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MUSIC ON THE SECONDARY LEVEL

A TEACHING GUIDE

NOTES ON MUSICAL SELECTIONS

Hector BERLIOZ:
LACRYMOSA (excerpt form the Requiem)

Presentation: Jean-Paul Despins

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I. BIOGRAPHY

Côte St.-André (in Isère) witnessed in 1803 the birth of one of the most illustrious representatives of French Romanticism, Hector Berlioz. At the age of seventeen, upon finishing his classical studies, he arrived in Paris quite decided to undertake the study of medicine. But a presentation of the opera "Iphigenia in Aulis" by Gluck (1714-1787) made such an impression upon him that he gave up his medical studies to devote himself entirely to music from then on.

At the age of twenty-three he succeeded in getting into the Paris Conservatory. Unable to compose using the innovative ideas of his teacher, Anton Reicha (1770-1836), probably the only qualified contrapuntist in Paris, unable to stomach the solid teaching of the most serious theoretician the Conservatory possessed, he placed his confidence in Jean-François Lesueur (1760-1837), a poor teacher and a mediocre orchestral arranger. If the latter had any lasting influence on the young Berlioz, it was mainly to give him an intense love and interest for orchestral immensity.

A born revolutionary, Berlioz joined the "Jeune France" movement, and became friends with Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, Alexandre Dumas, Sainte-Beuve, Mérimée, Balzac, and the famous painter Delacroix.

While passionately involved in Parisian life he discovered the beauty of Beethoven's symphonies. Thus inspired, he soon produced the "Ouverture des Francs Juges" (1827) and presented his famous "Symphonie Fantastique" (1830).

After winning the much coveted Prix de Rome, he accepted the post of musical critic in the "Journal des Débats" (Debating Journal). Here his frequently scathing judgments, his biting remarks, and his satirical expressions did little to attract the admiration and confidence of the musical public.

All the while performing this literary task he was creating several works quite bold in their conception and not always favorably received. In 1837 there was the "Requiem"; in 1840 followed the "Symphonie Funèbre et Triomphale"; and in 1846 came the "Damnation of Faust".

Unhappy in his married life, and having lost his only son, he retreated during the last years of his life into a state of pessimism and depression which never left him. He stopped composing and set about writing his Mémoires, which were published only after his death.

He died in Paris on March 8, 1869.

II. GENERAL CONCEPTION OF THE "REQUIEM"

On the frontispiece of the published composition we find that this Requiem, or High Mass for the Dead, Opus 5, is dedicated to the Count de Gasparin, Peer of France; that it was performed for the first time at the Eglise des Invalides on the fifth of December, 1837, for the funeral service of General Damrémont and the French officers and men who died in the taking of Constantine; and that it was published by Schlesinger and Brandos, Paris, in 1838.

Such details as these were frequently written at that time as a matter of course on the cover pages of works being published. Without giving too much importance to the many stories that surround the appearance of this work, and without paying undue attention to the malevolent critics who greeted this piece - in particular the unfair gossip which Blaze de Bury wrote in the "Revue des Deux Mondes" (1840, Volume I) - one must acknowledge the intrinsic unity of this magnificent work, its solid religious thought, and its clarity of expression which deals only distantly and reluctantly with the theatrical and the picturesque. Contrary to certain ill-considered judgements, this work is far from filled with genial and grandiloquent disorder.

This religious work, which sinks its roots deep into the universal "I" of the Romantic period, may be compared advantageously with such masterpieces as Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and his Mass in D (1770-1827), Liszt's Messe de Gran (1811-1886), and Wagner's Parsifal (1813-1883).

If Berlioz' REQUIEM does not appear to be religious music in the strict sense of the word, nevertheless it possesses all the visionary radiance of religious music, provided that we examine it with great care.

The sometimes apocalyptic aspect of this masterpiece transcends the idea of time; and the alternation of the dramatic with the intimate outpouring of personal sentiment suggests to us a poetry of sublime greatness and immensity.

