HECTOR BERLIOZ

LA DAMNATION DE FAUST

CONDUCTOR
Edward Gardner
Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus

CHORUS MASTER
Donald Palumbo

Opera in four acts
Libretto by the composer and Almire Gandonnière based on Gérard de Nerval’s translation of the play Faust by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Saturday, January 25, 2020
1:00–3:45 pm

First time this season

The original production of La Damnation de Faust was made possible by a generous gift from Mr. and Mrs. Howard Solomon

Additional funding from the Gramma Fisher Foundation, Marshalltown, Iowa, and Robert L. Turner, in memory of his father, Bert S. Turner

Concert performances a gift of Rolex

Met Chorus costumes underwritten with a generous gift from Douglas Dockery Thomas
The Metropolitan Opera
2019–20 Season

The 27th Metropolitan Opera performance of
HECTOR BERLIOZ’S

LA DAMNATION DE FAUST

CONDUCTOR
Edward Gardner

IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

FAUST
Bryan Hymel

MÉPHISTOPHÉLÈS
Ildar Abdrazakov

BRANDER
Patrick Carfizzi

MARGUERITE
Elina Garanča

There is no Toll Brothers–Metropolitan Opera Quiz in List Hall today.

Saturday, January 25, 2020, 1:00–3:45PM
Musical Preparation  Derrick Inouye, Howard Watkins*, and Bénédicte Jourdois*
Stage Director  Paula Suozzi
Stage Band Conductor  Joseph Lawson
Children’s Chorus Director  Anthony Piccolo
Met Titles  J. D. McClatchy
Costumes for the Female Choristers designed by Isaac Mizrahi
Chorus Costumes executed by Metropolitan Opera
    Costume Department
Hair and Makeup executed by Metropolitan Opera
    Wig and Makeup Department

This performance is made possible in part by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.

Before the performance begins, please switch off cell phones and other electronic devices.

Met Titles
To activate, press the red button to the right of the screen in front of your seat and follow the instructions provided. To turn off the display, press the red button once again. If you have questions, please ask an usher at intermission.
The Metropolitan Opera is pleased to salute Rolex in recognition of its generous support during the 2019–20 season.
Synopsis

Act I
On the plains of Hungary, the aging scholar Faust contemplates the renewal of nature. Hearing peasants sing and dance, he realizes that their simple happiness is something that he will never experience. An army marches past in the distance. Faust doesn't understand why the soldiers are so enthusiastic about glory and fame.

Act II
Depressed, Faust has returned to his study. Even the search for wisdom can no longer inspire him. Tired of life, he is about to commit suicide when the sound of church bells and an Easter hymn remind him of his youth, when he still had faith in religion. Suddenly, Méphistophélès appears, ironically commenting on Faust's apparent conversion. He offers to take him on a journey, promising him the restoration of his youth, knowledge, and the fulfillment of all his wishes. Faust accepts.

Méphistophélès and Faust arrive at Auerbach’s tavern in Leipzig, where Brander, a student, sings a song about a rat whose high life in a kitchen is ended by a dose of poison. The other guests offer an ironic “amen,” and Méphistophélès continues with another song about a flea that brings his relatives to infest a whole royal court. Disgusted by the vulgarity of it all, Faust demands to be taken somewhere else.

On a meadow by the Elbe, Méphistophélès shows Faust a dream vision of a beautiful woman named Marguerite, causing Faust to fall in love with her. He calls out her name, and Méphistophélès promises to lead Faust to her. Together with a group of students and soldiers, they enter the town where she lives.

