

The Romantic Period in music occurred during a time of great social, political and economic change. As a result of the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution, the whole structure of society was changed. Out of a society of farms and small cities where the wealth was held by the nobility and the Church grew an industrial society of factories and growing cities, controlled by the “new middle class”. Upward mobility was possible for everyone and anyone.

The Romantic ideals spread throughout Europe and influenced both art and music. Instead of emphasizing logic and controlled emotions, the “Romantics” placed a great importance on personal feelings and emotions, were concerned with self-expression above all else and created new forms (or changed older ones) to fit their needs.

In the 1850s, a German politician, Otto van Bismark, revolutionized the way nations thought about themselves (and each other) through his concept of “Realpolitik” (“the ends justify the means”). Similarly in music, so long as the composer expressed the emotion, the form didn’t matter (to a certain extent). This is the real meaning of “Romantic” music: from the Old French word ‘romaunt’ comes an ideal of intensity of emotion. Romaunt: “subordinating form to theme, imaginative, passionate, preferring grandeur, or picturesqueness or passion or irregular beauty to finish and proportion, subordinating whole to parts or form to matter”.

Wind Bands were drastically changed during the Romantic. During the 1850s, instrument makers Stolzel and Bluhmel invented the valved brass instrument, which radically altered what brass instruments could play. During the 1840s, the saxophone was invented and began to be used in French infantry bands. Better manufacturing processes made brass instruments more affordable, allowing the working class more access to purchasing instruments, allowing the formation of amateur wind bands.

Music publishing companies began to expand their collections of wind band music to meet the growing demand for music. Much of the music played by wind bands consisted of arrangements or transcriptions of overtures, symphonies and operas by leading orchestral composers.

Composers in the Romantic concentrated on fewer compositions than before, preferring to thoroughly ‘work out’ their musical ideas, using increasingly chromatic harmonies, and using ‘unexpected’ key relationships.



Some General Characteristics of Romantic Music

MELODY	Long lyrical melodies with irregular phrases; wide, sometimes angular skips; extensive use of chromaticism; vivid contrasts; a variety of melodic ideas within one movement
RHYTHM	Frequent changes in both tempo and meter
TEXTURE	Almost entirely homophonic
TIMBRE	A great variety of tone colour; woodwind and brass sections of the orchestra increased; many special orchestral effects introduced; rich and colourful orchestration

In the Classical era, the ideal was the expression of *tempered emotion* through the use of MELODY.

In the Romantic, the ideal shifted instead to the expression of *extreme emotion* through HARMONIC embellishment of the melody.

Some Important Composers

Franz Schubert	1797-1828
Frederic Chopin	1810-1849
Robert Schumann	1810-1856
Franz Liszt	1811-1886
Richard Wagner	1813-1883