

Romantic Terms

Absolute Music: Music with no programmatic reference or story—music for its own sake.

Aria: A lyrical type of singing with a steady beat, accompanied by orchestra; a songful monologue or duet in an opera or other dramatic vocal work.

Bel Canto: (means "beautiful singing" in Italian) An Italian tradition of "beautiful singing" primarily in opera seria and opera buffa in the late-17th through early-19th centuries. It was characterized by impeccable/seamlessly-smooth phrasing (*legato*) demonstrating great breath control and vocal flexibility throughout the singer's entire range, well-focused tone and diction, no loose vibrato, no forcing in the high register, and an agile ability to ornament tastefully. This term is most particularly associated with the type of singing done in early-Romantic operas by Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti.

Cadenza: An improvised or written-out ornamental virtuosic passage played by a soloist in a concerto. In Classic concertos, a cadenza occurs at a dramatic moment before the end of a movement, when the orchestra stops so the soloist can play in free time, and then after the cadenza is finished the orchestra reenters to bring the movement to its conclusion.

Castrato: The term for a male singer who was castrated before puberty to preserve his high soprano range (this practice lasted in Italy until the late 1800s). Leading male roles were written specifically for the castrato voice because it had the high range of a woman with the vocal power and strength of a mature male. Today, the rendering of castrato roles is problematic because it requires either a male singing in falsetto (weaker than a castrato) or a female mezzo-soprano (strong in this register, but then the woman has to impersonate a man).

Counterpoint: Combining two or more independent melodies to make an intricate polyphonic texture.

Form: The musical design or shape of a movement or complete work.

Genre: A category (type) of musical composition.

Homophonic Texture: Polyphonic music with all the parts moving rhythmically together (chordal texture).

Idée Fixe: In psychology, an idea that dominates a person's mind for a long period of time. In music, Berlioz used this term to describe the recurring theme that appeared in increasingly disturbing guises in all five movements of his *Symphonie fantastique* (1830)—this tune represents the woman who was the object of obsession in the work's programmatic story.

Lied: A German art song, performed by one singer accompanied by either piano or orchestra.

Leitmotif: A musical theme or motive associated with a particular person, thing, emotion, or idea in a Musikdrama.

Motivic Construction: Using a small rhythmic and/or melodic figure as a building block for larger ideas throughout a movement or a multi-movement, as a means to unify the composition.

Opus: ("Op."; Latin for "work") Opus numbers are assigned by the publisher in the sequence that a composer's works were actually published—not when they were composed (therefore, opus numbers are not necessarily in chronological order—a piece may have been written many years before it was published).

Post-Romanticism: A musical style typical of the last decades of the 1800s and first decades of the 1900s, characterized by extreme largeness of scope and design, a mixture of various musical forms (e.g., opera and symphony), programmatic references, and heightened contrapuntal complexity. Often Post-Romanticism also embraces vivid religious or mystical fervor, a sense of longing, and a sense of the grim and the grotesque.

Program Music: ("programmatic music") Instrumental music intended to tell a story, or give an impression of an image or specific idea.

Recitative: A speech-like manner of singing in a free rhythm

- *Recitativo secco* ("dry recitative") refers to speech-like singing accompanied sparsely by harpsichord.

- *Recitativo obbligato* is a section of recitative that includes brief yet dramatic moments of orchestral support.

Retransition: In a sonata form, this is the last part of the Development section that sets up the final harmonic return to the home key that happens with the start of the Recapitulation.

Scherzo: ("Scherzo" means "joke") A moderately-fast commoner's dance in 6/8 meter which replaced the aristocratic Minuet as the preferred 3rd movement dance used in four-movement Classic instrumental works after 1810. In the Romantic era, a scherzo is also single-movement piano works with a harshly dark and dramatic fervor.

Thematic Transformation: A high-level means of unifying a work by basing it on a recurring but ever-developing main theme as a way of showing its spiritual metamorphosis.

Theme: In the Classic era, a "theme" is a melodic idea that stands on its own (has a complete harmonic progression and cadence).

Tutti: ("All" in Italian) In a concerto, this term in the score tells everyone to play together.

Genres Used in the Romantic Era

Ballade: A solo piano genre with a somewhat narrative style, favored by some Romantic composers, most notably Chopin and Brahms.

Ballet: A fully-staged programmatic theatrical work for dancers and orchestra.

