

Climbing Jacob's Ladder In a Strange Land

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The Romantic Period in Europe:

The musical stylistic period that follows the European Classical Period is known as the Romantic Period of artistic creativity. The dates of that time period signature is 1825-1900. The music characteristics of this stylistic period is:

1. Composers become more independent in their musical thinking and compositional writing. They are not bounded by set rules of music theory, composition, and form and analysis influenced by the standards of classical period compositions.
2. Composers: Franz Schubert – Art Songs, Robert Schumann- piano compositions, Clara Schumann – concert pianist and composer, Frederic Chopin, National celebrity and composer of piano music, Franz Liszt, Johannes Brahms, Felix Mendelssohn, Opera composers – G. Verdi and Puccini, Hector Berlioz, many others, and most especially, the Czechoslovakian composer, Antonin Dvorak.
3. Composers write music based upon their inspirations and emotions.
4. Nationalism in music reflects a composers desire to highlight the folk melodies and songs that are representative of ones country.
5. Piano is a popular instrument
6. A re-discovery of music from the Middle Ages

It is important to note that the European Classical Period in music began according to musicologists in 1750 -1825. This time period of course highlights the contributions of such great composers as Josef Haydn (1732-1809 in Rohrau, Austria), who becomes known as the father of our Symphony orchestration and the String Quartet. Not that he founded these musical entities but he was skillfully creative in developing music themes and ideas that contributed to the unifying theoretical characteristics in music compositions such as repetitive melodies and harmonies in movements for sonatas, concertos, symphonies, string quartets, etc. Incidentally, he composed hundreds and hundreds of compositions in this 30 year careers. These musical forms are known as the Sonata Allegro form, Theme and Variations, Rondo, and Minuet and Trio. Its is Haydn's music that sets the fundamental standards of what is considered classical music.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) in Germany, who was a child musical prodigy, was a genius beginning at age 3 in which he composed sonatas, minuets, pianoforte compositions,

youth. Of course we know that he wrote many great symphonies. Both he and Haydn lived in the time period in which musicians who were employed either by the church, the court system meaning employed by a wealthy family, or the city government were considered servants.

Mozart rebelled at being considered a servant but such was the cultural standards in Europe

In 1770, Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany 1770 and died 1827. Beethoven is recognized even today in the 21st century as one of the greatest composers of symphonic and instrumental of all times. He composed many instrumental works, ie. Moonlight Sonata, String Quartet in??, and of course Symphony No. 5 in C Minor. He only composed 9 symphonies. He believed that music was more than just entertainment...that music could affect the humanistic qualities of life.

His musical characteristics were highlighted by repetitive melodic ideas that would change immediately into other ideas. Plus his music was very dramatic in that his melodies could sound very turbulent and then very serene. As a composer that lived in the latter period of the Classical stylistic period. He refused to be considered as a servant in his employed. Also, his music is based upon his senses and sensitivity at the time of writing. He would re-write many compositions over and over. Much different than Mozart who never re-wrote any composition over. Mozart felt that his works were already perfect from the beginning of the creative moments and therefore did not need to be re-written. It's important to note that Beethoven was becoming more hearing impaired while writing his 5th Symphony. The musical characteristics of Beethoven's musical contribution laid the foundation for the characteristics of The Romantic Period in the Arts.

National Social Phenomena in 19th Century America

1. America is slowly recovering from The Revolutionary War – gaining independence and developing her government
2. America is aware of The Napoleonic Wars
3. The Mexican American War – Texas, New Mexico, and California.
4. The structure and standards of The Constitution
5. The issue of Slavery
6. Emancipation Proclamation in 1863
7. The Civil War
8. Evolving from an Agricultural homeland to an industrialized nation
9. The Great Migration
10. Immigration of people to America from other countries
11. The development of Public Education
12. The founding of Historically black colleges and institutions
13. Westward Expansion
14. The Reconstruction Period
15. Democracy and Capitalism
16. The Suffrage Movement
17. The list can go on and on

The Status of Black People in America-late 19th century and early 20th century

After the abolition of slavery, people of color, who were enslaved and then became free either moved into the Northern cities of America or stayed in the places and towns in southern America and tried to survive. According to Bernice Johnson Reagon, founder of “Sweet Honor in the Rock” stated, “During the nineteenth century, being on your way out of slavery usually meant leaving a place to go to another place, covering geographical territory. You actually had to put distance between where you were and where you were headed. There is a story of triumph, terror, and betrayal that unfolds across the Southland between the time we call the year of Jubilee, which ended slavery. We had four million people changing status from slavery to freedom at the end of the Civil War. Four million black people trying to figure out what it meant to be free in devastated South. That in itself is a revolution. There were massive refugee efforts for Blacks and Whites who were displaced and destitute at the end of the Civil War. For the first time in the South the Reconstruction years brought schools for Black people and for Whites who could not afford to privately pay for their education.”

