

## Introduction: Berlioz on the eve of the bicentenary

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In a recent novel by the popular French journalist Patrick Poivre d'Arvor, *Un Héros de passage*, a prototypically inexperienced and ambitious young man arrives from the provinces in the capital – the year is 1845 – there to seek fame and fortune. In Paris he makes the acquaintance of a darkly beautiful woman called “Queen Pomaré.” This is not the historical Tahitian Queen whose fifty-year reign over the Polynesian island, from 1827 to 1877, encompassed its establishment as a French protectorate in 1843; it is rather the then fashionable cancan dancer, Élise Sergent, whose exotic and richly bejeweled appearance earned her that piquant and much bandied-about royal appellation.

What has this to do with Berlioz? It happens that in a musical *boutade* for a friend's album the composer once portrayed *himself* as chapelmaster to “Queen Pomaré” and composed “in Tahitian words and music” what he called a “morning greeting” to Her Gracious Majesty. I would not be surprised if there were a relationship between this *Salut matinal* – evidence, like so much else in his œuvre, of our man's delight in voyages both real and imagined – and the “other” Queen Pomaré, who was the licentious star of the Bal Mabille in the mid-eighteen-forties, when the undated album-leaf may well have been set down.<sup>1</sup> The sobriquet *pomaré*, like others applied to women of doubtful virtue, was widely known to all who made and attended to art and literature at the time. Théophile Gautier spoke of “la reine Pomaré” in his feuilleton for *La Presse* of 21 December 1846 – only two weeks after he published the review of the première of *La Damnation de Faust* in which he famously anointed Berlioz, Hugo, and Delacroix as “the trinity of Romantic Art.”<sup>2</sup> Berlioz's friend Pier Angelo Fiorentino, a critic of “uncommon perception” on the composer's own testimony, was apparently among Queen Pomaré's lovers, and so, too, was Charles Baudelaire, who wrote some lascivious verses about their liaison.<sup>3</sup> Heinrich Heine wrote a poem about this “untamed beauty”<sup>4</sup> – and the untamed isle of Tahiti itself runs through years of Berlioz's public and private writings as an *idée fixe* of distant and wondrous adventure. So it seems fair to suggest that Berlioz's little machination was marinated in *double entendre*. And that his “appetites of the flesh,” though “much weaker than the appetites of the mind,” as Hugh Macdonald has recently

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suggested, were perhaps not entirely satisfied by fare of the purely intellectual sort.<sup>5</sup>

When he returned to Paris in 1853, after giving two concerts in Frankfurt on 20 and 24 August, Berlioz wrote letters to three different friends to express satisfaction with the artistic results of his trip. From his letter of 3 September 1853 to the composer-conductor Gustav Schmidt, who facilitated the concerts in Frankfurt, we learn that Berlioz particularly enjoyed the company of the players and the members of Frankfurt's musical community, among them (though not mentioned in Berlioz's letter) the wealthy Polish Count Thadeus Tyszkiewicz. (Thadeus's father, Count Vincenz, had been one of the Polish refugees for whose cause the not-yet twenty-year-old Richard Wagner, we know from several emotional pages in *Mein Leben*, felt great political and personal sympathy during his student days in Leipzig.) It happens that Thadeus Tyszkiewicz traveled from Frankfurt to Paris in the autumn of 1853 and remained there for a year or so as, among other things, a correspondent for Robert Schumann's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. He caused a much-publicized ruckus by openly suing the then director of the Opéra, Nestor Roqueplan, for falsely advertising and producing a version of *Der Freischütz* that in Tyszkiewicz's view was corrupt – incomplete, mutilated, and execrably performed.

What has this to do with Berlioz? The work Tyszkiewicz had seen on the stage of the Académie Impériale de Musique was, of course, *Le Freischütz* – not the bastardization of the work that Castil-Blaze had performed at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in December of 1824 as *Robin des bois* (which Berlioz became famous for excoriating), but the adaptation of the work, first performed at the Opéra on 7 June 1841, with a French text by Émilien Pacini and recitatives as required at the Opéra by Berlioz himself. The prosecutorial matter, much reported in the press both foreign and domestic, ended when the Première Chambre of the Tribunal Civil de la Seine determined that what the Count had seen was precisely what was to be expected in Paris, that the suit was without merit, that Tyszkiewicz must pay court costs.