These are some of the contrasting features which make of this magnificent Mass a true and valid testimonial, not so much by its social or national content as by its specifically musical quality.

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III. VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL TOOLS

4 flutes--2 oboes--2 English Horns--4 clarinets
 12 French Horns--8 bassoons--4 valve cornets-----
 4 tubas---16 timpani----tenor drum in B^b
 bass drum----4 gongs----10 cymbals
 first violins--second violins--violas--
 violoncellos
 string basses
 chorus (with tenor solo)
 four small orchestras (ensembles) made up
 of brass winds

First orchestra in North End: 4 cornets-4 trombones-2 tubas
 Second Orchestra in East End: 4 trumpets--4 trombones
 Third orchestra in West End: 4 trumpets--4 trombones
 Fourth orchestra in South End: 4 trumpets-4 trombones-4 tubas.

The CHOIRS require some two hundred participants,
 divided as follows:

- a) sopranos & altos
- b) tenors I & II
- c) Basses I & II.

The strings require a minimum of 100 instrumentalists.

The brasses are divided as follows:

12 French Horns, of which: 3 are in E
 3 are in A
 3 are in D
 3 are in C.

They are reinforced at certain points by the four small ensembles at the four points of the compass.

The percussions are composed of:

15 kettledrums, tuned as follows:

Pairs 1 and 2: "B" and "E"

Pairs 3 and 4: "G" and "D#"

Pairs 5 and 6: "A" and "D"

Pair 7 : "G" and "C"

One kettledrum: "F#" .

(All the kettle-drummers must use sticks with sponge head.)

Bass-drum, cymbals, and gong.

This enormous ensemble was required by Berlioz because he felt the need to produce, in the Eglise des Invalides, a Mass of such sonority as would fit the size of the church together with the solemn character of a truly "national" ceremony.

IV. TEXT OF THE LACRYMOSA

Liturgical Text

Lacrymosa dies illa
 Qua resurget ex favilla.
 Judicandus homo reus,
 Huic ergo parce Deus.
 Pie Jesu Domine,
 Dona eis requiem.
 AMEN

Berlioz' Text

Lacrymosa dies illa
 Qua resurget ex favilla.
 Judicandus homo reus.

 Pie Jesu Domine,
 Dona eis requiem
 Aeternam.

English Translation

Mournful day! that day of sighs
 When from dust shall man arise,
 Stained with guilt his doom to know,
 Mercy, Lord, on him bestow.
 Jesus kind! Thy souls release,
 Lead them thence to realms of peace.
 Amen.

Note that Berlioz omits the "Huic ergo parce Deus" and the "Amen", but adds the word "Aeternam" (eternal). When we listen to the Lacrymosa we perceive that Berlioz is constantly shifting the text about, now changing the order of certain phrases, now omitting some, each time that a point of expression, or the melodic or harmonic structure, inclines him to do so.

Written below is the Gregorian Chant text of the Lacrymosa. Gregorian Chant has disappeared almost completely from our daily life. This is a great loss when one realizes the capital importance it has had in the development of music.

