Jurnal SENI MUSIK
Vol. 14, No. 2 Oktober 2022 page: 1 - 11
DOI: dx.doi.org/xx.xxxxxx/jsm.v1i1.xxx
P-ISSN: 1829-8990 E-ISSN: 2580-5371

The Concept of Classic-Romantic as One Entity in Western Music History

Mario Santoso
Universitas Pelita Harapan
mario.santoso@uph.edu

Abstract

Any periods of Western music history prior to 1720s – Antiquity, Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque – can be regarded as independent eras in essence, which are marked by a definable boundary that is clearly noticeable from one another; however, the term classicism and romanticism refer to one phenomenon that is essentially dependent to one another. The two eras cover one same period since they complement each other, which extends roughly from the years of 1720s to the first decade of the twentieth century. The purpose of this writing is to provide descriptive explanations of why the terms "classic" and "romantic" are two aspects of one – the same phenomenon, and of one same historical period.

Keywords: Classicism, Romanticism, Western Music History, Survey, Music

Introduction: "Classic" and "Romantic"

The periodization of Western music history is the result of scholar's careful analyses of two elements: first, analysis of a specific composer's styles and his works, for example, the individual styles of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750, Baroque), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791, "classic"), Frederic Chopin (1810-1849, "romantic"), Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971, twentieth century). Second, analysis of similar musical activities of numerous composers active within the same generation, for example, the common artistic writing of Mozart, Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), and young Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), who all reflected the same manner of stile galant (simplicity). Note that it was scholars who termed and developed the periodization of music historical periods. The composers living at that time-being surely were not aware of the current period they lived in since historical labels are applied after their existence.

Two of the most discussed, beloved, analyzed, and performed music among the historical periods are from the "classic" era and the "romantic" era, which cover the period of 1720s-1810s and 1810s-1850s respectively. One might ask a question whether Beethoven was a "classic" or a "romantic" composer; I find that the answer to the question is always varied, some would say

Received: 02/10/2022 Revised: 18/10/2022 Published: 31/10/2022

"classic" and the other would say "romantic; for me, Beethoven was both, depending on how we give definition and meaning to the words. Many scholars continue to consider the two periods as dependent to one another since they are two aspects of one same phenomenon and of one same historical period.

In terms of chronological perspective, the two terms cover one self-contained age of art and literature study (including music); in any art forms during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these two labels are used interchangeably. In terms of style, the two terms operate within one fundamental idea of structure and expression through their musical elements; therefore, neither term express any specific style in music as they constantly were merging into one. There was no distinct chronology of when they begin and end. Both terms were essentially developed by a younger generation of German and Austrian artists, who felt the need to such new direction of more profound and purposeful art – something pleasant with naturally contrasting elements rather than Baroque art music that focused on one subject – affect – being manipulated into complex and serious setting through a musical device called *fortspinnung* (spinning-out of the main material).

In the study of nineteenth century music historiography, the word "classic" refers to a new composition writing that begins around 1720s, from Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773) Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757), and the sons of Bach. Unlike the term "baroque," when and where the word "classic" was first used in European musical art cannot be determined whatsoever; moreover, scholars do not provide when the end of that period is because it cannot be strictly defined. What we know is that the word "classic" remains in use through the whole nineteenth century and far into the twentieth century, especially the neoclassic writing that flourished around 1910s-1950s when composers imitated or evoked pre-"romantic" styles, genres, and forms, in the wake of the World War I.

In literature, Friedrich Schiller (1788-1805) already used the expression "classic" while Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) used the expression of "romanticism." Heinrich Christoph Koch (1749-1816), a prominent music theorist in the late eighteenth century, in his Handwörterbuch [Dictionary] of 1807, wrote the expression entitled romantisch without discussing klassich. Among the confusions, Adelmo Damerini (1880-1976) – an Italian musicologist – in his book Classicismo e romanticism nella musica [Classicism and Romanticism in music], suggests the word "romantic" as follows,

> "First employed in music in André Grétry *Mémoires ou Essais* (1789) [Memoirs or Essays], and Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794) used it in *La Chronique de Paris* [the Paris Chronicle] in April 1, 1793 to characterize the music of Étinne Mehul (1763-1817)." (Damerini, 11).

