Introduction to   
Choral Literature

A Community Musicianship Course  
Capella Nova, Inc. – July 2020

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# Week I: The Medieval & Renaissance Periods

## The Medieval Period

The Medieval Period of music is the period from the years c.500 to 1400. It is the longest “period” of music (embracing about 900 years of music history) and runs right from around the time of the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the beginning of the Renaissance.

The vast majority of medieval music was **monophonic** – in other words, there was only a single melody line. (“mono-phonic” literally means “one sound”).

The development of **polyphonic** music (more than one melody line played at the same time (“poly-phonic” means “many sounds”)) was a major shift towards the end of the era that laid the foundations for the Renaissance.

**Gregorian chant**, consisting of a single line of vocal melody, unaccompanied in free rhythm was one of the most common forms of medieval music. This is not surprising, given the importance of the Roman Catholic church during the period. The Mass was (and still is) a ceremony that included set texts (liturgy), which were spoken and sung.

[LISTEN: Gregorian Chant – Ubi Caritas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_QEP-RHYLY)

As the Medieval Period progressed, composers began to experiment, and polyphonic styles began to develop. **Organum** was a crucial early technique, which explored polyphonic texture. It consisted of 2 lines of voices in varying heterophonic textures.

The 3 main types of organum are:

**Parallel organum** (or “strict organum”) - One voice sings the melody, whilst the other sings at a fixed interval – this gives a parallel motion effect.

[LISTEN: Parallel Organum](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QH71sxmG9wY)

**Free organum -** The 2 voices move in both parallel motion and/or contrary motion.

[LISTEN: Free Organum](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgHzH5iDcGQ)

**Melismatic organum** - An accompanying part stays on a single note whilst the other part moves around above it.

[LISTEN: Melismatic Organum](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngCRm7uLirA)

Significant Works For Further Listening:

[Hildegarde von Bingen: Ave Generosa](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lbg4TSP44yU)  
[Guillaume Dufay: Ave Maris Stella](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mcxEtyEUw4)  
[John Dunstable: Agnus Dei](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=co4vtFJjZGk)  
[Machaut: Messe de Notre Dame](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gEV42RKf6E)

### The Renaissance Period

The main characteristics of Renaissance music are (Fuller 2010):

* Music based on modes.
* Richer texture, with four or more independent melodic parts being performed simultaneously. These interweaving melodic lines, a style called polyphony, is one of the defining features of Renaissance music.
* Blending, rather than contrasting, melodic lines in the musical texture.
* Harmony that placed a greater concern on the smooth flow of the music and its progression of chords.

The development of polyphony produced the notable changes in musical instruments that mark the Renaissance from the Middle Ages musically. Its use encouraged the use of larger ensembles and demanded sets of instruments that would blend together across the whole vocal range.

Principal liturgical (church-based) musical forms which remained in use throughout the Renaissance period were **masses** and **motets**, with some other developments towards the end of the era, especially as composers of sacred music began to adopt secular (non-religious) musical forms for religious use. The 15th and 16th century masses had two kinds of sources that were used, monophonic and polyphonic, with two main forms of elaboration, based on cantus firmus practice or, beginning some time around 1500, the new style of "pervasive imitation", in which composers would write music in which the different voices or parts would imitate the melodic and/or rhythmic motifs performed by other voices or parts.

During the period, secular music had an increasing distribution, with a wide variety of forms, but one must be cautious about assuming an explosion in variety: since printing made music more widely available, much more has survived from this era than from the preceding Medieval era, and probably a rich store of popular music of the late Middle Ages is lost. Secular music was music that was independent of churches. The main types were the German **Lied**, the French **chanson**, the Italian **madrigal**, and the Spanish **villancico.**

***The Mass***

Mass is the main eucharistic liturgical service in many forms of Western Christianity. The term Mass is commonly used in the Roman Catholic Church as well as in Anglican circles. Only five parts of the Ordinary Mass -- Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei -- were set to music by Renaissance composers.

