

5 The concert overtures

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Like his symphonies, Berlioz's concert overtures raise lingering questions regarding the effect of "story" or program upon pure musical coherence. Their relative brevity – crucial to their popularity both during and after the composer's lifetime – allows observation of how he handled such matters as organization and orchestration in the approximately twenty-five-year period between the composition of the first and last works included in this category.

The genre of the concert overture excludes those composed as operatic preludes. For this reason there is no discussion here of the *Grande Overture de Benvenuto Cellini*, composed in February 1838 and published in full score in 1839, long before the rest of the opera, or of the overture to *Béatrice et Bénédict*. *Les Troyens* is striking for – among other things – its opening *in medias res*, with no separate overture. However, when external considerations caused *Les Troyens* to be divided in half, Berlioz felt the necessity of explicating the action of *La Prise de Troie* (the acts excised at the time of the performance) by opening *Les Troyens à Carthage* with a *Prologue*, which he composed in June 1863. This consists of a *Lamento*, a *Légende* (in which a *rapsode*, or epic narrator, gives a synopsis of *La Prise de Troie*), and the *Marche troyenne* "in the triumphal mode" accompanied by a *Chœur de rhapsodes*. The *Lamento*, which uses material from the original Act I, is not properly speaking an overture, but it is a noble evocation of the fall of the Trojan nation, and its dark sonorities sustained by the low notes of the tenor trombone – "majestic, terrifying, awesome," as Berlioz called them in the *Traité d'instrumentation* – are sufficient to warrant its revival in concert performance.

The *Grande Overture des Francs-Juges* is included here because Berlioz clearly regarded it as a concert overture, and conducted it more frequently than he did any other of his compositions except the overture *Le Carnaval romain*. The opera *Les Francs-Juges* ("The Judges of the Secret Court"), a *Freischütz*-like tale of heroism and intrigue set in the Germanic Middle Ages, is the result of Berlioz's collaboration in the mid-eighteen-twenties with his friend and librettist Humbert Ferrand. It was never staged and never published. But the overture was completed in 1826 and published, after what must have been considerable revision, in parts (in 1833), in full

[69]

score (in 1836), and in various arrangements, including one for piano four-hands by Berlioz himself (1836).

In addition to this work, then, there are six concert overtures that receive attention here; their titles and dates require brief explanation as well.

The *Grande Overture de Waverley* was composed after the *Francs-Juges Overture*, probably in early 1827. Both had their premières at a concert of his own music that Berlioz organized on 26 May 1828. *Waverley*, too, was much revised before its publication in 1839. This is the work to which Berlioz finally affixed the label Opus 1, a fitting designation for his first independent orchestral work to rely on no previously composed music. He had earlier published *Huit Scènes de Faust* as Opus 1, but soon came to feel that that score was defective: he withdrew it from publication, and gathered and destroyed as many copies as he could. Thus it was that his first-numbered publication became associated not with Goethe's philosophical drama but rather with Sir Walter Scott's 1814 evocation of eighteenth-century Scotland.

The *Overture de La Tempête*, composed in the summer of 1830 and first played at the Opéra on 7 November 1830, precisely one month before the première of the *Symphonie fantastique*, was a year later taken over into *Le Retour à la vie* as a *Fantaisie dramatique sur La Tempête, drame de Shakespeare*. Berlioz's decision to incorporate this composition into the rarely performed sequel to the *Fantastique*, later known as *Lélio*, has had the unfortunate effect of removing from circulation one of his most lively and evocative Shakespearean works whose orchestration alone – which includes one or two pianos, four-hands each, and mixed five-part chorus – should cause it to be performed on more than special occasions.

The *Grande Overture du Roi Lear, Tragédie de Shakespeare*, is one of the chief products of Berlioz's sojourn in Italy as winner of the Prix de Rome, along with *Le Retour à la vie* (mentioned above) and the *Intrata di Rob-Roy MacGregor*. The autograph of *Le Roi Lear* – the only manuscript of a mature work by Berlioz that resides in the United States (at the Beinecke Library of Yale University) – is marked “Nizza 7 mai 1831,” a reminder that Nice was then still under the protection of the Italian House of Savoy, and did not become a part of France until 1860. Berlioz programmed this work frequently, both in Paris and abroad, and had it published in full score and parts in 1840.

