

## Music History - Chapter 6

### The 19th Century Romantic Movement

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

#### I. The Composer and His Music

##### A. Background

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn in northwestern Germany and was taught music by his father and a local organist. From 1792, when he went to Vienna, he studied first with Haydn and then with other composers. Building on the genres, styles, and conventions of the Classic period, he created highly individual works that brought him unprecedented success and that became models for later composers. These included 9 symphonies, 5 piano concertos, 16 string quartets, 32 piano sonatas, and many other orchestral, chamber, and vocal works. He was neither as prolific nor as speedy a composer as Haydn or Mozart, but took each piece through many drafts and revisions, as we can see in his surviving sketchbooks. Starting in his twenties, Beethoven gradually went deaf, writing movingly of his suffering in an 1802 letter called the Heiligenstadt Testament. His deafness tended to isolate him from society.

##### B. Beethoven's "Three Periods"

Beethoven's career is traditionally divided into three periods. In the first, to about 1802, he assimilated the musical language, genres, and styles of his time. In the second, ca 1803-16, his works are more individual, longer, and grander than before. In the last period, ca 1816-27, his music becomes more introspective (and often more difficult to play and understand).

#### II. First Period

##### A. Patrons

Beethoven was supported by aristocratic patrons both in Bonn and in Vienna. In Bonn he worked only for the elector of Cologne, but in Vienna he had several noble benefactors, including three who gave him an annuity to keep him in Austria. He also sold his works to publishers, performed as a pianist, and taught piano. Thus he was able to make a living without being dependent for employment on a single patron, as Haydn had been

##### B. The Piano Sonatas

Beethoven's piano sonatas continue the tradition of Haydn but show individual features. Several traits of his piano style may be indebted to the sonatas of Muzio Clementi (1752-1832) and Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760- 1812): economy of material,

symphonic breadth, sudden changes of harmony, dynamics, texture, and mood, and certain kinds of pianistic figuration.

##### C. Chamber Music

Beethoven's first six String Quartets, Op. 18 (1798-1800), follow the model of Haydn in motivic development and use of counterpoint but show his individuality in their themes, surprising modulations and turns of phrase, and formal structure. Other chamber works of the first period include piano trios, violin sonatas, cello sonatas, and a septet for strings and winds.

##### D. First Symphony

Beethoven's First Symphony in C Major (1800) also follows Haydn's example, but has a scherzo as the third movement and features long codas in the other movements.

##### E. Second Symphony

Beethoven's Second Symphony in D Major (1802) is longer than previous symphonies, with more thematic material and long codas that develop the main ideas.

#### III. Second Period

##### A. Beethoven's Reputation

By his early thirties, Beethoven was renowned as a pianist and composer, had many aristocratic patrons, and was sought after by publishers.

##### B. The Eroica Symphony

The Third Symphony in Eb Major, the Eroica (1803), was of unprecedented length and complexity, with many unusual features. The first movement has a great number of melodic ideas, including a "new theme" in the development, but almost all derive from the material presented near the beginning. Most novel is that the main theme is treated as a person in a drama, struggling and finally triumphing. The sketches show that many of the unusual features, such as the horn's "too early" entrance at the recapitulation, were planned from early on. Beethoven originally titled the work Bonaparte, after Napoleon, but changed the title to Sinfonia Eroica (Heroic Symphony). The second movement is a funeral march that evokes the style of French Revolutionary marches and hymns. The third movement is a scherzo, and the finale a mixture of variations (on a theme from Beethoven's ballet The Creatures of Prometheus) with elements of fugue and march style.

### C. Fidelio

In Beethoven's one opera, *Fidelio* (1804-5, rev. 1806 and 1814), Leonore assumes the disguise of a man in order to free her husband from wrongful imprisonment. Beethoven revised the work repeatedly before it was a success.

### D. The Rasumovsky Quartets

Beethoven's second group of string quartets consisted of the three in Op. 59 (1806), dedicated to Count Rasumovsky, Russian ambassador to Vienna and lover of music. They share the heroic, individual style of the *Eroica* Symphony, and two movements include Russian themes.

