

ROMANTIC PERIOD OF WESTERN MUSIC HISTORY (1820-19000)

What is **romanticism**?

- A cultural movement that stressed emotion, imagination and individualism. It marked a shift away from structured, formal approaches of the classical period, favoring more personal and passionate music.

What is **neoclassicism**?

- A reaction against the emotional excesses and complexity of romanticism. Composers aimed to revive the clarity, balance and formality of classical period.

Which are the characteristics of Romantic music?

- Chromatic harmony was used for expression and not for decoration. Dissonant chords (discords) to create high degree of emotional tensions
- Emphasis on songlike, lyrical melodies
- Extreme pitch ranges (very high/very low sounds/notes) and extreme volume/dynamic ranges e.g *pppp* and *ffff*
- Featured more fluctuations in tempo than in the classical by frequent *accelerandos*, *tempo rubato* etc
- Irregular phrases with concealed cadences
- Change of major and minor keys to chromaticism
- Advanced modulations which sometimes blurred the tonality
- Music for the church declined in importance
- Most romantic works were intended for concert hall performance and symphony/philharmonic orchestras were the favorite concert media
- Slowing and quickening of pulse, meter changes, syncopation and complex patterns contribute to rhythmic expressiveness.
- More terms to express mood and tempo introduced (e.g *rubato*; *doloroso*; *rallentando*; *morendo*)
- Homophonic and polyphonic textures combined
- Orchestra increased in both size and range. Brass section was expanded and given more important role, composers wrote up to 3 or 4 parts per instrument.
- Composers often wrote music that told a story or painted a picture (programme music)
- Some composers incorporated folk melodies and rhythms from their native countries (nationalism)
- Most prominent music forms were: German lied, song cycles, operas, music dramas, leitmotifs, programme music, concert overtures, symphonic poems and character pieces.

Romantic music briefs

MUSIC FORMS OF THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

a) German lied

- German song for solo voice and piano (plural – lieder – songs). Here, the piano does not just play an accompanying role but also a partner with voice, complementing each other.
- There are two types of lieder; **strophic and through composed**. Strophic where several verses (strophes) of a poem are set to same music, through composed where different music is composed to each verse of the poem.
- A group of poems /art songs/lieder designed to be performed together, with similar themes were called **song cycles**.
- Common composers of lieder were Franz Schubert and Robert Schumann

b) Romantic operas

- Most derived their stories from novels, stage plays or old medieval legends

Types of romantic operas:

✓ **The Grand opera**

- Larger-scale, lavish productions that emphasized dramatic intensity, elaborate staging and grandiose musical forms, originating primarily in France
- Popular composers of grand opera were: Françoise Allber, Gioachinno Rossini and Jacques Halevy

✓ **Comic opera (*Opera comique*)**

- Opera that blends humorous or satirical stories with rich expressive musical style

Differences between grand opera and comic opera

- Grand opera used recitative while comic opera used spoken dialogue
- Comic opera required fewer singers and players compared to grand opera
- Comic opera is shorter and more modest compared to grand opera which is lengthy (often four or five acts)
- ✓ **Music dramas**
 - Type of opera championed with German composer Richard Wagner
 - Here, music, poetry, drama and visual elements were all unified.
 - Wagner shifted attention from voice to orchestra
 - Orchestra's importance in opera was brought to a climax by use of leitmotifs.
 - A **leitmotif** is – a short musical idea associated with some person, thing or idea in the drama.

NEW MUSICAL FORMS OF ROMANTIC PERIOD

c) Programme music

- Instrumental music associated with a story, poem or idea

d) Concert overture

- Independent orchestral work in one movement intended to open a concert

e) Symphonic poem

- **A single movement orchestral work that tells a story, paints a picture or evokes a specific mood or idea.**

Examples of symphonic poems and their composers

- ✓ *Prometheus* by Liszt
- ✓ *Wallensteins comp* by Smetana
- ✓ *Francesca da Rimini* by Tchaikovsky
- ✓ *Don Juan* by Richard Strauss

f) Character pieces

- Are piano pieces that describe an event. Usually in binary, ternary or rondo form

Examples of character pieces and their composers:

- ✓ *Papillon* (butterfly), *kinderscenen* (scenes from childhood) by Robert Schumann
- ✓ *Years of pilgrimage* by Liszt (describing his journeys)
- ✓ *Mazurkas* (Polish dance), *polonaises* (descriptive of Poland) by Chopin
- ✓ *Moments musicaux* by Schubert

What was **nationalism** in Romantic period?

- ❖ A movement where composers expressed pride in their homeland, culture and heritage through music. They created music with a specific national identity using the folksongs, dances, legends and history of their homelands.
- ❖ Popular nationalistic composers include: Smetana, Rimsky-Korsakov, Edward Grieg, Jean Sibelius

What's the opposite of nationalism?

- ❖ Exoticism – which is the use of musical elements that evoke the atmosphere or characteristics of a foreign culture, often one that is perceived as distant or unfamiliar to the composer and audience