

International Symposium: ‘What Berlioz Heard’ (Saint-Étienne and Lyon, 19—21 March 2026)

Currently slated for Thursday afternoon:

‘The *Symphonie Fantastique* as an image of Paris’s orchestral history’

Full scores of operas were published in Paris in a prolific way – both large-scale and smaller-scale pieces. So my dissertation task was to scrutinise every available score of orchestral music given there between 1789 and 1810, including ceremonial music, etc. The results were given shape by reference to (i) instruments and their techniques (ii) the make-up of each Parisian ensemble (iii) aesthetic and theoretical writing.

Journalistic reception was not included. This empirical study showed the way towards a poetics of orchestral music, explored in ‘Image and Gesture’, the final chapter,

In theory, all this written music and associated documentation was available to Berlioz to study. But it is also true that important operas from the above years were still in repertory during 1822–1830, and so I will discuss orchestral sounds from those operas to which Berlioz had immediate aural access. Because scores no longer heard in public were still accessible to Berlioz’s inner ear, I focus on what these larger sets of data reveal: an easily-forgotten musical /cultural memory that we can relate to *Symphonie fantastique*.

If future students were to examine every orchestral piece given in the twenty years after 1811, we should have another empirical body of data concerning what Berlioz heard, or else read in the library. This would possess separate validity from those things that Berlioz chose to critique for the benefit of others (e.g. recipients of letters or newspaper readers) about composers like Méhul, Spontini, Le Sueur, Dalayrac – and their successors.

David Charlton, 3 Feb. 2026