### E. The Fourth to Eighth Symphonies

Beethoven's Fourth and Fifth Symphonies project opposite moods; the Fourth in Bb Major (1806) is jovial, while the Fifth in C Minor (1807-8) portrays struggle and final triumph. The Sixth Symphony in F Major, named the *Pastoral* (1808), evokes country scenes. The Seventh Symphony in A Major (1811-12) is large in scale, while the Eighth in F Major (1812) is quite condensed. Beethoven also wrote several overtures, which resemble in form the first movement of a symphony.

### F. Piano Sonatas and Concertos

Many of Beethoven's piano sonatas show individual features. For example, the *Moonlight Sonata*, Op. 27, No. 2 (1801), begins with a fantasia movement; the *Sonata in D Minor*, Op. 31, No. 2 (1802), uses a melody that resembles a recitative; and the *Waldstein Sonata in C Major*, Op. 53 (1804), uses traditional forms with intense themes and strongly contrasting textures. His first three piano concertos belong to his first period, and the Fourth in G Major (1805-6) and Fifth (*Emperor*) in Eb Major (1809) to his middle period, along with his one Violin Concerto (1806).

## IV. Third Period

### A. The Late Style

Although Beethoven was famous across Europe and well supported by patrons and publishers, his deafness led to greater social isolation. His music became more abstract and introspective, with extremes from the meditative to the grotesque conjoined in works that referred to Classical conventions without being constrained by them.

### B. Characteristics of Beethoven's Late Style

Beethoven's late compositions work out the full potential of themes and motives. The *Diabelli Variations* (1819-23) do not simply embellish the

theme as do earlier variation sets but rework material from it to create a new design, mood and character in each variation. Several individual movements, especially slow movements, also use this kind of variation technique. Beethoven's late style is also marked by changes in other aspects:

1. He creates a new sense of continuity by blurring phrase and section divisions and de-emphasizing cadences.

\*He includes passages that have an improvisatory character or use instrumental recitative.

\*He often uses fugal textures in developments, and several movements or large sections are fugues.

\*He uses new sonorities, including wide spacings and exceptionally dense textures.

\*He often uses an unusual number of movements and unusual kinds of movements.

The *String Quartet in C Minor*, Op. 131 (1826), exemplifies all of these characteristics.

### C. The *Missa solemnis*

The *Missa solemnis* (1822), or *Mass in D*, is a massive work that recalls the choral style of Handel while resembling the symphonic conception and mix of chorus and soloists typical of Haydn's late Masses.

### D. The Ninth Symphony

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (1824) is longer than his others. Its finale is innovative in recalling the themes of the earlier movements and introducing soloists and chorus to sing stanzas from Friedrich von Schiller's *Ode to Joy*.

### E. Beethoven and the Romantics

Beethoven's middle-period works were the most influential on later composers, particularly for their conception of music as a vehicle to express the composer's own feelings and experiences. (This was perhaps the most innovative aspect of Beethoven's music; composers since Josquin had sought to express the feelings in a text, composers of opera to depict a character's emotions, and instrumental composers to represent the generalized affections, but apparently no composer before Beethoven's middle period had sought to represent his own feelings and experiences. This idea became so influential that modern listeners often assume that this is what all composers have had in mind, even before Beethoven.) Through this and through his innovations in form and procedure, he became a revolutionary force in the history of music.

## ROMANTICISM AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

### I. Romanticism

There is more historical continuity than contrast between the Classic and Romantic periods. Most music between 1770 and 1900 uses a common set of conventions. The main differences are of degree: Romantic music is more individual in expressing feelings and transcending conventions. Music was seen as the most Romantic art. But music was also closely identified with literature, particularly in the art song and in program music.

### II. Orchestral Music

#### A. The Beethoven Legacy

Beethoven cast a long shadow, and later composers sought to differentiate their music from his, typically by extending some elements of his music while rejecting others. Schubert introduced songlike themes into the symphony; Berlioz found precedents in Beethoven's symphonies for both the programmatic basis and the thematic drama of his *Symphonie fantastique*; Schumann, Mendelssohn, Brahms, and Bruckner continued the symphony in individual ways; and Wagner saw the choral finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as pointing to the future—a more intense union of music with words and drama.