Berlioz's name was invoked by lawyers on both sides of the issue. The composer, furious that anyone should accuse him of mutilating a masterpiece, took steps to restore his reputation as a defender of the faith, writing to the editor of the *Journal des débats* on 22 December 1853 and to half a dozen other editors in Germany as well to proclaim his good intentions.<sup>6</sup> What has heretofore not been known, what could not be known from the letter of protest of 22 December, is that Tyszkiewicz was in fact a personal acquaintance of Berlioz. Indeed, the two had spent some time together in Frankfurt in August, after Berlioz's concerts there, and as a

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token of his respect for the Frenchman, Tyszkiewicz offered Berlioz the first edition – a costly item – of the full score of Wagner’s *Lohengrin* (published in Leipzig in 1852), with the following dedication:

Offert à Monsieur Hector Berlioz en souvenir de son passage par Francfort et  
comme témoignage de l’admiration la plus sincère et du plus profond respect.  
Thadée C<sup>te</sup> Tyszkiewicz, 29.VIII.1853.<sup>7</sup>

Someone with a conspiratorial turn of mind might therefore wonder, since he describes Roqueplan as an ungrateful and hypocritical Philistine in chapter 57 of the *Mémoires*, if it was Berlioz who encouraged Tyszkiewicz to sue.

These two episodes in the life of the artist, unrelated, offer confirmation, as that excellent collector Sarah Fenderson used so often to say, that “Berlioz leads everywhere.” And that everything – at least as it pertains to the culture of the French nineteenth century, be it a Tahitian look-alike doing a prurient polka in the public square or a bona fide Polish count filing suit for a musical sort of Parisian immorality – leads to Berlioz.

The notion that Berlioz leads everywhere becomes more evident as we approach the two-hundredth anniversary of the composer’s birth, to be celebrated with considerable pomp in the autumn of 2003. Concerts, exhibitions, and scholarly colloquia will mark the occasion, and, should the President of the French Republic so decree, Berlioz’s remains will be translated to the Panthéon: *aux grands hommes, la patrie reconnaissante*. Berlioz, rarely in the shadows, will have an especially brilliant day in the sun. The hullabaloo should do no harm. Nor should it obscure the steadily good work of the scholars behind the scenes who are responsible for the scores, books, and articles that lead, we hope, to intelligent programming, perceptive listening, and sound appreciation.

Many of these scholars are represented in this collection, which, with its circumscribed genre studies and more wide-ranging essays, is designed to encourage general readers to deepen their understanding of the life and work of that singularly fascinating composer, conductor, writer, traveler, friend, lover, cynic, and prophet who was Berlioz. A word about each seems in order here.

In the opening piece, Jacques Barzun, quoting from memory (as was Berlioz’s lifelong habit) and drawing on the learning of a lifetime, situates Berlioz in the age that invented the religion of art and the “genius” who preached and practiced it. With characteristic grace, Barzun gives broad explication to romanticism itself. On the basis of her close reading of the polemics surrounding the *guerre rossinienne* that erupted on the eve of Berlioz’s arrival in Paris, Janet Johnson then shows us the young composer

caught in the crossfire between the academic classicism of the Parisian musical establishment and the romantic modernism of Rossini espoused by Stendhal, Delacroix, and Balzac.

Julian Rushton prefaces a series of articles on Berlioz's principal compositions (arranged in five categories) by reflecting upon the nature of category, or *genre*, itself – this, clearly one of the most conspicuously challenging dimensions of the music of our composer. The symphony, many writers of the eighteen-twenties and thirties would have it, and Richard Wagner would later proclaim in “The Artwork of the Future” (1849), was a form that was no longer viable. In fact, though he much transformed the form by dramatizing it, Berlioz wrote four works called “symphonies” that are viable indeed, as Jeffrey Langford's treatment of them makes plain.

Robert Schumann (who wrote “viable” symphonies of his own) thought highly of the *Fantastique*, as is well known; he thought highly of Mendelssohn's symphonies, too, but offered even greater praise to his concert overtures, “in which the idea of the symphony is confined to a smaller orbit.”<sup>8</sup> Berlioz's concert overtures, as we may conclude from Diana Bickley's essay, have been equally deserving of approbation as exceptionally original undertakings in the post-Beethovenian world of symphonic composition.

