The Idea of Romanticism

Music that is characterized as Romantic, like Baroque or Classical, does not always conform to the time period it is assigned by historians and scholars. Like all the periods of Western music history, many composers were still writing in so-called “outdated” styles long into the next era. It is only the major shifts in the popular trend of composition that historians use to put a relative timeframe on separate musical periods, usually beginning with a composer or group of composers that illicit such change. Writer E.T.A. Hoffman called the music of Haydn and Mozart “romantic”, and characterizes Beethoven as “a completely romantic composer”. Of course, Hoffman was not necessary referring to the quality of romance as love or infatuation, but more as a sense of the idealistic and fantastical that permeates the compositions of high-Romantic composers such as Schumann, Wagner, Berlioz, and Mendelssohn, among others. However, there are common threads in harmony, structure, rhythm, and subject matter that constitute categorizing the music between 1825 and 1900 as within a similar vein. Previous conventions held in the highest esteem in previous centuries were beginning to break down and be replaced with newer, unexplored territory which captured the imagination of writers and listeners around Europe. In true Romanticism, the composer is unburdened by the constraints of the world around them, but instead can experiment with communicating pure emotion, thoughts, and feelings. New song forms such as the lied gave Schubert, Schumann, Wolf, and Brahms an outlet to communicate a new marriage between music and poetry, and programmatic music gave composers such as Berlioz, Dvořák, and Liszt a means to narrate a story through purely instrumental works. In light of these new trends, music became more influential in Europe’s social structure. The public concert, which was just beginning to gain popularity in the Classical Period, was now a major source of income for composers, as well as publishing, writing, and critiquing for music periodicals and newspapers. Though the music of the past was recovered and performed in what was rapidly becoming our modern orchestral repertoire, originality was highly prized, combined with a richer harmonic tapestry laden with unique effects, tone colors, and textures. In this, the music of Romanticism blossoms directly out of the Classical Period, which ended with the music of Beethoven, a composer most defined by historians as the inaugural figure of the Romantic Period.
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Beethoven, the First Romantic

While immortal composers such as Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart firmly characterize the music of the Classical Period, Ludwig van Beethoven stands alone as the master composer who splits the gap between the Classical and Romantic Eras. While Haydn would serve for a short time as Beethoven’s composition teacher (a fact that Beethoven kept quiet for many years), Haydn was too “old-fashioned”, and too famous, to update his music to fit the changing tastes of European society. It is very possible that Mozart may have transformed his craft to fit the times, but his untimely death in 1791 made that impossible. It was Beethoven, who was described by his friend and supporter, Count Ferdinand von Waldstein, as “[having] received Mozart’s spirit from Haydn’s hands”, who constantly reinvented himself and his music through his personal triumphs and ordeals, most notably through his struggles with deafness and his personal health.

Born in Bonn, Germany in 1770 (see Composer Profiles for details), Ludwig van Beethoven was a complete antithesis to the sophisticated, well mannered composers of the day. To get their works performed, a composer would also have to play the role of salesman; charming, pleading, and sometimes even begging to make a living. But Beethoven was no such artist. He embodied the paramount Romantic ideal that art is the highest form of expression, and those who were genius enough to create high art should be worshipped by the aristocracy, not the other way around. And Beethoven was sure that others would pay top-dollar to acquire his works. In fact, three nobles, Prince Joseph Franz Lobkowitz, Prince Karl Lichnowsky, and Baron Gottfried von Swieten, paid Beethoven an annual stipend just because of who he was. Beethoven in return dedicated many of his monumental works to them, cementing their names forever in the annals of musical history. Most others saw Beethoven as an anti-social, ill-tempered prima donna, who became increasingly eccentric in his later years, but it is true that Beethoven had once attempted to acquire some social grace, even going so far as to take dancing lessons, which were ultimately unsuccessful.

After establishing himself first as a master keyboard improviser, Beethoven’s “First Period” (1793-1802) compositions are clearly Classical in nature. Most of the music that represents the development and evolution of Beethoven’s style first began with his keyboard compositions. As a fellow keyboard virtuoso, W.A. Mozart was a strong source of inspiration for Beethoven, and though he had a fervent wish to study with him, Mozart’s death in 1791 prevented that. Though he did study for a brief time under Haydn, Beethoven learned most of his theory and counterpoint from other instructors, including Ignaz Schuppanzigh, Johann Schenk, Georg Albrechtsberger, and even Antonio Salieri.

It is very possible that Beethoven’s music may not have evolved to the state we know it if not for the tragedy of his deafness around 1796. For a while the 31 year old Beethoven denied he was
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losing his hearing, until in 1802 he realized that it was a somber reality. He traveled to the small country town of Heiligenstadt without notifying anyone, and spent six months there contemplating his fate. In October he wrote a lengthy correspondence to his brother (pictured above), which is known as the Heiligenstadt Testament. Its contents describe how Beethoven thought about committing suicide after admitting his deafness and only one thing, his music, stopped him. 

Afterwards, Beethoven returned to Vienna and began composing in what would be called his “Second Period” of work, also known as his “Heroic” period. It is in this intensely creative period that we see the first glimpses of Romanticism in its genesis. Included in this period are the great Symphonies No. 3: “Eroica”, Symphony No. 5, and his sole opera Fidelio, where Beethoven becomes the hero of his own story, triumphing over adversity and elevating the common man through his art. Some of the other prominent characteristics of Beethoven’s Second Period include disruption of meter, short but powerful motives and thematic material, and frequent harmonic shifts. This would serve as a prelude to the superior compositions of his “Third Period”, which historians place around 1816 until his death in 1827. During this time, Beethoven almost single-mindedly devoted all of his energy to his craft, further alienating his friends and family. His works reflect his innermost desire to bring all men to equality, paving the future for mankind. This is present in works such as the Missa Solemnis and the great Ninth Symphony. But during this time, Beethoven’s health continued to decline; he suffered from colitis, recurrent bronchitis, and a diminished immune system, resulting in numerous infections. After his death from liver failure in 1827, it was clear that Beethoven had become the standard that all future composers would strive to equal.

In the Shadow of Genius

While many composers lived and wrote quality works as Beethoven’s contemporaries, most of these figures have been lost to history in Beethoven’s shadow. It was no question that Beethoven’s works, particularly his symphonies, had become the preference of conductors and audiences alike, so it was logical that many would attempt to follow in his footsteps. Those who have distinguished themselves in the early Romantic Era as noteworthy composers include Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826), who composed mostly chamber works and operas, most notably the opera Der Freischütz (“The Marksman”) in 1821. This opera is exceptional mainly because it incorporates German folk music with singspiel, a form of part-singing, part-speech that is used in the famous “Wolf’s Glen” Scene of Act II. Other composers who continued the traditions of the Classical Period include Peter Winter, Anton Reicha, and Muzio Clementi.

In Vienna, Franz Schubert (1797-1828) became known as a celebrated composer of amateur music, though his works cover almost every major genre of the time. Schubert (see
Composer Profiles for biographical details) composed nearly one thousand works, a momentous task in itself, let alone the fact that he only lived a short thirty-one years. During his brief lifetime, his output includes eight operas, seven Masses, eight symphonies, string quartets, piano sonatas, and hundreds of lieder. In fact, it is in the category of lieder for which Schubert is most well known.

**Ach du Lieder?**

Though Franz Schubert did produce works on the grand scale of opera, mass, and the symphony, it is his chamber works that are his greatest contribution to the Romantic era, particularly in the category of lieder. The lied, which is German for “song”, is generally used to describe German poems of intense emotion and more often than not darker, even supernatural themes. After the Industrial Revolution of the previous century, many writers made it their goal to access the more “primitive” aspect of human nature, which they felt was corrupted by the growing influence of modern civilization. The lied is often used when referring to a piece of music for piano and singer based on a Romantic poem. Lied can be traced back to the troubadour songs of the Middle Ages, using the combination of new poetry and folk song influences, but it is with the Romantic Period that lied became wildly popular among amateur musicians in home performances.