#### B. Schubert

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) composed almost 1,000 works in his short life, including more than 600 lieder. His *Unfinished Symphony* has been called the first Romantic symphony because of its lyrical themes, harmonic excursions, and striking orchestration, traits also true of his "Great" C-major Symphony.

#### C. Mendelssohn

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) combined adherence to Classic forms with themes reminiscent of foreign lands in his Symphonies Nos. 4 (Italian) and 3 (Scottish). Among his other important orchestral works are his Violin Concerto, his concert overtures (independent one-movement works), and his incidental music to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

#### D. Berlioz

The *Symphonie fantastique* (1830) by Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) is a musical drama whose words are not spoken or sung but are written in a program handed out to the audience. The central theme, or *idée fixe* (fixed idea or fixation), stands for the woman with whom the artist is infatuated and

appears in every movement, sometimes transformed; this procedure helped to initiate the cyclic symphony. *Harold en Italie* (Harold in Italy, 1834) is also a program symphony, with a solo violinist playing the protagonist, and *Romeo et Juliette* (1839) is a "dramatic symphony" for orchestra, soloists, and chorus, extending Beethoven's example in the Ninth Symphony into what is almost an upstaged opera. These innovative works influenced all later program music and began a new era of colorful orchestration.

#### E. Schumann

Robert Schumann (1811-1856) composed his first symphonies (published as No. 1 and No. 4) in 1841. The four movements of Symphony No. 4 are played without a break and linked by thematical recall.

#### F. Liszt

Franz Liszt (1811-1886) wrote 12 symphonic poems between 1848 and 1858 and another in 1881-82. He was the first to use the term, which designates a programmatic work, usually in one movement, that evokes ideas and feelings associated with its subject and may follow the course of a poem or narrative with a similar sequence of moods and events. His symphonies are also programmatic. Some works introduce numerous transformations of a single motive or theme, an approach that had a strong impact on later composers. Several later composers wrote symphonic poems, and Liszt's harmonies influenced Wagner and others.

#### G. Brahms

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) wrote four symphonies, four concertos, two overtures, two serenades, and a set of orchestral variations. He combined Classic structure with Romantic melodic gesture and emotional intensity. Middle movements are often in keys a third away from the main key of the symphony, instead of in the dominant or subdominant. His textures are often contrapuntal, with active melodic basses or countermelodies in the inner parts. The superimposition of duple and triple divisions of the beat or measure is frequent, as are other metric clashes and melodic cross-relations between parts.

#### H. Bruckner

Anton Bruckner (1824-1896) was an organist, and his symphonies show that background in his orchestration and in their serious, religious spirit. Their length, massive orchestra, and harmony show the influence of Wagner. They often begin like Beethoven's Ninth, with the gradual emergence of a theme, and end with chorale-like themes. While outwardly conforming to Classic structures, his

symphonies depend upon the continuous development of musical ideas.

#### I. Tchaikovsky

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) wrote six symphonies, of which the last three are the best known. The Fourth has a private program about relentless fate, depicted in the opening horn theme that returns in the first and fourth movements. The key structure of the first movement is unusual, moving around the circle of minor thirds. The opening theme of the Fifth recurs in all movements. The Sixth (the Pathétique) has as its second movement a waltz in 5/4, and is exceptional in ending with a slow movement. Tchaikovsky's ballets are very well known.

#### J. Dvorak

Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904) is best known for his Symphony No. 9 (From the New World, 1893), written during his sojourn in the United States.

### SOLO, CHAMBER, AND VOCAL MUSIC IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

#### I. The Piano

The 19th-century piano had a larger range, more varied dynamics, and faster response than the 18th-century piano. (It was also now mass-produced and thus widely available and affordable, so that it became the most common household instrument.) There were two schools of playing in the early 19th century, one emphasizing clarity and fluency, the other large sound and dramatic orchestral effects. The 19th century saw the rise of the traveling virtuoso. Some pianists emphasized technical display; others linked technique to interpretative substance.

