

Season Finale: *Symphonie fantastique*

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Allison Loggins-Hull: *Doublespeak* (World Premiere, New Jersey Symphony Commission)

Ms. Loggins-Hull has graciously provided the following introduction to the world premiere of her new work.

Doublespeak is a symphonic tone poem in three continuous movements that explores the tension between truth, perception, and language in modern life. The title refers to the manipulation of meaning: language that disguises reality while appearing to state it plainly.

The first movement, *The Party*, draws inspiration from George Orwell’s *1984*. Embedded quietly but persistently in the music is a transcription of Morse code spelling the line: “The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command.” This coded message unfolds beneath an unsettled orchestral texture and creates a constant, almost subliminal tension. Above it emerges a theme inspired by “We Shall Overcome,” highlighting the fragile space between hope and control.

The second movement, *Connection*, turns to the contradictions of life in the digital age. Modern technology promises unprecedented connectivity, yet many people experience a growing sense of distance and isolation. Recurrent “digital blips” flicker throughout the orchestra, suggesting the constant presence of technology in daily life.

The finale, *Hold*, introduces a driving bass ostinato that propels the music forward with relentless momentum. The earlier protest theme slowly re-emerges and fragments of the opening material return. The movement reflects vigilance and endurance, the determination to remain aware, engaged, and resilient. Even as the music gathers strength, the ending leaves an uneasy question in the air. Victories may come, but the forces that distort truth rarely disappear entirely.

–Allison Loggins-Hull

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 22 in E-flat Major, K. 482

When Mozart introduced this concerto in 1785, his Viennese audience demanded that he repeat the slow movement. Mozart’s magnificent C-minor Andante forms the emotional core of this concerto: music on a par with his finest wind serenades.

But it is tough to single out one movement. This was the first concerto in which Mozart used clarinets rather than oboes. From the opening fanfare and ensuing response of descending wind chords, Mozart establishes the woodwinds as the principal expressive force of the work. They mesh convincingly with the soloist, and yet seem to be soloists themselves, so absorbing are their passages in all three movements.

Mozart is profligate with his themes in this splendid concerto. So many entrancing, elegant melodies enter the first movement's orchestral exposition that by the time solo piano enters, its theme has half a dozen tuneful competitors. The memorable Andante is unusual in form, combining elements of variations, sonata, and rondo. The piano part is essentially variations. Mozart inserts two episodes for winds, the first in E-flat, the second in C major, to relieve the tension. His coda is exquisite, at once delicate and ominous.

Because of its lilting 6/8 meter, the Allegro finale has often been compared to a "hunting" rondo. Trumpets and timpani echo the military flavor of the first movement. Midway through, Mozart sets these brighter instruments aside temporarily, interjecting yet another miniature woodwind serenade featuring clarinets and bassoons, in an A-flat section marked Andante cantabile. With this temporary shift, Mozart both recalls the poignant tragedy of the slow movement, and raises the finale to a higher expressive plane.

Because Mozart composed K. 482 for his own use, no written cadenzas survive; he improvised them in performance. For these performances, Mr. Ax plays his own cadenzas.

Hector Berlioz: *Symphonie fantastique*, Op. 14

Obsessive love underlies Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. Its principal theme, symbolizing the beloved, recurs in each movement. Berlioz called it *idée fixe*, or 'fixed idea.' His expansion of this symphony to five movements is a direct outgrowth of Beethoven's five-movement "Pastorale" Symphony, which also embraced extra-musical content. Beethoven's inspiration was the pastoral beauty of the countryside. Berlioz was influenced by Thomas DeQuincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* and by his own unrequited love for an Irish actress. Berlioz transforms the *idée fixe* in the course of each movement, as opium induces the hero to hallucinate. Those hallucinations distort the *idée fixe* in the thrilling "March to the Scaffold." In the finale, the "Witches' Sabbath," Berlioz introduces the medieval chant *Dies irae*. Rachmaninoff and other later composers would follow his example, using the same chant in other musical works.

