


# *Syrinx* (1913)
# *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* (1892)
## by Claude Debussy
### (Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 1862 – Paris, 1918)

Debussy's solo flute piece *Syrinx* may come across as a brief afterthought to his orchestral masterpiece *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, written twenty years earlier, but it holds a captivating history of its own. The work was originally composed as music to enhance the atmosphere of *Psyché*, a stage play by Gabriel Mourey, a long-time friend of the composer. Mourey's drama revisited the ancient Greek myth of Pan, the nature god who fell in love with the nymph Syrinx. To escape his advances, she transformed into a river reed. From that reed, a heartbroken Pan fashioned his musical pipe, named it a syrinx, and played mournful melodies to lament his lost love. Within the play, Debussy's music accompanies a dialogue between two nymphs, watched over by the hidden god. The playwright deeply admired the contribution, describing the short piece as a real jewel of restrained emotion, sadness, visual beauty, and discreet tenderness.

While *Syrinx* explores the myth of Pan in an intimate setting, Debussy had thoroughly immersed himself in this dreamlike world decades prior through his relationship with Stéphane Mallarmé. One of the greatest innovators in French poetry, Mallarmé created works packed with complex symbols designed to express moods rather than tell straightforward stories, capturing the blurry line between dreaming and waking. His famous poem, *The Afternoon of a Faun*, was published in 1876. Debussy first set a Mallarmé poem to music at age twenty-two, and later joined a circle of artists who met at the poet's house every Tuesday night. Because of this, the young composer was deeply familiar with Mallarmé's style long before he began working on his famous orchestral piece. The poem itself features a faun lounging near a river, daydreaming about beautiful nymphs and unable to tell if they are real or mere figments of his imagination. His desires filter through this hazy memory as past dreams emerge from the shadows only to recede once again.

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## *Syrinx*
## *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*

The solo flute, representing the faun's panpipes, plays a prominent role throughout the piece. Its iconic opening melody winds downward and upward, charting an unstable, exotic musical path that completely broke away from traditional classical models. As the music unfolds, the orchestral accompaniment grows more intense. Following a brief pause, a new section begins as the clarinet and oboe temporarily take the lead. The tempo quickens until a new melody arrives in sharp contrast to the opening flute theme, played by the woodwinds and French horn. Eventually, the original flute theme returns at its initial pace, steering the music away from the agitation of the middle section and settling into a serene tranquility that lasts until the very end. Through this masterpiece, Debussy beautifully captured the poem's vagueness, creating unpredictable themes that drift naturally without strict rhythmic boundaries, with timbres that perfectly mirror the free-flowing thoughts of the daydreaming faun.




# Gloria
## (1959-60)
## by Francis Poulenc
**(Paris, 1899 - Paris, 1963)**

***Gloria in excelsis Deo***
***Laudamus te***
***Domine Deus***
***Domine Fili unigenite***
***Domine Deus, Agnus Dei***
***Qui sedes***

Francis Poulenc earned an early reputation in Paris with a successful ballet for the Ballets Russes, quickly becoming a fixture in the city's fashionable artistic circles. During these glamorous years, his childhood Catholic faith fell by the wayside. However, a profound turning point arrived in 1936. Following the tragic death of a close colleague, a grieving Poulenc visited the sanctuary of the Black Virgin of Rocamadour in Southern France, home to a revered twelfth-century statue of the Virgin Mary carved from dark wood. This moving experience reawakened the composer's faith, inspiring him to write sacred choral music. Over the following decades, he composed a series of deeply spiritual works, culminating in a commission that resulted in his magnificent Gloria, one of the crowning achievements of his final years.

Poulenc possessed a notoriously playful, slightly irreverent streak that he had to consciously rein in when setting religious texts. Even so, these two distinct sides of his personality—the devout believer and the witty Parisian entertainer—coexist beautifully throughout the Gloria. The opening movement immediately sets a joyful tone with a grand, celebratory glorification of God. It is followed by a lively second movement that the composer admitted caused quite a stir upon its premiere. Poulenc playfully defended the music, explaining that while writing it, he was picturing Renaissance frescoes of mischievous angels sticking out their tongues, alongside the memory of a group of serious Benedictine monks he once saw enthusiastically playing soccer. This playful spirit animates the music through quirky trombone notes, simple vocal parts, and crisp, bouncy orchestral rhythms that reinforce the joyful text before the music briefly turns solemn to close the movement.

