

MSC 1003 – Music in Civilization Spring 2019

Prof. Smey

Class 19, Thursday April 4

In this session we saw the conclusion of *Don Giovanni*, took a quick peek at *The Magic Flute* and we talked about our new unit, the Romantic Period.

Abbreviated Overview: The Romantic Period (1820-1900)

I started this part with a quick peek at what's new in this era. We'll return to our general overview next session.

You may remember how I characterized the Classical Period as a swing away from a more *Dionysian* aesthetic (wild, emotional) to a more *Apollonian* one (rational, orderly.) With the Romantic Period we see a swing back to the Dionysian.

There are a few changes in emphasis as we leave the Enlightenment and enter an era of Romanticism. Rather than trying to explain the entire world from a universal, objective perspective, Romantic thinkers are much more concerned with the **subjective experience of individuals**. They like **extreme emotional states** (like wonder, fear, and passionate, unrequited love) and are interested in the **supernatural**. They still value “**Nature**,” but the Romantic idea of Nature is much more reverent and mystical than that of the Enlightenment, when Nature was cited as the primary source of scientific knowledge.

Orchestral Music in the Romantic Period

In our intro I noted that the Romantic period sees two opposite musical trends that occur simultaneously. Music for the home becomes “miniaturized” as composers strive to make their work more playable and more enjoyable for amateurs. Music that is already large-scale, however, like orchestral music and opera, only becomes more massive.

In this part we looked at the large-scale part of the equation.

In the Romantic period **Program Music** is all the rage. This is a piece that tells some sort of story. It will often dispense with traditional means of organization (i.e. the old forms like sonata or minuet and trio) and simply follow dramatic storytelling logic instead. In a way this is an extreme form of tone painting, which we learned about way back in the Renaissance.

Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique* [1830]

In the Romantic period composers become particularly interested in writing music that tells a story. This is known as **program music**.

Hector Berlioz writes the first important symphonic music after Beethoven, and it was he who really made Program Music the new thing. At the première of the *Symphonie fantastique* he literally handed out pages of text that he wanted the audience to read, so that they would be able to follow the story he was telling. (This is the “program” in program music.) Here is an edited-down version of it:

Part one - Daydreams, passions

A young musician...sees for the first time a woman who unites all the charms of the ideal person his imagination was dreaming of, and falls desperately in love with her.

Part two - A ball

[The young man spots his beloved at a ball, and fails to get her attention.]

Part three - Scene in the countryside

[The young man is strolling outdoors and again he sees his love interest. He again fails to get her attention.]

Part four - March to the scaffold

Convinced that his love is spurned, the artist poisons himself with opium. The dose of narcotic, while too weak to cause his death, plunges him into a heavy sleep accompanied by the strangest of visions. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he is condemned, led to the scaffold and is witnessing his own execution.

Part five - Dream of a witches' sabbath

He sees himself at a witches' sabbath, in the midst of a hideous gathering of shades, sorcerers and monsters of every kind who have come together for his funeral.

We are going to learn part IV for the quiz. You could read up on what Craig Wright says about this piece on pp. 251-257 in the seventh edition, 257-265 in the eighth.