

HKDSE Listening – Paper 1A

Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, Op. 14 H. 49 (1830)

Hector Berlioz (1803–1869)

Berlioz went to Paris to study medicine but was increasingly attracted to music. He abandoned medicine in 1826 and enrolled in the Paris Conservatory in 1826. His teachers considered him talented but willful and undisciplined. He won the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1830, and he was required to spend two years in Italy.

Berlioz is adept in orchestration, and he published a textbook on orchestration that takes into account the new possibilities of the orchestra's changing instruments.

Symphonies

- *Symphonie fantastique* (1830): a landmark work based on a written program contrived by the composer, describing a story of obsession and unrequited love
- *Lélio, or the Return to Life* (1831): a sequel to the *Symphonie fantastique*, a mixture of orchestral music, chorus, song, and melodrama
- *Harold en Italie* (1834): based on Byron's epic poem Childe Harold's Pilgrimage
- *Roméo et Juliette* (1839): based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

Operas

- *Benvenuto Cellini* (1838): based on the life of the celebrated Renaissance sculptor
- *Les Troyens* (1859): based on the story of the Trojan War

Sacred Music

- *Requiem* (1837): makes use of huge performance force (antiphonal orchestras and choruses)
- *L'Enfance du Christ* (The Infancy of Christ, 1854)

Writing

- *Grand traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes* (Treatise on Instrumentation and Modern Orchestration) (1843)

Hallmarks of Berlioz's musical style

1. **Orchestration as drama:** Berlioz is a founding figure of modern orchestration, expanding the orchestra, exploiting novel timbres, and writing a seminal *Treatise on Instrumentation* (1844). He favored distinctive colors in woodwind, brass, and percussion, including then-unusual instruments like English horn, cornet, and ophicleide.
2. **Expressive harmony:** He often treated harmony as an expressive, coloristic force rather than following strict functional progressions, placing strong triads at climactic melodic points in striking ways.
3. **Long, irregular melody:** Commentators describe his writing as extended melody shaped like “flexible musical prose,” avoiding the square four-bar phrase and using irregular rhythmic groupings and accents.
4. **Rhythm and surprise:** He liked accenting weak beats, mixing duple and triple groupings, and using unexpected rhythmic ideas, contributing to a sense of volatility and drama.
5. **Programme symphony:** *Symphonie fantastique* (1830) is a five-movement “episode in the life of an artist,” complete with an autobiographical, opium-dream program and a recurring *idée fixe* representing the beloved.
6. **Hybrid genres:** He called some works “dramatic symphony” (*Roméo et Juliette*) or “dramatic legend” (*La damnation de Faust*), blending symphony, opera, and oratorio to serve literary subjects.
7. **Subjectivity and personal expression:** His music is often tied to his own emotional life—Harriet Smithson famously inspired *Symphonie fantastique*—illustrating Romantic ideals of self-confession and subjectivity.
8. **Formal freedom:** While indebted to Beethoven and Classical rhetoric, he freely adapts forms (e.g., five-movement symphonies, episodic designs) to fit programmatic needs rather than strict symphonic conventions.

“... characteristics of my music are passionate expression, intense ardour,
rhythmical animation, and unexpected turns.”

Hector Berlioz, *Memoirs* (1865)

Basic Information about the Symphony

Original Title:	<i>Épisode de la vie d'un artiste, Symphonie fantastique en cinq parties</i> (Episode of the life of an artist, fantastic symphony in five parts)
Full Title:	<i>Symphonie fantastique: Épisode de la vie d'un artiste ... en cinq parties</i> (Fantastic Symphony: Episode in the Life of an Artist ... in Five Sections)
Later Title:	<i>Symphonie fantastique: Première partie de l'Épisode de la vie d'un artiste, oeuvre lyrique</i> (Fantastic symphony: the first part of the episode of an artist's life)
Completion:	April 1830
Premiere:	5 December 1830 (Conservatoire de Musique de Paris)
Genre:	Symphony (Programme symphony)
Movements:	Five
Orchestra:	130 players (originally intended 220 players)

Originality and Novelty

1. cyclic technique and thematic transformation: **Idée fixe**
2. quotation: **Dies irae**
3. symphony accompanied by a programme (instrumental music that tells a story)
4. expansion/enlargement of the orchestra
5. new instruments: ophicleides, tubular bells
6. new playing techniques: con sordino, col legno, off-stage playing

(Edward Cone on the symphony's "great originality")

December 5, 1830, was the date, and it is an important one. It marked the end of Berlioz's apprenticeship and the beginning of his career as a professional composer, and it vividly brought to the attention of the public the fact that it was entering a new musical era. For despite the many traditional and even eclectic elements of the symphony, despite its obeisance to classical formal procedures, despite the composer's insistence on his harmonic orthodoxy, this music sounded like no music ever before heard. The proof of its **great originality** is that today, almost a century and a half later, it still sounds like no other music.

Compositional Background of the Symphony

Berlioz saw the Irish actress **Harriet Smithson**, who played Ophelia in a performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in 1827, and soon fell in love with her. Despite sending her letters, she refused to meet him. He devoted his feelings of unrequited love in creating *Symphonie Fantastique*, to express his romantic sufferings.

Harriet did not attend the first performance of *Symphonie Fantastique* until Berlioz arranged another performance for her several years later. He finally met Harriet, and the music touched the heart of Harriet. They were married on October 3, 1833.

The relationship between the couple deteriorated over the course of several years. They were formally separated in 1844, and Harriet died in 1854.

The *Symphonie fantastique* musically depicts an artist's thoughts, dreams, and nightmares. Originally titled *Episode in the Life of the Artist: Symphonie fantastique*, this piece is among the most renowned examples of programme music in the classical repertoire. For the performances, the French composer Berlioz created and distributed a detailed programme for the concert audience. The artist dreams about his beloved and her eventual rejection of him, a dream (the “fantasy” in the title) that moves from blissful reverie (in the opening movement) to nightmare (in the fourth and fifth movements).

Programme Symphony

What is programme music?

- Instrumental music that is based on a ‘programme’ e.g. story, poems, literature, scenic description, drama, etc.
- Usually have a descriptive title for the entire work and/or each movement
- Particularly popular during the Romantic period, with composers like Franz Liszt, Hector Berlioz and Richard Strauss creating works that exemplified this style

The titles for the movements were likely to be added after the music was written.

1. *Rêveries – Passions (Daydreams – Passions)*

- A young musician falls in love with a woman with the perfect charm conjured in his dreams.

He is overwhelmed by love and despair, who attempts to escape reality through opium.

- The artist fixates on his beloved and imagines her in the form of a melody, the *idée fixe* or “obsessive idea” heard in every movement in one guise or another.

2. *Un Bal (A ball)*

- The artist imagines himself seeing his beloved at a ball, during a waltz.
- He later catches glimpses of the beloved woman, before she disappears again.

3. *Scène aux champs (Scene in the country)*

- A slow movement in which the artist dreams of himself in the countryside.
- He finds himself in a peaceful contemplation of the beauties of nature. However, whenever he goes, his beloved image comes to him, bringing troubles to his soul.
- The scene begins peacefully, but he is soon seized by panic, thinking that his beloved has been unfaithful to him.
- The mixture of hope and fear, thoughts of happiness disturbed by dark forebodings.

4. *Marche au supplice (March to the scaffold)*

- His love is not reciprocated. Heartbroken, he poisons himself with opium.
- He dreams of killing the woman he loved, and he is condemned to death.
- Having murdered his beloved for her unfaithfulness, the artist is led to the scaffold, a large elevated platform supporting a guillotine.
- There, he dreams of her one last time, but her musical image—the *idée fixe*—is interrupted by the fall of the guillotine’s blade. The artist dies, at least in his dream.

5. *Songe d’une nuit du sabbat (Dream of a night of the sabbath)*

- He sees himself at witches’ sabbath, crowd of spirits, sorcerers and monsters assembled for his funeral.
- The beloved, in the form of her melody, the *idée fixe*, now appears in grotesque form, for in the artist’s nightmare, she has become a witch. In the end, evil triumphs over good.

