

SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7, AT 7 PM

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8 & 9, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

THIERRY FISCHER, *conductor*

STEPHEN HOUGH, *piano*

ANDREW NORMAN

Unstuck – **10 minutes**

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Concerto No. 1 in G Minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 25 – **21 minutes**

Molto allegro con fuoco

Andante

Presto – Molto allegro e vivace

Stephen Hough, piano

– **INTERMISSION** –

HECTOR BERLIOZ

***Symphonie fantastique*, Op. 14** – **49 minutes**

Reveries and Passions

A Ball

Scene In the Country

March to the Scaffold

Dream of a Witches' Sabbath

This concert will last one hour and 55 minutes, including a 20-minute intermission.

This concert will be recorded live for future broadcast. To ensure the highest-quality recording, please keep noise to a minimum.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

How do young artists find a unique voice? This program brings together three works, each written when their respective composers were only in their 20s. The young American Andrew Norman was already tapping into his gift for crafting vibrantly imaginative, almost hyper-active soundscapes in *Unstuck*, the brief but event-filled orchestral piece that opens our concert. Felix Mendelssohn had already been in the public eye as a child prodigy before he embarked on a series of travels across Europe from which he stored impressions for numerous mature compositions – including the First Piano Concerto. Just around the time Mendelssohn wrote this music, his contemporary Hector Berlioz was refining the ideas that percolate in his first completed symphonic masterpiece. The *Symphonie fantastique* created a sensation of its own with its evocation of a tempestuous autobiographical love affair through an unprecedentedly bold use of the expanded Romantic orchestra.

ANDREW NORMAN

Unstuck

October 31, 1979, in
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Currently resides in
Los Angeles, California

Composed:
2008

**Estimated
length:**
10 minutes



First performance:

September 9, 2008, in
Zürich, Switzerland, with
Michael Sanderling conducting
the Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich

First Nashville Symphony performance:

These are the orchestra's first
performances.

Among the most sought-after American composers of his generation, the Los Angeles-based Andrew Norman was first inspired to write music when he encountered John Williams's *Star Wars* scores. His emergence as a successful artist in his own right has been astonishingly rapid. Norman was a finalist for the 2012 and 2019 Pulitzer Prize in music and was named Composer of the Year by Musical America in 2017. Though he has just turned 40, Norman has written orchestral, chamber, vocal and theater music. The Los Angeles Philharmonic gave the American premiere of his first opera, a children's opera (also meant for adults) inspired by Georges Méliès' 1902 silent film classic *A Trip to the Moon*.

Influenced by the milestones of Romantic orchestral music, as well as contemporary

composers such as John Adams, Norman has mapped out a unique style. His works additionally incorporate an understanding of listening habits in the era of digitalization, video game music and YouTube.

Unstuck was written on a commission from the Zurich-based Orpheum Foundation for the Advancement of Young Soloists. Norman recalls being faced with a case of writer's block: "For a long time this piece languished on my desk, a mess of musical fragments that refused to cohere." He found a way out when he chanced to read Kurt Vonnegut's classic anti-war novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, or *The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* (1969). The Vonnegut novel mingles science fiction fantasy with the author's experiences as an Allied soldier during the firebombing of

Dresden in 1945. The protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, escapes the linear flow of time, traveling backward and forward to the past and future.

“I remembered one of its iconic sentences,” writes Norman, “[and] had a breakthrough realization. The sentence was this: ‘Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time.’” He adds that this brought him an epiphany: “The realization was that the lack of coherence in my ideas was to be embraced and explored, not overcome.” In the score for *Unstuck*, Norman has inscribed this line from *Slaughterhouse-Five*: “It is just an illusion we have here on earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever.”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

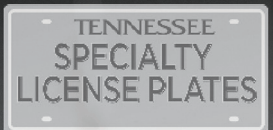
The materials for *Unstuck* burst on the scene and seem to be pulled in contradictory directions. The score calls for “recklessly fast” playing as these sonorities fracture at whiplash speed, amassing a kaleidoscopic array of timbre and energy.

The composer writes: “I realized that my musical materials lent themselves to a narrative arc that, like Vonnegut’s character, comes ‘unstuck’ in time. Bits and pieces of the beginning, middle and end of the music crop up in the wrong places like the flashbacks and flashforwards that define the structure and style of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.”

