

## Program Notes

by April L. Racana

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## Georges Bizet (1838-1875) Symphony No. 1 in C major

Best known for his opera *Carmen*, Georges Bizet would not live long enough to discover that his final work had become one of the world's most well-loved operas in spite of its rough start. (In Paris at the Opéra-Comique its premiere was postponed by a number of delays, and the first performances received much criticism from both the audiences and theatre critics of the time). In a life that was cut short at a very young age, even his first symphony would not be discovered until nearly eight decades after it was composed.

*Symphony in C Major* was composed when Bizet was only seventeen years old, as part of an assignment given to him by his teacher Charles Gounod at the Paris Conservatory. In fact, Bizet had entered the conservatory just prior to his tenth birthday after his musical parents had realized his talents. It was there he would receive a number of prizes for his musical works, including the Prix de Rome in 1857. That prize would give him an allowance for five years for further studies as well as time devoted to composing. When he was still a student at the conservatory he had been assigned the task to transcribe Gounod's first symphony (Symphony No. 1 in D) for two pianos. This would give Bizet detailed knowledge of his professor's work and apparently inspired him in his own first symphonic assignment.

Berlioz began composing his first symphony in October of 1855 and completed it by the end of November that same year. The composer never sought to have it published or performed during his lifetime. Instead many scholars believe that the young Bizet felt it owed too much to his mentor's own first symphony, especially as he was still a student, so he kept it in his files where it soon became forgotten. Eventually the collection of all

of Bizet's sketches and works would be donated to the Paris Conservatory where they would remain stored in the archives. It wasn't until 1933 when the musicologist Jean Chantavoine was doing inventory of the Bizet collection that this first symphony was discovered. On February 26, 1935, Bizet's Symphony in C would finally be premiered in Basel, Switzerland by conductor Felix Weingartner.

Some scholars believe Bizet was paying homage in many ways to Gounod by presenting his first symphonic work in the same framework as his mentor, even quoting directly from Gounod's Symphony in D throughout. However, most scholars also believe that Bizet took Gounod's ideas even further, highlighting the musical innovation that would eventually find its way into later works such as *L'Arlesienne* and *Carmen*.

Presented in four movements, the lively opening and closing movements are set in traditional sonata form. The slower second movement features the oboe playing the main theme in the key of A minor. The third movement mirrors Gounod's with its drone in the low strings over a rustic wind ensemble. And though the similarities are apparent between the student and the master's symphonic compositions, the youth of the former can be heard throughout. As one critic, A. Peter Brown described: "As befits the composer's youth, the *Symphony in C Major* exudes infectious energy and good spirits: Gounod charms the ear but Bizet excites it." Bizet himself later acknowledged how much he owed Gounod, writing to him: "You were the beginning of my life as an artist. I spring from you..." [Wright, 1993]

**Work composed:** 1855 **World premiere:** February 26, 1935, Basel, conducted by Felix Weingartner

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

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## Franz Liszt (1811-1886) A Faust Symphony, s.108

Franz Liszt is perhaps known best for his prowess as a pianist, but was equally proficient at composing, as well as writing transcriptions of his own and others' works. In fact it is believed that Liszt's transcription of Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy* led him to explore further the cyclic form of thematic transformations. It was during Liszt's years in Weimar when he especially developed this 'transformation technique', which has been described as a type of variation technique where there is a particular theme that can be heard throughout the work. However, it is altered in fundamental ways, such as in its rhythm, tempo, harmonic treatment, and general character. It is this cyclic form of thematic transformations that he took to an even higher level in this work, *A Faust Symphony*.

Up until his appointment as music director in Weimar, Liszt had been active as a concert virtuoso travelling worldwide, becoming recognized as one of the best pianists of his time. He had also composed during this time, primarily for his own instrument, but his time in Weimar allowed him to concentrate on composing for larger orchestral ensembles. During the decade he worked as music director in Weimar, Liszt would compose twelve symphonic poems and two symphonies, as well as complete his two piano concertos, among other works.

Based on the characters in Johann von Goethe's *Faust*, and subtitled 'in Three Character Sketches', Liszt sets out to portray the three characters as they develop in the narrative by Goethe. Each of the three movements uses the technique of thematic transformation, not to tell the story per se, but instead to display the various nuances of each character as they are impacted by one another throughout the various events that take place.

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The first movement focuses on Faust, with two themes portraying his scholarly side as well as his romantic inclinations, the themes developing and changing as Faust's character does. Here Liszt employs a twelve-tone theme to highlight Faust's academic struggles and pursuits, while the second theme in the oboe uses a descending melodic seventh leap to portray his romantic longings.

The contrast in the second movement is meant to paint a portrait of the more calm and steady character of Gretchen. And the third movement's depiction of Mephistopheles twists many of the themes previously heard as this evil spirit attempts to influence the other characters. Liszt takes the musical thematic transformations to their fullest and most brilliant extreme here.

Composed between the years 1854-1857, a revised ending added in the later version includes a 'chorus mysticus' of male voices, together with a tenor solo, entoning the words from Goethe's *Faust*, ("All things transitory..."). Many scholars believe that Liszt's *Faust Symphony* took programmatic music to the next level, influencing many composers after him including Strauss, Debussy, Stravinsky, Wagner, and Schoenberg, with its orchestral as well as its harmonic, melodic, and thematic innovations.

**Work composed:** 1854 **World premiere:** September 5, 1857 in Weimar, the unveiling of the Goethe and Schiller monument, conducted by the composer  
**Instrumentation:** piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (triangle, cymbals), harp, organ, strings, solo tenor, male chorus

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A Faust Symphony (in Three Character Pictures),  
after Goethe - Final Chorus (chorus mysticus) /  
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Original German	English Translation
<p>Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis, das Unzulängliche, hier wird's Ereignis, das Unbeschreibliche, hier wird es getan, das Ewigweibliche zieht uns hinan.</p>	<p>All transitory things are but a likeness; what is insufficient, here becomes a true event; what is unwritten, here is accomplished; the eternal feminine draws us upwards.</p>

English translations by Keith Anderson

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Piano: Izumi Tateno

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Mahler:  
Symphony No. 1 "Titan"

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