Comparison with Classical symphonies

	Classical symphonies		Symphonie fantastique
1st movement	moderately fast sonata form	-----	moderately fast sonata form
2nd movement	slow and lyrical theme and variations	-----	moderately fast waltz
3rd movement	moderately fast minuet and trio	-----	slow (Adagio)
4th movement	fast and light-hearted rondo form	-----	Fast, agitated
5th movement			A frenetic dance Sectional form

Note: In Berlioz's original conception, the second and third movements were reversed in order.

Instrumentation

Berlioz is widely acknowledged as a master of **orchestration**, the art of arranging music for the instruments of the orchestra. The orchestras at his time were becoming larger and larger, and Berlioz incorporated a wider variety of instruments into his compositions. In particular, the **brass** section is greatly expanded, and the **percussion** instruments (timpani, bass drum, and snare drum) are given more prominence.

For example, the orchestra for this symphony requires approximately 90 players in total:

1. **Woodwinds:** 2 flutes (one doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes (one doubling on English horn), 2 clarinets (in Bb, A, C, Eb), 4 bassoons
2. **Brass:** 4 horns (in Eb, E, F, Bb, C), 2 cornets (in Bb, A, G), 2 trumpets (in C, Bb, Eb), 3 trombones, 2 ophicleides (a forerunner of the tuba)
3. **Percussion:** timpani, bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, (tubular) bells, 2 harps
4. **Strings:** violin I (15), violin II (15), viola (10), cello (11), double basses (9)

Berlioz makes use of a variety of novel instrumental colors for expressive effects, including **muted strings** to suggest dreaming, **two harps** for the elegant waltz in the ball scene, **English horn** and an **offstage oboe** imitating shepherds' pipes, **snare drum** and **cymbals** for the march to the scaffold, **church bells**, and violins played with the wood of the bow (**col legno**) in the witches' dance, creating a brittle sound evocative of skeletons rattling.

Idée fixe (fixed idea)

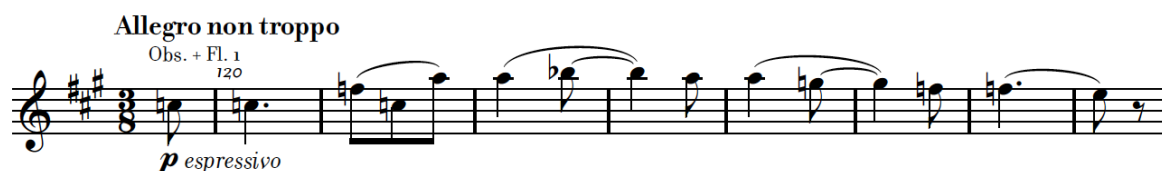
Berlioz makes use of a melody to represent the obsessive image of the protagonist's beloved woman, called the *idée fixe* (fixed idea, a term he borrowed from psychology). This theme recurs across the five movements to personify the desired woman (**Harriet Smithson**) throughout the symphony. It also undergoes **thematic transformations** according to the scenes and settings in different movements, transforming it to suit the mood and situation at each point in the story.

The *idée fixe* is first presented in the first theme at the beginning of the exposition of the first movement (bar 72) – a lyrical theme suffused with a graceful and noble quality.

Movement 1 – The original version of the *idée fixe*, depicting the ideal woman who is “passionate”, “noble and shy” (see page 13 for the complete theme)



Movement 2 – The protagonist catches a glimpse of his beloved woman in a ball; the *idée fixe* is transformed into a triple-meter waltz



Movement 3 – The protagonist walks in the countryside and thinks of his beloved woman; the *idée fixe* is set in 6/8 meter, which evokes a pastoral scene



Movement 4 – The protagonist thinks of his beloved woman one last time the moment before the fall of the guillotine’s blade; the *idée fixe* returns to its original duple meter, key and instrument (oboe), but is here cut short by a *sforzando* chord

The guillotine's blade falls here in the
"March to the Scaffold," interrupting the *idée fixe*

Fl.

Crescendo
(gradually louder)

poco sf

Slightly
emphasized

Decrescendo
(gradually softer)

Movement 5 – The beloved woman turns out to be a witch, appearing grotesque and wicked; the *idée fixe* is performed by the E-flat clarinet (which has a more shrilling timbre) and set in 6/8 meter (similar to a gigue, which is an English rustic peasant dance)

Allegro

Cl. 1

poco f

cresc.

Note: the *idée fixe* was taken from a cantata, *Herminie*, written in 1828 in an unsuccessful effort to obtain the Prix de Rome.

First Programme of the Symphony (1830)

NOTE

The composer has aimed to develop, to the extent they can be rendered in music, various situations in the life of an artist. The plan of the instrumental drama, since it lacks the assistance of words, needs to be outlined in advance. Thus the following program should be considered in the same way as the spoken words of an opera, serving to introduce the pieces of music, whose character and expression it motivates.

* Distribution of this program to the audience, in the concerts that include this symphony, is essential for complete understanding of the dramatic plan of the work.

Rêveries – Passions

The author imagines that a young musician, afflicted with (受苦於) that moral disease (道德疾病) that a well-known writer calls the *vague des Passions* [wave of passions], sees for the first time a woman who embodies all the charms of the ideal being (理想存在) he has imagined in his dreams, and he falls desperately (絕望的) in love with her. Through an odd *whim* (突發奇想), whenever the beloved image appears before the mind's eye of the artist it is *linked with a musical thought* (樂思), whose character, *passionate* (熱情) but at the same time *noble* (高貴) and *shy* (害羞), he finds similar to the one he attributes to his beloved.

This melodic image and the model it reflects pursue him incessantly like a double *idée fixe* (固定樂思). That is the reason for the constant appearance, in every moment of the symphony, of the melody that begins the first Allegro. The passage from this state of *melancholy reverie* (憂鬱的遐想), interrupted by a few fits of *groundless joy* (無故的喜悅), to one of *frenzied passion* (瘋狂的激情) with its movements of *fury* (怒火) of *jealousy* (妒忌), its return of *tenderness* (柔情) its *tears*, its *religious consolations* (宗教的慰藉) — this is the subject of the first movement.

ABall

The artist finds himself in the most varied situations — in the midst of *the tumult* (騷亂) *of a party*, in the peaceful *contemplation* (沉思) of the beauties of nature; but everywhere, in town, in the country, the beloved image appears before him and *disturbs* (打擾) his peace of mind.

Scene in the Country

Finding himself one evening in the country, he hears in the distance two shepherds piping a *ranz des vaches* in dialogue. This **pastoral** (田園) duet, the scenery, the quiet **rustling** (沙沙作響) of the trees gently brushed by the wind, the hopes he has recently found some reason to entertain — all concur in affording his heart an **unaccustomed** (不習慣) calm, and in giving a more cheerful color to his ideas. He reflects upon his **isolation** (隔離); he hopes that his **loneliness** (孤獨) will soon be over. — But what if she were **deceiving** (欺騙) him! — This mingling (混合) of hope and fear, these ideas of happiness disturbed by black **presentiments** (預感), form the subject of the Adagio. At the end one of the shepherds again takes up the *ranz des vaches*; the other no longer replies. — Distant sound of thunder — loneliness — silence.

March to the Scaffold

Convinced that his love is **unappreciated** (未被重視), the artist poisons himself with **opium** (鴉片). The dose of the **narcotic** (麻醉藥), too weak to kill him, plunges him into a sleep accompanied by the most horrible visions. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he is **condemned** (定罪) and led to the **scaffold** (斷頭台), and that he is witnessing *his own execution*. The **procession** (遊行隊伍) moves forward to the sounds of a march that is now **sombre** (陰沉) and fierce, now brilliant and **solemn** (莊嚴), in which the muffled noise of heavy steps gives way without transition to the noisiest **clamor** (叫囂). At the end of the march the first four measures of the *idée fixe* reappear, like a last thought of love interrupted by the fatal blow.

Dream of a Witches' Sabbath

He sees himself at the sabbath, in the midst of a frightful troop of **ghosts** (鬼魂), **sorcerers** (巫師), monsters of every kind, come together for his **funeral** (葬禮). Strange noises, **groans** (呻吟), bursts of **laughter** (陣陣笑聲), distant cries which other cries seem to answer. The beloved melody appears again, but it has lost its character of **nobility** (高貴) and **shyness** (害羞); it is no more than a dance tune, **mean** (卑鄙), **trivial** (瑣碎), and **grotesque** (怪誕): it is she, coming to join the sabbath. — A roar of joy at her arrival. — She takes part in the **devilish orgy** (惡魔般的狂歡). — **Funeral knell** (喪鐘), **burlesque** (滑稽) **parody** (模仿) of the **Dies irae, sabbath round-dance**. The sabbath round and the Dies irae combined.

