Chapter One

Berlioz in the Year of the *Symphonie fantastique*

Et l'inexorable mélodie retentissant à mon oreille
jusque dans ce léthargique sommeil…

—Berlioz, *Lélio ou Le Retour à la vie*

At Berlioz's funeral, the eulogy pronounced by the President of the Académie des Beaux-Arts of the Institut de France, Eugène Guillaume, included the following passage:

> At an early age, Berlioz was irresistibly drawn to music. From the outset, his strong will led him to repudiate some of the wrong-headed and frivolous conventions of the art. He was only at the beginning of his career, and yet his originality was already abundantly in evidence. His first work, the *Symphonie fantastique*, established his reputation.[1]

Guillaume was among the many who assumed, correctly, that the *Symphonie fantastique* was the source of Berlioz's celebrity; he was also among the many who assumed, incorrectly, that the *Fantastique* was the composer's "first work." Earlier, Henri Blaze had likewise written that Berlioz first came before the public with the *Symphonie fantastique*, striding on to the musical scene "with the wild look of a Jacobin of 1793."[2] The error is minor but indicative: talked about incessantly during the composer's lifetime with a partisanship equaled in passion only by that which met the introduction in France of the music of Richard Wagner, the *Symphonie fantastique*, well before the composer's demise, became synonymous with both his name and his role as an *agent provocateur* of musical discourse and debate. Its sketches, drafts, self-borrowings, and several versions have now been scanned, its literary and autobiographical sources have now been well studied. Scholars old and new

have found the symphony and its program eminently apt for analysis, psychoanalysis, and criticism. Does anything remain to be said?

The answer, I believe, is yes. The practical details of its first performance, for example, can be further clarified by documents preserved at the Musée Hector-Berlioz at La Côte-Saint-André: that Berlioz had over fifteen hundred programs run off between November 22 and November 29, 1830, and six hundred publicity posters printed between November 29 and December 3, tells us something of his urgent last-minute preparations for the concert; that he was renting violas, double basses, bows, strings, and mutes up to and including the very day of the première tells us much about the preparedness of his orchestra.[3] And as for the narrative program of this "Épisode de la vie d'un artiste," the storied document which the composer distributed to the audience and attached to the score, new literary sources continue to turn up. In an out-of-the-way book, for example, I was pleased to discover a certain "Épisode de la vie d'un voyageur," in which a young man wanders round Paris for a month trying to find the beautiful young woman he has seen but once—a woman whose image appears before his mind's eye, like an *idée fixe*, whenever he sees a rose.[4] The woman meets a tragic fate. Did Berlioz—who tells us of the extraordinary images he saw in his *own* mind's eye[5]—read this book?

These are matters of detail—fascinating, perhaps; far-reaching, perhaps not. There are larger issues, however, which in my view merit more extensive consideration. The *ranz des vaches* that opens and closes the third movement is nowhere to be found in the official repertories of such Alpine melodies,[6] nor does it closely resemble the *ranz des vaches*, which we can be sure our composer knew, in Rossini's *Guillaume Tell.* Is this Berlioz's invention? The "*Dies irae*" of the finale is authentic plainsong, and thus, for some, "sanctified." Was not the parody of the chant—indeed, the mockery of the Gregorian melody (I am thinking of bars 157–162 and other corresponding passages)—an audacious conception at a time when the Catholic Church was powerfully influential upon the censors of the arts, and when sacrilege, for example, was punishable by death? Indeed, is this not what Ludwig Börne had in mind when he called the work "heretical" and even "licentious"?[7] As for the "*Marche au supplice*," which Berlioz claimed was written "in one night"[8]: was the composer here taking a stand, indirectly, on the preeminent issue on everyone's mind at the time of the trial of Charles X's disgraced ministers—the issue that caused Alfred de Vigny to mold his drama *La Maréchal d'Ancre* around the fundamental idea of "the abolition of the death penalty" and Lamartine to enter the political arena with his *Ode contre la peine de mort*?[9] Regardless of its origins in the opera *Les Francs-Juges*, from which it

was most definitely extricated (even if the precise date of the surviving source of the march is uncertain), this music—ominous, brilliant, triumphalist—is celebratory in a way that a musical condemnation of capital punishment, if one could imagine such a thing, would not be. In its original guise—if its placement in the libretto of Berlioz's early opera has been correctly identified[10]—it is rather a music for the brutal soldiers of a cruel usurper, for a salute to tyranny, for an acknowledgement of despotism, or so one might wish to conjecture, even though in music, violence, like other emotional attributes, resists facile interpretation. The final fifteen bars of the march, you will perhaps remember, give us the final cry of the love-crazed murderer, the thwack of the guillotine, the thump of the severed head as it falls from the scaffold, and the mighty if macabre applause of the crowd.

The meaning of this gesture, more obviously pictorial than any other in the work, is not readily interpreted. If it does suggest approval of the ultimate punishment, then it puts the composer at odds, not only with Lamartine and Vigny, but also with Charles Nodier and, most famously, with Victor Hugo. The matter needs review in the light of the larger political history of France from the waning years of the Bourbon Restoration to the collapse of the Second Empire; clarification of his stance on the death penalty would further illuminate the picture we have of the composer of the *Symphonie fantastique*. At the end of her life, in 2018, the Berlioz scholar Katherine Kolb was at work on a book entitled *Music After the Guillotine*; it is sad that we do not have the light she would have cast on this dark matter.

Paris in 1830

The year of the *Symphonie fantastique*—1830—was marked at the end of July by a three-day revolution, *Les Trois Glorieuses*, that altered lingering eighteenth-century governmental procedures and pointed the country in a new direction. The political battles that pitted radicals against reactionaries and that resulted in the modest compromise of Louis-Philippe and the July Monarchy had their counterparts in the arts. Most notable among them was, of course, the *bataille d'Hernani*, the controversy that surrounded the opening of Victor Hugo's tragedy, at the Théâtre-Français (what we more commonly call the Comédie-Française), on February 25, 1830, and its proclamation, in the preface, of "freedom in art, freedom in society: *this* is the double goal which all just and reasonable individuals must work to achieve." Those who objected to Hugo's novel techniques (of poetry inflected by drama, of stage action, of set

design, and more), were likened to the partisans of the Ancien Régime; those who applauded their virtues were likened to the new champions of Liberté, Égalité, and Fraternité.