Among the many writers of verse and poetry in the 19th century, none could equal the talents of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), now simply referred to as Goethe, in regards to German literature. Though originally trained in law in Leipzig, Goethe quickly turned to writing after losing his position as a licensee only a few months after he was certified. In 1774 he wrote the novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which would bring him worldwide fame. Scholars would later theorize that it was this book that ushered in the Romantic age. The book outlines the trials and tribulations of Werther, a young and sensitive artist that falls in love with Charlotte, who is engaged to a man named Albert. Knowing that Charlotte will never return his love, Werther still cultivates a friendship with them both. This ultimately ends in tragedy with Werther committing suicide rather than live with the pain of not having Charlotte for his own. While Goethe would later distance himself from *Werther*, the original publication of the novel brought him instant success. He followed it up with a plethora of novels and poems; most notably among them is the tragic play *Faust*, which he published in two parts; the first in 1805, and the second in 1832, the year of Goethe’s death. *Faust* is considered to be one of the greatest achievements of German literature, and scores of composers have treated the subject, including Schubert, Gounod, Liszt, and Berlioz.

The works of Goethe have provided Romantic composers with rich, dynamic material in tales filled with intriguing characters and supernatural plots. Some of Schubert’s greatest works of lieder are set from Goethe’s writings, including *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (“Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel”), which is set from *Faust*, and *Der ErlKönig* (“The Erl King”), which is based on Goethe’s poem of the same name. Schubert’s lieder expand the possibilities of how music and lyrics intertwine to weave a tapestry of orchestral color and pictorial images. While Schubert did not
always choose such excellent subjects to set in his works, these two examples show perfectly how Schubert succeeded in elevating the lied to symbolize the Romantic movement. In *Gretchen*, for example, Schubert symbolizes the spinning of Gretchen’s wheel by creating a repeating ostinato pattern in the piano; the only time it halts is when Gretchen is at the height of emotion when the music reaches its climax. In *Erlkönig*, the steady triplets demonstrate the horses’ gallop in a father and son’s ride home, while the son tries to tell his father that the Erl (sometimes mistranslated as “Elf King”, in which case the piece would have been called “ElvenKönig”) King is calling out to him. Schubert uses the dialogue itself to set up his shifting harmonies and dramatic chord changes as the Erl King calls out to the boy sweetly, then ever more forceful as the song progresses. This kind of musical imagery depicting individual characters would be developed by composers such as Liszt, Berlioz, and Wagner. Schubert also wrote “cycles” of lieder, or several poems in one collection designed to be grouped together using a common theme. Among these is the famous *Winterreise* (“Winter’s Journey”), a collection of twenty-four poems by Wilhelm Müller, and the *Schwanengesang*, made up of six poems by Heinrich Heine.

Many composers have strived to further develop Schubert’s innovations in the lied genre, including Robert Schumann, Heinrich Marschner, and Hugo Wolf. And while Schubert may not have been the first composer to work with lieder (Beethoven had even sketched out a setting of *ErlKönig*, but did not go further with it), he certainly was the catalyst that elevated lieder to a higher art form, one that can be held in the same esteem as the symphonies of Beethoven or the masses of J.S. Bach.

**Italian Opera in the Early Romantic Era**

While many other European nations, particularly France and Germany, were already incorporating Romantic themes into their operas, Italy remained slow to embrace those tendencies in the early 19th century. While the opera was still the highest form of public entertainment, many composers still used the Classical formula of mythological texts, highly embellished arias and cadenzas for soloists (many of whom altered them to suit their personal tastes), and composing in the two main types of opera – opera seria and opera buffa. *Opera seria*, based mostly on the librettos of the great Italian poet Pietro Metastasio (1698-1792), used texts that were drawn from either ancient history or legend. The operas usually have a happy ending, in which some kind of divine figure (usually the royalty or aristocrat who commissioned the opera) saves the day by intervening at the end of the drama. The leading male would normally be a very high voice, such as a castrato, and very few choruses or ensemble voices were used. In the previous century, composers who contributed to the library of opera seria included Alessandro Scarlatti, Johann Adolf Hasse, Christoph Willibald Gluck, and George Frideric Handel.
**Opera buffa**, on the other hand, was far less rigid than opera seria, and mostly drew on folk themes that could be enjoyed by the general populace. Its characters included a wide variety of archetypal themes, such as the clever servant, the incompetent soldier, or the satiric royal figure. Composers including Giovanni Paisiello and W.A. Mozart excelled at comic opera, illustrated in works such as Paisiello’s *The Barber of Seville* (later to be set by Rossini) and Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*. Comic opera was more pliable than opera seria during the late 18th century; the most noticeable of these changes being the gradual use of the chorus as a significant aspect in the plot, and the decreased use of the standard recitative-aria formula that is so prevalent in opera seria. One of the early pioneers of this transition was the German-born **Johann Simon Mayr** (1763-1845). Though born in Bavaria, Mayr moved to Bergamo, about 25 miles northeast of Milan, and was appointed *maestro di cappella* at the Cathedral of Bergamo, where among his many students was Gaetano Donizetti. His operatic works fall into both categories of opera seria and opera buffa, and were widely received around Europe. His contribution to 19th century opera for the most part is his unique and innovative use of orchestration, which would be picked up by Rossini. Mayr introduced the compositional technique of adding instruments during crescendo passages (now known as the “Rossini” crescendo), and the use of inventive solo parts for the woodwinds and brass instruments. Near the end of his life, he developed cataracts and became blind, and unfortunately, though he wrote over seventy operas, hardly any of them are performed today.

Since many of the older Italian opera composers of the previous century, including Paisiello, Cherubini, and Spontini, were starting to retire or pass away in the early 19th century, and Mayr writing his final opera in 1824 before going completely blind in 1826, Italian opera needed rejuvenation if it was to continue to dominate the European musical landscape. The composer most responsible for this rebirth was the Italian **Gioachino Rossini** (1792-1868). Born in Pisaro off the Adriatic coast (see Composer Profiles for biographical details), Rossini achieved enormous success almost instantly with his very first opera, *La Cambiale di matrimonio* (“The Marriage Contract”) written when he was eighteen years old. A few years later, his operas were performed around Europe and hailed as instant successes the moment they hit the stage. While Rossini is primarily known for composing comic opera, he did dabble in non-theatrical musical forms, including oratorio, cantata, chamber music, and even the symphony. But it is for his contribution to Italian opera buffa that is his greatest achievement in Western music history. A master of melody, Rossini’s operas usually contain sections of varying tempos, both for soloists and ensembles, and frequently wrote out his cadenzas for arias, unlike the previous practice of having the soloist decide what to sing based on their prestige and fame (which also caused many arguments between Rossini and the principal singers). His characters and plotlines are perfectly synchronized to the music, creating a fast-paced lyrical drama emphasizing wit and entertainment over substance and heaviness.
Rossini’s operas were not always met with public enthusiasm; when his opera *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (“The Barber of Seville”) premiered in 1816, audiences were outraged at Rossini’s audacity to use the same subject as Giovanni Paisiello’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, which had premiered in 1792 (only 24 years earlier!). This represented a clash between the old style of opera buffa and the new style that Rossini had firmly established. Even so, Rossini continued to produce operatic successes until his final opera, *Guillaume Tell*, premiered in 1829. After this, Rossini lived in a wealthy retirement until his death at the age of 76.

Two other composers shared the spotlight with Rossini, though neither generated the fame that Rossini would claim for himself. Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848), most famous for his operas *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) and *Don Pasquale* (1843), was a student of Simor Mayr in Bergamo. Donizetti wrote more than seventy operas during his lifetime, in both opera seria and opera buffa. The dramatic love affairs and extreme emotional content are more connected to the Romantic idea that Rossini chose not to produce in his operas. While the public was still more interested in mere entertainment, Donizetti’s works serve to make the connection between Rossini’s operas and the operas of later Romantic composers such as Verdi and Wagner. His contemporary, Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835), also drew on Romantic texts in his ten operas before he died suddenly at the age of 34. Mostly known for his two operas, *Norma* (1831), and *I Puritani* (“The Puritans”) 1836, Bellini was well received for his use of ensemble singing, embellished melodic lines, and sensitive harmonies that were designed to offer audiences a *bel canto* (“beautiful singing”) work of dramatic music.