#### II. Music for Piano

##### A. Romantic Piano Music

In order to sustain Lyrical melodies with an active accompaniment, pianists often created a three-layer texture of melody, bass, and inner figuration shared between the hands. The new, more resonant piano also invited chordal textures. The most frequent forms were short dances or Lyrical pieces.

##### B. The Early Romantic Composers

There were many composers of piano music, including Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) and a number of Bohemian composers.

##### C. Schubert

Schubert wrote marches, dances, and Lyrical works that create a distinctive mood. His longer works

include 11 sonatas and the Wanderer Fantasy, which uses a theme from his song The Wanderer. His sonatas often present three keys in the exposition rather than two and, while following Classic form, use Lyrical themes that resist development.

##### D. Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn wrote a variety of piano works, including preludes and fugues that show his interest in J. S. Bach. His most popular piano works are his Lieder ohne Worte (Songs without Words), which capture the Lyrical quality of the lied in works for piano alone. He also wrote important music for organ.

##### E. Robert Schumann

Schumann planned to be a concert pianist, but after he injured his right hand he turned to composition and to writing about music in the journal he founded, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. All his published music before 1840 was for piano. In addition to several longer works, he specialized in short character pieces, often grouped into collections such as *Papillons* (Butterflies), *Carnaval*, and *Phantasiestücke* (Fantasy Pieces). His pieces carry titles that suggest extramusical associations. In his criticism and his music, he used the imaginary characters Florestan, Eusebius, and Raro to reflect different sides of his own personality. He also wrote fugues and fugal passages that pay homage to Bach.

##### F. Chopin

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849) wrote almost exclusively for piano. He was born in Poland and lived in Paris from 1831. His mazurkas and polonaises are stylized Polish dances and are among the first nationalist works of the 19th century. His playing style was more personal than theatrical, and his music is accordingly introspective. He used *tempo rubato*, in which the right hand pushes forward or holds back the tempo while the left hand accompanies in strict time. He followed John Field (1782-1837) in composing nocturnes, slow works with embellished melodies over wide-ranging accompaniments. Chopin also wrote preludes, under the influence of Bach; ballades (a term he apparently coined); scherzos; fantasias; sonatas; and concertos. His etudes are studies in piano technique, but are unusual for etudes in that they are also for concert performance.

##### G. Liszt

Liszt was born in Hungary and trained in Vienna. He was a touring virtuoso from a young age, seeking to match on the piano the dazzling virtuosity of the violinist Nicolo Paganini (1782-1840). Liszt made

many transcriptions for piano of other music. His original compositions for piano include Hungarian Rhapsodies, etudes, and many short descriptive pieces, and his works for piano and orchestra include two concertos; he also wrote for organ, using Baroque forms and styles. His Piano Concerto No. 1 in Eb Major and his one-movement Piano Sonata in B Minor exemplify his use of thematic transformation, a device also used in his symphonic poems. Liszt experimented with chromatic harmony, especially in his late works.

#### H. Brahms

Brahms avoided pianistic display but achieved a great variety of textures by combining simple ideas. He often used broken-chord accompaniments, crossrhythms, and melodies doubled in octaves, thirds, or sixths. He wrote three early sonatas, variation sets, and two concertos in mid-career, and numerous small, lyrical piano pieces in later life, when he also composed a set of chorale preludes for organ in emulation of J. S. Bach.

#### 1. Other Composers

Other significant works for keyboard were Modest Musorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition (1874) and pieces for piano and organ by Cesar Franck (1822-1890).

#### III. Chamber Music

The best chamber music of the Romantic period came from composers who felt closest to the Classic tradition.

##### A. Schubert

Schubert wrote several significant chamber works, notably the Trout Quintet, three late string quartets, an octet for strings and winds, and the String Quintet in C Major, widely regarded as his best chamber work.

##### B. Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn wrote an octet, six string quartets, two piano trios, and other chamber works.