Second Programme of the Symphony (1855)

Note: Berlioz revised the programme for the score to be published in 1855. This symphony is now intended to be performed together with its sequel *Lélio, ou Le retour à la vie* (Lélio, or the Return to Life), Op. 14b.

NOTE

The following program should be distributed to the audience whenever the Fantastic Symphony is executed dramatically and consequently followed by the monodrama *Lélio*, which finishes and completes the *Episode from the Life of an Artist*. In such cases, the orchestra should be unseen, placed on the stage of a theater behind the lowered curtain.

If the symphony alone is performed in a concert, this arrangement is no longer essential; if necessary, one can even dispense with distributing the program, keeping only the titles of the five movements. The symphony by itself (the author hopes) can afford musical interest independent of any dramatic purpose.

Program of the Symphony

A young musician of morbidly sensitive temperament and fiery imagination poisons himself with opium in a fit of lovesick despair. The dose of the narcotic, too weak to kill him, plunges him into a deep slumber accompanied by the strangest visions, during which his sensations, his emotions, his memories are transformed in his sick mind into musical thoughts and images. The loved one herself has become a melody to him, an *idée fixe* as it were, that he encounters and hears everywhere.

PART I

REVERIES, PASSIONS

He recalls first that soul-sickness, that *vague des passions*, those depressions, those groundless joys, that he experienced before he first saw his loved one; then the volcanic love that she suddenly inspired in him, his frenzied suffering, his jealous rages, his returns to tenderness, his religious consolations.

PART II

ABALL

He encounters the loved one at a dance in the midst of the tumult of a brilliant party.

PART III

SCENE IN THE COUNTRY

One summer evening in the country, he hears two shepherds piping a *ranz des vaches* in dialogue; this pastoral duet, the scenery, the quiet rustling of the trees gently brushed by the wind, the hopes he has recently found some reason to entertain—all concur in affording his heart an unaccustomed calm, and in giving a more cheerful color to his ideas. But she appears again, he feels a tightening in his heart, painful presentiments disturb him—what if she were deceiving him?—One of the shepherds takes up his simple tune again, the other no longer answers. The sun sets—distant sound of thunder—loneliness—silence.

PART IV

MARCH TO THE SCAFFOLD

He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he is condemned to death and led to the scaffold. The procession moves forward to the sounds of a march that is now somber and fierce, now brilliant and solemn, in which the muffled sound of heavy steps gives way without transition to the noisiest clamor. At the end, the *idée fixe* returns for a moment, like a last thought of love interrupted by the fatal blow.

PART V

DREAM OF A WITCHES' SABBATH

[The program for this movement reproduces the First Program.]

Appendix 1

Berlioz's Initial Conception of the Symphony (Letter to Humbert Ferrand)

After a period of calm violently disturbed by the composition of the *Élegie en prose*, which is the last of my Songs, I have just been plunged again into all the tortures of an endless and unquenchable passion, without cause, without purpose. She is still in London, and yet I seem to feel her around me; I hear my heart pounding, and its beats set me going like the piston strokes of a steam engine. Each muscle of my body trembles with pain. — Useless! — Frightening! —

Oh! Unhappy woman! If she could for one moment conceive all the poetry, all the infinity of such a love, she would fly to my arms, even if she must die from my embrace.

I was on the point of beginning my grand symphony (*Episode from the Life of an Artist*), in which the development of my infernal passion is to be depicted; I have it all in my head, but I can write nothing. Let's wait.

- - -

... since my last letter, I have gone through some terrible squalls, my ship has cracked up badly, but it has at last righted itself; now it sails fairly well. Frightful facts, whose truth I cannot doubt, have started me toward a cure; and I believe that it will be as complete as my tenacious spirit can allow. I have just confirmed my resolution by a work that satisfies me completely. Here is its subject, which will be published in a program and distributed in the hall on the day of the concert.

Episode from the Life of an Artist (grand fantastic symphony in five parts).

- First movement: double, made up of a short adagio, immediately followed by a fully developed allegro (vague des passions, aimless reveries; frenzied passion with all its fits of tenderness, jealousy, fury, fears, etc., etc.).
- Second movement: Scene in the Country (adagio, thoughts of love and hope troubled by dark presentiments).
- Third movement: A Ball (brilliant and stirring music).
- Fourth movement: March to the Scaffold (fierce, pompous music).
- Fifth movement: Dream of a Witches' Sabbath.

Now, my friend, here is how I have put together my novel, or rather my tale, whose hero you will have no difficulty in recognizing.

★ I imagine that an artist, gifted with a vivid imagination, finding himself in that state of mind that Chateaubriand has depicted so admirably in *Rene*, sees for the first time a woman who embodies the

ideal of beauty and fascination that his heart has long been seeking; he falls desperately in love with her. As the result of an odd whim, whenever the image of the loved one appears before his mind's eye it is accompanied by a musical thought in whose character he finds a grace and a nobility akin to those he attributes to his beloved. This double *idée fixe* pursues him incessantly; that is the reason for the constant appearance, in every movement of the symphony, of the chief melody of the first allegro (No. 1).

(我心理想到了一位藝術家,既有天份又富有熱切的想像力, [...]他第一次見到了一位能符合他心中理想美和極具魅力的女性,這正是他長久以來所尋求的,因而瘋狂地迷戀上她。但是說來奇怪,每當這個愛的形象在心中升起時,總是伴隨著一段音樂的念頭,這段音樂優美且高貴的特質,和他愛慕的女性氣質十分相似。這個雙重的「執念」(*Idée fixe*)」始終地縈繞著他不去。這就是第一個快板段落(No. 1)的主要旋律,在此交響曲中其他樂章持續出現的原因。)

After periods of great agitation, he begins to entertain hope; he believes that his love is returned. Finding himself one day in the country, he hears in the distance two shepherds piping a *ranz des vaches* in dialogue; this pastorale immerses him in a delightful reverie (No. 2). The principal melody reappears for a moment against the motifs of the adagio.

He goes to a ball, but the uproar of the party fails to distract him; his *idée fixe* returns to trouble him, and the beloved melody makes his heart pound during a brilliant waltz (No. 3).

In a fit of despair, he poisons himself with opium; but, instead of killing him, the narcotic induces a horrible vision. In the course of it he believes that he has killed his beloved, has been condemned to death, and witnesses his own execution. March to the scaffold; a huge procession of headsman, soldiers, populace. At the end, the melody reappears once more, like a last thought of love, interrupted by the fatal blow (No. 4).

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He sees himself surrounded by a foul assembly of sorcerers and devils, come together to celebrate the sabbath. They call afar. At last the *melody* arrives. Hitherto it had appeared only in graceful form, but

now it has become a vulgar tune, trivial and mean; it is the loved one coming to the sabbath to attend the funeral procession of her victim. She is now only a prostitute, fit to take part in such an orgy. Then the ceremony begins. The bells ring, the whole infernal crew prostrate themselves, a chorus sings the plainchant sequence of the dead (*Dies irae*), two other choruses repeat it, parodying it in burlesque fashion. Then finally the sabbath round-dance begins to whirl; in its most violent outburst, it mingles with the *Dies irae*, and the dream is over (No. 5).

There, my friend, is the sketch of what I have done in this huge symphony. I have just written the last note. If I can be ready on Whitsunday, May 30, I shall give a concert at the Nouveautes with an orchestra of two hundred and twenty musicians. I'm afraid I won't be able to get the parts copied. Right now I'm a dolt; the frightful mental effort that produced my work has tired out my imagination, and I wish I could spend all my time sleeping and resting. But, if the brain sleeps, the heart is wakeful, and I am acutely aware of missing you. Oh, my friend, shan't I be seeing you again?

