

MUSIC TEACHERS.CO.UK
...the internet service for practical musicians.

Edexcel A Level Syllabus – Analysis

Berlioz: Harold en Italie
3rd movement

Gavin Meredith

© 2002 MusicTeachers.co.uk

Background

Completed in 1834, *Harold in Italy* was Berlioz's second symphony. His first, the *Symphonie Fantastique*, had already proved him to be a symphonist of remarkable originality on many levels.

Harold in Italy utilises some of its predecessor's characteristics, the most obvious of which is the use of descriptive titles for each movement and the corresponding programmatic nature to the music. Of course, Berlioz was not entirely original in employing this technique, as Beethoven's *Pastoral* symphony, written between 1807-8, has a similar use of titles, but it was not common for composers in the early 19th century to immediately assume such a programmatic nature to their symphonies. The programmatic structure of this second symphony is vague, and its inspiration draws on two main sources. Firstly, the *Harold* of the title relates to the poet Byron's work *Childe Harold*, although the music is not based directly on any specific events from this; it merely tries to capture something of the character of Byron's protagonist. This aspect is coupled with Berlioz's own recollections of walking in the hills of Italy to make the symphony's movements almost a series of tone-poems. Cohesion is provided through the use of a recurring theme (known as an *idée fixe*), which appears in a different guise in each movement representing Harold. The *idée fixe* technique is another feature in common with the *Symphonie Fantastique*, and its association of a theme with a particular person foreshadowed the *leitmotif* principle found later in the operas of Wagner.

Another striking feature of this symphony is the employment of a solo viola. The story goes that Paganini, the famous violin virtuoso, had requested a viola work from Berlioz to show off the Stradivarius instrument he had acquired. Apparently, having been shown some sketches of the work, Paganini complained that the soloist's role was too small and not difficult to be an adequate showpiece for his talent. Thus, Paganini's association with the work was broken, but Berlioz completed it with the solo viola part as he had originally intended it. Despite using a soloist, the work has nothing of a concerto nature about it; the viola is integrated within the symphonic structure as more of a commentator and narrator.

The third movement's title translates as 'The Serenade of a mountaineer of the Abruzzes to his Mistress'. Its structure is ingenious for the use of two contrasting, but related, tempi, and their subsequent combination in the final section of the work.

The opening *Allegro assai* contains nothing to signify the 'serenade' of the title, but after 31 bars it becomes clear that this is merely scene-setting; the rustic, bare-fifths of the violas' opening and the jaunty tune in the wind capture the flavours of a mountain village and the traditional folk tunes played by its inhabitants. The following *Allegretto* suddenly relaxes the mood into a more lyrical one for the introduction of the 'serenade' theme by the cor anglais, which then dominates the movement.

Analysis

No. of bars: 208

Key: C major

Bar	What Happens	Comment
1-31	<p>The movement opens with a bare-fifth harmony (C and G), sustained in the woodwind, establishing the tonic of C. The bassoon holds a bass pedal note (C) throughout these 31 bars. The violas set up the jaunty, dotted 6/8 rhythm, doubling the 'fifths' but also adding a third to the chord to make a C major triad (when the melody enters they do not stick to one harmony, but retain a C in the bass at all times).</p> <p>Over this accompaniment, the oboe and piccolo play a lively theme, made up of repeated small cells which are grouped to make uneven phrase lengths and often placing an accent on the second beat of the bar.</p> <p>In bars 14-18, the tonality hints at F major through the use of B-flats, but the music easily slips back into the key of C major. This introductory section ends on a paused tonic chord.</p>	<p>Berlioz sets the movement up with a rustic atmosphere, depicting the mountaineer of the title. The opening harmony in the woodwinds is known as a drone, and mimics the sound that a bagpipe makes, especially through the use of a repeated accent on the first beat of each bar. The violas are playing at the bottom of their register, and their open strings (C and G) enhance the rustic flavours.</p>
32-48	<p>The strings (divided, to produce a thicker texture) play an accompanimental role with simple plucked chords and triad based viola figures. After three bars of introduction (the same number as in the first section), the cor anglais introduces the serenade theme, whose wider contours contrast well with the flatter outline of the preceding theme. Again, irregular phrases are employed, the first being seven bars long, and the theme itself seems to subtly juxtapose bars of 6/8 (bars 35-36) with 3/4 (bars 37-38). Harmonically this opening feels fairly stable, apart from a hint at a move to a minor in bar 40. On the second phrase of this theme a bassoon adds a sustained line to the texture.</p>	<p>The change in mood and tempo (half the preceding speed) heralds the start of the 'Serenade' of the movement's title. Immediately the feeling is much more relaxed and serene.</p>
49-59	<p>The strings drop out and the woodwind take over the accompaniment, using arpeggiated figures in the clarinet and two sustained bassoon lines. The cor anglais</p>	