The operas and the “dramatic legend” *La Damnation de Faust* are the subject of James Haar's succinct reading, which gives us the broad outlines of their genesis and reception, and skillfully sets down the main aesthetic issues to which they give rise. In his essay on the religious music, Ralph Locke grapples, as one must, with the very definition of “religious,” and speaks perceptively to Berlioz's achievement, particularly in the *Requiem* and *Te Deum*, in finding new ways of writing in forms where old-fashioned styles more commonly prevailed.

In Berlioz's songs there lie particular tensions between music private and public, music for the salon and for the concert hall, music for traditional minds and for more progressive ears. In her essay on Berlioz's better-known works in the category, Annegret Fauser engages with these and other issues such as composerly intentions versus accreted meanings, struggling to capture the musical experience as it simultaneously invites and resists interpretation.

Like the writings of Balzac, which now are seen to give “form” to the first part of the French nineteenth century, Berlioz's, too, in a more restricted arena, give shape to some of the main musical streams that flowed from the “Indian Summer” of the Bourbon Monarchy, at the opening of his career, through the autumn of the Second Empire, at the end. His

*Mémoires* are at once a colorful if selective chronicle of his life and a remarkable literary document of varied pace and tone; they are impulsive, satirical, enthusiastic, indignant, and as vivid as any ever written. As Pierre Citron informs us in a comprehensive reading that originally served to introduce his 1991 edition of the *Mémoires*,<sup>9</sup> the book allows us to feel the rebellion and the liberty that permeate the spiritual climate of the nineteenth century as a whole.

Begun in the year of Chateaubriand's death, Berlioz's *Mémoires* put one in mind of the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, both widely considered the crowning achievements of their authors' literary careers. By their range and variety, Katherine Kolb tells us, Berlioz's earlier collections of writings put one in mind of *La Comédie humaine* – the encyclopedic project that Balzac, whom Berlioz had by then known personally for several years, announced in 1842. In her thoughtful study of five short stories, Kolb shows how Berlioz entertains, disturbs, vents frustration, reveals principle, and forges worlds different from and more imaginative than the prosaic one in which he found himself constrained to live.

In his regular critical writings, only a small percentage of which he later collected in *À travers chants*, Berlioz had usually to use a careful combination of diplomatic skill and wit, as Katharine Ellis demonstrates in her essay here. It is ironic that the sarcasm which yesterday won Berlioz so many enemies has today won him so many new friends. Passages in which the critic indulges his passion – such as his astute and brilliant description of the Allegretto of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony (to which David Cairns returns in his contribution to this volume) – turn out in fact to be atypical.

In France today I am sometimes surprised to hear Berlioz called composer, writer, and *theorist* – since in the face of certain theoretical constructions, Berlioz was inclined to say *non credo*: “music is free; it does what it wishes, and without permission.”<sup>10</sup> The designation is due to the widespread awareness of the importance of his *Traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes* (of which a modern critical edition is only now in the making). Joel-Marie Fauquet's essay considers the series of articles that formed the nucleus of the *Traité* (whose overmastering novelty, on its publication as a book, was the inclusion of numerous musical examples in full score), and suggests that the practical value of the tome is matched if not surpassed by its value as a treatise on aesthetics. (The chapter on conducting that Berlioz added to the second edition, in 1855, is by contrast a treatise on executive authority.)

Under the rubric of *execution*, D. Kern Holoman deals here with some of the realities of bringing Berlioz's music to life. For performers and those interested in the mechanics of performance – which scores to

obtain, which instruments to use – Holoman the conductor-scholar offers practical advice.

Four *critical encounters* demonstrate in different ways the majestic reaches and unexpected perimeters of Berlioz's artistic horizons. For Berlioz, Gluck and Beethoven were both teachers and gods; on the basis of the essays here by Joël-Marie Fauquet and David Cairns we can measure their relative places in Berlioz's artistic pantheon. His admiration for Gluck grew along with his first musical stirrings and remained with him to the end: in one sense Gluck, for Berlioz, could do no wrong. However, as Fauquet demonstrates, his work could be adjusted and refined in ways that reflected our nineteenth-century composer's particular embrace of the notion of progress that was so overwhelming in Second Empire France. Berlioz discovered Beethoven only later, when he came to feel the full import of the notion of "genius"; the German composer became for him an incommensurable hero, as Cairns suggests, and Berlioz felt a deeply emotional necessity to celebrate the master's formidable scores, his flights of fancy, and even his flaws. In his Beethoven criticism, Berlioz's worshipful analyses give us, to paraphrase Berlioz's great friend Ernest Legouvé, the key to a sanctuary.

