

LE DAMNATION DE FAUST

Dramatic legend in 4 parts

Music by Hector Berlioz

Libretto by Hector Berlioz

First Performance: Opéra-Comique, Paris, December 6, 1846

Part I. Faust, a learned philosopher, wanders in the fields at sunrise meditating upon Nature. He observes a crowd of peasants who dance and sing, jesting rudely. The Hungarian troops approach to martial music. Great excitement prevails among the peasants. Faust alone remains cold and unmoved.

Part II. Faust in his study deplores his unhappy lot. Neither in nature, nor in books, nor in old memories has he found solace. He decides to take poison, but as he raises the cup to drink the strains of an Easter hymn turn his thoughts toward good. Even then the fiend Mephistophèles is at his elbow, tempting him with promises of earthly joys. He succumbs and goes forth with the fiend in search of pleasure. They enter a wine cellar in which a number of boon companions are carousing. Mephistophèles joins them, but Faust is disgusted by their uproarious ribaldry. Led by Mephistophèles to a garden on the banks of the Elba, he falls asleep amid the music of a chorus of sylphs, and dreams of Margaret, a fair unknown peasant girl. As the sylphs dance about him he awakens, still thinking of Margaret and desiring to find her. A troop of soldiers march by, returning from war and eager for pleasure. They are joined by a band of students, who proclaim in song the joys of wine and love.

Part III. Distant drums and trumpets sound the retreat. Faust impatiently awaits Margaret in her dwelling. Mephistophèles warns him of her coming, and he conceals himself in her room. Margaret enters musing upon a strange dream of an unknown lover. She braids her hair, singing dreamily of the faithful King of Thule. Mephistophèles invokes the power of evil and begins a mocking serenade, while in the garden without the will-o'-the-wisps dance. Faust appears before Margaret, who is startled, but in an ardent love scene they declare their mutual passion, and Margaret at last is persuaded to give herself to her lover. The entrance of Mephistophèles, to tell them that the villagers are coming to warn Margaret's mother of her danger, terrifies the bewildered girl. She and Faust part reluctantly, while Mephistophèles exults over the enslavement of his victim. The villagers approach muttering threats, as Mephistophèles forces Faust to depart.

Part IV. Margaret, heavy-hearted, sits alone, thinking of her lover who comes not. Soldiers march by singing of the glories of war.

Marche hongroise: Faust alone in his study has found solace in Nature, but Mephistophèles disturbs him with the news that Margaret is in prison, condemned to death for the murder of her mother, Martha, to whom the fiend had given too powerful a sleeping potion. Faust sings a paper which he believes will free Margaret, but which really gives over his soul to perdition. Faust and the fiend then set forth on a wild ride through the darkness. As they gallop along they hear women and children praying. Strange shapes close around them presaging death. The horses tremble and snort with fear. Faust imagines that it rains blood. Everywhere he sees horrible visions, and at last he is hurled into the abyss to which the fiend has craftily led him and is forever lost. The Prince of Darkness appears attended by infernal spirits, who exalt over his downfall. With a change of scene a celestial chorus is heard and the spirit of Margaret saved by faith and repentance is received into heaven. With her apotheosis the drama ends.