2-17-2009

UNLV Symphony Orchestra: Concert IV. Wagner and Berlioz

Taras Krysa
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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2009

Concert V: Mahler I
Tuesday, April 28, 2009
Artemus W. Ham Concert Hall
7:30pm

Wagner and Berlioz

TARAS KRYSA
MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

Tuesday Evening
February 17, 2009  7:30PM
Artemus Ham Concert Hall
Located on Campus of UNLV
4505 Maryland Pkwy

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS
~ PROGRAM ~

Richard Wagner
Prelude and Isolde's Transfiguration (Liebestod)
from Tristan und Isolde

Christine Seitz, soprano

~ INTERMISSION ~

Hector Berlioz
Symphonie fantastique
(Episode in the Life of an Artist), Op. 14
I. Rêveries. Passions
II. Un Bal
III. Scène aux champs
IV. Marche au Supplice
V. Songe d'une nuit du Sabbat

THE UNLV SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The Symphony Orchestra at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas is comprised of undergraduate/graduate music majors/minors in the UNLV College of Fine Arts as well as non-music majors.

The mission of this performing ensemble is threefold:

1). To train music majors to become professional performers and teachers;

2). To introduce non-music majors to higher quality music making.

3). To enrich the cultural life of UNLV and the greater Las Vegas community.

The UNLV orchestra presents a number of programs each season that include a variety of the orchestral standard repertoire, ranging from early Baroque through Modern Contemporary. The UNLV Symphony Orchestra performs at least one major work with chorus every year as well as one complete opera. Student soloists are featured throughout the year either on the Student Soloists Concert or as guest artists for winning the annual Solo Concerto Competition. The list of guest conductors and soloists with the UNLV Symphony Orchestra includes Oleh Krysa, Itzhak Perlman, Sarah Chang, Rachel Lee, Edgar Meyer, Wei Wei Le, Andrew Smith, Mykola Suk, Kaitlen Tully and many others. Past music directors include Jim Stivers, Tad Suzuki, Hal Weller and George Stelluto.
Christine Seitz joined the faculty at the University of Missouri in the fall of 2008. She was the Opera Director and a member of the Voice faculty at the University of Nevada Las Vegas from 2002 through 2008, after teaching voice at Luther College and at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She received B.Mus. degrees in both applied voice and music education and an M.Mus. in applied voice from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Professor Seitz launched her opera directing career in 1992, when she became the founding Opera Director for the Pine Mountain Music Festival in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, directing and producing operas there from 1992 through 2002. She has been on the staff at Des Moines Metro Opera as a stage director for the Apprentice Artist Program since 2006, and she has been a guest director for the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre, the Florentine Opera of Milwaukee (educational outreach productions), the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Luther College. She has created original translations and supertitles for productions at the Pine Mountain Music Festival, the Florentine Opera of Milwaukee, the University of Wisconsin Madison, the Dubuque Symphony and the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Christine Seitz is an established dramatic soprano, singing operatic roles with the Seattle Opera, the Dallas Opera, Madison Opera, the Los Angeles Opera, the Toledo Opera, Kentucky Opera, the Florentine Opera of Milwaukee, Central City Opera, and in Europe with the Wuppertaler Bühnen and the Stadttheater Bern. She sang the leading role of Anna Clemenc in the world premiere of The Children of the Keweenaw, by composer Paul Seitz and librettist Kathleen Masterson, at the 2001 Pine Mountain Music Festival. She has also sung in concert with the Waukesha Symphony, the Greater Lansing Symphony Orchestra, the Caramoor Festival, the Germanfest Symphony in Milwaukee, the Cincinnati May Festival and the Las Vegas Philharmonic. Ms. Seitz has sung in numerous recitals in New York City and throughout the Midwest, collaborating with pianists Steven Blier and Jessica Paul, and she has presented voice workshops and master classes in Houghton, Michigan, and the University of California-Irvine. She is the Artistic Director of Studio North Opera, a local arts organization in Houghton, Michigan, dedicated to presenting performances of operatic scenes to audiences in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. A native of Madison, Wisconsin, she was a two-time winner of the Eastern Wisconsin Metropolitan Opera District Auditions.