**Early Romantic Music in Paris**

Though Italian opera was hesitant in adapting to the changing tastes of European society, Paris had thoroughly embraced the tide of Romanticism, mostly due to the historical context in which it began. In 1815, Napoleon attempted to retake his former empire in The Hundred Days of his return, but was ultimately defeated in the Battle of Waterloo. Meanwhile, the Council of Vienna, knowing full well that revolution could easily change the fortunes of the aristocracy (the French Revolution had only been twenty years earlier), placed considerable more limitations on the power of the monarchy. Louis XVIII, Napoleon’s successor to the throne, was able to manage an uneasy calm between the nobility and the general public. He had seen revolutions in Spain, Naples, and the Ottoman Empire, and was not interested in creating a second one in Paris. When Louis died in 1824, the next king, Charles X, had a vision completely opposing Louis’s dreams of harmony and reconciliation. Charles strongly believed in the old order of things, and worked to restore the aristocracy to its former glory before the Revolution. He soon found himself abdicating the throne and fleeing to England after the French people had begun setting up barricades and preparing for an assault on the palace. His replacement, Louis Philippe, had served
in the French republican army of the Revolution, and had built a reputation as a champion of the people. Calling himself the “citizen king”, he would often mingle amongst the people in plainclothes. Louis had understood that the future of France belonged to its people, and he was not one to stand in the way of progress.

In musical progress of the same timeframe, the new social order exhibited a tremendous effect. Opera houses had become a vehicle for big business in the early 19th century, and entrepreneurs such as Louis Véron combined publicity, marketing, and showmanship to create a spectacle that is now known as French grand opera. While Italian opera seria at the time was still laden with mythological texts, the operas of 19th century Paris drew heavily on post-classical historical librettos. Composed primarily with the intent to please their audiences, the nobility, royalty, and even the clergy are all portrayed as villains, capable of horrific and even supernatural acts. Stagecraft and machinery were used to great effect, much like the pyrotechnical shows and concerts of today, and extreme sets were constructed to give opera as much excitement for the audience as possible. The composer most known in the grand opera style was Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864), a German immigrant who composed 17 operas in total but is primarily famous for one in particular, titled Les Huguenots (“The Huguenots”) written in 1836. Les Huguenots displays all the characteristics of grand opera, designed to create mass spectacle and awe. Meyerbeer combines a raucous plot, including drinking, fighting, a massacre, an orgy, and a grand ball, with immense chorus singing (there is only one aria in the entire opera), a full orchestral accompaniment with great volume, massive sets, and extreme emotional climactic scenes. Its premiere set all of Paris abuzz; unanimously favorable reviews poured in from all around France, while German Romantics equally condemned it; seeing it as a glorified spectacle of decadence and overwhelming extravagance. Overall, while grand opera only lived for a relatively short while until around 1850, it did firmly establish Paris as the new musical center of Europe. Effects of grand opera, such as Meyerbeer’s treatment of orchestration and creating new tone colors, served to inspire the works of future opera composers such as Berlioz, Wagner, and Richard Strauss.

The Great Performers

The Romantic Era also gave rise to the virtuoso; performers who defied all convention with their incredible ability and musical talent. In this, they also served as the archetype for the Romantic Hero; a person whose character and mystique were equally as important as their musical genius. The Romantic Hero was mysterious, an enigma to all those who sought to understand him, yet capable of producing music full of beauty and humanity. Yet there also echoed a hint of the supernatural; musical abilities that were so advanced that it was difficult to accept them without imagining some kind of otherworldly power. Such was the case with the
famous violinist **Niccoló Paganini** (1782-1840). Paganini’s violin ability was second to none; many still say that he was the greatest violinist in the world. His fans certainly thought so; wherever he went he was surrounded by a court of admirers. Critics and listeners marveled at his acrobatics, pizzicatos, double and triple stops, and playing speed that it became almost legendary. In fact, many people believed that Paganini had signed a contract with the devil, giving his soul in exchange for inhuman musical prowess. Even his facial features led many to imagine a dark countenance with a hint of inhuman pleasure. In reality, he was an incredibly gifted man who in addition to his performing ability, wrote many etudes for solo violin that are used today as etudes and showpieces for professional and aspiring violinists. His most famous is the *24 Capricci* for solo violin, which are studied by any player who can seriously be called a professional violinist.

One virtuoso performer who had been mesmerized by Paganini’s legend was the great pianist **Franz Liszt** (1811-1886). Liszt (see Composer Profiles for biographical details) had heard Paganini at the age of 21 after moving to Paris with his family in 1832 and was immediately taken with not only his musicianship, but his persona. With hardly any private instruction, Liszt became the greatest of all pianists living in the Romantic Era. His personality matched the concept of the Romantic hero perfectly; he was tall, thin, had penetrating green eyes, and an ethereal air that added to his mystique. He had countless affairs with women (several of them married), and was known to be self-centered and arrogant. In fact, it was Liszt that is credited with creating the solo recital, doing away with any and all orchestral accompaniment in his concerts. He became the public soloist that would continue to play a part in the development of music even through to the present day.

Other concepts that Liszt would invent was the **symphonic tone poem**, a one-movement programmatic work present in pieces such as *Les Préludes*, and the idea of thematic transformation. **Thematic transformation**, which involves subjecting a primary theme to many different transmutations, including performing it in retrograde, inversion, and modulation, among other techniques, was used by Liszt to avoid the earlier, outdated Classical forms that did not suit his tastes. Liszt would perform original works or transcriptions of larger orchestral pieces including the Beethoven symphonies, the J.S. Bach masses, and other music by composers including Scarlatti, Rossini, Wagner, and Berlioz.

While Liszt’s virtuosic technique was unmatched in his day, he owes much of his stylistic education to another piano prodigy, **Frédéric Chopin** (1810-1849). Chopin (see Composer Profiles), unlike Liszt, had a more formalized musical education, studying composition and theory in his native Poland. After settling in Paris, like many of the great musicians of the day, Chopin never again visited his homeland, although his upbringing greatly influenced his writing. The mazurkas and polonaises, both Polish folk dance forms, is highly characteristic of Chopin’s style. In another separation from Liszt, Chopin gave very few public concerts, and made most of his
money through teaching and publishing pieces. His playing reflects a duality that was favored by more Classical composers such as J.S. Bach and Mozart; a strong, steady left hand with an expressive rubato right hand. The two, as Chopin thought, would reconcile and balance the other; a stylistic feature that pianists including Liszt would absorb into their playing. The young Felix Mendelssohn would later comment: “There is . . . something entirely original in his piano playing and it is at the same time so masterly that he may be called a perfect virtuoso”. While Chopin was influenced by the great virtuosos such as Niccoló Paganini, he never immersed himself in Romanticism, preferring to write almost exclusively for the piano and in absolute form. None of his original pieces have programmatic titles; they were all added after his death in 1849. Chopin’s place in music history rests with his ability to make the piano a complete instrument, capable of subtle nuances mixed with technical virtuosity; creating vast color and delicate sensibility, all while expressing lyrical and poetic qualities in ways that had never been explored before.

Program Music and Romanticism

Before the 19th century, instrumental music consisted mostly of what is known as absolute music, or music that can be described simply from its form or structure. It is meant to exist solely for its own sake, and does not conjure up specific images designed by the composer or any external source. Although composers experimented with musical imagery before Romanticism, composers had not written instrumental music to tell a definite story. Musical imagery served more to convey general impressions to the listener, such as in Vivaldi’s Four Seasons quartet, or Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony. With the emphasis on literary and highly charged emotional content, composers of the Romantic era began to write works that were based on specific literary references, specifically from the writings of Shakespeare and Goethe. Programmatic music, also known as program music, is labeled specifically as instrumental works without vocals that tell a definite story that goes beyond mere musical impressions or imagery. Over the course of the century, composers from all over Europe would write programmatic works, mostly based on literary or folk tales of a nationalistic idiom. Among them would include Edvard Grieg (Peer Gynt Suite), Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (The Nutcracker Suite), Modest Mussorgsky (Pictures at an Exhibition and Night on Bald Mountain), and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (Scheherazade), to name a few. However, the first composer to bring program music to the forefront of the Romantic movement was the French composer, conductor, and writer Hector Berlioz (1803-1869).