Norman also points to the implications of the title, which suggests “the way that a few of the piece’s musical ideas get caught in repetitive loops,” he explains. “The orchestra, perhaps in some way dramatizing my own frustration with composing, spends a considerable amount of time and energy trying to free itself from these moments of stuckness.”

Unstuck is scored for 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets (2nd doubling bass clarinet, 3rd doubling E-flat clarinet), 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, vibraphone, tom-toms, tin cans, snare drum, cymbals, tam-tam, crotales, bass drum, cowbells, temple blocks, bongos, metal tins, washboard, ratchet, piano and strings.

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FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Concerto No. 1 in G Minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 25

Born on February 3, 1809,
in Hamburg, Germany

Died on November 4, 1847,
in Leipzig, Germany

Composed:
1830-31

**Estimated
length:**
21 minutes



First performance:

October 17, 1831, in Munich, with
the composer as the soloist.

**First Nashville Symphony
performance:**

April 18 & 19, 1986, with Music
Director Kenneth Schermerhorn
and soloist David Bar-Illan

In addition to his gifts as a composer, Felix Mendelssohn led an active musical life as a conductor and virtuoso concert pianist in demand across Europe. The First Piano Concerto originated during a happy and stimulating period of travel across Europe. It draws on sketches the composer jotted down while in Rome — though, according to his biographer R. Larry Todd, Mendelssohn composed the bulk of the score and orchestrated it while staying in Munich, where he gave the premiere.

The First Piano Concerto was very well-received, and Clara Schumann became a powerful champion. Indeed, it became so popular in this period that, over in Paris, Hector Berlioz parodied it in his *Evenings with the Orchestra*, in a passage that imagines a fine Erard concert grand possessed with the spirit of the G-minor Concerto. In Berlioz's own words: "They took the keyboard out of the instrument — and the keys were still moving up and down by themselves...."

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Classical-Romantic balance that is a signature of Mendelssohn's style is apparent in his mixture of poise and discreetly innovative structural ideas. The most obvious

of the latter is his linking of all three movements into a single interconnected totality. Mendelssohn opens the Concerto by giving the soloist a sudden early entrance after just a few measures of fiery dramatics from the orchestra. This ploy adds to the sense of urgency and reinforces the agitated, driving emotions of the first movement. Like Mozart, Mendelssohn knew that the piano could allure just as powerfully with simple, restrained poetry (note the second theme) as it could with rocketing octaves and rippling scales. Near the end of the first movement, the dotted rhythm of the main theme gives way to a fanfare from the trumpets and horns.

This fanfare is used as a linking device between the movements. It clears the space for a piano solo that leads to a placid Andante, which features reduced, pastel-like scoring to enhance the intimate rapport between the soloist and ensemble. As a unifying device, Mendelssohn alludes to the dotted-rhythm pattern of the first movement's main theme.

The fanfare returns after a long, hushed pause to launch the finale. Its joyful, G-major theme poses a counterbalance to the G-minor passions that had opened the concerto. Mendelssohn not only alludes to the dotted-rhythm pattern of the opening movement's first theme but also, near the end, has the

soloist echo that movement's second theme — as if chancing upon it while improvising. An exuberant coda revels in the glittering virtuosity that characterizes this movement.

In addition to solo piano, the Piano Concerto No. 1 is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets, plus timpani and strings.

ABOUT THE SOLOIST



STEPHEN HOUGH

piano

Over the course of his career, Stephen Hough has distinguished himself as a true polymath, not only securing a reputation as a uniquely insightful concert pianist, but also as a writer and composer. Hough is commended for his mastery of the instrument, as well as an individual and inquisitive mind that has earned him a multitude of prestigious awards and a longstanding international following.

Hough became the first classical performing artist to win a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 2001. In 2008, he was awarded Northwestern University's Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano and went on to win the Royal Philharmonic Society Instrumentalist Award in 2010. In December 2013, he was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE).

Since taking first prize at the 1983 Naumburg Competition in New York, Hough has appeared with major American and European orchestras and has given recitals at the most prestigious concert halls around the world. Among other ensembles, he has appeared with the BBC, Czech, London, Los Angeles, Netherlands, New York and Royal philharmonics; the Atlanta, Baltimore, BBC, Boston, Chicago, Montréal, National, NHK, San Francisco, St. Louis and Toronto symphonies; and the Budapest Festival, Cleveland, Minnesota, Philadelphia, Russian

National and Zürich Tonhalle orchestras.

