Hector Berlioz  
(1803-1869)  
Hungarian March (Rákóczy March) from *The Damnation of Faust*

There are, by some counts, more than thirty different musical settings of Goethe’s Faust, including Gounod’s opera, Liszt’s symphony, Wagner’s overture, the second part of Mahler’s *Symphony of a Thousand*, and Berlioz’s “dramatic legend,” *The Damnation of Faust*.

The Faust legend—the tale of a brilliant man who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for unlimited knowledge and worldly pleasures—originated in Germany, and most treatments of the story take place there. Except for one. At the beginning of *The Damnation of Faust*, Berlioz places the action “on a Hungarian plain.” Why Hungary? Because Berlioz had already composed the Hungarian March, and wanted to use it in his new work. He already knew the effect the work had on audiences.

In early 1846, Berlioz was on a concert tour in central Europe. He was about to leave Austria for Hungary when he received a word of advice from a member of the audience at his farewell concert in Vienna. “A Viennese amateur well up on the ways of the country I was about to visit,” wrote Berlioz, “came to see me… ‘If you want the Hungarians to like you,’ he said, ‘write a piece on one of their national airs.’ ” Berlioz chose a tune written in honor of the Rákóczyys, an aristocratic family long identified with the struggle for Hungarian independence. It could not have been a greater success. “…as the orchestra unleashed its full fury, a tumult of shouting and stamping convulsed the theater,” Berlioz recounted. Having scored such a rousing success, Berlioz evidently couldn’t resist taking a bit of poetic license to conclude Part I of his new work with Faust witnessing the Hungarian army march by.

Franz Liszt  
(1811-1886)  
Concerto for Piano No. 1 in E-flat major, S.124

Before there were rock stars, there was Franz Liszt. It was no accident that director Ken Russell cast The Who’s Roger Daltry to star in his fanciful 1975 film biography, *Lisztomania*.

Actually, by the time Russell made his movie, the word “Lisztomania” was already well over a century old. The German poet Heinrich Heine coined the term in 1844 to describe the frenzy of emotion that Liszt created in his audiences—especially young women. Stories abound of women fighting over handkerchiefs casually dropped by Liszt at the end of performances. According to Wikipedia, “…Liszt’s playing was reported to raise the mood of the audience to a level of mystical ecstasy. Admirers of Liszt would swarm over him, fighting over his handkerchiefs and gloves. Fans would wear his portrait on brooches and cameos. Women would try to get locks of his hair…and some female admirers would even carry glass vials into which they poured his coffee dregs.”

But behind the sensational aspects of Liszt’s life was even greater substance. With his dazzling technique, he created the image of the modern piano virtuoso. As a teacher, he influenced many of the greatest pianists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries. He encouraged and supported other composers, and gave generously to many causes (after the late 1850s, Liszt donated virtually all his performing fees to charity). Above all, he was a continually inventive and adventuresome creative artist, ceaselessly experimenting with musical form. “Music is never stationary,” he said. “Successive forms and styles can only be like so many resting places—like tents pitched and taken down again on the road to the ideal.”

Liszt’s search for new expression is especially evident in his First Piano Concerto. In place of the standard, three-movement form of the traditional concerto, Liszt created a single unified work, in which themes introduced earlier in the piece are recapitulated at the end. “This kind of binding together and rounding off of a whole piece at its close,” Liszt explained, “is somewhat my own, but it is quite maintained and justified from the standpoint of musical form.”

Although the piece is played continuously, listeners can hear four distinct sections: an opening Allegro, a lyrical Adagio, a lively Scherzo (with triangle), and a march-like Allegro marziale as the finale.

The Piano Concerto No.1 was premiered in 1855, with Liszt at the piano and his good friend Hector Berlioz at the podium.

**Gustav Mahler**

**(1860-1911)**

**Symphony No. 1 in D major, “Titan”**

During his lifetime, Mahler’s music was misunderstood by many, ridiculed by others, and scorned by some of the most influential critics of his day. But Mahler took a much longer view. “My time will come,” he insisted.

He was right. Where performances of Mahler were once rare occurrences, they are now routinely sell-out events, and conductors are now measured as much by their mastery of Mahler as by their way with Beethoven.

Of all Mahler’s symphonies, the First gave him the most difficulties; before he felt confident in releasing his first essay in symphonic form, he rethought and revised it repeatedly. In its first two performances in 1889, it was described as a symphonic poem. Mahler made additional alterations—including the deletion of a fifth movement—before the work reached its final form in 1896.

Over the opening bars of the symphony, Mahler wrote the instruction “Wie ein Naturlaut,” which can be freely translated as “as if spoken by nature.” This music, with its sense of an entire world called into being, introduces not just the symphony, but the voice of Mahler himself as a symphonist. "My music is always the voice of Nature sounding in tone,” said Mahler. “That Nature embraces everything that is at once awesome, magnificent, and lovable, nobody seems to grasp. It seems so strange to me that most people, when they mention the word Nature in connection with art, imply only flowers, birds, the fragrance of the woods, etc. No one seems to think of the mighty underlying mystery, the god Dionysus, the great Pan…That, if anything, is my program, or the secret of my composition.”
As the movement unfolds, the voice of nature becomes a human one, when Mahler quotes a theme from his song-cycle, *Songs of a Wayfarer*. From here, the music bursts with joyful energy on its way to an exuberant close.

Mahler made great use of folk-like elements in his music, as in the second movement, a hearty Austrian Ländler.

The third movement displays another characteristic of Mahler: his love of the grotesque—of familiar forms recast in a startling and sardonic way. Inspired by a woodcut picturing animals carrying a hunter to his grave, it turns the French folksong *Frère Jacques* into a plodding funeral march, and, at one point breaks into the sound of a klezmer-flavored Jewish wedding.

The finale was characterized by Mahler’s protégé, the conductor Bruno Walter, as filled with “raging vehemence.” In a letter to Walter, Mahler struck a similar tone: “Both the *Funeral March* and the storm that breaks out immediately afterward strike me as burning accusations hurled at the Creator.”

As the movement progresses, the vehemence of this opening alternates with episodes recalling the innocence and youthful passions of the first movement. Mid-way through, a triumphant chorale theme emerges, only to be swept away by another great orchestral outburst. But in the end, it proves victorious and brings the symphony to a glorious conclusion.

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