**LISTEN: Mass for Four Voices (Byrd)**

[**Kyrie**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MibaqQJOiw)[**Gloria**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbM70rwPQeQ)[**Credo**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVG67CWoslQ)[**Sanctus**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25QXAllk4Kw)[**Agnus Dei**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJG7H-Xa5xI)

***The Motet***

The motet was one of the pre-eminent polyphonic forms of Renaissance music. According to Margaret Bent, "a piece of music in several parts with words" is as precise a definition of the motet as will serve from the 13th to the late 16th century and beyond. The Renaissance motet is a polyphonic musical setting, sometimes in imitative counterpoint, for chorus, of a Latin text, usually sacred, not specifically connected to the liturgy of a given day, and therefore suitable for use in any service.

In the latter part of the 16th century, Giovanni Gabrieli and other composers developed a new style, the polychoral motet, in which two or more choirs of singers (or instruments) alternated. This style of motet was sometimes called the Venetian motet to distinguish it from the Netherlands or Flemish motet written elsewhere. "If Ye Love Me" by Thomas Tallis serves the demand of the Church of England for English texts, and a focus on understanding the words, beginning in homophony.

[LISTEN: If Ye Love Me (Thomas Tallis)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqt005j1dB0)

***The Madrigal***

Madrigals originated in Italy during the 1520s. Unlike many strophic forms of the time, most madrigals were through-composed. In the madrigal, the composer attempted to express the emotion contained in each line, and sometimes individual words, of a celebrated poem. Traditionally, polyphonic madrigals are unaccompanied; the number of voices varies from two to eight, and most frequently from three to six. In Italy, the madrigal was the most important secular form of music of its time, reaching its formal and historical zenith by the second half of the 16th century. At about the same time, English and German composers took up the madrigal as well. After the 1630s, the madrigal began to merge with the cantata and the dialogue. With the rise of opera in the early 17th century, the aria gradually displaced the madrigal.

[LISTEN: Matona, mia cara (Orlando di Lasson)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUSeiOaTnsQ)

***The Lied***

The word *Lied* is German for “Song.” Originally, these German songs were monophonic (one voice) with or without instrument. The 14th century brought a decline of the monophonic lied and the introduction of polyphonic *Lieder* (plural of Lied) for two or more voices or voice and instruments. One of the most popular polyphonic lieder is the two-voice “Wach auff myn Hort” (“Awake, my darling”) by Oswald of Wolkenstein (1377–1455).

[LISTEN: Wach auff myn Hort](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6N2KvxPi0x0)

The 15th century saw a flowering of polyphonic lieder for as many as four voices singing together. These polyphonic settings, unlike the courtly Minnelieder, are addressed to educated scholars and clergy as well as nobles. Bar form and romantic texts predominate, and through-composed pieces (i.e., devoid of sectional repetition) occur. The tunes are usually sung by the middle part (tenor); often the parts accompanying the tenor are played on instruments. The tenor melody is often a preexistent, familiar one, not a tune newly composed for the polyphonic lied. Franco-Flemish influences appear in the relations among the parts (usually three); sometimes the texture is chordal, otherwise one part may imitate the melody of another voice for part of a phrase. When three parts are present, whether sung or played and sung, the tenor and top part (descant) form a harmonic unity, while the third part (countertenor) skips between and below the other two.

[LISTEN: Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen (Isaac)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI712ZGflAQ)

***The Chanson***

The word *Chanson* is French for “Song.” Like the German *Lieder*, originally, these French songs were monophonic (one voice) with or without instrument.

The first important composer of chansons was Guillaume de Machaut, who composed three-voice works in the *formes fixes* during the 14th century. Guillaume Dufay and Gilles Binchois, who wrote so-called Burgundian chansons (because they were from the area known as Burgundy), were the most important chanson composers of the next generation (c. 1420–1470). Their chansons, while somewhat simple in style, are also generally in three voices with a structural tenor. These works are typically still 3 voices, with an active upper voice (discantus) pitched above two lower voices (tenor and altus) usually sharing the same range.

Later 15th- and early 16th-century figures in the genre included Johannes Ockeghem and Josquin des Prez, whose works cease to be constrained by formes fixes and begin to feature a pervading imitation (all voices sharing material and moving at similar speeds), similar to that found in contemporary motets and liturgical music. The first book of music printed from movable type was *Harmonice Musices Odhecaton*, a collection of ninety-six chansons by many composers, published in Venice in 1501 by Ottaviano Petrucci.

