

Roman Carnival Overture

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 4 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 cornets, 3 trombones, timpani, tambourines, cymbals, triangle, strings

Duration: 8 minutes.

THE COMPOSER – HECTOR BERLIOZ (1803-1869) – Berlioz spent a significant amount of time touring outside of his native France during the early 1840s. Paris at that time was an ongoing frustration for Berlioz and he found her overly-traditional temperament quite stifling. Fortunately, the appetite for his “modern” approach to composition was more accepting abroad so he often found far less complicated performance opportunities in the other cities he visited.

THE HISTORY – *Roman Carnival Overture* enjoyed immediate success at its premiere in 1844 but owes its source material to an initially disastrous opera project from 1838. Though they had nearly 20 rehearsals to prepare, the first performances of Berlioz’ *Benvenuto Cellini* were plagued by an overmatched orchestra, upset singers and an imperious conductor who throughout the process declined to take any constructive advice from the composer. When the tenor walked off set early in the run and left the title role unfilled, the production had to be officially shelved. Berlioz later leveled several understandable complaints at the maestro. Not least among them was the lackluster and joyless interpretation of the *saltarello* music that accompanied the 2nd Act’s closing carnival scene. Always willing to borrow from himself and eager to divine something useful from the temporary ruin of his *Benvenuto Cellini*, Berlioz used this music as well as a lyric duet from the 1st Act to craft his brilliant orchestral showpiece *Roman Carnival Overture*. The opera premiere was hissed mercilessly back in 1838 but the new overture Berlioz based on its themes drew wild applause and a demand for an immediate encore. Berlioz was so happy with the response, and felt so vindicated by it, that he suggested *Roman Carnival* be used as the prelude to the 2nd Act of the opera should it ever get a revival (which it did under Franz Liszt in 1852).

THE WORLD – 1844 saw the Dominican Republic gain independence from Haiti, the serial publication of the Alexandre Dumas’ *The Three Musketeers*, the first public demonstration of the telegraph by Samuel Morse and the death of the world’s last two confirmed Great Auks.

THE CONNECTION – The last time CCSO performed *Roman Carnival Overture* was back in 2012. John Giordano conducted.