The *Intrata di Rob-Roy MacGregor*, another overture inspired by Scott, was also completed in Italy, after *Le Roi Lear*, in the summer of 1831. Berlioz sent it to Paris as one of the official *envois* required of those holding fellowships at the French Academy in Rome. It is possible that he employed the Italian word *intrata* in the title as a tribute to his idol, Gluck,

who had used the word at the head of the score of his opera *Alceste* (1767), which Berlioz admired and knew intimately.¹ *Rob-Roy*'s first performance was given by the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire on 14 April 1833, but, as Berlioz wrote years later, in chapter 39 of the *Mémoires*, it seemed “long-winded and diffuse” and was so coolly received by the public, to his disappointment, that he burnt the score “immediately after leaving the concert.” (The surviving manuscript, in a copyist's hand, is the one that Berlioz had had made to send to Paris.)

Le Carnaval romain, ouverture caractéristique, is not only the work that Berlioz himself most frequently conducted, but the work that has continued to be the most popular item in his catalogue. Berlioz composed it between June 1843 and January 1844, using as primary material two themes from the score of *Benvenuto Cellini*, the opera that had been unsatisfactorily performed and received at the Académie Royale de Musique in 1838 and 1839. As if in defiance of public judgment he created this ever sparkling overture, which was given an enthusiastic reception at its first performance on 3 February 1844, and which was published shortly thereafter both in Paris (in 1844) and in Berlin (in 1845).

It is not known with precision when the *Ouverture du Corsaire* was conceived and drafted. The score was published with this title in 1852, but on the autograph manuscript the original title, now crossed out, is *La Tour de Nice*. This, and a date set down there in a foreign hand, suggested to Jacques Barzun that the work began life during Berlioz's visit to Nice during the eventful year of 1831.² The title *La Tour de Nice* was later replaced by *Le Corsaire rouge*, the French translation of *The Red Rover*, and this title has suggested to others that Berlioz wrote the piece while under the continuing spell of that sea story by “the American Walter Scott,” as Berlioz called him, James Fenimore Cooper. (Berlioz devoured Cooper in 1827 – the year of *The Red Rover* – and continued to read him thereafter, as his books appeared almost simultaneously in both English and French.) When the word *rouge* was crossed out, however, the overture took on its definitive title and its Byronic twist: Byron's *The Corsair* was published in London in 1814 and in Paris, as *Le Corsaire*, in 1825.³

In chapter 53 of the *Mémoires* Berlioz writes with nostalgia about his visit to Nice in the summer of 1844; though he provides considerable detail, he makes no mention of composing. It is only from the letter to his sister of 5 November 1844 – in which he says that he has “composed a grand overture for my forthcoming concerts” – that we know that he had by then completed *La Tour de Nice*, as it was called at the première on 19 January 1845. It was not performed again until 4 April 1854 (two years after publication), this time with the title it has today, *Le Corsaire*. In letters of 12 April 1852 and 4 April 1854, Berlioz insists – to Franz Liszt, to

whom he had no reason to exaggerate – that *Le Corsaire* is a work he has never heard. The second version differs from the first primarily by its inclusion of a new slow theme and its overall tautening of the structure, making it more than two hundred bars shorter than the first. In the absence of further information we must assume, therefore, that Berlioz considered the revisions so substantial as to have altered the very identity of the original composition. In this case he had abrogated his normal practice of hearing a work before bringing it out in print, for the revised version had indeed been published in Paris in 1852.

