

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

*A Night at the
(Imaginary) Opera:*

The visual dimension in Hector
Berlioz's *Lélio, Roméo et Juliette* and
La damnation de Faust

By

Frances Claire Moore

A thesis

Submitted to the New Zealand School of Music
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Music
In Musicology

New Zealand School of Music

2009

Abstract

In keeping with the spirit of Romanticism, Hector Berlioz has always been something of a rogue figure. Works like *Lélio*, *Roméo et Juliette* and *La damnation de Faust*, which Daniel Albright refers to as ‘semi-operas’, occupy an uncomfortable place within the concert hall. The intersections between song, symphony, opera and the spoken word that form these works immediately pose questions concerning musical unity, narrative interpretation, issues of genre, and performance style. While the musical and literary aspects of the three compositions have been the subject of scholarly attention, this study turns its gaze onto the various *visual* dimensions that are present within *Lélio*, *Roméo et Juliette* and *La damnation de Faust*. By emphasising the presence of spectacle in Berlioz’s compositions, questions soon arise concerning the implications of these visual elements for performance. Berlioz’s relatively early work, *Lélio*, illustrates the extent to which the composer is already concerned with how the visual suppression of performing bodies can create and change narrative meanings. *Roméo et Juliette* raises the curtains that hide *Lélio*’s musical forces. Rather than simply distilling Shakespeare’s drama into music, Berlioz relies instead on a visual memory of *Romeo and Juliet* to replace the absence of physical characters within his ‘symphonie dramatique’, thus creating an aural rendition of a past theatrical event. Through an exploration of the spectacle within *Lélio* and *Roméo et Juliette*, we see how Berlioz has constructed a visually detailed imaginary theatre that resides within the score. An understanding of this imaginary theatre is integral in the subsequent analysis of Berlioz’s controversial and wonderfully diabolical *La damnation de Faust*. This work is performed as often in the opera house as it is in the concert hall. However, an in-depth analysis of the

libretto and score reveals curious and occasionally contradictory visual implications. The impact that these contradictions have on the visual dimension in the performance of *La damnation de Faust* will be explored through a reading of two ground-breaking productions: Raoul Gunsbourg's *La damnation de Faust* from 1893 – the first production to treat Berlioz's score as an opera; and Robert Lepage's mixed-media production of *La damnation*. The work of these two directors serves to highlight, perhaps inadvertently, the problematic effects of Berlioz's imaginary theatre on the necessarily more concrete realisations of *La damnation* when confined within the opera house. However, the cinematic approach of Lepage suggests another avenue of performance that has the potential to reveal new dimensions of Berlioz's unique dramatic-symphonic works. Ultimately, it may be that the supreme technicolour nature of Berlioz's music always functions to transport us beyond our own mundane experiences and forever challenges us to seek something beyond the limits of the possible, however much those limits might change.

Acknowledgements

Many incredibly generous people have impacted the writing of this thesis. My first thank-you must go to my supervisor Dr Inge van Rij. Her passion for Hector Berlioz as well as her extraordinary generosity, patience and care continuously inspires me to aim ever beyond what I think is possible. Her insightful comments and suggestions have been an invaluable guide. I feel lucky and privileged to have worked with her for these past few years.

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Greer Garden for assisting me with my research in Paris and to Dacia Herbulock for her expertise with the French language. I would also like to thank Geoffrey Coker and the Whetu Kairangi Masonic Trust who helped to support my travels overseas. I am also grateful to Victoria University for providing me with a Victoria Masters Scholarship, without which I would not have been able to undertake this course of study.

Many thanks must go to the staff of the New Zealand School of Music, whose support and engagement with my studies has been at times thought-provoking, challenging and always encouraging.

Writing this thesis would have been nigh impossible without the love and support of my friends and family. I would like to thank my friends for at least attempting to introduce a little perspective into what can be the fraught process of research! I am particularly grateful to Jessie Prebble and Barbie Patterson for their unlimited support – the coffee, cake and wine were always appreciated.

I would not have been able to write this thesis without the practical and emotional support of three incredibly special people in my life – my partner Justin Gregory and my parents Colleen and Charlie Moore. Thank you for putting up with me and undertaking this adventure alongside me.

Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	ii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iv
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vi
Introduction	1
Part One: Early Semi Operas	
1. <i>Lélio</i>	21
2. <i>Roméo et Juliette</i>	54
Part Two: From Semi-Opera to Opera: Staging Faust	
3. Contexts of <i>La damnation de Faust</i>	102
4. Raoul Gunsbourg and <i>La damnation de Faust</i>	157
5. Robert Lepage and <i>La damnation de Faust</i>	185
Conclusion	214
Bibliography	217

List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Maurice Sand's picture of the character Léo from *Masques et bouffons* (1860). P. 35.

Figure 2: 'L'homme orchestre', lithograph by Benjamin Roubaud. P. 63.

Figure 3: John Martin's *The Deluge* 1834. P. 110.

Figure 4: Gunsbourg's diagram of Faust's study from Gunsbourg's *Livret de mise-en-scène*. P. 170.

Figure 5: Diagram detailing the props on Faust's desk from Gunsbourg's *Livret de mise-en-scène*. P. 174.

Figure 6: Diagram of rain machine from Gunsbourg's *Livret de mise-en-scène*. P. 177.

Figure 7: Diagram of panorama from Gunsbourg's *Livret de mise-en-scène*. P. 178.

Subsequent photos taken from *L'avant-scène opéra : Hector Berlioz, La damnation de Faust*, Vol. 22.

Figure 8. P. 186.

Figure 9. P. 186.

Figure 10. P. 187.

