

**Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes**  
**October 18-19-20, 2024**  
**99th Season / Subscription Program 2**  
**J. Michael Allsen**

Visions lie at the heart of the works heard on this program, which is led by guest composer conductor Nicholas Hersh. British composer Anna Clyne, whose music is making its first appearance at a MSO program, based her work *This Midnight Hour* upon poetic visions by Charles Baudelaire and Juan Ramón Jiménez. Violinist Kelly Hall-Tompkins played a stunning performance of the Wynton Marsalis *Violin Concerto* in 2022. She returns here to perform two works, beginning with the gentle *The Lark Ascending* by Ralph Vaughan Williams, based upon a poem by George Meredith. She then plays plays *Tzigane*, Maurice Ravel's virtuosic take on Roma fiddling, written for the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Arani. And to end the program we play the monumental *Symphonie fantastique* by Hector Berlioz, a passionate and often disturbing musical vision ending with a trip to hell!

Leading British composer Anna Clyne, who now resides in New York, wrote this exciting work for L'Orchestre national d'Île-de-France in Paris.

**Anna Clyne**

**Born:** March 9, 1980, London, United Kingdom.

***This Midnight Hour***

- **Composed:** 2015.
- **Premiere:** November 13, 2015, in Paris, by the Orchestre national d'Île de France, Enrique Mazzola. director.
- **Previous MSO Performances:** This is our first performance of the work.
- **Duration:** 12:00.

**Background**

Clyne frequently sees her works as collaborations, and many of her orchestral works, including this one, have arisen out of her collaborations with the orchestras for which she has been a composer-in-residence.

Among the leading British composers of her generation, Anna Clyne was born in London and was composing by age 11. She studied at the University of Edinburgh and the Manhattan School of Music. Clyne has served as composer-in-residence

with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, L'Orchestre national d'Île-de-France in Paris, and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. In 2024, she has just completed residencies with orchestras in Finland, England, and Spain. Clyne's inventive music spans a wide range of styles, from electroacoustic works to more traditional works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, and chorus. *This Midnight Hour* was composed during her residency in Paris

### What You'll Hear

This evocative score draws upon images from poems by Jimenez (of mad energy) and Baudelaire (of a “melancholic waltz”).

Clyne provides the following description of the piece:

“The opening to *This Midnight Hour* is inspired by the character and power of the lower strings of L'Orchestre national d'Île de France. From here, it draws inspiration from two poems—one by Charles Baudelaire and another by Juan Ramón Jiménez. Whilst it is not intended to depict a specific narrative, my intention is that it will evoke a visual journey for the listener. Jiménez's *La musica* is very short and concise:

“Music—  
a naked woman  
running mad through the pure night  
(translated by Robert Bly)

“This immediately struck me as a strong image and one that I chose to interpret with outbursts of frenetic energy, for example, dividing the strings into sub-groups that play *fortissimo* staggered descending cascade figures from left to right in stereo effect. This stems from my early explorations of electroacoustic music. There is also a lot of evocative sensory imagery in Baudelaire's *Harmonie du Soir*, the first stanza of which reads as follows:

“The season is at hand when swaying on its stem  
Every flower exhales perfume like a censor;  
Sounds and perfumes turn in the evening air;  
Melancholy waltz and languid vertigo!  
(translated by William Aggeler)

“I riffed on the idea of the melancholic waltz about halfway into *This Midnight Hour*—I split the viola section in two and have one half playing at

written pitch and the other half playing 1/4 tone sharp to emulate the sonority of an accordion playing a Parisian-esque waltz.”

The piece starts with hectic “running” music, with a forceful line from the low strings and jagged bursts from the woodwinds. Clarinets and introduce a languid new idea before a static interlude punctuated by the drums. Another frantic episode leads into Clyne’s rather woozy “melancholic waltz.” The piece ends with a calm, folklike idea, overlaid with a sometimes bluesy solo trumpet.

This tranquil work was written directly after Vaughan Williams returned home from the horrors of World War I.

