In the second half of the nineteenth century, composers confronted a number of contradictory ideas about the arts and music. The failure of the 1848 revolutions in France, Italy, and a number of German states symbolized to many people the failure of the Romantic ideals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Literature and the arts were shifting to realism in style and subject matter, and the era of industrialization and modernization was quickly becoming a reality. As a result, composers of the mid-1800s were left with the task of creating a musical language and style befitting the new cultural climate. During this time of uncertainty and change, composers often felt torn between two conflicting emotions. They were inclined to idealize the past and yearn for a simpler time, yet they also felt excitement for the burgeoning era of progress and industrialization. Most composers of this era preferred to follow their own aesthetic inclinations rather than to strictly ascribe with any one stylistic pathway, and because of this music composed in the mid-to-late 1800s exhibits more diversity than music produced by previous generations of composers. In addition, a number of notable composers, such as Felix Mendelssohn, Frédéric François Chopin, and Robert Schumann, died in the mid-1800s, which greatly impacted the musical landscape of the second half of the century.

One of the most visible debates in Romantic musical aesthetics regarded the type of music to possess the highest music artistry and expressiveness. There were those who favored purely instrumental music such as symphonies or concertos, while others believed that music was enhanced when fused with literary elements. In light of this debate, Hungarian-born composer and piano virtuoso Franz Liszt, along with German composer Richard Wagner and French composer Hector Berlioz, created in the 1850s a progressive faction of composers known as the New German school that championed music's association with literary elements and opposed the Classicism of most Viennese composers. The New German school created three new musical genres: a multimovement composition associated with a story or poem called the program symphony (Berlioz), a one-movement, programmatic orchestral genre composed in free musical form called the symphonic poem (Liszt); and the music drama (Wagner), an idiom in which music, poetry, drama, and stagecraft all serve to enhance the dramatic work as a whole. In each of these genres the New German school created new approaches to composing large musical forms that involved thematic transformation, nontraditional modulation, and principles of cyclic unity. Late-nineteenth-century works that typify these principles include Liszt's programmatic "Faust" Symphony and his twelve symphonic poems such as Le prélude, Prometheus, Héroïde funèbre, and Hamlet; Wagner's music dramas Tristan and Isolde and Der Ring des Nibelungen (The Ring of the Nibelung), a four-opera cycle based on Norse mythology comprised of Das Rheingold (The Rhine Gold), Die Walküre (The Valkyrie), Siegfried, and Götterdämmerung (The Twilight of the Gods).

German composer Johannes Brahms differed from many of the composers of the late nineteenth century with his outspoken opposition to the New German school. Brahms had a high regard for the forms and materials seen in the works of great classical composers such as Ludwig von Beethoven, Franz Joseph Haydn, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and his traditional yet innovative string quartets, symphonies, and concertos enjoyed great success. Brahms left a massive impact upon composers of the early twentieth century with his most famous works, including his German Requiem and Symphonies 1–4.

Austrian composer Anton Bruckner was much less of a neotraditionalist than Brahms, as he agreed with some of the ideals of the New German school, but he too looked to the works of...
classical and Romantic composers for inspiration. Considered one of the most innovative composers of the second half of the nineteenth century, Bruckner is remembered primarily for his symphonies, vocal works, and sacred compositions.

Later German and Austrian composers Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, and Hugo Wolf struggled with the conflict and uncertainty that existed in music at the end of the nineteenth century. Strauss wrote symphonic poems such as Don Juan as well as conservative instrumental works, while Wolf and Mahler are remembered primarily for their songs, but Mahler also earned great acclaim for his orchestral works. Although Mahler, Strauss, and Wolf each exhibited some element of traditionalism in their work, their compositions were also quite innovative, and further challenged the boundaries of tone, harmony, and orchestration in late-nineteenth-century music.

In opera, Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi was the dominant figure in Italy after 1850, writing such as La Traviata, Un ballo in maschera, and Don Carlos, all of which became highly successful operas and gave him international success. In his later operas, such as Aida and Otello, Verdi treated tonality and chromaticism much more freely than in his previous works. Verdi was succeeded by Giacomo Puccini, an Italian composer who produced two operas at the end of the nineteenth century: La Bohème (1896) and Tosca (1900), works that successfully fused lyric opera with elements from the emerging Italian operatic idiom called verismo. In late-nineteenth-century France opera was shifting from the spectacle and pomp of grand opera to opera lyrique, a genre that focused on love stories drawn from literature. Works in this vein include Carmen by Georges Bizet, Roméo et Juliette by Charles Gounod, and Manon by Jules Massenet.

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century nationalism was a prominent element in many musical works produced by European composers. Nationalism was incorporated into music primarily through the use of national and folk music elements, as heard in Liszt’s Hungarian-tinged Missa Solemnis, or through the use of national elements for the subject of a composition, such as in the opera The Bartered Bride by Czech composer Bedřich Smetana, a work based on a folk story of peasant life in Bohemia. Other notable Czech composers who wrote nationalist music include Antonín Dvořák and Leoš Janáček. Nationalism was a prevalent feature in works of many late-nineteenth-century Russian composers, including Mily Balakirev, Alexander Borodin, César Cui, Modest Musorgsky, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, a group who banded together as the "mighty handful" in an effort to create a distinctly Russian school of music. Not all Russian composers chose to incorporate nationalist elements into their music, but instead composed programmatic or absolute Romantic music, a faction that included Anton Rubinstein, Alexander Scriabin, and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, who composed highly acclaimed symphonies, ballets, and orchestral fantasias.

Music composition at the end of the nineteenth century was dramatically different in harmonic organization, tonal conceptualization, and musical form than works composed at the beginning of the century. During the Romantic era, composers had experimented with every facet of musical composition, and by the end of the nineteenth century it seemed that composers had pushed the limits of musical form to the extent that the ideals and aesthetics created at the beginning of the Romantic era were no longer appropriate for applications in new compositions. The modern era emerged in the early twentieth century, and in this age, composers such as Claude Debussy, Gustav Mahler, Alexander Nicolayevich Scriabin, and Richard Strauss seeking to compose works of distinction were forced to develop a new musical language that befitted the changing times.

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See also Berlioz, Hector; Gounod, Charles; Liszt, Franz; Verdi, Giuseppe; Wagner, Richard

Bibliography

**MUSSET, (LOUIS-CHARLES-) ALFRED DE 1810–1857**

French playwright and poet

Time and changing literary fashions have not dealt kindly with Alfred de Musset, and, paradoxically, one of the most striking figures in French Romanticism is now valued mainly for a dramatic work that was not highly appreciated in his own days. Belonging, like Alphonse Marie-Louis de Lamartine and Alfred Victor de Vigny, to an aristocratic family, Musset was born in 1810; when he made his appearance in Parisian literary circles he was welcomed by writers who were conscious that they had been the pioneers of French Romanticism. Though a little apprehensive of a potential rival, Victor Hugo, for instance, invited him to his receptions in his house in the rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, and the strikingly handsome young man made a great impression. He appeared to possess the Romantic temperament to the full. As early as 1828 he brought out a free translation of Thomas De Quincey's Confessions of an Opium Eater. It was followed just two years later by his Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie.