Beethoven and Berlioz

Minnesota Orchestra

Jun Märkl, conductor
Augustin Hadelich, violin

Friday, June 8, 2018, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, June 9, 2018, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

With these concerts we gratefully recognize Cynthia and Jay Ihlenfeld for their generous contribution to the Minnesota Orchestra’s Investing in Inspiration campaign.

Ludwig van Beethoven
Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 61
Allegro ma non troppo
Larghetto
Rondo: Allegro

[There is no pause before the final movement.]

Augustin Hadelich, violin

INTERMISSION

ca. 20’

Hector Berlioz
Symphonie fantastique, Opus 14
Reveries – Passions (Largo – Allegro agitato e appassionato assai)
A Ball (Valse: Allegro non troppo)
In the Country (Adagio)
March to the Scaffold (Allegretto non troppo)
Dream of the Witches’ Sabbath (Larghetto – Allegro)

OH+ Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley
Friday, June 8, 7:15 pm, Target Atrium
Saturday, June 9, 7:15 pm, Target Atrium

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
Jun Märkl, conductor

Jun Märkl has long been known as a highly-respected interpreter of the core Germanic repertoire from both the symphonic and operatic traditions, and more recently for his refined and idiomatic explorations of the French impressionists. This week’s performances with the Minnesota Orchestra mark his long-awaited return to Orchestra Hall following his debut here in 2002. His enduring relationships at the state operas of Vienna, Berlin, Munich and Semperoper Dresden have in recent years been complemented by his role as music director of both the Orchestre National de Lyon and MDR Symphony Orchestra Leipzig. In addition, from 2014 to 2017 he was chief conductor of the Basque National Orchestra. Märkl, who recently led a new production of Wagner’s Lohengrin in Tokyo, has conducted many of the world’s leading orchestras, including the Cleveland Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo, Czech Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, Oslo Philharmonic and Tonhalle Orchester Zürich. He launched his career by winning the conducting competition of the Deutscher Musikrat in 1986, and the following year he won a scholarship from the Boston Symphony Orchestra to study at Tanglewood with Leonard Bernstein and Seiji Ozawa. More: musicvinearts.com, junmarkl.com.

Augustin Hadelich, violin

Augustin Hadelich made his Minnesota Orchestra debut in 2015 in performances of Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto under conductor Christopher Warren-Green. He has firmly established himself as one of today’s great violinists, performing with every major orchestra in the U.S., plus an ever-growing number of major orchestras in the U.K., Europe and Asia. A highlight of his 2017-18 season was his return to the Boston Symphony for a performance of Ligeti’s Violin Concerto, in which he premiered a new cadenza for the concerto composed by Thomas Adés, who also conducted. This season he has also performed with major American ensembles such as the San Francisco, Atlanta, Detroit, Fort Worth, Houston, Pittsburgh and Saint Louis symphony orchestras, along with other orchestras around the globe. A prolific recording artist, he won the 2016 Grammy Award for Best Classical Instrumental Solo for his recording of Dutilleux’s Violin Concerto, L’arbre des songes, with the Seattle Symphony under Ludovic Morlot. His newest disc, the complete Paganini Caprices for Warner Classics, was released in January. He was recently named Musical America’s 2018 Instrumentalist of the Year. More: schmidtart.com, augustin-hadelich.com.

one-minute notes

Beethoven: Violin Concerto

Here is one of the most exalted concertos for any instrument, deeply lyrical, poetic and imaginative. The opening Allegro is built on deceptively simple ideas—a repeating five-beat pulse and scale patterns—while the Larghetto is sublime and hymn-like. The finale is rousing and rollicking, with a main theme that presages the “Ode to Joy.”