Berlioz (see Composer Profiles) became the leading symbol for French Romanticism after rising to the forefront of orchestral music in the 1840’s. Though he was not a prodigy or instrumental virtuoso, his love of composition and unique imagination produced works that inspired a generation of composers, including Wagner, Debussy, and Richard Strauss. Inspired by
the music of composers such as Beethoven and Gluck, and the literary writings of Shakespeare and Goethe, Berlioz’s music adds a completely original dimension to orchestral music with his innovative orchestration, use of tone color, and instrumental devices to associate the music with the storyline. Unlike Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony, which merely demonstrates images and feeling through the title of each movement, it is impossible to fully appreciate Berlioz’s music without understanding the literary subtext to each of his works. This is particularly evident in his first major symphony, the Symphonie Fantastique, Op. 14. During this time, Berlioz was deeply in love with the Irish actress Harriet Smithson, who became his muse for the idée fixe, or main idea that pervades the piece (see Figure 1). The story of the symphony is inspired from multiple literary sources, including Thomas De Quincey’s Confessions of an English Opium Eater and Goethe’s Faust. In the symphony, the artist (Berlioz) is in the throngs of “hopeless love” and poisons himself with opium. The resulting hallucinations result in the five movements of the piece: 1). Reveries, where the artist’s beloved is introduced by the idée fixe; 2). A Ball, where he sees the beloved at a festive occasion, yet the artist is still tortured by the sight of her; 3). Scene in the Fields, where the artist broods on his loneliness in the meadow while listening to the shepherds’ calls; 4). March to the Scaffold, where the artist dreams that he has killed his love and is now sent to be executed, and 5). Dreams of the Witches’ Sabbath, where the beloved joins in a cacophony of monsters and demons while the idée fixe is parodied. The Symphonie, premiering only three years after Beethoven’s death, has become a staple of the orchestral repertoire and is performed often with every major orchestra in the world.

Almost every piece by Berlioz has some kind of programmatic material. His second and third symphonies, entitled Harold in Italy and Romeo et Juliette, respectively, were referred to by the composer as “dramatic legend(s)”, completely separating them from any previous notion as conventional symphonic works. They firmly establish Berlioz as the head of a more “radical” branch of Romanticism, which would be echoed with the tone poems of Richard Strauss, who would also edit Berlioz’s Treatise on Instrumentation, one of the most influential orchestration texts ever written.

**The German Romantic Tradition**

After Napoleon’s final defeat at the battle of Leipzig in 1813, the fragmented German-speaking nations decided to form a coalition, resulting in the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Their aim was to create a more nationalistic society; a strong unified front against the forces of outside influence and foreign threats. Comprised mostly of students and young people, the most
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outspoken group was organized in a movement called Junges Deutschland (Young Germany). Among these liberals included writers, poets, and composers, most notably among them was the young musician and writer Robert Schumann (1810-1856). During his notably short life (see Composer Profiles for more details), Schumann with a few other like-minded friends organized a journal called the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, or the New Journal for Music. Many of Schumann’s writings in the Journal consist of music reviews, editorials, and general commentary on a wide range of musical and political subjects. Schumann was the archetypical Romantic; he loved Beethoven, hated French and Italian opera, and exalted the careers of his Romantic contemporaries, particularly Chopin and Liszt. His own music reflects his predilection for Romantic aesthetics; though many of his pieces have programmatic titles, such as the Scenes from Childhood, Op. 15 or the Carnaval, Op. 9, Schumann is primarily concerned with the feelings and sensations associated with the musical imagery, as opposed to the actual scene or action that the music describes.

Another composer in Schumann’s circle that deserves recognition is Clara Wieck (1819-1896). While Robert was taking lessons from her father, Friedrich Weick, he noticed that her own prodigious skills had won her considerable renown. Soon afterward, he fell in love with her, and asked her father for her hand in marriage. Sadly, her father refused, explaining that he would never give his daughter’s hand away to a penniless musician without a steady career. That did not stop Robert, however, and it would take until 1840 for the two to be properly married, even without her father’s consent. Though Clara would gain a husband, she would slowly realize that she was throwing away her own budding career. Her concert tours eventually ended; Robert hated traveling, and her new role as a wife and mother (she would have eight children, four of which would outlive her) prevented her from pursuing her aspirations as a performer. As a pianist, she was dedicated to championing the works of her husband and other Romantics; the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg commented that she was “one of the most soulful and famous pianists of her day”. As a composer, Clara Schumann’s works are increasingly performed and recorded by modern artists, though in her later years she became less confident about her talents; “A woman must not desire to compose”, she wrote when she was 36 years old. She had composed nothing after this, mostly due to the mental instability and eventual death of her husband in 1856. She herself lived to be 76, and became one of the greatest symbols of famous women musicians in history.

Before his death, Schumann helped to create another staple of Germany’s musical culture, the Leipzig Conservatory, where he taught piano and composition. His fellow professor and co-founder was Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847), who although also had a short life (shorter than Schumann’s) quickly established himself as a musical genius who many would consider as
Mozart’s successor. Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (see Composer Profiles) would grow up in a life of great privilege; his father was a very successful banker who was already the inheritor of a sizable fortune. Felix and his three siblings were given all the education their parents could provide, though his older sister Fanny demonstrated considerable ability on the piano. Originally, the family believed that Fanny had the superior musical talent among the children, though her skills were not further explored due to the fact that at the time it was not considered proper for a woman to have a musical career. Soon afterward, Felix demonstrated the same natural talent, and his parents began having him tutored in piano, composition, and counterpoint. Through the years Felix and Fanny would have a very close relationship, and in modern times Fanny Mendelssohn (later Fanny Hensel) would be considered every bit as gifted as her brother, having composed over four hundred pieces of music herself. Felix would derive his works from more traditional forms, using the models of J.S. Bach and Mozart as his tools. By the time he was 30, Mendelssohn had already distinguished himself as both an accomplished composer and conductor, performing in Germany, London, and Paris to critical acclaim all over Europe. His music demonstrates both Classical and Romantic tendencies; his use of formal technique is decidedly eighteenth century, as befitting his early training, but his use of programmatic and imagery techniques, specifically in his Overture to A Midsummer Night’s Dream is a complete product of his own era. After his untimely death at the age of 38, Mendelssohn would be remembered as a composer whose works exhibit the same clarity and transparency as Bach and Mozart, yet updated to meet the modern fashions of Romanticism. Though he himself was a great friend of the Schumanns and even lived for a time in their household, Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) would never embrace the sweeping tide of Romanticism that Schumann advocated in his writing and compositions. Brahms (see Composer Profiles) would be known during his lifetime and beyond as the greatest composer to stay true to the “old” forms and achieve success, even during times of musical experimentation by composers such as Verdi and Wagner. Though he was by nature very self-critical and conscientious of his work, the defining characteristics of Brahms’ style developed very early on. By the time he was twenty, Schumann had already recognized him in his Journal as “destined to give ideal expression to the times”. After Schumann had died, Brahms continued a friendship with Clara Schumann, though there is no definitive evidence of a romantic relationship between the two, as any letters between them had been destroyed. Brahms himself would never marry, remaining a dedicated bachelor for the rest of his life. The first piece that gave Brahms national acclaim was his German Requiem, Op. 45, and continued with notable works including his Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op. 56A, the Violin Concerto, Op. 77, two Piano Concertos, Op. 15 and 46, and his two orchestral overtures Academic Festival Overture, Op. 80, and the “Tragic” Overture, Op. 81. Like Mendelssohn, Brahms studied the Classic composers Mozart, Haydn, and especially Beethoven while using their example to compose in the traditional forms. But unlike Mendelssohn, Brahms would not have a symphony premiered until 1876, after working on it for nearly twenty years. Brahms hesitated for so long because he was intimidated by the monumental task of following Beethoven’s example (indeed, his Symphony No. 1 in C minor, which is written in the same key as Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5, was called “Beethoven’s 10th”). Brahms would later follow his first symphony with three more, each working within the tradition set forth by Beethoven and his
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contemporaries. He never wrote a piece in programmatic style, instead focusing on creating works of power and intelligence using his sophisticated mastery of counterpoint, thematic development, and close-knit harmonies that complimented structure and form. He is considered by modern scholars to be the last great composer of the Classic-Romantic style.

