

François-Xavier Roth conducts Strauss, Berlioz and Boulanger

Thursday, January 21, 2027 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin
François-Xavier Roth, conductor · Véronique Gens, soprano · Julien Behr, tenor · Jean-Sébastien Bou, baritone

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Metamorphosen for 23 solo strings</i>	26'
2	BERLIOZ 1803–1869 <i>Roméo et Juliette, Op. 17: Roméo seul</i>	
3	BERLIOZ 1803–1869 <i>Roméo et Juliette, Op. 17: La Reine Mab, ou la Fée des Songes</i>	
4	BOULANGER 1893–1918 <i>Faust et Hélène</i>	30'
TOTAL MUSIC		56'

Richard Strauss

1864–1949

Metamorphosen for 23 solo strings

26 minutes

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The piece opens in the depths, with cellos and basses moving through a slow sequence of dark chords. Then the violas introduce the idea that haunts the whole work: a few repeated notes followed by a falling phrase in a halting, dotted rhythm. If it sounds half familiar, that is because it is very close to Beethoven's funeral march, though Strauss keeps the full quotation back until the end.

The overall shape is slow, faster, slow. From the dark opening the music gradually gathers speed and warmth. New melodies appear in major keys and the texture grows more and more intricate, until all 23 lines are in motion at once. Listen for how

often a solo violin or cello rises out of the web and sinks back into it. These brighter passages sound like memories, and each time the falling theme pulls the music back.

At the height of the fast central section the momentum breaks, and the opening tempo returns with full weight. The last pages are a long descent. When the cellos and basses finally state Beethoven's march plainly, under the theme that has been shadowing it all along, the connection is made, and the piece ends in C minor, very quietly.

Hector Berlioz

1803–1869

Roméo et Juliette, Op. 17: Roméo seul

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The movement begins with the violins entirely alone, playing a slow, wandering, chromatic line: Romeo by himself, restless and melancholy. Other instruments join gradually, and from far away come fragments of a quick dance. Then a solo oboe sings a long, tender melody over a quiet pulse from the percussion, which keeps the rhythm of the distant ball going underneath. Berlioz had written this tune years earlier for one of his Prix de Rome cantatas and saved it for a better use.

The dance music draws closer and the tempo changes to Allegro: we are inside the Capulets' ballroom, with the full orchestra in brilliant colours. The high point comes when Berlioz brings back the oboe's melody, now given out at full volume by the wind and brass, and sets it on top of the whirling dance tune. Combining two themes in this way was a favourite device of his. The movement drives on over a repeating figure in the bass, pauses for a last, brief memory of the solo oboe, and ends in a blaze.

Hector Berlioz

1803–1869

Roméo et Juliette, Op. 17: La Reine Mab, ou la Fée des Songes

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The marking is *Prestissimo*, and almost everything is quiet. The strings play with mutes, divided into many parts, while the double basses are silent for long stretches, so that the music

seems to have no weight at all. Short phrases dart between strings and woodwinds, break off in sudden silences and start again.

In the middle the pace relaxes. A plaintive melody floats over high, glassy harmonics from the violins and the harps. When the fast music returns it brings new colours with it. Listen near the end for a faint, bell-like chiming: these are antique cymbals, a pair of very small tuned cymbals that Berlioz specified for this movement. The scherzo vanishes as lightly as it arrived.

Lili Boulanger

1893–1918

30 minutes

Faust et Hélène

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The story is told in a single span. It begins with an orchestral prelude: Faust lies in troubled sleep, and Méphistophélès (baritone) sets spirits to watch over him. When Faust (tenor) wakes, he can think only of Helen, the most beautiful woman who ever lived, and demands that Méphistophélès bring her back from the dead. Méphistophélès complies.

Hélène (written for mezzo-soprano, sung here by a soprano) appears. At first she resists Faust: too many men have already died for her. The duet in which he wins her over is the centre of the work.

The ending is swift. Méphistophélès breaks in to say that Helen must return to the grave. The orchestra darkens as the ghosts of the Trojan War rise up, with Paris at their head, to claim her. Faust tries to fight for her, and is struck down.



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