Reagon, further states, “We were not all naïve Black people walking into freedom during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Building our schools, building our churches, trying to find land to farm and jobs of any kind....and desperately reaching out—trying to find members of our families that had been sold away from us—we daily walked in danger. We had lived with these White people all our lives, and we knew how much they hated us free. But we worked, hoping that the federal troops would be enough to drive a wedge so we could establish a different life beyond slavery that would make freedom available to us”(Reagon, p 6-7). I know this to be true for the following institutions were established:

1. Diamond Hill Baptist Church – founded 1872 - 7 years after slavery was abolished
2. Court Street Baptist Church – founded (born out of 1st Baptist Church, still existing today on 11th and Court Streets). Court Street Baptist for black worshipers was established in 1833. Present building built in 1879.
3. Fisk University was founded – In 1865, 6 months after the end of the Civil War and two years after the Emancipation Proclamation, John Ogden, Rev. Erastus Cravath, Rev. Edward Smith established the Fisk School in Nashville, TN. January 1866 is the date of the first classes convening.
4. Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute was opened for classes on 1868. However, prior to the name of Hampton, the site and name of the school was Butler School for Negro Children- which later became Hampton Institute. Booker T. Washington was one of Hampton’s most famous graduates. Native Americans (70) also attended Hampton.

5. Virginia State College was founded in April 1882 – 17 years after slavery was abolished
6. Richmond Theological Institute in Richmond, VA was established in 1865 and Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C. was established in 1865. In 1899 both schools merged and thus Virginia Union University became established.
7. Oberlin College, in Oberlin, Ohio was established in 1833. As most of you know, Oberlin was the first American higher education institution to regularly admit female and black students in addition to white males.
8. The Oberlin Conservatory of Music was founded in 1865 in Oberlin, Ohio.
9. Columbia University was founded as Kings College in 1754. Columbia in the latter part of the 19th century opened its doors to black male students.

Growth and development of America's style of music:

America in the 19th century is a diverse country. The diversity is highlighted by the many forms of music that people who come to this young world and for those generations have lived in this nation either entertain themselves or others through the music expressions of their culture.

1. Bluegrass and country that derived out of the Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, western parts of North Carolina has its legacies in the Scottish, Irish and Gaelic tunes of Europe.
2. Songs of the West
3. Music of the Moravian people who settled in North Carolina and Pennsylvania. Their amateur music sounds like the Classical music of Germany in the 18th century.
4. Music of the Re-awakening Period, i.e. hymns – Amazing Grace, Nearer My God To thee, etc. White Spirituals.
5. Stephen Foster piano music, i.e. O Susanna, Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair.
6. Piano compositions by Louis Moreau Gottschalk
7. Delta Blues which originated out of Delta MISS. Signature instruments – guitar and harmonica. Such musicians as Robert Johnson, Charlie Patton, Son House.
8. Ragtime music
9. American Band music – John Phillip Sousa
10. Negro Spirituals
11. The foundations (commercialization, live entertain, people creating their own music) of Popular Music is set in the 19th century.

Antonin Dvorak

According to Eileen Southern, retired professor at Harvard University, in her book, *The Music of African Americans*, she states, "During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the United States entered upon a new era in its musical history. Symphony orchestras and major opera companies were established, an American school of composers emerged and promising developments took place in the area of music education. Professional orchestras were established in New York, Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati.

While black musicians were barred from participation in the activities of the symphony orchestras and opera companies, they were admitted to some of the music schools and conservatories. Moreover, a few black students enjoyed the patronage of such eminent musicians as the Bohemian composer Antonin Dvorak, from Chech Republic served as the director of the National Conservatory of Music (1841-1904) established in 1885 in New York for the training and education of music teachers. (Southern, p 266-267). She further states, "It was not until the decade of the 1890s, however, that a nationalistic school of music actually got under way in the United States. Antonin Dvorak started it all. Soon after he came to America as director of the National Conservatory in New York in 1892, he revealed his enthusiasm for the folk music of the land and called for the formation of an American school of composition.

