

Music: An Appreciation

Part V: The Romantic Period

TIMELINE

- Monroe Doctrine, 1823
- Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 1831
- Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 1837
- Dumas, *The Three Musketeers*, 1844
- Poe, *The Raven*, 1845
- Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 1859
- American Civil War, 1861 – 1865
- Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 1884
- Bell invents telephone, 1876

Romanticism

- Stressed emotion, imagination, and individualism
- Emotional subjectivity basis of arts
- Favorite artistic topics:
 - Fantasy and the supernatural
 - Middle Ages: concept of chivalry and romance
 - Nature as mirror of the human heart
- Period of the Industrial Revolution
 - Resulted in social and economic changes

Romanticism in Music

- Many important romantic composers
 - Franz Schubert, Antonin Dvořák, Robert Schumann, Peter Tchaikovsky, Frédéric Chopin, Johannes Brahms, Franz Liszt, Giuseppe Verdi, Felix Mendelssohn, Giacomo Puccini, Hector Berlioz, Richard Wagner, Bedřich Smetana
- Continued use of classical forms
- Greater range of tone color, dynamics, and pitch than in classical period
- Expanded harmony, complex chords

Characteristics of Romantic Music - 1

Individuality of style

- Composers want uniquely identifiable music

Expressive aims and subjects

- All approaches were explored
- Romantic love still focus of songs and operas
- Dark topics drew composers

Nationalism and exoticism

- Nationalism: music with a national identity
- Exoticism: intentionally imply foreign culture

Characteristics of Romantic Music - 2

Program music

- Association with a story, poem, idea, scene

Expressive tone color

- Composers tried to create unique sounds
 - Blending of existing instruments
 - Addition of new instruments
- Tone color important to emotional content

Colorful harmony

- Chords built with notes not in traditional keys

Characteristics of Romantic Music - 3

Expanded range of dynamics, pitch, and tempo

- Dynamics *ff*, *pp* expanded to *ffff* and *pppp*
- Extremely high and low pitches were added
- Changes in mood frequently underlined by (sometimes subtle) shifts in tempo

Forms: miniature and monumental

- Some composers went on for hours
- Others' music lasted only a few minutes
- Composers wrote symphonies, sonatas, string quartets, concertos, operas, and many other classically traditional works

Romantic Composers and Their Public

- Demise of the patronage system
 - Composers regarded themselves as “free spirits”
 - Decline in artistic fortune—Napoleonic wars
- New urban classes/new musical topics
- Public was entranced by virtuosity
- Piano became a fixture in most homes
- Composers/audience: same social class
- Few composers financially successful

The Art Song

- Composition for solo voice and piano
- Linked to vast amount of poetry in this period
 - Composers interpreted poems, translating mood, atmosphere, and imagery into music
 - Mood summed up at end with piano *postlude*

Strophic and through-composed form

- Strophic form repeats music for each verse
- Through-composed: new music each verse
- Sometimes *modified strophic* form used

The song cycle

- Group of songs unified in some manner
- Storyline or musical idea may link the songs

Franz Schubert

- Born in Vienna (1797 – 1828)
- Early romantic composer
- Prodigious output
 - When 18 years old, wrote 143 songs
 - At 19 years, wrote 179 works

Schubert's music

- Wrote over 600 songs
 - Also symphonies, string quartets, other chamber music, sonatas, masses, operas, and piano works

Robert Schumann

- German, early to mid-romantic (1810 – 1856)
- Wanted to be piano virtuoso
 - Problem with hand ended his ambition
- Married his piano teacher's daughter
- Temperamentally unsuited for some of the musical positions he attempted
- Committed to asylum where he died
- Wrote piano pieces, art songs, and later symphonies

Frédéric Chopin

- Polish born musician (1810 – 1849)
- Poet of the piano
- Move to Paris (European artistic capital) at age 21
- Known for his beautiful tone, rhythmic flexibility, and extensive use of piano pedals
- Piano teacher to the daughters of the rich
 - Avoided concert halls
 - Wrote nocturnes, mazurkas, preludes, and waltzes
- Developed personal style at early age
 - Evokes a variety of moods
 - Captured the spirit of the Polish people

Johannes Brahms

- German composer (1833 – 1897)
- Son of a musician (father played bass)
- Became close friends with the Schumanns
 - Lived with Clara while Robert was in asylum
 - Lifelong friends with Clara; he never married
- Studied earlier composers' works in detail

Brahm's Music

- Considered somewhat conservative due to his use of classical forms
- Wrote in all traditional forms except opera

Impressionism and Symbolism

French impressionist painting

- Used broad brush strokes and vibrant colors
 - Viewed up close, the painting appears unfinished
 - Viewed from a distance, it has truth
- Focused on light, color, and atmosphere
- Depicted impermanence, change, and fluidity
- Named after Monet's *Impression: Sunrise*

French symbolist poetry

- Symbolists also broke with traditions and conventions
- Avoided hard statements—preferred to “suggest” (symbolize) their topics
- Symbolist poetry became the basis for many impressionist musical works

Gabriel Faure

- French Composer, Organist, & Teacher (1845-1924)
- He was married, but he had several mistresses, including Emma Bardac, who would eventually become the wife of composer Claude Debussy.
- Early works includes *Chansons sans Parole* (Songs without Words) and the *Cantique de Jean Racine*
- His most famous work was his *Requiem*, which was first performed in 1888, after nearly twenty years of work
- In 1896 he was appointed principal organist at the famous **La Madeleine** church.
- He would go on to be the teacher of several famous French composers, including Maurice Ravel.

Claude Debussy

- French impressionist composer
- Crossed romantic/20th century (1862 – 1918)
- Studied in Paris and Rome
- Lived large; liked luxury, but stayed in debt

Debussy's music

- Attempted to capture in music what impressionist painters did in visual art
- Titles imply a program music type approach
- Used orchestra as pallet of sounds, not *tutti*
- Expanded harmonic vocabulary and practice
 - Used 5-note chords instead of traditional 3
 - Made use of **pentatonic** and **whole-tone** scales
- Obscured harmony, tempo, meter, and rhythm

Assignment:

Each box below contains two contrasting songs from the Romantic Era. One will be a German *Lied*, the other a French *Chanson* by one of the composers studied today. Listen to each song in its entirety, and compare and contrast it to the other in a 1-2 page paper. Be sure to look-up the lyrics meaning and incorporate that into your paper.

GROUP 1

[Schubert *Die Forelle* Lyrics](#)

[Faure *En Priere* Lyrics](#)

GROUP 2

[Schumann *Widmung* Lyrics](#)

[Debussy *Cinq Melodie Populaire Greque* Lyrics](#)

(Only listen to the first two songs of the Debussy)