Taras Krysa was born in Kiev, Ukraine to a musical family and began his formal studies as a violinist at the Moscow Conservatory. After moving to the United States, Mr. Krysa continued his studies at Indiana University and Northwestern University both in violin and conducting. His conducting teachers have included Victor Yampolsky, Jorma Panula and David Zinman. As a violinist, Mr. Krysa has won positions with the New World Symphony orchestra and St. Louis Symphony Orchestras. In recent seasons his conducting appearances have included National Ukrainian Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra van het Osten, New World Symphony, St. Petersburg Symphony, Moscow Soloists, Slovak Sinfonietta, Spoleto Festival Chamber Orchestra, Kiev Chamber Orchestra and the Lublin Philharmonic Orchestra. He has made three critically acclaimed recordings for the Brilliant Classics label. In addition, Mr. Krysa has served as Principal Conductor of the Ukrainian State Pops Symphony Orchestra, which he led on several European tours with an appearance at the Concertgebouw Hall. Currently, Taras Krysa is serving as the Director of Orchestras at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and Music Director of the Henderson Symphony Orchestra.
~ PROGRAM NOTES ~

Prelude and Isolde's Transfiguration from Tristan und Isolde

Richard Wagner was born in Leipzig, Germany on May 22, 1813; he died in Venice, Italy on February 13, 1883.

Scoring: 3 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets in A, 1 bass clarinet in A, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba, timpani, harp, Soprano solo, and strings.

Approximate performance time: 16 minutes.

The Prelude to Tristan und Isolde was first performed in concert in 1859, before the entire opera was even finished. Wagner joined it together with the Liebestod (“Love Death”), the opera's final scene, and presented the two excerpts in concert in 1863, two years before the stage premiere. At this point, it had been more than a decade since a new Wagner opera had been staged, and during these years, Wagner had worked harder than ever. After Lohengrin (1848), the composer had to flee Germany because of his role in the Dresden uprising of 1849. Settling in Switzerland, Wagner produced his groundbreaking theoretical works on music drama, and began composing the Ring cycle. Twice, he interrupted the composition of the Ring in favor of projects that seemed easier to realize—first for Tristan which, at first, promised to be the “lighter fare” that could be produced quickly and yield some immediate profit while the much greater demands of the Ring could be met. The other interruption was Die Meistersinger. With the knowledge of what Tristan eventually became, it is amusing to read the following passage in Wagner's autobiography:

A man who rejoiced in the name of Ferreiro introduced himself to me as the Brazilian consul in Leipzig, and told me that the Emperor of Brazil was greatly attracted to my music...The Emperor loved everything German and wanted me very much to come to Rio de Janeiro, so that I might conduct my operas in person. As only Italian was sung in that country, it would be necessary to translate my libretto, which the Emperor regarded as a very easy matter, and actually an improvement of the libretto itself... I felt I could easily produce a passionate musical poem that would turn out quite excellent in Italian, and I turned my thoughts once more, with an ever-reviving preference, towards Tristan and Isolde.

In the end, Tristan, influenced by Wagner's reading of Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy and a passionate love affair with Mathilde Wesendonck (whose husband was one of Wagner's benefactors), did not exactly turn out as “lighter fare.” It certainly proved much more difficult to perform than Wagner had anticipated. (And, needless to say, the Brazilian plans came to nothing.) For this reason, Wagner turned to concertizing, and the Tristan Prelude, as a representative new work, naturally had pride of place on his programs. Tristan was based on several medieval romances telling the story of an illicit love between Tristan, King Mark's vassal, and Isolde, engaged to be married to the King. The story could be told in simpler words than it is in the following account by Wagner, but hardly in a way more apt to put us in the mood of the music:

An old, old tale, inexhaustible in its variations, and ever sung anew in all the languages of medieval Europe, tells us of Tristan and Isolde. For this king the trusty vassal had wooed a maid he dared not tell himself he loved, Isolde; as his master’s bride she followed him, because, powerless, she had no choice but to follow the suitor. The Goddess of Love, jealous of her downtrodden rights, avenged herself: the love potion destined by the bride's careful mother for the partners in this merely political marriage, in accordance with the customs of the age, the Goddess foists on the youthful pair through a blunder diversely accounted for; fired by its draught, their love leaps suddenly to vivid flame, and they have to acknowledge that they belong only to each other. Henceforth no end to the yearning, longing, rapture, and misery of love: world, power, fame, honor, chivalry, loyalty and friendship, scattered like an insubstantial dream; one thing alone left living: longing, longing unquenchable,
desire forever renewing itself, craving and languishing; one sole redemption: death, surcease of being, the sleep that knows no waking!