Dvorak became particularly fond of one of his black students, Harry Burleigh, and spent many hours listening to him sing the folksongs of his people and discussing with him the possibilities for utilizing the folk music as the basis for composition. Within three months of his arrival, Dvorak had begun work on a symphony, *From the New World* (No.9) in E minor, that employed themes invented in the spirit of Negro and Indian folk melodies. Dvorak states, "I am now satisfied that the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the negro melodies. This must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States....These are the folk-songs of America, and your composers must turn to them....in the negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music. They are pathetic, tender, passionate, melancholy, solemn, religious, bold, merry, cheerful, or what you will." (Southern, p. 267)

Going Home....Singing

Robert Nathaniel Dett(1882-1943)

Vivian Flagg McBrier, who grew up in Lynchburg, VA as a young girl at 1320 Taylor Street. Graduate of Dunbar High School was a student of Nathaniel Dett at Hampton Institute. McBrier, while living, obtained her B.S. Degree from Elementary Education from Virginia State College. Later, she attended Hampton Institute becoming a student of Nathaniel Dett, thus receiving her B.S. Degree music performance.

At Dunbar High School, for a few years she taught choral and music appreciation. Later, she became a professor at D.C. Minor's College, later becoming known as D.C. Teacher's College, and presently District of Columbia University. Later, obtaining her doctorate at The Catholic University of America While there obtained Masters Degree in Music at Columbia University in New York.

In her book, entitled, R. Nathaniel Dett: His Life and Works (1882-1943), McBrier states" Robert Nathaniel Dett was a Black American composer, pianist, music-educator of the early twentieth century. The importance of Dr. Dett lies not only in his activities as a musician, but in his influence as a teacher and leader. His music which was dominated by the idiom of nineteenth century Romanticism, found considerable popularity during his life time. It must be recognized, also, that he was a competent craftsman utilizing successfully the Negro spiritual in conventional art-forms.

Robert Nathaniel Dett was born October 11, 1882 in Drummondville, Ontario, Canada, which has now been incorporated into Niagra Falls, Ontario. His mother was born also in Ontario, Canada. In the mid-nineteenth century, the communities of Drummondville and Niagara Falls, Ontario, had large black populations. Niagara Falls, New York was the termination of Harriet Tubman's underground railway for escaped slaves who crossed easily from the United States into Canada and freedom. It's probable that Dett's grandparents were escaped slaves.

Dett's parents operated a hotel in Niagra Falls, Ontario. His father also was a porter on the trailway system running from Montreal to Vancouver, British Columbia. As a young boy he studied piano under private teacher Austrian teacher, thus obtaining the influence of master composers, i.e. Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven(McBrier, p 9-11).

In 1903, Dett entered the Conservatory of Music at Oberlin College in Ohio. Incidentally, the decision to study at Oberlin was appropriate and wise as few colleges at that time admitted Black students and few could boast of so fine a Conservatory of Music. He was trained in his five years all of the basics of music theory, composition, performance, and history. (Which is still the basic foundation of a degree in most conservatories and colleges of music today. These basics are of the German, Italian music concentration.

At the time Dett was not at all interested in folk melodies of black people. His inspiration was drawn from the great European masters.

He graduated in 1908. His years of employment was at varied colleges throughout his lifetime beginning at Lane College in Tennessee, but most significantly at Hampton Institute(1913-1922) and later Bennett College for Women(1937-death), Greensboro, NC. While teaching he composed much piano compositions and melodies and taught students, and gave recitals throughout America. His teaching at Hampton Institute and Lane College did not contain him in the classroom, because he was constantly attending sessions and classes at other universities, i.e. Columbia University, Northwestern University in Evanston, ILL. (spent p summer studying music their during my high school years in the Music School at Northwestern) I was only one of 7 black students out of 250 students across America. The experience was musically amazing. Also, Dett spent 1920 at the University of Harvard as a student of Arthur Foote. Arthur Foote was an American classical composer. He was part of the Boston Six – George Chadwell, Amy Beach, John Knowles Paine, Edward McDowell, and Horatio Parker. These American composers were the new era of late 19th c and early 20th composers who integrated American folk tunes into what was considered classical music. They are the group that put America on board as part of her contribution to classically trained music with an American twist.