##### C. Schumann

Schumann wrote all his major chamber works (three string quartets, piano quartet, and piano quintet) in 1842, the year after his first two symphonies; he later added three piano trios. His quartets particularly show the influence of Beethoven.

##### D. Brahms

Brahms is Beethoven's true successor in the realm of chamber music, with a large body of works of high quality spanning his entire career. Perhaps

anxious about competing with Beethoven, he delayed writing string quartets until mid-career. Like most of Brahms's works, the well-known Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34 (1864), uses developing variation, in which a musical idea is varied to create a string of interrelated but different ideas, producing both unity and variety. His chamber works with clarinet or natural horn are peaks of the literature for those instruments.

##### E. Franck

Franck wrote several chamber works united by the cyclical use of themes, recalling themes in two or more movements.

#### IV. The Lied

##### A. The Ballad

Ballads were long narrative poems written in imitation of folk ballads. They called for more variety and emotional expressivity from composers than did the lyrical atrophic poem. In response to these demands, the piano became more of an equal partner with the voice in conveying the meaning of the poetry.

##### B. Schubert

Schubert had a gift for creating song melodies that were both lovely in themselves and perfectly suited to the text. He often used chromaticism and harmonic contrast to create drama or highlight the meaning of the words. Many songs are atrophic; those that are through-composed are based on recurring themes and a clear tonal structure. The accompaniments often include figures that convey an image or feeling in the text. He set dozens of poems by Goethe and composed two song cycles (groups of songs intended to be performed in sequence and often implying a story) to poems by Wilhelm Muller, Die schone Mullerin (The Lovely Miller's Daughter, 1823) and Winterreise (Winter's Journey, 1827).

##### C. Robert Schumann

In Schumann's lieder, the piano is equal to the voice in interest and expressivity. He wrote more than 100 songs in 1840, the year of his marriage, including the song cycle Dichterliebe (A Poet's Love) on poems by Heinrich Heine.

##### D. Clara Schumann

Clara Wieck Schumann (1819-1896) was a child prodigy on the piano who became an important soloist and composer. Her marriage to Robert Schumann and raising a family limited her touring, but she continued to perform, compose, and teach.

## E. Brahms

Among Brahms's over 250 songs, many are in a folklike style over simple accompaniment, such as the famous "Brahms lullaby." He also arranged German folksongs. His principal model in song composition is Schubert, and his usual tone is serious and reflective. His piano parts seldom depict an image in the poem, and they are quite varied in texture (unlike Robert and Clara Schumann, who often use the same figuration throughout a song).

## V. Choral Music

### A. Types of Choral Music

The 19th century saw a revival of choral works from earlier centuries, such as Palestrina, Lasso, Handel, and Bach. (Partly as a result, new choral music tended to be relatively conservative or even to hearken back to earlier eras; it was not the trailblazer of new styles it had been in the Renaissance.) There were three main types of choral music composed in the 19th century:

1. Part-songs on secular texts, usually short and mostly homophonic;
2. Music on liturgical texts, for church or home performance; and
3. Concert works for chorus and orchestra, often with soloists.

### Part-Songs and Cantatas

Singing societies, amateur choruses who sang together for their own pleasure, were very popular in the 19th century, and composers produced hundreds of part-songs, cantatas, and other works for these amateur men's, women's, or mixed choirs. Brahms especially was a master of choral music of all types.

### C. Church Music

The Cecilian movement, named after St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music, was a movement within the Catholic Church to revive the a cappella style of Palestrina and restore Gregorian chant to purer form. Other composers continued to write church music with orchestra or organ, including Catholic Masses and English anthems. In St. Petersburg, Dmitri Bortnyansky (1751-1825) helped to found a new choral style of Russian church music based in part on traditional Orthodox chant.