Cantata: A short, unstaged multi-movement Lutheran liturgical sacred work for solo singers, chorus and small orchestra (5-9 movements performed during a Lutheran church service).

Character Piece: A one-movement programmatic work for solo piano.

Concerto: A 3-movement work that pits a soloist vs. orchestra. In the Classic era, the solo concerto was the most esteemed type of instrumental composition (until the Beethoven symphonies). Romantic concertos often used Classic forms but in a freer, longer and more personally expressive manner:

- *Solo Concerto:* a 3-movement work for a one solo instrument vs. orchestra

1st movement: Fast, in the home key (Form = Concerto-sonata form with Ritornello elements)

2nd movement: Slow, in a different key (Form = a small-scale form such as Ternary form or 5-part Rondo form)

3rd movement: Very fast, in the home key (Form = Rondo form, blended with Ritornello elements).

Etude: (derived from the Italian word "studiare"—to study) A "study" piece that focuses on some technical aspect for the player to master on the instrument. Chopin *Etude in C minor*, Op. 10 No. 12 "Revolutionary" (c1831)

Mass: A "musical Mass" often refers to a musical setting of just the Mass Ordinary (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei). In the Romantic era, Masses continued to be written by Catholic composers such as Verdi and Bruckner, who wrote them in a more dramatic theatrical style.

Mazurka: A Polish folk dance usually in lively triple meter with a strong accent on the second or third beat of each measure. Chopin *Mazurka in B-flat major*, Op. 7 No. 1 (1830-32)

Mazurka: A French art-song. Chopin *Mazurka in B-flat major*, Op. 7 No. 1 (1830-32)

Musikdrama: A term usually associated with Wagner's German politically-driven theatrical works, in which music, staging, costuming etc. all have the sole purpose to propel the dramatic story.

Nocturne: A piano genre established by John Field, and made famous by Chopin, suggesting quietness of night.

Opera: Invented by Italians in the early Baroque, this is a large-scale fully-staged dramatic theatrical work involving solo singers, chorus, and orchestra. In the Romantic era, several types of opera thrived in various countries, both serious and comic:

- **Grand Opera:** A dominant type of French opera in the nineteenth century, generally in 4 or 5 acts, which featured large-scale casts and orchestras, lavish spectacle and special effects, usually with plots centered around dramatic historic events.

- **Lyrical Opera:** A type of French opera that blends "grand opera" with "opera bouffée."

- **Opera seria:** A type of serious Italian opera in three acts, sung all the way through, based on dramatic alternating scenes of recitative and aria.

- **Opera buffa:** Comic Italian opera usually in two acts, sung in Italian all the way through (no spoken dialogue), such as Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1816).

- **Opéra bouffée:** A light or satirical French opera similar to an operetta. *Orphée aux enfers* ("Orpheus in Hell") 1858 [this work spoofs the situation, and even includes the famous "Can-Can" as a dance in Hell]

- **Opéra comique:** Comic opera in two acts, with spoken French dialogue and sung French arias. Oddly, though it is tragic in nature, Bizet's *Carmen* (1875) comes from the opéra comique tradition (it has spoken French dialogue and sung French arias).

- **Operetta:** A type of opera that is light in terms of both music and subject matter; closely related in English to musical theatre.

- **Verismo:** Italian opera with stories that aim to be more "true-to-life." Puccini *La Bohème* (1896)

Oratorio: A large-scale religious work performed by solo singers, chorus, and orchestra without staging, scenery or costumes.

Piano Cycle: A multi-movement set of character pieces assembled together in a similar manner to a song cycle. Schumann *Carnaval* (1834-35).

Sonata: As in the Classic period, a multi-movement instrumental work for a solo piano, or for a single instrument with piano accompaniment. Brahms *Piano Sonata No. 1 in C major* (1853).

Song Cycle: A set of art-songs arranged intentionally as a cycle to depict an ongoing story, or based on the same literary source. Mahler *Kindertotenlieder* (1901-04).

String Quartet: A chamber ensemble of four string players (2 violins, viola, cello); also the term for a 4-movement work for string quartet. Schubert *String Quartet in No. 14 in D minor* ("Death and the Maiden"-1824).