Who’s Up for Some More Opera?

After the large-scale spectacle of French grand opera, there was no composer after Meyerbeer to take the reins in the mid-19th century, and so the genre began to decline. A new model rose in its place, called lyric opera, which possessed little if not any trace of the old grand opera tradition. The librettos of lyric opera mainly centered on subjects revolving around love, and action such as historical battles or any other violence was for the most part eliminated. One of the first operas in the lyric style was by Ambrose Thomas (1811-1896), who was a student with Berlioz at the French Conservatory. His opera Mignon (1866) is his most famous, emphasizing melody and repetitious rhythms that are more predictably songful than innovative. One of the most famous examples of lyric opera is from another student of the Conservatory, Charles Gounod (1818-1893). Though Gounod wrote a large quantity of music in several genres, including church music, two symphonies, and numerous other vocal and instrumental pieces, it is his opera Faust that remains his most endearing legacy. Other composers of lyric opera in the mid-century include Jules Massanet (Manon – 1884), Jacques Offenbach (Tales of Hoffman - 1851), and Georges Bizet. Bizet (1838-1875) in particular produced a wide repertoire of music, but is most remembered for his operatic masterpiece Carmen (1875). His use of Spanish cultural music such as Gypsy music, the seguidilla (a dance similar to a bolero), and the famous Habanera in the first act, exhibits exoticism in a realistic drama featuring melodies that have become ingrained in both operatic and popular culture.

In Italy, one composer towered over all others, Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901). As much of a political figure as a musical one, Verdi (see Composer Profiles) became a symbol for Italians fighting for independence from foreign rulers. In 1815, the Congress of Vienna gave Austria dominion over Italy’s northern provinces, including Lombardy, Venetia, and Tuscany. Only one ruler, Victor Emmanuel I, was the only native Italian in the country. Much like the American and French revolutions, Italians soon began a series of uprisings devoted to the expulsion of the Austrian monarchy. The youth movement known as the “Carbonari” (so called because they masqueraded as coal sellers) created the concept of Risorgimento, or “Reawakening”, and fought battles all over the peninsula. In 1842, Verdi premiered his first operatic triumph, Nabucco. The politics of the time greatly influenced Nabucco’s success; its plot revolved around the Old Testament story of the release of the Hebrews from the tyranny of the Babylonian rulers. Italians swarmed around these themes, creating a national hero of Verdi. Since then, Verdi had continued to introduce political themes in his operas, including I Lombardi, depicting the battle of the knights of the First Crusade against the Saracens, and La Battaglia di Legnano, the story of the defeat of Frederick Barbarossa by the Lombardic League in the 12th century. All of these carried over into the current affairs of the Italian people, and in turn, Verdi was lionized as a hero of Italy. Even his name became an acronym for independence (Viva Vittorio Emmanuel, Rey d’Italia, or
Long Live Victor Emmanuel, King of Italy). Verdi believed that all nations should develop a unique national culture, a philosophy that would be echoed throughout all of Europe.

The titan of German Romantic opera, Richard Wagner (1813-1883), also believed in Verdi’s sentiments, though the two composers would share a rivalry that would last through the ages. Wagner (see Composer Profiles) believed in the superiority of the German culture and filled his operas with librettos of German legends and figures representing the greatest literary traditions of the nation. Through his writings, Wagner exhibits a superiority complex that borders on the delusional. Since he was constantly fleeing from creditors due to his own inability to pay for his large spending sprees, Wagner wrote of the corruption of society and called for the abolishment of all currency. Whatever particular need Wagner had at the moment was what he advocated against; in his mind genius (specifically his own) should be recognized and worshipped by the world at large. In his operas, Wagner would focus on the development on musical drama. His orchestra would become the partner of the dramatic action on stage by his use of the leitmotif, translated as “guiding” or “leading motive”. These specific musical passages would serve as a representation of a character, event, or feeling associated with the emotional content of the drama. Nowhere in the history of opera is this so well represented than in Wagner’s massive opera cycle The Ring of the Nibelung, or The Ring Cycle. Based on the German mythological texts of the Nibelungleid and the Edda, Wagner composed four operas based on the life of the demigod Siegfried. Many of his other operas, including Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, Tristan und Isolde, and Parsifal, exhibit intense psychological drama, combined with motives representing the superiority of the German culture. As a man both idolized and despised by people all over the world, Wagner’s personal legacy is a complicated one. His musical legacy in the second half of the 19th century, however, had become so influential that no other German composer of opera could match his popularity for the remainder of the Romantic Era.

My Country ‘Tis of Thee .

Among the many musical changes in the Romantic Era, none so profoundly affected the history of music more than the idea of nationalism. The search for a unique cultural identity was something that emerging nations had long sought after for centuries. From the establishment of the Roman Empire to the revolutions in America and France, political upheavals were usually followed by a significant change in musical culture. Mythological texts that represented the Germanic culture were incorporated by Wagner in his Ring Cycle, while political themes of Italian independence inspired many of Verdi’s operas. This sentiment spread to music that more accurately represented the people of a particular nation, such as in folk songs and dances. The
Austrian composer **Johann Strauss, Jr.** (1825-1899) used what came to be known as the “Viennese waltz” with pieces such as *On the Beautiful Blue Danube* and *Tales from the Vienna Woods*. Dances that reflected Austria’s national heritage became incredibly popular in Vienna during the second half of the 19th century, and were performed in concert halls and taverns alike.

In Hungary, the quest for a national culture went through many trials and tribulations. For hundreds of years, the country was ruled by foreigners, including the Magyars, the Turks, and the Hapsburgs until movements spreading reform and political independence eventually succeeded in liberating the country in 1867. Before then, Hungarian music had been attempted by composers such as Liszt in his *Hungarian Rhapsodies* and Brahms in the *Hungarian Dances*, but it would not be until the 20th century that Hungarian composers such as Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók would incorporate national folk songs into their orchestral works.

Before modern-day Czechoslovakia had been unified, the nations of Bohemia, Slovakia, and Moravia had difficulty shaking off the grip of foreign rule. Many native composers in these areas left the country to seek their fortunes elsewhere in nations like Austria, Germany, and France. Foreign composers, however, found new popularity in the capital city of Prague, Mozart and Joseph Haydn in particular. The first major composer to achieve a high level of success in his own native Bohemia was **Bedřich Smetana** (1824-1884). Smetana was born east of Prague near the border of Bohemia and Moravia, and had not received any formal training in composition until age 19. Never quite attaining the prestige of his early ambitions as a concert pianist, Smetana returned to his native country and taught pupils while briefly taking a role as a revolutionary against the absolutist rule of the Hapsburgs. After developing a friendship with Franz Liszt and with his financial support, Smetana established a Piano Institute in 1848, where his popularity began to flourish. He settled in Prague in 1862, and for the next twenty years composed specifically to add to the nationalistic culture of his homeland. Of his eight operas, all composed to Czech librettos, only one, *The Bartered Bride* (1866) has made it into the current operatic repertoire. His most famous piece is his suite of six symphonic songs entitled *Ma Vlast* (“My Homeland”), the most enduring of which is the second movement, *The Moldau*. Smetana is considered to be the father of Bohemian music, and would later serve as a cultural icon in the Czech Republic.

The most popular composer of the Romantic Period to come out of Bohemia was **Antonín Dvořák** (1841-1904). Dvořák (see Composer Profiles), who was a viola player in the Prague Provisional Theatre under the direction of none other than Smetana, did not begin formally studying music until he was sixteen. His early works mirror the basic style of Beethoven, Schubert, and then Wagner during his education at the Prague Organ School, where, in addition to viola, he learned how to play both the violin and the piano. Though he never did write in the style of Brahms, the great German composer helped get the young Bohemian his first pieces published. Soon afterward, Dvořák gained popularity both nationally and internationally. He accepted an offer to teach in America for three years, where he used his love of folk songs to create his best known work, the Symphony No. 9, “From the New World”. Prior to this, Dvořák had already put some of his country’s folk rhythms in print with his *Moravian Duets* for two voices and piano and the well-known *Slavonic Dances, Op. 46*, for two pianos. When he returned
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to Bohemia, Dvořák had already established himself as Smetana’s equal as a preserver and innovator of Czech culture.

