

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra  
2018-2019 Mellon Grand Classics Season

March 8 and 10, 2019

MANFRED HONECK, CONDUCTOR

HECTOR BERLIOZ

*La Damnation de Faust*  
Dramatic Legend in Four Parts, Opus 24

Part I  
Part II

Intermission

Part III  
Part IV

Faust ..... Charles Castronovo  
Mephistopheles ..... Luca Pisaroni  
Marguerite ..... Clementine Margaine  
Brander ..... Alexander Elliott

Peasants, Gnomes and Sylphs, Soldiers and Students,  
Demons and The Damned, Celestial Spirits

MENDELSSOHN CHOIR OF PITTSBURGH  
MATTHEW MEHAFFEY, DIRECTOR

PITTSBURGH YOUTH CHORUS  
SHAWN FUNK, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

## PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

### HECTOR BERLIOZ

#### *The Damnation of Faust*, Dramatic Legend in Four Parts, Opus 24 (1845-1846)

**Hector Berlioz was born in Côte-Saint-André, France on December 11, 1803, and died in Paris on March 8, 1869. He composed *The Damnation of Faust* from 1845-1846, and it was premiered in Paris at the Opéra Comique with Berlioz himself conducting. The Pittsburgh Symphony has performed the complete work three times in its history, including in March 1951 with conductor Paul Paray, May 1969 with conductor William Steinberg, and most recently in November 1986 in both Heinz Hall and New York's Avery Fisher Hall with conductor Charles Dutoit. The score calls for three piccolos, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, four bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, two tubas (originally one tuba and one ophicleide), timpani, percussion, two harps and strings. Performance time: approximately 2 hour 30 minutes.**

There was a historical Faust. The Doctor Faustus who provided one of the most enduring figures in Western folklore and literature lived in Germany in the early 16th century, gaining a wide reputation as a necromancer, astrologer, alchemist and sorcerer. So extraordinary were his powers, so tangled the path of his life, so evil his reputation, that the popular belief sprang up that he was in league with the devil himself; Faustus more than once referred to that unearthly force as his "crony." Though many scholars accused him of being nothing more than a brazen charlatan, he threw enough of a fright into the fledgling Protestant clergy that he was denounced by Luther and Melanchthon. Soon after his death, around 1540, Faust came to symbolize the man endowed with special powers during his earthly life at the cost of his own eternal damnation. The tales about Faust first found their way into literature when they were woven through the *Faustbuch*, published by a now-unknown author in 1587, in which Faust was made to give accounts of legendary, ancient and medieval sorcerers and occultists from his own merciless point of view. The incarnation of the lord of the underworld, Mephistopheles — savage, ironical, scheming, wicked — and his hellish domain were made chillingly vivid in that telling. Translations quickly spread the *Faustbuch* across Europe, and by 1604, the English dramatist Christopher Marlowe had produced his *History of D. Faustus*, which retained some of the coarse humor and sensational images of the original work but added to them a certain dignity and tragedy. Plays and puppet shows on the Faust theme were popular for the next two centuries, as were manuals of magic bearing Faust's name explaining how to avoid a pact with the devil, or, if it came to that, how to break one. In 1784, the German rationalist writer Gotthold Lessing tried to redeem Faust in an unfinished play by depicting him as a noble man in pursuit of knowledge at any cost. This redemptive thread was taken up by Goethe in his renowned transfiguration of the Faust legend into a cosmic treatise on man's relation to the universe. (Part I was published in 1808; Part II in 1832, shortly after the author's death.)

In 1827, Gérard de Nerval published his French translation of Goethe's *Faust, Part I*. Hector Berlioz, 24, consumed by the fit of raging passion for the English actress Harriet Smithson that flared into the *Symphonie Fantastique*, and primed to consume the most profound and moving experiences and ideas, devoured it. "This marvelous book fascinated me from the very first moment," he wrote. "I could not put it down. I read it incessantly, at meals, in the theater, in the street, everywhere. This translation in prose contained some versified fragments, songs, hymns, etc. I yielded to the temptation of setting them to music." The result was the *Eight Scenes from "Faust"* for voices and orchestra of 1829, which Berlioz had printed ("foolishly," he later admitted) at his own expense — actually, financed by a loan from one of his students — and sent off to Goethe for the great man's opinion. ("Berlioz shrank from nothing. Had Virgil been alive, a copy of *Les Troyens* would have undoubtedly been mailed to Rome promptly upon publication," chided Louis Biancolli.) Goethe, whose musical taste was both untrained and conservative, sought advice on the score from his friend Carl Zelter, the distinguished Berlin composer, choir master and teacher of Mendelssohn. They concluded that Berlioz's music merited unstinted vilification, and in a letter to him compared it to "a fragment of an abortion resulting from a hideous incest." Berlioz did not bother to reply.