Symphony: In the Classic era, this was a multi-movement work for orchestra, usually larger in scope than in the Classic era:

[related terms]

- *Program Symphony:* a multi-movement programmatic work for orchestra. Berlioz *Symphonie fantastique* 1830

- *Romantic Symphony:* a multi-movement work for orchestra which makes use of 19th-century style elements, but which may or may not be programmatic. Bruckner, *Symphony No. 7*; Dvořák, *Symphony No. 9*

- *Symphonic Poem:* a one-movement programmatic work for orchestra. Smetana *The Moldau* 1874

Forms Used in the Romantic Era (internal designs of individual movements)

Binary Form: A form comprised of two distinctly opposing musical sections ("A" vs. "B")

--it is the musical reflection of traveling a straight line from "Point A" to "Point B".

In Binary Forms, each section is usually repeated: ||: A :|| ||: B :||
I - V V - I

"Rounded Binary Form" is created when the main melody returns at the end of the "B" section:

||: A :|| ||: B A :||
I - V V - I

Coda: A (means "tail" in Italian) A brief, final musical section often appended to a movement to bring it to a satisfying conclusion.

Concerto-Sonata Form: A design used in the first movements of concertos that merges aspects of Baroque Ritornello form with Classic Sonata form:

It still features the Exposition, Development and Recapitulation sections of the traditional sonata form, but has to make considerations for whether the "tutti" (orchestra) or "solo" plays the main themes and makes the critical harmonic modulations, and where the soloist does a cadenza:

Exposition 1 (Orchestra)

- Theme 1 (in home key)

- Theme 2 (in V)

Exposition 2 (Soloist + Orchestra)--this is called a "double exposition"

- Theme 1 (in home key)

- Theme 2 (in V)

[solo trills]

Development (Soloist + Orchestra)

- other keys

[solo trills]

Recapitulation (Orchestra, then Soloist with Orchestra)

- Theme 1 (orchestra in home key)

- Theme 2 (soloist with orchestra in home key)

[orchestra pauses]

- soloist does a cadenza (on V)

[solo trills]

-Coda (solo and orchestra in home key)

Cyclic Form: The same motive or theme used in more than one movement of an instrumental work.

Multi-movement Instrumental Design: In contrast to the standard 4-movement design of the many Classic instrumental works, the Romantic era featured works that often changed the speed/mood of movements and the key relationships between and within movements. Slow introductions and long codas can be added, unusual keys, longer more sentimental or flamboyant themes, etc.

Ritornello Form: ("Return") A Baroque formal design based on the dramatic alternation of two opposing entities: A "returning" big group ("Tutti") and a contrasting small one ("solo")--Tutti-Solo-Tutti-Solo-Tutti-Solo-Tutti, etc. In the Classic era, ritornello form was superseded by Classic forms, but it was still used in the alternating "tutti vs. solo" structure in Classic concertos.

Rondo Form: A form that has its main melodic idea--the fast and catchy "rondo" theme [A]--return two or three times after contrasting melodic material and key. There is a 5-part Rondo (A B A C A) used in slower movements, and a 7-part Rondo (A B A C A B A) used in faster movements.

Scherzo & Trio Form: ("Scherzo" means "joke") After 1810, this design was the usual third movement of four-movement works.

- This form features a moderately-fast commoner's dance in 6/8 meter with two opposing sections:
- "Scherzo" section (a circular dance "in a 2 with a triplet feel" [6/8], quite different than a "Minuet")
 - "Trio" section: sweeter-sounding with reduced scoring
 - "Scherzo" returns

Sonata Form: The most important structural design of the Classic era, denoted by three dramatic divisions:

- Exposition: Two themes in opposing keys--Theme 1 (home key), Theme 2 (other key)
- Development: Harmonically unstable (explores distant keys from home)
- Recapitulation: Return of Theme 1 and Theme 2 in the home key

Sonata-Rondo Form: A form that blends the essential features of both sonata form and rondo form.

In the diagram below, the rondo form elements are in large capital letters:

Exposition

- Theme 1 in home key [A]
- Theme 2 in V [B]
- Theme 1 in V [A] --In sonata-rondo, Theme 1 is brought back here (but is in V, not I)

Development (other keys) [C]

Recapitulation

- Theme 1 in home key [A]
- Theme 2 in home key [B]
- Theme 1 (Coda) home [A]

Ternary Form: A form having both opposition and return ("A B A")--it is the musical reflection of a circle (start at "A" at the top, go around the circle to "B" at the bottom, then continue around the circle back to "A")

Theme & Variations Form: A form that presents a musical "theme" and then a series of variations on that theme:

- Theme 1 - Variation 1 - Variation 2 - Variation 3 - Variation 4 (etc.)

