CHAPTER18

CHAPTER 18: THE EARLY ROMANTICS

Chapter Outline

Prelude. (CHWM 411–12)

The first generation of Romantic composers found new ways to engage the established musical genres of the eighteenth century. Some writers thought that because music was free from the concreteness of words and visual images, it could evoke emotions that words could not. Central to public concert life was the orchestra. The German art song, or *Lied,*was the most suitable medium for the literary and lyrical tendencies of Romanticism. The*ballad,*a form of long narrative poem imitating a folk ballad, inspired composers to use more varied themes and textures and to make the piano part as important in expressing the poetry as the voice. Lieder composers often grouped their songs into collections and *song cycles.*Improvements in piano manufacturing and design made it ideal for home music-making and public concerts. Most chamber music in the early nineteenth century came from composers strongly influenced by the Classical tradition, such as Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Schumann.

I. Franz Schubert (CHWM 412–21, NAWM 121–22 and 133)

*Franz Schubert*(1797–1828) was a prolific composer and made significant contributions to song, symphony, solo-piano, and chamber-music repertoires.

1. ***Lieder***  
   The characteristics of the Romantic Lied are exemplified in the songs of Schubert, who wrote over six hundred Lieder.
   1. Melody   
      Schubert composed beautiful melodies that capture the character and situation of their poetry. **Music: NAWM 122**

**Biography: Franz Schubert**  
After studying music as a child, Schubert became a schoolmaster, working in his father’s school for several years. His true love was music, and he composed in his free time with astonishing speed. He never held a salaried musical position and gained most of his income from publication. Best known for his Lieder, Schubert was a prolific composer in all genres.

* 1. Harmony   
     Schubert used harmony as an expressive device and often modulated to the mediant or submediant.
  2. Texts   
     Schubert set poetry by many writers, including Goethe, and wrote two song cycles on poems by *Wilhelm Müller*: *Die schöne Müllerin*(The Pretty Miller Maid, 1823) and *Winterreise*(A Winter’s Journey, 1827).
  3. Form   
     Schubert always chose forms that suited the shape and meaning of the text. For example, he used *modified strophic form*to depict contrast or change.
  4. Accompaniments   
     In Schubert’s music, the figuration of the accompaniment always fits the poem’s mood and the personality of the protagonist. In *Gretchen am Spinnrade*(Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel), the piano suggests the spinning wheel and Gretchen’s agitation as she thinks of her beloved.**Music: NAWM 121**
  5. *Erlkönig*  
     In *Erlkönig*(The Erlking), triplets in the accompaniment suggest a galloping horse and the anxiety of a father, while the singer presents three different characters, each with distinctive music.
  6. *Der Lindenbaum*  
     In *Der Lindenbaum*(The Linden Tree) from *Winterreise,*Schubert conveys the meaning of the poem through form, melody, accompaniment, and harmony. **Music: NAWM 122**

1. ***Orchestral Music***
   1. *Unfinished* Symphony   
      In his *Unfinished*Symphony, Schubert used material from the introduction for the development section while focusing the main thematic areas on memorable, lyrical melodies like those of his songs and piano works.
   2. "Great" Symphony in C Major   
      In his "Great" Symphony in C Major, Schubert blended Romantic lyricism and Beethovenian drama within an expanded Classical form.
2. ***Solo Music for Piano***  
   In the nineteenth century, the piano became the main instrument for music-making in the home, creating a steady demand for piano music. Schubert wrote marches, dances, and lyrical works suitable for the amateur market and larger works, including eleven sonatas and the *Wanderer Fantasie*(1822), for more accomplished performers.
   1. Sonatas   
      Schubert’s sonatas typically feature lyrical themes that resist development and often use three keys in the exposition, rather than two.

**Innovations: The Industrial Revolution and Music-Instrument Manufacture**  
Manufacturing innovations during the Industrial Revolution made musical instruments more widely available and less costly. The design of the piano was improved, and its new capabilities were exploited by composers and performers. Harps were developed that could be played in any key. New brass instruments were invented, and valves were added to trumpets and horns, enabling them to produce all the notes of the chromatic scale. Modern wind instrument design, improved percussion construction, and the saxophone all have their origins in the nineteenth century.

1. ***Chamber Music***  
   Schubert modeled his first quartets on those by Mozart and Haydn and wrote them for his friends to enjoy, but his last three string quartets from 1824 to 1826 are conceived more as dramatic pieces of concert music than as entertaining diversions for amateur players.
   1. String Quintet   
      In his String Quintet in C Major (1828), Schubert treats all five instruments as equals, develops musical ideas in a symphonic way, and presents contrasting moods and styles within and between movements.