The formal attributes of Berlioz's overtures are not the main stuff of their originality. The slow introductions, the loosely sonata-like allegros, the breathless perorations also fit the description of the overture found in Castil-Blaze's *De l'Opéra en France* (1820), with which Berlioz was undoubtedly familiar: "A symphonic Allegro – rapid, brilliant, impassioned – following upon a short introduction in a more deliberate tempo: such is the widely accepted form of the overture."⁴ Theoretical debate about the genre of the overture, ranging from Rousseau in the mid-eighteenth century to Lacépède, Momigny, and Étienne Jouy in the early nineteenth century, focused on the appropriate relationship between the opera itself and its instrumental introduction; but some overtures were performed separately from their operas as early as the seventeen-nineties – Vogel's overture to *Démophon* (1789), Méhul's *La Chasse du Jeune Henri* (1797), to mention only two – and by the eighteen-twenties, Castil-Blaze and others acknowledged the occasional effectiveness of performing overtures as independent compositions.

Berlioz obviously knew overtures by Grétry, Gluck, Salieri, Cherubini, Méhul, Rossini, and others – but he probably did not know Beethoven's *Namensfeier* (1815) and *Die Weihe des Hauses* (1822), or Mendelssohn's overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1826), which may be said to represent the first true works in the category of the concert overture. Thus, by conceiving an overture with no reference to any opera, ballet, or play subsequently enacted on the stage, Berlioz marked a first in France, with the composition of *Waverley* in 1827.

Grande Overture des Francs-Juges

This overture was composed, in the traditional manner, after the opera it was designed to precede was completed. In the opening section, marked Adagio sostenuto, the presentation of the home key of F Minor is followed by a majestic if lumbering theme in the brass, in D-flat Major, asso-

ciated with Olmerik, the opera's despotic ruler: this theme – proudly notated in two letters to Ferrand (the librettist) of 6 and 28 June 1828 – made a stir at the first rehearsal. Berlioz told his father (on 29 May 1828) that as the introduction came to an end, a violinist turned to him and cleverly suggested that the music had had the effect of a windstorm playing the organ – which led to a round of applause. (The words Berlioz cites are apparently a misremembered quotation from Act III of *The Tempest*, where Alonso cries that “the billows spoke,” “the winds did sing,” and the thunder is a “deep and dreadful organ-pipe.”)

A dominant pedal prepares the return to F Minor for the Allegro assai (with its remarkably fast tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 80$). Here the main business is the contrasting theme in A-flat Major, a thirty-two-bar violin melody whose resolute and four-square regularity suggests the truth of Berlioz's remark, in chapter 4 of the *Mémoires*, that he borrowed it from a quintet composed when he was barely into his teens. (That his father liked this melody gives us a rare glimpse into the elder gentleman's musical taste.)

The move from A-flat back to the tonic is via a middle section, *misterioso* and more episodic than developmental, in C Minor (with a presentation of the contrasting theme in E-flat Major). The music at the return to F Minor is more varied than the word recapitulation would suggest, and the quadratic second theme, too, is quietly and indirectly insinuated before it returns literally and boisterously in F Major. The rest is all coda, with “Olmerik” returning in D-flat before the Rossini-like rush to the end.

When Berlioz compared the players' enthusiasm at the rehearsal to the public's lukewarm reaction at the concert, he realized (in the letter to Ferrand of 29 May) that “one cannot suddenly win an audience over to novel forms.” By “des formes nouvelles” he surely refers not to the repetition of blocks of material (which he rarely carries out in literal fashion) but to the thematic contrasts and dynamic intensities of his various situations and sonorities. When he heard the *Francs-Juges* Overture for the second time, in 1829, the critic F.-J. Fétis, for example, did seem to be coming around: Berlioz was consumed with “fever,” but this was “by no means the fever of an ordinary man.”⁵ Something of this seems to have been felt by Johann Christian Lobe, too, when, after participating in the performance of the piece in Weimar, on 19 March 1837, he penned an invitation to Berlioz to come to Germany that was published in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. It was felt as well by Wolfgang Robert Griepenkerl, whose enthusiasm for Berlioz was sparked by hearing the *Francs-Juges* Overture in Brunswick in 1839.⁶

