

ANALYZING & COMPOSING IN THE ROMANTIC STYLE

Lesson plans by Joy Morin

OBJECTIVES:

- Teach four 50-minute class periods over four days, with a performance held on the fifth day.
- Develop a working knowledge of the Romantic Period stylistic characteristics.
- Utilize the concepts learned by composing a Class Composition for piano in the Romantic style (about 15-20 measures in length).
- Hear their Class Composition performed in a performance setting.

MATERIALS:

- Manuscript paper (at least 2 sheets per class per day)
- Large whiteboard
- Music notation software, such as Finale or Sibelius (optional)
- Colored pencils
- 2 small, handheld whiteboards
- dry erase markers and Kleenex (for whiteboards)
- accompanying handouts:
 1. Day 1: The Four Period of Music History
 2. Day 1: Prompts for Composing
 3. Day 2: Stylistic Traits of Romantic Music
 4. Day 3: Music and the Imagination

*Originally created for the
Stella Royce Music Camp 2009
Theory & Composition Class*

LESSON PLANS

DAY 1

1. Welcome the students to camp. Introduce yourself. Ask the students for their names.
2. **Introduction to the Romantic Period:** Pass out the handout, “The Four Periods of Music History.” Complete it together as a class in order to review the past two years’ camp themes (the Baroque & Classical Periods) and to introduce this year’s theme: the Romantic Period.
3. **The Compositional Process:** Discuss how the compositional process of composers changed from the Classical Period to the Romantic Period:
 - a. In the Classical Period, composers followed **forms** or **formal structures** when they composed (e.g., **sonata form**). It’s like a set of rules you have to follow in order for it to be called a sonata. Or, it’s like a puzzle: try to see what kind of amazing piece you can compose that still qualifies as a sonata. In addition, there were rules about handling dissonance.
 - b. In the Romantic Period, composers focused on creating music that described people, places, experiences, feelings, or emotions. They wanted to express themselves and share with others. Some composers still followed forms, however, like Chopin and his nocturnes, mazurkas, polonaises, and waltzes. But others structured their piece any way they wanted – as long as it sounded like whatever the composer wanted to be describing. This is called **programatic music** – music that tells a story. As far as harmony goes, Romantic composers began breaking all the rules and used dissonance in new ways (as we will see tomorrow).
4. **Explain the Class Composition project:** We are going to try composing programatic music just like the Romantic composers did. This week at piano camp, we’re going to compose a Class Composition together. We’ll work on it each day, and at the end of the week, our piece will be performed at the recital on Friday. (Either the instructor, an advanced student, or some other volunteer will be performing the piece.) Each of you will get to take home a copy of the composition. (We are aiming for 15-20 measures in length as a minimum.)
5. **Begin the Class Composition:** Hand out the “Prompts for Composing” handout. Read them the instructions and give them 3-5 minutes to quietly scan and circle the ideas they like. Then, come together as a class and ask students what were their favorite ideas. Write them on the board (not more than 10 if possible). Discuss, vote, and narrow it down to one idea.
6. **If there’s time:** Continue discussing the chosen theme for the Class Composition. Ask the students for ideas for how we can create some music to sound like their theme. Write down their ideas. If there’s still time, jump right in and start composing the beginning of the song (maybe a melodic idea, an introduction, or establish an ostinato figure, etc.).
 - a. NOTE: The composing should be done together on the whiteboard. Ask a volunteer/assistant (but not one of the students) to copy the notes from the whiteboard onto a piece of manuscript paper as you go, so that you have a hard copy to continue from the next day.

LESSON PLANS

DAY 2

1. **Harmonic Advancements of the Romantic Period:** Complete the “Stylistic Traits of Romantic Music” handout together (shouldn’t take long):
 - a. The dates of the Romantic Period are **1820** to **1900**.
 - b. Composers of the Romantic Period were very interested in composing **programatic music** – music that tells a story or is based on an idea.
 - c. Romantic composers often composed **character pieces** (piano pieces, often short, that are based on an idea) and **tone poems** (orchestral pieces that are based on an idea). Other common forms include concertos, dances, etudes, and variations.
 - d. Other Romantic Period characteristics:
 - i. Thicker **texture** – more layers of notes and fuller chords.
 - ii. More frequent and more distant **modulations** – switching to other keys during the piece.
 - iii. Increased use of the **pedal** on the piano.
 - iv. Increased use of **dissonance** to increase unpredictability.
 - v. Increased **chromaticism** – half-step motion.
 - e. Romantic Composers began using new chords, like **secondary dominants** and **diminished seventh** chords.
2. After completing the worksheet together, talk more about the new chords mentioned above.
 - a. **Briefly review the I, IV and V chords:** Ask for a volunteer to play the chord progression I, IV, V, I at the piano. Try drawing them out on the whiteboard together. Explain why the chords look different in root position from how we usually play it at the piano (fits your hand better).
 - b. Review the terms **tonic** and **dominant**. Romantic composers liked modulating to new keys frequently. To modulate to a new key, essentially you just need to have a V – I in the new key. This familiar progression establishes the new key in your ear.
 - c. **Secondary Functions:** When you have a **secondary dominant**, basically you are making a V of something. It’s almost like you are in a briefly in a different key than you actually are. Write out and play some examples.
 - d. **Diminished Sevenths:** Write out and play it on the piano for them to hear. Point out how dramatic they sound.
 - e. Briefly play a game: see if they can identify the new chords by ear.
 - f. For older students: Analyze a Romantic Period piano piece that contains secondary dominants and diminished seventh chords.
3. **Class Composition:** Continue where we left off yesterday, establishing ideas for creating the desired sounds. Work on getting a title, writing more melody, etc. Help students incorporate the new chords, just like the Romantic composers. Spend the rest of the time getting as far as you can on the composition. They will need a lot of your direction and help. Goal: have 10 measures or more sketched out (harmonies can always be filled in later.)

