

ALC 1608 Berlioz: L'Enfance du Christ / Colin Davis

Structure

Part One: *Le Songe d'Hérode* (Herod's Dream)

Scene 1: Narrator: "*Dans la crèche*" ("In the cradle..."). The work starts abruptly without an overture or prelude with the tenor narrator describing the situation in the land at the time of Christ's birth.

Marche nocturne (Nocturnal March). A fugal passage of interweaving melodies evoking Roman soldiers patrolling outside King Herod's palace by night.

Polydorus: "*Qui vient*" ("Who is coming..?")

Marche nocturne (continued)

Scene 2: Herod's aria. One of the most famous pieces in *L'enfance*, this long aria expresses the king's inner despair as he is tormented by a recurring dream of a child who will overthrow him. Herod is accompanied by trombones just as Méphistophélès was in *The Damnation of Faust*.

Scene 3: Polydorus: "*Seigneur*" ("My lord"). Polydorus announces the arrival of the Jewish soothsayers.

Scene 4: Herod and the soothsayers. Herod describes his dream to the soothsayers.

The soothsayers make Cabbalistic processions and proceed to the exorcism. A short, wild dance in 7/4 time.

Soothsayers: *“La voix dit vrai”* (“The voice speaks the truth”). The soothsayers confirm that Herod’s dream is true and advise him to kill every newborn child in the land.

Herod: *“Eh bien”* (“Very well”) Herod agrees and gives orders for the Massacre of the innocents.

Scene 5: The stable in Bethlehem. Christ is in the manger as Mary and Joseph sing a lullaby to him.

Scene 6: Choir of angels: *“Joseph! Marie!”*. The angels warn them to flee to Egypt to escape Herod’s persecution. Berlioz uses an off-stage choir (accompanied by an organ) in an open room to represent the angels, an effect originally used in Gossec’s *La nativité* (1774). During the final bars, he then suggests the doors to be closed.

Part Two: *La fuite en Égypte* (The Flight to Egypt)

Overture. Another fugue in triple time.

L’adieu des bergers (The shepherds’ farewell). A famous choral movement, often performed separately.

Le repos de la Sainte Famille (The repose of the Holy Family). Choral movement depicting Mary, Joseph and Jesus resting in the shade of a tree.

Part Three: *L'arrivée à Saïs* (The Arrival at Saïs)

Narrator: "*Depuis trois jours*" ("For three days...") The narrator describes the troubled journey from Bethlehem to Saïs in Egypt.

Scene 1: Inside the town of Saïs. Joseph and Mary's pleas for refuge are rejected by the people of Saïs because they are Hebrews. The musical accompaniment is suitably anguished.

Scene 2: Inside the Ishmaelites' house. Finally the father of a family of Ishmaelites (in other words, unbelievers) takes pity on them and invites them into his house.

Father of the family: "*Grand Dieu!*" ("Almighty God!"). The Ishmaelite orders his family to care for the travellers.

Father of the family: "*Sur vos traits fatigués*" ("On your tired features"). Learning that Joseph is a carpenter too, he invites him to join him at his work. Joseph and his family may stay in the house for as long as necessary.

Father of the family: *Pour bien finir cette soirée* ("To end this evening"). He has music played to soothe them.

Trio for two flutes and a harp. An instrumental interlude, one of the few pieces of chamber music Berlioz ever wrote. The use of the flutes and harps is inspired by Gounod's opera *Sapho* and is meant to evoke the atmosphere of the ancient world.

Father of the family: *“Vous pleurez, jeune mère* (“You are weeping, young mother”). The Ishmaelite urges Mary to go to sleep and worry no longer.

Scene 3: Epilogue. The narrator describes how Jesus spent ten years growing up in Egypt.

Narrator and chorus: *“O mon âme”* (“O my soul”). The work concludes with this serene movement for tenor and choir.