The overtures to Johann Christoph Vogel's *Démophon*, Méhul's

Stratonice, and Catel's *Sémiramis*, like Beethoven's overture to *Egmont* (1810), are fiery F-Minor pieces that end in a triumphant F Major; the overture to Cherubini's *Médée* (to which the Beethoven owes a thing or two) remains in the minor at the end. In 1826 Berlioz could not have known the Beethoven, but he admired the Vogel and the Méhul, and knew the Cherubini and, probably, the Catel.⁷ A case for the influence of these works on what was, after all, Berlioz's first work to be widely performed as an independent composition, remains to be made.⁸

Grande Overture de Waverley

This composition follows the traditional format outlined above, in which a particularly slow introduction, ♩ = 56, leads to a spirited Allegro. Instead of commanding attention at the outset, as Berlioz's last two overtures do to perfection (with a quick and impetuous passage that heralds the slow section), *Waverley* begins with a single note in the oboe followed by a quiet descending phrase in the strings. It is difficult not to draw a parallel here with the quiet solo horn opening of Weber's overture to *Oberon*, for Berlioz admired and even revered Weber's music. But while he soon became intimately acquainted with the operas, it is by no means certain that he knew the score of *Oberon* as early as 1827, when *Waverley* was first drafted.

After a thirty-one-bar introduction, there is a broad aria for the cellos, irregular in phrase structure, curious in harmonic underpinning, imaginative in orchestration: the canonic reflection of the theme in the winds is an academic nicety, and the rhythmic figure in the timpani that accompanies the return of the principal melody is a small stroke of genius. This Larghetto is followed by an Allegro vivace with main themes in tonic and dominant that return, symmetrically, in dominant and tonic. The coda is marked by certain commonplaces that led Hugh Macdonald to wonder if Berlioz was here mocking the Rossinian style he claimed to detest,⁹ but the reworking of this section demonstrated by the autograph manuscript suggests rather an attempt to meet the then celebrated opera composer on his own turf.

Indeed, between its performance in May 1828 and its publication in 1839 the work underwent considerable change: not only was the peroration revised, but so, too, was the instrumentation, as the orchestral forces were reduced from one hundred and ten players to eighty-three. The score originally included the new-fangled trompette à pistons with three valves – a small but telling indication of the young composer's fascination with freshly minted instruments and techniques. When Berlioz discovered that

the three-valved model was less reliable in intonation than the model with two, he replaced the former with the latter.

Sir Walter Scott was much in fashion in France in the eighteen-twenties, and the quotation at the head of the *Waverley* Overture (taken from a poem in chapter 5 of Scott's 1814 novel of the same name) is certainly congruent with its two-part form:

Dreams of love and lady's charms
Give place to honour and to arms.

Berlioz dedicated the published score to his uncle, Félix Marmion, a military officer and a man of letters with whom Berlioz maintained affectionate and life-long relations, despite the temporary rift caused by Hector's marriage to Harriet Smithson. Indeed, one might wish to view the dedication as Berlioz's peace offering to his mother's music-loving brother.

Ouverture de La Tempête

Berlioz was invited to compose this overture by his friend Narcisse Girard, the concertmaster of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire in its early years and, from 1830 to 1837, the conductor of the orchestra at the Théâtre Italien, where *La Tempête* was originally scheduled for performance on 1 November 1830. This does not explain its inclusion of a five-part chorus of "airy spirits" – surely the first time voices would play a role in a composition called "overture" – but it does explain the reason that these spirits sing in Italian, which was *de rigueur* in the theatre that first welcomed Rossini to France. When the orchestra at the Théâtre Italien proved to be inadequate at the rehearsal, Berlioz adroitly managed to arrange a performance with Habeneck's better-equipped troops at the Opéra, where the première took place on 7 November 1830.

