

Study Guide – Romantic History

Terminology & Definitions

- *Romant*: subordinating form to theme; imaginative, passionate; preferring grandeur, picturesqueness or passion
- *Program Music*: a compositional technique in which a piece of music is written to reflect and convey a particular theme or narrative, using tools like tone painting and instrumental effects
- *Musical Nationalism*: the notion that the music of a particular country should reflect that country's origins, ethnicity and aspirations; uses folk melodies, regionally specific instruments, vernacular language, stories from folklore, etc.

General Characteristics

- *Melody*: Long, lyrical lines; irregular phrasing; chromaticism & dissonance; lots & lots of melodic ideas in a single work
- *Harmony*: Dissonance, chromaticism & odd key relationships are used freely, to get the most emotional expression out of the music
- *Texture*: Homophonic, orchestral textures; piano & voice (art song)
- *Timbre*: Much wider variety of tone colours than ever before; lots of percussion, more woodwinds and brass; special orchestral effects
- *Form*: Basically irrelevant
- *Dynamics*: Dramatic, sweeping crescendos & decrescendos; sudden, drastic dynamic changes
- *Rhythm*: Frequent tempo & meter changes, even within single movements

Important Forms

- *Opera*: operas continued in similar fashion, though the accompanying orchestras got bigger (just as symphony orchestras got bigger) and added new sounds; operas got longer as well (2–3 hours in the Classical, 4+ in the Romantic)
- *Art Song/ Lied*: a form that varies both in name and style across different regions, the only really defining feature is that it's always written for voice and one instrument (usually piano); German Lied, specifically, was always piano and voice and *the two are treated like equal partners* (as opposed to the piano accompanying); lots of imagery and tone painting; always tells a story
- *Symphony*: the symphony continued to be important, although a lot of early Romantic composers avoided writing them (thanks, Beethoven); they **did not** adhere strictly to Sonata-Allegro form anymore – a single movement in a Romantic symphony might have 4 or 5 themes or melodic ideas or it might just be a long, dramatic development of one
- *Fantasia*: Basically has no rules, which is fine since Romantic composers mostly ignored the rules anyway

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Historical Implications, Sample Questions & Other Important Stuff

- *How does Romantic music differ from Classical music?*
 - Classical music was all about **tempered emotional expression**, through simple but beautiful *melodies*, whereas the Romantic composers were more interested in **extreme emotional expression**, through increasingly challenging and dramatic *harmony*
 - In the Classical era, form ruled above all else; music was created by either rigidly conforming to the rules or by deliberately subverting them in ways that the audience would not *expect* but would *understand*; In the Romantic, forms were considered to be a very loose framework to be roughly followed or abandoned entirely
- *What were some developments in the construction and use of instruments in this era?*
 - Brass instruments got valves, meaning they could play a much greater range and variety of notes; it also meant that they could play chromatically
 - The saxophone was invented; this was a whole new tone colour for the orchestra, although it admittedly did not catch on right away
 - Tonnes more percussion used in orchestras, adding a whole new dimension to composition; lots of special percussive effects are now possible (like low rolling bass drums that sound like storms, cymbals that sound like the ocean waves crashing, etc)