

THE ROMANTIC ERA

VOCAL SECTION

The Romantic Era brought further changes in the world of vocal music. *Oratorios* and choral music were semi-important vocal forms of the time, while the art song was by far the most important.

Art Song

The *art song* became its own special category of vocal music - separate from folk song, operatic aria, and popular song. It was very lyrical. Composers made great strides during this time period to closely associate the text or words of a piece with its musical counterpart.

Melody

The art song was poetic in nature, and its tones were more lyrical than the dramatic tones of an opera. An art song would turn written poetry into something tangible that could be emotionalized through its music. Its goal was to turn specific words or phrases into a musical scene.

Accompaniment

The piano helped to add more emotion into the Romantic art song. The accompaniment enhanced the mood and meaning of the text by harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic material independent of the voice part. It also provided harmonic and melodic support to the voice. It also served to punctuate the poetic form by interludes between stanzas and lines of the poem.

Form

Poetic structure is responsible for the musical form of a song. Two basic forms are *through-composed* form and *strophic* form. Through-composed form is different for each stanza and the music closely follows changing ideas and moods in the poem. In strophic form, each stanza of the poem is set to the same music, whereas modified strophic form involves consecutive stanzas playing modified versions of the same music. There are other musical forms that are partly strophic, where some stanzas have the same music, while others have different music.

Song Cycle

The song cycle is a group of poems by one poet set to music by a composer. The song cycle has a central idea or mood.

ORATORIO

The oratorio was not the main focus of the romantic era. Composers concentrated more on opera and solo song. However, some composers wrote oratorios. Felix Mendelssohn was a notable composer of oratorio. His famous oratorios are St. Paul and Elijah.

OTHER RELIGIOUS CHORAL MUSIC

Church music had reached the height of its popularity in the past and was not a main form of music in the Romantic era. The differentiation between an oratorio and other religious music lay within the text, instead of within formal and stylistic factors. Liturgical texts and psalms were set to music more often as festival works for concert performance than as functional church music. Romantic church music was like an oratorio as it employed large choruses, an orchestra, and solo voices. Differing from the oratorio, church music of the time did not have a narrator or make use of a recitative.

SECULAR CHORAL MUSIC

Secular choral music partly gained its popularity in the Romantic Era due to an increase in nationalism and an increasing interest in folk song. Choral pieces of the time ranged from unaccompanied part songs to [*cantata*](#) like works with solo voices and orchestras. Choral elements were also used in a number of symphonic works by the great composers of the era.