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# Gloria

The third movement introduces the soprano soloist, whose lyrical melodies pair with expressive woodwinds to project an atmosphere of deep piety and quiet introspection. This exuberant affirmation of faith carries directly into the short, crisp musical patterns of the fourth movement. The soloist returns to the spotlight in the intimate fifth movement, where the choir recedes into the background to create a soft, atmospheric cushion. In a moment of quiet beauty, a single tenor from the choir joins the soprano for just one measure, creating a fleeting, expressive duet amid a texture of delicate, detached notes. The final movement opens with the unaccompanied choir singing in unison, punctuated by dramatic orchestral reminders of the piece's very first theme. A fast central span brings back the buoyant, playful energy of praising God, before the soprano soloist takes over the opening melody for a majestic, concluding "Amen." Through this unique blend of the sacred and the worldly, Poulenc crafted a highly personal response to a timeless religious text, offering a brilliant summary of his entire musical style near the end of a stellar forty-five-year career.




# *Symphonie Fantastique*, Op. 14
# (1830)
## by Hector Berlioz
### (La Côte-Saint-André, France, 1803 - Paris, 1869)

***Daydreams-Passions***
***A Ball***
***Scene in the Meadows***
***March to the Scaffold***
***Sabbath Night's Dream***

The year 1830 was an extraordinary turning point in the political and cultural life of France. In February, the premiere of Victor Hugo's play *Hernani* openly challenged strict classical traditions, sparking an outright battle in the theater between conservatives and radicals. By July, actual fighting hit the streets as a revolution permanently ousted the restored Bourbon dynasty, paving the way for a new era of modernization under Louis-Philippe, the "Citizen King." It was against this backdrop of upheaval that the twenty-seven-year-old Hector Berlioz premiered his *Symphonie fantastique* in December. Though somewhat overshadowed by the political chaos, his monumental first orchestral work exuded the raw, revolutionary spirit of the time.

Berlioz boldly claimed to take up symphonic music where Beethoven left off. He certainly drew inspiration from Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, borrowing the concept of a five-movement structure with descriptive titles. Yet Berlioz pushed the boundaries of storytelling much further than his predecessor. While Beethoven focused primarily on expressing general emotions, Berlioz invented an entire, vivid narrative, insisting that a detailed literary program be printed and distributed to the audience like the spoken text of an opera. The first movement, *Daydreams—Passions*, introduces a young musician troubled by a deep spiritual melancholy. He falls desperately in love with a woman who embodies his ultimate ideal. Through a trick of his imagination, this beloved woman is permanently linked to a specific musical theme—the *idée fixe* or "fixation"—a recurring melody that haunts him and reappears in every single movement. This opening chapter charts his emotional journey from dreamy sadness and aimless joy to a state of delirious passion, fury, and eventual religious solace

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# *Symphonie Fantastique*, Op. 14 (1830)

In the second movement, *A Ball*, the scene shifts to the swirling hubbub of a festive carnival and the peaceful beauty of nature. Yet no matter where the artist travels, the haunting melody of his beloved vision appears before him, casting a shadow over his soul. The third movement, *Scene in the Meadows*, transports the artist to a quiet evening in the country. He hears two shepherds in the distance playing a traditional melody on their pipes. The rustic atmosphere, the gentle rustle of the trees, and a glimmer of newfound hope bring a temporary peace to his heart. However, dark forebodings soon interrupt his happiness as he wonders if she will deceive him. This delicate balance of hope and fear forms the core of the slow movement, which ends with one lone shepherd playing into the silence, answered only by distant thunder and complete solitude.

In the fourth movement, March to the Scaffold, the artist realizes beyond doubt that his love is unrequited. He attempts to end his life with opium, but the dose merely plunges him into a deep sleep filled with terrifying visions. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, and that he has been condemned to death and marched to his own execution. The procession moves to a march that shifts from fierce and somber to stately and brilliant, punctuated by sudden crashes and the dull thud of heavy footfalls. At the very end of the march, the opening bars of his beloved theme briefly return like a final thought of love, only to be violently cut short by the fatal stroke of the blade.

The final movement, *Sabbath Night's Dream*, finds the artist at a witches' sabbath, surrounded by a ghastly crowd of sorcerers, monsters, and spirits gathered for his funeral. Amid a chaotic texture of strange groans, bursts of laughter, and distant shouts, the beloved melody returns. However, it has lost its original refinement, transformed instead into a vulgar, grotesque dance tune to signal her arrival at the devilish orgy. This wild finale blends a funeral knell with a terrifying parody of the traditional plainchant for the dead, building to a frantic climax.

