

The Romantic Period

The Romantic period was about how passionate emotions can be expressed through art and music.

The Romantic Period was in the 19th Century

- 1) The Romantic period was from about 1820-1900 (but there's a bit of an overlap between different musical periods).
- 2) Writers, artists and composers at this time were portraying feelings and nature in their work. They wanted to show contrasts — like love and hate, happiness and grief, and life and death.
- 3) As well as being inspired by the natural world, they were fascinated by supernatural ideas.
- 4) Composers wrote music based on poems and paintings, and also used their music to tell stories.
- 5) Tchaikovsky, Brahms and Chopin were all Romantic composers. Some of Beethoven's later pieces also fitted into the Romantic period.

Romantic Music is More Dramatic Than Classical

- 1) Romantic composers used a wide range of dynamics, with lots of sudden changes — in one bar, the music could change from ppp to fff and back again. They also used a lot of sforzandos and accents as well — it made the music very dramatic.
- 2) To make the music more expressive, composers gave extra instructions — as well as tempo markings, they would include instructions like dolce (sweetly), amoroso (lovingly) or agitato (agitated).
- 3) There were more tempo changes — a piece might change speeds lots of times within the same section. Musicians in this period used rubato as well — it means 'robbed time' and it's when performers speed up a little in one phrase and slow down in another to make up for it. It gives them the freedom to be more expressive.
- 4) Composers added extra notes to chords to make the harmonies more interesting — they used 7ths, 9ths, 11ths and 13ths (9ths, 11ths and 13ths are just 2nds, 4ths and 6ths but an octave higher). They helped create dissonance (clashing notes), which let them show emotions like pain and misery.
- 5) There was a lot of virtuoso playing — composers wrote technically difficult music to give performers the chance to show off. It was very exciting to watch and listen to. Rachmaninoff and Liszt wrote solo piano music that had to be written on four staves as there were so many notes to play.
- 6) Lots of Romantic composers were very proud of the countries they came from — they used folk tunes and dance rhythms from their homelands to show their national pride. Tchaikovsky used the French and Russian national anthems in his 1812 Overture.

The Orchestra Developed in the Romantic Period

- 1) Orchestras got much bigger — extra instruments were added to all sections of the orchestra, especially woodwind and percussion.
- 2) Brass instruments were able to play more notes as they now had valves.
- 3) All these changes meant that composers could write music with a larger range of texture, timbre and dynamics.
- 4) The development of the piano (see the next page) meant that it became a much more popular and important instrument. Lots of piano music was written in the Romantic period.

If music be the food of love — play on...

Make sure you know some key features of Romantic music — you'll need to be able to spot them in the exam. Listen out for dynamic contrasts and interesting harmonies in Chopin's Raindrop prelude.

The Romantic Period

The piano was definitely one of the most important instruments in the Romantic period.

The Piano Developed in the Romantic Period

The piano's been around since the 18th century, but the developments in the 19th century made it really popular with Romantic composers.

SIZE: the piano changed shape a bit and got bigger (and louder). This meant it had a bigger dynamic range.

KEYS: the number of keys (and notes) increased to just over 7 octaves. Composers now had a larger range in pitch to compose for.

PEDALS: both pedals (the sustain pedal that holds notes on and the soft pedal) became more effective. Some modern pianos have three pedals — the third pedal allows some notes to be held on while others are not.



STRINGS: the strings inside were both thicker and longer, making a fuller tone. They were also pulled tighter, so they were more tense.

FRAME: the frame used to be made of wood, but was now made of metal (to cope with the new strings). This made it easier to transport them.

HAMMERS: the hammers were given a felt covering (instead of a leather one). This made the tone softer and more rounded.

Melodies Were the Focus of Piano Pieces

- 1) In Romantic piano pieces, the melody was the most important part. Melodies were often marked cantabile — to be played in a singing style.
- 2) There were lots of virtuosic sections and cadenzas (see p.89) to give the pianist chance to show off.
- 3) The music had a large range of dynamics, articulation and tone. Pianists had to use the pedals a lot to get the right sounds.
- 4) The accompaniment was often broken chords (see p.88), but unlike many Classical pieces, the broken chords would be spread across several octaves.

Preludes Were Popular Piano Pieces

Preludes were originally the bit of music that came before the main piece. During the Romantic period, they had become popular as stand-alone pieces.