### **Ralph Vaughan Williams**

**Born:** October 12, 1872, Down Ampney, United Kingdom.

**Died:** August 26, 1958, London, United Kingdom.

### ***The Lark Ascending***

- **Composed:** Completed in 1920.
- **Premiere:** Marie Hall, to whom the score is dedicated, played *The Lark Ascending* at its first performance, with piano accompaniment, in December, 1920. Six months later the composer’s friend Adrian Boult conducted her in the premiere of the orchestral version in London.
- **Previous MSO Performances:** We have performed the work once previously, in 1978, with MSO concertmaster Norman Paulu as soloist..
- **Duration:** 13:00.

### **Background**

Marie Hall, dedicatee of the score, was a leading British violinist of the day, and one of the first female violinists to have a truly international career.

Though he was nearly 42 at the outbreak of World War I, Vaughan Williams volunteered for service almost immediately, setting composition aside for the duration of the war. He served first as an ambulance orderly and then as an artillery officer, and at the end of the war, he was named Music Director of the First Army in France. Returning to England, he took up a position as Professor of Composition at the Royal College of Music, and began composing again with great intensity. Among the works he had sketched out before the war was *The Lark Ascending*, and he revised the score extensively in 1920. Vaughan Williams

dedicated it to Marie Hall, one of the most eminent violin soloists of the early 20th century. Hall advised him on the solo part. One of the reviewers said that it “showed serene disregard for the fashions of today or yesterday.” *The Lark Ascending* is based upon a short poem by the popular Victorian writer George Meredith, which Vaughan Williams includes in the score:

He rises and begins to round,  
 He drops the silver chain of sound,  
 Of many links without a break,  
 In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake.

For singing till his heaven fills,  
 ‘Tis love of earth that he instils,  
 And ever winging up and up,  
 Our valley is his golden cup  
 And he the wine which overflows  
 To lift us with him as he goes.

Till lost on his aerial rings  
 In light, and then the fancy sings.

### **What You’ll Hear**

The solo violin winds out a lovely melodic line above a lightly-scored orchestral accompaniment.

The work is an exercise in serenity. The orchestra begins with a hushed, expectant passage before the solo line enters, ascending to the violin’s upper range in a series of short phrases reminiscent of birdsong. This outwardly simple melody uses just a few pitches: one of my teachers jokingly referred to this piece as “Vaughan Williams’s loving tribute to the pentatonic scale.” But it is thoroughly lovely, played above the simplest accompaniment. There is a change of character, to a lyrical theme played by the orchestra, as the solo part “chirrup” a lively decoration. Vaughan Williams introduces a new idea, a stolid folk dance that leads to an avian cadenza. The orchestra introduces a third theme, a broad folklike melody. The piece closes with a final reprise of the opening music, and a solo violin passage that fades to nothingness as the lark vanishes in the misty heights.

Hungarian music, particularly that of the Roma people, has been fascinating composers from the time of Mozart onwards. This work by Ravel attempts to capture the excitement of Roma fiddling.

### **Maurice Ravel**

**Born:** March 7, 1875, Ciboure, France.

**Died:** December 28, 1937, Paris, France.

### *Tzigane*

- **Composed:** 1922-24.
- **Premiere:** A version for violin and piano was premiered in London by Jelly d'Arani, violin, and Henri Gil-Marchex, piano, on April 26, 1924. Ravel completed the orchestral version a few months later, and this version was premiered in Paris on November 30, 1924, with d'Arani as soloist.
- **Previous MSO Performances:** Previous MSO performances have featured Vartan Manoogian (1982) and Laura Frautschi (1997).
- **Duration:** 10:00.

### **Background**

Jelly d'Arani, the Hungarian violinist who inspired Ravel to compose this work, had settled in London by 1922, after years of successful tours. She was an excellent player, but also did not shy away from using her “exotic” Roma heritage to further her career.

During the early 1920s, Maurice Ravel was in a severe compositional slump. His spirit and Parisian musical society had been devastated by World War I, and he was deeply depressed over the death of his mother. He managed to complete his *Violin Sonata* in 1922, but the years leading up to this were extremely unproductive. In July of 1922, Ravel was invited to a private concert where the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Arani played the recently-completed sonata. Ravel was entranced by her playing, and was particularly fascinated by her Hungarian musical heritage. He asked her to play some authentic Roma tunes, and eventually the two stayed together until 5:00 in the morning, discussing Hungarian music. *Tzigane* (meaning “Gypsy”) was obviously inspired by this experience, and although it was relatively slow in coming, it marked the beginning of a new period of creativity for Ravel.