Based on those documentations, to explain the definition of "classic" and "romantic" in literature study is not possible since it leads to countless misunderstandings and obscurities. The same impossibility happens when attempting to define the word in music; there is only approximate definition of the term. Rudolf Gerber (1899-1957) – a German musicologist – explained the two terms as the following:

> "Every definition must consider the 'classic' in its relation to the 'romantic,' since both these style concepts are basically one, being but two different refractions of the one concept of shaping. There is no 'classic' style period in the history of music, only a 'classic-romantic' one. Classic style means the perfect blending into esthetic form of the individually contradictory. The concept of perfection that comes to expression in this process results from complete self-reliance, total self-dependence of the creative spirit. Without this inner independence and self-generated sense of responsibility of the creative artist, a classic art is inconceivable." (Gerber, 656).

In classicism, the power of a subjective expression is neutralized through the clear structure of the work; while in romanticism, the power of individualism, although highlighted as the front line, is still within a fundamentally similar structure to the "classic" music, even in an expanded expression. In short, the two terms express such perfect blend between inner feeling and outward form, in which musical structure underlines the whole work of art, the passion of the artist, and the expression.

Concept of the term "Classic" and the Turn to the "Classic" Period

The term "classic" refers to Greek and Roman antiquity and the aesthetic value associated with it, including the concept of balance, proportion, clarity, and natural. Both audience and composer during mid-to-late eighteenth century valued these qualities in music. The word "classic" fundamentally implies neither a style period nor a distinct style since it embraces any phenomena and/or activity that can recur in any phases of history. Friedrich Blume (1893-1975), a German musicologist stated,

> "In German usage a musical work of art counts as 'classic' if it manages to intensify and epitomize in convincing statement and enduring shape the forces of expression and form at work in its own historical context." (Blume, 3).

Based on the definition by Blume, someone or something is called "classic" when it seems unsurpassable, and its impact remains lastingly effective. The designation of the term dates to the middle of the nineteenth century – around 1830s – the time when music historians began to see

eighteenth century music as a golden age that possessed enduring value, hence "classical." Following are some examples that the term "classic" does not define either a style or a time period:

1. Franz Schubert (1797-1828) is the "classic" exponent of the German art song – and justly so, while he lived during the "romantic" period; his works (symphonies, piano sonatas, art songs, and the list goes on) reflect the general attitude and expression of the romantic rather than the classic phase.
2. With similar justification, one can say that Pierluigi de Palestrina (c1525-1594) has for centuries been looked upon the "classic" exponent of (Catholic) church music, especially due to his unparalleled 104 number of the counter-reformation masses; nevertheless, Palestrina was active during late Renaissance era, not during 1720s-1810s as what many call the timeframe as the "classical period."
3. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) is the "classic" exponent of Lutheran Protestant church music since his sacred vocal works (especially the cantatas) gathered the influences from Martin Luther and those cantatas remained staple repertoires to the present time.
4. In jazz, the "classic" most influential figure of the first jazz functional genre, the New Orleans style, lived during the early twentieth century.

The span of 90 years between 1720 and 1810 is a good timeframe to describe the "classic" era, which starts from the turn to the classic period, in which various new music trends "attacked" the music of Johann Sebastian Bach due its complexity and artificiality (explained below). During 1770s, both Haydn and Mozart began to write a new style (*sturm und drang*); in 1810s, when Beethoven had completed all the major works of the middle "heroic" period. The "classic" era was largely represented by only three composers (Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven), who worked in Vienna over a period of no more than 40 years.

The turn to the "classic" period is not escapable from the eighteenth-century intellectual outlook that stressed the power of humanity by applying reasons to understand self-fulfillment. While philosophers wrote about the rights of the individual, musicians wrote about natural feeling and sensitivity, as described in Johann Adolf Scheibe (1708-1776) and his criticism on Bach's music for the "artificiality" and "confusion" that obscured "natural beauty." Johann Mattheson (1681-1754) also chastised Johann Sebastian Bach in 1725 by ridiculously mocking the cantata *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis* [I have a lot of distress], BWV 21 as follows:

> "I, I, I, I had much grief, I had much grief, in my heart, in my heart. I had much grief, etc., in my heart, etc., etc., I had much grief, etc. Sighs, tears, sorrow, anguish, sigh, tears, anxious, fear. (Crouch, 1998).

