**Symphonie Fantastique, Berlioz**

**Wider listening**

Composers for comparison:

Strauss

Schubert

Schumann

Mendelssohn

Mahler

Liszt

Beethoven

 Context:

* Hector Berlioz 1803-1869
* Symphonie Fantastique was first composed in 1830 (but later revised), meaning it was relatively early in the Romantic era.
* The work is written in five movements, of which the first is studied, and is nominally a symphony - and in the sense that it is a largescale orchestral work - but it breaks away from the conventional symphony of Haydn and Mozart in its programmatic nature and its five rather than the common structure of four movements.
* Berlioz wrote extensive programme notes to go with the music, outlining the story of the Symphonie Fantastique. The earlier title for the work was “Episode de la vie d’une artiste” (“Episode in the life of an artist”).
* The story is of a young artist who falls in love with a beautiful woman. His thoughts are constantly of her, with this being reflected in the music with an idée fixe, a recurring theme.
* Berlioz was a pioneer of programmatic music, preceding the tone poem movement of Strauss and Liszt.
* He was unusual as a composer for not playing the piano and it has been suggested that this affected Berlioz’s orchestration style which was very individual. He certainly placed a great deal of importance on orchestration, writing a detailed study on the subject called “Treatise on Instrumentation”.



Melody

Wider listening by element

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| Beethoven Symphony no. 5, mvt 1 | * Four-note opening motif (both the rhythmic and melodic elements together and separately) used relentlessly throughout the first movement.
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| Liszt Faust Symphony, mvt. 1 | * The first movement represents Faust with an eerie chromatic melody that uses all twelve tones.
* Liszt then uses motivic development and thematic transformation of the melody throughout the movement to explore the character.
* The idée fixe in SF has a similar role and is treated to a bit of development but as it is used in all five movements there is more variation between the movements.
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| Berlioz Harold en Italie Herminie | * Harold is represented by a theme on a solo viola. This theme, or idée fixe, recurs in every movement.
* A cantata written by Berlioz in 1828. The theme from the first movement is the idée fixe of S.F.
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Structure/form

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| Strauss Don JuanLiszt Faust Symphony | * Liszt and Strauss favoured the new tone (symphonic) poem over the symphony.
* Strauss’ Don Juan is a single-movement piece but on a symphonic scale, using the form of the tone poem rather than a conventional three or four movement symphony. It follows Don Juan ins his search for love and his subsequent death.
* Liszt’s Faust Symphony is written in three movements or character portraits, of Faust, Gretchen and Mephistopheles, characters from Goethe’s drama.
* The first movement which depicts Faust follows a loose sonata form, with a short development section and a long recapitulation, quite like in Symphonie Fantastique.
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| Beethoven “Eroica“ Symphony no. 3, mvt 1Beethoven Symphony no. 5, mvt. 1 | * This movement has a long coda that appears to further develop rather than conclude ideas from the preceding music.
* Also has a long coda.
* In earlier classical symphonies the coda was very short and much less significant in the sonata form as the recapitulation was often more complete and was simply a quick reiteration.
* Although the structure of S.F is not so clear because Berlioz follows sonata form very loosely, it is mostly analysed as having a very long coda that is not just a reiteration of the music material of the movement.
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| Beethoven Symphony no. 6 “Pastoral” | * Has programmatic titles for its movements (therefore influences its structure and form).
* Beethoven occasionally writes notes e.g. “birdsong” in the score.
* The fourth movement is a programmatic storm - in S.F we also have a storm. Interesting to explore how the two composers (and indeed all composers) portray their storms.
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| Schubert and Mendelssohn symphonies | * These two composers writing in the early Romantic period continued to develop the symphony but, on the whole, wrote within classical conventions in terms of form.
* That said, they were more adventurous with their harmony and sometimes structure, exploring the boundaries of the sonata form.
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Harmony/tonality

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| Schubert Symphony no.5, mvt 1 | * Typically, in the development section of a sonata form movement the music modulates into various keys, circling round the tonic key. In the Classical era these keys were mostly closely related to the tonic.
* In this development section, there is a sequence of modulations in very unrelated keys. In the key of Bb, it modulates through Db, Bb minor, Gb and Eb minor.
* The use of these unrelated keys shows a bolder attitude regarding tonality compared to the Classical era.
* A similar thing can be seen in b46-60 of Symphonie Fantastique (although this is the introduction rather than the development section):

Ab, Db, E, C#m, G#m, Am all over an Ab pedal or ‘pivot note‘. |
| Strauss Don Juan | * As a tone poem, the music is programmatic and follows the story of the protagonist. At the end, a triumphant E major modulates to a sad E minor as Don Juan loses in a duel and dies.
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Texture

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| Berlioz Harold en Italie | * Where the theme is introduced the texture is sparse. In the first movement, a harp and quiet sustained strings support the solo viola. This allows the viola melody - an idée fixe - to be heard clearly.
* Similarly, in SF when the idée fixe is first presented in b72 there is a monophonic texture; the melody is played by flutes and first violins in unison. Then from b78 the continuing melody is punctuated by the rest of the string section with two-quaver ‘palpitation’ figures. Again, the melody is very dominant.
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| Strauss Don Juan | * Strauss develops the melody-dominated homophony of the main themes by adding contrapuntal countermelodies.
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Sonority/Dynamics

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| Mahler Symphony no. 8 | * Known as The Symphony of a Thousand.
* Written for a massive orchestra, two SATB choirs, a children’s choir and soloists.
* Shows the further expansion of the orchestra as the Romantic era continued.
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| Beethoven Symphony no. 5 | * Added three trombones and contrabassoon to the symphony orchestra.
* Berlioz wrote for large forces in Symphonie Fantastique too, including at least 60 strings, four bassoons rather than the usual two, and two cornet à pistons as well as two trumpets.
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Tempo/metre/rhythm

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| Beethoven Coriolan Overture Beethoven Symphony no. 9, mvt. 4 | * Both use silence as a dramatic device.
* In the Coriolan Overture, Beethoven uses silence as a motif. In the opening section, large chords are followed by substantial silences.
* There is a silence in the middle of the movement before the tutti chorus and orchestra enters.
* Berlioz uses silence to great effect by inserting an unexpected general pause in b229-231 straight after a ***ff*** tutti section.
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| Schumann “Rhenish” Symphony no.3, mvt 1 | * The movement begins with considerable rhythmic ambiguity. Despite the 3/4 metre, the opening theme seems to be in 3/2, crossing bar lines and undermining the downbeat before finally slipping into the 3/4 as the movement progresses.
* Rhythmic ambiguities and irregularities are a sign of new Romantic tendencies, breaking away from the strict rhythmic control of the Classical era.
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