Through-composed Design: A musical structure that has no discernible form--the music keeps changing as it goes on, with no returning themes.

Romantic Composers (in chronological order)

Early-Romantic Composers

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): This German-born composer was the most revolutionary musician of the Classic and early Romantic eras. He excelled especially at the symphony, sonata, and string quartet, and brought music to powerful new heights of expression and socio-political influence--despite spending most of his career in complete deafness. *Symphony No. 3 "Eroica"* [symphony] 1803-4

Franz Schubert (1797-1828): He established the German art song (Lied) as an important genre in the 19th century. He wrote over 600 Lieder, as well as song cycles, symphonies, string quartets, sonatas, and Masses. *Erlkönig* [Lied] 1815

Giocchino Rossini (1792-1868): This Italian opera composer wrote several of his earliest works in an early Romantic style before 1820. *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* [opera buffa] 1816

John Field (1782-1837): An Irish-born early-Romantic composer, who also worked in Paris, Vienna, and Russia. He is known for his piano works, especially for inventing the nocturne.

Mid-Romantic Composers

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47): This German musical prodigy is known for his colorful symphonic music, piano miniatures, songs, and oratorios, and for his work as a conductor--in which he revived interest in the music of JS Bach. *Elijah* [oratorio] 1846

Hector Berlioz (1803-69): This daring French composer and brilliant orchestrator composed the first truly programmatic symphony. He is known for his operas, songs, and programmatic orchestral works. *Symphonie fantastique* [program symphony] 1830

Frédéric Chopin (1810-49): This Polish-born composer-pianist spent most of his brief career in Paris. He is especially known for his character pieces and piano concertos. *Nocturne in E-flat major*, Op. 9 No. 2 (1830-32).

Robert Schumann (1810-56): He was important as a music critic, but is most remembered for his many songs and descriptive character pieces for piano. *Carnaval*, Op. 9 [piano cycle] 1834-35

Franz Liszt (1811-89): This Hungarian composer-pianist was perhaps the most spectacular pianist in history. He is known for his piano music and orchestral symphonic poems. *Piano Concerto No. 2* (1839-40)

Richard Wagner (1813-83): This German theatrical innovator perfected the use of the Leitmotif in his Musikdramas, and paved the way for the expanded use of tonality and chromaticism in the 20th century. *Der Ring des Nibelungen* [Musikdrama] 1848-74

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901): This operatic Romantic dramatist can be considered the most important Italian composer of the 19th century. *Rigoletto* [opera seria] (1851)

Modest Musorgsky (1839-81): This Russian composer is known as one of "The Five" Russian Romantic composers who endeavored to make a national musical style for their country. He is known for his opera *Boris Godunov* (1868), his symphonic poems such as *Night on Bald Mountain* (1867), and especially for his piano cycle *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874) that was vividly orchestrated by Maurice Ravel in 1922.

Georges Bizet (1838-75): He was the most renowned composer of French grand opera in the mid-Romantic era, but is most famous for his opera *Carmen* (1875) [opéra comique]--it is an opéra comique because it has spoken dialogue and sung French arias--the story of *Carmen* is actually quite dramatic and tragic.

Bedrich Smetana (1824-84): He was the first important Czech (Bohemian) composer; known for his symphonic works and operas. *The Moldau* [symphonic poem] 1874

Jacques Offenbach (1819-80): This French composer wrote nearly 100 operettas between 1850 and 1880 (such as *Orphée aux enfers* (Orpheus in Hades, 1858). He is remembered mostly for his unfinished masterpiece--the 4-act "opéra fantastique", *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (The Tales of Hoffmann) 1851.

Charles Gounod (1818-93): A French composer known for his grand opera *Faust* (1859), and his song-setting of the *Ave Maria* (based on a work by JS Bach).