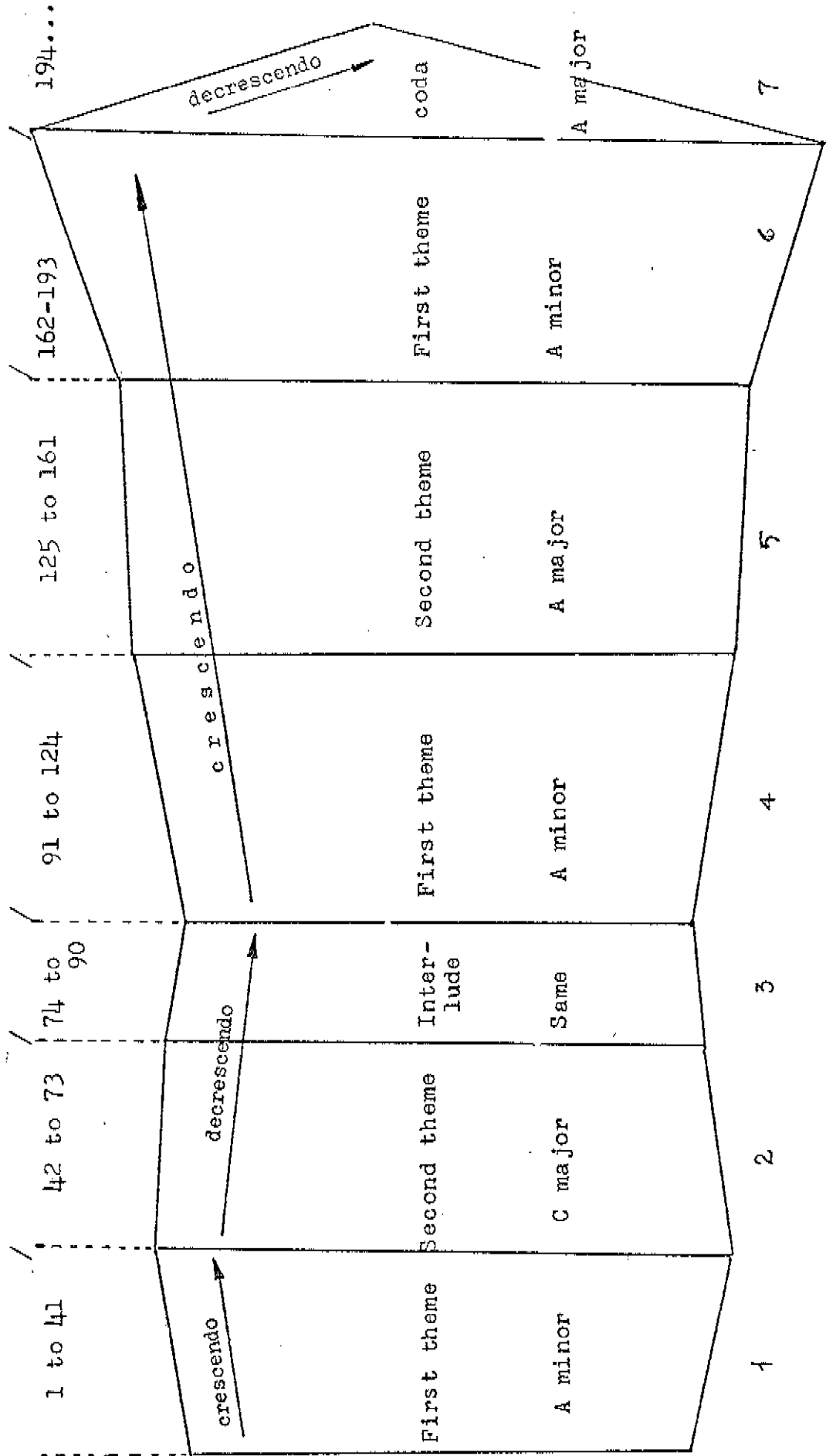


nis. Lacri-mó-sa dí-es illa. Qua re-súrget ex fa-villa

Ju-di-cándus hó-mo ré-us; Hú-ic ergo pár-ce, Dé-us.

Pí-e Jé-su Dó-mine, dó-na é-is réqui-em. A-men.

V. GENERAL PLAN OF THE LACRYMOSA



One can easily distinguish the imitations which take place between the sopranos and the tenors at the words, "Qua resurget.....homo reus."

Musical score for measures 14-19. The score is written for three vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor) and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "La-cry-mo-sa di-es il-la! qua re-us. La-cry-mo-sa! qua sur-get ex-fa-vil-la, ho-mo re-us, re-sur-get ex-fa-vil-la, ho-mo re-us,"

As conclusion of this first theme the basses, the tenors, and the sopranos and altos attack the word "lacrymosa" one after the other, while we hear the persistent tremolo of the violins and violas.