The main goal of musical art during mid-eighteenth century was deeply based on the ideas about nature; it was no longer concerned with the exaggerate emotions or mythic heroes or grand historical figures as in the baroque topics, but the feelings of ordinary lives. Bach's colleagues, including George Friedrich Handel (1685-1759), François Couperin (1668-1733), and Scarlatti already went into the new musical direction that highlighted simplicity and sensitivity. Hallmarks of classical style began to emerge in the 1720s with many different terms describing stylistically diverse music between 1720s-1770s:

1. Pre-classical, a somewhat negative connotation due to its unfortunate value judgment that suggests the music of that time was not yet up to the standards.
2. *Stile galant*, which emphasizes the sense of grace and elegance.
3. *Empfindsamer stil,* which means "sensibility."
4. *Sturm und drang* [storm and stress], which was first introduced in literature by Friedrich Maximilian Klinger (1752-1831).

Followings are the stylistically diverse music during the timeframe:

1. Opera reform, in which the age of enlightenment had such great impact since it reevaluated the overall plot of baroque opera; the audience increasingly distasted the opera and demanded new operatic art form that would have greater dramatic integrity.
2. *Drama giocoso* [playful drama], which was so important in the development of late eighteenth-century *opera buffa* [comic opera].
3. *Querelle des bouffons* [War of the actors and audience], the controversial drama between French audience at that time regarding the Italian influence into French's Lullian opera.
4. Italian operatic overture, which is the counterpart to the famous Baroque French overture; the genre was important in becoming early Italian symphony since it bears three sections.
5. French *clavecin* [harpsichord] music, especially in the hand of Couperin and Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) with the writing of *ordre* [suite].
6. German instrumental music, especially sonata of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788).
7. Italian keyboard sonata, in which Scarlatti came into prominence with his 500 one-movement sonatas.
8. Early classic symphony, with equal developments in Italy, Germany, and Austria.

The discussion of music during "classic" era includes two main topics:

1. Instrumental music, in which composers of instrumental music working in the second half of the late eighteenth century developed a variety of genres and forms that would remain in

use until the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries. They wrote genres including symphony, concerto, chamber music (the "serious" format and outdoor music, described by Haydn), instrumental sonata, and organ music.

2. Vocal music, which includes opera that retained its traditional position of supremacy; art song, which would greatly contribute to the development of the genre in the nineteenth century; and vocal sacred music.

The Beginnings of the "Romantic" Style in Music

The adjective "romantic" and the noun "romanticism" have been used since the beginning of the nineteenth century to describe music of that time without a clear definition; even until the present time, those two words are still doubtful whether they explain a specific style, a technique, or a general artistic perspective. Blume described the adjective "romantic" as follows:

> "The adjective 'romantic' was used in eighteenth century literature in the sense of 'romance-like,' 'narrative.' In music, too, the adjectival form seems to have been the earlier, and for a long time one still described things as 'romantic' rather than attributing 'romanticism' to them. Use of the form to refer to a time, a manner, or an individual working in these did not become general in music until E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822." (Blume, 95).

The term "romantic" refers to the word "romance" in literature; unlike other literary forms, it is free from any structural conventions that values imagination and personal expression. Such concepts as "romantic opera" or "romantic art song" were not acknowledged until later in the nineteenth century, which was first introduced by the later study of musical historiography to designate comprehensive historical groups. In the early use, the term "romantic" was to indicate a specific content or a character; for example, Schiller called his *Jungfrau von Orléans* [Virgin of Orleans, 1802) a "romantic tragedy," while Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) called his *Freischütz* [Freeshooter, 1820) a "romantic opera."

It is uncertain when both terms began to be associated or used in music with any types or titles of compositions. Like the term "classic," the term "romantic" does not imply a definite style whatsoever. In the decade between 1790 and 1800 the question of romanticism was countless times referred to in literature as well as in music; and around 1800 German poets were stood in romantic ideas, for examples:

1. Jean Paul (1763-1825) in *Hesperus* (1795), *Flegeljahre* [Adolescence, 1804].
2. Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) in *Lucinde* in 1799, and *Fragmente* of 1800.

3. E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) in Ritter Gluck (1809).
4. Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853) published a small book describing the ideas and the vocabulary of romanticism.
5. Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773-1798) in *Herzensergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* [the Outpourings of the Heart of an Art-Loving Cloister-Brother], and *Das merkwürdige musikalische Leben des Tonkünstlers Josepg Berglinger* [the Remarkable Musical Life of Joseph Berglinger].

