



BERLIOZ

Harold en Italie, Op. 16

Hector Berlioz (11 December 1803 – 8 March 1869) was a French Romantic composer, best known for his compositions *Symphonie Fantastique* and *Requiem*. His influence was critical for the further development of Romanticism, especially in composers like Richard Wagner, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Franz Liszt, Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler and many others. Berlioz appears to have been innately Romantic, this characteristic manifesting itself in his love affairs, adoration of great romantic literature, as well as Shakespeare and Beethoven, and his weeping at passages by Virgil. Although neglected in France for much of the 19th century, the music of Berlioz has often been cited as extremely influential in the development of the symphonic form, instrumentation, and the depiction in music of programmatic and literary ideas, features central to musical Romanticism. He was considered extremely progressive for his day, and he, Wagner, and Liszt have been called the "Great Trinity of Progress" of 19th-century Romanticism.

Harold en Italie, Symphonie en quatre parties avec un alto principal (English: Harold in Italy, Symphony in Four Parts with Viola Obligato), Op. 16, is Hector Berlioz's second symphony (after *Symphonie Fantastique*), written in 1834. Berlioz was originally prompted by virtuoso violinist Niccolò Paganini to write a viola solo – Paganini had just acquired a Stradivarius for himself. Berlioz began "by writing a solo for viola, but one which involved the orchestra in such a way as not to reduce the effectiveness of the orchestral contribution." But when Paganini saw the sketch of the allegro movement, with all the rests in the viola part, he told Berlioz it would not do, and that he expected to be playing continuously. They then parted, with Paganini disappointed.

Inspired by Lord Byron's poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the first movement ("Harold aux montagnes") refers to the scenes that Harold, a melancholic character, encounters in mountains. In the second movement ("Marche des pèlerins"), Harold accompanies a group of pilgrims. The third movement ("Sérénade") involves a love scene; someone plays a serenade for his mistress. And in the fourth movement, ("Orgie de brigands"), spiritually tired and depressed, Harold seeks comfort among the wild and dangerous company of brigands, perhaps in a tavern. Jacques Barzun reminds us that "the brigand of Berlioz's time is the avenger of social injustice, the rebel against the City, who resorts to nature for healing the wounds of social man" – not quite the common criminal commonly thought of today. Throughout the symphony, the viola represents Harold's character. The manner in which the viola theme hesitantly repeats its opening phrase—gaining confidence, like an idea forming, before the long melody spills out in its entirety—was satirized in a musical paper after the premiere. It began "Ha! ha! ha! – haro! haro! Harold!"—a cheeky touch that Berlioz recalled years later in his *Memoirs*.