But a play—a spoken performance, a work of literature—is not readily transformed into an immediately graspable symbol of struggle. That honor was bestowed upon the most notable painting of the year, and subsequently one of the most famous paintings of the canon, *La Liberté guidant le peuple*, subtitled "le 28 juillet," by Eugène Delacroix. This work, executed in the autumn of 1830 and now, after a checkered history, hanging proudly in the Louvre, adorned the announcement, in 1841, of the socialist Louis Blanc's history of the eighteen-thirties, just as it did the posters announcing the socialist Francois Mitterrand's election to the French presidency one hundred forty years later, in 1981. For the cover of the catalogue of an important international exhibition of French painting in the age of revolution, the editors chose Delacroix's *Liberté*. The painting itself, now widely considered a *chef-d'œuvre* of bold design, vivid figuration, and powerful color, is for art historians simply unthinkable apart from the circumstances of its creation: it is a work that succeeds "in joining the world of modern historical fact and traditional allegory," as the art historian Robert Rosenblum has put it, "in a turbulent, explosive vision that elevates the street fighting of Paris to a hymn to the universal ideal of liberty."[11] Reproduced in the history manuals for generations of French school children, it is in some ways a visual symbol of France itself.

It is not my intention here to sing the praises of Delacroix's early masterpiece. It is rather to note, in the context of a musicological essay, that this literally revolutionary painting was produced by an artist whose public career up to 1830 was intrinsically linked to French "officialdom." *La Barque de Dante*, exhibited at the Salon of 1822, was purchased by Louis XVIII; *La Scène des massacres de Scio*, exhibited at the Salon of 1824, was purchased at the instigation of Charles X; *Justinien dictant les Instituts* was commissioned in 1827 by Charles's Conseil d'État. Though scandalized by the overt sensuality of *La Mort de Sardanapale* (1827), the government's Director of Fine Arts, Vicomte Sosthène de La Rochefoucauld, commissioned the artist (in 1828) to paint *La Mort de Charles le Téméraire*, which was offered by Charles X to the city of Nancy. Meanwhile, having established a relationship with the other branch of the royal family, Delacroix painted *La Messe du Cardinal de Richelieu*, in 1829, on commission from the Duc d'Orléans, the future King Louis-Philippe. *La Liberté* itself, purchased by Louis-Philippe, was originally destined to hang in the Salle du Trône at the Tuileries Palace. It is thus fair

to say that Delacroix's artistic well-being—and he was of course not alone—depended heavily upon governmental good will, governmental commission, governmental exhibition, and governmental purchase.

Delacroix's *La Mort de Sardanapale*, among other paintings, has been convincingly interpreted as an attack on the absolutist pretensions of Charles X.[12] But not all critics equated artistic daring with political ideology. Furthermore, in 1830, Delacroix's *Liberté* was read in some quarters as a glorification of revolution, and in others as a condemnation of such turbulence, presumably because of the graphic reality of certain details.[13] The man himself was apparently something of a dandy who enjoyed regular social intercourse with the aristocratic world of Paris. From the documents preserved—his famous *Journal* leaps from 1824 to 1847, but letters from the intervening period do exist—it appears clear that Delacroix recognized the abuses of the régime of Charles X, that he had confidence in Louis-Philippe, and that he was pleased by the rapid return to public order after the three-day revolution.[14] More generally it can be said that Delacroix stood with those who championed the cause of "liberty" even well before his explicit tribute painted after the revolution in 1830. The Greek War of Independence against the Turks, the latter viewed as barbarians, had for a decade been supported by the activists of the Romantic generation in France. Delacroix would celebrate the Greek combat with several important works, including *La Grèce sur les ruines de Missolonghi* (begun in 1821) and *La Scène des massacres de Scio*, his first monumental tableau. Some of the sketches and drafts for these two works were later to play a direct role in the composition of *La Liberté guidant de peuple*.[15]

This painting, in sum, has been viewed by certain modern critics as simply representative of historical fact. By others it has been seen as "saturated" with ideology.[16] Delacroix himself is viewed variously as close to the political imbroglios of his generation or as far from the revolutionary crowd. One thing is certain: the artist's life and the artist's work can be justly interpreted only in the light of the political history of his day. Even for such an apparently innocuous matter as the interpretation of the "peuple" of the title, Delacroix's work must be considered in terms of reference beyond those of painting alone. Did he mean "la classe ouvrière" ("the working class")? Or did he mean "tout le monde" ("everyone")? We shall hear more of Delacroix in chapter 7.

Berlioz in 1830

In a summary of Berlioz's activities of 1830, the editor of his *Correspondance générale*, Pierre Citron, mentions "politics" but once. July 28, 1830: Berlioz leaves his "cell" (at the Palais de l'Institut) and finds Paris in the midst of revolution. "He wanders through the streets and procures a rifle. But despite his ardent desire to join the battle for freedom, he finds no opportunity to fight and feels ashamed for having served no useful purpose."[17] If one takes Berlioz at his word—that his desire to battle for liberty was "ardent"—then one must assume such a desire was present both before and after the three-day revolution; one must assume the composer, like the other young modernists in the circle around Victor Hugo, was a believer in both political and artistic liberty, and, perhaps worth saying, in their reciprocal relationship. What is the evidence of this? Berlioz most assuredly did not go around inscribing "Vive la liberté" on the walls of Paris during the eighteen-twenties; nor did he parade around town waving the tricolored flag that Delacroix featured in his famous painting. Those who wished at the time to champion the cause of liberty spoke out, as did Byron and Lamartine and Casimir Delavigne and others, in favor of the Greeks and their war of independence. And in fact, during his student days, Berlioz did so as well. On a libretto prepared by his friend Humbert Ferrand, Berlioz began in the fall of 1825 to compose a work entitled *Scène héroïque pour grands chœurs et grand orchestre*, or, *La Révolution grecque*. In his correspondence of the time Berlioz does not insist on the political message of the libretto. But the subject was *ipso facto* political: the call to arms, in Berlioz's score, is set to music of great fire and brimstone; the message to other countries, in the printed libretto, is clear:

> Europe, bestir thyself! See them dying!
> O God of the powerful, render your sword visible in their hands!
> Only should you deign with your strength to assist their gallant efforts,
> Will their blows ring true, will their frailty become might.[18]

Until the astonishing rediscovery of the *Messe solennelle* (1824), in 1991, *La Révolution grecque*, whose first version was completed in 1826, was the earliest extended work by Berlioz that had come down to us in its entirety. Though in form it is old-fashioned—shaped like a Rome Prize cantata and not illogically viewed as a warm-up exercise for the kind of work Berlioz would compose for the competition—its content was of decidedly current interest, and literally pro-Greek-revolutionary. The music is harmonically

unadventurous and rhythmically repetitive, and while Berlioz revised a part of the score in 1833, for a prospective performance in honor of the third anniversary of the July Revolution, he reused its main musical ideas in no subsequent work—quite the opposite of his later appropriation of the score of the *Messe solennelle*, and a small suggestion that, in hindsight, he was little satisfied by that earlier effort.

