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By Hector Berlioz

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Possibly the most colourful figure in the history of Western music, Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) was certainly the most eloquent. His autobiography is among the greatest ever written. Larger than life - like his massive works - Berlioz was a seminal figure in the Romantic movement and his book is both a personal testament and an account of his role in that movement. It tells the story of his romance with Harriet Smithson - with whom he fell in love when he saw her playing the part of Ophelia - and his even more passionate affairs with Shakespeare, Scott and Byron. Familiar with all the great figures of the age - Liszt, Wagner, Balzac, Delacroix, Weber, Rossini - Berlioz paints brilliant and often mordant portraits of them in a style which is one of the glories of French prose. Above all, this is the intimate and detailed self-revelation of a complex and attractive man, driven by his creative urges to a position of lonely eminence. The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz were translated some years ago by David Cairns now famous himself as the composer's finest biographer. For the Everyman edition he has completely revised the text, and the extensive notes which accompany it, to take account of the latest research.

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