



Beatrice et Benedict by WNO

Reviewed by Denis Joe February 2012

(English translation based on Geoffrey Dunn, OUP 1965)

Based on Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, ***Beatrice et Benedict*** is not appreciated as well as the rest of the Berlioz output. And whilst the composer rated it as a *divertissement* - and it is seen very much as that today – I think it is a masterful piece. Commissioned for the opening of a new opera house in Baden-Baden, in 1862, *Beatrice et Benedict* was to become Berlioz's last major work.

Berlioz worshipped Shakespeare's work and only used a part of *Much Ado About Nothing* adding the role of the composer, Somarone, the duet, a beautiful nocturne that closes the first act, sung by Ursule and Héro (*Vous soupirez, madame* !), the trio of Héro, Beatrice and Ursula (*Je vais d'un cœur aimant*) and Beatrice's heart-stopping aria (*Dieu! que viens-je d'entendre?*)

The overture, unlike that of his opera *Benvenuto Cellini*, is composed from material of the opera. However the manner in which it is composed and the way that Berlioz weaved the tunes into it, makes it a piece that could well find success in the concert hall. There is a typical Berlioz feel to it and it does not drag out comic elements of the opera. When one considers that this was the composer's first major work after the epic

Les Troyens

there seems to be a sense of relief to the introduction of *Beatrice et Benedict*.

When the curtain rises, as with [*La Traviata*](#), a group of people are celebrating on the stage. This time they are outdoors and celebrating a Sicilian victory in battle. Héro awaits the return of her loved one, Claudio, who she is to marry. Claudio and his fellow officer, Don Pedro, chide their colleague, Benedict that he too should marry, but Benedict assures them that he will remain a bachelor. So Don Pedro contrives to be a matchmaker for Benedict and Beatrice, who professes to despise him, using Ursule and Héro to work on Beatrice. Both parties create a situation when they talk about either Beatrice or Benedict being in love with the other, whilst they are in earshot.



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