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My revenge is not too severe. Besides, it wasn't in that spirit that I wrote the *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*. I don't want to take revenge. I pity her and despise her. She is an ordinary woman, gifted with an instinctive genius for expressing lacerations of the human soul that she has never felt, and incapable of conceiving a great and noble passion such as mine for her.

(Berlioz's *Memoire*)

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On the day before the concert, Liszt called on me. It was our first meeting. I spoke of Goethe's *Faust*, which he confessed that he had not read, but which he soon came to love as much as I. We felt an immediate affinity, and from that moment our friendship has grown ever closer and stronger. He came to the concert and was conspicuous for the warmth of his applause and his generally enthusiastic behaviour.

The performance was by no means perfect—it hardly could be, with works of such difficulty and after only two rehearsals. But it was good enough to give a reasonable idea of the music. Three of the movements of the symphony, the Waltz, the March to the Scaffold and the Witches' Sabbath, created a sensation; the March especially took the audience by storm. The Scene in the Country made no impression at all. But it bore little resemblance to the present version. I made up my mind at once to rewrite it. Ferdinand Hiller, who was then in Paris, gave me some excellent advice which I endeavoured to profit by.

(Berlioz's *Memoire*)

Appendix 2

Stylistic Features of Music in the Romantic Period

1. Emotional Expression

- Music focus on conveying deep emotions and personal feelings, often reflecting themes of love, nature, and the supernatural.

2. Expansion of Form

- Composers expand traditional forms (like sonata and symphony) and created new forms, such as the symphonic poem, overture, concert etude, etc.

3. Nationalism

- Incorporation of folk elements and themes specific to a composer's homeland, often using native melodies and rhythms.

4. Harmony and Tonality

- Use of complex harmonies, including chromaticism and modulations to distant keys, creating richer sound textures.

5. Orchestration

- Increased size and diversity of the orchestra, with composers experimenting with new instruments and timbres to achieve unique sounds.

6. Programmatic Music

- Many works are inspired by literature, art, or personal stories, often depicting a narrative or a concept (e.g. Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*).

7. Virtuosity

- Rising prominence of the virtuoso performer, with composers writing technically demanding pieces for instruments, showcasing the performing skills of the musician.

8. Melody

- Memorable, lyrical melodies became a keystone, often characterised by sweeping lines and expressive phrasing.

9. Use of Dynamics

- Greater contrasts in dynamics, with expressive crescendos and decrescendos enhancing the emotional impact.

10. Influence of Literature and Art

- Music was often inspired by poetry, painting, and philosophy, reflecting broader cultural trends and ideas of the time.

First Movement: Rêveries – Passions (Daydreams – Passions)

Part I – Slow Introduction

bars 1–16	bars 17–23	bars 24–48	bars 49–71
Largo Theme	Episode	Largo Theme	Transition
C minor	C major	E-flat major	→ C major (V)
<i>pp</i> 	<i>pp</i>  <i>ff</i> <i>p</i> 		<i>pp</i> <i>ff</i> <i>p</i>

The first movement begins with **slow introduction**, which lasts for about 1/3 of its duration. Its form is rather flexible: apart from the twofold appearances of the **Largo theme**, which presents an extended legato melody played by the strings, the central **episode** and the ending **transition** are harmonically unstable and display a large range of fluctuations in tempo and dynamics. This unpredictable and rapid changes from one mood to another vividly portrays the protagonist—that is, the artist described in the program—is experiencing a *vague des Passions* (wave of passions), as if his mind is discombobulated by the plethora of emotions and desires that emerge from his inside.

(1) Largo theme

bars 1–2	a short introductory passage, like the opening of the stage's curtain before the beginning of an opera played by the woodwinds only; the flutes and clarinets play repeated notes G in triplets, while the oboe presents the only melodic motion in these two bars—an ascending stepwise motion from G to Eb, foreshadowing the opening ascending sixth of the <i>idée fixe</i> this passage articulates the harmonic progression of V–I in C minor
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Movement 1 – Largo Theme

The image displays a musical score for the Largo Theme in Movement 1. It consists of four staves of music, each with specific annotations:

- Staff 1 (bars 3-9):** Labeled 'a' in a box. It begins with a *pp* dynamic. An arrow points to bar 4 with the text 'foreshadow the *idée fixe* (bars 74-9)'. Brackets above the staff identify the 'main idea' (bars 3-5) and the 'contrasting idea' (bars 6-9). Bars 5 and 9 are highlighted with yellow circles.
- Staff 2 (bars 7-10):** Labeled 'a'' in a box. It features a crescendo (*cresc.*) leading to a *f* dynamic, followed by a *pp* dynamic. Brackets above the staff identify the 'main idea' (bars 7-8) and the 'contrasting idea' (bars 9-10).
- Staff 3 (bars 11-14):** Labeled 'b' in a box. It starts with a *p* dynamic. Brackets above the staff identify 'fragmentation' (bars 11-12) and '(repetition)' (bars 13-14). Bars 12 and 14 are highlighted with yellow circles.
- Staff 4 (bars 15-16):** Labeled '15' at the beginning. It shows 'frag.' (fragment) and '(rep.)' (repetition) markings above the staff.

bars 3–16

a melody is presented in Violin I, which we call the “**Largo theme**”; this theme shares a remarkable resemblance to the *idée fixe* that arrives later in this movement

the passage depicts the protagonist deep in his “**melancholy reverie**”; the overall mood of this Largo theme is **melancholic** and sometimes **depressing**

this passage is performed mostly by the strings, occasionally supported by the woodwinds and horns; the strings are playing *con sordino* (with mute), creating a soft and tender sound

the texture is by and large **homophonic**; it evokes a kind of contrapuntal texture in bars 7–9 with the imitative entries among the strings

	the phrasing is irregular and unsymmetrical; breaks and pauses (with fermatas) are frequent in this passage, creating a kind of free-floating quality and aimlessness that are characteristic of a reverie the dynamics is mostly <i>pianissimo</i> (pp), with a brief yet unexpected surge of energy in bars 9–10 to <i>forte</i>, a moment that is also emphasized by a tension-inducing V¹¹ chord (i.e. a V chord with an added 9th and 11th upper extensions)
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(2) Episode

bars 17–23	the tempo becomes faster (<i>plus vite</i>) and more animated (<i>animé</i>); the passage symbolizes the “fits of groundless joy” as described in the program, with the mode changes to major and the violins playing a jubilant ascending C-major scale in rapid triplet semiquaver notes, now without mute (<i>senza sordino</i>) this “groundless joy” becomes more intense, reinforced by an ascending sequence in bars 20–21 (up a perfect fourth each time) and a motivic fragmentation in bar 21, reiterating in earnest the broken-chord triplets in quick succession; the dynamics also increase from <i>pianissimo</i> to <i>fortissimo</i>; everything culminates to a climactic moment on the downbeat of bar 23, as if the protagonist is now overwhelmed by an excess of pumped-up energy—in a state of “frenzied passion” as according to the program the musical intensity suddenly subsides after the climax, where the minor mode creeps back via the E–Eb chromatic inflection, and the top melody descends gradually from the high G6
bars 24–27	a short transitional passage that prepares for the return of the Largo theme the tempo is gradually slowed down until it reaches the original tempo as in the beginning (<i>retenu jusqu’au premier mouvement</i>)

