

subject, in which the oboes and flutes figure prominently, is far more relaxed and linear. It is this subject that dominates the energetic development, though the first subject maintains a regular presence in one guise or another.

The Adagio begins with an introductory passage accompanied by a motive derived from the main rhythmic figure of the first movement. The oboe takes up a haunting, Oriental-inflected cantilena, the strings answering with a warm, serene theme of their own, no doubt inspired by bel canto opera. Bizet interrupts this lyrical, luxuriant expanse with a slow fugal section based on the motive that accompanied the introduction. A transition back to the oboe melody carries the movement to a gentle close.

The Scherzo begins with a Scottish tinge, a lively jiggling rhythm. Bizet employs this first tune as counterpoint for the broad second subject, a string melody that recalls the soaring lines of Mendelssohn's "Italian" Symphony. The first subject pops up again, this time over a rustic drone bass, as the main substance of the movement's central Trio.

The fourth movement, a nimble, breathless Allegro vivo, opens with a whizzing workout for the strings, which take a few bars' rest as the brass and woodwinds play a cheerful march. A third melody affords a moment of lyricism for the strings, though they soon resume the scurrying pace of the opening. The symphony ends in a blaze of colorful virtuosity, an apt conclusion for a work so thoroughly infused with the composer's youthful exuberance.



Tchaikovsky
Francesca Da Rimini
Bizet Symphony In C

Charles Munch
The Royal Philharmonic

In 1876, Tchaikovsky was persuaded by a literary critic and friend from his conservatory days, Hermann Laroche, to write an opera based on a tale in Dante's *Divine Comedy* about Paolo and Francesca of Rimini. The story intrigued Tchaikovsky: Francesca and Paolo are lost souls in hell, owing to their adulterous affair (which was an actual historical event). The affair grew out of the latter's efforts to secure Francesca's hand in marriage, not for himself but for his unattractive hunchback brother, Gianciotto, who, after his marriage to Francesca, catches the pair in lovemaking and has them executed. Francesca narrates the circumstances of their painful afterlife in Dante's poetic account.

Plans for the opera fell through, however, and Tchaikovsky, at the behest of his brother Modest, wrote this symphonic fantasy inspired by the story. The dark opening, marked *Andante lugubre*, depicts the mood and scenery at the doorway to Hell, above which an inscription reads, "Abandon all hope, you who enter here." Tchaikovsky brilliantly captures the sounds and imagery associated with the whirlwind that carries lost souls, including Francesca and Paolo. The music here is agitated, with the strings swirling angrily and a sense of desperation permeating the awful feeling of ineluctable descent. The *Allegro vivo* marking here may well be a deliberately ironic choice by the composer, for the *vivo* derivatives of "spirited" and "lively" are hardly appropriate to this frenzied grimness.

After this section is presented a second time, Tchaikovsky introduces a tranquil but yearning love theme on clarinet. Why is such a lovely melody

emerging from these hellish environs? Francesca's first words in her narration are, "There is no greater pain than happiness recalled in a time of misery." The strings take up the beautiful melody and the mood of sweet regret almost makes the listener forget the dark character of the preceding section.

Eventually the whirlwind music from the opening returns to depict the lovers being swept up again, perpetuating their chastisement of seeing but never communicating or touching each other. The music ends in dramatic fashion, as ten emphatic chords, punctuated by the crashing gong, bring the work to a rousing, chilling conclusion.

Though Bizet's *Symphony in C major* (1855) today enjoys regular performances, the mature composer regarded the work as a youthful indiscretion and suppressed it. Indeed, the symphony remained unperformed until 1935, two years after it turned up in a bundle of manuscripts donated to the Paris Conservatory by composer Reynaldo Hahn. Bizet, whose reputation rests on a mere handful of works, always attached greater importance to his later *Symphony in C major* (1871), subtitled "Roma." Nonetheless, the decidedly less inspired "Roma" remains eclipsed in the shadow of its ebullient predecessor.

The 1855 symphony, written when Bizet was 17, was strongly influenced by the two symphonies of Gounod, which in turn owe something to Schubert and Mozart. The opening *Allegro vivo* commences with a short, inquiring rhythmic figure, a three-note motive that recalls the terseness of the material from which Beethoven spins the first movement of his *Fifth Symphony*. The second

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1 Overture-Fantasia 23:14

Symphony In C

2 Allegro Vivo 6:41

3 Adagio 8:39

4 Allegro Vivace, Trio 3:47

5 Allegro Vivace 5:50

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