

David Curran

Royal Holloway College, University of London, United Kingdom  
 david.curran.2011@live.rhul.ac.uk

## Love and History in Berlioz's 'Chasse Royale et Orage', a semiotic-Schenkerian perspective

### ABSTRACT

#### Background

'Chasse Royale et Orage' (Royal Hunt and Storm) is one of the most celebrated numbers of Berlioz's penultimate opera, *Les Troyens*. Signifying the moment in which Dido and Aeneas consummate their love, this orchestral tableau plays host to the first confrontation of the opera's two main overarching themes: love and history. An exceedingly rich piece of pictorial music, which has a structure that is at once, to paraphrase Ian Kemp, universal in design and unique in its working out, it seems apt for an investigation into musical meaning.

#### Aims and repertoire studied

This paper proceeds from the belief that close reading is an indispensable tool for the elucidation of musical meaning, whether such meaning is said to be mediated by an accompanying text or by a work's historical context, or, indeed, by both. This framework provides the basis for the paper's structure, which outlines a music-to-text approach, beginning with a close reading of a single operatic number, 'Chasse Royale et Orage', then bringing analytical observations into contact with the work's immediate programmatic context, in the form of a written programme, and wider context, by situating the piece within the opera as a whole. Ultimately, the paper aims to provide a fresh analytical reading of the movement which, through its situation of Berlioz's form within a common musical discourse, enables interpretation of the music from a music-philosophical perspective from which it has typically been excluded.

#### Methods

On the most basic level the form of 'Chasse Royale' can be described as a large-scale crescendo and decrescendo. It is cast in the form of an introduction and allegro in C major but has nothing to do with sonata forms. There are no fewer than seven themes in the work, for instance, and their disposition does not clearly align with an accompanying polarity of tonic and dominant. Rather, Berlioz deploys his themes in free alternation, subordinating them to his larger structural premise. Formal tables arranged around reprises or rotations of themes, then, are at risk of missing the more dynamic nature of the form. This paper, therefore, uses a flexible approach to formal and structural analysis in order to try to do justice to the work's idiosyncrasies without giving the impression that Berlioz's music is an historical anomaly.

The elision of sections outlined in the formal analysis is also supported by Berlioz's complex harmonic-tonal strategy. Cadences throughout the work are frequently evaded or otherwise immediately undermined. In some instances there is a mismatch between the structural and rhetorical implications of cadences such that points of arrival simultaneously function as

points of departure. Thus resolution is frequently deferred until a later point and tension is carried over to subsequent sections. The dissipation of this energy after the climax, then, is achieved by a series of lesser climaxes that bring the work to a close. The atmosphere of the work's final moments, however, is decidedly subdued, suggesting a less than satisfactory resolution.

These structural aspects of the work are grasped with recourse to an adaptive approach to Schenkerian analysis. The analysis, here, demonstrates how the work's rhetorical strategy rubs up against the canonic harmonic-contrapuntal strategy cogently captured in Schenker's *Ursatz*. First, the dislocation of the primary tone serves to destabilise the tonic, since the start of the structure has to be understood as 'off-tonic', and to thereby initiate a long passage of tonal instability. It also highlights the preference, in the central section of the work, for contrapuntal 'flickering' at the expense of functional harmonic movement, a strategy that weakens the tonic's ability to resolve long-range dissonance. Finally the analysis highlights the exceptionally late emergence of the dominant, the effect of which is to undermine the tonic-dominant polarity that is fundamental to the articulation of a mono-tonal structure and to thereby weaken the force of the work's resolution.

#### Implications

The final section of the paper brings the analytical observations into contact with Berlioz's detailed programme for the work. The text outlines a multi-layered narrative that progresses from a state of relative calm towards a state of increased activity and back. It also exposes a series of oppositions, between, for instance, man and woman, nature and humanity, love and history, and individual and collective, all of which can be heard as coming into conflict with one another. The paper suggests that the long-range crescendo and decrescendo coupled with a tonal strategy based on a departure and return scheme can readily act as a metaphor for the productive tension that results from bringing these groups into conflict. The work's deliberately weak resolution, however, and its refusal to articulate a single tonality, I suggest, can be read as a loss of faith in the capacity of music (as a manifestation of mind) to resolve these conflicts in a lasting and satisfying manner.

#### Keywords

Nineteenth-century music, Berlioz, Schenkerian analysis, and semiotic analysis

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