

The Romantic Period: c.1830-1920

POLITICS & SOCIETY: THE MAIN EVENTS

- ★ 1830: Joseph Smith began the Mormon Church (Church of Latter day Saints) in New York.
- ★ 1848: Revolutions throughout Europe, people rose up against their governments: in France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Hungary and Poland.
- ★ 1851-1860: the Gold Rush in Australia. Gold discovered in Victoria, and people rushed there to make their fortunes.
- ★ 1854: The Eureka Stockade, in Ballarat, Victoria. Angry miners rebelled at unfair licensing fees for gold mining.
- ★ 1859 -1868: the Suez Canal was built by a French Company. Sea travellers were now no longer forced to sail right round Africa when travelling from Europe to Asia.
- ★ 1861-65: Civil war in America, fought between pro-slavery Southern states, and the abolitionist northern (Yankee) states.
- ★ 1880-1902: the Boer War, fought between British, and the Boers who governed the Orange Free State in South Africa. The Boers were descendants of Dutch settlers, in South Africa.
- ★ 1880: Ned Kelly, Australia's most famous bandit, was captured and hanged.
- ★ 1886: Coca-Cola introduced as a new drink, in fact a 'brain tonic'.
- ★ 1889: Eiffel Tower was completed for the Paris Exhibition.
- ★ Effects of the French Revolution, the American War of Independence and the Enlightenment (see Classical Period notes) - all of which by now, had far-reaching effects on the thinking and attitudes of the western world especially. There was by this stage a great belief in the freedom of the individual and the rights of the common man to express himself without the artificial restraints of tradition. This expressed itself both politically and in every area of the arts.

SCIENCE & PHILOSOPHY: THE GREAT SCIENTISTS & THINKERS

- ★ 1859: Darwin: *The Origin of the Species*
- ★ 1812-1816: Hegel: *Science of Logic*
- ★ 1895: X-rays discovered by the German physicist, Roentgen

GREAT INVENTIONS

- ★ 1839: The bicycle.
- ★ 1852: First passenger elevator.
- ★ 1874: J. Davis & Levi Strauss made the first blue jeans with rivets.
- ★ 1876: Alexander Bell invented the telephone.
- ★ 1877: Edison invented the first record player.
- ★ 1879: Edison invented the first electric light.
- ★ 1885: Benz of Germany built the first gasoline driven car.
- ★ Throughout the 19th century, the progressive application of electricity, steel production, railways and steamboats changed the face of the world.

ARTISTS & ARCHITECTS

- ★ Cézanne: *Jas de Bouffan*
- ★ Courbet: *Burial at Ornans*
- ★ Gauguin: *Woman with a Flower*
- ★ Manet: *House in Rueil*
- ★ Renoir: *Girls at the Piano*
- ★ Seurat: *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*
- ★ Van Gogh: *Vase with Twelve Sunflowers*
- ★ Whistler: *At the Piano*

- ★ Haussmann (architect): Gare de Lyon
- ★ Wyman (architect): Bradbury Building

LITERATURE: THE MAIN WRITERS

English

- ★ Byron: *Child Harold's Pilgrimage*
- ★ Wordsworth: *Poems in Two Volumes*
- ★ Coleridge: *Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*

German

- ★ Goethe: *Faust, Hermann & Dorothea*
- ★ Schiller: *Wallenstein*
- ★ Richter: *Hesperus*

French

- ★ Hugo: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Les Misérables*
- ★ Flaubert: *Madame Bovary*
- ★ Mallarme: *L'aprèsmidi d'un Faune*

American

- ★ Longfellow: *The Song of Hiawatha, Paul Revere's Ride*
- ★ Poe: *The Fall of the House of Usher*
- ★ Twain: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn.*

GENERAL ARTISTIC TRAITS

The term 'Romantic' first appeared in 18th-century England and originally meant 'romance-like,' i.e. resembling the fanciful character of medieval romances.

The inner thinking and feeling of artists in the Romantic period was characterised by a marked emotionalism, a reliance on the imagination along with a subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature. The Arts generally reflected a yearning for the unobtainable, for the mysterious, the strange and the remote.

In literature as well as music, there was a strong sense of the importance of feeling and imagination, of poetic creativity, and a rejection of conventional forms and subjects. Imagination was praised over reason, emotions over logic, and intuition over science, making way for a vast body of literature and music of great passion. Content was always emphasized over form. There was an increasing demand for spontaneity and lyricism, qualities that the adherents of romanticism found in folk poetry and in medieval romance. This led to a rejection of regular meters, strict forms, and other conventions of the classical tradition. In English poetry, for example, blank verse largely superseded the rhymed couplet that dominated 18th-century poetry.