### D. Other Music on Liturgical Texts

A number of composers wrote large works for chorus, soloists, and orchestra on texts from the liturgy. These were written for special occasions or

intended to be performed in concert rather than in church. Berlioz's *Requiem* (1837) and *Te Deum* (1855) are dramatic symphonies with voices, scored for large orchestras with interesting instrumental effects. Several of Liszt's works are on a similarly large scale. Gioachino Rossini's *Stabat Mater* (1832, rev. 1841) and Giuseppe Verdi's *Requiem* (1874) are in operatic style, dramatizing their subjects. Bruckner was a church organist; his Masses share qualities and some themes with his symphonies, and his motets show the influence of the Cecilian movement.

## E. The Romantic Oratorio

Several German, French, and English composers composed oratorios, most notably Mendelssohn's *St. Paul* (1836) and *Elijah* (1846). Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* (A German Requiem, 1868) uses biblical passages rather than the liturgical texts, and blends old and new styles.

## OPERA AND MUSIC DRAMA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

### I. France

#### A. Background

Paris was a center for opera in the early 19th century, with governmental support that varied through changes of regime.

#### B. Grand Opera

Grand opera was a new kind of opera on historical subjects, as much spectacle as music, that appealed to a broad audience. The genre was established by the librettist Eugene Scribe (1791-1861) and the composer Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864), whose opera *Les Huguenots* (1836) is an early example.

#### C. Opera Comique

Opera comique used spoken dialogue rather than recitative, used a smaller cast, and used simpler music than grand opera. Its plots were comic or romantic rather than historical. After the 1851 declaration of the Second Empire under Napoleon III, the satiric genre of opera bouffe emerged with Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880). His comic style influenced the later operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan in England and of Johann Strauss and others in Vienna.

#### D. Lyric Opera

Lyric opera developed from romantic comic operas, with similar romantic plots and a focus on melody, but on a somewhat larger scale. A famous example is *Faust* (1859) by Charles Gounod (1818-1893). *Carmen* (1875) by Georges Bizet (1838-1875) is classed as an opera comique because it has spoken

dialogue, but is a drama that reflects exoticism and a late- 19th-century taste for realism.

#### E. Berlioz

Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* (1846) is not an opera, but a series of scenes from *Faust* set for concert performance by soloists, chorus, and orchestra. *Les Troyens* (1856-58) is his operatic masterpiece and has as much in common with the operas of Lully, Rameau, and Gluck as with 19th-century grand opera.

### II. Italy

#### A. General

Italian opera was less influenced by Romanticism than were other operatic traditions. Opera was the only internationally significant music from Italy during this period. The 18th-century reforms of Jommelli and Traetta affected Italy in the 19th century, including more use of winds and horns and more important roles for the chorus and the orchestra.

#### B. Rossini

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) was the most successful opera composer of the early 19th century. His 32 operas include both serious and comic works, all with a strong emphasis on shapely, ornamented melody over a spare accompaniment. His most popular works today are his comic operas, such as *il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*, 1816). Many arias move from a slow, highly embellished cavatina to a faster, brilliant cabaletta. Both sections often use vocal coloratura. Rossini often used repetition of an idea combined with a crescendo to build excitement. After composing many operas for Italian opera houses, Rossini moved to Paris in 1824, wrote some operas in French, and then wrote smaller vocal and piano works.

#### C. Donizetti

Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) composed about 70 serious and comic operas as well as many songs, oratorios, cantatas, religious works, symphonies, and chamber works.

#### D. Bellini

Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835) wrote 10 serious operas in a refined style marked less by Rossini's coloratura than by a flexible, elegant style of embellishment that influenced Chopin. French opera influenced the plots of Italian opera; opera semiseria featured a serious plot with Romantic sentimentality, as in French lyric opera.

### III. Giuseppe Verdi

#### A. General

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) was the major figure in Italian opera after Donizetti. He continued the Italian operatic tradition and was a strong nationalist. His career divides into three periods: to 1853 (the year of *il trovatore* and *La traviata*); to 1871 (the year of *Aida*); and his last two operas, *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893). His operas focused on human drama, and his librettos, drawn mostly from Romantic authors, provided high emotions, strong contrasts, and quickly moving plots. Most of his operas are in four main segments, with ensemble finales in the middle two, a big duet in the third, and a prayer or meditation for the heroine to begin the fourth.