Allison Loggins-Hull: *Doublespeak* (World Premiere, New Jersey Symphony Commission)

Allison Loggins-Hull

Born: 1982 in Chicago, Illinois

Current Residence: Montclair, New Jersey

Composed: in 2025–2026

World Premiere: These performances are the world premiere.

Duration: 13 minutes

Instrumentation: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion [tam-tam, glockenspiel, wind chimes, snare drum,

xylophone, marimba], piano, and strings

Ms. Loggins-Hull has graciously provided the following introduction to the world premiere of her new work.

Doublespeak is a symphonic tone poem in three continuous movements that explores the tension between truth, perception, and language in modern life. The title refers to the manipulation of meaning: language that disguises reality while appearing to state it plainly.

The first movement, *The Party*, draws inspiration from George Orwell's *1984*. Embedded quietly but persistently in the music is a transcription of Morse code spelling the line: "The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command." This coded message unfolds beneath an unsettled orchestral texture and creates a constant, almost subliminal tension. Above it emerges a theme inspired by "We Shall Overcome," a familiar musical gesture associated with collective resistance. Placing this echo of protest within an ominous sonic landscape highlights the fragile space between hope and control.

The second movement, *Connection*, turns to the contradictions of life in the digital age. Modern technology promises unprecedented connectivity, yet many people experience a growing sense of distance and isolation. The music carries a nostalgic character shaped by lyrical lines and a sense of longing. Small recurring "digital blips" flicker throughout the orchestra, brief gestures that suggest notifications, networks, and the constant presence of technology in daily life.

The final movement, *Hold*, introduces a driving bass ostinato that propels the music forward with relentless momentum. An extended melodic line stretches above it as the earlier protest theme slowly re-emerges and fragments of the opening material return. The movement reflects vigilance and endurance, the determination to remain aware, engaged, and resilient. Even as the music gathers strength, the ending leaves an uneasy question in the air. Victories may come, but the forces that distort truth rarely disappear entirely.

–Allison Loggins-Hull

Ms. Loggins-Hull uses Morse code as a kind of *idée fixe*. She says that the code represents urgent communication during times of adversity. "That felt like an important concept to include in the first movement." She allows that the piece is loosely centered around the home key of D but adds that she has intentionally kept the key center ambiguous, thereby applying the term 'doublespeak' to the tonality itself.

All three movements include tense moments of silence (indicated in the score with the abbreviation G.P., which stands for *Generalpause*; the term designates a momentary rest for the entire orchestra, especially one that occurs unexpectedly). Loggins-Hull clarifies, "The grand pauses in *Connection* represent the ironic disconnection of our modern times, creating a sense of yearning and/or nostalgia in the music."

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 22 in E-flat Major, K. 482

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: January 7, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria

Died: December 5, 1791 in Vienna, Austria

Composed: December 1785

World Premiere: December 23, 1785 in Vienna

Duration: 34 minutes

Instrumentation: flute, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, solo piano, and strings

Meanwhile to two letters of mine I have had only one reply from your brother, dated December 28th [1785], in which he said that he gave without much preparation three subscription concerts to 120 subscribers, that he composed for this purpose a new piano concerto in E-flat, in which (a rather unusual occurrence!), he had to repeat the Andante.

Leopold Mozart passed on this news from Wolfgang to his daughter Nannerl early in January 1786. Although exasperated that his son was not always an exacting correspondent, Leopold was clearly very proud of Wolfgang's success, and awaited news of recently composed works with eagerness. Hearing this E-flat concerto today, we can hardly be surprised that the first Viennese audience encored the slow movement. Mozart's magnificent C-minor Andante forms the emotional core of this concerto; it is music on a par with his finest wind serenades.

But it is tough to single out only one of the rich movements in K. 482. This was the first concerto in which Mozart elected to score his orchestra for sweeter clarinets rather than the customary oboes. From the opening fanfare and ensuing response of descending wind chords, Mozart establishes the woodwinds as the principal expressive force of the work. They mesh convincingly with the soloist, and yet seem to be soloists themselves, so absorbing are their passages in all three movements.

