

Classical versus Romantic forms

Classical and Romantic composers both wanted to express emotion and used specific musical forms to do so. The difference between them was that the classicists saw form not as a restraint but as a way of achieving beauty. Classical composers were more objective and rational; order and symmetry, serenity and perfection of form are the basis for the emotions generated by their music. The Romantics were subjective—they saw everything in terms of how they felt. In their search for the sublime, the Romantics called on fantasy and imagination, awe and exhilaration. Composers now wanted to be able to express themselves freely and spontaneously without appearing to be confined by the form of the music. They still based their work on the traditional forms, like first-movement form or rondo form, but they were more flexible and sometimes it is difficult to hear the structure in the way that we can in Classical works. In addition, the Romantics' musical phrases were longer and less distinct from each other, and they did not tend to mark the end of their musical ideas with cadences, or sequences of notes or chords that seem to provide a conclusion.

New forms were developed as well. The one-movement symphonic poem was a Romantic creation, for instance. Composers added choral voices to their symphonies and sometimes a narrator, and works were written for solo voice and orchestra.

Monumental and minuscule

Musical forms were greatly expanded in the Romantic period. A symphony by Haydn or Mozart can be played in 20 minutes; Romantic composers wrote symphonies that were twice as long. Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* lasts over an hour and a half! Just as the novel became popular in the Romantic period, partly because it gave writers enough room to express their ideas, the symphony became the favoured musical form. And because symphonies were longer and more complex, Romantic composers wrote many fewer of them. Haydn wrote over a hundred symphonies, Schubert wrote nine, Tchaikovsky six, and Robert Schumann and Brahms four each.

The tendency toward larger works extended well beyond the symphony. Many compositions in the Romantic period were absolutely huge, requiring more instruments, more performers and more time. For example, Wagner's opera cycle, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, lasts for four long evenings, has 30 people in the cast, a massive orchestra with specially created instruments, and needs fifteen different sets for the stage.



This cartoon satirizes the idea of huge orchestras and grandiose compositions.

On the other hand, the Romantic period was also one that favoured miniature works. Often they were written for solo piano—pieces entitled “Prelude,” “Waltz,” and “Intermezzo” were very popular. Others had fanciful names like “Dreaming,” or “Poet’s Love.” Some even took less than a minute to play. One of the most important types of miniature work was the art song, written for solo voice, generally with piano accompaniment.

Nationalism in music

"The art of music is above all other arts the expression of the soul of a nation. The composer must love the tunes of his country and they must become an integral part of him."

British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams

Tchaikovsky incorporated both the French and Russian national anthems into his 1812 *Overture*, a piece using cannons and fireworks that commemorates the Russian victory over Napoleon in that year.



Chopin, shown here at the piano, was half Polish, and he made a point of composing works based on typical Polish dance rhythms.

The nationalism that was such a strong political force in the Romantic period was also a force in music. For years the folk idiom had largely been ignored, not considered important enough for music that was intended mainly for an aristocratic audience. But with the increasing democratization of the Romantic period, "common" music began to be appreciated. Composers incorporated their countries' folk music and dance rhythms into their works. Chopin's mazurkas and polonaises are a tribute to his Polish ancestry, and Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* recall the gypsy music of his native Hungary. Other composers wrote operas about national heroes, like Borodin's *Prince Igor*, or symphonic poems about nature, like Smetana's *The Moldau*, about a river that he loved in his native Czechoslovakia. Some based their work on national folk legends, like von Weber's folk opera *Der Freischütz*, or Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung*, others on local fairy tales, like Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* ballet. At other times, pieces were written to celebrate a great victory in battle. These works appealed to national pride in the composers' countrymen, and exposed people in other countries to musical idioms that were new to them.

This painting illustrates a scene from a Polish ballet. Dances like the polka, the polonaise or the mazurka were part of Polish life.



The Wolf's Glen scene from Carl Maria von Weber's early German Romantic folk opera *Der Freischütz*.



Dynamics

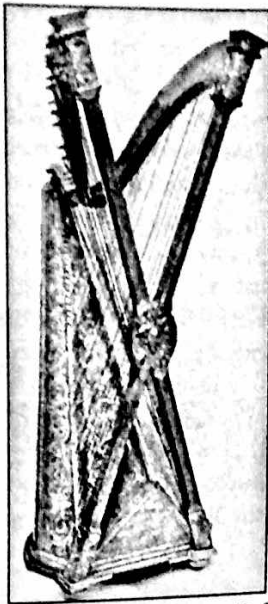
Romantic composers greatly extended the range of loudness and softness in their music. Classical composers did not often go further than *piano* or *forte*, but in Romantic works it is quite common to see scores with *fff*, or *ffff*, and *ppp* markings. The dynamics change more often in Romantic works, and the changes are sometimes unexpected.

Tempo and expression

Romantic music has a greater range of tempo than does music from the Classical period. The favourite moderate *andante* tempo of the earlier era gives way to long, leisurely slow movements and there are more changes of tempo within movements, creating different moods. Also new in the Romantic period is the concept of *tempo rubato*. *Rubato* means "robbed" or "borrowed" in Italian, and the practice of playing a piece *rubato* means that the performer could adjust the rhythm slightly within a phrase, slowing it down a little in one place and speeding up in another, but always balancing it out by the end of the phrase. For a pianist, for instance this could mean keeping the beat strictly with the left hand, and making the adjustments to the rhythm in the right hand. Composers did not usually mark *rubato* in their scores, but the practice is documented by recordings made at the turn of the last century by performers who were trained in the Romantic era. *Rubato* was applied to almost every score in this period, and a performer's sensitive use of *rubato* is still considered a mark of his or her artistry.

Romantic composers did mark their works with a great many new indications of the way they wanted their music to be played. A whole new vocabulary sprang up, words like *cantabile* (in a singing tone), *maestoso* (majestically), *dolce* (sweetly), *con amore* (with love), and *gioioso* (joyously). Tempo markings also became more expressive; instructions like *allegro agitato* (an agitated allegro) or *adagio dolente* (a grieving adagio) are frequently found on Romantic scores.

Melody



This harp was built to satisfy the needs of the chromatic scale. It was really two harps criss-crossed.

Romantic melodies are usually longer than Classical ones, so they have time to build up to a strong climax, and they appeal more to the emotions. Some are strong and robust, others pensive and sad. In addition, the Romantics developed the principle of thematic unity, which meant using some of their themes throughout a whole work, even ones with several movements. Sometimes they would also use variations on a recurring theme, but never in the typical theme-and-variations form of the Classical period. But perhaps the most recognizable characteristic of Romantic music is its lyrical quality. People always recognize the themes from the music of this period because many of them are so singable. The music appealed to audiences, and it is still popular among concert goers to this day.

Harmony

There were important developments in harmony during the Romantic period. Composers used harmony to bring out the emotions in the melody and for colour and atmosphere. Instead of restricting themselves to melodies and harmonies in the traditional major/minor key system, they explored chromaticism, which uses all 12 notes in the octave. They experimented with new

chord forms and combinations that could evoke different moods. Increasing chromaticism meant greater dissonance and tension, and the idea of a stable central key that the



If you examine this theme from Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, you will see that he has used all 12 notes in the chromatic scale, something that rarely happens in earlier music.

music always returned to became less important than it had been in the Classical period.

Tone colour

Tone colour refers to the quality of the sound played by a particular instrument compared to the sound of another instrument playing the same pitch. For instance if a clarinet and a trumpet both play middle C, the sound quality is quite different. Romantic composers worked with tone colour to a far greater extent than had been done before, and sound quality was as important an aspect of music for them as melody, rhythm and form.