In recent seasons, Hough has been especially focused on exploring Beethoven's five piano concertos. To celebrate the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth, he recently recorded all five concertos with Hannu Lintu and Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra for release by Hyperion Records in May 2020.

In recital, Hough performs a program that explores the theme of death — a topic that “people are often reluctant to talk about,” he says, but which “has always been a central subject [in the arts] resulting in the most exalted and inexhaustible expression.” The program comprises the Bach-Busoni Chaconne in D minor, Busoni's *Berceuse élégiaque*, Chopin's Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, Liszt's *Funérailles*, *Bagatelle sans tonalité*, and Mephisto Waltz No. 1, and Hough's own Sonata No. 4 (*Vida Breve*). He performs this program in Santa Barbara, New Orleans, Fort Worth, Kingston (Ontario) and at Caramoor in Katonah, New York. International performances take place in Germany, Taiwan, and the U.K.

Hough has composed for orchestra, choir, chamber ensemble and solo piano, and his compositions are published by Josef Weinberger, Ltd. A noted writer, he has contributed articles for *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Times* (U.K.), *Evening Standard*, *The Tablet*, *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine*. For seven years, until 2016, he wrote more than 600 articles for his blog on *The Telegraph*. A major anthology of essays by Hough titled *Rough Ideas: Reflections on Music and More* will be published in the U.S. by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in February 2020.

HECTOR BERLIOZ

Symphonie fantastique, Op. 14

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

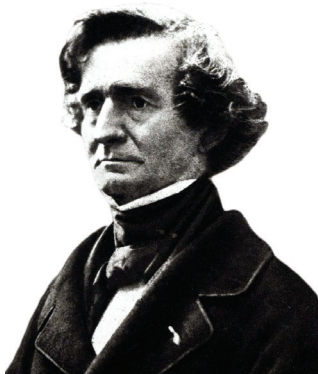
Died on March 8, 1869, in Paris

Composed:

1830;
revised frequently
between 1830-55

Estimated length:

49 minutes



First performance:

December 5, 1830, in Paris, with
François Habeneck conducting

First Nashville Symphony performance:

October 26 & 27, 1959, with
Music Director Willis Page

When he finally succeeded at winning the Prix de Rome in 1830 (following multiple attempts), Hector Berlioz made his first trip abroad. In Italy, he had a chance to meet Mendelssohn during the period of his First Piano Concerto. While in Italy, the French composer also made the first of numerous revisions to his still fresh *Symphonie fantastique* — one of the most remarkable early achievements by any composer. Indeed, it defies belief that Berlioz was still only in his late 20s when he composed the *Symphonie fantastique*.

This score marks a Romantic revolution in harnessing music's power to convey autobiographical, subjective expression. Even on a strictly musical level, the *Symphonie fantastique* is autobiographical in the sense that it recycles material from some of Berlioz's earlier compositions.

In the fall of 1827, a London theater company took Paris by storm, performing a handful of Shakespeare plays in English at the Théâtre de l'Odéon on the Left Bank. Berlioz, who had deserted the study of medicine to follow his bliss, didn't even know English at the time, but the experience was like a divine revelation: "Shakespeare, coming upon me unawares, struck me like a thunderbolt," Berlioz wrote decades later in his *Memoirs*.

A good deal of that impact had to do with the Irish actress Harriet Smithson, who played Ophelia and Juliet — and who became the object of the composer's obsession. This encounter kindled a love for Shakespeare that lasted throughout Berlioz's life and inspired several major works. A little later, he experienced a similar epiphany when the symphonies of Beethoven were introduced to Paris.

The *Symphonie fantastique* premiered in December 1830, only three years after Beethoven's death and just a half-year after the Paris revolution. It incorporates Berlioz's desperate love for Smithson and the sense of music's untapped power that Beethoven revealed to him. One of the many novelties of the work is its layout in five movements, for which Berlioz had a model in Beethoven's Sixth Symphony (the "Pastoral").

In Berlioz's original concept, the *Symphonie fantastique* centers around an unnamed Artist's obsession with a woman who represents his ideal of love. He initially published an elaborate program that lays out a narrative about the Artist. After the Artist's conflicting emotions are explored in the first movement, he finds himself "in the tumult of a festive party and in the peaceful contemplation of the beautiful sights of nature — yet everywhere, whether in

town or in the countryside, the Beloved's image keeps haunting him." He finds a temporary respite in the countryside as he listens to two shepherds playing their pipes.

