

MSC 1003 – Music in Civilization Fall 2017

Prof. Smey

Session 18, Tuesday October 31

Since this class fell on Halloween I organized it around the theme of scary and supernatural things. We watched the Act II finale of *Don Giovanni*, Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, and the Schubert song "Erlkönig."

Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique* [1830]

In the Romantic period composers become particularly interested in writing music that tells a story. This is known as **program music**.

Hector Berlioz writes the first important symphonic music after Beethoven, and it was he who really made Program Music the new thing. At the première of the *Symphonie fantastique* he literally handed out pages of text that he wanted the audience to read, so that they would be able to follow the story he was telling. (This is the "program" in program music.) Here is an edited-down version of it:

Part one - Daydreams, passions

A young musician...sees for the first time a woman who unites all the charms of the ideal person his imagination was dreaming of, and falls desperately in love with her.

Part two - A ball

[The young man spots his beloved at a ball, and fails to get her attention.]

Part three - Scene in the countryside

[The young man is strolling outdoors and again he sees his love interest. He again fails to get her attention.]

Part four - March to the scaffold

Convinced that his love is spurned, the artist poisons himself with opium. The dose of narcotic, while too weak to cause his death, plunges him into a heavy sleep accompanied

by the strangest of visions. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he is condemned, led to the scaffold and is witnessing his own execution.

Part five - Dream of a witches' sabbath

He sees himself at a witches' sabbath, in the midst of a hideous gathering of shades, sorcerers and monsters of every kind who have come together for his funeral.

We are going to learn part V for the quiz.

Art Song

We looked at the tradition of the Art Song, which became particularly popular in early Romantic Germany and Austria. (In German these are called *Lieder*, pronounced "LEED-er".) Art Songs are usually performed by one singer plus a pianist. The text is written by a poet, and often published with the intention that composers will turn them into music. The overall goal is to create the most refined combination of text and music, not unlike the work of the Troubadours and Trouvères in the Middle Ages.

The first Art Song we are going to learn for the quiz is Franz Schubert's "Erlkönig." This is a sort of ghost story with text by Goethe, in which a man and his son are riding through the forest, being pursued by a supernatural being that preys on children. You can read a full translation of the text (with detailed comments on the music) in our textbook, pp. 247-251 in the eighth edition, pp. 242-245 in the seventh.