[LISTEN: Mille regretz (Josquin)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnEgoNEHs68)

# Week II: The Baroque Period

The transition from Renaissance to Baroque musical style began in the late sixteenth century. The polychoral motets of the Venetian school, with two or more independent choirs juxtaposed to exploit the resulting contrast in color, provided the seedbed for the Baroque notion of conflict. Composers of the Venetian school also employed large performing forces, including choirs of instrumentalists, in their music. This led to the development of concertato style, in which the playing of a soloist or small group of players was contrasted with that of the full ensemble. This style of composition led to the development of the concerto. The concerto, of course, is an instrumental form, and during the Baroque era, instrumental music assumed far greater prominence than previously.

An examination of the madrigals of Monteverdi, written over a fifty year period, reveals many of the stylistic changes that signaled the transition from Renaissance to Baroque. Monteverdi's early madrigals (written 1587-1603) were composed in the style of the high Renaissance. Similar in character to the works of Marenzio in their use of chromaticism, they nevertheless begin a departure from the ideal of equality of voices and moved toward the Baroque notion of soprano-bass polarity. In contrast, his last four books of madrigals (written 1605-1638) include independent instrumental sections contrasted with choral interludes (concertato style) and increasing use of figured bass.

Several pairs of contrasting terms have been applied to the "old style"of Renaissance music versus the "new style" of the Baroque. Stile antico andstile moderno is one such pair. Another, used by Monteverdi, was prima prattica and seconda prattica. In the first half of the seventeenth century the two styles coexisted, with the earlier style employed most frequently in sacred music, while the new style was evident in secular music, most notably in the operas of the early Baroque.

Text was of extreme importance to composers of both the Renaissance and Baroque eras. However, the manner in which it was approached differed markedly. The Renaissance ideal was of several independent vocal lines, each with its own inflections and accentuation. In the early to mid seventeenth century, the trend was away from this polyphonic ideal, toward soprano-bass polarity, in which a single melody was sung and a figured bass line was played by an accompanying instrument or instruments. By the late Baroque era, in the first half of the eighteenth century, polyphony had returned to popularity. The polyphony of the late Baroque differed from that of the Renaissance: It was rooted in tonal harmony and characterized by an energetic, metrically conceived, driving rhythm.

The tradition of requiring full participation by the performer in decisions concerning tempo, articulation, ornamentation, and other matters continued from the Renaissance into the Baroque era. Keyboard players presented with a figured bass line were expected to "realize" it, filling in chords, adding ornaments, and otherwise embellishing their playing. Singers, particularly soloists, were expected to improvise ornamentation and elaboration for a melody found in the score.

Although all of the stylistic changes mentioned here occurred over a period of decades, the year 1600 is widely accepted as a convenient if somewhat arbitrary date to mark the end of the Renaissance and the beginning of the Baroque. It should also be noted that many if not all of these changes ere interrelated. For example, the move away from polyphonic texture toward an accompanied melody was closely related to the shift from modality toward the major-minor key system and the use of figured bass. The increasing significance of new instrumental forms grew out of the employment of dependent instrumental parts, contrasted with choral sections. The total impact of all of these changes taken together propelled music forward into e new era.

The performance of Baroque choral music requires life and energy. It is music that is full of emotion. In Baroque music there tends to be unity of emotion within a given section of a composition. This stems from the Baroque idea that an individual is controlled by a single affect or emotion at any given time. But this does not mean the music should be emotionless. More overt emotion may be displayed in a Baroque choral piece than in music from the Renaissance. Contrast in emotion must be achieved as one section ends and another begins in a new tempo and with new dynamics.

Terraced dynamics, wherein dynamic changes occur between sections of music (as opposed to long crescendos and decrescendos within sections) is a typically Baroque musical characteristic. Similarly, the tempo of a Baroque composition should be steady within each section of a work. Sharp contrasts in tempo occur between sections.

The tone to be used in a Baroque mass is bigger and more dramatic than what would be appropriate for a sixteenth-century setting of the same text. A freer approach to vibrato along with a wider dynamic range help distinguish the two styles.

The use of an orchestra to accompany Baroque choral music adds to the variety of color available and accentuates the need for choir members to sing with warmth and projection. As was the case in the Renaissance, it was quite common and accepted to double the vocal lines in a composition with instruments. In the Baroque period, in addition to the instrumental doubling, compositions also typically contained an independent orchestral accompaniment, often calling for strings, trumpets, oboes, and a keyboard instrument (harpsichord or organ) providing the continuo.

