

# In what ways did the ideals of romanticism infiltrate music criticism of the nine...

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Romanticism was always an important part of the musical revolution and this was made clear in the works of the great masters. One could take as a typical example, the music of Beethoven which Berlioz found entrancing and which he introduced several times into his own works. A great critic who analysed Beethoven's music to the letter was ETA Hoffmann whose description of the Fifth Symphony as a transition from darkness to light was one of the most important pieces of writing in the 19th century.

Nothing is more romantic than the music of Hector Berlioz. One almost cannot stop after starting but the most important of his works is undoubtedly the *Symphonie fantastique* which begins with a dreamy string part and some woodwind which undoubtedly caught the eye of the great composer Franz Liszt. Liszt transcribed the *Symphonie fantastique* for piano and although Berlioz's orchestration is incredibly vivid, the piano part is fantastic and otherworldly. Here we have all the romantic ideals interspersed into one huge work where music really becomes the centre of all artistic endeavours.

Liszt also wrote extensively about other works in the Berlioz canon such as the overtures which are full of incredible orchestration and palpitating beauty all around. In a sense overtures such as 'Waverley' and 'Rob Roy' espoused the romantic ideal of salvation from evil and the sense of a hero. Music criticism thus took on a different turn with the romanticised nature of the music fitting in quite perfectly with what was going on in the world outside. Liszt also came up with the symphonic poem himself, a concept which he copied from Berlioz who had come up with the first programme symphony.

Another work which undoubtedly impressed Liszt and which is romantic as

you may get is the brilliant 'Harold in Italy' programmatic symphony. Here Berlioz uses the viola as a sort of commentary against the backdrop of symphonic music which revels in the Italian landscape. Again we have to compare this style with what was going on at the time especially with the Grand Tours where Italy was a popular destination and which is quite significantly portrayed in the music of Berlioz. Liszt was very much enthused by this work which can be described as the true embodiment of the Romantic ideal.

Hoffmann's criticism of the Fifth symphony is important since it shed new light on the composer's definition of programmatic music. This could be understood as a new approach to music criticism where the sense of romantic feeling was much more to the fore than before. Hoffmann correctly identified certain purple passages in the music as the embodiment of romantic ideals which all culminate in full and unabashed glory.

What follows is a sample review of a concert which could have taken place in the 19th century with appraisal of some romantic works

The concert began with a rumbustious and highly volatile performance of Beethoven's Third Symphony, the 'Eroica'. Bernard Haitink is an excellent conductor and immediately, he set the pace for the symphony with incredible versatility. The opening movement sailed along quite well with the pressure points played with absolute perfection by the LSO who were consistently in command. The Funeral March was also beautifully done with the strings trembling accordingly and everything coming together rather beautifully. I also enjoyed the Scherzo and Finale with both movements excellently done and with the orchestra on true top form especially in the

Finale.

The concert then followed on with two works by Brahms, the Academic Festival Overture and the Alto rhapsody. The former received a jolly and volatile performance with Haitink whipping up the tempo to quite a frenzy towards the end and everything sounded very well indeed. The Alto Rhapsody featured contralto Bernarda Fink who sang the lovely words by Goethe with great poetic feeling and almost surreal intensity throughout, the effect was pretty magical and very moving with the LSO strings also joining in and sounding extremely harmonious throughout.

Finally we had the much vaunted 'London' symphony, Haydn's last numbered one in the genre which sounded very well indeed. Although the LSO is a modern instrument orchestra, everything sounded exactly as one should expect it and the players truly gave of their all especially in the outer movements. The slow introduction came through quite absorbingly and everything was carried out with a panache which was interestingly disarming on all counts.

The concert was a hugely enjoyable one in every department and one can only look forward to further efforts by Bernard Haitink and the LSO who can be described as one of the top partnerships of the moment now.

Instrumental music developed quite profoundly in the 18th Century especially through the music of Bach. Amongst the most important forms of musical development one can identify the fugue, the gavotte as well as the minuet. The 18th century also saw the development of the concerto grosso which also saw substantial changes across the same period which eventually developed into a symphony. Vivaldi perfected the art of the concerto with

several named works to that name especially the more famous one titled The Four Seasons where descriptive elements come to the fore consistently. The same could be said of the concertos which Bach wrote and which feature a number of stylistic differences which are also noticeable in for example, the Brandenburg Concertos.

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