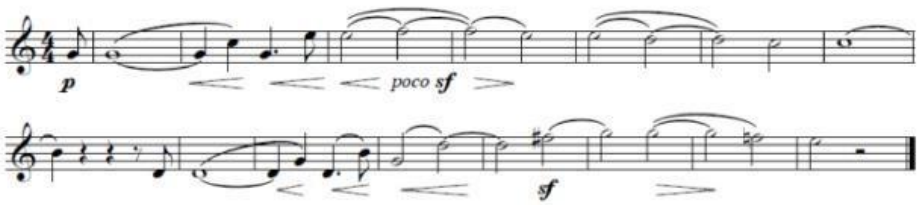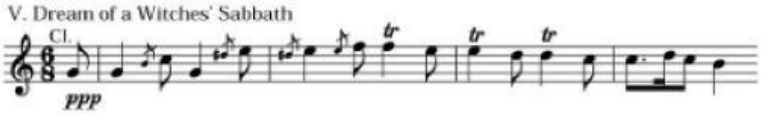# LEITMOTIF & Programmatic music

In Romantic and 20th-century music, composers often used a technique called ***leitmotif*** – a short, recurring musical idea linked to a person, idea, or emotion. Leitmotifs are used to create unity and tell a musical story.

### Symphonie Fantastique – Berlioz

Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique is one of the most significant examples of the PROGRAMME SYMPHONY. It was composed in 1830 and is inspired by Berlioz's unrequited love for the actress Harriet Smithson. The Symphony is subtitled 'Episodes in the Life on an Artist'. Berlioz wrote the programme note describing the background to the symphony: *a young heartbroken musician has poisoned himself. Although the poison is too weak to kill him, it causes a series of visions in which his feelings and memories are represented by music.* The programme note describes the different scenes and emotions that the artist dreams of in each of the FIVE MOVEMENTS. All of the artist's visions are centered on the woman that he has fallen in love with and she is represented by a leitmotif melody that appears in different movements with varied orchestration and mood.

| Movement | Leitmotif / 'Idee Fixe' |
|---|---|
| 1 Dreams |   |
| 2 A Ball | This begins with a lilting waltz, but is interrupted by the idée fixe, its rhythm changed to accommodate the waltz meter.   |
| 3 Scene in the Country | This begins with two shepherds answering one another with their pipes - the cor anglais calls and the oboe answers off stage. The idée fixe is presented by flute, clarinet and oboe   |
| 4 March to the Scaffold | Here, the artist dreams he has murdered his beloved, and has been condemned to death and is being led to the scaffold. At the end of the march a solo clarinet begins to play the idée fixe, savagely interrupted by a loud chord representing the fall of the guillotine's blade:   |
| 5 Dream of a Witches' Sabbath | Berlioz musically depicts the descent of the executed artist into hell, where his murdered Beloved and a host of witches greet him. Rhythmic distortion of the idée fixe and more raucous sounds indicates the transformation of the Beloved.   |

LIVEWORKSHEETS
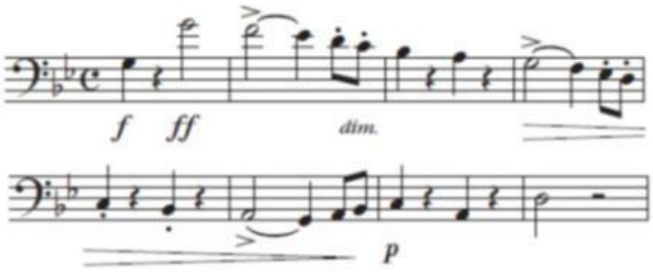
# Listening task – March to the scaffold

During this movement, the artist dreams that, insane with jealousy, he has murdered his beloved and is dragged to the scaffold. This movement opens with a repeated **MOTIF** played by muted horns, timpani and **PIZZICATO** low strings.

1. Which of the following rhythms best matches the repeated **MOTIF** that you hear?



2. Theme A is then heard




a) What instruments play this theme the first time it is heard?

✎ _____

b) What instruments play this theme when it is repeated?
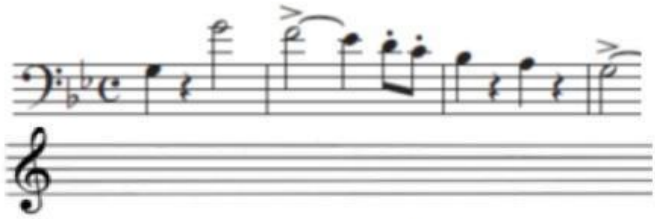
✎ _____

c) Describe the **TONALITY** of Theme A? ✎ _____
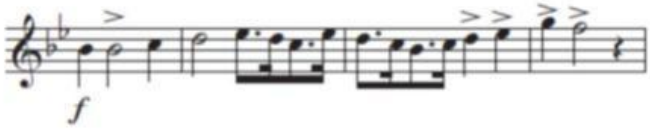
d) How is the choice of **TONALITY** suitable to the descriptive nature of this movement?

✎ _____

e) Transpose the bracketed notes so they sound at the SAME PITCH in the treble clef.



3. Another theme is heard in the brass and woodwind.




a) How does the **TONALITY** of this theme compare with Theme A ✎ _____

b) How would you describe the **RHYTHM** of this theme?

✎ _____

LIVEWORKSHEETS

4. a) Now listen to the last section of *March to Scaffold*, which features the idee fixe on the clarinet towards the end. Comment as fully as you can on the table below.

| MELODY / HARMONY | RHYTHM/TEMPO | TEXTURE / STRUCTURE | TIMBRE / DYNAMICS |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |

b) Write a statement on the style / period of this excerpt and justify your answer

| |
|---|
| |

LIVEWORKSHEETS