

Romantic Era 1825-1900

The term Romantic, when applied to this era (1825-1900), pertains to music with an imaginative emotional appeal. Romantic era music emphasizes personal feelings and emotions. Composers who wrote during this period wanted to express their innermost thoughts and feelings through their music.

The emotional music of the Romantic era greatly contrasts with the music of the Classical era which can best be described as elegant, formal, and restrained. Classical composers wrote very structured music. Romantic era composers were much more free with their music, using it to express themselves. The music of the Classical era sounded essentially the same throughout Europe. But Romantic era composers began to compose in nationalistic styles as a way to show their patriotism and love of country. For example, a German composer might use German folk tales as the basis for his music, or a Russian composer might incorporate Russian folk music in his compositions.

Composers were not only more free musically, they were also more free as individuals. Many, though certainly not all, were celebrities, like today's rock stars. Some were quite wealthy. A composer might earn income through the sale of printed copies of his music, or he might tour as a conductor throughout Europe and North America. Or he might produce performances of his music or **operas**, like today's concert promoters. Others were supported by wealthy **patrons** and a few were supported by their governments.

Music in the Romantic era frequently represented something (such as an element of nature, like a sunrise), or expressed something (such as love of country or patriotism), or described something (such as a poem). The orchestra truly became the composer's "instrument" during this era. Orchestras grew in size, and the skill of orchestration (scoring music for the various instruments of the orchestra) became an important part of the composer's craft. Composers began to use the instruments of the orchestra in much the same way that an artist uses colors...for effect, contrast, and beauty.

Great **conservatories** (schools which trained musicians) grew during the Romantic era, and this resulted in many more skilled performers than in previous eras. As orchestras employed more skilled performers, composers were able to write music that was more difficult.

New forms developed. The symphonic poem was a fairly long (as long as an hour) work for orchestra in one movement. Often a symphonic poem attempted to tell a story or paint a musical picture. Descriptive music such as this is called program music. Not all the new forms were orchestral. Composers also wrote

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short piano pieces, and songs for solo voice with piano accompaniment using expressive poems as the song lyrics. German composers, in particular, excelled at composing songs.

Perhaps the most grandiose new form of the Romantic era was the music drama, a kind of opera using an enormous cast and a large orchestra. The operas of **Richard Wagner** and **Giuseppe Verdi** were the best examples of music drama. Both Wagner and Verdi considered their operas to be a kind of super-art, combining music, drama, theater, and the visual arts of scenery and costuming.

By 1900, the great, emotional music of the Romantic era gave way to the composers of the twentieth century, who looked at music, and the art of composing, much differently than their predecessors in the nineteenth century.

Composers of the Romantic era

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805-1847)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849)

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

John Philip Sousa (1854-1932)

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Famous people of the Romantic era

Victor Hugo (1802-1885), French author, poet, playwright

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), U.S. president

Harriet Tubman (1820-1913), U.S., helped African-American slaves escape to north

Frederick Douglass (1817-1895), U.S. author, diplomat

Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906), U.S., campaigned for women's right to vote

Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), British founder of modern nursing

Louis Pasteur (1822-1895), French chemist

Mark Twain (real name, Samuel Clemens) (1835-1910), U.S. author

Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), French artist

Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), Dutch artist