

INTRODUCTION TO ROMANTIC MUSIC

NEED FOR GREATER EXPRESSION

Composers of the Romantic Period sought a greater freedom of expression and emotion in their music. They sought the interaction of harmony with increased chromaticism, in order to achieve greater fluidity and contrast, and to meet the needs of longer works or serve the expression that struggled to emerge. Some composers analogized music to poetry and its rhapsodic and narrative structures, while creating a more systematic basis for the composing and performing of concert music.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ROMANTIC MUSIC

The increased use of chromaticism, along with modulation to increasingly remote keys, gave the listener a greater sense of ambiguity and uncertainty. A greater use of diminished 7th and related chords and innovative chord progressions also expanded the harmonic language. The sonata form was expanded. There was an increasing focus on melodies and themes, as well as an increase the number of songs written, in particular lieder. Also present was greater harmonic elusiveness and fluidity, the longer melodies, poetry as the basis of expression, and the use of literary inspirations, in which some composers adopted them as the central pursuit of music itself. Technological advances included an increase in the range and power of the piano and the improved chromatic abilities and greater projection of the instruments of the symphony orchestra.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL INFLUENCES

One of the major economic influences was that of the Industrial Revolution. This led to major improvements in the mechanical valves, and keys that most woodwind and brass instruments depend on, leading not only to more reliability and fuller sound, but also allowing more professionalization in the orchestra.

The rise of the middle class also affected music. Composers of the Romantic Period often wrote for the public, rather than the nobility. These listeners did not have the same musical background and training as did the nobility. Composers of the Romantic Era believed that the purpose of music was to be heard, and that there should be no segregation of musical tastes.

NATIONALISM

The increasing importance of nationalism as a political and cultural force in the 19th century was mirrored in music and the other arts. Many composers expressed their nationalism by incorporating elements unique to their native cultures, such as folk song, dance, and legendary histories. In addition to these exterior elements, there was an increasing diversification of musical language, as composers used elements of rhythm, melody and modality (modes) characteristic of their respective nations. Many composers wrote nationalist music, especially towards the middle and end of the 19th century.