## What You'll Hear

Though they were closely contemporary pieces, Ravel takes an approach in *Tzigane* that is entirely different from that of Vaughan-Williams: here the focus is entirely on the violin part, which is filled to the brim with astonishing technical feats.

Ravel's friend, violinist André Polah, who advised him on technical details of the solo part, wrote that: "Ravel's idea was to represent a [Roma violinist] serenading a beautiful woman—real or imaginary—with his fiery temperament and with all the resources of good and bad taste at his command. In the solo part, Ravel has not only uses every known technical effect, but has invented some new ones!" Ravel was particularly adept at absorbing musical influences, and in *Tzigane* he creates his own version of Hungarian music. The work opens with a lengthy and spectacular solo cadenza that manages to capture the essence of Roma fiddling, together with echoes of the 19th-century violin virtuoso Niccoló Paganini. When the orchestra finally enters, it provides a rich, but inobtrusive background to an ever-more-complicated battery of virtuoso techniques: rapid harmonics, quadruple stops, and an amazing passage that calls upon the player to play *pizzicatti* with the left hand in the midst of bowed arpeggios.

Okay, I'm just going to say it: Hector Berlioz was one strange dude...

## Hector Berlioz

**Born:** December 11, 1803, La Côte-Saint-André, France.

**Died:** March 8, 1869, Paris, France.

### *Symphonie fantastique (Fantastic Symphony), Op. 14*

- **Composed:** Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, which he subtitled "Episode in the Life of an Artist," was written between 1829 and 1830.
- **Premiere:** December 5, 1830 at the Paris Conservatoire, under the direction of François-Antoine Habaneck.
- **Previous MSO Performances:** Previous performances by the Madison Symphony Orchestra were in 1973, 1983, 1997, 2006 and 2015.
- **Duration:** 55:00.

## Background

This grand, programmatic work was inspired by Berlioz's obsessive love for English actress Harriet Smithson.

If we were to paint a picture of the archetypical Romantic Composer, we could probably use Hector Berlioz as a model. Six feet tall, with a huge mop of hair and a passionate personality, Berlioz was nearly always in a state of emotional upheaval—upheaval reflected in his copious writings and larger-than-life compositions. All of his compositions illustrated his passions, but none is more directly (and disturbingly) autobiographical than his *Symphonie Fantastique*. The story behind this work reads like a Hollywood screenplay...

**Scene 1: Paris, 1827.** Berlioz (a young Gérard Depardieu? Johnny Depp in a red wig?), a passionate young composer, sees Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for the first time. He is in ecstasy over the play, despite the fact that the performance was in English, a language he does not understand. What *really* makes an impression on him, however, is Harriet Smithson, the English actress in the role of Ophelia (if contemporary descriptions of her are accurate, Lena Dunham would be perfect.) Berlioz is immediately obsessed with Smithson, and writes to her with a marriage proposal—the first of dozens of love letters. Rather than taking out a restraining order, she simply leaves Paris in 1829 without ever acknowledging Berlioz's existence.

**Scene 2: Paris, 1830.** Berlioz has just completed the *Symphonie fantastique*, an enormous five-movement programmatic work, which details his obsession with Harriet, including a drug-induced dream sequence in which he kills her and goes to Hell. The work is controversial, but highly successful. Berlioz is happy for the time being, and has a new love interest, the pianist Camille Moke (Gwyneth Paltrow).

**Scene 3: Paris, 1832.** Berlioz, dumped by Camille, is despondent and considering suicide. Harriet is in town again, and an English gossip columnist talks her into attending a performance of the *Symphonie fantastique*. (The inspiration for Berlioz's symphony is an open secret, and her presence at the concert is sure to stir things up...) Harriet savors the attention, and begins to pay some *serious* attention to Berlioz. The two are married a year later.

**Epilogue.** Like most affairs based upon obsession, the real thing turns out to be not as good as the fantasy. Within a year of their marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Berlioz are miserable. They stick together for ten unpleasant years, and are eventually

divorced in 1844. Berlioz does not feel truly free of the relationship until 1854, when Harriet dies. He is married to his second wife a few weeks later. [Note: I'm not making any of this up! - J.M.A.]

### What You'll Hear

The *Symphonie fantastique* is perhaps the prototypical romantic program symphony, the work that set the tone for many symphonies and symphonic poems to come. Not only is it intensely emotional, it is based upon a distinct program: a story Berlioz wants us to follow in the work.