But fear that his Beloved has betrayed him gnaws at the Artist. In despair, he takes opium to commit suicide but ends up having a fever dream that he has murdered the Beloved and is witnessing his own execution. The final movement takes the nightmare into hell, where the Artist is caught up in a witches' Sabbath celebrating his funeral. Even the Beloved takes part in their revels.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

In the first movement ("Rêveries – Passions"), a long, slow, melancholy introduction evokes the Artist in his solitude, incomplete without this love; muted strings and uneasy pauses set the tone perfectly. When the Allegro starts several minutes in, Berlioz presents a musical code for the Beloved (flutes and violins), whom he sees for the first time in real life after dreaming of her. He calls this the *idée fixe*. It's a "fixed idea" because it not only represents the artist's obsessive image of the Beloved, but also plays a key part in the *musical* structure, coming back at crucial moments, in varied contexts that affect how it is presented. The melody's yearning quality suggests how much the *idée fixe* is actually a projection of the Artist's own desire.

The harp-tinged textures of the dance-centered second movement, "A Ball," bring out the "classical" side of Berlioz, who also numbered Mozart and Gluck among his idols. The third movement, "Scene in the Countryside," is the longest and most enigmatic. Here the inspiration from Beethoven's *Pastoral* is most obvious, but so is Berlioz's originality in taking a different tack. The oboe and English horn play the dueting shepherds. The natural setting translates the Artist's subjective angst into

menacing weather.

The first two movements focus on the Artist's love — an ideal whose fulfillment leaves him frustrated. The final two movements go in the polar opposite direction. If the Beloved promises an image of heaven, the music here traces a descent into hell. The fourth movement, "The March to the Scaffold," presents a chilling image of the barbaric crowd eager to witness his execution. At its climax, Berlioz shifts from the Artist's perspective to a crowd shot: the clarinet replays the *idée fixe* as the artist's "final thought of love." Afterward comes a graphic depiction of the guillotine's blade snapping down — and the Artist's head rolling.

The final "Witches' Sabbath" includes a hideous distortion of the *idée fixe* into a mocking, squawky taunt on E-flat clarinet. This launches the orgy of the witches' dance itself, while the funeral is signaled by the Dies Irae melody used in the Catholic Requiem (first in the tuba, after the bells begin to toll). Even the Dies Irae gets turned into a parody in an orgiastic fugue that combines it with the witches' dance. The Artist never awakens from this horror, but in 1831 Berlioz provided a sequel whose protagonist does: *Lélio, ou le Retour à la Vie* ("Lélio, or the Return to Life"). Here, music provides its own antidote to the poisonous, drug-like effects that win out in the *Symphonie fantastique*'s jarring conclusion.

The Symphonie fantastique is scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (2nd doubling E-flat clarinet), 4 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 cornets, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, 2 (bass) tubas, timpani, bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, bells, 2 harps and strings.

— Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony's program annotator.

ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR



**THIERRY
FISCHER**
conductor

Thierry Fischer has been music director of the Utah Symphony since 2009 and will finish his term in summer 2022, becoming music director emeritus. He has been principal guest conductor of the Seoul Philharmonic since 2017, and in March 2020 he begins a new position as music director of the São Paulo Symphony

Fischer has led Utah Symphony in annual single composer cycles including Mahler, Ives and Nielsen; he has also released acclaimed performances of Mahler's symphonies 1 and 8 on Reference Records, the latter with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. This year saw the first release of a Saint-Saëns symphony cycle on Hyperion as part of an ongoing collaboration. He has conducted the orchestra in Utah's five national parks and forged outreach links in Haiti. In celebration of its 75th anniversary season in 2016, he brought the orchestra to

Carnegie Hall for the first time in 40 years and released a CD of newly commissioned works by Nico Muhly, Andrew Norman and Augusta Read Thomas.

Highlights of summer 2019 included Fischer's debut with The Cleveland Orchestra, and a revelatory Strauss and Sibelius program with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment at London's Southbank Centre. He has a significant presence this season at Flagey in Brussels.

Fischer started out as principal flute in Hamburg and at the Zurich Opera. His conducting career began in his 30s, when he replaced an ailing colleague, subsequently directing his first few concerts with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, where he was principal flute under Claudio Abbado. He served as principal conductor and artistic advisor of the Ulster Orchestra in 2001-06, and he was principal conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales from 2006-12. In 2008-11, he was chief conductor of the Nagoya Philharmonic, where is now honorary guest conductor.