II. Hector Berlioz (CHWM 421–25, NAWM 130)

1. *Symphonie fantastique*  
   Berlioz conceived his *Symphonie fantastique*(1830) as a musical drama whose words are not sung, but are written in a program given to the audience.
2. *Idée fixe*  
   The main theme, or *idée fixe*(fixed idea), represents the obsessive image of the hero’s beloved and appears in every movement, transformed to suit the drama. Throughout the five movements, Berlioz bends the standard structure of the symphony to serve narrative and autobiographical purposes. **Music: NAWM 130**

**Biography: Hector Berlioz**  
Berlioz taught himself to compose in his teens and eventually studied at the Paris Conservatory. In 1830, he composed *Symphonie fantastique,*an attempt to express his obsession with Harriet Smithson in the context of a Beethovenian symphony. Many of Berlioz’s compositions were inspired by literature. His music was far too radical for steady support, so he turned to writing music criticism, organizing his own concerts, and conducting.

1. *Harold en Italie*  
   Berlioz’s second symphony, *Harold en Italie*(Harold in Italy, 1834), features a solo viola and was inspired by a poem and Berlioz’s own visit to Italy.
2. *Roméo et Juliette*  
   Berlioz’s *Roméo et Juliette*(Romeo and Juliet, 1835) is a "dramatic symphony" in seven movements for orchestra, soloists, and chorus.
3. Church music   
   Berlioz’s *Grande Messe des morts*(Requiem, 1837) and *Te Deum*(1855) are of huge dimensions and belong to a patriotic, rather than liturgical, tradition.
4. Berlioz’s influence   
   Berlioz’s radical approach influenced how other composers wrote program music and used instrumental color, harmony, expression, and form.

**A Closer Look: The Symphony Orchestra**  
The Romantic orchestra was more than twice the size of that used by Haydn and Mozart, with many more strings and a greater number and variety of winds, brass, and percussion. Individual instruments were also more powerful. Orchestras were now led by *conductors,*who used a baton to beat time and cue entrances. Audiences first complained about the "noisiness" of larger orchestras but grew accustomed to their sounds and colors over time.

III. Felix Mendelssohn (CHWM 426–29, NAWM 131 and 135)

*Felix Mendelssohn*(1809–1847) blended influences from Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and his own contemporaries.

1. ***Orchestral Works***  
   Mendelssohn’s mature symphonies, overtures, and violin concerto follow Classical models and show the strong impact of Romanticism.
   1. *Italian*Symphony   
      The *Italian*Symphony (No. 4, 1833) accommodates tuneful themes in Italian styles within the developmental structures of Classical forms.
   2. Overtures   
      Mendelssohn’s imaginative use of figuration and orchestral color for musical depiction in his *Midsummer Night’s Dream Overture*(1826) set the standard for all subsequent concert overtures.
   3. Violin concerto   
      In his Violin Concerto in E Minor (1844), Mendelssohn linked the three movements and reworked concerto form, finding new ways to reinterpret yet continue the concerto tradition. **Music: NAWM 131**
   4. Oratorios   
      Mendelssohn rooted his oratorios *St. Paul*and *Elijah*in Baroque tradition while creating something new and up-to-date. **Music: NAWM 135**

**Biography: Felix Mendelssohn**  
Mendelssohn was a prodigy, composing seriously by age eleven. He was supported by his family, who had the financial means to provide the best teachers and who were at the center of Berlin’s intellectual life. Mendelssohn achieved success as a composer, pianist, conductor, and music director and was the founder of the Leipzig Conservatory.

1. ***Piano Works***
   1. *Songs Without Words*  
      Mendelssohn’s best-known piano works are his *Lieder ohne Worte*(Songs Without Words), which capture the lyrical qualities of Lieder and exemplify his belief that music can express what words cannot.

IV. Robert Schumann (CHWM 429–33, NAWM 123, 125, and 132)

*Robert Schumann*(1810–1856) concentrated on composing works of a single major genre for a year or more at a time before moving to a different genre.

**Biography: Robert Schumann and Clara Schumann**  
After university studies in law, Robert Schumann aimed to become a concert pianist, studying with Friedrich Wieck, Clara’s father. While Robert suffered a career-ending injury and turned to composition and criticism, founding the journal *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*,*Clara Schumann*(1819–1896) became one of the leading concert pianists in Europe. After their marriage in 1840, Clara toured less but continued to perform and compose while raising eight children. Her husband suffered physical and psychological illnesses and was confined to an asylum for the last two years of his life. After his death, Clara performed, taught, and edited and promoted Robert’s music.