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# *Symphonie Fantastique*, Op. 14 (1830)

While audiences easily remember the theatrical tales of execution and witches, Berlioz emphasized that these dramatic figures were chosen precisely for their musical qualities. By integrating familiar types like dances, marches, and plainchant, he gave the music a concrete meaning where the narrative and sound became entirely interdependent. The radical style of the symphony relies on the program to make sense, just as the story relies on the themes. Many of these dramatic dreams were undoubtedly Berlioz's own, fueled by his real-life obsession with Harriet Smithson, an Irish actress playing Shakespearean roles in Paris. He fell madly in love after seeing her on stage just once, pining for years before they ever met. Though they did eventually marry and separate, this intense infatuation directly birthed the symphony. While Berlioz did repurpose a few melodies from earlier, unfinished works, the new narrative context completely transformed them, seamlessly weaving his past ideas into a unified, revolutionary masterpiece.

Given this highly unconventional design, it is no surprise that many listeners in the 1830s were completely taken aback by the symphony's novelties. The musicologist François-Joseph Fétis wrote a scathing review, and even Felix Mendelssohn—who personally found Berlioz thoroughly likable—deemed the music “utterly loathsome” and depressing. It is all the more remarkable, then, that Robert Schumann devoted one of his longest, most analytical essays to defending the *Symphonie fantastique*. Having never heard the orchestral version, Schumann studied the work entirely through Franz Liszt’s piano transcription. Written in direct response to Fétis’s attack, Schumann’s review was filled with admiration; though he noted occasional flaws, he was among the first to recognize Berlioz’s genius. This crucial defense widely disseminated the French composer's name across German musical circles, effectively launching his international career.

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# *Symphonie Fantastique*, Op. 14 (1830)

*The following are the original, detailed movement descriptions as written by Berlioz for his literary program:*

## Episode in the Life of an Artist

**Part One: *Daydreams—Passions*** - The composer imagines that a young musician, troubled by that spiritual sickness which a famous writer* has called "le vague des passions," sees for the first time a woman who possesses all the charms of the ideal being he has dreamed of, and falls desperately in love with her. By some strange trick of fancy, the beloved vision never appears to the artist's mind except in association with a musical idea, in which he perceives the same character—impassioned, yet refined and diffident—that he attributes to the object of his love.

This melodic image and its model pursue him unceasingly like a double idée fixe. That is why the tune at the beginning of the first allegro constantly recurs in every movement of the symphony. The transition from a state of dreamy melancholy, interrupted by several fits of aimless joy, to one of delirious passion, with its impulses of rage and jealousy, its returning moments of tenderness, its tears, and its religious solace, is the subject of the first movement.

**Part Two: *A Ball* -** The artist is placed in the most varied circumstances: amid the hubbub of a carnival, in peaceful contemplation of the beauty of nature—but everywhere, in town, in the meadows, the beloved vision appears before him, bringing trouble to his soul.

**Part Three: *Scene in the Meadows* -** One evening in the country, he hears in the distance two shepherds playing the ranz des vaches**; this pastoral duet, the effect of his surroundings, the slight rustle of the trees gently stirred by the wind, certain feelings of hope which he has been recently entertaining—all combine to bring an unfamiliar peace to his heart, and a more cheerful color to his thoughts. He thinks of his loneliness; he hopes soon to be alone no longer... But suppose she deceives him!... This mixture of hope and fear, these thoughts of happiness disturbed by dark forebodings, form the subject of the Adagio. At the end, one of the shepherds again takes up the ranz des vaches; the other no longer answers... Sounds of distant thunder... solitude... silence...

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# *Symphonie Fantastique*, Op. 14 (1830)

**Part Four: *March to the Scaffold*** - The artist, now knowing beyond doubt that his love is not returned, poisons himself with opium. The dose of the narcotic, too weak to take his life, plunges him into a sleep accompanied by the most terrible visions. He dreams that he has killed the woman he loved, and that he is condemned to death, brought to the scaffold, and witnesses his own execution. The procession is accompanied by a march that is sometimes fierce and somber, sometimes stately and brilliant; loud crashes are followed abruptly by the dull thud of heavy footfalls. At the end of the march, the first four bars of the idée fixe recur like a last thought of love interrupted by the fatal stroke.

**Part Five: *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*** - He sees himself at the witches' sabbath, in the midst of a ghastly crowd of spirits, sorcerers, and monsters of every kind, assembled for his funeral. Strange noises, groans, bursts of laughter, far-off shouts to which other shouts seem to reply. The beloved tune appears once more, but it has lost its character of refinement and diffidence; it has become nothing but a common dance tune, trivial and grotesque: it is she who has come to the sabbath... A roar of joy greets her arrival... She mingles with the devilish orgy... Funeral knell, ludicrous parody of the Dies irae, sabbath dance. The sabbath dance and the Dies irae in combination.