In an article announcing the new work, Berlioz described its peculiar structure: "This overture is divided into four separate parts that are none the less linked to one another and form one continuous composition: *Prologue, Tempest, Action, and Dénouement.*" He then outlined the four parts in terms of the business of Shakespeare's play: the airy spirits' prediction of the coming of Miranda's future love; the storm-driven arrival of the King of Naples and his son upon the enchanted island; the disparate emotions of the timid Ferdinand, the virginal Miranda, the savage Caliban, the majestic and magical Prospero; and the eventual departure of Miranda and Ferdinand "to the accompaniment of fanfares and the joyful shouting of the entire crew."¹⁰

The music of the *Introduction*, which returns, refrain-like, at the end of the *Tempête* and the *Action*, is remarkable in its upper-register scoring for piccolo, flute, clarinet, muted violins, chorus without basses, and – another first for an orchestral composition – piano four-hands. (Berlioz may well have imagined this part as played by his friend Ferdinand Hiller, and by the woman whose love he had drawn away from Hiller, Camille Moke, whom he called “Ariel.”) The texture is “glinting” and “diaphanous,” as David Cairns has put it, “hovering seemingly weightless above the earth.”¹¹ In his review of the concert of 7 November 1830, F.-J. Fétis had been equally moved:

A truly remarkable work was performed last Sunday at the Opéra. [...] This is M. Hector Berlioz’s overture to *The Tempest*, the drama by Shakespeare. [...] The disposition of the orchestra and chorus here is marked by great originality; the means the composer employs are largely new; the blendings of instrumental sonorities are unheard of; and the voices are handled with uncommon intelligence and in a singular manner.¹²

Fétis was also impressed by the second section, which Cairns calls “a marine landscape in sound [. . .] handled with exhilarating freshness.” Berlioz borrowed the principal melody of the *Action* from his 1829 prize cantata, *Cléopâtre*. The fiery opening of the *Dénouement* is inventive in its use of repeated five-bar phrases, but the remainder of the peroration may be heard as galloping imitation of Rossini’s already celebrated overture to *Guillaume Tell*.

The *Fantaisie dramatique sur La Tempête*, as it was rebaptized on incorporation into *Lélio ou le Retour à la vie*, has long remained hidden from view as the finale of the little-performed sequel to the *Symphonie fantastique*. (Berlioz’s efforts to have it separately performed in Paris, in early 1834, and in London, in early 1848, came to naught.) The four-in-one structural organization and the close association with the action of Shakespeare’s play, however, in addition to the singular instrumentation, suggest that the composition merits attention not only in its own right, but as an antecedent to such one-movement illustrative works as Wagner’s *Faust Overture* and Tchaikovsky’s “overture-fantasy” *Roméo et Juliette*, to say nothing of Franz Liszt’s one-movement symphonic poems.

Grande Overture du Roi Lear

Berlioz read Shakespeare’s *King Lear* at one of the great emotional cross-roads of his life – during the very week, in mid-April 1831, when he learned that his long-silent fiancée, Camille Moke, was to marry another man. This episode, which forever colored his stay in Italy as winner of the

Prix de Rome (and his thinking about women, and revenge, for years to come), is brilliantly recounted in chapter 34 of the *Mémoires* and need not detain us here. What apparently cured Berlioz of his hysterical anger at the betrayal was intensive labor: on arrival in Nice on 20 April, he proceeded to spend two concentrated weeks drafting what became the *Ouverture du Roi Lear*.

This expansive work is in two parts marked *Andante non troppo lento, ma maestoso*; and *Allegro disperato ed agitato assai*. The first part can be construed as an ABA form whose middle section, a lyrical melody stated successively by the wind and brass – the latter with ravishing effect, is surrounded by sections in which the violas, cellos, and basses speak nobly and indignantly in the manner of the instrumental recitatives of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (which Berlioz had not heard, but had read, in Paris). The second part (with the very quick marking of $\text{♩} = 168$) can be construed as a near-regular sonata form: the principal themes of the exposition, in tonic and dominant, return in the recapitulation and remain, as expected, in the tonic. What is unusual is the return of the “speaking bass” from the opening, now remade into transitional and contrapuntal material, in the recapitulation and coda. The autograph manuscript, with renumbered pages and papers of different qualities, shows that over the years the work – in particular the second subject of the exposition and the coda – was considerably revised.

