

John Nelson and Joyce DiDonato continue their universally-acclaimed Berlioz series with *Roméo et Juliette* recorded live in Strasbourg



"John Nelson is the best living conductor of the complex music of Hector Berlioz since the death of Colin Davis."

RONDO Magazin

Saturday 18 April, 19:00

Monday 20 April, 19:00

Palais de la musique et des congrès, Strasbourg

Berlioz *Roméo et Juliette*

Joyce DiDonato | Cyrille Dubois | Nicolas Courjal

John Nelson conductor

Gulbenkian Chorus Lisbon

Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg

Generously supported by Ascanio's Purse

Continuing the prodigious successes of the multi award-winning *Les Troyens* (2017) and *La Damnation de Faust* (2019), acclaimed Berlioz authority **John Nelson** returns to Strasbourg on 18 and 20 April 2020 to record Berlioz's ***Roméo et Juliette*** live in concert. Featuring star soloists **Joyce DiDonato**, **Cyrille Dubois** and **Nicolas Courjal**, the recording will be released on **Warner's Erato** label in November 2020.

"Lightning, they say, never strikes in the same place twice. If that's the case, then somebody please explain the scorch marks streaked across Strasbourg's Palais de la Musique et des Congrès."

Bachtrack on La Damnation de Faust

Deftly poised between choral symphony and stage drama, ***Roméo et Juliette*** marks the pinnacle of French Romanticism, highlighting Berlioz's exceptional orchestral mastery, complete with a double chorus of warring Capulets and Montagues. Berlioz regarded *Roméo et Juliette* as his greatest success, particularly the Love Scene, with rich orchestral writing dramatising the two lovers.

Thoughts of setting the work had haunted Hector Berlioz since he attended a revelatory performance of Shakespeare's play in 1827, starring actress **Harriet Smithson**, beginning an infatuation on Berlioz's part that only ended with the pair's hapless marriage in 1833.

"Oh, the ardent existence I lived during that time! I struck out boldly across that great ocean of poetry, caressed by the wild, sweet breeze of fancy, under that fiery sun of love that Shakespeare kindled. I felt within me the strength to reach the enchanted isle where the temple of pure art stands serene under a clear sky."

– Hector Berlioz

Roméo et Juliette was made possible through a generous gift of twenty thousand francs from Niccolò Paganini, who hailed the composer as Beethoven's heir, and features orchestral virtuosity in his honour, particularly in the **fiendish Queen Mab Scherzo**.

"The work is enormously difficult to perform. It poses problems of every kind, problems inherent in the form and in the style and only to be solved by long and patient rehearsal, impeccably directed. To be well done, it needs first-rate performers—players, singers, conductor—intent on preparing it with as much care as a new opera is prepared in a good opera house, in fact almost as if it were to be performed by heart."

– Hector Berlioz

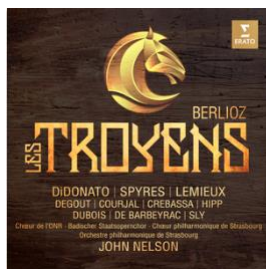
Among those at the premiere in November 1839 was a young **Richard Wagner**, who never forgot the impression it left on him. *Tristan und Isolde* was strongly indebted to *Roméo et Juliette*, and Wagner inscribed a full score to the composer: *"To the dear and great author of Romeo and Juliet, from the grateful author of Tristan and Isolde."*

Acclaimed conductor **John Nelson** made his New York City debut with an uncut concert performance of Berlioz's *Les Troyens* at Carnegie Hall in 1973, and has been a foremost interpreter of the composer's music since. His multi award-winning recording of *Les Troyens* (2017) with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg was followed in 2019 with highly-acclaimed performances of *La Damnation de Faust*. In 2019, Nelson performed Berlioz's *Requiem* (Grande Messe des Morts) in St. Paul's Cathedral to mark 150 years to the day since the death of the composer, in a performance also released on CD and DVD.

"Roméo et Juliette is my favourite Berlioz: above everything else, it just blows me away, especially the Love Music. Seventeen sublime minutes, which I always find so paradoxical: Berlioz never knew real love so how could he write this perfect, youthful, ardent music? All the action takes place within the orchestra, and that's very Berlioz, he was so descriptive. There's nothing quite like it in the repertoire. Nobody writes the way that man writes."

– John Nelson

Success for *Les Troyens*



Gramophone Magazine – Recording of the Year
BBC Music Magazine Awards – Opera Award
Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik – Opera
International Opera Awards – Best Recording (Complete Opera)
Sunday Times – Disc of the Decade; Classical Recording of the Year
BBC Radio 3 Record Review – Disc of the Week

Forum Opéra: "the musical event of the year"

The Times ★★★★★: "thrilling power and white-hot invention"

The Guardian ★★★★★: "electrifying performances"

Financial Times ★★★★★: "majestic, ambitious, extravagant"

The Telegraph ★★★★★: "if only Berlioz had lived to hear this"

Success for *Requiem (Grande Messe des Morts)*



International Classical Music Awards 2019 – Choral Nominee

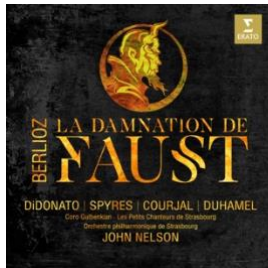
Gramophone: “another high point in Nelson’s work for the composer.”

