic pedal C in the bassoon.
- There are modal inflections (B flat).

- The serenade theme is also in C.
- There are brief modulations to G major at b. 89 and D minor at b. 100.
- From the return of the saltarello material in bar 136 to the end, the music remains in C major.

Harmony

- The harmonic language is functional with use of cadences. It is diatonic throughout with some chromatic inflections largely through the use of diminished chords.
- Chords are used in all inversions with some stock progressions involving V7d, e.g. b. 78/9 with V7d moving to Ib.
- The harmony of the opening Allegro assai is built on a tonic pedal C with brief references to the chords of G⁷ (e.g. b. 19) and F (e.g. b. 14).
- In the Serenade section, the harmonic vocabulary expands to include an imperfect cadence in A minor, with 4-3 suspension (b. 39-40).
- The E major chord moves chromatically through a diminished 7th chord to G⁷ in b. 41 bringing the melody back to C major tonic harmony.
- The theme rounds off with a clear perfect cadence in C at b. 46-7.
- The second part of the serenade material is more chromatic, e.g. a change from A minor to A major harmony in b. 51.
- At b. 53-54, the key seems briefly to be G minor, with a chord progression of VIb, Vb, I.
- A G dim chord on the last quaver of b. 54 seems to take the music to A flat, but the progression moves unexpectedly to F# dim (first inversion), F# major (first inversion), and B dim, paving the way for the imperfect cadence in C at b59.

Melody

The opening **Allegro assai (Saltarello)** is based on a folk-like melody characterized by:

- Repeated notes.
- Conjunct movement.
- Narrow range of a 9th, but with no interval greater than a third within phrases.
- Acciaccatura ornaments colour the repeated Gs.
- The melody is largely centered around the note E.
- The B flat can be regarded as a modal inflection.
- One-bar cells, leading to irregular phrasing.
- Some inversion of basic material.

- Ascending sequences b. 14-17.

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 third reminiscent of the *idée fixe*, which opens with a falling 3rd and falling 6th.
- Here the falling 6th is delayed by the E (sounding A) resolving to the D# (sounding G#)



- A clear falling sixth occurs in the second phrase at b. 45.
- Chromaticism occurs at b. 49.
- Irregular phrase lengths occur in the Serenade them with 7+7+4+7 bar lengths.

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

- The long note values of the Harold theme do not match the rhythm of the original theme but the pitch is exactly the same as that of the original's first three bars.
- This is then repeated a 4th higher with upper strings doubling the viola with a complete use of the first four bars of the Harold theme.
- The second section of the *idée fixe* is then presented at b. 85, characterized by falling third and then falling fifth starting on G.

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

- The Harold theme (*idée fixe*) is heard complete in C played by the flute and harp in long notes.
- The serenade theme is fragmented with the broken chord opening isolated, then repeated in D minor.
- After two bars rest the falling 3rd is played twice, and the falling 6th once.
- Material based on b. 48 is then played but the final bar is further developed, with the viola playing a descending sequence based on the motif of b. 52 (b. 182-185).

- The saltarello theme is then fragmented, with the figure in b. 194-195 repeated an octave lower in b. 195-196.

Rhythm and metre

Handling of rhythm in this movement is most innovative. The metre throughout is compound duple (6/8). However, the tempo of the Allegro assai introduction is double that of the Allegretto. It is important that this is maintained as the final Allegretto has both tempi running simultaneously. Here the violas play the opening rhythmic ideas in two bars against one bar of the slower Serenade theme.

The rhythm of the opening Allegro assai is a contrast of long note values in the lower woodwind (a pedal C in the bassoon) against the energetic dance rhythms in the viola. The melodic ideas of the piccolo and oboe have dotted rhythms and accents on the second beat of the bar.

The Serenade theme exploits the possibilities of mixing 3/4 and 6/8, evident in the third bar of the melody where two quavers are followed by a minim, b. 37-38. As the theme recurs many times this is a strong characteristic of the whole movement. In b. 132 this idea is ornamented with semiquavers. Semiquavers are also used to provide a lively accompaniment in the cello at b. 71 – 95, and in the clarinet accompaniment at b. 48.

Triplet semiquavers also appear (e.g. b. 77).

The most dramatic moments for the soloist involve the repeated semiquaver octave leaps (b. 99) which also hint at simple triple 3/4 metre.

There is a hint of rhythmic augmentation in b. 192 as the final motif is turned from semiquavers to quavers to complete the phrase.