Some Baroque choral music tends to be "instrumental" in conception. Such music is characterized by driving dotted rhythms, and it must be infused with life, energy, and a sense of propulsion. Slower sections should be distinctly contrasting.

### Important Forms

In the Baroque period, some of the important choral forms, such as the mass and the motet, represented the continued development of Renaissance ideas. Others, such as the cantata and the oratorio, were newly created or assumed a new importance in terms of stylistic development. Some forms crossed the boundaries of sacred and secular. The cantatas of Bach, for example, included both classifications. For the purposes of this discussion, opera is not considered. A brief definition of each of the important Baroque choral forms is presented here.

***Anthem***

The anthem tradition begun in Elizabethan England by Gibbons, Byrd, Tallis and others continued in the Baroque, reaching its highest state in the anthems of Purcell and Handel. The Baroque anthem was more elaborate than that of the Renaissance, utilizing recitatives, instrumental accompaniments with continuo, independent instrumental sections and interludes, and elaborate solo passages.

[LISTEN: Zadok the Priest (Handel)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYi1AkWU1Xk)

***Cantata***

Derived from the Italian word *cantare* meaning "to sing," the cantata developed in the seventeenth century as an extended piece of accompanied secular music with recitatives and arias. In Germany, the Lutheran chorale formed the basis for extended treatment in the "chorale cantata," a sacred work written for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, and brought to its highest development by J.S. Bach.

[LISTEN: Wachet auf (Bach)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hR5ImpCyrdY)

***Madrigal***

In the Baroque era, the madrigal continued to be popular and came to embody the "new style" in the form of the continuo madrigal developed by Monteverdi, using figured bass, and incorporating sections for solo, duet, or trio with continuo and contrasting sections for instruments with those for choir.

[LISTEN: Cruda Amarilli (Monteverdi)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hR5ImpCyrdY)

***Magnificat***

A musical setting of the canticle of the Virgin Mary found in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Polyphonic settings were written as early as the fourteenth century. The Magnificat is a part of the Catholic service of Vespers and the Anglican service of Evensong. Monteverdi, Hassler, Purcell, and most importantly Bach, wrote significant settings of this text.

[LISTEN: Magnificat (Bach)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8Oeq12zjZk)

***Mass***

During the early Baroque, the mass tended to be a conservative musical form, similar in style to the Franco-Flemish mass of the sixteenth century. As the seventeenth century progressed, masses began to incorporate concertato style and to have instrumental accompaniments. These developments led to the five masses of J.S. Bach, whose B Minor Mass is one of the towering monuments of Western music. Unlike his other masses, the B Minor Mass is two hours in length and divides the ordinary into twenty-five separate movements characterized by a wide range of expressive and musical devices.

[LISTEN: Mass in B Minor (Bach)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EH6wdRVqoXQ)

***Motet***

The motets of the Venetian school were written in concertato style, exploiting the colors of contrasting choral and instrumental forces. Schutz, Monteverdi, and Lully wrote motets that included a wide variety of forces, textures, and emotions. This led to the multimovement motet of the late Baroque, exemplified by the works of Bach and Buxtehude.

[LISTEN: Selig sing die toten (Schütz)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0j7F5R44ObA)

***Oratorio***

The setting of a sacred or heroic text for chorus, soloists, and orchestra. The details of the story are conveyed through recitative. Similar in character to opera, an oratorio is not staged, nor are the singers costumed. The first important composer of oratorio was Carissimi. The Baroque oratorio reached its highest point in the works of Handel.

[LISTEN: Israel in Egypt (Handel) NB: Hyperlink leads to a playlist of multiple videos.](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2k8ekJXk4nVQLU75EAz7bEJD2pKh19He)

***Passion***

The passion is a musical setting of the events at the end of Christ's life, from the Last Supper to the Crucifixion. The story is carried in recitatives sung by the Evangelist. Other soloists perform recitatives and arias, and the role of the chorus varies from the singing of chorales, more complex contemplative choral sections, and turba sections in which the chorus assumes the identity of the crowd.