Intermission  (AT APPROXIMATELY 2:00PM)

Act III
Faust and Méphistophélès hide in Marguerite’s room. Faust feels that he will find in her his ideal of a pure and innocent woman. Marguerite enters and sings a ballad about the King of Thule, who always remained sadly faithful to his lost love. Méphistophélès summons spirits to enchant and deceive the girl and sings a sarcastic serenade outside her window, predicting her loss of innocence. When the spirits have vanished, Faust steps forward. Marguerite admits that she has dreamed of him, just as he has dreamed of her, and they declare their love for each other. Just then, Méphistophélès bursts in, warning them that the girl’s reputation must be saved: The neighbors have learned that there is a man in Marguerite’s room and have called her mother to the scene. After a hasty goodbye, Faust and Méphistophélès escape.
Act IV

Faust has seduced, then abandoned, Marguerite, who still awaits his return. She can hear soldiers and students in the distance, which reminds her of the night Faust first came to her house. But this time he is not among them.

Faust calls upon nature to cure him of his world weariness. Méphistophélès appears and tells him that Marguerite is in prison. She has accidentally given her mother too much of a sleeping potion, killing the old woman, and will be hanged the next day. Faust panics, but Méphistophélès claims that he can save her—if Faust relinquishes his soul to him. Unable to think of anything but saving Marguerite, Faust agrees. The two ride off on a pair of black horses.

Thinking they are on their way to Marguerite, Faust becomes terrified when he sees demonic apparitions. The landscape becomes more and more horrible and grotesque, and Faust finally realizes that Méphistophélès has taken him directly into Hell. Demons and damned spirits greet Méphistophélès in a mysterious, infernal language and welcome Faust among them.

Hell has fallen silent after Faust’s arrival—the torment that he suffers is unspeakable. Marguerite is saved and welcomed into Heaven.

Berlioz on Demand

Looking for more music by Hector Berlioz? Check out Met Opera on Demand, our online streaming service, to enjoy other outstanding performances from past Met seasons—including Live in HD transmissions of La Damnation de Faust and Les Troyens and a rare radio broadcast of the epic Benvenuto Cellini. Start your seven-day free trial and explore the full catalog of more than 700 complete performances at metoperaondemand.org.
In Focus

Hector Berlioz

La Damnation de Faust

Premiere: Opéra-Comique, Paris, 1846

Berlioz’s magnificent exploration of the Faust legend is a unique operatic journey. The visionary French composer was inspired by a bold translation of Goethe’s dramatic poem Faust and produced a monumental and bewildering musical work that, like the masterpiece on which it’s based, defies easy categorization. Conceived at various times as a free-form oratorio and as an opera (Berlioz ultimately called it a “légende dramatique”), La Damnation de Faust is both intimate and grandiose, exquisitely beautiful and blaringly rugged, hugely ambitious, and presciently cinematic. Its travelogue form and cosmic perspective have made it an extreme challenge to stage as an opera. Berlioz himself was eager to see the work staged, but once he did, he conceded that the production techniques of his time were not up to the task of bringing the work to dramatic life. Most of the work’s fame has come through concert performances. In any form, La Damnation de Faust is an extraordinary work with the power to astound and impress even the most seasoned listener.

The Creators

Hector Berlioz (1803–1869), a French composer, conductor, music critic, and essayist, was a colossus of 19th-century musical life. More celebrated as a conductor and writer in his own day, his uninhibited reviews and articles for journals of his time make for lively reading even today, and his Treatise on Instrumentation (1844) has had a profound impact on subsequent composers. His musical works were extravagantly praised and even more intensely vilified in his lifetime, and it is only within the last few generations that his stature as a path-breaking composer has been recognized and that several of his operas have entered the repertory. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) is regarded as the preeminent figure of German literature. The author of Faust (published, revised, and re-edited between 1806 and 1832) and The Sorrows of Young Werther (1774), he was also an authority on philosophy, art, and music. Berlioz collaborated with French writer Almire Gandonnière (1814–1863) to adapt Gérard de Nerval’s (1808–1856) French translation of Faust into the opera’s sweeping libretto.