LESSON PLANS

DAY 3

1. **Review:** Ask the students for some of the major differences between Classical music and Romantic music. Try to quickly go over the following: Romantic Period dates (1820-1900), programatic music, character pieces, tone poems, chromaticism, modulations, secondary dominants, and diminished sevenths. Quickly write out the new chords on the board again if needed.
2. **Music and Inspiration:** Remember, Romantic composers were trying to describe/recreate places, events, experiences, smells, objects, people, etc. with their music. We are going to try to think like Romantic composers today.
 - a. Hand out the “Music and the Imagination“ handout. Distribute the colored pencils among the students. Now ask them to close their eyes as you read the instructions. Then they may open their eyes and draw or describe with words the scene they saw in their head. They should all be describing the theme they chose as a class for their Class Composition. Allow them no more than 7-10 minutes to work on their drawing/description. Then ask each student to share what they made with the class – simply holding it up and saying a few words about it.
 - b. Reiterate that this is how Romantic composers created their music: they were inspired by something, and did their best to recreate that scene by their music.
3. **Class Composition:** Spend the majority of class time today working on the Class Composition. Try to draw from the pictures/descriptions the students wrote as you compose. Encourage them to have specific moments in the music that describe specific moments in the story. You can even label these moments directly in the score! Remember, tomorrow is the last day to finish things up, so try to have things pretty much complete by the end of today. If it’s not shaping up as quickly as it should be, try skipping and writing an ending – then all there is left is to bridge it together. Also, just focus on having at least a melody line completed the whole way through. If needed, you can also fill in the harmonies for them outside of class time.
 - a. NOTE: It would be a good idea to begun entering the Class Composition into Finale or Sibelius software tonight, so that there won’t be as much to pull together tomorrow night. Plan to bring in a copy of what is completed so far to class tomorrow – the kids will be thrilled to see it!

LESSON PLANS

DAY 4

1. **Last Day of Theory & Comp Class!** Ask the students for feedback about camp: what did you like? What didn't you like? Are you enjoying creating our Class Composition together?
2. **Play a review game:** Divide students into two teams, and give each team a whiteboard, marker, and Kleenex. Whichever team writes the correct answer on the whiteboard first gets a point. Ask questions such as:
 - a. Name the dates of the Romantic Period dates.
 - b. Name the two new chords we talked about this week.
 - c. What is the name of the composer who is know for his character pieces?
 - d. Name two examples of character pieces that Chopin wrote.
 - e. Other terms: **programatic music, tone poems, modulations, chromaticism.**
3. **Finish the Class Composition:** The majority of class time today should be spent finishing the composition. If you are worried about finishing it in time, it's okay: it doesn't have to be a long piece, and if you have to, you [the instructor] can always fill in the missing pieces outside of class time tonight. Just be sure the essentials are there.
 - a. Be sure that the Class Composition has:
 - i. A programatic title. Decide whether the title will be announced to the audience before or after the piece is performed at the recital.
 - ii. Each student's name listed (and spelled correctly) as the composers.
 - iii. Descriptions labeling specific moments of the story in the score. (optional)
 - iv. A paragraph or a few sentences that introduce the piece. This will be read before/after (students' choice: do they want the audience to know anything about the piece in advance, or not?) the piece is played at the recital.
 - b. Make sure the students are proud of their hard work and of their end result. It's not easy to compose a piece of music in just 4 days. That might be pushing it even for the composers of the Romantic Period! Praise them for a job well done.
 - c. Make sure the students know that they should look for you after the performance to receive their own copy of their class composition. NOTE: tonight everything must be entered into music software, printed, and copies make. In addition, give a copy of the score to the person who will be playing the piece at the performance (yourself, an older student, or another volunteer).