Berlioz's major work in 1826 concerned the opera *Les Francs-Juges*, a "rescue opera" befitting of the French revolutionary tradition most famously embodied in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, and perhaps influenced by that celebrated work in the choice of the name of the hero, Lenor, who, like Leonora, appears in the opera in disguise. The extant fragments of Berlioz's opera have now been published and studied in detail;[19] they need not concern us here. Suffice it to say that if the cries of "Viva la libertà!" in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* may logically be taken for expressions of the composer's own political sentiments, as they have, then the cries in Berlioz's opera of "La liberté, fille de la victoire, sera le prix de nos efforts,"[20] may be reasonably taken as an expression of his.

Other early musical manifestations of Berlioz's "politics" include a setting from 1829 of Victor Hugo's *Chanson de pirates* from *Les Orientales*, in which, among other themes, one finds condemnation of the Ottoman Empire's practice of cruelty to women. (It has been suggested that Berlioz's setting, now lost, became the *Chant de brigands* in *Le Retour à la vie*; in my edition of that work, I propose a different source.)[21] They also include the most striking number of his *Neuf Mélodies* from December of the same year, the *Élégie en prose*, in which the poet Thomas Moore relates the heroic acts of the Irish patriot Robert Emmet. It is well known that Berlioz made an orchestral arrangement of *La Marseillaise* in 1830, and had an epistolary exchange with the author of the hymn, Rouget de Lisle.[22] It is less well known that he made another setting of a work by Rouget de Lisle, the *Chant du Neuf Thermidor*, discovered only in 1984, in the Bibliothèque du Conservatoire de Genève.[23] We may logically suppose that this selection, presumably made from Maurice Schlesinger's republication in 1830 of Rouget de Lisle's *48 Chants français*, was motivated by the coincidence of the dates—le 9 Thermidor = July 27, 1794; July 27 = the first of *Les Trois Glorieuses*—although the political situations were not identical: le 9 Thermidor marked the downfall of Maximilien Robespierre and the beginning of the end of the Reign of Terror; July 27 opened a three-day revolution that was preceded, not by a cycle of revolutionary violence, but by the proclamation of highly reactionary edicts issued by an increasingly authoritarian King. Still, at the time, some observers, such

as the royal naval commander Charles Stuart Cochran, did speak of an abhorrence of authority that ran "from the ferocious Robespierre to the fanatical Polignac";[24] such a comparison was thus by no means out of bounds. Rouget de Lisle, incarcerated as a potential royalist, sent his original hymn to the National Convention on 17 Thermidor (August 4, 1794) to accompany his immediately successful request to be released from prison.[25] Perhaps Berlioz, too, thought of his arrangement as a kind of offering to the new "King of the French," Louis-Philippe d'Orléans, who would be sworn in, not on August 4, but five days later, on August 9, 1830. Such a gift would have been only one of numerous such *hommages*, songs and plays and poems and more, many still preserved in the private archives of the Orléans family.[26]

The precise dates of the composition of these hymns is not known. It is possible that Berlioz set them down several months *after* the enthroning of the new King, and after the announcement of Berlioz's victory in the 1830 prize competition, on August 21, as elements of his campaign for an exception to the rules that required him to profit from his fellowship exclusively in Rome. That campaign, to benefit from the fellowship in Paris, went on for some months, as the composer witnessed performances in the capital of *Sardanapale*, on September 30, of the *Fantaisie dramatique sur La Tempête*, on November 7, and of the *Symphonie fantastique*, on December 5. Had it succeeded, Berlioz's *Chant du Neuf Thermidor* would have been his ticket to freedom, not from prison, like Rouget's, but from exile.

Administrative Matters

The ambitious aristocrat who created the Direction des Beaux-Arts in 1824 and who administered for the government of Charles X most of the artistic affairs of the capital, Vicomte de La Rochefoucauld, was a grandee of considerable power and influence. Often ridiculed for exaggerated prudishness, he was in part responsible for certain progressive reforms in the musical arena in the later eighteen-twenties, including the regeneration of the Opéra and the foundation of what became the finest orchestra in Europe.

> It is to one of the last ministers of the Maison du Roi of King Charles X, Monsieur le Vicomte Sosthène de La Rochefoucauld, that France owes the foundation of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. It was upon being solicited by Habeneck, and at the request of Cherubini, that the noble Vicomte issued

> the memorable decree that would regenerate French music…[27]

Like many of his contemporaries, Berlioz had to deal with La Rochefoucauld whenever he wished to appeal to the administration for governmental support. We possess only eight letters that Berlioz sent to the Director of Fine Arts after 1828, but we know that the Vicomte swam into his ken as he contemplated the concerts he wished to give at the time, not so much to reap a profit as to make himself known to the public and marshal his legitimacy and nascent renown. In recognition of the gentleman's assistance, Berlioz took the unusual step of dedicating to "Monsieur Le Vicomte de La Rochefoucauld, Aide de Camp du Roi, Directeur-général des Beaux-Arts," his "opus 1," *Huit Scènes de Faust*, which appeared in April of 1829. To his prior request for permission to make the dedication, La Rochefoucauld had replied, on March 17:

> You wish to offer to me, Monsieur, the dedication of the first work that you have designed for publication, the score of *Huit Scènes de Faust* from Goethe, and you lead me to believe that you would be sincerely grateful if I were to accept this *hommage* on your part. In so doing, I am pleased to acquiesce to your wish, and to take this occasion to offer you renewed assurance of my interest in your artistic capabilities, which are already meritorious of encouragement as you enter the initial phase of your career.
>
> Please accept, Monsieur, this expression of my high esteem.[28]

In my translation, I have attempted to suggest not only the Vicomte's formality of expression but also what I take to be his sincere appreciation of Berlioz's youthful talent, and perhaps even his surprise that Berlioz's first important publication should be dedicated to him. Considering La Rochefoucauld's occasional countermanding of the directives of Cherubini, who was resistant to administrative innovation other than his own, Berlioz's dedication surely bore a grain of sincerity, but also a grain of wisdom, since he knew he would be in need, in future endeavors, of the Vicomte's good will. (For similar reasons, François-Joseph Fétis dedicated his early *Dictionnaire historique des musiciens* to La Rochefoucauld.)[29] We thus ought to see the composer as a man whose behavior—despite the pictures he would soon paint of himself as consumed exclusively by Art and Love—was conditioned by the political realities of the time, by the sometime necessity of conformity to convention, of compromise for the sake of career.