The Setting

The opera generally follows Goethe’s settings of the story, with familiar locales in Germany (the city of Leipzig and the banks of the River Elbe, among others) and the abyss of the demons. Berlioz added his own touches, most notably by setting the opening scene on the plains of Hungary. Some have criticized this choice as an excuse to include the Hungarian March, but it also stresses the epic’s universal nature by reducing its specifically German aspects.
The Music
Berlioz’s score is as fragmented, wild, and imaginative as the dramatic poem it depicts. From the very beginning, the music announces its distinctive personality: The tenor’s first solo features a melody that seems to take an unexpected turn at every opportunity, like the subsequent peasants’ chorus with its odd syncopations and mixed meters. But there is transcendental beauty in the unusual moments: the Dance of the Sylphs in Act II, for example, floats a light melody over muted cellos holding a single note, while the percussion and harps interject whispered sighs. The Menuet des Follets, a spirits’ dance in Act III, is a pretty minuet distorted by weird dissonances, paralleling the heroine’s fall into sin. This eccentric mélange continues in the vocal solos; the bass’s sneering Song of the Flea in Act I, the heroine’s intensely lush aria “D’amour l’ardente flamme” in Act IV, and the tenor’s ravishing invocation “Nature immense, impénétrable et fière” are among the most memorable. The chorus plays an important role throughout, portraying humans, angels, and demons at various points. The elaborate choral music includes complex rhythms and, at one point in Act II, two different languages (French and Latin) sung simultaneously. Yet for all the massive effects that have impressed (or offended) critics and audiences from Berlioz’s time to our own, the score achieves some of its greatest moments through daring restraint: Faust’s final surrender of his soul in Act IV is musically depicted by a single note in the percussion.

Met History
The work premiered at the Met in an unstaged concert performance in 1896. The great Anton Seidl, a protégé of Wagner, conducted an all-French cast led by the legendary Pol Plançon as Méphistophélès. A staging of the piece was attempted in 1906 for six performances featuring Plançon opposite Geraldine Farrar as Marguerite. While well received critically, the work then fell out of the repertory until 1996, when James Levine led two concert performances, one at Carnegie Hall, and the next year on tour with the company in Japan. A new production by Robert Lepage—the company’s first since the 1906 staging—had its premiere in 2008, with Levine conducting, Susan Graham as Marguerite, Marcello Giordani as Faust, and John Relyea as Méphistophélès. It returned in 2009, starring Ramon Vargas, Olga Borodina, and Ildar Abdrazakov.
The 19th century in Europe is almost unthinkable without Faust: This archetypal figure, emblematic of human desire and our willingness to barter our souls for what we most want, is everywhere in Romantic music, art, and literature. An overflowing cornucopia of Faust-related works began with the Historia von D. Johann Fausten published by Johann Spies in 1587 as a chapbook (a term for cheap, anonymous 16th-18th-century pamphlets, or street literature). The title character was based loosely on an actual historical figure, Johann Georg Faust (ca. 1480–1520), purported to be an alchemist and necromancer from Württemberg. Versions of the tale can be found throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, including the German chapbook Das Faustbuch des Christlich Meynenden (The Faust Book for Christian Believers) of 1725, widely circulated and read by none other than Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In King James I’s England, the playwright Christopher Marlowe used an English translation of the original chapbook (The Historie of the Damnable Life, and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus, 1592) as the basis for his verse-drama The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, ca. 1604. Over two centuries later, Marlowe’s drama was translated masterfully into German by Wilhelm Müller, the poet of the Schubert song cycles, in 1818, at a time when Faust was “in the air.”

In all versions of this tale, a magician or scholar unsatisfied with life sells his soul to the devil’s emissary Mephistopheles for erotic experience, gold, or knowledge. The earlier versions were moralizing tales, whatever the keen interest in the sins enacted on the way to infernal doom. The titanism of human will that asks questions no matter what the cost, and the sense of sin when one abolishes the deity, are at the core of much of this material. But with Goethe and his Faust, Parts I and II (begun between 1773 and 1775 and completed a few months before Goethe’s death in 1832), the archetype takes on new and colossal dimensions. In place of the traditional moral opposition between good and evil in a religious landscape, Goethe’s secular version pits energy against sloth and prizes “treiben,” “striving,” even if one does great harm in the nonstop search for progress. Goethe’s Faust is the first modern man, constantly reinventing himself in the flux of a changing world. His bet is on experience: that he will never find the present moment perfect but will want to charge onward in quest of more realms of activity. What he craves is omniscience, not the book learning he discards at the outset, but experiences erotic and otherwise, as well as firsthand contact with the sources of Western civilization.

