Berlioz was born in France on December 11, 1803, and although he learned to play the flute and guitar as a young boy, he never became skilled at any instrument. When Berlioz was eighteen, he was sent to medical school to become a doctor just like his father, but despite his father's wishes, he left the school to study music composition instead.

Even as a child Berlioz experienced his emotions deeply, and his honesty and wild imagination often set him at odds with the rest of the world. So when he fell in love with an actress named Miss Harriet Smithson, he became quite infatuated with her. Berlioz strongly believed that music could represent real emotions like love (or the sadness of not being loved in return), and in his most famous work *Symphonie Fantastique*, he symbolized just that.

Unlike other pieces that are enjoyed simply as music, this piece tells a story and Berlioz is its main character. *Symphonie Fantastique* is divided into five movements, each having something in common: Berlioz’s daydreams of the lovely Miss Smithson represented as a melody or musical theme. As he realizes that she does not love him in return, his lonely thoughts turn into a bizarre and scary nightmare (as heard in the music of the fifth movement). Through his music Berlioz attempted to create moods and express emotions.

Berlioz was very interested in books, and the stories of many writers inspired his own work. He was a good writer himself, and published many articles in music journals, and wrote books on his composition and orchestration techniques (the way a composer combines different instruments to create unique sounds).

During his lifetime Berlioz was criticized by many people from his own country for being too unusual or eccentric. He often had a hard time getting the public to come to his concerts, and was appreciated much more by people in other countries; where he was known more as a conductor than a composer. He liked his performances to be very big and grand - one of his concerts had 1,200 musicians! With so many performers, Berlioz hired five other conductors to follow him and help lead the orchestra.

"The prevailing qualities of my music are passion, expressiveness, inner fire, rhythmic drive, and unexpectedness."

Above all, the sound of Berlioz's music is unique; it includes abrupt contrasts, fluctuating dynamics, many changes in tempo, and is always exciting!

H. Berlioz
Lesson Plan for “Dance of the Witches’ Sabbath”
from *Symphonie Fantastique* by Hector Berlioz

**Standards Addressed:**
- Standard 1: Creating, Performing and Participating in the Arts
- Standard 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources
- Standard 3: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art

**Performance Indicators:**
Students will:
- Play alone/together a short excerpt from notation, with a good tone, pitch, duration and loudness (1b)
- Demonstrate appropriate listening and other participatory responses to music (2e)
- Use terminology from music and other arts to analyze and compare the structures of musical and other artistic and literary works (3f)

**Objective:**
- Students will use descriptive words to gain understanding of this particular composition.
- Students will become familiar with the compositional technique of orchestration through active listening and discussion.
- Students will identify elements of music.

**Materials:**
- CD player
- Transparencies of Atmosphere and Emotions sheets (see supplemental pages)
- “Listening for Mood” handout (included)
- Mallet Instruments
- Notation of *Dies irae* (included)

**Listening Repertoire:**
“Dance of the Witches’ Sabbath” from *Symphonie Fantastique* by Hector Berlioz

**Vocabulary:**
- Dynamics: degrees of loudness and softness; common markings are the Italian words *piano* (soft), *forte* (loud) and *crescendo* (gradually increasing in volume from soft to loud)
- Col legno: striking the strings with the wooden part of the bow instead of with the hair
- Tremolo: quick and continuous sound on a strings instrument, produced by an up-and-down movement of the bow on a single note; creates a “trembling” effect
- Pizzicato: plucking of strings with fingers

**Preparatory Activity:**
- Set up mallet instruments throughout the classroom.
- Devise a strategy so all students learn and play the *Dies irae* theme on a mallet instrument.
- Notation of the theme is included in the teacher guide. Please transfer this to your chalkboard or make a transparency of the music.
• Teach the students the *Dies irae* main theme first. Play the theme 3 times.
• Explain that the composer uses rhythmic variations of this theme in the composition. Each variation had a different rhythm but the same notes.
• Teach the students to play rhythmic variation 1 and rhythmic variation 2. What do the students notice about the variations? Is the rhythm quicker or slower?
• Explain to the students that the *Dies irae* theme means “Day of Wrath” and that this theme is used in the piece they are going to listen to today. Other composers have used this theme in their works also. (Mozart, Rachmaninoff, Verdi and Saint-Saëns for example.)
• As you start the bulk of the lesson plan remind students to keep their ears open for the *Dies irae* theme and raise their hand when they hear the theme.