[LISTEN: Passion of St. John (Bach)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSv7SkXmhFI)

***Te Deum***

The opening words of this text, "Te deum laudamus," mean "We Praise Thee, God." It is sung at the Roman Catholic office of Matins, at Anglican Morning Prayer, and for other festive sacred and secular occasions. Purcell and Handel each wrote significant musical settings of the Te Deum.

[LISTEN: Dettingen Te Deum (Handel)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LB-xV6d4jJA)

***Vespers***

Evening worship in the Roman Catholic rite. Vespers includes a series of psalms, a hymn, and the Magnificat. Monteverdi's Vespers of 1610 utilized choir, instrumentalists, and was written in concertato style. It is the most important Baroque example of the form.

[LISTEN: Vespers 1610 (Monteverdi)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GYjNj75MFI)

# Week III: The Classical Period

The Baroque period culminated in the masterpieces of J.S. Bach and G.F. Handel. In the middle of the eighteenth century, contemporaneous with the mature years of Bach and Handel, a new musical style developed that is known as Rococo or preclassical style. This style is most evident in keyboard and orchestral music, but it is mentioned here because it represented a transition from the Baroque to the Classical era, occurring between 1725 and 1770.

In the world of painting, Rococo style is characterized by delicate colors, many decorative details, and a graceful and intimate mood. Similarly, music in the Rococo style is homophonic and light in texture, melodic, and elaborately ornamented. In France, the term for this was style galant (gallant or elegant style) and in Germany empfindsamer stil (sensitive style). François Couperin (1668-1733), in France, and two of the sons of J. S. Bach, C. P. E. Bach (1714-1788) and Johann Christian Bach (1735-1782), in Germany, were important composers of music in the Rococo style.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, a reaction against Rococo style occurred. There were objections to its lack of depth and to the use of decoration and ornamentation for their own sake. This led to the development of Classical style.

The Classical period itself lasted from approximately 1775 to 1825. The name classical is applied to the period because in art and literature, there was keen interest in, admiration for, and emulation of the classical artistic and literary heritage of Greece and Rome.

Intellectually, this era has also been labeled the Age of Enlightenment. Philosophers such as Rousseau, Voltaire, and Montesquieu wrote of the value of the common person and the power of human reasoning in overcoming the problems of the world. This revolution in thinking inevitably led to conflict between the old order and new ideas. The French and American revolutions in the last quarter of the eighteenth century were stimulated by this new attitude.

The musical scene in the classical period reflected the changes occurring in the society in which the music was being written. This was the first era in music history in which public concerts became an important part of the musical scene. Music was still being composed for the church and the court, but the advent of public concerts reflected the new view that music should be written for the enjoyment and entertainment of the common person.

Unlike the Renaissance or Baroque eras, which included many important composers and trends, the choral music of the classical era was dominated by three composers: Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), and Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827). For the first time, during the Classical period most of the important stylistic advances that occurred can be observed most clearly in the instrumental forms: the symphony, concerto, sonata, and in instrumental chamber music (e.g., the Beethoven string quartets). Church music tended to be more conservative than secular compositions, which also helps to explain why stylistic innovations were seen most clearly in instrumental music but were less prevalent in the choral music of the period.

Choral and instrumental forms overlapped during the Classical period to an unprecedented degree. Forms developed in the instrumental area were appropriated and used to good effect in choral music. Sonata allegro form, for example, often found in sonata or symphony movements, is also used in sections of classical masses. Beethoven included choral sections in two instrumental works, his Choral Fantasia and the Ninth Symphony.

This period in music history is sometimes referred to as "the Viennese Classic period," and it was centered in Vienna. Beethoven, Haydn, and Mozart, though none was a native Viennese, all worked in Vienna for significant periods in their careers. Although Vienna was the focal point for musical activity of the period, classical music is not parochial but universal in spirit and in style.

### Important Forms

***Mass***

The mass continued to be an important form for each of the three primary Classical composers. During the Classical period, masses involved orchestra, soloists, and choir in a fully integrated work, utilizing organizational principles derived from instrumental forms.

[LISTEN: Coronation Mass (Mozart)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jfs4lTs3mLI)

***Missa Brevis***

This concise treatment of the mass text may consist of strictly delimited development, simultaneous setting of several lines of text, or the omission of certain sections of the mass.