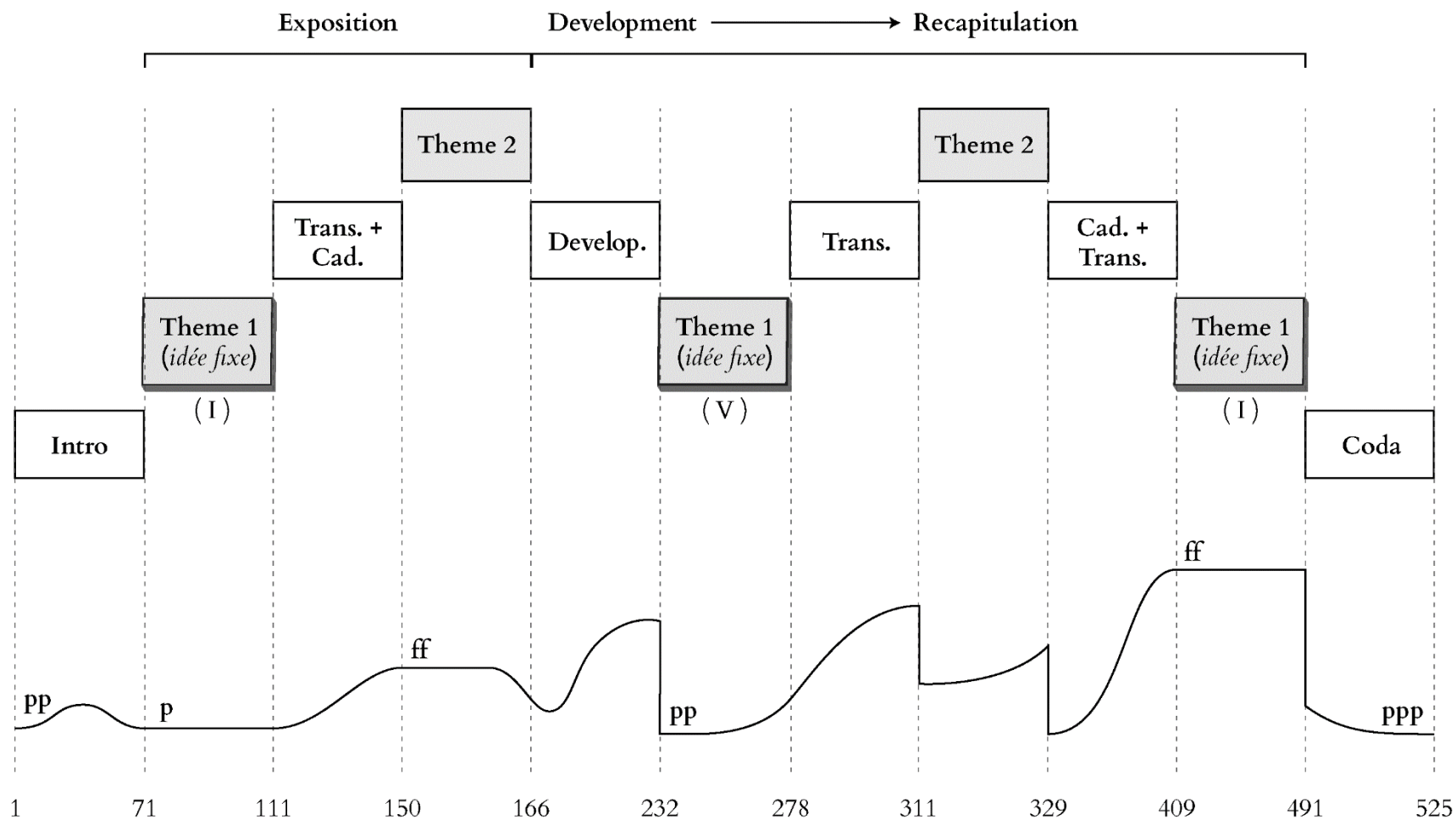
	this passage also brings about a modulation from C minor to Eb major (its relative major) the woodwinds play a repeated-note pattern in triplet quavers, evoking the triplet rhythm of a valse that is the highlight of the second movement
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(3) Largo theme – return

bars 28–48	the Largo theme returns in the violins, now doubled in octaves; the cellos and double basses response with some kind of pseudo imitation the flutes and clarinets play a series of slurred notes and ascending scales in fast running notes as accompaniment to the Largo theme the beginning portion of the theme is in the key of Eb major (the relative major of C minor); it changes back to C minor starting from bar 34 onwards compared to the first Largo theme, this restatement is more intense, agitated, turbulent and passionate—for example, apart from the fast-running notes in the woodwinds, the lower strings (viola and cellos) now play in tremolos (bars 30–35), which has a more anxious sonority the ending of this theme is extended: the melody continues its descent beyond bar 41, and is further liquidated into a series of drooping chromatic lines with syncopation; this languishing ending sounds as if the protagonist has fallen once again into his deep melancholic reverie although the chromatic descending line arrives on a potential cadential dominant (V) in bar 45, the theme refuses to close; instead, the dominant resolves deceptively to VI in the following bar (bar 46), postponing the expected tonic arrival later into the movement
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(4) Transition

bars 49–71	after the deceptive resolution to VI, this passage sustains Ab in the bass as a pedal point for more than 11 bars, before it resolves definitively to the cadential dominant (V) in bar 61 this passage is harmonically mesmerizing: the bass note Ab is supported each time by a different chord—first major triads (Db, Ab, E), then minor triads (C#, E, G#), followed by a diminished seventh chord; this non-functional concatenation of chords represents the aimless wandering of the protagonist's mind in his reveries the three-note head motif in Violin II (Ab–Db–F) foreshadows the opening bar of the <i>idée fixe</i> (G–C–G–E) after groping its way around the Ab, the music finally gets back to C major (the parallel major of the opening C minor) in bar 61, celebrated by onsets of a chordal texture in <i>mezzo-forte</i> (mf) and <i>fortissimo</i> (ff)—emphasizing the cadential 6/4 chord and V7 chord respectively; also take note of the huge fluctuations of dynamics in these two bars, which seems to underscore the erratic nature of the protagonist's mental condition tempo changes suddenly to Allegro in bar 64, and the overall mood becomes more agitated and passionate (<i>agitato e appassionato assai</i>); timpani enter for the first time, played with wooden sticks covered in leather (<i>baguettes de bois recouvert en peau</i>)
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Formal diagram of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, Movement 1

Part II – Allegro

The Allegro section bears resemblance to Classical **sonata form**, even though there are some salient deviations from the traditional model. The entire fast section revolves around the ***idée fixe***, a recurring thematic idea that symbolizes the beloved woman with whom the protagonist is feverishly infatuated (“a woman who embodies all the charms of the ideal being he has imagined in his dreams”).

(1) First Theme – *Idée fixe*

The ***idée fixe*** can be divided into three parts:

- a. An **8-bar opening idea**, followed by its restatement on the dominant as a response
- b. A continuation of the opening via **fragmentation** into 4-bar phrases, which are then **sequenced** up each time by steps (G–Ab, A–Bb, B–C)
- c. A **closing phrase** that ends on a **perfect cadence** (V–I) in C major

As a musical representation of the ideal woman, the ***idée fixe*** possesses the qualities of elegance and gracefulness, characterized by the elongated legato melodic line performed by Violin I and flutes in **unison**, both of which are particularly apt for carrying an expressive and sweet melody. The theme is also endowed with great passion, evoked by the frequent **dynamic changes** and **tempo fluctuations**.

Accompanying the ***idée fixe*** are a series of **two pulsating detached quaver notes** played by the strings—a sonic imitation of heart pounding when the protagonist first catches sight of the ideal woman. This palpitation of the protagonist’s heart becomes more and more agitated and impassioned, which goes hand in hand with increase in dynamics to *forte* (bar 99).

Movement 1 – Idée fixe

a 8-bar opening idea

72 *poco sf*

response (modified repetition of the opening idea)

78 *sf*

b 4-bar fragmentation

85 *dolce* *cresc. poco a poco*

sequential repetition *animez* sequential repetition *animez*

92 *cresc. sf*

sequential repetition (extended)

99 *retenu* *a tempo* *dim.* *p* *poco f p* *sf*

c

concluding phrase ending with a perfect cadence

106 *p* *sf* *un peu retenu*

(2) Transition

bars 111–18	the music becomes more forceful and animated, as if performed with fire (<i>con fuoco</i>); it opens with an ascending scale, reaching three <i>fortissimo</i> block chords (with tremolo strings), followed by a cascade of descending thirds this passage highlights two of the main motives from the opening theme (<i>Idée fixe</i>): the upper-neighbor motion (E–F–E) and the descending third
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bars 119–25	we can refer to this melody as the “cadential phrase” this melody shares certain similarity to the last phrase (i.e. phrase c) of the <i>Idée fixe</i>: the descending seventh from C6 to D5, and the double detached quaver rhythm in the lower strings
bars 125–49	the same materials are repeated as before; after bar 133, the phrase grouping gets shorter and shorter (i.e. fragmentation), first two bars long (bars 133–9), then one bar (bars 140–2) and finally half a bar (bars 143–8) the music intensifies (<i>crescendo</i> up till <i>fortissimo</i>) from bar 146 onward, driving towards an emphatic perfect cadence in the dominant key (G major) that coincides with the onset of the second theme (bar 150)