The young Hector Berlioz knew no German: He read Faust, Part I hot off the press in the 1828 translation by Gérard de Nerval, the pseudonym of the great French Romantic writer Gérard Labrunie. “This marvelous book fascinated me from the first … I could not put it down. I read it incessantly, at meals, in the theater, in the street,” Berlioz later wrote in his Memoirs, completed in 1865. Goethe’s mammoth drama is couched in poetry, with a vast array of poetic techniques, but Nerval’s translation is prose, and here the darkness of the myth comes to the fore. Soon after the French version appeared, Berlioz began work on his Huit scènes Visit metopera.org
THE GERSHWINS’

PORGY AND BESS

BY GEORGE GERSHWIN, DUBOSE AND DOROTHY HEYWARD, AND IRA GERSHWIN

“A Porgy of its time that speaks to ours” (Washington Post). The Met’s historic new production of America’s greatest opera returns after a sold-out run in the fall. Bass-baritone Eric Owens and soprano Angel Blue star as the title couple—with three additional performances just added in February!

JAN 8, 11, 15, 18, 24, 28  FEB 1 mat, 4, 12, 15

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45

Program Note CONTINUED

de Faust (Eight Scenes from Faust), Op. 1, but he became dissatisfied with it shortly after publication; he removed the opus number and tried to recall every copy he could find. Before his doubts had set in, Berlioz had sent his new work to Goethe, who gave it to his friend, the composer Carl Friedrich Zelter. Zelter was not impressed: “sneezing, croaking, vomiting … an abscess, a freak of nature, born of a hideous incest,” he told Goethe.

It was 18 years later, in 1846, that Berlioz returned to his initial effort at a Faust composition to make something much larger, with additional text commissioned from a minor librettist named Almire Philbert Gandonnière. During Berlioz's concert tour in 1845, he wrote his own text for Faust's “Nature immense,” the climactic invocation of nature in Act IV—a high point of the entire work; the brooding power of an orchestral introduction that goes from C-sharp minor through B-flat minor to F minor to F-sharp minor in a mere eight measures is unforgettable. For Romantics such as Berlioz, inherited forms were meant to be replaced by new and unique forms, some of them combinations of existing types. Accordingly, Berlioz puts various traditional genres in a blender and combines (or assaults) them in novel ways throughout his life. He had to designate the finished Faust work as something, though, and after experimenting uneasy with “opera in concert,” he settled on “dramatic legend” to describe his blend of oratorio, opera, and symphony. Berlioz toyed with the notion of a more conventional opera on the subject, but he plays so freely with time and space that operatic narrative would seem an impossibility. (Goethe strings together scenes in a remarkably free manner as well, and his Faust similarly resists staging.) But there is structure: Each of the four sections begins with the individual and progresses to the massed collective. Act I, for example, begins with Faust's soliloquy about the approach of spring and ends with a rousing version of the Hungarian Rákóczi March. (When taken to task for this un-Goethean choice, Berlioz replied that he would have sent his Faust anywhere in the world “if I had found the slightest musical reason for doing so”). Act II begins with Faust alone in his study, his dusty endeavors depicted musically as a fugato (Berlioz loved contrapuntal displays and also gives us a thoroughly ironic “amen” fugue), and ends with counterpoising a soldier's chorus and a choir of students while Faust and Méphistophélès sing against them, this in contrast with the greater delicacy of the dancing sylphs and Faust's dream of love. Berlioz loved juxtaposing different planes introduced separately, then combined. Act III begins with Faust alone in Marguerite's chamber and ends with the choral hue-and-cry of scandalized neighbors, while Act IV concludes with one of the most ghastly ruckuses in all of 19th-century music.