	<p>starts to develop the theme, doubled an octave higher by the oboe. In bars 53-58 they are then joined by the bassoon, doubling an octave below the cor anglais and extending the rhythmic idea in bar 50. Here, the strings re-enter with a smooth, mostly chromatic line, played the same (only an octave apart) in each instrument until bar 58.</p> <p>Also, the tonality begins to shift in this section, with suggestions of a minor (bar 50) and d minor (bars 51-52) before the music slides more chromatically. However, it arrives back on a dominant seventh chord in C (the tonic of the movement) at the start of bar 59.</p>	
60-99	<p>The oboe and cor anglais hold a G (the dominant), underneath which two horns take up the serenade theme. The accompaniment joins in after two bars, with the same texture as at bar 32. As the melodic phrase ends in bar 65, the solo viola enters, playing the theme which is the <i>idée fixe</i> of the symphony. This theme (which is a rhythmically altered version of the original) overlaps with the serenade theme which is continued by the piccolo and clarinets in bar 67.</p> <p>In bar 71 the texture changes, with the accompaniment provided by a steady pulse in the double basses and harp, interspersed with rippling semiquavers in the cellos. The viola's <i>idée fixe</i> is then given more weight as it is joined in octaves by the rest of the strings.</p> <p>From here onwards, the woodwind section develops the serenade theme. This is done using fragmentation and decoration of all the melodic material in bars 32-59. For example, the end of the phrase in bar 79 (originally from bar 52) is treated as a fragment which is imitated in close succession by the other woodwind instruments. The woodwind parts in 87-88 can be directly related to the falling end of the phrase in bar 50. Also, in bars 86-87 the oboe and flute can be heard decorating the opening of the theme with added semiquavers and triplets, which themselves owe something to the rippling</p>	<p>The use of the two horns in bar 60 gives a real flavour of the outdoors and the mountains.</p> <p>The solo viola's theme is the one with which it first appeared near the beginning of the first movement, the <i>idée fixe</i>.</p> <p>The use of a harp was not a common feature of the symphony orchestra of the early 19th century.</p>

	<p>semiquavers in the cellos.</p> <p>This development crescendos to a cut-off in bar 99 on a chord of A major.</p> <p>The harmony becomes quite fluid throughout this development; several keys are hinted at without proper modulation.</p> <p>As the music moves toward the cut off in bar 99 it moves into d minor (bar 97) to finish off on an imperfect cadence.</p>	
100-122	<p>The soloist is left with the oboe and cor anglais to hold on to the dominant (A), underneath which the horns take up the serenade theme, this time in d minor.</p> <p>The viola steadily rises through an octave, whilst the winds echo the minor version of the theme in bar 106. The music remains in d minor and, unlike bar 99, it comes to a perfect cadence in bar 111.</p> <p>A fortissimo d minor chord in the strings is followed by a sudden shift in texture, with the soloist being accompanied only by the woodwind. The woodwind then begin a restatement of bars 49-59, over which the viola provides wistful commentary. There is little change to the orchestration here, apart from the dominant trills in the flute and piccolo</p>	<p>The d minor version of the theme turns the mood to a much more plaintive one.</p>
123-135	<p>As in bar 60, the horns restate the serenade theme in C major and the texture continues in the same way with the strings joining in. The viola adds a line over the top of the strings which is rhythmically based on the oboe in bar 52 (see bar 127) and the 2nd bar of the serenade theme (bar 128).</p> <p>The cor anglais and bassoon repeat the opening of the theme in bar 130 as the strings come to a halt, and the section closes quietly with a perfect cadence in C major.</p>	
136-165	<p>A reprise of the first thirty bars of the movement. However, instead of coming to a close the music runs straight into the next section.</p>	<p>Berlioz provides a fleeting recollection of the mountain scenery.</p>
166-208	<p>The close relation of the tempi for the <i>Allegro assai</i> and <i>Allegretto</i> sections (ie the first is twice the speed of the second) allows Berlioz to combine elements of both simultaneously. Therefore, the violas carry on their jaunty 6/8 rhythm whilst the</p>	

	<p>rest of the orchestra play at half their tempo.</p> <p>The flute and harp begin in bar 167 to pick out a very slow moving version of the theme played by the solo viola in bar 65, the work's <i>idée fixe</i>. They play the complete theme, as heard when the soloist first enters in the opening movement, but here it spans 23.5 bars instead of the original 8.</p> <p>For the first time in the movement so far, the soloist takes up the opening of the 'serenade' theme, at first in the tonic key of C major (bar168), then in D minor (bar 170-171). It then continues to develop this theme, stretching the original arpeggiated shape slightly (bar 180) and playing with the falling figure from bar 52 (see bars 182-185).</p> <p>After bar 184 the music begins to fade away (<i>perdendosi</i>).</p> <p>From bar 190 onwards, only the strings remain playing, which is then reduced to just the violas, whose perpetual rhythm is interspersed with pauses, adding to the sense of closure. Their dotted quavers are replaced by dotted crotchets (bar 198), then dotted minims (bar 200) before they come to rest on a bare-fifth chord on C (their two lowest open strings). It is then left to the soloist to have the final word with a muted reminiscence of the serenade theme, which ends with a falling arpeggiated figure based on the tonic chord of C major. The violins and cellos then join for the final confirmation of the tonic chord as the movement comes to a murmuring halt.</p>	
--	---	--