(3) Second Theme

bars 150–67	the second theme sounds like a variation of the first theme (<i>idée fixe</i>); it juxtaposes the head motif from the first theme (played by solo flute and solo clarinet an octave apart), followed by an answer from Violin I with a descending melodic idea the second theme consists of three phrases; the second phrase ends with a perfect cadence, but it elides with the onset of the third phrase; the third phrase ends satisfactory with a perfect cadence without overlap
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(4) Development

bars 166–90	rising sequences based on the head motif of the second theme (also <i>idée fixe</i>) the model is initially four bars long, which is sequenced up by a semitone each time (from G to Ab and A); grouping becomes shorter from bar 174 onward,
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	getting more intense and agitated as the bass ascends stepwise; this passage arrives on a V4/2 chord in C major
bars 191–97	a short passage based on the answer (descending melodic idea) of the second theme, first by the woodwinds, then by the strings
bars 198–228	an episode based on chromatically ascending and descending parallel sixth chords, played in staccato; the melodic contour also goes in tandem with the crescendos and diminuendos; the melodic apex is accentuated by <i>forte</i> attacks from the woodwinds and French horns (such as bars 202 & 210) this passage represents the waves of passion that escalate and subside inside the protagonist's mind
bar 229–31	a general pause of three bars (all the instruments stop playing); Berlioz emphasizes this pause with the indication “silence” on the score this dramatic pause creates a sense of suspense, heightening the expectation of what to come next

(5) First theme (*Idée fixe*) – return in V

bars 232–78	the first theme (<i>idée fixe</i>) returns in the dominant key (G major); the melody is presented by the woodwinds (flutes, clarinets, and bassoons; oboes added later), doubled across three octaves the strings provide the accompaniment to the melodic line; the rhythmic figuration here is more active, with the violins (on beat 1 & 3) cooperating with cellos and double basses (on beat 2 & 4) to create a continuous succession of quaver pulses, which infuses a greater rhythmic propulsion and forward momentum to the music
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	different from the first statement, the top notes of the violins double the structural tones of the <i>idée fixe</i>, making it more pronounced the viola fills out the harmony by playing a series of repeated notes or dyads (akin to tremolos); it also depicts the feeling of agitation and impatience of the protagonist
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(6) Transition

bars 278–311	the end of the first theme (<i>idée fixe</i>) digresses into a development phrase; the bass line initially descends chromatically, then moves up by sequence in triplet rhythm the music arrives triumphantly (<i>forte</i>) on the tonic of G major in bar 291, celebrated by a stream of descending slurred notes the harmony seems to be about to bring forth another cadential progression, moving to II chord in bar 297; yet it crashes onto a <i>fortissimo</i> fully diminished seventh chord in bar 304 (G–Bb–C#–E); this chord is repeated three more times, each time moving up a semitone
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(7) Second theme

bars 311–28	this passage is based on the answer of the second theme, initially in the minor mode, then back to C major the texture is polyphonic at first, with the answer imitated among different string instruments: first cellos, then violas and second violins the emphatic statement of the theme in bars 322–8 sounds like a point of triumphant arrival, as if the protagonist has succeeded in attaining his beloved woman
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(8) Cadential phrase → Transition

bars 329–58	it is based on the cadential phrase, which leads into a transitional passage; the cadential phrase is repeated four times: (1) first played by the woodwinds and then by the strings (in C major); yet lurking beneath the peacefulness of this melody is something ominous and disquieting—the rolling of the timpani in <i>pianissimo</i>, played with soft mallet (<i>baguettes d'éponge</i>) (2) played by Violin II; Violin I joins in above with an eerie-sounding chromatic descending line (3) played by the cellos; the violins play a series of interlocking short phrases in crotchets; the key changes to minor near the end (bar 349), with the expected A being chromatically altered to Ab (4) played by cellos, double basses, and bassoons; the melody is distorted, beginning in C major, but the expected D is one semitone too low into C# (bar 354), steering the music to the submediant key of A major
bars 358–409	an extended transitional passage that features an entirely new melodic idea, played by the oboes the passage is harmonically unstable the music becomes increasingly more animated and enlivened, moving up gradually in chromatic steps and getting progressively louder

(9) First theme (*Idée fixe*) – return in I

bars 409–50	a triumphant return of the first theme (<i>idée fixe</i>) in <i>fortissimo</i> dynamic; the melody is played by the flutes, piccolo, oboes, trombones, violins and violas
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	(the strings are playing an embellished version of the melody, with added passing tones and chordal leaps between the melodic notes) the other instruments accompany with a syncopated rhythm (short-long-short) in chordal texture the melody differs from bars 428 onward, substituting the original closing phrase (phrase c) with a more intensive fragmentation of the first theme (bars 439–450) the violins move up by chromatic steps, while the other string parts supports with an incessant string of repeated notes; the woodwinds punctuate the texture on the weak beats in block chords the theme culminates on a <i>fortissimo</i> cadential dominant in bars 449–450 (initially embellished with a C–B suspension); yet the perfect cadence is withheld, refusing to resolve to the tonic on the downbeat of bar 451
bars 451–74	after this cadential failure, the music ruminates upon the first four bars of the <i>idée fixe</i>, now in a slower tempo (<i>retenu</i>); these four-bar groups enter with overlaps, juxtaposing one over the other like a stretto the music seems to lose its momentum, when the major sonority of the first theme is deformed into minor in bar 456 (E is lowered into Eb), and the bassoon continues in Db major—the Neapolitan (bII) key of C major yet this bout of despairing mood is only temporary; the music picks up its zest again in bar 461 with an unyielding determination—the tempo gets faster (<i>tempo più animato</i>), the strings play in repeated notes, dynamics gradually get louder (<i>crescendo</i>), and the notes ascend incrementally into the high register the music arrives on the cadential dominant again in bar 473; here it resolves successfully to tonic in bar 475, yet the highest pitch of the strings (E in Violin I) still refuses to return to the tonic

bars 475–91	this passage features a series of syncopated attacks across the entire orchestra; the texture suddenly becomes sparse in bar 483, with the strings performing an ascending scale with <i>crescendo</i>, driving toward the final cadence the final perfect cadence (in C major) arrives in bar 491, with the entire orchestra blasting in <i>fortissimo</i>, bringing the movement to a satisfactory close
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(9) Coda

The movement originally ends with the perfect cadence in the previous section. This coda was added by the composer at a later stage (perhaps signaling that the triumphant ending is only illusory, for the protagonist delves back into his melancholic reverie as before). Also, this coda corresponds pretty closely to the program note: “its return of tenderness, its tears, its religious consolations”.

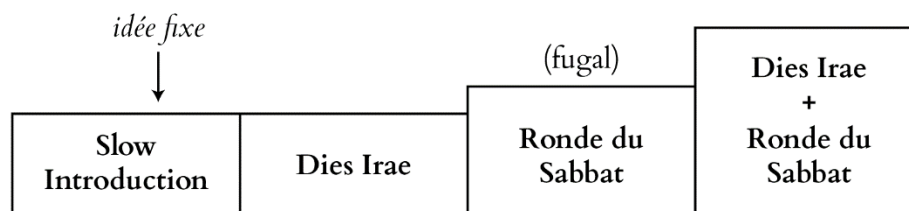
bars 491–525	the first four pitches of the <i>idée fixe</i> are reiterated in <i>pianissimo</i>, with the original dotted rhythm getting neutralized into four crotchet notes; the major modality quickly darkens into minor, implied by the chromatically inflected notes (Eb, Ab and Db) the <i>idée fixe</i> is restated one last time in bar 503 by the violins a chordal passage concludes the first movement, labelled “<i>Religiosamente</i>” (“religiously”); the music alternates between the subdominant (IV) chord and the tonic (I) chord, articulating a series of plagal cadence that is often associated with the “Amen” ending typical in Christian church music the entire orchestra is required to play as softly as possible (<i>Tout l’orchestre aussi doux que possible</i>), bringing the movement to a peaceful and transcendent end
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Fifth Movement: *Songe d'une nuit du sabbat* (Dream of a night of the sabbath)

After killing his beloved and being sentenced to death on a scaffold, the protagonist finds himself in the underworld witnessing a Witches' sabbath. (A sabbath is originally a day of rest in the Christian tradition; here the witches are having a day off and hold a gathering at midnight.) His beloved reappears, signaled by the return of the *idée fixe*, which is here totally transformed into something “mean, trivial, and grotesque”.