Nationalism soon spread from the Eastern European countries to all over Europe. It was most felt in smaller nations whose musical culture had previously been influenced by other, more powerful nations. In Scandinavia, many of the musical developments mirrored what was being composed in Germany at the time. Most musicians from Finland, Sweden, and Norway traveled to the Leipzig Conservatory to study and compose. Among these was the Norwegian composer

**Edvard Grieg** (1843-1907). Grieg (see Composer Profiles) became a powerful voice for Norwegian culture with his tremendous output of pieces featuring many folk themes. Sadly, only few have made it into the permanent repertoire, including the popular Peer Gynt Suite and the smaller Lyric Pieces. In Spain, Italian dominance led composers such as **Isaac Albéniz** (1860-1909) to return to the rich heritage of Spanish music. Also trained at the Leipzig Conservatory, Albéniz had already traveled the world to places like Cuba, South America, and New York before taking piano lessons from Franz Liszt. Though he lived primarily in Paris, Albéniz composed in the traditional Spanish rhythms of the habanera, fandango, and bolero, influencing the future works of Debussy and Ravel. In England, the most notable works come from the operettas of **Arthur Sullivan** (1842-1900). Together with the lyricist W.S. Gilbert, they produced some of the most memorable stage works of the late Romantic Era, including *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878), *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879), and *The Mikado* (1885). Though possessing influences of early Italian opera, the collaborations of Gilbert and Sullivan are still performed today, preserving the traditions of the English theatre.

**Glinka, Tchaikovsky, and the Mighty Handful**

Although being the largest country in the world, Russia in the Romantic Era had produced comparatively little “authentic” Russian music in the orchestral world until the latter half of the century. Most musical influences came from outside sources; Italian operas, German singspiel, and the music of Chopin and Liszt. It was the works of young Russian writers such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Count Leo Tolstoy, and most importantly, Alexander Pushkin, that galvanized the country into embracing its national cultural heritage. Musicians at the time were considered second-class citizens; while authors, poets, sculptors, and artists were recognized and celebrated by the government, musicians did not enjoy this elevated status. The first major Russian composer to achieve national greatness was **Mikhail Glinka** (1804-1857). Glinka (pictured below),

![The 1983 movie production of Gilbert and Sullivan’s “The Pirates of Penzance” starring Kevin Kline.](image_url)
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is usually regarded as the father of Russian opera with his work *A Life for the Czar* (1836), which tells the story of an ordinary peasant, Ivan Susanin, who gives his life to save Czar Michael, first ruler of the Romanov dynasty, by diverting the invading Polish army. Though Glinka uses mostly European harmonies and orchestrations, the opera was hailed as a model for Russian dramatic music. Glinka followed up this success with the operas *Ruslan and Ludmilla* (1842) and *Kamarinskaya* (1848), establishing himself as a Russian hero to his later contemporaries.

The next development in Russian nationalism came with a group of largely untrained amateurs organized by the composer *Mily Balakirev* (1837-1910), who was the only musician among them to have any formal training. Often called “The Five”, or “The Mighty Handful”, they consisted of Balakirev, *César Cui* (1835-1918), *Alexander Borodin* (1833-1887), *Modest Mussorgsky* (1839-1881), and *Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov* (1844-1908). Most of these composers had positions in other fields; Borodin was a chemist, Mussorgsky was an army officer, Rimsky-Korsakov was a naval officer, and Cui was a military engineer. Together, they learned under the parentage of Balakirev while helping each other in the spirit of camaraderie. Borodin later wrote, “In the relations within our circle, there is not a shadow of envy, conceit, or selfishness. Each is made sincerely happy by the smallest success of another”. This was put to the test many times, as early writings also indicate harsh words within the group, especially when Rimsky-Korsakov (see Composer Profiles), the youngest, was offered a position teaching at the newly established Conservatory in St. Petersburg. The Conservatory, founded by Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894), a pianist and composer, was considered “the enemy” by the group as it represented every acadamian aspect of music that was not uniquely “Russian” in nature. Rimsky-Korsakov did indeed accept the position as the group was beginning to disband; Mussorgsky (see Composer Profiles) died of alcoholism at the age of 42, while Borodin died six years afterward. Balakirev himself tried to maintain a grip on his circle, but as they were already starting to pull away from him, he was no longer the symbol of Russian nationalist music. Of the Mighty Handful, only a few works of Borodin’s and Mussorgsky’s have made it into the permanent repertoire. Rimsky-Korsakov would later become the subsequent symbol of Russian nationalism, teaching the next generation of composers that would include Sergei Prokofiev and Igor Stravinsky.

Maintaining a place outside the circle of The Five, yet every bit as influential in both Russian and European music was *Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky* (1840-1893). Tchaikovsky (see Composer Profiles), who was a direct student of Anton Rubenstein’s and a graduate of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, used a great deal of Russian folk influences throughout his life. A closeted homosexual with severe social anxiety, Tchaikovsky’s music reflects his overbearing stress and despair; he even went so far as to attempt suicide by submerging himself in a river (his brother Modest, also a homosexual, rescued him). Tchaikovsky was most fascinated by the composers of the Classical Era, particularly in Mozart and Haydn. He respected Beethoven, but did not adore him, and he deplored the music of Wagner and Brahms. From his Classic
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influences, Tchaikovsky became very preoccupied with form and large scale genres of instrumental music, most specifically in his three ballets, Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty, The Nutcracker (pictured below), and his final three symphonies. Two operas have also made it into the permanent repertoire, Eugene Onegin (1878) and The Queen of Spades (1890). Tchaikovsky thus stands apart as a composer who could reconcile a neo-classicist structural format with Russian nationalism, together with introspective melodies and intense emotionalism that reflected his creative and turbulent mind.

Paris near Century’s End

Though influences of foreign music, specifically German and Italian opera, still pervaded the local tastes of France, composers of the mid to late century took interest in other forms of composition besides opera, including chamber works, symphonies, and sacred music. After the popularity of grand opera waned around mid-century, French composers traded Meyerbeer for Wagner, with interest even returning to the classical styles of earlier German composers such as Beethoven, Schumann, and Mendelssohn. Though most of his works are now considered obsolete, a major French composer of the late Romantic Period was César Franck (1822-1890). Franck, born in Liège (modern-day Belgium), did not become a naturalized French citizen until 1873, but is considered a driving force in the development of French music through to the end of the century.

In his youth, he was a promising student at the French Conservatory, and later became a professor of organ there after several posts abroad. One of his more famous students was the composer Vincent d’Indy (1851-1931), known mostly for his Symphony on a French Mountain Air. Franck himself is known for only a few select works, particularly his Symphony in D minor (1888), in which he cultivated the idea of “cyclic” form, or reintroducing the main theme in subsequent movements (Dvořák’s New World Symphony is also an excellent example). Another feature of Franck’s music is his strong use of chromaticism, a trait that was mostly influenced by Wagner, particularly in Tristan and Isolde. Franck heard Tristan in 1874 and immediately experimented with chromatic techniques, resulting in the Piano Quintet (1879), the Symphonic Variations for Piano and Orchestra (1885), and the Violin Sonata in A (1886). Though Franck primarily composed in classical forms, his music is considered a model for progressivism that would be further developed by his Conservatory students.
Another admirer of Wagner’s music in his early years, Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) despised the music of Franck, d’Indy, and later the progressive music of Debussy and Richard Strauss. Ironically, Saint-Saëns (see Composer Profiles) was both an innovator and a traditionalist. He hailed the older music of Berlioz and Meyerbeer while also praising the newer works of Liszt and Wagner. He worked strictly in Classical forms such as the symphony, concerto, and sonata, but also became the first French composer to follow Liszt in the genre of the symphonic poem. Though a Romantic composer, Saint-Saëns can almost be called a Neoclassicist through his traditional harmonies, mostly diatonic, and Classical formal structures. Saint-Saëns is also the first major composer to write an original movie score, in the 1908 film The Assassination of the Duke of Guise, though the movie is only about 15 minutes in length.