Berlioz's relationship to La Rochefoucauld had a bearing on the efforts he made—little known in the literature—to better the lot of all young French composers by widening their opportunities for performance. We tend to view Berlioz as an individualist, as a melancholy and isolated figure who long fought lonely battles for understanding from the public, the press, and the powers that be. But in his student days, Berlioz was a member of a society of young artists who were as interested as he in innovation and change. Proof positive of one such association comes in the form of a fascinating document that concerns a Gymnase-Lyrique, which Berlioz mentions in a letter to his friend Humbert Ferrand of November 11, 1828:

> You know that I have been named "Premier Commissaire" of the Société Gymnase-Lyrique. I am in charge of selecting and replacing the musicians, of renting the instruments, and of looking after the scores and orchestral parts. I am occupied with these tasks at this very moment. We are beginning to receive subscriptions, and we already have some twenty-two hundred francs in the bank. We have received anonymous letters from some individuals who are jealous [of our endeavors]. Cherubini is attempting to determine whether to help us out or to do us in. At the Opéra, everyone is babbling about us, as we continue on our merry way.[30]

The guiding spirit and artistic director of the Gymnase-Lyrique was Stéphen de La Madelaine, a chapel singer at the court of Charles X, one of Berlioz's close friends in the eighteen-twenties, and later a functionary at the Ministry of the Interior. Planned in the fall of 1828, the Gymnase-Lyrique had as its purpose "the encouragement of those young French composers who have not as yet had an opera or a ballet performed on the stage of one of the Parisian operatic theaters by providing them with the means to become known to the public via concerts equal in brilliance to the best the capital has to offer."[31] The organization intended to present vocal and orchestral music by its composer-members with a force of sixty-five instrumentalists and fifty-five singers, with activities commencing, in January 1829, in an auditorium situated in the recently completed Passage du Saumon, at the time the longest such *passage* in Paris.[32]

Berlioz was optimistic about the group's future, and pleased to be assigned tasks, including that of vocal coach, that would later prove essential to his career as a traveling conductor. His optimism was spurred by the possibility of assistance from Vicomte de La Rochefoucauld. Indeed, as I was pleased to discover, a letter from the founding members of the Gymnase-Lyrique, requesting precisely such assistance, was composed and

penned in late October 1828 by the Premier Commissaire of the association, Berlioz himself:

> Monsieur le Vicomte,
>
> Monsieur Stéphen, the founder of a musical association entitled Gymnase-Lyrique, sent you a letter several weeks ago requesting authorization to employ the leading singers of the Académie Royale de Musique for the concerts of the new association, which are to take place on Sunday mornings once every two weeks.
>
> Since this authorization in no way runs counter to the interests of the Opéra, we should like to add our voices to that of Monsieur Stéphen in begging your assistance. We also hope, Monsieur le Vicomte, that after having thoroughly examined the constitution of our Society, you will be persuaded that it has been conceived in such a way as to produce the most beneficial results and will thus offer your august support to an effort whose success could brighten the future for many young composers by reducing the first hurdles of their professional careers.
>
> We are, Monsieur le Vicomte, with the greatest respect, your humble and devoted servants,
>
> the composer-members of the Gymnase-Lyrique.[33]

This letter is signed by Berlioz and the following musicians: Mathurin-Auguste Barbereau, Nathan Bloc, Louis-Constant Ermel, Alphonse Gilbert, Claude-Joseph Paris (in absentia [in Rome]), Eugène-Prosper Prévost, Théodore Schlosser, Stéphen de La Madelaine, Jean-Baptiste Tolbecque, and Francois-Laurent-Hébert Turbry. For Berlioz, who penned the letter, as we know only from his conspicuously chiseled hand, these now largely forgotten individuals, many of them recent competitors for the Prix de Rome, would have been among the musicians of "la Jeune France." (Turbry was a student of Lesueur's who, in 1835, would compose a *Symphonie fantastique*, a parody of Berlioz's, as is obvious from the printed program.[34] In the same year, another *Symphonie fantastique* was composed by the Belgian conductor Étienne-Joseph Soubre.)[35] The constitution or "Règlement" of the Gymnase-Lyrique is dated October 14, 1828; a revision of October 23, 1828, was joined to Berlioz's letter to La Rochefoucauld and printed in the *Revue musicale* at the beginning of the month by F.-J. Fétis, who wholeheartedly approved of the effort: "The editor of the *Revue musicale* is far too devoted to the cause of the art of music and of the youthful composers not warmly to applaud Monsieur Stéphen's generous proposition, which he seconds as firmly as possible and with great hope for a successful outcome."[36] This "Règlement" articulates

an idealistic agenda clearly modeled on the democratic program of the new Société des Concerts du Conservatoire (founded only eight months earlier, in February 1828), proposing as it does both shared responsibilities and shared rewards.

It is noteworthy and perhaps revealing that Berlioz and his collaborators chose to pursue this private effort to establish a concert organization at the same time that a similar, public organization, a Société Mineure des Jeunes Élèves de l'École Royale de Musique, was attempting to establish itself in emulation of that same Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. Fétis wrote about it in an April 1828 issue of the *Revue musicale*:

> An emulation [of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire] borne of the thunderous public reception of their brilliant performances did not take long to establish itself. A new ensemble has been organized by the youthful students at the École Royale de Musique whose goal is to perfect the talents of the performers by exposing them to the public eye and to have them play the works, or more properly the sketches, of the student-composers who are still enrolled at the school. Monsieur Cherubini has authorized the establishment of this association and has offered it the use of the small concert hall of the Conservatoire.[37]

Unfortunately for the young musicians of the Gymnase-Lyrique, who were aiming at something higher than a student orchestra, Monsieur Cherubini was not inclined to offer support to them: worried about the potential competition it would offer to both the Société Mineure and the Société des Concerts, the indomitable director of the Conservatoire seems to have convinced La Rochefoucauld not to provide a subvention for the new society. A different but similar organization designed to assist young composers, the Athénée Musical, founded in 1829 by André-Hippolyte Chélard,[38] did manage to put on concerts for some years, after the opening concert of August 26, 1829, in the Salle Saint-Jean in the Hôtel de Ville, apparently with the financial and moral support of the then Préfet de la Seine, Gaspard de Chabrol de Volvic, in what may have been a small demonstration of municipal independence from the government of the state.

The Gymnase-Lyrique, the Athénée Musical, and even the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire were organizations distant from the mainstream of early nineteenth-century French musical life, which flowed through the capital's three major opera houses: the Opéra, the Théâtre-Italien, and the Opéra-Comique. The last-mentioned theater, though frequently in financial difficulty during the period with which we are concerned, was central to

the hopes of young composers desirous of presenting their new music. For many years, from the Restoration through the July Monarchy, efforts were thus made by various groups and individuals to establish a second Opéra-Comique: we find a number of such proposals both in the press and in the archives.[39] In 1828, some of the artists mentioned above, this time led by Berlioz's friend from the Théâtre de l'Odéon and the Théâtre des Nouveautés, the violinist-conductor Nathan Bloc, appealed directly to the Minister of the Interior to obtain government support for such a new theater. The petition cited below, signed by twenty-five French composers, including fifteen former winners of the Prix de Rome, was addressed to Comte de Martignac, Minister of the Interior from January 1828 through August 1929:

> The Fine Arts are in need of protection. But one art in particular needs greater assistance than all the others. By some unfortunate turn of fate, not only is music not properly supported, but it is and has long been barred from seeking the means to support itself on its own. If you were to accord to us your august protection, all young composers would owe you an eternal debt of gratitude.
>
> There exist in Paris only two theaters that are licensed to present new French operas: the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique. These two theaters normally perform works by composers who are already well known. Those young composers who graduate from our conservatories, and those who win the Grand Prize awarded by the Institut de France, after having worked assiduously for long years and after having long dreamed of riches and renown, see themselves reduced to poverty or oblivion because of the impossible situation in which they find themselves, unable as they are to make their works known to the public. How they envy the lot of the painters and the sculptors! Every year the museums open their doors to all of those who have even a modicum of talent. But while the exhibition of a handsome canvas or a beautiful statue can enable a previously unknown artist to establish a reputation, the musician alone is condemned to silence—and this because the requirement of official authorization prevents all theaters other than the Opéra and Opéra-Comique from performing his work. Thus we find that France, first in the realm of the Arts and Sciences, is, uniquely in the realm of music, inferior to both Germany and Italy.
>
> Do not think, Monseigneur, that our nation is lacking in musical genius. It is rather lacking only in the means of putting such genius on display. Were you to wish it, young French musicians would, in a few short years, be able to stand proudly beside their rivals, because the esteemed masters who have taught them the secrets of their art are unequaled elsewhere in Europe.
>
> Germany and Italy each have a hundred cities, and each city has several theaters in which a young composer can test his abilities before the public and

profit from the lessons of experience. Only in France are there but two lyric theaters.

All musicians thus trust that, in you, their hopes will not be disappointed.[40]

The copy of the petition preserved in the archives omits the signatures. But Berlioz was close to the Swiss-born violinist at the time: Bloc conducted the orchestra for Berlioz's inaugural concert of May 26, 1828, prepared the orchestra for the *Symphonie fantastique*, in May 1830, when the performance had to be canceled *in extremis*, and remained in contact with the composer through the end of that year and beyond, even after leaving Paris to become the conductor of the Société de Musique de Genève, in 1831, and, in 1835, the founding director of the Conservatoire de Genève. Furthermore, when Bloc wrote to a correspondent who was as interested as he in ameliorating the lot of the young composer, on November 10, 1829, Berlioz acted as his scribe![41] So we may be certain that Berlioz was one of the "collègues" Bloc mentions in the letter cited below. In two essentially identical letters, addressed to two successive Ministers of the Interior and dated October 11, 1829, and January 1830, Bloc resubmitted his original 1828 petition, along with a letter of support from the Section de Musique of the Académie des Beaux-Arts:

Monseigneur,

For a long time, young composers have been in a most unfortunate situation. In order to better their standing, they resolved to address a petition to His Excellency the Minister of the Interior and respectfully to request that he graciously give the authorization necessary such that another theater, in addition to the Opéra-Comique, be permitted to present their works.

I write to you today, Monseigneur, in the name of my colleagues, respectfully to request that you act favorably upon this petition, persuaded as I am of your willingness to protect all that is useful and just. Such a favorable action will be met by all composers with lasting gratitude.[42]

Many such requests for performance opportunities for young French composers were put to the administration at the time. In the *Revue musicale*, F.-J. Fétis proposed a detailed scheme for opening several new theaters in the main cities of the departments, anticipating by more than one hundred fifty years the artistic "décentralisation" that was in vogue in France during the mid-nineteen-eighties and that to this day rises to the top of one or another political leader's cultural agenda. That Berlioz wished to administer a theater of his own in 1838 is now better known than it once was (this is the subject

of chapter 4); that he had joined his efforts to those of others, ten years earlier, is a less-familiar fact of his student years in Paris.

It is noteworthy that Nathan Bloc's petition calls attention to the relatively happy lot of painters and sculptors, to whom the doors of the museums were regularly open and from whom purchases by the government were regularly made. The notion of becoming known—of being able to put their work before the public, with government assistance—was thus especially attractive to young composers. (Franz Liszt would later propose an ambitious government-sponsored system of musical commission and performance roughly modeled on the annual salon system for painters and sculptors.)[43] Had the administration accepted some of the musical reforms that were proposed by a Commission on the Arts in their September 1830 report to the Minister of the Interior,[44] nineteenth-century French musicians might have enjoyed more celebrity. In particular, had "officialdom" been willing to simply relax the strict system of limited authorizations, or *privilèges*, that restricted the performance of new French works to essentially two theaters—allowing the Théâtre de l'Odéon, for example, to produce opera as well as spoken drama (as Berlioz had explicitly hoped they would), allowing the lesser venues to put on works with new music—then the composer of *Les Francs-Juges* and a host of others might have had more opportunities to hear their music in performance. In fact, the system of *privilèges*, designed to preserve the prosperity of the main houses, persisted until 1864.

Petitions

We have observed that, in behalf of the art of music, Berlioz occasionally joined the political fray by allying himself with other hopeful artists in the effort to improve the collective prospects of all struggling musicians. Most of Berlioz's campaigns were individual ones, however, and some—such as requesting from the Minister of the Interior, Vicomte de Martignac, an "encouragement annuel," on August 20, 1828, to pursue his studies—were daring indeed:

> Monseigneur,
>
> I am twenty-four years old, I am a member of an honorable albeit large family from La Côte-Saint-André (in the Isère). Having worked with great diligence, and having received encouragement from the highest authorities, I have just been awarded the Second Grand Prize in musical composition from the Institut de France.

> And yet my father, financially drained by the considerable sacrifices he has had to make, is no longer able to support my living in Paris. My career is thus at this moment at an impasse; I am about to lose all hope.
>
> Several students at the École des Beaux-Arts who, like me, have received a Second Grand Prize, have been able to travel to Rome, with the aid of a government grant, in order to pursue their studies.
>
> I therefore dare to solicit the enlightened benevolence of Your Excellency, not in order to gain so great a favor, but rather to benefit from an annual stipend that would allow me to continue my studies in Paris and to compete, next year, for the Grand Prix de Rome.
>
> I should like to believe, Monseigneur, that I shall one day fully justify the encouragement I hope to receive from your good offices.
>
> I am, with profound respect for Your Excellency, your most humble and obedient servant,
>
> Hector Berlioz, student of Monsieur le Chevalier Lesueur, at the École Royale de Musique,
>
> 96, rue Richelieu, Paris, this August 20, 1828.[45]

(In my translation, I have interpreted the word Berlioz applies to his father, *épuisé*, as "financially drained." It is true that, for his two daughters, Doctor Berlioz did have to provide meaningful dowries in order to attract appropriate suitors. It is also true that Berlioz's father was one of the wealthiest men in his village and surrounding area and was probably not so overdrawn as Berlioz here suggests.) One of the "high authorities" supporting Berlioz's appeal to Martignac was his teacher, Jean-François Lesueur, whose recommendation is affixed to Berlioz's letter:

> I have the honor to attest to His Excellency that the request from Monsieur Berlioz is founded on the brilliant hopes for success to which his talent and genius give rise, talent and genius that need further development in order to reach their maximum potential. This young man, highly educated in all the other sciences, is in my opinion certain to become a great composer who will bring great honor to the French nation. I do not hesitate to predict that in fewer than ten years, he will even become a true *chef d'école*. But he is in need of assistance in order to complete his musical studies in another twelve to eighteen months. Monsieur Berlioz is a born musician; nature itself seems to have chosen him, from among so many others, to become a composer of such extraordinary talent as to become a veritable painter in his art. But all will be lost to him if he fails to obtain the benefaction of an enlightened minister who is the guarantor of the nation's arts and letters. Should Monsieur Berlioz be so fortunate as to merit the patronage and support of our French Maecenas, he will repay such noble confidence in his future and will forever

repeat with gratitude: "It is Monsieur le Comte de Martignac who opened the gates to my career."[46]

Victor Hugo was accorded such a government stipend by the administration of Charles X, it is worth noting, but in 1828, Hugo, though only one year his senior, was considerably more established than Berlioz. The composer's petition, in the event, went without response.

Of the other campaigns waged by Berlioz during his student days, none was more concentrated than the two-pronged attack to capture the Rome Prize and, victory attained, to enjoy the traditional government fellowship while remaining in the French capital. Indeed, Berlioz's activities, from the moment of his disillusionment in the prize competition of 1829, may be construed as battle tactics to obtain the prize in 1830. As the 1828 second-prize winner, he had been within his rights, as his letter to Vicomte de Martignac suggests, to expect a first prize in the following year. But in the summer of 1829, he wrote such an original cantata, *La Mort de Cléopâtre*, that the judges denied him the crown. He thus gave a concert of some of his own works, and the "Emperor" Concerto, with Ferdinand Hiller, on November 1, 1829; he published the *Ballet des ombres* in December of that year; he brought out the *Mélodies irlandaises* in February of 1830; he conceived and composed the *Symphonie fantastique* in the early months of 1830; he held a rehearsal on May 16, had the program of the symphony printed in *Le Figaro* on May 21 and in the *Journal des comédiens* on May 23, and prepared for (but had to cancel) a performance on May 30. These efforts, in addition to being logical steps in the development of a career, were ways of making a public impression and of inducing the judges, in a manner of speaking, to award him the prize. Such a strategy was surely not original. The French have long had a passion for prizes that may date from the creation of the Académie Française itself, in 1635. Prize politics have been in the news since time immemorial; they remain in the news today.

Of the 1830 prize competition and prize cantata I have written elsewhere and at length, expressing some doubt that Berlioz's winning entry, *Sardanapale*, was as mediocre a work as he subsequently claimed:[47] the apparent quotation at measure 89 of a tune from *La Muette de Portici* could be read as an impish prank; the final V–I cadence, tacked on, should be read, considering Berlioz's usual inventiveness at this point of the proceedings, as an intentional impertinence. Be this as it may, it is certain that the completion of this self-designated timid and academic score, played at the Palais de l'Institut on October 30, was accompanied not only by the settings of *La*

Marseillaise and the *Chant du Neuf Thermidor* that I have mentioned, but also by the completion and revision of two other scores, the *Ouverture de La Tempête*, played at the Opéra on November 7, and the *Symphonie fantastique*, finally performed at the Conservatoire on December 5.

During the autumn, Berlioz pleaded with the authorities that an exception be made to the traditional rules of an Académie des Beaux-Arts founded upon and devoted to tradition. In fact, exceptions to the rules were sometimes made by the Academy, as Berlioz knew and as various archival documents attest, but not in the particular sense that Berlioz had in mind—namely, to receive his stipend while remaining in France. It is no secret that the absurdity of sending composers to Rome is the theme of many of Berlioz's writings on the Prix de Rome. It is the theme as well of an article by the liberal journalist François-Fortuné Guyot de Fère, "Musique: Art dramatique," that appeared in the November 21, 1830, issue of the *Journal des artistes et des amateurs*, of which he was the editor. This fellow, a regular in the liberal press, appears nowhere in the Berlioz literature, but in speaking soundly to the paucity of Roman musical life for the Rome-prize-winning composer, Guyot de Fère seems to take a page from Berlioz's book.

In the matter of exceptions, the sculptor Antoine Étex, an unsuccessful candidate for the Prix de Rome in 1828, 1829, and 1830, was in fact awarded a fellowship by the new Ministry of the Interior under Louis-Philippe—in part due to his participation in the July Revolution—"in order to complete his studies and produce a work that would give him the right to hope for his fair share of the artistic monuments commissioned by the government of his country."[48] Others found their way to Rome with government aid but without a *premier prix*; some shortened their periods of "exile" due to problems of family, or of health.[49] But no Rome Prize winner seems to have been able to avoid the trip to Rome, as Eugène-Prosper Prévost hoped to do in 1831,[50] and as Berlioz had hoped to do in 1830.

On August 23, 1830, Berlioz wrote to his mother that if needed he would go so far as to ask the new King himself for permission to remain in Paris. On September 3, he reported to his father in this regard that he had asked for assistance from Alexandre Périer, a member of the great banking family from the Dauphiné, an acquaintance of Berlioz's uncle Félix Marmion (Périer and Marmion had been fellow students at the École centrale de Grenoble),[51] and the younger brother of Casimir Périer, who would become Président de la Chambre des Députés on August 6, 1830, and who would serve as Président du Conseil, that is, Premier Ministre, from March 13, 1831, to May 16, 1832.[52] At nearly the same moment, Berlioz asked Jules-René Guérin—a

physician who was the founding editor of the *Gazette de santé* (soon the *Gazette médicale de Paris*), and who may well have known Berlioz during his medical-student days, in as much as both men began their studies in 1821—to second his request for an exemption from the rule requiring him to go to Rome by means of an attestation regarding his alleged medical problems. In fact, if we accept Guérin's testimony at face value—few scholars have—then we must think twice about the remarks of more recent commentators on Berlioz's mental and physical health:

> The undersigned, docteur en médecine de la Faculté de Paris, hereby declares that he has treated Monsieur Hector Berlioz for some five years for disorders of the nervous system ["affections nerveuses"] accompanied by symptoms of stroke ["congestion cérébrale"]. I have noticed that these symptoms become especially acute during the summer months, exacerbated by the hot sun. Consequently, I believe it would be dangerous for Monsieur Berlioz to have to live in a warm climate such as that of Rome, where he would be exposed to conditions likely to renew and augment his medical difficulties.[53]