The Telegraph ★★★★★: “a celestial vision, masterfully performed”

Musical America: “something exceptional unfolded in London’s iconic cathedral.”

The Times: “spine-shakingly spectacular and heart-rendingly haunting”

Success for *Damnation de Faust*



New York Times – Recordings of the Year 2019

Sunday Times – Album of the Week

Diapason d’Or – November 2019 Nouveauté

Presto Classical – Recordings of the Year 2019 Finalist, Recording of the Week

The Guardian ★★★★★: “sell your soul for a damned fine Faust”

The Times ★★★★★: “hot as hell”

New York Times: “another immaculate account of a Berlioz masterwork”

Le Figaro: “one of the best in the Berliozian discography”

Crescendo Magazine: “There won’t be anything better for a long time...”

Opera Magazine: “a triumphant addition to the Berlioz anniversary celebrations”

Musical America: “As a concert, this rendition of La Damnation de Faust was unforgettable. As a recording session, expect it to win accolades.”

John Nelson



John Nelson is recognised on the international scene as one of America’s most eminent conductors. He studied at the Juilliard School in New York, where he received the Irving Berlin Conducting Prize. He has been the Musical Director of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Opera Theater of St. Louis, the Caramoor Music Festival in New York and the Chamber Orchestra of Paris. He has also been the Principal Guest Conductor of the National Orchestra of Lyon, Artistic Advisor of the orchestras of Nashville and Louisville, and is presently the Principal Guest Conductor of the

National Orchestra of Costa Rica, the country in which he was born to American missionary parents.

In the course of his career he has conducted virtually all the major orchestras in the United States and Canada, including those of New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Montreal and Toronto, and also in Europe, where he has conducted all the major London orchestras, the Dresden Staatskapelle, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, the Orchestre de Paris, the Oslo Philharmonic, the Czech Philharmonic, the Budapest Festival Orchestra and all the major orchestras in Spain. In Asia he has conducted the New Japan Philharmonic, the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, the Malaysian Philharmonic, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the China Philharmonic and the orchestras of Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hangzhou. His large repertoire has led him to the world’s great opera

houses, including the Metropolitan Opera, the Chicago Lyric Opera, the Bastille in Paris, the Stuttgart Opera, the Grand Théâtre in Geneva, the Dutch National Opera and the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma.

John Nelson is recognised as a great interpreter of the sacred music repertoire. In 1994 he co-founded SOLI DEO GLORIA, an organization based in Chicago that commissions works of sacred music from the world's foremost composers, such as Christopher Rouse, James MacMillan and Roxanna Panufnik. John Nelson's distinguished discography includes Händel's Semele (Grammy Award 1993), Berlioz's Béatrice et Bénédict (Diapason d'Or 1992) and highly acclaimed DVDs of Bach's B minor Mass and St. Matthew Passion, Haydn's Die Schöpfung and Beethoven's Missa Solemnis. He also recorded the complete Beethoven Symphonies and Piano Concertos with the Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, of which he is Honorary Musical Director. His 2018 critically-acclaimed recording of Berlioz's Les Troyens with Joyce DiDonato and Michael Spyres has been a great recognition of his work and authority as an outstanding Berlioz specialist, crowned by the Gramophone Magazine 'Opera Recording of the Year' and also classical 'Recording of the Year', among other prizes including the BBC Music Magazine Award for Opera, the International Opera Award, and has also just been nominated by the Sunday Times as 'Recording of the Decade'.

The outstanding success of this first Berlioz project led immediately to concerts and recordings of The Damnation of Faust, which took place in 2019 - again with Joyce DiDonato and Michael Spyres and once again John's interpretation has been met with great critical acclaim. To this end, future projects with Joyce DiDonato already include a recording and concert of Romeo and Juliet in 2020, L'Enfance du Christ in 2021 and Carmen in 2023 (all with Warners).

Recent concert highlights include performances of Massenet's Werther at the Wuppertal Opera, Le Nozze di Figaro at the San Diego Opera, Berlioz's Damnation of Faust at the Opéra de Nice and performances of Beethoven's Missa Solemnis in Notre Dame, Paris and Victoria Hall, Geneva. To commemorate the 150th anniversary of the composer's death, John Nelson conducted an all Berlioz programme at the Prague Spring Festival and a moving performance of the Requiem with the Philharmonia orchestra, and London Philharmonic/Philharmonia choruses with Michael Spyres in St Paul's Cathedral, London which was telecast live and made into a stunning DVD.

For more information on any of the above, please contact:

Nicky Thomas Media

2-6 Baches St, London N1 6DN

+44 (0)20 3714 7594 | +44 (0)7768 566 530

info@nickythomasmedia.com

www.nickythomasmedia.com