

# **ROMANTIC PERIOD**

**CHARACTERISTICS AND THEIR APPLICATION TO THE CONCERTO**

# 1820 - 1900

The Romantic period gave us an explosion of composers and music that have stood the test of time and provided a rich tapestry of sound and style. The sheer number of great composer from this brief period of music shows how much ideas were being spread across Europe at this time and the influence they were all having on each other.

Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Tchaikovsky, Smetana, Dvorak, Brahms, Verdi, Puccini, Wagner, Mahler

This list could continue but even stopping here, the length and quality of these composers says it all.

# CHARACTERISTICS

## 1. INDIVIDUALITY OF STYLE

**Romantic music puts unprecedented emphasis on self-expression and individuality of style.**

*“There is not a bar which I have not truly felt and which is not an echo of my innermost feelings.”* Tchaikovsky talking about his 4th Symphony

***Robert Schumann observed that***

*“Chopin will soon be unable to write anything without people crying out at the seventh or eighth bar, that is indeed by him”*

***These composers all developed styles that were so synonymous with themselves that they are immediately identifiable.***

# CHARACTERISTICS

## 2. EXPRESSIVE AIMS AND SUBJECTS

The Romantics explored a universe of feeling that included flamboyance and intimacy, unpredictability and melancholy, rapture and longing. Countless songs and operas glorify romantic love, often, the lovers are unhappy and face overwhelming obstacles.

Romantic music is closely linked to literature which, being Gothic at this time had a fascination with the macabre. Examples include *dream of a witches' sabbath* from Symphony Fantastique by Berlioz or Danse Macabre by Saint-Saens

# CHARACTERISTICS

## 2. EXPRESSIVE AIMS CONT.

All aspects of nature were used as subject matter for Romantic Music. The idea of depicting nature was not new, Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony is a good example of this. The Romantics went to great pains though to depict as many different aspects as they could. Some examples of this include,

Shepherd's pipes and distant thunder in Symphony Fantastique - *Berlioz*

A wild horseback ride through a storm in Die Erlkonig - *Schubert*

The flow of a River in Moldau - *Smetana*

A walk through the countryside Ging heut' Morgan Uber's Feld - *Mahler*

# CHARACTERISTICS

## 3. NATIONALISM AND EXOTICISM

Nationalism was an important political movement in the 19th century and composers went about deliberately creating music that expressed a specific national identity. They did this by using the folk songs, dances, legends and history of their respective homelands. This was in direct contrast to the more universal character of Classical music.

Fascination with national identity led some composers to draw on material from other lands in a trend known as musical exoticism. Bizet, who was French, composed the opera Carmen set in Spain. He masterfully took melodic, rhythmic and dance like characteristics common in Spain to use in his opera.

Another example of this is Rimsky-Korsakov and his piece Scherezade. In this he creates an Arabic atmosphere

# CHARACTERISTICS

## 4. PROGRAM MUSIC

Program music has existed in some form or another for centuries, it became particularly prominent in the Romantic era due to the close links between music and literature and visual art. A programmatic instrumental piece can represent the emotions, characters and events of a particular story or it can evoke the sounds and motions of nature.

In Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, agitated music depicts the feud between the two families, a tender melody is used for young love and a funeral march for their tragic fate.

In the *Moldau* by Smetana, he is depicting the main river in Bohemia (Czech Republic). He uses musical effects to call to mind the the flowing river, a hunting scene, a peasant wedding and the crash of waves.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3G4NKzmFC-Q>

# CHARACTERISTICS

## 5. EXPRESSIVE TONE COLOUR

Romantic composers revealed in rich and sensuous sound using tone colour to obtain variety of mood and atmosphere. Never before had timbre been so important. In both symphonic and operatic works, the Romantic orchestra was larger and more varied in tone colour than the Classical orchestra. Toward the end of the Romantic era, an orchestra might include close to 100 musicians. The Classical orchestra used up to about 60.

Brass, woodwind and percussion sections of the orchestra took on a more active role. Romantic composers increased the power of brass instruments. In 1824, Beethoven broke precedent by including 9 brass instruments in his 9th symphony. In 1894 Mahler included 25 for his 2nd symphony

Woodwind section took on new tone colours as the contra bassoon, bass clarinet, Cor Anglais and piccolo became regular members of the orchestra. Improvements in the construction of brass and woodwind instruments allowed them to perform more flexibly and accurately.

Composers sought new ways of blending sound and in 1844, Hector Berlioz's *Treatise on Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration* heralded the recognition of orchestration as an art form



# CHARACTERISTICS

## 6. HARMONY

In addition to exploring new tone colours, the romantics explored new chords and novel ways of using familiar chords. Seeking greater emotional intensity, composers emphasised rich, colourful and complex harmonies.

There was prominent use of chromatic harmony which uses chords containing notes not found in the major or minor scales. Chromatic chords add colour and motion to romantic music. Dissonant chords were used more freely than in the Classical era and the delay before resolving these chords was extended which helped to create a higher sense of yearning and tension.

Romantic music used a huge variety of keys with rapid modulations. This means that the tonal centre has less importance in Romantic music as more emphasis was placed on harmonic instability.

# CHARACTERISTICS

## 7. FORM: MINIATURE AND MONUMENTAL

As a perfect expression of extremes that interested Romantic composers, musical form was used in both a miniature scale and monumental.

Music in miniature forms included short piano pieces by Chopin or songs by Schubert. Many of these were very short and intended to be performed in the intimate surroundings of a drawing room in a house. This went along with the growing number of people who had pianos in their houses. The ability of these composers to create an intense feeling through melody and harmony found a home in these short pieces.

The opposite of these are the monumental works by composers like Berlioz and Wagner. These called for a large number of performers and would last for many hours, or in the case of the Ring Cycle by Wagner, intended to be done over a number of days.

The regular forms of symphonies, string quartets and concertos were still used, however the individual movements became longer. A Classical symphony or concerto might last for 25 minutes compared to 45 minutes in the Romantic era. New techniques were used to unify these longer works such as the *idée fixe*. This is the same theme heard in different movements.

# CHARACTERISTICS

## 8. EXPANDED RANGE OF DYNAMICS, PITCH AND TEMPO

The Classical extremes of dynamics ranged from pp to ff. This was not good enough for the Romantics who extended these to pppp and ffff. The changes could be sudden and extreme or use a lot of crescendos and diminuendos.

Changes of mood in Romantic music was often underlined by accelerandos, ritardandos and subtle variations of pace. To intensify the expression of the music, performers made use of rubato, the slight holding back or pressing forward of tempo.