

Louis Joseph Ferdinand HÉROLD
(1791 - 1833)

Overture to the Opera "Zampa"

Louis Joseph Ferdinand Hérold came from a musical family. His father, a piano teacher by profession, had been a student of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and did not intend for his son to follow a musical career. After his father's death in 1802, Louis could finally pursue this avenue and enrolled in the Paris Conservatoire, where he became a virtuoso on piano and violin. While a student, he won the coveted Prix de Rome in spite of the fact that one of the judges remarked, "This piece is full of flaws, but I see great things ahead for him."

Following extended visits to Naples and Vienna, he returned to Paris, where he held a variety of positions of increasing importance in the leading musical institutions of that city. Though relatively short-lived (he died of tuberculosis less than two weeks before his forty-second birthday), he had spent more than twenty years writing a prodigious number of compositions that included symphonies, piano concertos, operas, ballets, chamber music, and some fifty-five opus numbers worth of piano sonatas and miscellaneous piano pieces. "I am going too soon," he lamented on his deathbed. "I am just beginning to understand the stage!"

Zampa, an opera-comique in three acts was first performed on May 3, 1831 at the Opera-Comique in Paris. Since *Zampa* contained spoken dialogue, it had to be performed at that theater rather than the Paris Opera, which would accept only grand operas. *Zampa* has a colorful, if somewhat grisly plot: *Zampa*, a pirate of exceptionally bad principles, abducts Camilla from her betrothed and forces her to agree to marry him instead. While celebrating his forthcoming wedding, he becomes inebriated and impudently places a ring on the finger of the marble statue of Alice, who died of a broken heart after *Zampa* had jilted her. The statue comes to life and drags the pirate to his death beneath the sea.

Hérold maintained an especially high level of inspiration and originality throughout the score for *Zampa*. The overture, one of Hérold's most enduring works, is nowhere near as grim as the plot would suggest, yet it reflects the dramatic impact and musical variety of the work.