Literary archetypes morph through time and different cultures: Berlioz's Faust is not Goethe's. Berlioz leaves out the three prologues, most of the initial scene in the study, the cathedral scene, the prison scene, and the Walpurgisnacht, while the cast of characters is ruthlessly pruned to focus on only three (Faust, Méphistophélès, and Marguerite). Furthermore, the French Faust suffers from a
Two extraordinary sopranos—Aleksandra Kurzak and Lisette Oropesa—share the role of Verdi’s beloved heroine Violetta, in Michael Mayer’s sumptuous staging. The remarkable rotating cast also features Dmytro Popov, Piero Pretti, Quinn Kelsey, and Luca Salsi, with Karel Mark Chichon and Bertrand de Billy on the podium.

**JAN 10, 14, 18 mat, 23, 26 mat, 31  FEB 3, 7, 26, 29  MAR 5, 9, 13, 19**

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brand of ennui and passivity one can trace to Lord Byron’s male heroes, utterly unlike Goethe’s celebration of energy, deeds, and striving. If both Fausts summon Mephistopheles from within their own souls, Berlioz’s Faust is characterized by an all-consuming solitude that leads to the failure of love, companionship, God, and nature. The devil within him drives him to greater and greater isolation.

Perhaps the greatest difference between Goethe’s Faust and Berlioz’s Faust is in their fates. The German Faust is redeemed at the end so that Goethe might link the ceaseless quest for knowledge/progress/deeds with the redemptive power of love for a woman, what he called the “Ewig-Weibliche,” the Eternal-Feminine. But Berlioz’s Faust is damned at the precise moment when his pity, terror, and sense of responsibility for Marguerite’s fate should, we feel, make him eligible for salvation—but he is too far along on the road to ruin to be redeemed. The Recitative and Chase in Act IV in which Faust learns that she is condemned to die is a dialogue-scene between Faust and Méphistophélès, the vocal part exemplifying the expressive recitative style peculiar to these two characters and the accompaniment set for horns only; the devil, we understand from that choice of instrumentation, is now nearing the end of his hunt for Faust. The Ride to the Abyss follows immediately thereafter, with Faust and his diabolical companion mounted on black horses named Vortex and Giaour (another Byronic touch): In this shocking passage, the oboe sounds an oddly separated melody—“Whistling in the dark?,” asks the scholar Daniel Albright—above diabolical galloping in the strings, a choir of country girls singing “Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis,” the cries of monstrous black birds of prey, dancing skeletons, and a mad acceleration until Faust falls into the chasm and Méphistophélès proclaims his triumph. In the Pandaemonium, a male choir sings in nonsense syllables (the composer Hugo Wolf in his youth would terrify his sisters with this chorus), and the music careens hell-bent through a panoply of different keys, starting in B major and ending in F major. Not only are these keys and pitches associated with Faust and Méphistophélès throughout, but they are a latter-day manifestation of the medieval “diabolus in musica,” or the interval of a tritone.

As a journalist in Prague wrote in 1846, Berlioz was himself Faust. In his massive and magnificent biography of the composer, David Cairn invokes Berlioz’s “disillusioned idealism, the search for an idea of love that never found fulfillment, the wanderings, a Byronic search for sensation, the pantheistic worship of nature, the longing to be united with all of creation, the onslaught of black spleen, the terrible sense of alienation, the self-questioning that turned beauty into ashes”—these Faustian traits belonged to Berlioz too. Fortunately for us, he could turn the Faust within him into vivid music on the grandest of scales.