Berlioz: Symphonie fantastique

In what musicologist Michael Steinberg called “the most remarkable First Symphony ever written,” Berlioz breaks the rules and oversteps the boundaries, creating an exhilarating, one-of-a-kind journey: the story of an artist and his obsession with an ideal woman.
in the spring of 1806 Beethoven finally found time for new projects. For the previous three years, his energies had been consumed by two huge works: the Eroica Symphony and the opera Fidelio. With the latter completed, the floodgates opened. Working at white heat over the rest of 1806, Beethoven composed the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Fourth Symphony, the Razumovsky Quartets and the Thirty-Two Variations in C minor for solo piano. He also accepted a commission from violinist Franz Clement for a concerto and, as was his habit with commissions, put off the work for as long as possible. One contemporary, unnamed, wrote that at the premiere, on December 23, 1806, Clement had to sight-read portions of the work from Beethoven's manuscript.

regal and lyrical, not showy
The Violin Concerto is one of Beethoven's most regal works, full of easy majesty and spacious in conception (the first movement, lasting 24 minutes, is about as long as the final movement of the Ninth Symphony). Several features give this music its majestic character. It unfolds with a relaxed nobility, due in part to its unusually lyrical nature. We do not normally think of Beethoven as a melodist, but in this concerto he makes full use of the violin's lyric capabilities. Another reason lies in the concerto's generally broad tempos: the first movement is marked Allegro, but Beethoven specifies ma non troppo, and even the finale is relaxed rather than brilliant. In fact, at no point in this concerto does Beethoven set out to dazzle his listeners: there are no passages here designed to leave an audience gasping, nor any that allow the soloist consciously to show off. This is an extremely difficult concerto, but a non-violinist might never know that, for the challenges of this noblest of violin concertos are at the service of the music itself.

the music: a surprising opening
allegro ma non troppo. The concerto has a remarkable beginning: Beethoven breaks the silence with five quiet timpani strokes. By itself, this is an extraordinary opening, but these five pulses also perform a variety of roles through the first movement—sometimes they function as accompaniment, sometimes as harsh contrast with the soloist, sometimes as a way of modulating to new keys. The movement is built on two ideas: the dignified chordal melody announced by the woodwinds immediately after the opening timpani strokes and a rising-and-falling second idea, also stated initially by the woodwinds. Beethoven delays the appearance of the soloist, and this long movement is based exclusively on the two main themes.

larghetto; rondo: allegro. The Larghetto, in G major, is a theme-and-variation movement. Muted strings present the theme, and the soloist embellishes that simple melody, which grows ornate as the movement proceeds. A brief cadenza leads directly into the finale, a rondo based on the sturdy rhythmic idea announced immediately by the violinist. But this is an unusual rondo: its various episodes begin to develop and take on lives of their own. One of these episodes, in G minor and marked dolce, is exceptionally haunting. After it is developed briefly, it vanishes, never to return. The movement drives to a huge climax, with the violin soaring high above the orchestra, and the music subsides and comes to its close when—almost as an afterthought, it seems—Beethoven turns the rondo theme into the graceful concluding gesture.

Instrumentation: solo violin with orchestra comprising flute, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings

Program note by Eric Bromberger.

Hector Berlioz
Born: December 11, 1803, La Côte-Saint André, Isère, France
Died: March 8, 1869, Paris, France

Symphonie fantastique, Opus 14
Premiered: December 5, 1830

No disrespect to Mahler or Shostakovich, but Symphonie fantastique is the most remarkable First Symphony ever written. Berlioz composed it in 1830, when much that was new and forward-looking was in the air, particularly in the social, political and scientific spheres. The Parisians had torn up their cobblestones and gotten rid of a king who believed in Divine Right; the British parliament would soon enact the first in a series of reform bills designed to enfranchise the middle class; America experienced the Nat Turner revolts and the first effective moves towards abolition.
At the same time, however deeply he was in debt to Beethoven, Berlioz strove to write “new music.” He succeeded. The fantastique sounds and behaves like nothing ever heard before. It takes off on paths Beethoven could never have imagined; that it was written just three years after the death of Beethoven is a fact to stagger the historical imagination.

the composer in love

In 1827, at the Paris Odéon, Berlioz saw a performance of Hamlet by a company from London. It was a distinguished group, whose leading men were Edmund Kean and Charles Kemble, two of the most renowned actors on the English stage. Performing the younger female roles was Harriet Smithson, a 27-year-old actress with whom Berlioz fell instantly and wildly in love. He wrote to her repeatedly; he heard gossip about an affair between her and her manager. This hurt him, but it also provided enough distance to enable him to plan and to begin work on the symphony—whose subject was an artist “with a vivid imagination” who falls in love with his “ideal” woman, experiences hope and doubt, then an opium-induced dream in which he sees himself being executed for killing his beloved; after his death she appears to be “only a prostitute” taking part in an orgy at “a foul assembly of sorcerers and devils.”

