

## Program Notes to *Symphonie Fantastique* Hector Berlioz

### NOTE

*The composer's intention has been to develop, insofar as they contain musical possibilities, various situations in the life of an artist. The outline of the instrumental drama, which lacks the help of words, needs to be explained in advance. The following program should thus be considered as the spoken text of an opera, serving to introduce the musical movements, whose character and expression it motivates.*

### PROGRAM

A young musician of extraordinary sensibility and overflowing imagination, in a paroxysm of despair caused by unhappy love, has poisoned himself with opium. The drug is too feeble to kill him but plunges him into a heavy sleep accompanied by the weirdest visions. His sensations, emotions, and memories, as they pass through his diseased mind, are transformed into musical images and ideas. The beloved one herself becomes to him a melody, which haunts him everywhere.

#### Part I: Reveries. Passions

First he remembers that weariness of the soul, that indefinable longing, that sombre melancholia and those objectless joys which he experienced before meeting his beloved. Then the volcanic love with which she at once inspired him, his delirious suffering, his return to tenderness, his religious consolation.

#### Part Two: A Ball

At a ball, in the midst of a noisy, brilliant fête, he finds his beloved again.

#### Part Three: In the Country

On a summer evening in the country, he hears two herders calling each other with their shepherd melodies. The pastoral duet in such surroundings, the gentle rustle of the trees softly swayed by the wind, some reason for hope which had come to his knowledge recently – all unite fill his heart with a rare tranquility and lend brighter colours to his fancies. But his beloved appears anew, spasms contract his heart, and he is filled with dark premonition. What if she proved faithless? Only one of the shepherds resumes his rustic tune. The sun sets. Far away there is rumbling thunder – solitude – silence.

#### Part Four: March to the Scaffold

He dreams he has killed his loved one, that he is condemned to death and led to his execution. A march, now gloomy and ferocious, now solemn and brilliant accompanies the procession. Noisy outbursts are followed without pause by the heavy sound of measured footsteps. Finally, like the last thought of love, the *idée fixe* appears for a moment, to be cut off by the fall of the axe.

#### Part Five: Dream of a Witches Sabbath

He sees himself at a Witches Sabbath surrounded by a fearful crowd of spectres, sorcerers, and monsters of every kind, united for his burial. Unearthly sounds, groans, shrieks of laughter, distant cries, to which other seem to respond! The melody of his beloved is heard, but it has lost its character of nobility and reserve. Instead, it is now an ignoble dance tune. Trivial and grotesque. It is she who comes to the Sabbath! A shout of joy greets her arrival. She joins the diabolical orgy. The funeral knell, burlesque of the *Dies Irae*. Dance of the Witches. The dance and the *Dies Irae* combined.