In 1914, Dett published “Listen to the Lambs”, which he referred to as “a religious characteristic in the form of anthem. This is his most popular choral composition. In discussing the anthem Dett stated:

“I recall that I wrote “Listen to the Lambs” out of a feeling that Negro people, especially the students of Hampton Institute where I was then teaching, should have something musically which would be peculiarly their own and yet which would bear comparison with the nationalist utterances of other peoples work in art forms.” (McBrier, 36). Nathaniel Dett was the first black composer, teacher, director to anthemize negro spirituals. He could compose brilliantly because he absorbed in the European style of writing but also keenly aware of the songs, triumphs/tribulations of his people.

Listen to the Lambs....Singing

The next generation of African American music composers born in the first twenty years of the twentieth century were students who had studied the European classical approach including the piano genre of music in their youth and showed exceptional talent and skill in their artistry. They were either children whose parents were wealthy professionals, i.e. teachers, higher education administrators, doctors, attorneys or financially challenged non-professionals and mostly un-schooled - such as farmers, porters, domestics, etc. Upon graduation from college their children either taught in historically black higher education institutions, in public schools or became music directors/organist/pianists in churches. They became instructors and composers of instrumental music, performers, or choral directors, arrangers.

According to Helen Walker Hill, author of *From Spirituals to Symphonies: African American Women Composers and Their Music*, stated, "Before and after the Civil War, black leaders along with black and white abolitionists and sympathizers worked to combat the doctrine of the genetic and inferiority of the Negro by publicizing black individuals who met European ideals of refinement and achievement by establishing self-improvement and literary clubs, and by promoting the philosophy of racial uplift. Women figured prominently in this movement" (Hill, p. 15).

Undine Smith Moore

Undine Smith Moore, who became known as The Dean of Black Women Composers was born 1904 in Jarrett, VA and later her family moved to Petersburg, VA in 1908. She started studying piano at the age of 7 and eventually through her growth and educational development graduated at the top of her class in 1926 at Fisk University. From 1929-1931 she commuted to New York to work on a Masters of Arts Degree and professional certificate at Columbia University Teacher's College. (I may also add that she was a student at Fisk University at the same time that our own Clarence W. Seay - outstanding Principal of Dunbar High School, Lynchburg, VA 1938-1968-attended...graduating in 1925).

According to Hill, "As a child Moore had experienced the Jim Crowism that barred blacks from theaters and all but the gallery of the Academy of Music. As she grew older, Moore recognized that a racist society "educated me to feel my 'otherness' ...left me ignorant of that which was accessible to me. She said, One of the most evil effects of racism in my time was the limits it placed upon the aspirations of blacks, so that though I have been making up and creating music all my life, in my childhood or even in college I would not have thought of calling myself a

composer or aspiring to be one. As for publication, she automatically assumed that it was out of the question for her as a black person. Later in life, these patterns would continue to condition her expectations, so that she never thought of submitting her Gilbert and Sullivan operetta editions for publication(although similar editions appeared some years later)., let alone her songs and instrumental music (Hill, p 61).”

Moore began teaching in 1927 at Virginia State College later becoming Virginia State University in Petersburg, VA until her retirement in 1972. Smith was deeply committed to teaching music courses to her students, being a guest pianist performer, guest lecturer at several colleges in her life- time, and a composer of instrumental and choral music in the Baroque and Classical Period genre. She especially embraced the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig van Beethoven. She was inspired by Nathaniel Dett, Harry T. Burleigh, her family, and Antonin Dvorak. Her music represents a strong melodic and harmonic intermingling of a European approach to Negro Spirituals.

In the 1950s, according to Hill, ... “Moore began to make more use of her African American musical heritage. ... (arranging and composing spirituals became a part of her musical expressions , “The power of things we heard when we did not know we were hearing, of the things we saw when we did not know we were seeing, is remarkable, a source of continuing wonder....Such things heard, and not heard, seen and not seen, are lodged deep within us....And the place where they are lodged is also the place from which our creativity comes(Hill, p 54).. Moore further states... “Both in my home life and in my life at Fisk University, I was surrounded by these great musical expressions of Afro-American people. As which is frequently the case, that which is extremely familiar to us may temporarily escape out attention as the subject matter of creative effort, Thus, my early compositions at Fisk and later at Columbia University did not reflect my background with spirituals. After completing a Master’s Degree, however, it suddenly dawned on me that the songs my mother sang while cooking dinner; the melodies my father hummed after work moved me deeply. I began to write down the melodies they sang for some vague, undefined reason(Hill, p 66} . Undine Smith Moore received numerous accolades and honorary degrees throughout as an inspiration to her students and other colleagues throughout the Twentieth century to Music. She referred to herself as a “teacher who composes rather than a composer who teaches”.