Berlioz's *Faust* then laid fallow until 1845, when he was on an extended concert tour of Austria, Hungary and Germany. He collected some scraps from the earlier *Eight Scenes*, largely concocted his

own text on the Faust tales, and set to work on his “dramatic legend” while bouncing along in a coach between Eastern European cities. (He left a detailed account of the work’s genesis in his fascinating *Memoirs*.) The piece, titled *The Damnation of Faust*, was completed in Paris the following year, and first heard at the Opéra-Comique in December. The premiere was a disaster. Hardly half of the seats were filled, and Berlioz acquired some 10,000 francs in debt. “Nothing in my career as an artist has wounded me more deeply,” he admitted. It was not until 1876, seven years after his death, that *The Damnation of Faust* achieved success, and then immediately, almost ironically, became his most popular work in Paris — it had to be repeated constantly for six weeks, and was given an average of a half-dozen times annually by the prestigious Colonne Orchestra for the next 25 years.

The success of the *Damnation of Faust* was due in no small part to the originality and impact of its orchestral writing, demonstrated nowhere better than in the score’s most famous moment, the thrilling *Rákóczy March*, whose circuitous route into the finished work Berlioz related in his *Memoirs*: “The night before my departure from Vienna for Hungary, a Viennese amateur well up on the ways of the country I was to visit came to see me, bringing a volume of old airs. ‘If you want the Hungarians to like you,’ he said, ‘write a piece on one of their national tunes.’” Berlioz chose the song written in 1809 by John Bihari to honor the Rákóczys, a noble family long active in the Hungarian struggle for freedom from Austria. The piece Berlioz erected on Bihari’s theme was received tumultuously by the Hungarian patriots when the composer premiered it in Pesth on February 15, 1846. More than simply a stirring march (George Bernard Shaw wrote that he would “charge out and capture Trafalgar Square single-handed” if it lasted one minute more), the *Rákóczy March* seemed to the Hungarians to distill the essence of their fiery calls for independence that were to erupt in violence two years later. Such was the success of this piece that Berlioz made room for it in the finished *Damnation of Faust* by incongruously transporting his German hero to a Hungarian plain to witness a charge of the national cavalry. “I should not have hesitated to bring him in any other direction if it would have benefited the piece,” explained the pragmatic composer.

Berlioz authority Wolfgang Dömling provided the following précis of the dramatic progress of *The Damnation of Faust*:

“PART I (Scenes 1-3). Faust, alone at sunrise in a meadow, revels in the loveliness of springtime and the joys of his solitary way of life. The tranquil pastoral scene is disturbed, however, first by country folk singing a round, and then by a regiment of fully armed soldiers marching off to battle (*Rákóczy March*). Faust quickly withdraws from this scene.

“PART 2 (Scenes 4-8). Alone in his study, Faust resolves to put an end to his profoundly melancholy mood by taking poison. The sounds of the Easter hymn restrain him, however, and he returns to everyday matters and the consolations of religion. All of a sudden, Mephistopheles appears and promises Faust, who at first is highly sceptical, a life of the utmost good fortune and pleasure. The next setting is Auerbach’s cellar in Leipzig, where students are carousing and singing; Mephistopheles enters with Faust and sings his *Flea Song*. In the following scene, on the banks of the Elbe, Mephistopheles casts a sleeping spell over Faust and then entices him with tantalizingly seductive dreams; he is allowed a glimpse of his future love, Marguerite. On awaking, Faust demands to meet her. The last scene is taken up by a procession of soldiers and students.

“PART 3 (Scenes 9-14). Faust has been led by Mephistopheles into Marguerite’s chamber and awaits her with passionate longing. Marguerite appears, and Faust, hiding behind a curtain, learns that she too has dreamed of him as her future beloved. Lost in a reverie, she sings the *Ballad of the King of Thule*. Rounding off his magic feats with a flourish, Mephistopheles conjures up a grand dance of the will-o’-the-wisps [a ‘will-o’-the-wisp’ is a natural phenomenon of flickering light produced by the evening combustion of marsh gases, known to have led many travelers astray. In modern parlance, a ‘will-o’-the-wisp’ is an elusive thought or a misleading idea], and seductively sings an ironically ‘moral’ song. Faust and Marguerite discover one another and declare their mutual love. Their tryst is rudely interrupted by rowdy neighbors and Mephistopheles’ interference.

“PART 4 (Scenes 15-20). In a highly dramatic solo scene, Marguerite pours out her fervent love for Faust, but a passing troop of soldiers makes it clear that she will never see him again. Faust himself is alone in the wilderness, this time in a desperate mood. Mephistopheles appears and forces Faust to sign a document that will free Marguerite from prison, to which she has been condemned for murdering her mother. They set off, but Mephistopheles drags Faust down into Hell, where his arrival is greeted with demoniac glee. Marguerite, who has repented of her sins, is received into Heaven with all kindness.”