Here in music's own most unrestricted element, the musician who chose this theme for the introduction to his drama of love could have but one care: how to impose restraint on himself, since exhaustion of the subject is impossible. So just once, in one long-articulated impulse, he let that insatiable longing swell up from the timidest avowal of the most delicate attraction, through anxious sighs, hopes and fears, laments and wishes, raptures and torments, to the mightiest onset and to the most powerful effort to find the breach that will reveal to the infinitely craving heart the path into the sea of love's endless rapture. In vain! Its power spent, the heart sinks back to languish in longing, in longing without attainment, since each attainment brings in its wake only renewed desire, until in final exhaustion the breaking glance catches a glimmer of the attainment of the highest rapture: it is the rapture of dying, of ceasing to be, of the final redemption into that wondrous realm from which we stray the furthest when we strive to enter it by force. Shall we call it Death? Or is it the miraculous world of Night, from which, as the story tells, an ivy and a vine sprang of old in inseparable embrace over the grave of Tristan and Isolde?

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### Symphonie fantastique
(Episode in the Life of an Artist), Op. 14

Hector Berlioz was born in La Côte-Saint-André, Isère on December 11, 1803; he died in Paris on March 8, 1869.

Scoring: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 4 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 cornets, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, 2 tubas, timpani, bass drums, snare drum, cymbals, bells, 2 harps, and strings.

Approximate performance time: 55 minutes.

Although we generally don't think of it that way, this is the most amazing first symphony ever composed. Few of us today, as at the first performance in 1830, notice the word symphony in the title; we are much more taken with the fantastic part—the idea of unbridled passion, a wild opium dream, and the romantic notion of self-expression—or with Berlioz's subtitle, which promises a glimpse into the creative mind.

Berlioz knew audiences well; he provided a title for each of his five movements and distributed a descriptive program note to tell the story behind the music. The question he begged, however, wasn't whether a few words might help someone understand the music, but whether the music made any sense without them. Even Berlioz eventually changed his mind. The issue wasn't new. Beethoven had already famously addressed it by giving descriptive titles to the movements of his Pastoral Symphony. (And there are other less well-known precedents, some dating from a hundred years earlier.) Beethoven hedged a bit, calling his work "more an expression of feeling than painting"; Berlioz was unequivocal—at first.
On April 16, 1830, he wrote to his friend Humbert Ferrand that he had “just written the last note” of his new symphony, “Here is its subject,” he continued, “which will be published in a program and distributed in the hall on the day of the concert.” Then follows the sketch of a story as famous as any in the history of music: the tale of a man who falls desperately in love with a woman who embodies all he is seeking; is tormented by recurring thoughts of her and, in a fit of despair, poisons himself with opium; and, finally, in a horrible narcotic vision, dreams that he is condemned to death and witnesses his own execution. It must have been shocking in 1830; it’s strong stuff even today. For Berlioz it struck very close to home.

On September 11, 1827, Berlioz first laid eyes on Harriet Smithson, the young actress playing Ophelia and Juliet with an English Shakespearean troupe then visiting Paris—that moment the Symphonie fantastique was launched, and throughout its composition Berlioz was obsessed with Henriette, as he referred to her, even though they wouldn’t meet until 1832, two years after the premiere of the work she inspired.

A few days before the premiere, Berlioz’s full-scale program was printed in the Revue musicale, and, on the evening of the performance, December 5, 1830, two thousand copies of a leaflet containing the same narrative were distributed in the concert hall, according to Felix Mendelssohn, who would remember that night for the rest of his life because he hated the music so much. No one was unmoved. It is hard to know which provoked the greater response—Berlioz’s radical music or its bold story. It is possible that people focus on the program because the music is so much harder to explain. But for Berlioz, who always believed in the bond between music and ideas, the two were inseparable. In an often-quoted footnote to the program as it was published with the score in 1845, he insists that “the distribution of this program to the audience, at concerts where this symphony is to be performed, is indispensable for a complete understanding of the dramatic outline of the work.” [Berlioz’s own program note appears in the sidebar.]

But Berlioz changed his mind. Several years later, after he had written Lélio, the bizarre sequel to his Symphonie fantastique, a new version of the program appeared, allowing that it should be distributed only when both Lélio and the Symphonie fantastique were “executed dramatically” together, and that, if the symphony alone was played in a concert the program was no longer necessary. “The symphony by itself (the author hopes),” wrote Berlioz, “can afford musical interest independent of any dramatic purpose.” Why did Berlioz change his mind? Possibly in defense of the music, which he thought compelling enough to stand on its own. Probably because his own Harold in Italy, a program symphony without a program, had subsequently proved that titles were description enough.

The debate continues. In his landmark 1950 monograph on Berlioz, Jacques Barzun advocates relegating the program “to the role of promotional aid.” But rare is the concertgoer today who comes to this work innocent of the sensational story it has to tell and who is truly able to let the music speak for itself.