Mozart is profligate with his themes in this splendid concerto. So many entrancing, elegant melodies enter the first movement's orchestral exposition that by the time solo piano enters, its theme has half a dozen tuneful competitors. The memorable Andante is unusual in form, borrowing elements of variations, sonata, and rondo. The piano part is essentially variations on the dark C-minor idea. Mozart inserts two episodes for winds, the first in E-flat, the second in C major, to relieve the tension. Flute and bassoon share an intimate duet in the C-major section that hints at some of *The Magic Flute's* wonderful moments. Mozart's coda is exquisite, at once delicate and ominous, straining to mitigate the lamentation of the minor mode, but ultimately capitulating to the darker implications of 18th-century chromaticism.

Because of its lilting 6/8 meter, the Allegro finale has often been compared to a "hunting" rondo. Trumpets and timpani echo the military flavor of the first movement. Midway through, Mozart sets these brighter instruments aside temporarily, interjecting yet another miniature woodwind serenade featuring clarinets and bassoons, in an A-flat section marked Andante cantabile. Only in one other concerto—the so-called "Jeunehomme" concerto of 1777, also in E-flat—did he interpolate such a section. With this temporary shift, Mozart both recalls the poignant tragedy of the slow movement and raises the finale to a higher expressive plane.

Because Mozart composed K. 482 for his own use, no written cadenzas survive; he improvised them in performance. For these performances, Mr. Ax plays his own cadenzas.

Hector Berlioz: *Symphonie fantastique*, Op. 14

Hector Berlioz

Born: December 11, 1803 in La Côte-Saint-André, France

Died: March 8, 1869 in Paris, France

Composed: in 1830

World Premiere: December 5, 1830 in Paris; François-Antoine Habeneck conducted

Duration: 49 minutes

Instrumentation: two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes (second doubling English horn), two clarinets, four bassoons, four horns, two cornets, two trumpets, three trombones, two ophicleides (usually played by tuba), timpani, bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, bells, two harps, and strings

For Hector Berlioz, Beethoven epitomized the power and expressive potential of the symphony. He was thrilled by Beethoven's expansion of the symphonic concept in the "Pastoral" and "Choral" symphonies. In France, a country where symphonic music took a subservient role to the all-important operatic stage, Berlioz set his unorthodox ambitions on carrying on the Beethovenian spirit. Berlioz's passion for the literary works of Goethe and Shakespeare was to find lifelong expression in his symphonic music. The *Symphonie fantastique*, while not directly based on either Shakespeare or Goethe, has become irrevocably associated with a Shakespearean actress on tour in Berlioz's France.

An Irish femme fatale

Harriet Smithson made her Parisian debut in 1827 as Juliet and Ophelia, in English performances of Shakespeare's plays. She created a sensation, and Berlioz, like all of Paris, flocked to the theatre to see her perform. Though he did not understand English well, Berlioz was sufficiently familiar with *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* to project his literary ardor onto the female protagonist of each. He fell headlong in love with the comely Irish actress. Starting in 1828, he wrote to her for almost two years, but she did not respond to even those letters he had taken the trouble to frame in English.

The young composer's romantic passion was undimmed. By February 1830, Berlioz was in such a keyed-up emotional state that he "could scarcely endure—or distinguish between—moral and physical pain," as he wrote to his father. In this agitated, precarious frame of mind, Berlioz began composing the *Symphonie fantastique*. Two months later it was finished, the creative efflorescence of his unrequited love.

Opium and hallucination

As one might expect from such impassioned origins, the symphony is an intensely personal expression. Written on the eve of the 1830 July Revolution, the *Symphonie fantastique* is the quintessential expression of its age. Frankly autobiographical, it bears the subtitle "Episode in the Life of an Artist." The basic premise is that a sensitive young artist, rejected by the woman he loves, has taken a potentially fatal dose of opium in a suicide attempt. Rather than dispatching him to his destiny, the opium catalyzes a series of hallucinatory dreams reflecting the artist's unstable state. These visions culminate in the nightmare-induced belief that he has murdered his beloved and is being led to the scaffold for execution. Such lurid experiences process themselves in his drugged mind as music, which we hear.