[LISTEN: Missa Brevis in D (Mozart)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7liw0vQFPI)

***Missa Solemnis***

When choral musicians refer to the Missa Solemnis they are usually speaking of Beethoven's Mass in D Major, a milestone in the development of choral music. In a broader sense, however, the term refers to a more elaborate and extended musical treatment of the mass text than that employed in the Missa Brevis.

[LISTEN: Missa Solemnis (Beethoven)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCa0Fquy93A)

***Oratorio***

The Baroque oratorio tradition, begun by Carissimi and culminating in the works of Handel, was continued in the Classical period primarily by Haydn, who wrote two oratorios, The Creation and The Seasons, which have remained an important part of the choral repertoire.

[LISTEN: The Creation (Haydn)](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRb9WetLXOGLWhnsrY4b8EwRTQRQwzSI6)

***Requiem***

Although many musical settings of the Requiem were composed during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the Classical period produced a setting by Mozart (completed by a student following Mozart's death) that has become a staple of the choral repertoire and two settings by Cherubini that are also often performed.

[LISTEN: Requiem (Mozart)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63jv0JcDNUg&t=34s)

***Vespers***

Mozart wrote two settings of this service each of which includes psalms and the Magnificat, written for choir, quartet of soloists, and orchestra.

[LISTEN: Vesperae Solennes de Confessore (Mozart)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63140M-gqOM)

***Choral Symphony***

A symphony which includes sections written for choir and orchestra. The earliest and probably best known example of this is Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, incorporating choir and soloists in the fourth movement.

# Week IV: The Romantic Period

The Romantic period began with the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It should be noted, however, that throughout the history of music there has been a tension between the Classical and Romantic views of life and art. Objectivity versus subjectivity, form versus freedom, and individuality versus universality are issues that composers and other artists have confronted in every age. Romantic tendencies were evident in the music of all three of the preeminent Viennese classical composers (particularly Mozart and Beethoven), and by the end of Beethoven's career, the romantic spirit was firmly entrenched in Europe, remaining the dominant force in music until the beginning of the twentieth century.

There are some fundamental Romantic characteristics that should be noted to begin this discussion. Classicism and romanticism represent two opposing views of life and art. Whereas classicism is objective, romanticism is subjective. Control of harmonic tension, balance between dissonance and consonance, and the careful and complete exploitation of thematic development give Classical music a definite and distinct formal structure. Conversely, the Romantic spirit requires the loosening of formal constraints and the uninhibited expression of the individual composer's ideas and emotions.

One way in which the Romantic spirit was expressed in the nineteenth century was through nationalism. Whereas classical music tended to be universal in character, during the nineteenth century certain composers and compositions paid tribute to their country of origin through the use of folk melodies, dances, or instruments, or through the musical depiction of some locale in the homeland.

Just as nationalism reflected a preoccupation with the composer's own national heritage, exoticism was a Romantic fascination with music from other lands. An often cited example of this tendency was Rimsky Korsakov's Scheherazade, depicting scenes from the Arabian Nights. In fact, anything mysterious or exotic appealed to the Romantic mind. The writing of Poe exemplifies this preoccupation with the mysterious or morbid.

Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique tells of a young man's opium-induced visions of his beloved. Berlioz wrote a commentary, or program, describing the extramusical scenes depicted by each of the work's five movements. The idea of program music, intended by the composer to depict specific nonmusical ideas, was another important aspect of nineteenth-century Romantic style.

Although the forms of the Classic period continued to be used by Romantic composers, they took many more liberties with them, expanding and contracting them to suit their individual tastes. During the Romantic period, both miniature and heroic forms became popular. The lieder of Schubert exemplify the romantic spirit in a small and intimate form, just as Mahler's Symphony of a Thousand does so by involving two four-part choirs, a boys' choir, seven soloists, and a large orchestra in an undertaking so massive that it limits the opportunities to hear it performed.

During the Romantic period, the resources of tonality were completely exhausted, and chromaticism too was fully exploited. The highly chromatic works of Wagner and other late-nineteenth-century composers represented the final stage of this process, which led to a variety of alternative harmonic organizational structures that signaled the end of the Romantic era, around the beginning of the twentieth century.