The work that grew out of this strange affair, the *Symphonie fantastique*, is a landmark in the history of romantic music. Written for a huge orchestra, this work uses orchestral effects and even instruments that had never been used in a symphony. (This is, for example, the first appearance of the tuba—or rather its ancestor, the ophicleide—in a piece of orchestral music.) Even more striking is the programmatic idea behind Berlioz's score. This is not the first programmatic symphony—Berlioz himself credits Beethoven's "Pastoral" symphony as inspiration—but it is the first in which the extra-musical story line is so explicit. In a story that has echoes of Goethe's dark *Faust*, Berlioz musically describes his obsession in great detail, even going to the extent of publishing a written program as an aid to the audience's imagination. To illustrate his affair, he creates a musical *idée fixe* (literally "fixed idea" or "obsession") representing his changing view of his beloved. This idea appears in each movement, but each time in a different character: as a flowing Romantic melody in the opening movement, as a lilting waltz in the second, as a shepherd's song in the third, and in the fourth movement, it is the last thing the condemned artist thinks of before the blade of guillotine drops. Its final appearance is as a mocking dance in the "Witches' Sabbath" movement. The program Berlioz wrote to accompany the *Symphonie Fantastique* is as follows:

*"Part I: Reveries—Passions.* The author imagines that a young musician, afflicted with that moral disease that a well-known writer calls the *vague des passions*, sees for the first time a woman who embodies all the charms of the ideal being he has imagined in his dreams, and falls desperately in love with her. Through an odd whim, whenever the beloved image appears in the mind's eye of the artist, it is linked with a musical thought whose character, passionate but at the same time noble and shy, he finds similar to the one he attributes to his beloved. This melodic image and the model it reflects pursue him incessantly like a double *idée fixe*. That is the reason for the constant appearance, in every moment of the symphony, of the melody that begins the first *Allegro*. The passage from this state



of melancholy reverie, interrupted by a few fits of groundless joy, to one of frenzied passion, with its moments of fury, of jealousy, its return of tenderness, its tears, its religious consolations—this is the subject of the first movement.

“*Part II: A Ball.* The artist finds himself in the most varied situations—in the midst of *the tumult of a party*, in the peaceful contemplation of nature; but everywhere, in the town, in the country, the beloved image appears before him and disturbs his peace of mind.

“*Part III: Scene in the Country.* Finding himself one evening in the country, he hears in the distance two shepherds piping a *ranz de vaches* [shepherd’s song] in dialogue. This pastoral duet, the scenery, the quiet rustling of the trees gently brushed by the wind, the hopes he has recently found reason to entertain—all come together to afford his heart an unaccustomed calm, and in giving a more cheerful color to his ideas. He reflects upon his isolation; he hopes that his loneliness will soon be over. But what if she were deceiving him! This mingling of hope and fear, these ideas of happiness disturbed by black presentiments, form the subject of the *Adagio*. At the end, one of the shepherds takes up the *ranz des vaches*; the other no longer replies. Distant thunder—loneliness—silence.

“*Part IV: March to the Scaffold.* Convinced that his love is unappreciated, the artist poisons himself with opium. The dose of narcotic, too weak to kill him, plunges him into a sleep accompanied by the most horrible visions. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he is condemned to death and led to the scaffold, and that he is witnessing *his own execution*. The procession moves forward to the sounds of a march that is sometimes somber and fierce, and sometimes brilliant and solemn, in which the muffled sound of heavy steps gives way without transition to the noisiest clamor. At the end, the *idée fixe* returns for a moment, like a final thought of love before the fatal blow.

“*Part V: A Witches' Sabbath.* He sees himself at the sabbath, in the midst of a frightful troop of ghosts, sorcerers, and monsters of every species, all gathered for his funeral; strange noises, groans, bursts of laughter, distant cries which other cries seem to answer. The beloved melody appears again, but it has lost its character of nobility and shyness; it is now no more than a dance tune, mean, trivial and grotesque. It is she, coming to join the sabbath ... a roar of joy at her arrival. She takes part in the devilish orgy—funeral knell—burlesque parody of the *Dies irae*—sabbath round-dance—the sabbath round-dance and the *Dies irae* combined.”

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