The movement is divided into four large sections, revolving around three main thematic ideas:

1. *Idée fixe*: a recurring melody that is associated with the beloved woman; here it is played by the E-flat clarinet, set in a jaunty 6/8 meter, to portray the woman as a witch
2. *Dies irae* (Day of Wrath): a Gregorian chant sung during the Mass of the Dead
3. *Ronde du Sabbat* (Sabbat round dance): a dance melody in compound meter, set in a fugal texture, representing the devilish dancing of the witches and other underground creatures



Part I – Slow Introduction

Like the first movement, the finale begins with a slow introduction. It comprises five different musical elements in quick succession:

- A. bars 1–2: **tremolos** in the strings performed with mute (“con sordino”) and with the tip of the bow (“a punta d’arco”); the strings combine into a fully diminished seventh chord (A#–C#–E–G), which possesses a suspensive and eerie-sounding quality
the lower strings (cellos and double basses) play an **ascending** (octatonic) **scale** making up a tritone; this five-note scale is repeated three times
- B. bars 3–4: reiterating three-note figure in the strings, both ascending and descending, sounding like the screeching and cackling of the witches who gather for the sabbath
- C. bars 5–6: over the rumbling bass in the lower strings (cellos and double basses), the strings suddenly surge upward with pizzicatos in *forte* dynamics; the woodwinds (clarinet and

bassoons) and brass (horns, trombones, and ophicleides) respond with a descending contour in **staccato** chords

D. bars 7–10: three woodwind instruments (piccolo, flute, and oboe) play in union a series of repeated notes, ending with a downward **slide** (or **glissando**); this high-pitch woodwind instruments create a shrilling and piercing sound

the horn repeats the same melody an octave below like an echo, muted and in *pianississimo*

E. bar 11: a lead-in to the following bar, consisting primarily of a series of ascending perfect fourths

This musical block with the five elements listed above is then repeated nearly identically in bars 12–20 (except that the pitch level is raised by a semitone).

A

(strings) tremolo

tritone

B

C

ascending strings pizzicato

descending woodwinds chords

rumbling bass

D

repeated notes

slide

E

ascending 4th

Idée fixe

The *idée fixe* returns in bar 21, played by the solo clarinet in C major. This symbolizes the that the beloved woman is now making her entrance to the sabbath; this melody is first played in *pianississimo*, sounding by itself from afar (“solo lointain”). As described in the program note, this *idée fixe* here is transformed, or deformed, into something grotesque, twisted and freakish: “The beloved melody appears again, but it has lost its character of nobility and shyness; it is no more than a dance tune, mean, trivial, and grotesque: it is she, coming to join the sabbath.”

Movement 5 – Idée fixe (incomplete, in C major)



Comparison with the *idée fixe* in the first movement:

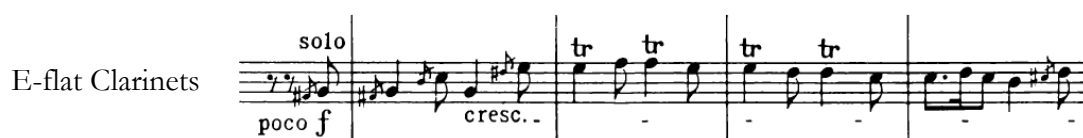
1. **compound** duple meter (6/8)
2. the primary notes of the melody are embellished with ornaments, such as **grace notes** (acciaccatura) and **trills**
3. played by the **clarinet** instead of the oboe

Also notice the rolling of the **bass drum** (G. C.) when the *idée fixe* first appear in bars 21–8.

The *idée fixe* is cut short by a sudden outburst of excitement in bars 29–39, performed by the orchestra in tutti and in *fortissimo* dynamic. The orchestral texture borders on cacophony, as each instrumental part plays a different melodic line. The overall effect is one of ecstasy and euphoria, as if the congregation is in high anticipation of the upcoming sabbath.

In bars 40–64, the *idée fixe* reappears in full, now played by two **E-flat clarinets** (labelled as “piccolo clarinet” on the score), which has a more shrilling and piercing timbre. The **oboes** and **clarinets in C** now function as accompaniments, playing a series of pulsating rhythmic patterns supporting the main melody. The texture builds up gradually when more instruments join in.

Movement 5 – Idée fixe (complete, in Eb major)



1. **piccolo** enters in bar 46, doubling the clarinet melody an octave above (note: piccolo is a transposing instrument up an octave); at the same time, the **bassoons** come in with a recurring arpeggiating pattern in the lower register



2. **violas** and **cellos** join in (bar 52) to enrich the bassoon figuration above



3. **flutes** enter in bar 56, doubling the main melody in unison (or an octave lower than the piccolo)
4. **oboes** and **first violins** enter in bar 60, also doubling the main melody in unison

During the *idée fixe*, the music gradually builds up the tension and exciting. Everything culminates into an exciting transitional passage in bars 65–83, featuring running semiquavers and *fortissimo* dynamic. The texture finally caves in during bars 78–83 when both the woodwinds and brasses drop out; the strings play a quick succession of falling thirds in **syncopated** rhythm, descending from the high to the low register and ending on a rumbling G bass (bar 92).

A fragment of the *Ronde du Sabbat* (Sabbat round dance)—its first two measures—appears in bars 84–5. The complete melody of the dance will appear later in full as the subject of a fugue.

The **chimes**, also called **tubular bells** or the **church bells**, enter for the first time in bar 102, anticipating the next section of the movement: *Dies irae* (Day of Wrath). The sound of the chimes is often associated with the **death knell**—the tolling of the bells when someone dies. Playing in three octaves, it hammers out the tonic and dominant pitch (C–C–G) in long notes. The strings interrupt the hymn-like chimes with interjections from the Sabbath round dance.

Part II – Dies irae

This section is structured around the three phrases of the *Dies irae* (Day of Wrath), a Gregorian chant sung during the Mass of the Dead. The original chant is sung without meter (ametrical); here Berlioz sets each note of the *Dies irae* to last one bar long, a stately rhythm evocative of the solemnity of a religious ceremony. (An exception to this occurs near the end of phrase 1 and 3, where the supertonic D is held onto slightly longer in order to postpone the final resolution to the tonic C.)

Movement 5 – Dies irae

Phrase 1



Phrase 2



Phrase 3



The chant melody is performed by one **ophicleide** (a forerunner of the tuba) and four **bassoons** (an octave below) in *forte* dynamic; the attack of each note is also emphasized by an accent. The chimes continue with its “death knell” motif (C–C–G), played in three octaves.

Phrase 1 is then repeated by the **brass** instruments (**French horns** and **trombones**) in half the rhythmic value (that is, a dotted quaver for each melodic note) in bars 147–57. Instead of the monophonic texture as before, here the *Dies irae* melody is harmonized by different triads.

Then the **woodwinds** (piccolo, flutes, oboes **upper**, clarinets in Eb and C) and the **strings** (first and second violins, violas) perform the same melody in even shorter rhythmic values (alternating between crochets and quavers). The instruments are playing in parallel thirds (or sixths). A rapid ascending (C-minor melodic minor) scale is appended to the last note of the woodwind melody (bar 162) as a round-off of the first phrase.

The same succession of instruments occurs in **Phrase 2** and **Phrase 3** of the ***Dies irae***: first by the **ophicleide and bassoons**, then by the **brasses**, finally by the **woodwinds** and **strings**. The rhythmic values are also reduced across repetition, from **dotted minims** to **dotted crochets**, and finally **crochets** and **quavers**.

At bar 222, a transitional passage ensues, foreshadowing the main melodic idea of the next section—the ***Ronde du Sabbat*** (Sabbat round dance). Over the sustained bass-drum rolls, snippets of the melody crop up among different string instruments, one following the other with increasing frequency. The texture builds up to *fortissimo* dominant seventh (V7) chord in bar 239–40, launching the music to the upcoming section.

