MASTERPIECE CONCERT SHOW NOTES: "FANTASTIQUE"

The Cape Symphony Orchestra will perform Fantastique on Saturday, November 16, 2024 at 7:30 PM and Sunday, November 17, 2024 at 3:00 PM at the Barnstable Performing Arts Center.

This season's Masterpiece Series concerts are a vital component of the search for Cape Symphony's next Music Director. Each will be conducted by a candidate for the position. Ticketholders will have the opportunity to share their thoughts in a survey to be emailed the week after the performance.

Cape Symphony

Alyssa Wang, Guest Conductor
Martina Filjak, Pianist
Cape Symphony Orchestra Musicians

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About Today's Program

JESSICA MEYER (b. 1974)
Turbulent Flames

This piece was commissioned by a consortium of orchestras led by the Auburn Symphony Orchestra, which premiered it just last month. Cape Symphony is honored to be part of this consortium and to perform the East Coast premiere of *Turbulent Flames* this weekend. We are delighted you're here to experience it.

"Flames behave in very interesting ways, much like people - just the right trigger, environment, or situation can create vastly different states of being," says composer Jessica Meyer. "The title of this piece was decided well before I started writing it, and I thought it was fitting since I wanted to write a fiery piece for orchestra that combined a good amount of virtuosity, unpredictability, and fun. When the time came, I started going down the rabbit hole of scientific articles and videos about various flame types and how a typical laminar flame (think gas stove or a Bunsen burner) could turn into a more unpredictable (and dangerous, in an uncontrolled situation) turbulent flame. I started seeing terms that seemed inherently musical to me; ones like Coherent Oscillations, Vortex Shedding, Luminous Zone, Phase Jitter, Pulsating Instability, and Propagation Velocity. While I played around with all the sounds that remind me of these processes (including ominous "flamethrower" sounding rolls on the bass drum) I thought of all the years I have played in different ensembles and wondered how powerful and incendiary an orchestra could get all while enjoying the safety of a controlled burn.

"This work would not be possible without the leadership of conductor Wesley Schulz and Executive Director Rachel Perry of the Auburn Symphony Orchestra. They have grown, and continue to build, a consortium of orchestras across the United States that will introduce this work into the world - and for that I am forever grateful."

EDVARD GRIEG (1843-1907)
Piano Concerto in A minor, op. 16

I. Allegro molto moderato
II. Adagio
III. Allegro moderato molto e marcato

Norwegian composer and pianist Edvard Hagerup Grieg is widely considered one of the leading Romantic composers. His work incorporated elements of Norwegian folk music, bringing fame to the music of Norway much as Jean Sibelius did for Finland.

Grieg learned to play piano at six from his mother, a music teacher. A clear and prodigious talent, he continued his studies at the Leipzig Conservatory. While he enjoyed many performances in Leipzig, however, he did not take to the discipline of conservatory study. "I left Leipzig Conservatory just as stupid as I entered it," he wrote. "Naturally, I did learn something there, but my individuality was still a closed book to me." Much later in life, he was awarded honorary doctorates by the Universities of Cambridge (1894) and Oxford (1906).

The Piano Concerto in A minor is one of Grieg's earliest compositions, written in Denmark when he was 24. It premiered in Copenhagen in 1869 to favorable reviews. The concerto is often compared to Robert Schumann's Piano Concerto, whose style it approximates. Grieg had heard Schumann's piece played in Leipzig in 1858 and was greatly influenced by it. The great Hungarian composer and pianist Franz Liszt played Grieg's concerto on sight and sang its praises.

The Piano Concerto is one of Grieg's most enduringly popular works, showcasing his incredible gift for melody. The concerto is in three movements, beginning with the rolling timpani that has become famous as one of classical music's most iconic openings.

This is the only concerto Grieg completed. He revised it several times, going back and forth on suggestions from Liszt, among other things, and completed the final version only weeks before he died of heart failure in 1907.

Grieg was much beloved by his countrymen; over 30,000 people came to his funeral. There's a large crater on the planet Mercury named after him.

This is also the first piano concerto ever recorded (by pianist Wilhelm Backhaus in 1909).

~ Intermission ~

HECTOR BERLIOZ (1803-1869)
Symphonie Fantastique

I. *Rêveries – Passions (Daydreams – Passions)*
II. *Un bal (A ball)*
III. *Scène aux champs (Scene in the country)*
IV. *Marche au supplice (March to the scaffold)*
V. *Songe d'une nuit du sabbat (Dream of a night of the sabbath)*

French Romantic composer Louis-Hector Berlioz was expected to become a doctor like his father but quit medical school to take up music professionally. Fierce independence and defiance of tradition characterized his music, too; the Paris establishment was divided as to whether his innovations represented "dangerous tendencies" or wholly original genius. Was it ignorance that defined him, or daring?

At 24, Berlioz became obsessed to the point of derangement with Shakespearean actress Harriet Smithson. His unrequited passion – countless love letters went unanswered, and she refused even to meet him – inspired *Symphonie Fantastique*, with an idealization of her its "idée fixe."

"A young musician of morbid sensitivity and ardent imagination poisons himself with opium in a moment of despair caused by frustrated love," writes Berlioz in the programme note for *Symphonie Fantastique*. "The dose of narcotic, while too weak to cause his death, plunges him into a heavy sleep accompanied by the strangest of visions, in which his experiences, feelings and memories are translated in his feverish brain into musical thoughts and images."

And so it begins. *Symphonie Fantastique* tells a bizarre and frightening story in five movements: uneasy daydreams of a beautiful woman; a glittering party at which he can't quite find her; a pastoral respite with dark premonitions; visions of murder, condemnation, execution; and finally, a hideous funeral gathering of witches, monsters, and shades, with the unattainable beauty now vulgar and grotesque.

Or as Leonard Bernstein put it, "Berlioz tells it like it is… You take a trip; you wind up screaming at your own funeral."

Symphonie Fantastique premiered at the Paris Conservatoire in 1830 to protracted applause from the audience and both shock and pleasure from the press. Harriet Smithson did not attend. Some years later, her career in decline, she did eventually meet and marry Berlioz, whose star was rising. Would it shock you to learn the marriage descended quickly into bitterness and betrayal?

"I consider *Symphonie Fantastique* one of the greatest orchestral masterpieces of all time," says conductor Alyssa Wang. "To engage with this piece is to put yourself into an extreme mindset, to be carried away by your emotions, to push yourself right to the very precipice. To perform this piece, you have to let yourself be consumed by an uncontrollable mania. It takes a lot of dedication and effort from every single person on stage. And hopefully, as an audience member you'll be delighted, shocked, entertained, horrified, and everything in between!"

Symphonie Fantastique is a cautionary tale of love and horror, but it's a wild and beautiful ride. Fasten your seatbelts, and take it all in.

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Tickets for "Fantastique"

Fantastique will be performed at the Barnstable Performing Arts Center, 744 West Main Street, Hyannis on Saturday, November 16, 2024 at 7:30 PM and Sunday, November 17, 2024 at 3:00 PM.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit capesymphony.org, call the Box Office at 508.362.1111, email tickets@capesymphony.org, or visit 2235 Iyannough Road in West Barnstable, MA. The Box Office is open Monday – Friday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. During concert weekend, we can only be reached by email.

Only tickets purchased on Cape Symphony's secure website or through the Cape Symphony Box Office are legitimate and guaranteed, and eligible for exchanges or credits in accordance with our ticket policies.

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Behind the Scenes

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Thanks to Encyclopedia Brittanica, hberlioz.com, jessicameyermusic.com, and Wikipedia,.

Cape Symphony Show Notes