We live in a society where such escapist drug use and suicide are unacceptable social behavior. But opium was not illegal in Berlioz's day; it was widely prescribed as a painkiller and far more readily available than it is today. Indeed, the 1822 publication of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* created quite a stir, and Goethe himself had contributed to the fashionable status of romantic suicide—especially that inspired by unrequited love—as early as 1774 with *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Berlioz was, one might say, on the cutting edge: unconventional enough to be deemed risqué but stopping shy of the offensive.

Berlioz the iconoclast: breaking with tradition

Musically this adventurous program required considerable adjustments to the traditional four movement symphonic form. To begin with, Berlioz expanded his symphony to five movements. A precedent had been set with the Beethoven Sixth ("Pastoral") Symphony; Berlioz adopted that idea to allow for greater exploration of the hero's different emotional states. Next, anticipating Wagner and to some extent Liszt, he assigned a musical theme to the beloved, calling it an *idée fixe*; the term is borrowed from psychology. This theme, introduced in the first movement and varied or transformed in each of the subsequent movements, becomes an integrating component that serves both structural and narrative purposes. As a recurrent melodic idea it makes the symphony a cyclic composition. As an auditory reminder of the program, the *idée fixe* turns the *Symphonie fantastique* into a dramatic work, even though it has no singers, actors, or staging. With this, his first unquestioned masterpiece, Berlioz turned a sharp corner with the Romantic symphony and never looked back.

Five movements: a tour through Berlioz's symphony

Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* is in both C major and C minor, using that tonal ambiguity to heighten the sense of psychological imbalance. In the first movement our hero first encounters his ideal woman, the beloved, and capitulates to her charms. He starts out in a state of sadness, somewhat meditative, but his newfound obsessive passion wreaks great changes on him—and in the music.

In the next vision (the second movement), we are with our hero at a gala ball, where he glimpses the beloved through the crowd of dancing couples. The key changes to F major for the appearance of the beloved; her impact on the artist is clear.

Berlioz was proud of the effect that the Adagio ("Scene in the Country") always had on the public and himself. Two shepherds (English horn and offstage oboe) discuss life in a mournful duet; thunder on the horizon disturbs the meditative atmosphere in an eloquent portent of impending doom.

The concluding two movements of the symphony are among the best-known excerpts in the entire symphonic literature. We see the dreamer marching to his own execution, having been condemned to death for the murder of his beloved. In the diabolical finale, witches and other ghoulish specters assemble for a death orgy. Berlioz twists the *idée fixe*, distorting it to a macabre, spectral scherzo idea. Is this his revenge for unrequited love?

The last movement is famous for its incorporation of the medieval *Dies irae* chant, with ophicleides brought in to reinforce the brass section. Berlioz quite rightly thought them ugly; his vulgarization of the chant melody was intentional. It is but one example of innovative orchestration in this remarkable orchestral showcase. The

Symphonie fantastique was also the first major orchestral work in which harp, English horn, and bells were used.

P.S.

The postscript to the Harriet Smithson story is that Berlioz did marry her in 1833, when her career was in decline. The marriage failed. Berlioz scholar Hugh MacDonald has raised the tantalizing possibility that another woman, Camille Moke, may have also figured in the tempestuous events that resulted in the *Symphonie fantastique*. She and Berlioz were involved in a liaison in the early months of 1830 and were briefly engaged. She later married Ignaz Pleyel, heir to the piano manufacturing firm. The possibility of an addition in the cast of characters sends us to the concert hall with an entirely fresh perspective on Berlioz's youthful masterpiece.

This information is provided solely as a service to and for the benefit of New Jersey Symphony subscribers and patrons. Any other use without express written permission is strictly forbidden.