Understanding Music

Seventh Edition

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displaying his astounding virtuosity. Paganini's technical brilliance was the inspiration for several composers in the nineteenth century.

Another great virtuoso performer was the pianist and composer Franz Liszt. Audiences treated him the way modern audiences treat rock stars: women fainted and people mobbed the stage.

Women in Nineteenth-Century Music

The nineteenth century opened doors of opportunity to a wide range of people, and women were no exception. Music conservatories began to accept women for musical training, and although considerable prejudice remained, some women became famous as performers and composers during the nineteenth century. This is not to say that there was equal opportunity. Most orchestras were still composed entirely of men, and many people thought that it was "unseemly" for women to appear as professional musicians in public. Still, a large number of women played the piano or sang, and many performed in their own living rooms or at the homes of friends.

Some women played an important role behind the scenes in nineteenth-century musical life, either as hostesses of vibrant salons, where much music making took place, or as wealthy patrons of the arts. Tchaikovsky, one of the most famous composers of the Romantic era, was supported privately by a very rich woman. Other composers relied heavily on their personal relationships with women, as supporters and lovers or as colleagues and critics. Among the most important women in the history of nineteenth-century music were Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann; we shall look at their lives and contributions to music during the course of this chapter.

Romantic Song

Romantic songs are intimate miniatures. They are written for a single voice with piano accompaniment and are designed to be sung in private parlors rather than in large concert halls.

The setting of the song is always designed to mirror the meaning of the text, either with specific word painting or in general atmosphere. The greatest Romantic songs (and there are many great ones) add great richness and emotional depth to the poems that they set.

Romantic songs may be either strophic or through-composed. **Strophic songs** are those that use the same music for each stanza of the poetry. **Through-composed songs** are those in which the music is different for each stanza. Sometimes modifications or combinations of these forms may appear.

Although most Romantic songs stand on their own as self-contained works, composers sometimes linked together a group of songs to create what is known as a **song cycle**. A song cycle may present a series of songs that are woven together to make a narrative, or it may link several songs by presenting them as different facets of a single idea.

Early Romanticism

In addition to Beethoven, five great composers were active in the first half of the nineteenth century: Franz Schubert, Hector Berlioz, Felix Mendelssohn, Fryderyk Chopin, and Robert Schumann. Also important were Clara Schumann (1819–1896) and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805–1847), although their achievements are harder to assess, as we shall see.

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Schubert was the son of a Viennese schoolmaster and lived most of his life in Vienna. He sang as a choirboy when he was young and also played the violin, performing string quartets with his father and brothers at home and playing in the orchestra at the choir school, where he came to know the symphonies of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Schubert's gift for composition was already evident, and when his voice changed, he left the choir and was accepted as a composition student by the composer at the Imperial Court in Vienna, Antonio Salieri. His father wanted Schubert to become a schoolmaster like himself; Schubert tried briefly, but he was a poor teacher and soon gave it up. He then embarked on his quiet career as a composer, living in Vienna and working every morning. He seemed to be a limitless fountain of music. "When I finish one piece," he said, "I begin the next." In the afternoons, he spent time with his friends in the various cafés of Vienna.

It is extraordinary to think that Schubert and Beethoven lived at the same time and in the same city, but met only once. The two men could not have been more different. Whereas Beethoven was proud, assertive, and difficult to get along with, Schubert was shy, retiring, and exceedingly modest, with a large number of good friends. Their music, too, is very different: Beethoven's is dramatic and

Time	Listen for
	A section
0:00	Opening melody. Focus is on descending left-hand accompanying chords. Upper neighbor tone is heard several times in right hand.
0:20	New note, melodic motion continues to descend.
	B section
0:46	More motion in melody and change in accompanying figures.
1:01	End of section, little flourish in melody, returning to:
	A′ section
1:07	Variation of A.
1:22	More rhythmic activity in both hands.
1:25	Loudest part.
1:35	Feeling of stasis.
1:48	"Goal" reached.
2:01	Final chord?
2:04	Expressive silence.
2:09	Real final cadence (three chords).

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

Of all the early Romantics, Robert Schumann was the most imbued with a literary imagination. He was born in 1810 in a small German town. His father was a bookseller, so the young boy had unlimited access to the popular Romantic writings of the day.

Schumann read voraciously and began to pour his feelings into poems and novels of his own, before finding a more congenial outlet in music. He played the piano well, though his exuberance outran his discipline. "I was always a fiery performer," he said, "but my technique was full of holes."

After his father died, Schumann went to the University of Leipzig as a law student, but he had no interest in the subject. He drank heavily and spent his money on having a good time. While in Leipzig, he met Friedrich Wieck, an eminent piano teacher, and Schumann took lessons from him.