Romantic composers were anxious to exploit to the fullest the potential of the orchestra in terms of tone color, as well as pitch and dynamic range, making unprecedented demands on players. The orchestra increased in size during the nineteenth century to the point where it sometimes numbered in the hundreds. By the late nineteenth century, dynamic markings such as pppp or ffff were common, and extensive use of crescendo and decrescendo added to the expressive resources available to composers.

Much of the writing for chorus from this period also seeks to fully exploit the possibilities of the human voice. Beethoven's Missa Solemnis makes great demands on the singers, and the performance of choral-orchestral masterworks composed later in the century also requires singers with solid vocal technique for a successful performance. This fascination with tone color and the use of augmented instrumental forces helps explain the dominance of instrumental music in this era. Without exception, the musical giants of the era were primarily composers of instrumental music. Most of the great choral masterworks of the period were choral/orchestral works.

Three hundred years earlier, during the Renaissance, choral music had been predominant, with instrumental parts added occasionally that reinforced (doubled) the choral lines. Through the ensuing centuries, the balance in importance between choral and instrumental music as the setting for stylistic change shifted steadily from choral to instrumental forms.

In performing music of the Romantic period, the tempo should be elastic, reflecting the expressive nuances of text. The idea of rubato (mentioned earlier) wherein the tempo varies is an important aspect of Romantic style. To perform many of the great choral/orchestral masterworks effectively requires mature voices, capable of producing a wide range of pitch, dynamics, and expression.

The Romantic era was a period in which individual expression was of critical importance in the interpretation of music. Romantic composers used standard notation and indicated in relatively specific terms the way they wished for their music to be performed. In performing the choral music of the period, study the text and the markings of the composer in the score. These indications provide the basis for an effective performance.

### Significant Composers and Works

**Gioacchino Rossini (1792** – **1868)**, though noted primarily for his operas, wrote several choral works in his later years. The two most important works were his mass, which he called Petite Messe Solenelle (Little Solemn Mass), and his setting of the Stabat Mater. Despite its title, the mass is a major work involving choir, quartet of soloists, and orchestra (originally, it was scored for two pianos and the orchestration was added later).

**Franz Schubert (1797** – **1828)** wrote six masses and several shorter choral works on both sacred and secular texts. Schubert's last two masses are considered his most important choral pieces, although it should be noted that his Mass in C and the shorter works (sacred settings and choral lieder) provide some excellent performance possibilities for school choral ensembles. [LISTEN: Mass in G](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5HFosuArRM&t=409s)

**Felix Mendelssohn (1809** – **1847)** wrote three oratorios: St. Paul (1837), Elijah (1846), and Christus (unfinished at the time of his death). In addition, he wrote some choral lieder, motets, and psalm settings. His fame as a choral composer is based primarily on his oratorios, of which Elijah is the most frequently performed. Mendelssohn's Lobegesang (Hymn of Praise) is a choral orchestral piece including chorus, tenor, and two soprano soloists in the last and longest movement. [LISTEN: Lobgesang](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPyM-w8O9k4)

**Hector Berlioz (1803** – **1869)** wrote a Te Deum, a Requiem, an Oratorio, and a choral symphony.

**Robert Schumann (1810** – **1856)** wrote an oratorio entitled Paradise and the Peri, which is still occasionally performed, and several sets of part songs, many of which are performable by a well-established high school choir (an excellent example is Zigeunerleben-Gypsy Life).

**Johanned Brahms** (1833 – 1897), in addition to the German Requiem, wrote choral settings of folksongs, other choral lieder, and several choral/ orchestral works, including a cantata. The Brahms settings of folk songs are feasible repertoire for a high school or even a well-established junior high choir (or any choir interested in some delightful pieces). [LISTEN: Requiem](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXDR4UpUC4o)

**Anton Bruckner (1824-1896)** was a devout Roman Catholic and his sacred music reflects his profound faith. Some of his shorter works are approachable by a high school choir (an excellent example is the motet Locus Iste), but others are too demanding for young singers in terms of pitch and dynamic range. All are notably beautiful in their depth of emotion, harmonic ingenuity, and dynamic contrast. Works: Masses 1, 2, and 3; Te Deum; Psalm 150; Several shorter sacred and secular choral works. [LISTEN: Mass in E Minor](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYX1q9kBWvo)