The most famous of Saint-Saëns’ students was Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924). Fauré (pictured on left), studied with Saint-Saëns at the École Niedermeyer in 1861, and later became one of his closest friends until Saint-Saëns’ death in 1921. Fauré would go on to become one of the greatest French composers leading into the modern age of the 20th century, living through the days of Berlioz to the serial music of the Second Viennese School. Inspired by his teacher, Chopin, and Liszt, Fauré’s works have little in common with the chromaticism of Wagner or Franck. His most influential works are that on the small scale, particularly his piano song cycles, of which he composed over one hundred, including the popular Après un rêve (“After a Dream”) and Clair de Lune (“Moonlight”). This style of accompanied song had its roots in the German lieder, but in the hands of Fauré became known as the French mélodie, or art song. They possess little virtuosity, but instead create a lyricism and smoothness of form that solidified him as a master of song. Of his large scale works, Fauré is best remembered for his Requiem in D minor, Op. 48 (1894), which took him over twenty years to compose. His time for composing was curtailed when he became the head of the Paris Conservatory in 1905; his most famous student was Maurice Ravel. He was elected to the Institut de France in 1909, and was greatly admired by his fellow composers, including Elgar, Tchaikovsky, Albéniz, Richard Strauss, and the young Aaron Copland. He retired from the Conservatory in 1920 at the age of 75 and in the same year was awarded the French Legion of Honour, an honor rarely given to a musician. Fauré died of pneumonia on November 4th, 1924 at the age of 79. Though he is considered a Romantic composer, Fauré lived to see the changing musical innovations of the 20th century; with many of the budding composers of that era asking him for advice and guidance. Though only a fraction of his music is regularly performed today, he was no doubt an incredibly influential force in the beginnings of French modernism.
Germany, Austria, and the End of a Century

Germany and Austria near the end of the nineteenth century was identified by composers who would look both backward into the past and forward into the future. Among those whose compositional styles reminiscence into older traditions is Hugo Wolf (1860-1903). Though not nearly as recognizable as other figures at the turn of the century, Wolf’s success as a composer lies with his great ability in the genre of German lieder. Though something of a throwback to Schubert and Schumann, Wolf’s art songs take a step forward in his mastery of uniting music and text to create a seamless, flowing texture that adds an understated “psychological” quality to the overall musical scheme. In his early career, Wolf briefly studied at the Vienna Conservatory before dropping out after two years. For the remainder of his life, Wolf lived sparsely, accepting financial help and lodging from friends while all the time composing a wealth of material, including over two hundred songs to texts by Goethe, Heyse, Keller, Geibel, and Eichendorff. Influenced mostly by Wagner and Liszt, Wolf’s songs are strikingly individual, and though his songs are more backward-looking than his contemporaries, Wolf represents an integral place in the transition to the modern age. Unfortunately, Wolf would become delusional after the failure of his opera Der Corregidor in 1896. He was later committed to a mental institution a year later, and though he was released in 1898, his delusions continued and was recommitted. Wolf died in the asylum in 1903, another example of a composer who would not survive to see his works gain acceptance and appreciation in mainstream culture.

Anton Bruckner (1824-1896) on the other hand, achieved great fame in his lifetime mostly due to the devotion of his students at the Vienna Conservatory, where he taught organ and theory from 1868 to 1891. The son of a village schoolmaster, Bruckner studied organ early in his career and became the primary organist at the cathedral in Linz in 1855. A deeply religious man, much of Bruckner’s works consist of sacred music, though he is mostly remembered for his symphonies, characterized by their enormous length and grandness. Bruckner, like Wolf, had an almost fanatical devotion to the music of Wagner, though his music also lies in debt to Beethoven’s later works, particularly the Ninth Symphony. In fact, most of Bruckner’s symphonies begin exactly as the Ninth; growing from a soft, gradual ambiguity into a major thematic statement. Bruckner’s life in the mid-
nineteenth century saw his compositional style firmly rooted into the Romantic tradition. He
employed mostly diatonic harmonies, frequently moving by thirds, and his formal structures also
fit neatly into unified sections. His orchestrations are very representative of his background as a
church organist, showing influences of Mozart and Palestrina's sacred music. Though he wrote
gigantic works seldom seen prior in history, Bruckner was also very insecure about his music. He
would allow conductors to freely interpret, and even "correct" some of his more unruly textures,
and it was not until the foundation of the International Bruckner Society in 1929 did the authentic
versions of his symphonies begin to emerge. In general, Bruckner's works are the first to enlarge
the scale of the symphony, whose ideas would be imitated, more successfully, by his German
contemporary, **Gustav Mahler** (1860-1911).

Mahler (see Composer Profiles) expanded what Bruckner had begun, ultimately
composing nine mammoth symphonies and the first movement of a tenth which was never
completed. His other achievement lies in the song with orchestral accompaniment, such as in *Das
Lied von der Erde* ("The Song of the Earth") and *Songs of a Wayfarer*. While Bruckner's
symphonies mirror the aesthetic of Beethoven's Ninth, Mahler is much more original with his
material. Though he displays influences from Wagner and Berlioz, Mahler's symphonies are much
more individual. Like Bruckner, Mahler also composed in more traditional molds, such as his use
of formal sonata-allegro structures and tonal vocabulary. In this way, Mahler can be seen as a
more transitional figure leading from the nineteenth century as opposed to an innovator like his
contemporaries, such as Richard Strauss, Debussy, or Scriabin. In all of Mahler's works, there is an
overt programmatic language that, while lacking a definitive story or plot, does much to
illuminate Mahler's frame of mind. Literary and existential elements pervade his conceptual ideas;
he is constantly invoking the ideas of nature and the universe as a portrayal of his own quest to
understand life. Like Beethoven, Mahler puts himself as the hero of his own story, as a
journeyman forever looking for an understanding of life, death, and the human experience. Even
Sigmund Freud, who had a session with Mahler in 1910, exclaimed that:

"I had plenty of opportunity to admire the capability for psychological understanding of this
man of genius. No light fell at that time on the symptomatic façade of his obsessional neurosis. It
was as if you would dig a single shaft through a mysterious building."

Though he is thought of as a more Romantic-era composer, Mahler lived to see the turn of
the century and the beginnings of a more modern tonal language in the works of his
contemporaries. The world in general had achieved incredible scientific and cultural
advancements. Nations were reshaped, technology was vastly gaining ground, and society in
general was becoming more and more industrialized as machines changed the lives of millions.
The beginnings of the twentieth century were marked by humanity's belief in its power over
nature and ancient superstition. Learning and scholarship began to increase in importance as
conservatories continued to produce the composers of the future. And as the end of the
nineteenth century approached, it was clear that a fundamental shift in musical tradition was
taking place. With new, imaginative ways to create sound, composers would chart a new course in
radical experiments that would challenge the basic concept of what constitutes music.
For Review:

- **Ludwig van Beethoven** is considered to be the composer who effectively ends the Classical Period and begins the Romantic Era. The works of his Middle and Late Periods dramatically differ from his early works in both structure and character, culminating with the monumental Symphony No. 9 in D minor, known as the “Choral” Symphony.

- Composers who continued the tradition of the Classical Period at the height of Beethoven’s career include Peter Winter, Anton Reicha, Muzio Clementi, and the famous German opera composer **Carl Maria von Weber**.

- **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** became the face of German literary Romanticism with his prodigious output, including his writings *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and *Faust*, which many composers have treated, including Liszt, Schubert, Berlioz, and Gounod.

- A contemporary of Beethoven’s, **Franz Schubert** is known for his monumental output, most especially for his *lieder*, or German song, compositions, for their ever-changing harmonies, textures, and flowing vocal lines.

- Italian opera of the early 19th century initially resisted the trends of Romantic tendencies. However, composers such as Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, and Vincenzo Bellini continued Italian opera’s dominance through their innovations in both *opera seria* and *opera buffa*.