**Procedure:**
• Have the students to get ready to listen to the beginning of the piece. (The room has to be especially quiet because the beginning of the piece is soft.) Play “Dance of the Witches’ Sabbath” from *Symphonie Fantastique*. **Make sure to only play one minute forty-three seconds (1:43) of the piece.**
• Play the example for the students again and ask the students to listen for the kind of atmosphere/mood the composer is setting for the listener.
• Ask students to share their thoughts on the atmosphere and mood of the opening. Ask the students, “How does the composer give us this impression?” Possible answers include:
  – Dynamics: starts off very quiet and then crescendos and then is quite loud
  – Pizzicato: plucking of strings with fingers
  – How the composers uses the instruments. For example, the woodwinds are very haunting and almost sound like wind howling in the night.
• Play the opening for the students again and have them listen for the violins. The violins play what is called tremolo. Define tremolo for the students. Ask students, “Does it sound like trembling?”
• Play the introduction again and have the students raise their hands when they hear the pizzicato, tremolo and the woodwinds “haunting” sound.
• Tell students that they will be listening to the fifth movement of *Symphonie Fantastique* by Hector Berlioz and that we are interested in what the music is saying to us about the mood and emotions of the piece. A comment made by the music scholar Jeffrey Langford states, “he (Berlioz) made clear that it was never his intention to paint pictures or tell stories in music, but rather to explore emotions.”
• Give background information on the composer. The piece *Symphonie Fantastique* has five movements and takes the listener on a journey of the visions of an artist. This artist has quite an imagination!
• Give the “Listening for Mood” handout to the students and explain that you will listen through this movement, which is the artist’s final vision. In the boxes the students write down words to describe the mood and emotions of each section of the movement.
• Listen to the introduction of the piece and have students write down descriptive words. (see timing below on table)
Discuss the descriptive words they came up with and then again ask, “What was it about the music that gave you this impression?” Ask students if they heard the bells tolling.

Now listen to the rest of the piece and ask students to fill out the rest of the handout. Show the mood words and the emotion words where students can see them. You can make them into overhead transparencies and project them for the class. They can refer to these lists as they listen to the piece. (Ask students if they know what all the words mean. If not, give a short explanation.)

Decide if you want to do it by sections or the whole piece (see table above).

Discuss the students’ ideas. What in the music gave the students their impression? Point out that music can give many different impressions to different people. No one answer is right!

One other compositional technique to introduce to the students is col legno. Define col legno for the students. Play the piece starting at 8:36 to give example of col legno. Remind students to watch the violins and violas during the concert to see the musicians using the stick of the bow instead of the hair.

Lesson Extension (Optional): please use your discretion

Read Synopsis (written by Berlioz)

**Dream of a witches' sabbath**

He (the artist) sees himself at a witches’ sabbath, in the midst of a hideous gathering of shades, sorcerers and monsters of every kind who have come together for his funeral. Strange sounds, groans, outbursts of laughter; distant shouts which seem to be answered by more shouts. The beloved melody appears once more, but has now lost its noble and shy character; it is now no more than a vulgar dance tune, trivial and grotesque: it is she who is coming to the sabbath… Roar of delight at her arrival… . . . The funeral knell tolls, burlesque parody of the *Dies irae*, the *dance of the witches*. The dance of the witches combined with the *Dies irae*. (http://www.hberlioz.com/Scores/fantas.htm)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction (listen for bells tolling)</td>
<td>0:00-3:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning - Dies Irae</td>
<td>3:21-5:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle - Rondu du Sabbat</td>
<td>5:12-8:05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End - Dies Irae and Rondu du Sabbat</td>
<td>8:06-9:58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Link Up!

http://www.hberlioz.com
Listening for Mood

Name_____________________________  Date________________________

Write down words to describe the atmosphere and emotions of each section.

Introduction

Beginning

Middle

End
Moods/
Atmosphere

Scary/Shocking
Explosive
Joy
Cheerful/Friendly
Mystery!
Noble
Serious/Dark
Warm/Inviting
Adventure
Light/Airy

EXCITEMENT
Calm/Peaceful
Playful
Emotions

Jubilation  Excitement
Fear  Sadness  Anger
Happiness  Joviality  Hope
Amusement  Passion
Joy  Triumph
Courage  Rage and Terror
Shock  Surprise  Thrill