Part III – Ronde du Sabbat

The **Sabbat round dance** is set in the manner of a **fugue**, with multiple statements of the main melodic idea (the subject) across different instruments. The subject of the fugal passage is shown here:

Movement 5 – Sabbat round dance



This eight-bar subject demonstrates a well-defined formal shape:

1. the **opening idea** displays an arch-shaped contour, ascending in the first two bars and then descending in the second half
2. a **sequential repetition** of one-bar melodic unit follows, each time going down by a third (starting on G, then E and C)
3. a **cadential idea** concludes the subject, ending with a 5–1 melodic descent (D–G) in the dominant key (G major)

This subject, originally performed by **cellos** and **double basses**, is then **imitated** by different instruments in succession.

1. **Violin II** (bars 248–55): dominant statement
2. **Violin I + bassoons** (bars 255–62): tonic statement
3. **woodwinds + violas** (bars 262–9): dominant statement

An **episode** ensues in bar 262, featuring one bar of syncopated repeated notes and one bar of chromatic scale-like passage. The episode continues by sequencing up chromatically, ultimately climaxing on the Eb in bar 285.

The subject seems to make its reappearance in bar 289 (corresponding to the **middle entries** in a fugue), but something seems to go awry. The dominant statement in the **woodwinds** begins in the minor mode, with the mediant note lowered by a semitone (Bb instead of B). This is immediately corrected by the **lower strings**, which come in two bars later in the major mode.

This is followed by a tonic statement of the subject, performed by the **upper strings** in bar 298. Everything seems to commence as expected, except for the last two bars, which, instead of bringing forth a cadence, now arises up to Eb by an ascending scale.

Everything deescalates afterwards. The brass hammers out a four-note rhythmic pattern that is reminiscent of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony—the “fate-knocking” motif. The musical texture seems to get fragmented into slurred two-note and three-note figures in the woodwinds and strings respectively.

The music gets quiet and mysterious from bar 330 onward. The strings play in murmuring two-note **tremolos**. The **Sabbat round dance** subject is neutralized into an ascending and descending **arpeggios**, while still preserving the original rhythmic profile. The quiet passage continues to get softer (“en diminuant toujours”) until it becomes nearly nothing (“presque rien”) near the end (bars 345–6).

In bar 348, the Gregorian chant ***Dies irae*** returns in fragments, played by the **French horns** and **cellos**. The chant melody is also distorted; for example, the A in the first phrase is lowered chromatically to Ab in bar 352. The violas respond with another variation of the **Sabbat round dance**, its melody transformed into an ascending and then descending chromatic scale (in parallel thirds).

In bars 364, this chromatic version of the Sabbath subject launches into a **stretto** passage, building up the texture again by layering the instruments one after the other: cellos, then violas, violin II, violin I, flute & violin I.

The music reaches a series of intense **syncopated** chords in bars 395–403. Furthermore, another series of non-syncopated chords, played by the brass, interlocks with the former in a hocket-like texture. The Sabbath subject then returns emphatically in full in bar 407, played by the strings in unison.

Part IV – Dies irae and the Sabbath round dance together (“ensemble”)

In this final section, the Gregorian chant ***Dies irae*** is combined with the **Sabbat round dance** subject in **counterpoint**.

1. ***Dies irae*** is sounded forcefully by the woodwinds and brasses (“tutta forza”); it is transposed from C minor to A minor; some of the pitches in the second half are slightly altered from either **Phrase 1** or **Phrase 3** of the ***Dies irae***.
2. The subject of the **Sabbat round dance** appears in strings, starting on the dominant; it finishes in bar 421, after which it veers off into an unremitting scale-like passage in semiquavers, going in tandem with the ***Dies irae*** as a countermelody.
3. The lower strings (cellos and double basses) provide a **bass line** to support the entire musical texture, which become tremolos after bars 422

This climatic combination of both themes leads further to an ascending passage in bars 435–43, featuring syncopated notes in Violin II.

In bars 444 onward, Berlioz introduces a novel sonority: the **col legno** strings (indicated on the score “frappez avec le bois de l’archet”, meaning “hitting with the wood of the bow”). Notice that each string parts play a slightly different rhythm (a succession of quaver and semiquaver notes).

Against this col legno rhythmic pulses is a variation of the **Sabbat round dance**, played by the woodwinds and violas. The addition of the **trills** recalls the transformed ***Idée fixe*** that has appeared earlier in the movement (which represents the beloved woman who has turned into a witch).

The rest of the movement is a jubilant and exhilarating coda that brings the movement (as well as the entire symphony) to a satisfactory closure. One noteworthy feat of orchestration can be found in bars 485–91, where the tremolo strings and the bass drums **alternate** between *pianissimo* and *fortissimo* dynamics, over which fragments of the ***Dies irae*** is sounded by the ophicleides and bassoons, later in shorter note values by the trombones and horns.

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Review

Form

Sonata form is adopted in the first movement. The form typically consists of three parts: (1) Exposition, (2) Development and (3) Recapitulation. Two optional sections – an introduction and a coda – are also added to the form.

- Exposition: It is organized with two contrasting themes in different keys. Berlioz presents the first theme as *idée fixe* in the tonic key. The second theme is set in the dominant key.
- Development: It frequently modulates to distant key. Fragments of themes reappear in new keys and get transformed.
- Recapitulation: The original theme, and later the tonic key, returns.

Even though the first movement of *Symphonie fantastique* is loosely based on sonata form, Berlioz takes liberty in transforming, rearranging, and connecting the themes, thereby creating a symmetrical, arch-like shape of formal design.

No strict formal structure is adopted in the fifth movement. This movement comprises a sequence of different musical sections – the *idée fixe*, then the witches' round dance and the *Dies Irae* passage. The *idée fixe* makes its appearance in this movement as well, but its character is altered via the compositional technique of thematic transformation.

Texture

A homophonic texture is characterized in the first movement. Some contrapuntal elements are adopted to create richer texture.

A variety of textures are created throughout the fifth movement, from homophonic passages to polyphony, where multiple melodic lines interact simultaneously. The Witches' Sabbath features a dance-like rhythm. It is characterized by imitative polyphony.

Melody

- The *idée fixe* is characteristic of a typical Romantic melody – a long, soaring melodic line that withholds the cadence till the very end.

Tonality and Harmony

- Harmony is mostly functional in this symphony, with a clear tonal center and major-minor modality.
- Chromaticism (or chromatic notes) are sometimes added to the diatonic chords to enrich the harmonic colours.
- Perfect cadences are used to confirm the home key or various modulated keys.
- Tonality is unstable and ambiguous (no clear tonal center) in the beginning section of the fifth movement.
- The tonality of the borrowed Gregorian chant melody – ***Dies Irae*** – is modal (the Dorian mode – its tonic note centers on the second scale degree of its corresponding major scale).
- Augmented and diminished chords are used in the fifth movement to heighten the unsettling feeling of being in the underworld.

Instrumentation

Strings:

- *pizzicato* (*pizz.*): pluck the string with the finger
- *tremolo*: rapidly repeat a single note or alternate between two notes, creating a trembling, shimmering, or wiggling effect
- *con sordino* (*con sord.*): “with mute”; the player attaches a device to their instrument (on the bridge) to produce a quieter, warmer, or more muffled, mysterious tone
- *senza sordino* (*senza sord.*): “without mute”
- *divisi*: split the orchestral section into two or more groups to play different notes or parts simultaneously
- *tutti*: play together (used after *divisi*)
- *double corde*: double stops (play two strings at the same time)
- *punta d'arco*: bow the string with the tip of the bow
- *frappez avec le bois de l'archet*: “hit with the wood of the bow”; commonly referred to as *col legno*; strike or bow the string with the wooden part of the bow

Percussion:

- *baguettes de bois recouvert en peau*: wooden sticks covered in leather
- *baguettes d'éponge*: sponge-headed drum sticks

Performance Directions

- *canto espressivo*: singing expressively
- *animez*: “animated”; perform with increased energy, spirit, and excitement, typically implying a faster tempo
- *retenu*: “held back”; a sudden or temporary decrease in speed
- *un peu retenu*: “held back a bit”
- *un peu plus animé*: “a bit more animated”