— Susan Youens

Susan Youens is the J. W. Van Gorkom Professor of Music at the University of Notre Dame and has written eight books on the music of Franz Schubert and Hugo Wolf.
Recorded earlier this season, the Met’s landmark production of *Porgy and Bess* is now available on a three-CD set. Eric Owens and Angel Blue headline the Gershwin’s great American opera, with David Robertson conducting. CDs can be purchased at the Met Opera Shop, located near the box office, or online at metoperashop.org.
The Cast

Edward Gardner
CONDUCTOR (GLOUCESTER, ENGLAND)

This season La Damnation de Faust in concert at the Met, Werther at Covent Garden, Peter Grimes with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Salome in concert at Bergen National Opera, a Chinese tour with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, and guest conducting engagements with the San Francisco Symphony, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, and Montreal Symphony Orchestra.

Met appearances Werther, Der Rosenkavalier, Don Giovanni, and Carmen (debut, 2010).

Career highlights He has served as chief conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra since 2015, and in 2021, he will become principal conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Between 2006 and 2015, he was music director of English National Opera, where he led productions of Tristan und Isolde, The Queen of Spades, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, Otello, Fidelio, Benvenuto Cellini, the world premiere of Julian Anderson’s Thebans, Martinů’s Julietta, Faust, Harrison Birtwistle’s Punch and Judy, and a double bill of The Rite of Spring and Bluebeard’s Castle, among many others. He has also appeared at the Paris Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, La Scala, the Glyndebourne Festival, and with the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, Vienna Symphony, and London’s Philharmonia Orchestra, among others.

Elīna Garanča
MEZZO-SOPRANO (RIGA, LATVIA)

This season Marguerite in La Damnation de Faust in concert at the Met, Dalila in Samson et Dalila at Staatsoper Berlin, Mahler’s Symphony No. 3 with the Berlin Philharmonic, and Eboli in Don Carlo at the Bavarian State Opera and Covent Garden.

Met appearances Dalila, Octavian in Der Rosenkavalier, Sara in Roberto Devereux, the title roles of Carmen and La Cenerentola, Sesto in La Clemenza di Tito, and Rosina in Il Barbiere di Siviglia (debut, 2008).

Career highlights Recent performances include Santuzza in Cavalleria Rusticana and Dalila at the Vienna State Opera, Santuzza at Covent Garden, and Eboli at the Paris Opera. She has also sung Léonore de Guzman in Donizetti’s La Favorite and Carmen at the Bavarian State Opera; Carmen, Santuzza, and Charlotte in Werther at the Paris Opera; Romeo in Bellini’s I Capuleti e i Montecchi in Barcelona, at the Bavarian State Opera, and in concert in Geneva and Baden-Baden; Carmen and Romeo at Covent Garden; Carmen, Charlotte, and Octavian at the Vienna State Opera; Carmen at La Scala and in Valencia; and Octavian, Léonore de Guzman in concert, and Romeo at Deutsche Oper Berlin.
This season Méphistophélès in La Damnation de Faust in concert and Banquo in Macbeth at the Met; Philip II in Don Carlo at the Salzburg Festival, Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre, Bavarian State Opera, and in Dresden; the title role of Don Giovanni at Lyric Opera of Chicago; and the title role of Attila in concert in Baden-Baden.

Met appearances Since his 2004 debut as Masetto in Don Giovanni, he has sung more than 150 performances of 16 roles, including Leporello and the title role in Don Giovanni, Assur in Semiramide, Figaro in Le Nozze di Figaro, Mustafà in L’Italiana in Algeri, the title roles of Prince Igor and Attila, and Méphistophélès.

Career highlights Recent performances include de Silva in Ernani and Attila at La Scala, Mustafà at the Salzburg Festival, the title role of Boris Godunov and Philip II in Don Carlos at the Paris Opera, and Attila in concert in Barcelona. He has also sung Alfonso in Donizetti’s Lucrezia Borgia in concert at the Salzburg Festival, the Four Villains in Les Contes d’Hoffmann at the Bavarian State Opera, Philip II in Don Carlo at Covent Garden, and Giovanni da Procida in I Vespri Siciliani at St. Petersburg’s Mariinsky Theatre.