The term “speaking bass” comes from Tovey, who urged that “we shall only misunderstand Berlioz's *King Lear* Overture so long as we try to connect it with Shakespeare's *Lear* at all.”¹³ With far greater knowledge of the recent events of Berlioz's life, David Cairns takes issue with Tovey's “absolutist” view of the work as a “magnificent piece of orchestral rhetoric in the tragic style,” asserting rather that the Beethovenian recitative is “clearly inspired” by the stubborn old king, just as the orchestral conflict in the coda is “surely an echo” not only of the destruction of Cordelia, in the play, but also, in Berlioz's biography, of the annihilation of the love of Camille Moke.¹⁴

Berlioz himself provides evidence of his thinking in a letter of 2 October 1858 to his admirer in Detmold, the Baron von Donop, where he says that he “intended to indicate [Lear's] madness only towards the middle of the *Allegro*,” and in a letter of 18 April 1863 to his friends the Massarts, where he says more generally that he intended to “give voice to” (*faire parler*) the old Britannic king and his sweet Cordelia. This letter was written on the eve of his concert in Löwenberg, on 19 April 1863, of which Berlioz speaks in the Postface of the *Mémoires*. Not having heard the piece for some nine years, he wrote, “But, it's tremendous! Did *I* really write this?” *Le Roi Lear* is the only overture about which he spoke with such pride.

Intrata di Rob-Roy MacGregor

If this is Berlioz's least-known and most maligned work, it is because the composer destroyed the autograph after the first and only performance during his lifetime, and spoke ill of it in the *Mémoires*. But his submission of the piece for performance by the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire is an indication that, in March 1833, he clearly believed in its potential attractiveness. Had he made some judicious cuts and emendations after that première, this score might now enjoy greater respect.

It is possible to view the structure of the work in terms of an orchestral sonata in D Major, with an introduction, a Scottish principal subject, a Caliban-like transitional theme (to liken it, as Hugh Macdonald does, to a unison tune in the *Ouverture de La Tempête*), and several secondary subjects of which the second was soon borrowed as the second subject of the first movement of *Harold en Italie*. A brief development is followed by the recapitulation, as expected, in D Major, but this is immediately interrupted by a forty-seven-bar passage, marked *Larghetto espressivo assai*, whose extraordinary scoring for harp and English horn is enough to justify the occasional modern revival. The work concludes with a varied recapitulation and coda that include new thematic material and the curiously original harmonic twists that Berlioz frequently employed to alter the conventional peroration's harping on dominant and tonic sonorities.

The *Larghetto* of *Rob-Roy* is the direct source of the "Harold" theme in the introduction of the first movement of *Harold en Italie*. (This is the well-known theme that recurs in each subsequent movement). The passage in the overture is every bit as evocative as the passage in the symphony when the English horn – for which Berlioz later substituted the viola – is in capable hands.¹⁵ The transfer of material to a work nominally inspired by Byron's *Childe Harold* from a work presumably inspired by Scott's novel about the "Scottish Robin Hood," *Rob Roy* (1818), again suggests the precariousness of linking the literary source to the musical texture.

Le Carnaval romain, ouverture caractéristique

Berlioz extracted *Le Carnaval romain* from *Benvenuto Cellini*, using as his principal material themes different from those employed in the formal overture to the opera – but a technique derived directly from that tumultuous curtain-raiser. The technique is the application of a swift opening summons-to-attention to the more traditional slow-fast construction. Here, at the outset, we hear a brilliant $\frac{6}{8}$ snatch of the main melodic material of the *Allegro vivace* – lifted from the finale of the

Deuxième Tableau of the opera, the carnival scene (No. 12), at the place where Teresa, with the women of the chorus, sings “Ah! Sonnez, trompettes! Sonnez, musettes! Sonnez, gais tambourins!”¹⁶ If we are precise about the reference it is because of the astonishing discovery, made only recently, that the source of *this* melody, in the opera, is a phrase (“laudamus te, benedicimus te”) from the *Gloria* of the early *Messe solennelle*.¹⁷ One of Berlioz’s most thrilling tunes, from the most thrilling scene of his first mature opera, thus comes from a student work (and a sacred work at that) of the mid-eighteen-twenties!