I Will Trust in the Lord and I'm Going Home....singing

Lena McLin

Lena McLin, born 1928 in Atlanta, Georgia-still living today is a composer and arranger of choral music and is also a choral director and educator. Lena came from a very strong religious and musical family in that her father was a Baptist pastor and her mother being a musician was his Minister of Music. Her mother's brother (McLin's uncle, Thomas A. Dorsey – is considered the Father of Gospel Music in the Twentieth Century. Dorsey is known for his compositions to name a few, Precious Lord Take My Hand, and I Am On the Battlefield for My Lord. Also, it's important to note that prior to creating gospel music, he was a blues musician in that he was Bessie Smith's pianist. Bessie Smith was historically popular in City Blues style in the early part of the twentieth century. If you ever listen to some ole Bessie Smith blues music that features a trombone and a piano, then...it's Lena McLin's uncle, Thomas A. Dorsey that you will hear on the recording.

McLin actually grew up in Chicago living with her uncle after he lost his wife and daughter in a car accident. She graduated from Spellman College, Atlanta, GA in 1951. She later studied music at the American Conservatory in Chicago, receiving her Masters of Arts Degree. Her career has mostly been a public school music teacher in Chicago for thirty six years. She also taught for a brief time at Virginia Union University in Richmond, VA. She was a member of the Music Educator's National Conference as a clinician and music consultant. Back in the mid- 1970s...I had a chance to meet her at a Music Conference and sat in on her music sessions. I was deeply amazed by her compositions and arranging because I had never met a female African American composer. My former high school teacher and mentor Mr. Robert Winfrey-- I knew was a composer but it was after he lived in Boston, MASS that his music was published.

Lena McLin is known as a renowned composer of cantatas, masses, solo and choral arrangements of spiritual, anthems, rock operas, soul songs, and works for piano and orchestra. Some of her former students are the R&B singer R. Kelley (credits her for saving his life off the streets of Chicago), Whitney Houston,

There is an extensive lists of African American composers that starts in the late Nineteenth century on into the early part of the Twentieth Century. There is a Lilian Evanti , who is recognized as the first African American female to sing with an Opera company back in the early part of the twentieth century. We have a copy of her music that was found in the Anne Spencer home a few months ago. This music recognizes that Evanti was also a composer and perhaps knew Anne Spencer.

According to Eileen Southern, "These (men) and women graduated from college, and some pursued graduate studies; they all taught either in public schools or historically black colleges, where they also had charge of music groups; and they all composed a large quantity of sacred music in both small and extended forms while also writing secular music."(Southern, p 604) They were generally conservative in their approach to music but also relied and reflected on the Negro spirituals that were a part of their youth.

Don't You Let Nobody Turn You Around.....singing

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Don't You Let Nobody Turn You Around.....singing

Jacob's Ladder – (Soulsters hum)

Jacob's Ladder- The song We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder along with Steal Away and Swing Low, Sweet Chariot has always been at least three of the first spirituals or songs in church that children of color learn at age 4-5 for my generation and older. We learned those songs either in Sunday School in their Houses of Faith, nursery or elementary schools, or hearing our mothers or grandmothers singing the lyrics or humming the tune. We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder, which does not have a known composer, has been arranged by many choral directors throughout time. The song has comforted many people through oppression and struggle during the Eighteenth/Nineteenth centuries with the existence of the institution of slavery. It was one of the songs that gave people strength in the Underground Railroad led by Harriett Tubman, and most significantly it was sung in the many marches of protest across America throughout the Civil Rights period in the 1960s. The song has given hope, faith, strength, and fortitude in healing or calming a people during either personal trials and tribulations or dealing with social justice circumstances and issues.

My paper this evening barely touches the research surface of an extensive list of black American composers in the twentieth century. It was no more than 3-4 months ago that Jane White gave me a musical composition written by Lillian Evanti, the first African American woman to sing with an Opera company at the turn of the 20th century. This composition, entitled Tomorrow's World was discovered in the home of Anne Spencer by her granddaughter Shaun Hester.

In closing, Dr. Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, a great twentieth/twenty-first century civil rights orator, activists, and minister ...states in his recent book of published speeches and sermons, "Life isn't as orderly as we would like! I heard God's voice calling me to preach his Word in and out of season, in and out of the pulpit". He goes on to say... "Life is a strange land, but we are called to preach God's Word in strange circumstances. We must sing the Lord's song, do his will even in and under strange circumstances (Lowery, p xi).

We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder song.

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