Politically, late 18th and early 19th century thought was also heavily influenced by the Romantic spirit - the desire to be free of convention and tyranny, and the new emphasis on the rights and dignity of the individual. There was a great sense of the Common Man becoming important - it was the age of the individual, of liberty. Through bloody revolution, the aristocracy in France had been supplanted in power by the bourgeoisie. The shock waves swept over the whole world. The cult of personal freedom, of aggressive individualism had taken hold of the new industrial society. Both the American War of Independence (1776) and the world-shaking slogans of the French Revolution (1789-99) 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity', had released forces that had been pent up for centuries. The sense of the injustice of oppression, for example, found its way into the work of the English visionary poet, William Blake, writing of the 'dark Satanic mills' that were beginning to deface the English countryside.

Both the French and American revolutions gave man a sense of his own worth, and this spirit pervaded literature, art and music of the 19th century. The creative ego was glorified, and feeling, sentiment and emotion were given great importance.

There was a pervasive interest amongst Romantic artists, in Nature - in the truth within nature. Delight in unspoiled scenery and in the innocent life of rural dwellers is a common theme amongst poets like Wordsworth, and composers like Liszt.

In the spirit of their new freedom, romantic artists expanded their imaginary horizons and often turned back to the Middle Ages for themes and settings. There seemed to be a preoccupation with the heroic past, and a delight in mystery, superstition, and the supernatural.

ROMANTIC MUSIC: AN OVERVIEW

Whereas the Classical artist believed in an ordered intelligible world accessible to the reasonable mind, the Romantic artist was more interested in the uniqueness of his own emotional response to the world, in the individual peculiarity of a private and personal response. Thus we can recognize the melancholy of Rachmaninoff, the self-pity of Tchaikowsky, the exaggeration of Liszt, the tenderness and torment of Chopin.

Because composers were now financially more independent and no longer depended on the patronage of Church or aristocracy, they were far freer to compose the sort of music they really wanted to. This resulted in much greater diversity in performance and composition generally. Because concert venues were now much larger, performers needed to sell tickets in order to provide themselves with an income, and as a result, they often developed a high degree of virtuosity and showmanship to attract audiences. Consequently, improvements were thus made to pianos extending their power and sonority. With strong iron frames and the developing use of the sustaining pedal, pianos could now fill a concert hall with all the rich sounds of a symphony orchestra.

The Romantic composers felt a great affinity with the poetry, literature and art of the times, these areas often becoming the inspirational forces behind a Romantic musical composition. Many of the Romantic composers were fired by a Nationalistic sense and composed music inspired by folk music of their homeland, eg. Brahms' Hungarian Dances, Dvorak's Slavonic Dances, Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies, Chopin's Mazurkas, Smetana's Moldau. In Russia, Glinka started a Nationalist Movement in music.

The Romantic imagination was full of exotic places and distant times, finding expression in deliciously vague phrases and evocative tunes. In their rebellion against the formal structure of the Classical composition, the Romantics now composed smaller pieces as well, not necessarily following any conventional form or structure (eg. nocturnes, mazurkas, impromptus, ballades, rhapsodies and miniatures of all sorts).

Music of the Romantic period was far freer in a rhythmic sense - it was often softer in contour and more lyrical in melody. Romantic melodies so often seem to originate from Song. The actual melodic lines were longer, the harmonies far more chromatic

and daring, which often served to heighten the movement to and from points of tension.

ROMANTIC MUSIC: THE MAIN COMPOSERS

- ★ Germany: Brahms, late Beethoven, late Schubert, Schumann, Wagner
- ★ France: Gounod, Faure, Berlioz, Saint-Saens
- ★ Poland: Chopin
- ★ Russia: Tschaikowsky, Rachmaninoff, Borodin, Glinka
- ★ Italy: Rossini, Verdi, Puccini, Donizetti
- ★ Hungary: Liszt

PERFORMANCE HINTS

The pedal is used far more in Romantic music than before, to produce a cantabile melody as well as to create a sense of the dramatic and confronting.

The issue of ornamentation in Romantic music can be a little confusing. In 1893, Edward Dannreuther emphasized the proposals of Hummel, Czerny and Spohr, i.e. that the trill should always begin on the main, or principal note, to avoid blurring the melodic line.

Because Romantic music is so concerned with passion and emotion, with yearning, intoxication and frustration, the performer must loosen up and go with the music to a large extent. Perfect tempo and rigid control are the enemies of this sort of expressive music. 'Rubato' captures the very essence of the Romantic style - along with a singing 'cantabile' melody and the performer's receptiveness to the emotions implicit in the music itself. Avoid the humdrum tempo, and just as equally, the predictable rubato.

The music must be allowed to live and breath naturally. Be aware of the new dissonant harmonies which deliberately create tensions that often need to be pointed to with a subtle tenuto or a small pause. Whereas the Classicists were interested in balancing tensions, the Romantics were more interested in the tension itself.