

MAY FESTIVAL

Choral Music of the Romantic Period

"Dies irae" (Day of Wrath) from Requiem, by Hector Berlioz

The Romantic Period in music began to develop essentially between 1820 and 1830, and was losing influence by 1900. The emphasis of this period was on *expression*, and above all, *extremes* of expression. Performing groups could be extremely small (a solo singer with piano) or immense, as exemplified by the Berlioz requiem. Appearing in the earliest years of the Romantic Period (1830), it was a dramatic challenge to all music that had come before. In addition to the large chorus, it features a large orchestra that, for its time, was enormous. Beyond large numbers of string and wind players, the percussion section includes 16 timpani drums, 2 bass drums, 10 pairs of cymbals, and 4 tam-tams (large gongs). Then, surrounding the audience are 4 sets of brass bands, each consisting of 8-12 players. Berlioz was experimenting with "surround sound" 150 years before anyone used the phrase "home theater."

The music of the period abandoned simplicity in favor of complexity of rhythms, harmonies, and melodies, as well as extremes of dynamics.

The video represents a small excerpt of a work that can stretch nearly 1-1/2 hours in length. The conductor is Leonard Bernstein, one of the most important conductors of the 20th century. (Yes, this is the guy who wrote the music for *West Side Story*, and also for *Mass*, performed at the 2018 May Festival.)

[0:07](#) The chorus basses enter softly, while strings play "pianissimo" (*pp*).

[0:24](#) When sopranos and tenors enter, they are marked "*ppp*."

[0:44](#) There is an enormous crescendo, paving the way for the participation of the full orchestra, as well as the brass bands elsewhere in the cathedral.

[2:35](#) Over relatively few seconds, the music moves through C major, C minor, F minor, and Gb major, before returning home to Eb major.

Here are some videos of other choral music from later in the Romantic Period:

(Don't you like surprises? See what you find!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyuk9CizAwE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILO2tc07mqc>