

THE ROMANTIC PERIOD OF WESTERN MUSICAL HISTORY

The Romantic Period: circa 1820–1900

Romanticism (also known as the **Romantic Era** or the **Romantic Period**) was an artistic, literary and intellectual movement that originated in the **second half of the 18th century in Europe**, and gained strength in reaction to the **Industrial Revolution**.

In part, **Romanticism** was a revolt against aristocratic, social and political norms of the **Age of Enlightenment (circa 1715-1789)** and a reaction against the scientific rationalization of nature.

Romanticism was embodied most strongly in the **visual arts, music** and **literature**.

Characteristics of Romantic Period Music

- 1. Individuality** of musical style with emphasis on self-expression.
- 2.** Development of **new harmonies**, including **chromatic harmonies** that use all the keys of the piano keyboard - the black keys and the white keys – together.
- 3.** Development of **program music** – music that depicts a story or scene.

4. Development of **nationalism** in music, such as **French** music, **Spanish** music, **Hungarian** music, **Czech** music, etc., often **incorporating native folk music**.

5. Greater variety of **mood, atmosphere** and **tone color**.

6. **Expanded orchestra size** for many new compositions, including large brass sections, expanded woodwind and string sections and the addition of new instruments, such as English horn, bass clarinet, contrabassoon and added percussion.

7. Development of a **wider range of musical dynamics** (volume) - from very soft (pianissimo) to very loud, (fortissimo) often encompassing **soaring musical high points**.

8. **Greater flexibility of tempo**, (musical speed) incorporating the increased use of **accelerandos** (speeding up) and **ritardandos** (slowing down), as well as extensive use of **rubato** (the bending and stretching of tempo and rhythm).

Generally speaking, the music of the Romantic period is more popular with classical music lovers than any of the other periods of Western musical history.