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“Cellini” at the MET

by [James Penrose](#)

“Malvenuto Cellini”? How astonishing that the public dismissed Berlioz’s early opera *Benvenuto Cellini* with that contemptuous epithet. Luscious arias for the female roles, astonishing rhythmic innovations, a dramatic score that transcends a libretto that itself was the only reason the opera was ever written—*Benvenuto Cellini* has it all. How could Berlioz’s contemporaries not respond to this delightful work? In fact, the sorry reception of *Benvenuto Cellini* established a pattern that echoed throughout the unhappy career of this man who—as he wrote in his bitterly funny *Mémoires*—“had the imprudence to be born in a not very musical nation at a not very musical time.”

Berlioz recounts the origins of *Benvenuto Cellini* in his splendid *Mémoires*. He was thirty-one and earning his living as a musical journalist when he came across t ...

James Penrose writes about music for *The New Criterion*.

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