#### B. Early Works

Verdi's early operas are especially notable for their choruses. Instead of a strict sequence of discrete musical numbers (such as arias, duets, and choruses), he mixed a variety of musical forces in a single scene to create a more compelling drama. In his second period operas appeared less frequently, as Verdi experimented with Parisian grand opera, daring harmonies, comic roles, reminiscence motives, and other new elements.

#### C. Late Works

After a long hiatus, Verdi returned to opera with *Otello* (1884-87), responding to intervening developments in German and French opera by making the music more continuous and by using several unifying motives. *Falstaff* (1893) takes to a new level the elements of comic opera, particularly the ensemble.

### IV. Germany

#### A. Background

German opera derived from Singspiel, absorbed French Romantic features, and was closely linked to German Romantic literature.

#### B. Weber

Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) was director of the opera at Prague and later at Dresden. His *Der Freischütz* (1821) established the tradition of German Romantic opera. Plots draw from medieval history, legend, or fairy tale, and involve supernatural beings and events in a natural setting. Characters stand for good or evil principles, and good triumphs in a kind of spiritual deliverance. These traits and some musical elements such as use of folklike style, chromatic harmony, and emphasis on the inner voices as well as the main melody distinguish German from French or Italian opera,

despite similarities in genre and musical style. The famous Wolfs Glen Scene uses melodrama (spoken dialogue over music), startling chromatic harmony, and unusual orchestral effects to create an eerie atmosphere. Weber often used recurring themes for dramatic effect and to unify the drama.

C. Other German Opera Composers German composers after Weber wrote comic, lyric, and dramatic operas.

#### V. Richard Wagner and the Music Drama

##### A. Career

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) was the most important composer of German opera and has been a pivotal figure for music since the middle of the 19th century, for he (1) Brought German Romantic opera to its peak, (2) invented the music drama, and (3) developed a harmonic idiom whose greater chromaticism and freer modulation influenced most later composers. His opera *Der fliegende Holländer* (The Flying Dutchman, 1843) set the pattern for his later works with a libretto by the composer himself, a plot based on a legend, the use of recurring themes, and the hero's redemption through the loving sacrifice of the heroine. *Tannhäuser* (1845) combines German Romantic opera with grand opera; *Lohengrin* (1850) is still more continuous, with less division into numbers, more use of recurring themes, and the association of keys with characters. The 1848 Revolutions forced Wagner into exile in Switzerland, where he wrote a series of essays on his musical and social theories (including both Opera and Drama and the notorious *Jewishness in Music*) and the librettos to his cycle of music dramas, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring of the Nibelungs), whose music he

completed over two decades: *Das Rheingold* (The Rhine Gold, 1853-54), *Die Walküre* (The Valkyrie, 1854-56), *Siegfried* (1856-71), and *Gotterdammerung* (The Twilight of the Gods, 1869-74). They are linked by a continuous story, common characters, and shared motives. His other music dramas are *Tristan und Isolde* (1857-59), *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (The Mastersingers of Nuremberg, 1862-67), and *Parsifal* (1882). Wagner's notion of music drama links drama and music in the service of a single dramatic idea. Together with scenery, staging, and action, they comprise a "total artwork" (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). Vocal lines are part of the entire texture, and music is continuous throughout an act rather than being broken into separate numbers, despite echoes of earlier types such as recitative, *arioso*, aria, and scene.

##### B. The Leitmotif

In Wagner's music dramas, a person, thing, or idea may be associated with a motive called a Leitmotif. By recalling and developing these motives, Wagner creates unity and makes the music itself the locus of dramatic action. These differ from the reminiscence motives of Verdi and Weber by being briefer, more numerous, and more pervasive in the music.

##### C. Wagner's Influence

The complex chromatic chords, constant modulation, and evasion of resolutions that characterize Wagner's harmony in *Tristan und Isolde* created ambiguities that depart from common-practice tonality and led in the music of later composers to new systems of harmony. His concept of opera as a combination of many arts and his notion of continuous music ("endless melody") strongly influenced later composers.