The premiere took place on December 5, 1830. Two years later Berlioz presented a sharpened and improved version of his symphony, now with a sequel whose script was full of unmistakable allusions to his passion for Miss Smithson. She was in Paris again, and she was persuaded to attend Berlioz’ concert on December 9, 1832. They finally met, and on October 3, 1833, they were married. The whole business was a disaster. By the time they separated in 1844, Smithson was no longer performing, as an accident had put an end to her career. She died in 1854, an alcoholic and paralyzed; Berlioz supported her financially until her death.

a fantastic symphony

Berlioz wrote several programs for his autobiographical and in every way fantastic symphony. Excerpts from the note he published with the score in 1845 are indicated with quotation marks.

reveries – passions. A young musician, “the artist,” sees and falls hopelessly in love with a woman who embodies the charms of “the ideal being of whom he has dreamed.” In his mind she is linked to a musical thought, and both “the melodic image and its human model pursue him incessantly like a double idée fixe.... The passage from this state of melancholic reverie, interrupted by a few fits of unmotivated joy, to one of delirious passion, with its movements of fury and jealousy, its return of tenderness, its tears, its religious consolation—all this is the subject of the first movement.”

It would be surprising if music had not exploded as well. When the 1830s were over, Chopin had written his Études and Preludes, Schumann had done most of his important work for solo piano, and Liszt’s transcriptions and original compositions practically constituted a reinvention of the piano. Paganini vastly expanded the possibilities of the violin, and important technical advances were achieved in the design of wind instruments.

the “new music” of Berlioz

From today’s vantage point we can see fairly easily that the beginnings of a new music were to be found in two places where not every observer in 1830 would have thought to look: in the works of Beethoven and Bach. And the better we know the Symphonie fantastique, the more clearly we can sense in it the presence of Beethoven and of that classical tradition Beethoven brought to so remarkable a pass.
The subtly shaped *idée fixe* is the melody that violins and flute play to an accompaniment of nervous interjections by the strings when the *Allegro* begins.

**a ball.** Whether the artist is engaged in festivities or contemplating nature, the “beloved image appears before him and troubles his soul.” The first three dozen measures paint for us the ballroom with its glitter and flicker, its swirling couples, the yards and yards of whispering silk. All this becomes gradually visible, like a new scene in the theater. This softly scintillating waltz is exquisitely scored.

**in the country.** The artist is calmed by the sound of shepherds piping, by “the quiet rustling of the trees gently disturbed by the wind,” but wondering if his beloved might be deceiving him, he feels a “mixture of hope and fear...ideas of happiness disturbed by black presentiments.” This scene speaks very much from a new sensibility, yet it is also here that we most feel the presence of Beethoven, particularly the Beethoven of the Fifth and *Pastoral* Symphonies. Berlioz’ piping shepherds are mutations of Beethoven’s nightingale, quail and cuckoo, but there is nothing in music before this, or since, like the pathos of the recapitulated conversation with one voice missing. As a picture of despairing loneliness it is without equal.

**march to the scaffold.** “Having become certain that his love goes unrecognized, the artist poisons himself with opium.” But rather than dying, he “dreams that he has killed the woman he loves, that he is condemned, led to the scaffold, and that he is witnessing his own execution.” In this stunning march, an instant knockout, Berlioz’ orchestral imagination—the hand-stopped horn sounds, the use of the bassoon quartet, the timpani writing—is astonishing in every way.

**dream of the witches’ sabbath.** The artist sees himself “in the midst of a frightful assembly of ghosts, sorcerers, monsters of every kind, all come together for his funeral.” The melody representing his beloved is now “no more than the tune of an ignoble dance, trivial and grotesque...she takes part in the devilish orgy...funeral knell, burlesque parody of the *Dies irae*...”

As we enter the final scene, with its trim thematic transformations, its bizarre sonorities—deep bells, squawking E-flat clarinet, the beating of violin and viola strings with the wooden stick of the bow, glissandos for wind instruments, violent alternations of *ff* with *pp*—its grotesque imagery, its wild and coruscating brilliance, we have left the Old World for good.