In her study of melancholy, monomania, and Berlioz, Francesca Brittan does not mention Doctor Guérin's diagnosis. In fact, it would tend to support her claim that Berlioz was not entirely well.[54]

On October 20, 1830, Berlioz mentioned to his mother that he hoped a word from Rossini and Spontini would aid his cause, even though the members of the Section de Musique at the Institut de France, other than his teacher, Jean-François Lesueur, would not.[55] And in a well-known letter of October 28, he appealed directly to the Minister of the Interior, at the time the formidable historian and statesman François Guizot, for permission to receive his stipend in Paris, citing both medical and professional reasons for his request. This is the letter to which are attached statements of support from Doctor Guérin (which we have cited), F.-J. Fétis, Spontini, Meyerbeer, and Lesueur.[56] A further letter of support addressed to the Minister of the Interior—not included in Berlioz's *Correspondence générale* and important to reproduce here—is especially revealing:

> It is neither my custom nor my belief that it is appropriate to make solicitations on behalf of myself or of others. But I should like to appeal to your fine artistic sensibilities in communicating to you a request in behalf of a young man of great talent and promise for the future.
>
> Monsieur Hector Berlioz has been awarded the Grand Prize in composition [at the Institut de France]; he would like to be exempted from the rule

> requiring him to sojourn in Italy, and thus to profit here in Paris from the stipend to which the prize gives him the right. Having undertaken certain immense new compositions and having begun negotiations with several German theaters for the performance of works already completed, he feels that such a long absence [from the capital] would immediately compromise the beginnings of his career.
>
> Monsieur Berlioz is furthermore in deplorable health. He suffers from excessive nervous irritation; the requirement to leave Paris at this moment throws him into such despair that it is my firm belief that such a trip might well be injurious to his well-being. All of this has made him highly distraught, and his friends are trying, in vain, to restore his equilibrium. But alas, musical genius, like poetic genius, gives rise to certain anomalies; and as to the genius of the laureate in question, I can attest to it, as do his teachers, Messieurs Lesueur and Spontini, and as do all of those who have followed him through the course of a musical education, during which he has had to struggle against unimaginable obstacles placed in his path by his family.
>
> I thought, Monsieur le Comte, that you would graciously allow one of Monsieur Berlioz's friends to testify in his behalf and to urge you to support a request the granting of which is, to me, a matter of profound concern.[57]

The writer of this letter, a man whom Berlioz knew well, was Louis de Carné, writer, politician, eventually a member of the Académie Française, and earlier, in March 1829, a founding editor of the newspaper *Le Correspondant*, for which Berlioz wrote several important articles in 1829 and 1830, notably a three-part biographical sketch of Beethoven and an "Aperçu sur la musique classique et la musique romantique." Carné was a dedicated constitutional monarchist and an ardent Catholic whom Berlioz's father held in high esteem. Berlioz may have met him as early as 1825, through the intermediacy of his friend Humbert Ferrand.[58] Obviously impressed by Berlioz's musical gifts, and perhaps taken with his ideas on religious music, Carné extended himself to a considerable degree, as we see here, on behalf of the freshly crowned winner of the Prix de Rome.

Vicomte de Carné's letter, further evidence of the "political" associations maintained by Berlioz during his student days in Paris, raises a practical question regarding the composer's claims to be negotiating with theaters in Germany. We know that in May he was discussing with the Austrian tenor Anton Haitzinger a possible German performance of his opera *Les Francs-Juges*, and that in December he sent manuscript scores of his works to Spontini, who since 1820 had been General Music Director in Berlin.[59] Carné seconds Berlioz's and his doctor's claims that he was subject to intense nervous irritation. He does not mention, for obvious reasons, that Berlioz

was reluctant to leave town because he was head-over-heels in love with Camille Moke.

Why, we may logically be permitted to ask, did Berlioz finally accept the obligation to go to Italy, thus apparently sacrificing both his work and his would-be wife? We know that he needed money. But even without the stipend, the prize offered public acclaim, and thus the possibility of performance in Paris, as well as of the possibility of assistance from what might have been his newly proud family. Furthermore, in 1830, Berlioz was at the beginning of an income-producing career as a journalist, at a time when the newspapers were multiplying and a certain Honoré Balzac (not yet using the nobiliary particle) turned to journalism to earn his daily bread.

Still, like Aeneas leaving Carthage and his beloved Dido, Berlioz, too, despite what he so ardently proclaimed at the end of 1830, was haunted by cries of "Italie! Italie! Italie!," the cries we hear at the end of act 4 of *Les Troyens*, and was finally drawn, by a sense of duty as well as by a capitulation to necessity, to the French enclave at the Villa Medici, atop the Pincian Hill, in the Eternal City of Rome.

Politics

When Berlioz was fourteen years old, his father was for a short while Mayor of La Cote-Saint-André. Did this make an impression on the boy? Some years later, when he famously confronted Cherubini in the library of the Conservatoire, he had a clear sense of the right of a private individual to enjoy the benefits of a public institution. Indeed, without the rich collection of that particular public institution, founded during the Revolution in 1795, and still one of the musical glories of the Fifth French Republic, Berlioz might never have become a musician. He later much enjoyed the benefits of another institution organized during the revolutionary era, the Institut de France, among whose constituent assemblies was an Académie des Beaux-Arts composed of painters, sculptors, engravers, architects, and *composers*, because music, too, was expected to play its part in promoting the material and moral welfare of the citizenry of the nation.

Like many at the time, Berlioz harbored an admiration for the grandeur and heroism of France's Napoleonic past. Of his precise political sentiments in and around 1830 we know relatively little. With his friend Humbert Ferrand, a devout Catholic and a "légitimiste," which at the time meant an advocate of the succession of the senior branch of the Bourbon Monarchy,

Berlioz apparently agreed to disagree.[60] With his family, and with a number of acquaintances, the subject of politics (as he wrote to his mother on September 19, 1830) was apparently taboo: "Although I have very definite political opinions, I can assure you that I rarely articulate them in public, since I find all conversations about such matters extremely tiresome."[61] The meaning of this comment, which I believe ought to be taken *cum grano salis*, is not self-evident. Pierre Citron, editor of Berlioz's correspondence, assumed that Berlioz's intention was to mask his pro-revolutionary sentiments in the aftermath of *Les Trois Glorieuses.* And yet that same revolutionary fervor became an impediment to Berlioz's efforts to focus attention upon the forthcoming première, in December, of the *Symphonie fantastique.* It is conceivable that Berlioz kept his political views close to the chest because, while surrounded by young artists optimistic about the future of the new regime, he himself may have regretted the removal from power of Vicomte de La Rochefoucauld, who (as we have seen) had formed a favorable impression of the composer, and who, as director of the Department of Fine Arts, might have authorized the exception that his successors refused to consider. Be this as it may, Berlioz in the year of the *Symphonie fantastique*, as at other times (as I shall too often remind the reader of this book), was more politically aware and alive than we have usually believed.

