

Maxime Pascal conducts Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ*

Thursday, December 17, 2026 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Maxime Pascal, conductor · Julie Boulianne, mezzo-soprano · Allan Clayton, tenor · Huw Montague Rendall, baritone · Jean Teitgen, bass · Edwin Crossley-Mercer, baritone · Theodore Platt, baritone · Caspar Singh, tenor · Rundfunkchor Berlin, chorus

approximately 95 minutes

Hector Berlioz

1803–1869

95 minutes

L'Enfance du Christ, Op. 25

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Part One: Herod's Dream. There is no overture. The narrator (tenor) sets the scene in a few lines, and then Roman soldiers patrol the streets of Jerusalem at night in a *Marche nocturne*: a quiet, fugal march whose lines weave in and out of each other as the patrol comes and goes. Herod (bass) is sleepless, haunted by a recurring dream of a child who will overthrow him. His long aria “O misère des rois” is one of the finest things in the score, gloomy and modal, with low brass shadowing his despair. Soothsayers are summoned and perform a strange, fitful dance in 7/4 time before confirming his fears; Herod orders every newborn child to be killed. The scene then changes to the stable at Bethlehem, where Mary and Joseph sing tenderly over the child, until an unseen choir of angels warns them to flee. Berlioz asks for these voices to sound from a distance, with an organ.

Part Two: The Flight into Egypt. This short central part is the original *Fuite en Égypte*. A gentle, modal overture leads to *L'Adieu des bergers* (The Shepherds' Farewell), the chorus that began the whole project. The narrator then describes the family resting by the roadside in *Le Repos de la Sainte Famille*, a pastoral scene in which female voices join briefly at the end.

Part Three: The Arrival at Saïs. After three days crossing the desert the family reaches the Egyptian city of Saïs. Mary and Joseph beg for shelter and are turned away at door after door, with anxious, stumbling music in the orchestra. Finally an Ishmaelite father of a family (baritone) takes them in, and, discovering that Joseph is a carpenter like him, has music played to comfort the guests. Their music is the Trio for two flutes and harp, one of the very few pieces of chamber music Berlioz ever wrote. In the epilogue the narrator reflects on the story, and the work ends with the unaccompanied chorus “O mon âme”, which fades into silence.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

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