1. ***Piano Music***
   1. Character pieces   
      Most of Robert Schumann’s piano works were *character pieces*, short works in colorfully named collections. **Music: NAWN 125**
   2. Titles and meanings   
      Schumann used evocative titles to stimulate the imagination; but their main function was to encourage close attention to the special features of each piece and to indicate possible avenues for exploration. **Music: NAWM 125**
   3. Ciphers and motives, unity and diversity   
      Schumann used musical ciphers to invite extramusical interpretation and to give unity to an entire work.
2. ***Songs***  
   As a Lieder composer, Schumann was Schubert’s first important successor. He wrote more than 120 songs in 1840, the year of his marriage, including the song cycle *Dichterliebe*(A Poet’s Love).
   1. Music and poetry   
      Schumann thought that music should capture a poem’s essence in its own terms and that voice and piano should be equal partners.
   2. *Dichterliebe*  
      In *Im wunderschönen Monat Mai*from *Dichterliebe,*Schumann uses unresolved harmonies to create a sense of longing. **Music: NAWM 123**
3. ***Symphony and Chamber Music***
   1. Symphonies   
      Robert Schumann modeled his symphonies on those of Beethoven, Schubert, and Mendelssohn.
   2. Fourth Symphony   
      Schumann’s Symphony No. 4 in D Minor is an integrated cycle in four movements played without a break. It combines traditional forms with a continuous process of variation. **Music: NAWM 132**
   3. Chamber works   
      Schumann built on the tradition of Haydn and Mozart without simply imitating them. His Piano Trios (1847) were his most influential chamber works.

V. Clara Schumann (CHWM 434, NAWM 134)

Women were discouraged from composing large concert works, but pieces for piano were accepted as extensions of private music-making. Clara Schumann wrote several collections of Lieder, using an approach to song that paralleled Robert’s. Her performances pleased critics, and she greatly influenced piano-playing and concert life in the nineteenth century. In her Piano Trio in G Minor, Clara combined traits from Baroque, Classic, and Romantic models. **Music: NAWM 134**

VI. Fryderyk Chopin (CHWM 434–39, NAWM 126–27)

*Fryderyk Chopin*(1810–1849) composed almost exclusively for piano. He wrote for performers and audiences of all levels and opened new possibilities for the piano.

**Biography: Fryderyk Chopin**  
Chopin was born near Warsaw in Poland. After studying at the Warsaw Conservatory, he toured as a concert pianist. His pieces with Polish character were very popular. In 1831, he moved to Paris where he met the leading musicians and entered the highest social circles. He made a living by teaching, publishing, and performing at private concerts and in salons.

1. Dances   
   Chopin’s *waltzes*evoke the Viennese ballroom, his *polonaises*assert the spirit of Poland, and his *mazurkas*capture the popular Polish ballroom dance. **Music: NAWM 126**
2. Nocturnes   
   Chopin’s *nocturnes*are short works with embellished melodies over sonorous accompaniments. **Music: NAWM 127**
3. Preludes   
   Chopin’s preludes show the influence of J. S. Bach.

**In Performance: Tempo Rubato**  
Chopin’s playing style was more personal than theatrical, and he used *tempo rubato,*holding back or hurrying the tempo, as an expressive technique.

**In Context: A Ballad of Love**  
The novelist *George Sand*(Aurore Dudevant, 1804–1876), a freethinking woman, developed a romantic relationship with Chopin that coincided with his most productive years.

1. Ballades and scherzos   
   Chopin’s *ballades*and scherzos are longer and more demanding than his other one-movement piano works.
2. Études   
   Chopin’s twenty-seven *études*combine virtuosity with significant artistic content.

VII. The Americas (CHWM 439–40, NAWM 124 and 129)

Drawing-room ballads and *parlor songs*in Great Britain and North America were usually strophic or in verse-refrain form, and the piano supported the singer.

1. Stephen Foster   
   The leading American song composer of the nineteenth century was *Stephen Foster*(1826–1864), the first American to earn a living solely as a composer.**Music: NAWM 124**
2. Louis Moreau Gottschalk   
   *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*(1829–1869) was the first American composer with an international reputation. His music was designed to appeal to a middle-class audience and the amateur performer. **Music: NAWM 129**