Eight months after the première of that work, the composer had a brief flirtation with the Saint-Simonians, whose mission to ameliorate the lot of the working classes, in an uncharacteristically fervent letter to one of the movement's principals, Berlioz seems to have fully embraced. I have frankly wondered about the sincerity of Berlioz's enthusiasm (tempered by his principled atheism), because from his mouth, the words *mon cher père*—addressed, not to his own father, but to the Saint-Simonian leader Charles Duveyrier—sound odd.[62] This letter refers to an encounter between Duveyrier and Berlioz which, as I read it, would have taken place in 1831, while Berlioz was away from Rome, on his harebrained and aborted mission to take revenge upon Camille Moke for breaking off their engagement in order to marry Camille Pleyel. Back in Rome from Nice, where he came to his senses, Berlioz read through recent issues of *Le Globe*, to which Duveyrier was a regular contributor. There he saw the page on which a critic—probably Duveyrier himself, as the fellow was a familiar face at the Opéra and would later coauthor the libretto of Verdi's *Les Vêpres siciliennes*—suggested to the new director of the Opéra, Louis Véron (appointed on February 18, 1831), that he renew the repertory: Rossini and Meyerbeer were still their prime, and "new talent, such as that of Hector Berlioz, was waiting to manifest itself."[63]

In its eight-year existence, this was the only time that *Le Globe* printed the name of Hector Berlioz. Circumstantial evidence thus suggests, considering the date of the recommendation (June 23, 1831), that Berlioz's meeting with Duveyrier had a practical purpose. Had he earlier been a member of the inner circle, *Le Globe* would have sent someone to review his concert of December 5, 1830. It did not. When Berlioz returned to Paris in the autumn of 1832 and gave the revised *Symphonie fantastique* with its sequel, *Le Retour à la vie*, on December 9 of that year, *Le Globe* was no longer in existence.

In the France of 1830, all the arts were politicized, whether in the specific sense of serving certain political ideas or ideals, or in the general sense of being subject to scrutiny of an other-than-purely-artistic sort. Some obviously reacted politically to the patriotic lines from the duet in Auber's *La Muette de Portici*, "Amour sacré de la patrie": the opera's performance in Brussels, on August 25, 1830, was widely seen as the catalyst for the revolutionary disturbances that took place in Belgium at that time, and that led to the Belgian declaration of independence, six weeks later, on October 4, 1830. "La liberté" in Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, like "la libertà" in *Don Giovanni*, could provoke emotional reactions from audiences both before and after the Revolution of 1830. We know, from countless archival documents, that individual *words*—as much if not more than themes and ideas—were considered by the censors as potentially dangerous: Victor Hugo was not permitted to use the words *lâche*, *insensé*, or *mauvais* to modify the word *roi*—even when the *roi* in question was centuries removed from Charles X. Eugène Delacroix was chided for painting an ideal of Liberty with certain overly realistic and thus potentially immoral details, for only nudes denuded of bodily hair, it would appear, were considered proper for public display. Berlioz risked negative criticism by incorporating the *Dies irae* into a passage of symphonic music, as we said above, because Charles X's Law of Sacrilege of 1825, if violated, could lead to execution.

Berlioz's concert of December 5, 1830, like other public manifestations during the autumn of that year, was for the benefit of the victims of the July Revolution. Some years ago I was pleased to discover in the archives the letter of invitation that Berlioz sent to the new King, probably at the end of November, in the days leading up to the event:

> Sire,
>
> Anxious to associate myself with the public's expression of gratitude to the heroes of the national cause, I am now preparing a concert for the benefit of

> those wounded in July. A number of distinguished artists have enthusiastically agreed to second my efforts.
>
> Recently crowned by the Institut de France, I simply could not hope to begin my career under more auspicious circumstances. Were Your Majesty to deign to honor by his august presence this musical solemnity, it would serve as yet another affirmation of Your Majesty's concern for our liberators, and would at the same time provide me with the utmost powerful encouragement.
>
> Sire, the fine arts, too, have a role to play in enhancing the grandeur of the nation. The enlightened manner in which Your Majesty has always honored the arts leads me to feel confident, even were it not motivated by such a noble cause, that my request will not be deemed inappropriate.
>
> Sire, I remain, with profound respect for Your Majesty, your most humble and obedient servant and subject, Hector Berlioz, laureate of the Académie des Beaux-Arts.[64]

The program Berlioz proposed, with an orchestra of one hundred musicians under the direction of François-Antoine Habeneck, included the overture to *Les Francs-Juges*, the prize-winning cantata *Sardanapale*, and the first performance of the *Symphonie fantastique.* Despite its subsequent celebrity, the symphony performed on December 5, 1830, was reviewed at the time in only six publications: *Le National* (December 6); *Le Figaro* (December 7); the *Revue musicale* (December 11); *Le Correspondant* (December 14), *Le Temps* (December 26); and *La Revue de Paris* (December).[65] Berlioz had hoped for a repeat performance, but this became impossible because of the continuing disquiet over the downfall of Charles X: "There is so much commotion everywhere you look," Berlioz had earlier written to his sister, "because everyone is talking only about politics."[66] The day after the first concert, the Austrian ambassador in Paris, Antoine-Rodolphe Apponyi, noted in his journal the very same thing: "Everyone is talking only about the trial of the former ministers."[67]

Berlioz in the year of the *Symphonie fantastique*, likened by Henri Blaze to a revolutionary Jacobin, as I mentioned, must be seen in the context of the politics of the time. The same is true for Berlioz in the years of the *Scène héroïque* (1825–1826), of *Le Cinq Mai* (1831–1835), of the *Grande Messe des morts* (1837), of the *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale* (1840–1842), of the *Hymne à la France* (1844), of the *Chant des chemins de fer* (1846), of the arrangements of Méhul's *Chant du départ* and of Rouget de Lisle's *Mourons pour la patrie* (1848), and of the Napoleonic cantata *L'Impériale* (1854). In short, though I list here only the obviously political works, it is true for his entire career. In his fine biography of the composer, Hugh Macdonald speaks

eloquently of the "unreasoning bond which held [Berlioz] in the city he never ceased to curse and abuse but which was, when all was said and done, his home."[68] Was that bond truly "unreasoning"? Or was it rather the result of a belief, despite his later suspicion and censure of republicanism, that the Revolution of 1830 was indeed a gesture in behalf of individual and artistic liberty, that French composers had or should have a role to play in maintaining and intensifying that liberty, and that, as in painting and sculpture (which seemed in comparison to have flourished), in music, too, as he optimistically put it in the report we shall present in chapter 8, that in Paris, one could "do better" than anyplace else in the world?[69]