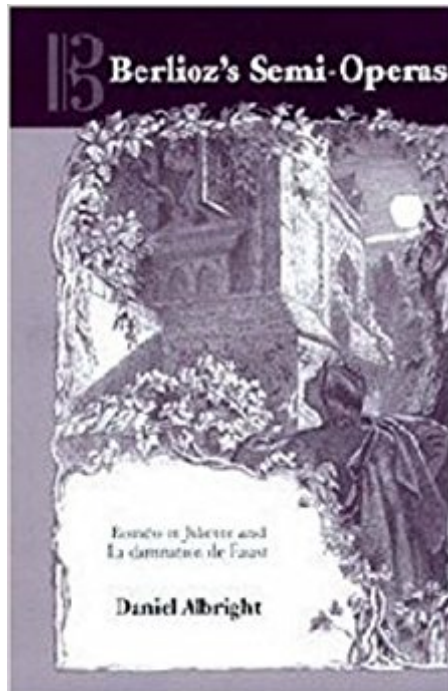




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Berlioz's Semi-Operas (Eastman Studies In Music)



Synopsis

This work studies two works that are among the most challenging of the entire Romantic Movement, not least because they assault the notion of genre: they take place in a sort of limbo between symphony and opera, and try to fulfill the highest goals of each simultaneously. Berlioz was a composer who strenuously resisted any impediments that stood in the way of complete compositional freedom. Most of his large-scale works nevertheless obey the strictures of some preexistent form, whether opera or symphony or mass or cantata; it is chiefly in these two experiments that Berlioz allowed himself to be Berlioz. One of the central characteristics of Romanticism is the belief that all arts are one, that literature, painting, and music have a common origin and a common goal; and this book tries to show that Berlioz achieved a Gesamtkunstwerk, a fusion of arts, in a manner even more impressive (in certain respects) than that of Wagner, in that Berlioz implicated into his total-art-work texts by two of the greatest poets of Western literature, Shakespeare and Goethe. The method of this book is unusual in that it pays equally close attention to the original text (*Romeo and Juliet* and *Faust*) as well as to the musical adaptation; furthermore, it suggests many analogues in the operatic world which Berlioz knew -- the world of Gluck, Mozart, Mehul, Spontini, Cherubini -- in order to show exactly how Berlioz followed or flouted the dramatic conventions of his age. This book aims to contribute to Berlioz studies, to studies of the Romantic Movement, and to the rapidly growing field of comparative arts. Daniel Albright is Richard L. Turner Professor in the Humanities at the University of Rochester.

Book Information

Series: Eastman Studies in Music (Book 14)

Hardcover: 204 pages

Publisher: BOYE6 (September 1, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1580460941

ISBN-13: 978-1580460941

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.5 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (1 customer review)

Best Sellers Rank: #4,276,203 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #47 inÂ Books > Humor &

Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Composers > Berlioz #2981 inÂ Books > Humor &

Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Forms & Genres > Opera #8108 inÂ Books > Arts &

Customer Reviews

Daniel Albright is an extraordinarily perceptive critical thinker. All of his studies are a delight to read, offering deep and thought-provoking insight into music, literature, and their intersections. His book on Berlioz's *Romeo et Juliette* and *La Damnation de Faust*, in two independent sections, is very well organized and allows the reader to understand a great deal about the works even if he or she is not intimately familiar with the texts or even with the music. He begins each section with a brief exegesis of the literary work (Shakespeare's or Goethe's), uses a few pages to explain Berlioz's exposure to the literature and possible inspirations for choosing to write semi-operas on the subjects, and then concludes with a hermeneutic approach to each semi-opera, relating it to other works in the composer's oeuvre and other various artistic entities. The book is not difficult to read, but always use a dictionary when confronting Albright. He manages to find the most obscure but also the most perfect words for the context. I am consistently impressed by his vocabulary (highlights include "quaquaverse," "deliquescing," "conation," "palimpsest," and chiaroscuro!) His prose is beautifully constructed, and he manages the challenges of using a narrative structure to explain deep and broad subjects quite well. Five stars!

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