Musical score for measures 36-39. The score is written for three vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor) and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "us. La-cry-mo-sa di-es il-la, sa di-es il-la, di-es di-es il-la, di-es"

2. Second Theme, in C major, from Bar 42 to Bar 73.

This second theme brings with it a moderate toning down, as compared with the nervous style of the first. However it is evident that Berlioz uses the first theme in a modified form to accompany the second. This system of a periodical use all through the piece of the main theme or its essential parts was employed systematically by Berlioz for the first time in his "Symphonie Fantastique" of 1830. This is what he came to call his "idée-fixe" (fixed idea). Such a procedure appears along the same lines with the "leitmotif" (leading motif) used by Wagner in his musical productions.

Sopr. II. Soli. *p dolce assai* 43 44 45 46 47

La-cry - mo - sa di - es il - la!

Tenor I. Soli. *p dolce assai*

La-cry - mo - sa di - es il - la!

p

La - cry - mo - - - sa di - es il - - - - la,

This arrangement allows us to perceive a certain redundancy of words and of rhythms typical of Berlioz. This form of expression, of repeated insistence, brings with it the idea of expressive massiveness, momentarily endowing the whole ensemble with a new dynamism. In the following example it is the phrase "dies illa" which stands forth.

f 59 60 61 62

La - - - cry - mo - - - sa di - es il - la! la - - - cry - mo -

La - - - cry - mo - - - sa di - es il - la! la - - - cry - mo -

p

La - - - cry - mo - - - sa di - - es di - es - il - la! la - - - cry - mo -

63 64 65 66

sa di - es il - - - la! di - - - - es il - - -

sa di - es il - - - la! di - - - - es il - - -

sa di - es il - - - la! la - cry - mo - sa di - - - - es il -

3. Interlude, Bars 74 to 90.

Before plunging back into the delirious excitement of the first theme, Berlioz inserts a graceful intermezzo, full of serenity, on the words, "Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem." (Kind Lord Jesus, give them rest.) It is the calm before the storm. The absence of all reference to the rhythm of the first theme, which is completely abandoned, must be underlined. Meanwhile a new accompaniment motif given to the second violins and violas is introduced. It is a sort of perpetual motion which emphasizes the meaning of the expression, "Requiem aeternam" ("Eternal rest").

The musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "us. Pi - e Je - su". The second staff is another vocal line with lyrics: "us. Pi - e Je - su pi - e Je - su". The third staff is a piano accompaniment with a "pp" (pianissimo) dynamic. The fourth staff is a piano accompaniment with a "dolce" marking. The fifth staff is a piano accompaniment with a "dolce" marking. The score is marked with bar numbers 74, 77, and 78.

It is interesting to note also the syllabic "ostinato" of the basses which is expressed continually in a sort of expressive speech, first on the tonic C, then on the leading note.

4. First Theme, in A minor, Bars 91 to 124.

The inaugural syncopated motif on the up-beat returns, and with it the vigorous reprise of the first theme. But this time the intervention of four small brass orchestras (ensembles) and the diabolical rolling of the kettledrums makes this section still more terrifying.

102 103 104 105 106 107

I. Pato solo.

III. Pato solo. *-f> p* *-f> p* *-f> p* *-f> p*

V. Pato solo. *-f> p* *-f> p* *-f> p* *-f> p*

5. Second theme in A major, Bars 125 to 161.

This time Berlioz, instead of modulating into C major, as he did at the beginning, enters at full speed in A major. The faint light of hope of the C major changes here into a brilliant burst of light filled with promise. Furthermore, he varies the manner of presenting this second theme. Compare the following two entries while fixing your attention on the word "Lacrymosa".