Late-Romantic Composers

Anton Bruckner (1824-1896): An This late-Romantic Austrian composer is known for his rich, polyphonic and lengthy symphonies, as well as Masses, and motets. *Symphony No. 7* [symphony] 1881-83

Johannes Brahms (1833-97): He was the most important successor to Beethoven in the 19th century with regard to both symphonic and chamber music. *Symphony No. 3 in F major* [symphony] 1883

Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky (1840-93): This late-Romantic composer was the first internationally-acclaimed Russian musician. He is known for his colorfully orchestrated ballets, concertos, opera, and symphonic works. *The Nutcracker* [ballet] 1892

Gabriel Fauré (1858-1924): This late-Romantic French composer, organist and teacher brought French art song ("mélodie) and chamber music to the highest levels of sophistication. His musical style had a strong influence on many 20th-century composers. *La bonne chanson* [song cycle of French mélodie] (1892-94)

Giocomo Puccini (1858-1924): A leading figure in the Italian operatic verismo (true-to-life) movement of the late 19th- early 20th-centuries. *La Bohème* [verismo opera] (1896)

Antonín Dvořák (c1841-1904): The leading Czech (Bohemian) composer of the Romantic era; known for his symphonies, chamber works, operas, and songs. Symphony No. 9 ("From the New World") [symphony] 1893

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911): The most important Austrian composer of the late Romantic era, and one of the greatest conductors and orchestrators in history. He is known for his highly-expressive and melancholy orchestrally-accompanied song cycles, and his massive symphonies, which are examples of post-Romanticism. *Kindertotenlieder* [song cycle] 1901-04

Transition to early 20th-century (c1895)

Richard Strauss (1864-1949): This German post-Romantic composer/conductor stretched Wagnerian Romanticism to greater extremes, and he also ventured into the realm of early expressionism in works such as *Salome* (1903). He is known for his intense operas and his symphonic poems. *Also Sprach Zarathustra* [symphonic poem] 1896

Claude Debussy (1862-1918): The leader of the French "impressionist" movement in music. He was the first to move into a clearly modern manner of composition--clearly breaking with the Romantic sound dominated by the style of Wagner. Debussy is best known for his impressionistic piano works, symphonic poems, songs, and the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*. *Prélude à l'après d'un faune* ("Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun") [symphonic poem] 1894

Late Classic goes to c1820

click on names, work titles and underlined terms for more info or to view a YouTube clip of the work

early modern

early Romantic

ROMANTIC

late Romantic

1820

1850

1880

1900

post-Romantic

(German) **BEETHOVEN**
Symphony No. 9 (1825)
symphony

(Austrian) **SCHUBERT**
Erkdnig (1815)
Lied

(German) **MENDELSSOHN**
Elijah
oratorio

(German) **SCHUMANN**
Carnaval
piano cycle

(German) **WAGNER**
Der Ring des Nibelungen
Musikdrama
(Leitmotif)

(German) **BRAHMS**
Symphony No. 3
symphony

(Austrian) **BRUCKNER**
Symphony No. 7
symphony

(Austrian) **MAHLER**
Kindertliededer
song cycle
(post-Romanticism)

(German) **R. STRAUSS**
Also Sprach Zarathustra
symphonic poem
(post-Romanticism)

BERLIOZ
Symphonie fantastique (1830)
program symphony
(idée fixe)

OFFENBACH
Orphee auf enfers
opera bouffee

GOUNOD
Faust
grand opera
(in 5 acts)

BIZET
Carmen
opera comique (!)
(but not funny)

FAURE
La bohne chanson
French melodie
(art song)

DEBUSSY
L'apres-midi d'un faune
symphonic poem
(impressionism)
early modern

Italy
(opera) **ROSSINI**
Il Barbieri di Siviglia (1816)
opera buffa

VERDI
Rigoletto
opera seria

(Hungarian) **LISZT**
Piano Concerto No. 2
concerto
(thematic transformation)

(Polish) **CHOPIN**
Nocturne in E-Flat
character piece

(Czech) **SMETANA**
The Moldau
symphonic poem

(Russian) **MUSORGSKY**
Pictures at an Exhibition
piano cycle
(orchestrated by Ravel in the 20th century)

(Czech) **DVORAK**
Symphony No. 9
symphony

(Russian) **TCHAIKOVSKY**
The Nutcracker
ballet

Cantata

(revived by Mendelssohn, Schumann, etc)

Lyric opera

(blends French "Grand opera" with "opera bouffee")

"Romantic Symphony"

(Program Symphony) usually has freer forms, larger orchestra, more expressive sentimental themes

Colorful Titles for

Piano Works

- Ballade
- Etude
- Mazurka
- Polonaise
- Nocturne
- Scherzo

Ways of Achieving

Large-Scale Unity

- Theme and Variations form
- Motivic Construction
- Idee Fixe
- Leitmotif
- Thematic Transformation
- Cyclic Form

TERMS