Berlioz's regard for Mozart seems to have been in a sense more intellectual, and also more dependent upon the manner in which his music was performed. Hugh Macdonald's contribution – I believe it is the first comprehensive examination of Berlioz's Mozart criticism – allows us to ponder the thought that maintaining the integrity of Mozart's music might have meant more to Berlioz than Mozart's music itself.

Wagner the man was imperfectly known to Berlioz, and his mature music remained to him a mystery. By the time of *Tristan* and the Paris *Tannhäuser*, those miracles of musical modernity, Berlioz was of little mind to celebrate the work of the self-proclaimed heir to the throne of Beethoven (to which title Berlioz, too, had a claim). Earlier, the expatriated Wagner was impressed but in some sense troubled by the composer of *Roméo et Juliette*. In my essay here I touch upon these issues, in particular considering what their meetings in person might have been like.

In the closing piece of the volume, Lesley Wright treats Berlioz's after-fame in France. As during his lifetime, Berlioz had his posthumous admirers and detractors along with fans on the fence, such as Bizet, who described his feelings in a formula whose words I have seen elsewhere – Berlioz "had genius but no talent" – but whose meaning I have never been able to fathom.

There has not been room in this last section for a study of his after-fame in Germany, where Berlioz was almost always well received, or in Russia,

where he exerted tremendous influence on the members of the “mighty handful” but also on Tchaikovsky, whose memory of Berlioz as the embodiment of a “blazing love for art” – the Russian met the Frenchman in 1868 – remained with him for the rest of his life.<sup>11</sup> In the section on the *principal compositions* there has not been room (tautologically) for consideration of the smaller works, of which some – *La Mort d’Ophélie*, for example, orchestrated in London in 1848 – are delightful indeed. The Rome Prize cantatas, too, are largely absent here: close comparison of Berlioz’s futile efforts with those of the winners might help us to understand the “talent–genius” conundrum that Bizet and others later sporadically evoked. Finally, Berlioz’s writings include his letters, which can rise to the level of literature, and his librettos, which can rise to the level of poetry. Study of these would have made *major writings* too long. Is it too long already? Read the description of the reinterment of Harriet Smithson, in the *Postface* of the *Mémoires*, where Berlioz evokes the horrifying sight, sound, and smell of a corpse as it is lifted from a rotted coffin; compare this to the description of the exhumation of Marguerite Gauthier, in chapter 6 of *La Dame aux camélias*, where, to confirm his acceptance of his beloved’s death, Armand Duval witnesses this same grisly process; and dare to say that Berlioz’s page is any less gripping than that penned by the celebrated Alexandre Dumas fils.<sup>12</sup>

With the completion of the *New Berlioz Edition*, the *Correspondance générale*, and the *Critique musicale*, the foundations of Berlioz research will have been settled, on the eve of the bicentenary, for some time to come. It is difficult to imagine undertaking these kinds of critical editions again. One central item has been partly overlooked in all of this, however, and that is Berlioz’s most famous book. Of *Les Soirées de l’orchestre*, *Les Grottesques de la musique*, and *À travers chants* we have Léon Guichard’s attentive *édition du centenaire*. But of the *Mémoires*, though we have a fine modern edition in French and a fine modern translation in English, we have no full-dress critical edition of the original text: no exhaustive and systematic comparison of the printed version with the autograph manuscript (of which important chapters are preserved in public and private collections) or with the portions of the book that were earlier published as articles. Such an edition of Berlioz’s *Mémoires*, it seems to me, clearly belongs in that celebrated series that is the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade*.

We also need facsimile editions – Berlioz’s manuscript, musical and epistolary, is of legendary expressive character – and we need a broadly inclusive picture book: perhaps the catalogue of the grand exhibition that is to crown the celebration of the bicentenary of Berlioz’s birth, at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, in 2003, will serve this purpose.

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The purpose of this Companion is to point *Kenner, Liebhaber*, and self-improving readers with well-stored minds to the satisfactions and singularities of the work of a complex and enduringly inventive artist. Such readers will find some redundancies and inconsistencies among the assertions and opinions voiced by these authors; to have edited them away would have been to reduce the reviewer's delight and to lessen the contentiousness that has from the outset been associated with the subject of our endeavor.