- 1) Debussy wrote preludes for piano. There's one in his Suite Bergamasque.
- 2) Liszt and Rachmaninoff wrote some very tricky piano preludes.
- 3) Chopin wrote a set of 24 piano preludes, one in each of the 24 keys. They're all pretty short — the longest is only 90 bars long, and the shortest lasts for just 13 bars. They don't follow set structures, though there are motifs (short musical ideas) that crop up in more than one prelude.

I'll have soup as a prelude to my dinner...

Pianos were popular because they were so versatile — with a range of over seven octaves, composers had fewer limitations when they were composing. The newly-developed piano could play a range of dynamics, and the pedals could be used to change the tone of the instrument too. Perfect for Romantics.

Chopin — Prelude No. 15 in D flat Major

Chopin's *Prelude No. 15 in D flat Major* is also known as the *Raindrop* prelude.

Chopin was a Polish Composer



- 1) Frédéric Chopin was born in Poland in 1810 — lots of his music uses Polish folk tunes and dance rhythms. He died in Paris in 1849.
- 2) He made a name for himself in Vienna before moving to Paris.
- 3) As well as composing, he also performed and taught music.
- 4) He composed a lot of piano music, and had a reputation as a 'tragic' Romantic composer, because he was ill a lot, and died young.

The Raindrop Prelude is in Ternary Form

- 1) *Prelude No. 15 in D \flat Major* is quite short (it's only 89 bars long) but can be divided up into four main sections. The first, Section A lasts from bars 1-27, and Section B from bars 28-75. A short bit of Section A is repeated in bars 76-81, then the piece finishes with a coda in bars 81-89. Unlike some of the other preludes, it has a clear structure — it's in ternary form (see p.80).
- 2) Section A is in D \flat major, while Section B is in C \sharp minor. Enharmonically, C \sharp minor is the tonic minor of D \flat major (as D \flat is the enharmonic equivalent of C \sharp). Chopin explores other keys in both sections — this is typical of Romantic music.
- 3) It's called the *Raindrop* prelude because of a repeated quaver A \flat in the left-hand part (it changes to a C \sharp when the key changes to C \sharp minor). This note is repeated throughout the piece.

Section A Introduces the 'Raindrop'

- 1) This prelude is marked sostenuto — it doesn't just mean sustained here, but it should also have a slow, held back tempo. The pianist has to use the pedal a lot — it helps sustain the notes.
- 2) You can hear the 'raindrop' note in the first bar, and it continues throughout the piece.
- 3) The first melodic phrase lasts 4 bars and is marked *p* (*piano* — quiet). The first three notes of the melody are descending — like raindrops. In the bar 3, the melody is harmonised in 6ths. These four bars are repeated with no changes (except for the last beat of the phrase, which leads into the new phrase). There's an ornament (see p.83) in the fourth bar — it's a turn written out in full. The turn isn't played in the 8th bar.

- 4) Another melodic idea starts in the last two quavers of bar 8. It's a four-bar melody and the key moves towards A \flat minor. It's followed by a variation of the tune.
- 5) From bars 14-20, the 'raindrop' note is played on an E, not an A \flat .
- 6) The melody goes through B \flat minor (the relative minor of D \flat major), then back to D \flat major for the last few bars of this section, where you can hear the opening melody again.

Raindrops keep falling on my piano...

Try following the phrases marked on the score as you listen to the piece. Section B's coming up next...

Chopin — Prelude No. 15 in D flat Major

This page carries on with the analysis of the *Raindrop* prelude — it picks up at Section B, which starts at bar 28 and finishes at bar 75.

