

Program

Note

The composer's intention has been to treat of various states in the life of an artist, insofar as they have musical quality. Since this instrumental drama lacks the assistance of words, an advance explanation of its plan is necessary. The following program, therefore, should be thought of as if it were the spoken text of an opera, serving to introduce the musical movements and to explain their character and expression.

First Movement

DAY-DREAMS — 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.

Second Movement

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.

Third Movement

IN THE MEADOWS

One evening in the country, he hears in the distance two shepherds playing a *ranz de 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 de vaches*; the other no longer answers ... Sounds of distant thunder ... solitude ... silence ...

Fourth Movement

MARCH TO THE SCAFFOLD

The artist, now knowing beyond all 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 horrible 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.

Fifth Movement

SABBATH NIGHT'S DREAM

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.

(translated by Nicholas Temperley)