Romanticism was a cultural movement that stressed emotion, imagination, and individualism. A romantic explored inner life and was drawn to the realm of fantasy. Tales of horror and the supernatural were common, and during this time many artists such as the romantic poets were influenced by opium. Literary icons of the time included William Wordsworth, Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, Walter Scott, Victor Hugo, and Charles Dickens. Some visual artists included Francisco Goya and Eugene Delacroix. Some significant romantic musicians included Franz Schubert, Robert and Clara Wieck Schumann, Frederic Chopin, Franz Listz, Felix Mendelssohn, Hector Berlioz, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Johannes Brahams, Giuseppe Verdi, and Richard Wagner (this is a very shortened list).

Characteristics of Romantic Music
There was an emphasis on self-expression known as individuality of style. Composers had very expressive aims and subjects as well. All aspects of nature attracted romantic musicians. Subjects were often drawn from the Middle Ages and from Shakespeare’s plays. Nationalism and exoticism were also very common in romantic music. Nationalism was expressed when romantic composers deliberately created music with a specific national identity. They used folk songs, dances, legends, etc. of their own homelands. Exoticism was the trend of composers drawing on materials from foreign lands. An example is Carmen, an opera set in Spain, written by French composer Georges Bizet. Program music is instrumental music associated with a story, poem, idea, or scene. As compared to earlier eras in music, romantic composers tended to use more expressive tone color to obtain a variety of mood and atmosphere. Toward the end of the romantic era, an orchestra might have 100 members, with the brass, woodwinds, and percussion taking on a more active role. Several new instruments were added to the orchestra as well. The range of dynamics, pitch and tempo tended to be expanded, too. Rubato, the holding back or pressing forward of tempo, was often used by performers. There was a very wide range of forms in the romantic era as well. There were smaller pieces, lasting only a few minutes, intended for performance in the home or some other intimate place. These forms were considered “miniature.” Monumental pieces, huge works intended for large concert halls or opera houses, were also being written in the romantic era.

Romantic Composers and Their Public
Inspired by Beethoven, musicians began living as “free artists,” writing music to fulfill an inner need rather than for a commission. Many musicians became free artists by necessity, due to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Aristocrats could no longer afford to maintain their opera houses or their musicians. Romantic composers began writing for a middle class audience. This led to the formation of many orchestras and opera groups such as the London Philharmonic Society (1813), the Paris Societe des Concerts du Conservatoire (1828), the Vienna Philharmonische Conzerte (1842), and the
New York Philharmonic (1842). Music conservatories were also being founded throughout Europe and in larger cities of the United States (including Chicago, Cleveland, Boston, Oberlin, and Philadelphia). Musicians also began touring to make a living, giving solo concerts in several cities. Two of the first musicians to “tour” were pianist Franz Liszt and violinist Niccolo Paganini. Another new thing was that music making increased in the homes of the middle class. Piano became a fixture in nearly every home.

The Art Song
An art song is a composition for solo voice and piano. They were originally written to be sung in the home, but they are performed in concert halls today. Art songs were basically poems set to music. Poets favored by romantic composers included Goethe and Heine. The German word Lied (song) is used in reference to a song with a German text. The mood of an art song is set by an introduction by the piano, and it is summed up at the end by the piano with a postlude.

Strophic and Through-Composed Form
Strophic form repeats the same music for each stanza of a poem, making a song easy to remember. In through-composed form, new music is written for each stanza of the poem, allowing the music to reflect a poem’s changing moods. A three stanza poem may be set with the first and third stanzas having the same music, but different music for the second stanza (A B A). This is called modified strophic form. A song cycle is a set of romantic art songs unified by either a story line that runs through the poems or by musical ideas linking songs.

Franz Schubert (1797 - 1828) was the earliest master of the romantic art song. He made his living strictly by composition. His first great song was Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel, composed at age 17. The following year, he composed 143 songs, including one of his most famous, The Erlking. Besides art songs, he composed symphonies, operas, masses, sonatas, string quartets, and other chamber music. He was thought of mainly as a song writer until several years after his death (at age 31), when his “Unfinished” Symphony was performed. We will listen to Erlkonig (The Erlking, 1815) in class. It is a musical setting of a narrative ballad of the supernatural by Goethe.

Robert Schumann (1810 - 1856) was born in Zwickau, Germany. He studied law, but he devoted himself to music and literature. He wanted to be a piano virtuoso but had a problem with his right hand. The problem only worsened when he attempted to correct it by wearing a gadget that he had made that was intended to strengthen his fingers. He met his future wife, Clara Wieck, while studying piano with her father. She was also a musician and composer. In addition to founding and editing the New Journal of Music, which contained reviews of young composers, he composed piano pieces, art songs, symphonies, and chamber music. His art songs and piano pieces were usually organized in sets or cycles. One such cycle is Carnaval, 21 brief pieces with descriptive titles evoking a festive masked ball.