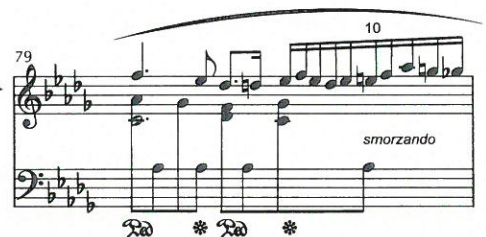
Section B is in C# Minor

- 1) Section B is very different to Section A. It's in a minor key, and sounds much more dramatic.
- 2) The melody's in crotchets in the bass part. The melody is played underneath the 'raindrop' notes — in this section, they're C#s. It's marked *sotto voce*, which means 'in an undertone' — it should be soft and quiet.
- 3) In bar 35, Chopin starts to build up the texture by doubling the 'raindrop' in octaves — it feels powerful.
- 4) The dynamics start to build up gradually until bar 43, where the music drops back down to *p*. It then gets louder again, building up to *ff* (*fortissimo*) in bar 56. There are lots of accents in Section B (see bars 40-43 and 56-59). This is quite a contrast to Section A, which was *p* all the way through with no accents.
- 5) In bars 60-63, the melody is quite similar to the start of Section B, but some of the note lengths have been augmented (made longer). This makes it feel slow and heavy.
- 6) In bars 64-67, the repeated C#s in the top line form an inverted pedal (a pedal point is one that is held on or repeated, usually in the bass part. An inverted pedal is a held note in the top part).
- 7) Although this section's in C# minor, Chopin explores other keys — the harmonies pass through C# minor and F# minor.
- 8) Bar 75 (the last bar of Section B) is a transition bar between Section B and the repeat of Section A. The last 4 quavers of bar 75 prepare for the key change in the next bar.



Part of Section A is Repeated

- 1) In bar 76, the piece returns to the key of Db major and repeats Section A.
- 2) The opening phrase is played again, just with a slightly different ornament — it's more chromatic, and has 10 notes instead of 7.
- 3) Chopin suggests that the piece is coming to the end by using the term *smorzando* (which means 'dying away') in bar 79.
- 4) In bar 81, the melody is cut short to make way for the coda.



The Coda Finishes the Piece

- 1) The coda starts on the last beat of bar 81, and lasts until bar 89 (the end of the piece). The melodic line in bars 81-83 has the highest notes of the prelude. These are also the only bars that are not accompanied by the 'raindrop' quavers.
- 2) In bar 84, the 'raindrops' come back on the dominant note (Ab) until the final tonic (Db) chord.
- 3) The coda starts off *f* then drops down to *p*. The final two bars are *pp* (*pianissimo*), the quietest part of the whole piece.
- 4) The piece slows down towards the end with a gentle *ritenuto*.

The Raindrop Prelude uses a range of dynamics...

Listen for the contrasts between Section A and Section B. Make sure you can spot the key changes and the changes in dynamics. Section B sounds a lot more dramatic than Section A, which is quite calm.

Romantic Songs — Lieder

'Lied' is the German word for 'song'. It's pronounced LEED.
If you're talking about more than one Lied you say Lieder (not 'Lieds').

Lieder are Romantic Songs

- 1) A Lied's a song for one singer and a piano. The piano part's not just a background accompaniment — it adds a lot to the story-telling of the piece. Lieder were really popular in Europe during the Romantic period — a bit like the pop songs of today.
- 2) The words of a Lied are really important. They're usually based on German poems from the 18th and 19th centuries. Lieder usually tell a story — they're often dramatic and full of emotion. The music illustrates the words, so you can tell when it gets sad or scary (like music in a film).
- 3) Some Lieder are through-composed (see p.57). This means that the music is different in each verse. Others have a strophic (p.57) structure, where the verses all have the same tune. There are lots of motifs — little bits of music that represent an idea, character or place. The motifs are repeated throughout the songs so you can follow what's happening. Sometimes the motifs match the words — in Schubert's 'Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel', the piano mimics the sound of the spinning wheel.
- 4) Schubert is one of the best known composers of Lieder. Other composers include Schumann, Beethoven and Brahms. Most well-known Lieder composers were German or Austrian.

The Romantic period lasted from about 1820-1900 and included composers like Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin and Wagner. Romantic music was very expressive and dramatic.

Lieder Can be Put Together in Song Cycles

- 1) Sometimes a collection of Lieder would be put together in song cycles by the composer. These are just groups of songs on the same theme.
- 2) Schubert's most famous song cycles are 'Winter Journey' and 'The Fair Maid of the Mill'.
- 3) Both cycles are collections of songs based on the poems of a German poet called Müller. They tell stories of lost love and rejection.

'The Erl King' is a Good Example of a Lied

- 1) 'The Erl King' is a Lied by Schubert, based on a poem by Goethe, a German poet.
- 2) It tells the story of a father carrying his dying child on horseback. The child can see the Erl King, a spirit of death.
- 3) It's a very tragic song — the boy dies at the end.
- 4) There are 4 characters in the story: the father, his son, the Erl King and the narrator.
- 5) Schubert uses the music to create different characters. Each character sings at a different pitch so that you can tell them apart when one tenor sings all 4 parts.
- 6) The piano part's very dramatic — the repeated triplets sound like the horse's galloping hooves.



Franz Schubert — Lieder of the pack...

Don't forget, in Lieder, the piano part's more than just an accompaniment. The words are often (but not always) in German, so if you hear German with a piano accompaniment, it's probably a Lied.