

The Romantic Period 1810-1910

The word Romanticism was first used to describe the stirrings of new ideas in painting, literature and Music which took place at the beginning of the 19th Century.

Classical composers had aimed to strike a balance between expressiveness and formal structure. Romantic composers shifted this balance. They looked for a greater freedom of form and a more powerful and intense expression of emotion, often revealing their innermost thoughts, feelings and sufferings

Many Romantic composers read widely and took a keen interest in art, forming close friendships with writers and painters. Often the inspiration behind a composition by a Romantic composer was sparked off by a painting which he had seen, or by a book or poem he had read.

Imagination, fantasy and adventure are important ingredients in the Romantic Style. Among the many ideas which held a strong fascination for Romantic composers were ..

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| Dreams, night and moonlight | The joy and pain of love |
| Nature, rivers, lakes and forests | Mystery, magic and the supernatural |
| Farr-off lands and the distant past | Legends and fairy tales |

The Romantic Orchestra

There was an enormous increase in the size of the Orchestra.

The Brass section, completed by the addition of the Tuba, now took on far greater importance.

The Woodwind Section increased with composers writing for woodwind instruments in 3's and 4's. The Piccolo, Cor anglais, Bass Clarinet and Double Bassoon were also added.

The Percussion section was also increased and became a more important, varied and colourful resource for the composer.

It was necessary to increase the size of the string section to maintain the balance between the four sections.
The harp also became a more regular member of the string section.

During the Romantic Period we find composers widening the range of their musical material by adding Chromatic notes to both melodies and Harmonies.

The word 'Chromatic' comes from a Greek word meaning 'Coloured'.

Romantic Composers felt Chromaticism made their music richer.

Melodies had more Chromatic movement and more adventurous modulations.

Harmonies became richer and intensely emotional with more powerful use of discords bringing in Chromatic notes from outside the key.

Franz Schubert 1797-1828

Schubert was an Austrian composer. In his very short life he wrote many Orchestral and Chamber works, however, he is most well known for his songs (Lieder).

He wrote more than 600! They are always sung in German and the Voice and Piano are equal partners in the delivery of the story.

Schubert wrote in two main forms:-

Through composed

A song which has different music for each verse of the lyrics. The music changes 'through' the 'composition' to help deliver the meaning of the words and add drama to the story. It is the opposite of Strophic.

Strophic

A song in which the same music is repeated for each verse.

Word painting

This is when the music mimics the literal meaning of a song. e.g. Ascending scales would accompany lyrics about going up or slow, dark music would accompany lyrics about death.

Song Cycles

Some Lieder were linked together by a common theme or story.

This set of songs is known as a 'Song Cycle'.

Opera

Operas were very popular in the Romantic Period. They had grown in scale and were huge productions with lavish Scenery and Costumes. Large Choruses were featured. A Leitmotif is a musical theme, like a signature tune, associated with a particular character or plot elements. It was invented by Richard Wagner.

Augmentation

When the length of the notes in melody or pattern have been 'drawn-Out' or prolonged. e.g. A melody originally consisting of quavers is augmented if it later appears with crotchets instead.

Diminution

The opposite of Augmentation is Diminution.

This means shortening the note values of a pattern or melody.

The Suite

In music, a Suite is a collection of orchestral pieces normally performed in a concert setting rather than as originally intended, as an accompaniment to a ballet or Opera. In other words, lots of beautiful and popular music has been written originally to be performed during a Ballet or Opera.

However, people want to hear the music and it is not always possible to stage a grand production like a Ballet or Opera. So, the popular bits of Orchestral music from the Ballet or Opera are selected and grouped together to form a Suite to be performed by an Orchestra at a concert.

The Piano

During the Romantic Period several extremely important improvements were made to the piano. This allowed great composers of piano music full artistic expression and gave us the piano of today

Chopin was a Polish Composer, virtuoso pianist and one of the great masters of Romantic music. He wrote for Solo Piano.

Though his pieces are technically demanding, the emphasis in his style is always on emotion and expressive depth.

All of his pieces are played tempo Rubato.

This means that the tempo is not rigid but speeds up and slows down giving free range for expression.

Chopin invented musical forms such as the Ballade and was responsible for major innovations in the piano genre. You need to recognise all these names as Solo piano pieces.

He wrote dances like the Mazurka, Waltz and Polonaise. And mood pieces such as the Impromptu, Prelude and the Nocturne and studies such as the Etude.



Frederic Chopin
1810 - 1849

Programme Music

The closer links formed during the Romantic Period between Music, Literature and Painting led to much keener interest in composing Programme Music.

Programme Music.

This is music which 'tells a story' or is in some way descriptive and so conjures up pictures in the mind of the listener.

There are three main types of Programme music....

The Concert Overture

Overture is the name given to the Orchestral introduction played at the beginning of an Opera.

However, the 19th century Concert Overture has no connection with Opera. It is simply a one-movement programme piece for orchestra, usually in Sonata form, intended for performance at a concert

Symphonic /Tone Poem

The Symphonic poem, sometimes called a Tone poem is a one-movement programme piece for Orchestra. It is longer and much freer in construction than the Concert Overture. The music takes its shape from the ideas and events of the programme itself.

The Programme Symphony

The Programme Symphony really began with Beethoven. Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, called the 'Pastoral Symphony' it depicted country scenes.

The programme symphony often had five movements instead of the usual four.

The Romantic Concerto

The Romantic Concerto used a large Orchestra and Composers, now challenged by the brilliant technical ability of virtuoso performers, made their solo parts increasingly difficult.

The element of polite competition found in classical Concertos now became transformed into an exciting and dramatic conflict
Between apparently unequal forces.

That was a single soloist opposed to the weight and power of a large orchestra. However, due to the brilliance of the players technique and the skilful writing by the composer, the soloist always emerged from the battle with flying colours!

Nationalism

Nationalist influences were found in the music of composers from countries which were struggling for independence such as Russia, Bohemia(later to be part of Czechoslovakia),Finland and Norway.

We describe a composer as 'Nationalist' if he deliberately aims to express strong feelings for his country in his music, or somehow brings to it a distinct flavour by which his nationality may be easily recognised.

The increasing importance of Nationalism as a political force in the 19th century was mirrored in music.

The main ways in which he can achieve this are:

by making use of the folk tunes or folkdance rhythms of his country

by taking scenes from his country's life, history or legends as a basis for works such as a symphonic poem.

Late Romanticism

Some composers carried the Romantic tradition into the 20th Century.

Two of the most important were Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss. These two composers often required gigantic forces to perform their music.

Richard Strauss 1864-1949

Was a German composer of the late Romantic period. He was best known for his Operas, Lieder and Tone Poems.

Thus Spake Zarathustra(1896)

Strauss's long Symphonic poem needed:

3 flutes and piccolo, 3 Oboes and Cor anglais, 3 Clarinets and Bass Clarinet,
3 Bassoons and Double Bassoon;
6 Horns, 4 Trumpets, 3 trombones and 2 Tubas;
Timpani, Bass drum, Triangle, Cymbals, Glockenspiel, low bell; 2 Harps,
Organ and Strings.

Gustav Mahler 1860-1911

Was a Bohemian born Austrian composer. He was best known for his Lieder and Symphonies.

Mahler's 8th Symphony(1906)

Mahler's 8th Symphony earned the nickname of 'Symphony of a Thousand' since in an ideal performance, a thousand musicians take part.

To a huge Orchestra of 130, with extra Brass seated apart, Mahler adds 8 solo voices, two large SATB Choirs and a Choir of 400 Children.

By the time Mahler wrote his 8th Symphony in 1906 many composers were reacting against what they considered to be the excessive and over-ripe style of Late Romanticism and were already striking out in new directions