Even in 1830, all the fuss over the program couldn’t disguise the boldness of the music. Berlioz’s new symphony sounded like no other music yet written. Its hallmarks can be quickly listed: five movements, each with its own title (as in Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony), and the use of a signature motive, the idée fixe representing Harriet Smithson that recurs in each movement and is transformed dramatically at the end. But what of the staggeringly inventive use of the orchestra, creating entirely new sounds from the same instruments that had been playing together for years; or the daring, unexpected harmonies; or even the melodies that are still, to this day, unlike anyone else’s. There’s hardly a page of this score that doesn’t contain something distinctive and surprising. Some of it can be explained—Berlioz developed his idiosyncratic sense of harmony, for example, not at the piano, since he never learned to play more than a few basic chords, but by improvising on the guitar. But explanation doesn’t diminish our astonishment.
None of this was lost on Berlioz's colleagues. According to Barzun, one can date Berlioz's "unremitting influence on nineteenth-century composers" from the date of the first performance of the Symphonie fantastique. In a famous essay on Berlioz, Robert Schumann relished the work's novelty; remembering how, as a child, he loved turning music upside down to find strange new patterns before his eyes, Schumann commented that "right side up, this symphony resembled such inverted music." He was, at first, dumbfounded, but "at last struck with wonderment." Mendelssohn was confused, and perhaps disappointed: "He is really a cultured, agreeable man and yet he composes so very badly," he wrote in a letter to his mother. For Liszt, the only admissible question was whether Berlioz was "merely a talented composer or a real genius. For us," he concluded, "there can be no doubt." (He voted for genius.) When Wagner called the Symphonie fantastique "a work that would have made Beethoven smile," he was probably right. But he continued: "The first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony would seem an act of pure kindness to me after the Symphonie fantastique."

What Wagner and many later musicians failed to acknowledge was that Beethoven is behind nearly every measure of the Symphonie fantastique—it was Berlioz's discovery of Beethoven that prompted him to write symphonies in the first place. (There are two more which followed shortly: Harold in Italy in 1834 and Romeo and Juliet in 1839.) On the surface, Berlioz seems to forecast Mahler, for whom a symphony meant "the building up of a world, using every available technical means." Indeed, the Symphonie fantastique did shelter a lot of previously composed material under Berlioz's new literary program, and it did, for its time, stretch the definition of the symphony to the limit. But it didn't shatter the model set by Beethoven. For it was a conscious effort on Berlioz's part to tell his fantastic tale in a way that Beethoven would have understood, and to put even his most outrageous ideas into the enduring framework of the classical symphony.

A parting word about Harriet Smithson, who started it all. She finally met Berlioz on December 10, 1832, the day after the first performance of the complete Episode in the Life of an Artist, which contained the Symphonie fantastique as its first half and Lélio as its second. After a rocky courtship, they married the following October. Within a few years they were miserable; they finally separated in 1844.

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UNLV Symphony Orchestra Personnel
Taras Krysa, Music Director

Violin I
Brian Hwang
Christina Riegert
Sandro Ladu
Barbara Ellis
Brandi Frias
Thomas Keeley
Marla Huizar
Allyson Maddalon
Samantha Alterman
Lillit Terbarseyan

Violin II
Mina Park
Zach McBride
Angela LaBella
Belinda Martinez
Lydia Scheve
Amanda Gentile
Andrew Ferral
Janay Harris
Jason Hung
Jose Orozco

Viola
Merietta Oviatt
John Pollock
Izzy Trinkle
Gerardo Polanco
Megan Muse
Vacheral Carter

Violoncello
Jessika Soli
Courtney Waldron
Anthony Rodriguez
Columban Heo
Joe Griego
Courtney Thomas
Alyssa Ledesma

Double Bass
Cory Mueller
Zuriel Santoyo

Flute
Clare Birmingham
Farah Zolghadr
Kristen Mosca

Oboe
Mark Runkles
Alex Hayashi
Kirsten Kraemer

Clarinet
Aki Oshima
Kanade Oi
Jonathan Cannon

Bassoon
Brian Marsh (contrabassoon)
Eric Foote
Leigh Anne Duncan

French Horn
Bryce Nakaoka
Fred Stone
Brian McGee
Mike Villarel

Trumpet
Megumi Kurokawa
Travis Higa

Trombone
James Nelson
Russell Koester
John Riley
Tom Papageorge

Tuba
Marcus Lewis
Jon Kercher

Harp
Gina Bombola
Melanie Scarberry

Percussion
Daniel Steffey
Melanie Scarberry
Charles Gott
Corene Pettier
Melody Loveless