A turning point in Schumann's career came (as it did for so many Romantic musicians) upon hearing the Italian virtuoso Paganini play a concert. He was entranced by the showmanship and hypnotic intensity of the great violinist and decided to become a piano virtuoso. He gave up his undisciplined life, enrolled as a full-time student with Wieck, and took a room in Wieck's house in order to devote himself to constant practice. Unfortunately, Schumann took this to extremes, as he tended to do with everything. He overdid the practicing and permanently damaged his hand.

There was, however, a bright side to this episode: Schumann turned from performing to composing music, and he met Clara, Wieck's daughter, who was to become the love of his life. When Schumann moved in with the Wiecks, Clara was only 10 years old. But she was a brilliant pianist, and Wieck had the highest hopes for her. Clara could outplay Schumann, even though he was twice her age.

By the time Clara was 15, she was already a great pianist, astounding audiences at home and abroad. But her father suddenly noticed a cloud on the horizon: Clara and

Wieck, in a letter to Schumann's mother: "Taking into account his talent and imagination, I promise to make him into one of the greatest living pianists."

Clara and Robert Schumann.

Photograph of Clara & Robert Schumann, Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/ Art Resource, NY.

Robert were falling in love. This was not at all in the plans. His daughter had a career ahead of her and didn't need to get involved with a neurotic, obsessive student, 10 years her senior, who barely made a living. So he opposed the relationship with all the means at his disposal. He took Clara away on long tours, refused to let the couple meet, and even threatened to shoot Schumann if he tried to see Clara. During this long period, the two wrote secret letters to each other, and Schumann poured his feelings into his music. He described his F♯-minor piano sonata as "a single cry of my heart for you," and Clara wrote to him that when she played, she played for him: "I had no other way of showing you what was in my heart."

The laws of morality are also those of art.
—Robert Schumann

In the end, the couple had no choice but to go to court to obtain the freedom to marry, and they were finally wed in 1840, when Clara was 20 and Robert was 30. In that year, Schumann turned his attention to compositions for piano and voice. He was on fire with inspiration and composed no fewer than 140 songs, including three song cycles. His texts were taken from the great Romantic poets: Byron, Goethe, Heinrich Heine, and others. Schumann's wedding gift to Clara was a setting of "Du bist wie eine Blume," Heine's poem comparing his beloved to the beauty of a flower.

Find the **Quick Listen** on **MySearchLab**
"Schumann *Du Bist Wie Eine Blume*"

If 1840 was Schumann's "year of song," 1841 was his "year of the symphony." Robert and Clara settled into their home in Leipzig, with a music room each, and Clara wrote, "We enjoy a happiness such as I have never known before." Schumann had recently encountered a symphony by Schubert. He was overwhelmed, and Clara encouraged him to work on a symphony of his own. His Symphony No. 1 (*Spring* Symphony) was sketched out in four days. The first performance was given by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, with Felix Mendelssohn conducting.

To me, Schumann's memory is holy.
—Johannes Brahms

In 1842, Clara went on tour and Schumann threw himself into a new passion: chamber music. He studied the string quartets of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven intensively. On Clara's return, he wrote three string quartets in five weeks, and by the end of the year had also completed a piano quintet, a piano quartet, and a piano trio.

About 1845, Schumann began to experience the fits of depression and illness that were to haunt him for the rest of his life. He composed only sporadically, and he had occasional nervous breakdowns.

In 1850, Schumann was appointed music director in Düsseldorf, but it soon became clear that his health and mental state were not sufficiently stable to allow him to perform his duties. Newspaper reviews became highly critical, singers refused to attend rehearsals, and Schumann's assistant conductor had to take over concerts at the last minute. Schumann began to suffer from hallucinations.

On a rainy day in February 1854, Schumann left his house in his slippers and walked to the bridge over the Rhine. He stepped over the railing and threw himself into the water. He was pulled out by some fishermen and carried home. A few days later, he was committed to a mental institution.

With eight children, Clara could not long maintain her household alone. She began touring again, but in 1856, she was summoned back urgently by the doctors. "I had to go to him," she wrote in her diary. "I saw him between 6 and 7 in the evening. He smiled and with great effort put his arms around me. I shall never forget it. All the treasures in the world could not equal this embrace." Two days later Schumann died; he was 46.

Schumann's Music

Schumann was a literary Romantic. Much of his music is inspired by literary references, and even when the inspiration is not literary, there is often some other programmatic reference to people or ideas.

His writing for piano, his own instrument, is masterly. The pieces for solo piano range