A)

pp 126 127

La-cry - mo - sa di -

Tenor I. *pp*

La - cry - mo - sa

p

La - cry - mo - sa

B)

141 142

La - cry - mo - sa di - es

mo - sa di - es, di -

La - cry - mo - sa di - es,

A combined vocal and instrumental unison, in crescendo, brings us back to A minor, and is followed by a terrifying cry on the word "qua" ("when"). What descriptive syllabic music! This fragment, sung in unison by the whole choir, even while making us almost forget the meaning of the word, nevertheless becomes an instrumental force that suggest to us the cry of the soul in anguish.

The musical score shows four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are in unison, with lyrics: '- get, ho - mo re - us, qua, qua'. The piano accompaniment features a tremolo in the strings and a powerful timpani rhythm. The score is marked with bar numbers 157, 158, 159, and 160.

6. First theme in A minor, bars 162 to 193.

With this final reprise of the first theme we arrive at the highest point of dramatic intensity in the work. The whole orchestral palette is brought together in unison for a moment, and we hear the fury of the timpani at the same time as the querulous tremolo of the strings.

164 165 166 167

f - sur - get ju - di - can - dus ho - mo re - us, qua re - sur - get ex fa

f - sur - get ju - di - can - dus ho - mo re - us, qua re - sur - get ex fa

f qua re - sur - get ho - mo, ho - mo re - us, qua re - sur - get ex fa

168 169 170 171

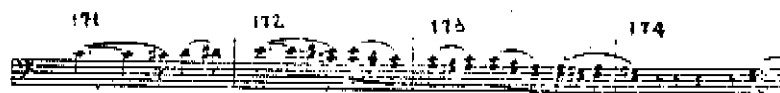
f vil - la: La - cry - mo - sa di - es, la - cry - mo - sa, la - cry -

f vil - la: La - cry - mo - sa di - es, la - cry - mo - sa di - es, la - cry

f vil - la: La - cry - mo - sa di - es, la - cry - mo - sa, la - cry

Bars 171 to 173 give us an idea of the character of the higher notes of the bassoon. In his treatise on instrumentation and orchestration (page 128), Berlioz has this to say about their use: "(They have) something about them that is painful, suffering, I might even say miserable; so that they may be placed sometimes in either a slow melody or an accompaniment setting with the most surprising effect."

For him, then, the higher notes of the bassoon come strangely close to the human voice, and have a touching and plaintive quality.



Bars 175 to 178 present the theme in long notes:

Musical notation for bars 175 to 179, showing a vocal line with lyrics and dynamic markings. The lyrics are: "quâ re - sur - get ex fa - vil - - - là - ju-di-can -". The dynamic marking is *ff*.

In bar 179 a surprise chord in B-flat major, upon the resounding entrance of the brasses, brings the movement to a veritable paroxysm, during which we distinguish an ascending chromatic movement played by the violins. This movement is followed by a nervous tremolo and then intensified by the appearance of the timpani.

180 181 182 183

cresc. molto

ff

7. Conclusion. (Bars 194 to the end.)

Berlioz, in a gesture of hope, creates a kind of chiaroscuro (light-and-shadow) effect by presenting a sketch of the main theme in the key of A major. During the last measures a closely woven arabesque by the 'cellos, violas, clarinets and bassoons comes to sustain the final cadence, which fades away peacefully in a superb decrescendo. The twelve strokes of the bass drum in the midst of an orchestra that has regained its calmness, strokes which accentuate the voices interspersed with silences, achieve an effect of astonishing beauty.

195 Sopr. I. II. 196 197
 di - es il - la, di -
 Ten. I. II.
 di - es il - la, di -
 Bass.
 di - es il - la, di -

198 199 200 201
 es il - la!
 es il - la!
 es il - la!

So that Berlioz concludes this magnificent page not in the despair of a Midnight fraught with darkness but in the serenity of a Midnight that precedes the Dawn!

Jean-Paul Despins.

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LIST OF RECORDINGS.

Album of two records on the label PHILIPS 6500-024-025.
An explanatory folder (6700-019) is inserted in the
box.

Conductor: Colin Davis.
Place: Westminster Cathedral in 1970.
Choirs and London Symphony Orchestra.

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