The examples above show that many artists contributed to shaping the language, ideas, and images of the term "romantic." It was the writing by Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart (1730-1791) in his writing *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* [Ideas on an Esthetic of Music, 1806] contains the essence of the entire Romantic perspectives on music and influenced many artists, including Jean Paul and Hoffmann.

Musical romanticism began simultaneously with literary romanticism during the late eighteenth century, and then broadened in the following decades. All the basic features of "romantic" thinking about music are present starting around 1800. Heinrich Christoph Koch (1749-1816), in his Dictionary of 1807, wrote, "Thus it is the character of the unusual, the great, and the adventurous, embellished by charm, that determines the nature of romanticism." Julius Becker (1811-1859) in his novel *Die Neuromantiker* (1839) expressly traces a "new romantic school to Beethoven's late works." (Scherring, 1949).

Composers of the nineteenth century similarly wrote the same genres with composers of the eighteenth century; the differences locate in how they treated and developed the musical elements by writing highly personal expression and exaggerating sentiments, along with extravagant passion. Followings are the list of personal expressions that differ from the eighteenth-century music:

Categories	**"Classic"**	**"Romantic"**
The "art of natural"	Logic everyday life.	Fantasy and imagination.
	Reasons and logic.	Inner emotional life.
Scope	Universalism.	Exoticism, nationalism, individualism.
Religion	Not a main idea – enlightenment.	The concept of life/death, salvation/hereafter.
Typical operatic topic	Love in the different social strata.	Longing love, filled with yearning, ecstasy, frustration, rejection, denial, despair.
Main musical elements	Emphasis on formal structure.	Emphasis on subjective and emotion.
	Pleasant, diverse, contrast.	Folk, exotic, dramatic exaggeration.
	Clear tonality.	Tonal expansion.
	Metered rhythm.	Stylized rhythm.
	The hero is still a vocalist.	The hero is an instrumental virtuoso.

Table 1. List of Personal Expression in "Classic" and "Romantic"

The discussion of music during "romantic" era includes seven main topics:

1. Orchestral music 1800-1850, in which the growing prestige of instrumental music in the early nineteenth century created new demands for all orchestral genres: symphony, concerto, and concert overture.
2. The rapid rise of piano and its development that became preferred by all musicians due to its expression and artistic quality.
3. Art songs, in which the development of the genre was so immense due to the rapid development of great poets and piano technology.
4. Chamber music, in which, although was still popular in the nineteenth century, however, the popularity declined rapidly, mostly was due to the rise of superstar virtuoso and soloistic nature.
5. Dramatic music (opera in the nineteenth century was designated as dramatic music), in which opera was still the pinnacle of the musical art form its combination between the drama (libretto), the music (score), and the visual arts (scenery and costumes).
6. Choral music, in which it declined greatly due to the growing importance of instrumental music and the ever-lucrative dramatic music.

7. Orchestral music 1850-1900, in which the civic orchestra became the predominant musical institution for orchestral music in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Five Reasons why Classic-Romantic is Essentially One

The first reason why classic-romantic is essential one era is because the two complement each other since they share the same musical genres, elements, and composition techniques. Composers working during 1720s to the early twentieth century wrote the following genres: symphony, instrumental sonata, instrumental concerto, various chamber music setting, art song, opera (or dramatic music as regarded in the nineteenth century), and sacred music. The differences locate in how they treat, develop, and expand the musical elements as time progressed, which can be summarized as described in the following table:

	Eighteenth century style	**Nineteenth century style**
Phrase structure; meter/rhythm	Arrangement in perfect periods combining two identical phrases most of the time, in an antecedent-consequent relationship. Metered rhythm was "universal."	Mostly similar with the eighteenth-century music; exotic dance rhythms appeared as early evidence of nationalism.
Harmony	Highly controlled dissonance and chromaticism; predominantly diatonic language.	A progressively more chromatic language with wider range of modulations.
Texture	Very clear melody and accompaniment in a predominantly homophonic texture.	Clear melody and accompaniment continue to be most common. Counterpoint is of interest only to a relatively small group of composers.
Melody	At least two thematic contrasting ideas with development of each was extended.	Consistent use of largely conjunct song-like melodies organized into long phrases.