Clara Wieck Schumann (1819 - 1896) was a leading 19th century pianist. She was an
acclaimed child prodigy, and as an adult, she premiered many of her husband’s works. She continued composing and performing while caring for her husband and their seven children. She stopped composing when she was 36. Until then, she composed songs, piano pieces, a piano concerto, a piano trio, and three Romances for violin and piano. She was also left to care for their children after Robert was committed to an asylum after trying to commit suicide by drowning in a nearby creek. In class, we will listen to her Romance in g minor for Violin and Piano, Op. 22, No. 2.

Frederic Chopin (1810 - 1849) wrote almost exclusively for the piano. He was the son of a Polish mother and a French father, and he earned a good living by teaching piano to the daughters of wealthy families in Paris. We will listen to two of his pieces in class: Nocturne in E Flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2 and Etude in c minor (Revolutionary), Op. 10 No. 12. A nocturne (night piece) is a slow, lyrical, intimate composition for the piano. An etude is a study piece.

Franz Liszt (1811 - 1886) was a Hungarian pianist and composer. He was considered very handsome and was known for his incredible showmanship. He studied in Vienna at age 11 where he met Schubert and Beethoven; then during his teens, he lived in Paris. He was greatly influenced by the violinist, Paganini, who inspired him to become possible the greatest pianist of his time. At age 36, he ended his career as a traveling virtuoso to become court conductor in Weimar. He conducted music by his contemporaries and composed many orchestral pieces. In 1861, he went to Rome for religious studies where he composed masses and oratorios. Later in life, he began experimental piano pieces that foreshadowed some features of twentieth century music. Characteristics of his piano music include daring leaps, rapid octaves and runs, and an unprecedented range of dynamics. He created the symphonic poem, or tone poem, a one movement orchestral composition based on literary or pictorial ideas. He was inspired by the works of Goethe and Dante, and much of his music is concerned with the devil and death. He influenced many composers, including Wagner.

Nicolo Paganini (1782 - 1840) was an Italian violinist and composer. He was considered by many to be the greatest violinist of all time. He first studied music with his father, then with some of the best instructors in Genoa (his place of birth). He began performing in public in 1790, and in 1795, he went to Parma, Italy to study, but the teachers there told him they could do nothing more for him. In 1797, he started his concert tours, and in 1809, he became a freelance soloist performing his own music. In early 1828, he began a six and a half year tour that started in Vienna and ended in Paris in September 1834. Throughout his life he was plagued by “lucky agonies” such as Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, marked by excessive flexibility of the joints. This enabled him to perform the amazing feats such as double stops that made him famous. Apparently, his wrist was so loose that he could move and twist it in all directions. This allowed his hand could double its reach and play in the first three positions on the violin without shifting. His virtuosity on the violin tends to overshadow his compositions. He wrote most of the music for his own performances, music so difficult that it was rumored that he had a pact with the devil. His compositions include 24 Caprices for unaccompanied violin - among the most difficult works ever written for the instrument.
**Felix Mendelssohn** (1809 - 1847) was a German composer born to a wealthy, distinguished Jewish family (though he was raised Protestant). By age nine, he was a brilliant pianist. By 13, he had written symphonies and other large orchestral and vocal works. At age 20, he conducted Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* - the first performance of this work since Bach’s death. This sparked renewed interest in Bach’s music and earned Mendelssohn an international reputation. He founded the Leipzig Conservatory at age 33 and died of a stroke at age 38. His music evokes many moods but avoids extreme emotions. Much of his music conveys an elfin quality with its rapid, light movement. He wrote in all forms of music except opera, but only a few of his pieces are popular today, including *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in e minor, Op. 64, Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Hebrides* overtures, the *Italian* and *Scottish* symphonies, the oratorio *Elijah*, and several chamber works.

**Program music** is instrumental music associated with a story, poem, idea, or scene. It depicts emotions, characters and events, or the sounds and motions of nature. The music can also imitate sounds such as bird songs, bells, thunder, wind, etc. The forms for program music can be like those of non-program music (sometimes referred to as absolute music), such as rondo, fugue, sonata form, etc. A *program symphony* is in several movements, each movement usually having a descriptive title (example: Berlioz’s *Fantastic Symphony* has 5 movements: 1) Reveries, Passions; 2) A Ball; 3) Scene in the Country; 4) March to the Scaffold; 5) Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath). A *concert overture* has one movement, usually in sonata form. A *symphonic poem, or tone poem*, is in one movement and can take any of the traditional forms as well as irregular forms. Examples include *Les Preludes* by Liszt, *Don Juan* and *Till Eulenspiegel* by R. Strauss, and *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* by Dukas. *Incidental music* is performed during a play, much like movie music of today. An example is *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by Mendelssohn which includes the famous *Wedding March*.

**Hector Berlioz** (1803 - 1869) was one of the first French romantic composers. His father sent him to Paris to study medicine, but he ended up studying music at the Paris Conservatory. His most famous piece, the *Symphonie fantastique* (*Fantastic Symphony*, 1830) was written for Harriet Smithson, a Shakespearean actress with whom he was in love. Due to his depiction of the weird and diabolical in his music, he had a hard time getting his works performed, and he often financed his own concerts. After 1840, he was in demand throughout Europe, conducting his own music as well as the music of others. The melodies in his works are often long, irregular, and asymmetrical, taking unexpected turns. Most of his works are for orchestra or orchestra with chorus and vocal soloists. All were dramatic and programmatic. *Idee fixe*, or *fixed idea*, was his method of using a single melody to represent one thing in a piece of music. In Symphonie Fantastique, it represented the “beloved” (Harriet Smithson) and appears in all five movements.

**Nationalism** influenced romantic music, and many composers gave their works a distinctive national identity. Nationalistic composers wrote operas and program music inspired by the history, legends, and landscapes of their native lands. There were
nationalistic composers throughout Europe (Scandinavia - Grieg and Sibelius; Bohemia which became part of Czechoslovakia - Smetana and Dvorak; Russia - Glinka as well as the “Russian Five” which includes Balakirev, Cui, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Mussorgsky). Nationalism also had an impact on the United States with composers such as Louis Moreau Gottschalk (New Orleans) and Edward MacDowell. We will listen to a couple of nationalistic pieces in class, including The Moldau by Bedrich Smetana.

**Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky** (1840 - 1893) was quite possibly the most famous Russian composer ever. He began studying music theory at the age of 21 with rapid progress. After graduating from the St. Petersburg Conservatory, he became the professor of harmony at the Moscow Conservatory and began composing furiously, quickly writing a tone poem, an opera, a symphony, and his first great orchestral work, Romeo and Juliet. In 1877, he married and after two weeks of marriage, he attempted suicide. Apparently he had difficulty coming to terms with his homosexuality. He had a nervous breakdown, and in the same year acquired a wealthy benefactress (Nadezdha von Meck) whom he never met in person. They communicated through letters only. She gave him an annuity that allowed him to devote himself only to composition. Fourteen years later, she cut off the annuity and stopped writing to him. Although he was distraught from losing his benefactress, Tchaikovsky achieved great success conducting his own works. But in spite of his successes, he remained a troubled man and died at the age of 53. Besides his famous symphonies (Nos. 4, 5, 6), piano concerto (No. 1 in B Flat), violin concerto, and Romeo and Juliet, he wrote scores for ballet, including Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty, and The Nutcracker. He also wrote eight operas and two orchestral showpieces (Marche slave and Overture 1812).

Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897) was a German composer who at age 13, studied piano, music theory, and composition by day, and played dance music for prostitutes and their clients at bars by night. he met Robert and Clara Schumann on his first concert tour (he was 20), and the three of them became close friends. Brahms helped Clara take care of her seven children when Robert was committed to an asylum after attempting to drown himself. Brahms wrote in all traditional forma except opera: four symphonies, two piano, one violin, and one violin and cello concerto, piano pieces, over 200 songs, choral music (German Requiem - most famous), and chamber pieces. His music is generally melodic and very singable. It gives the feeling of security and solidity. We will listen to part of Symphony No. 4 in e minor and a few other selections in class.

**Giuseppe Verdi** (1813 - 1901) was possible the most popular of all opera composers. Born to a poor family in a small Italian village, he became very well known for operas such as Nabucco, Rigoletto, Il Trovatore, La Traviata, Aida, Otello, and Falstaff.

**Giacomo Puccini** (1858 - 1924) was an Italian composer who created some of the best loved operas including Manon Lescaut, La Boheme, Tosca, and Madame Butterfly. Turandot was completed by a friend after his death.

**Richard Wagner** (1813 - 1883) was a German composer born into a theatrical family.
During his early twenties, he conducted in small German theaters and wrote several operas. In 1839, he went to Paris, but his works were not performed. In 1842, he returned to Germany for the production of his opera *Rienzi*. It was successful and he was appointed conductor of the *Dresden Opera*. Another early opera of Wagner’s was *Lohengrin*. Some of the more well known pieces from this opera are *Elsa’s Procession to the Cathedral* and *The Bridal Chorus*. The first performance of this work was conducted by Franz Liszt. A set of four operas based on Nordic myth, known as *The Ring of the Nibelung*, occupied Wagner for 25 years. Due to unrest in Germany, he lived in Switzerland for nearly ten years where he did much of the writing for *The Ring*. His work on this set was interrupted for the composition of another opera, *Tristan and Isolde* (1857 - 1859). His next opera, *Tannhauser*, failed in Paris, but he was “rescued” by King Ludwig of Bavaria, an 18 year old fan of Wagner’s who put all the resources of the Munich Opera at his disposal. It was during this time that Wagner fell in love with Cosima von Bulow, daughter of Franz Liszt and wife of Wagner’s friend and favorite conductor, Hans von Bulow. She gave birth to two of Wagner’s children while she was still married to von Bulow, but shortly after Wagner’s first wife died, he married Cosima. A year after completing his last opera, *Parsifal*, he died in Venice at the age of 69.

Wagner is known for his use of brief recurrent musical themes called *leitmotifs*. These *leitmotifs* are usually associated with a person, an object, or a thought in the drama. He used it a great deal in *The Ring of the Nibelung*. I’ll point it out when we listen to an excerpt from *Die Walkure* (*The Valkyrie, 1856*), the second and most widely performed of the four music dramas in *The Ring*. 