The main business of the ensuing *Andante sostenuto* is the three-fold presentation of another pivotal theme from the opera, the love music of the Cellini–Teresa duet in the Premier Tableau – where the central phrase, too, represents a surprising borrowing from an earlier work, in this case the 1829 prize cantata *Cléopâtre*.¹⁸ In *Le Carnaval romain* the English horn takes center stage, as in *Rob-Roy*, singing the duet music in the key of C Major. The violas intone a second presentation in E, and the orchestra as a whole a third, in canonic imitation, in A.

A whirling passage for the winds, *poco animato*, leads back to the $\frac{6}{8}$ carnival music that permeates the concluding *Allegro vivace*. This is writing so brilliantly fitted to the instruments that it is difficult to accept the fact that in its original guise it is vocal. Sliding imperceptibly from one key to the next, in sentences and rhythms of regular and irregular duration, and with canonic and contrapuntal passages that eventually incorporate the tune of the *Andante*, the *Allegro* accumulates a simply irresistible momentum and builds to what is perhaps Berlioz’s most dazzling conclusion, with a final progression of vi to I providing one last, blinding shock.

The first performance of *Le Carnaval romain* was given on 3 February 1844, in a program that otherwise featured arrangements of earlier works. The new composition, even though it had been inadequately rehearsed, was immediately encored and subsequently acclaimed by the reviewers. In the *Revue et Gazette musicale* of 11 February, Maurice Bourges offered an analysis (clearly based on an examination of the score) and an encomium:

Opulent in its ideas and effects, intense in its expression, extraordinarily original in its construction – this work has everything. It will henceforth be numbered among the most beautiful pages that we have from M. Berlioz’s pen.

Ouverture du Corsaire

This is the work which began life as *La Tour de Nice* and which was performed with that title in January 1845. In the catalogue of his works that

Berlioz appended to the libretto of *La Damnation de Faust*, the so-called “Labbite catalogue,” the title of this still unpublished composition is given as *Ouverture du Corsaire rouge*. When Simon Richault brought out the score and parts, in 1852, and even before, when Berlioz submitted a list of works to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in support of his candidacy for a chair at the Institute, on 6 March 1851, the work bore its definitive title. Assuming the validity of the chronology outlined earlier, *Le Corsaire* thus originally followed upon the heels of *Le Carnaval romain*.

In offering a quick opening (in the principal key) followed by a traditional slow–fast movement – an Adagio sostenuto, in A-flat Major, and an Allegro assai, in C Major – the overture repeats the pattern established by its immediate predecessor (although the tempo markings of the two halves of *Le Corsaire*, ♩ = 84 vs. ♩ = 152, are extreme). In this case the Adagio is taken up with one of those uniquely Berliozian melodies generated by a compound of the bizarre and the divine: the line – a ten-bar unit followed by a six-bar unit that is repeated – seems to clamor for words, as Hugh Macdonald has written, and no one would be surprised if its source were eventually discovered in some earlier vocal work that has not as yet come to light.

One could describe the Allegro as a monothematic sonata form, with a principal melody of sixteen bars whose consequent is the inversion of its antecedent. But this would be to overlook the intrusion into the proceedings of a speeded-up version of the theme from the Adagio, the canons and syncopations that enliven the texture, and the harmonic sleights-of-hand that signal Berlioz’s premeditated desire to avoid the commonplace at all costs. One of these miracles occurs in the peroration, when the C-Major version of the opening eight bars (at bars 402–409) glides electrically into a second return, this time in D (at bar 410). Another occurs at the final cadence, where five bars before the double bar the sudden pause on vi^6 clearly implies the conventional formula of V–I, but astonishingly introduces the rebellious formula of $\flat VI-\flat III$ – and only then V–I. The announcement for Berlioz’s concert of 29 June 1848 could thus fittingly apply to *Le Corsaire*, which alone would be “worth the price of admission, were it only to hear its final cadence of original harmony.”¹⁹

Rebellious, and, like the trombones in the *Lamento* from *Les Troyens à Carthage*, majestic and terrifying. These words apply to many portions of Berlioz’s concert overtures, but their most enduring impression – the impression that ensures their continued popularity – is one of vibrant energy and high spirits.