Tabel 2 Differences Between 18th and 19th Century Style

The second reason why classic-romantic is essentially one era is that the terms "classic" and "romantic" are both adjectives, which means that they do not explain any specific music historical style or timeframe whatsoever; they recur in the most varied passages and phases of history. Remember that a musical work of art counts as "classic" only if it manages to intensify in convincing statement and enduring shape at work; and the adjective "romantic" was already used in eighteenth century literature in the sense of romance-like. The second reason immediately leads to the third reason, in which the two are used interchangeably; in literature, Schiller was already using the expression "classic," while Goethe applied it as a contrast to "romanticism."

The fourth reason why classic-romantic is essentially one era is that the two emphasize the same philosophy – the art of natural. Again, the aesthetic of the classic-romantic era is the ideas about being natural – a preference over the excessively artificial art, which became increasingly widespread, gave way to the simple and straightforward. The baroque musical works, which were associated with musical *Affekt,* became increasingly distasted. By the time Bach died, even his sons considered his music old-fashioned.

The fifth reason why classic-romantic is essentially one era is that the two balance the importance of structure and flexibility at the same time. One of the most fatal mistakes in approaching and interpreting "romantic" music is the excessive rubato with no proper balance. In fact, the metronome as we know today, the one that was devised by Johann Nepomuk Maelzel (1772-1838), came to existence around 1820s; as a result, nineteenth century composers were concerned about the importance of pulse, especially the music of Chopin, for example, Karol Mikuli (1821-1897), one of Chopin's finest pupils, stated the following:

> "His playing is measured, straightforward, and he always had a metronome on the piano. The feeling of individual note values was always preserved, whatever the temporary rhythmic displacement. The rhythm would fluctuate but never disturbed the underlying metrical pulse. His approach was too novel for anybody trained in the old school." (Eigeldinger, 40).

When music is not played with strong fundamental underlying pulse, the structure would be confusing since there would not be any clear direction. Interestingly, composers of the eighteenth century would be more flexible in pulse within very strong and clear overall structure of the music; while nineteenth century composers would be stricter in pulse, written in expansive forms that are similarly used in the previous century.

Conclusion

The "classic" and the "romantic" are involved and intermingled with each other in music much as they are in literature, with no possibility of precise separation between them. The two terms refer to two phenomena that depend and rather complement each other that they cover one same period, from the years of 1720s to the beginning of the twentieth century – from the sons of Bach to Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Bela Bartók.

To the "classicist," the goal is the perfection of structural order, in which they universally express emotion through naturally contrasting elements; while to the "romanticists," the goal is

not the highest coherent order, but rather beautiful poetic ecstasy, an art with the darker and more subjectively secretive language – an art that portrays human feelings in a superhuman virtuosic manner, a new art-religion that recues man from earthly longing and pain. The determining elements and factors of these two terms would be in the symbolic power of form and the individual spontaneity.

Classic-Romantic era in German music is a unity because in it the human being (the natural) and his/her life is the central; it values the shape of specifically human emotional stages as the meaning and content of the musical statement. The two terms describe the dualisms of law and freedom, of intellect and the senses, of wholeness and detail, of universally human and individually human.

References

Blume, F., & Norton, H. M. D. (1970). *Classic and Romantic Music: A Comprehensive Survey* (First Edition). W. W. Norton & Company.

Bonds, M. E. (2014). *History of music in western culture* (4th ed.). Pearson.

Crouch, S. (1998). *Ich hatte viel Bekümmerniss (I had much Sorrow)*. Classical Net. Retrieved August 16, 2022, from http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/works/bachjs/cantatas/021.php

Damerini, A. (1942). *Classicismo e romanticismo nella musica*. Monsalvato.

Eigeldinger, J.-J., Shohet, N., Osostowicz, K., & Howat, R. (2013). *Chopin: Pianist and teacher as seen by his pupils*. Cambridge University Press.

Gerber, R. (1949). *Klassisch und Romantisch. Die Sammlung*, *IV*(11), 656.

Rosenblum, S. P. (1988). *Performance practices in classic piano music*. Indiana University Press.

Schering, A. (1949). *Aus den Jugendjahren des musikalischen Neuromantik*. In *Vom musikalischen Kunstwerk* (p. 36-71).