- Paris in the early Romantic Period became the center of Europe’s musical scene with the development of *grand opera*, led by composers such as Giacomo Meyerbeer. His treatment of the orchestra would be echoed by later composers, including Hector Berlioz, Richard Wagner, and Richard Strauss.

- The 19th century was also a showcase for virtuoso performers. Composers and instrumentalists such as Niccolò Paganini, Franz Liszt, and Frédéric Chopin dazzled audiences with their musical prowess, usually performing their own compositions.

- The Romantic movement also saw the rise of *programmatic music*, or instrumental music that tells a definite story. Its main pioneer was the French composer **Hector Berlioz**, whose works inspired an entire generation of future orchestral composers.

- In Germany, Romantic music was led primarily by composers such as Robert Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn, and Johannes Brahms through to the end of the century.

- French grand opera became obsolete by the middle of the 19th century, while *lyric opera* took its place for a short time, featured in the works of Charles Gounod and Jules Massenet. Jacques Offenbach and Georges Bizet also added to the operatic repertoire of the second half of the century.

- The greatest Italian opera composer of the later 19th century after Rossini was Giuseppe Verdi, who focused more on inner psychological drama rather than grand spectacle.

- **Richard Wagner** was the most influential German opera composer of the 19th century, using mythological librettos to create grand works designed to promote German nationalism. He also pioneered the use of the *leitmotif*, or “leading motive”, a technique used to serve as a musical representation of a character, event, or feeling associated with the emotional content of the drama.
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- **Nationalism** was also a common theme in the mid to late 19th century. Composers including Antonín Dvořák, Bedřich Smetana, Edvard Grieg, and many others, wrote music that glorified their homelands and gave each region of the world a unique musical culture.

- Several other European nations jumped on the nationalist bandwagon. In Spain, Isaac Albéniz; in Norway, Edvard Grieg; and in England, Arthur Sullivan gained popularity with works reflecting their own unique cultures.

- Russia also bred their own type of nationalistic music, based on the folk tales of their homeland. Among the greatest composers in Russia during the 19th century were Mikhail Glinka, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, and the five members of the group known as the “Mighty Handful”.

- In the latter half of the 19th century, Paris composers began to write in other forms in addition to opera. Traditional and progressive forms were used by multiple composers of the period, including César Franck, Camille Saint-Saëns, and Gabriel Fauré.

- Near the end of the twentieth century, German and Austrian composers such as Hugo Wolf, Anton Bruckner, and Gustav Mahler wrote more traditional works outside of their more radical contemporaries, a symbol of the waning years of the Romantic Era and the beginnings of twentieth century Modernism which would be more present in the works of composers such as Richard Strauss, Claude Debussy, and Igor Stravinsky.

**Suggested Listening:**

**Ludwig van Beethoven:**
First Period: Symphonies No. 1 & 2; String Quartets, Op. 18; Piano Sonata No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 13, “Pathétique”
Third Period: Symphony No. 9 “Choral”; Missa Solemnis; Diabelli Variations, Op. 120

**Carl Maria Von Weber:** Operas: Der Freischütz, Oberon

**Franz Schubert:**
Symphonies No. 4 “Tragic” D. 417, No. 8 “Unfinished” D. 759, No. 9 in C major “Great” D. 944; Piano Quintet in A major “Trout” D. 667, various chamber works
Song Cycle: “Die Winterreise” (“Winter’s Journey”) D. 911
Lieder: “Wanderer Fantasy” D. 493; “Death and the Maiden” D. 531; “Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel” D. 118; “The Erlking” D. 328; various solo piano and vocal songs

**Gioachino Rossini:** Operas: Il barbiere di Siviglia (“The Barber of Seville); La gazza ladra (“The Thieving Magpie); L’Italiana in Algeri (“An Italian in Algiers); Semiramide; Guillaume Tell

**Gaetano Donizetti:** Operas: Lucia di Lammermoor; Don Pasquale

**Vincenzo Bellini:** Operas: Norma; I Puritani (“The Puritans”)

**Giacomo Meyerbeer:** Opera: Les Huguenots (“The Huguenots”)
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Franz Liszt:
Solo piano: Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2; La Campanella from Études d’exécution transcendante d’après Paganini; Années de Pèlerinage, Part II: Sposalizio; Liebestraume No. 3
Orchestral works: Les Préludes, Faust Symphony, Dante Symphony, Totentanz

Frédéric Chopin:

Hector Berlioz:
Overtures: Le Corsaire Overture, Op. 21; Roman Carnival Overture, Op. 9
Mass: Grande Messe des Morts, Op. 5 (Requiem)

Robert Schumann:

Felix Mendelssohn:
Symphonies: Symphony No. 3 “Scottish”, Op. 56; Symphony No. 4 “Italian”, Op. 90; Symphony No. 5 “Reformation”, Op. 107
Overtures: Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage, Op. 27; The Hebrides (Fingal’s Cave) Overture, Op. 26
Incidental Music to “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”, Op. 61
Other: Violin Concerto, Op. 64; Songs Without Words

Johannes Brahms:
Symphonies: Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68; Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73; Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90; Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98
Chamber Music: Hungarian Dance No. 1 in G minor; Hungarian Dance No. 3 in F major; Clarinet Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 120/1; Clarinet Sonata No. 2 in E-flat major, Op. 120/2

Charles Gounod: Opera: Faust

Jacques Offenbach: Operas: Orpheus in the Underworld; Tales of Hoffman

George Bizet: Opera: Carmen

Giuseppe Verdi: Operas: Nabucco (or Nabucodonosor); Macbeth; Rigoletto; Il travatore (“The Troubadors); La traviata (“The Fallen Woman”); La forza del destino (“The Force of Destiny”); Aida; Requiem Mass; Otello; Falstaff

Richard Wagner:
Operas: Rienzi; Der fliegende Holländer (“The Flying Dutchman”); Tannhäuser; Lohengrin; Das Rheingold (“The Rhinegold”); Die Walküre (“The Valkyries”); Tristan und Isolde; Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (“The Mastersingers of Nuremberg”); Siegfried; Die Göttterdammerung (“Twilight of the Gods”); Parsifal
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Johann Strauss, Jr.: On the Beautiful Blue Danube Waltz; Tales from the Vienna Woods Waltz; Wine, Women, and Song Waltz
Bedřich Smetana: Ma Vlast (“My Homeland”); The Bartered Bride
Antonín Dvořák: Symphony No. 9 “From the New World”, Op. 95; Symphony No. 8 in G, Op. 88; Slavonic Dances; Carnival Overture, Op. 92; Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104
Arthur Sullivan: H.M.S. Pinafore (1878); The Pirates of Penzance (1879); The Mikado (1885)
Mikhail Glinka: Operas: A Life for the Czar (1836); Russian and Ludmilla (1842)
Modest Mussorgsky: Boris Godunov (1869); Khovanshchina (1880); Night on the Bald Mountain (1867); Pictures at an Exhibition (1874); Songs and Dances of Death (1877)
Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov: Sadko, Op. 5; Capriccio Espagnole, Op. 34; Scheherazade, Op. 35; Russian Easter Festival Overture, Op. 36; The Golden Cockerel; The Snow Maiden; Symphony No. 2 “Antar”; The Tale of Tsar Sultan; Procession of the Nobles
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky: Romeo and Juliet Overture; The Nutcracker Suite; The Sleeping Beauty; Piano Concerto No. 1; Swan Lake; Symphony No. 4; Symphony No. 5; Symphony No. 6 “Pathétique”; Slavonic March, Op. 31; 1812 Overture, Op. 49; The Queen of Spades; Eugene Onegin
César Franck: Symphony in D minor; Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major
Anton Bruckner: Symphonies 1-9
Hugo Wolf: Mörke-Lieder (1888); Eichendorff-Lieder (1889); Goethe-Lieder (1890); Spanisches Liederbuch (1891); Italienisches Liederbuch (1892, 1896); Michelangelo Lieder (1897)
Gustav Mahler: Symphonies 1-9 (10, Mvt. I); Das Lied von der Erde (“Song of the Earth”); Songs of a Wayfarer

Sources: