

# ROMANTIC 1825-1900

## HISTORICAL THEMES

### The increasing role of science in defining a worldview

The skepticism resulting from by a clearer understanding of the world and humanity's place in it changed the way people thought of themselves and society.

### The rise of European nationalism

Many areas of Europe (especially Italy and Central Europe) struggled to free themselves from foreign control. The years around 1850 saw many revolutions and attempts at revolutions.

### A growing autonomy for the arts

More and more, art was removed from functional roles and came to be appreciated for its aesthetic worth. Notions of the "artist" and of the "fine arts" were born.

## MUSICAL CONTEXT

### Increased Interest in Nature and the Supernatural

- Romantic artists saw nature in a less idealized way.
- The natural world was considered less a model of perfection and more a source of mysterious powers.
- Romantic composers gravitated toward supernatural texts and stories.

### The Rise of Program Music

- Music began to be used to tell stories, or to imply meaning beyond the purely musical.
- Composers found ways to make their musical ideas represent people, things, and dramatic situations as well as emotional states and even philosophical ideas.

### Nationalism and Exoticism

- Composers used music as a tool for highlighting national identity.
- Composers took an interest in the music of various ethnic groups and incorporated it into their own music.
- Composers also wrote works based on stories of exotic lands and people.

### Changing Status of Musicians

- A composer was no longer dependent for income on the steady employment by nobility but relied instead on the support of the public and the patronage of individuals.
- Music was seen less as an occupation and more as a calling.
- Specialized training institutions (conservatories) replaced the apprentice system of the church and the court.
- Women found more opportunities for musical expression, especially as performers, but social and cultural barriers still limited their participation as composers.

## MUSICAL STYLE

The nineteenth century saw the development of many different musical styles, so it is difficult to describe the Romantic style. But as in all the periods you are studying, certain elements stand out:

- Dynamic range is wider.
- There is a greater variety of instruments, including improved or newly-invented wind instruments.
- Melodies are longer, more dramatic and emotional.
- Tempos are more extreme, and *tempo rubato* is often called for.
- Harmonies are fuller, often more dissonant.
- Formal structures are expanded.

## HECTOR BERLIOZ

**Born: December 11, 1813. La Côte-St-André, Isère, France**

**Died: March 8, 1869. Paris, France**

### In his own words...

"To render my works properly requires a combination of extreme precision and irresistible verve, a regulated vehemence, a dreamy tenderness, and an almost morbid melancholy."



## PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

**Born: May 7, 1840. Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia**

**Died: November 6, 1893. St. Petersburg, Russia**

### In his own words...

"How can one express the indefinable sensations that one experiences while writing an instrumental composition that has no definite subject? It is a purely lyrical process. It is a musical confession of the soul, which unburdens itself through sounds just as a lyric poet expresses himself through poetry... As the poet Heine said, 'Where words leave off, music begins.' "



## CLAUDE DEBUSSY

**Born: August 22, 1862. St. Germain-en-Laye, France**

**Died: March 5, 1918. Paris, France**

### In his own words...

"A symphony is usually built on a melody heard by the composer as a child. The first section is the customary presentation of a theme on which the composer proposes to work; then begins the necessary dismemberment; the second section seems to take place in an experimental laboratory; the third section cheers up a little in a quite childish way, interspersed with deep sentimental phrases during which the melody recedes, as is more seemly; but it reappears and the dismemberment goes on... I am more and more convinced that music is not, in essence, a thing which can be cast into a traditional and fixed form. It is made up of colors and rhythms."

