



Hector Berlioz - *Roméo et Juliette* Op. 17, dramatic symphony

"This work is not a concert opera or a cantata, but a symphony with choirs. Even if singing appears from the beginning, it must prepare the listener's soul for the dramatic scenes in which the feelings and passions are expressed by the orchestra ". Thus expressed Hector Berlioz in 1839 about his third symphonic composition *Roméo et Juliette* op. 17 defining it in the score as a dramatic symphony for solos, choir and orchestra. The idea of expressing the contents of Shakespeare's tragedy with symphonic means had distant roots. In 1827 the composer was struck by a theatrical performance by an English company but had to be patient for more than a decade to put his music on a stage. It was thanks to a generous cash gift from Paganini, his great admirer, that he was finally able to devote himself to the new symphony, presented in Paris in November 1839. Divided into seven movements, the *Roméo et Juliette* symphony alternates vocal parts, to which the task of narrating the story, to other purely instrumental ones that intensify the dramatic action. Among them, a prominent place belongs to the *Scène d'amour*, Berlioz's favorite page, which stands out for its passionate melodic flow.

Gabriel Fauré - *Pelléas et Mélisande*, suite with incidental music Op. 80

In 1892 Maurice Maeterlinck had written *Pelléas et Mélisande*, a symbolist theatrical drama that will become a source of inspiration for many musicians. Confronting the most representative text of symbolism there were in fact Debussy, with his unique and famous work which bears the same title, Schoenberg and Sibelius. But the first to try his hand at the lucky subject was Gabriel Fauré, who in 1898 created the incidental music for a representation of the play of the same name in London. From the score, which consisted of nineteen musical numbers and included a chamber ensemble, Fauré later extracted a suite, transcribed for a large orchestra and presented in concert in February 1901. The four pieces in which it was divided - *Prélude*, *Fileuse*, *Chanson de Mélisande* and *La Mort de Mélisande* - describe with the author's usual elegance and refinement of writing the main scenes of the drama: the mysterious forest in which Golaud meets the fragile and melancholy Mélisande, the harbinger of the sad ending, the girl at the spinning wheel and finally the death of the protagonist accompanied by a moving funeral march. Later, Fauré also added a *Sicilienne*, one of the most famous and evocative page of the work, which evokes the scene of the courtship near the fountain through the poetic dialogue between flute and harp.

Maurice Ravel - *Daphnis et Chloé*, suite for orchestra No. 2

Commissioned by Sergej Djagilev for the Russian Ballets, *Daphnis et Chloé* engaged Maurice Ravel for four long years, prompting him to continuously search for a musical set-up that could satisfy the demands of the Russian impresario. However, the lack of affinity of views between composer and impresario resulted in a debut that was welcomed without fanfare which marked the end of any further collaborative relationship between Ravel and Djagilev's company. If on the one hand there were in fact the scenic needs of the choreographer Fokine, eager for a page that would highlight the physical and markedly erotic dimension of the story, on the other hand there were the artistic needs of Ravel, concerned rather to remain faithful to his own idea of Greece as an ideal place of composed and elegant beauty. Inspired by a novel by Longo Sofista, the ballet in three paintings tells the story of the love of two young shepherds who live on the island of Lesbos, Daphni and Chloe, according to the inveterate cliché of forced separation and the final reunion that only comes after having overcome numerous vicissitudes, all immersed in a pastoral scenario of languid sensuality. But Ravel, whose reference model was the idealized Arcadia in the paintings of Fragonard and Watteau, gave very little space to the Mediterranean eroticism inherent in the plot and created a ballet with caressing sounds and vaporous atmospheres, underlined by timbral mixes amalgamated with elegance and lightness, a fresco of indisputable musical beauty that will later become one of his most appreciated orchestral works.