A CONCERTO is a large-scale composition for a SOLOIST or a group of SOLOISTS accompanied by an ORCHESTRA. The soloist(s) tend to lead the piece of music but interact and alternate with the instrumental backing, sometimes in a “musical dialogue”, and sometimes playing with or alongside the larger ensemble together (TUTTI) to provide musical CONTRAST.

The SOLO part (or parts) are written to display the performers’ technical ability and to “show off” – a VIRTUOSO. Concertos often contain a CADENZA section where the soloist (or soloists) play(s) alone (sometimes unaccompanied), and this is often the most technically demanding and difficult piece of the entire movement/work.

Concertos have three MOVEMENTS contrasted by tempo – fast, slow, fast.
During the **ROMANTIC PERIOD**, composers continued to write **SOLO CONCERTOS** for a single solo instrument accompanied by an orchestra. Romantic composers wrote Concertos for almost any orchestral instrument, but many **PIANO** and **VIOLIN** Concertos were written during this period. In the Romantic period, the soloist stepped forward as an “heroic figure”, with the orchestra slipping back into a more “subordinate role”, but these changing roles also added to more excitement and drama and more “competition” between the soloist and orchestra.

The Romantic Orchestra was large and often contrasted dramatically with the soloist, who’s part became very virtuosic and difficult to play. With the growth of the Romantic Orchestra, new **TIMBRES** became available to composers who explored rich and colourful orchestration. **CADENZA** sections continued to allow the soloist the chance to “show off” their technical ability and these cadenzas become more complex and difficult with lots of melodic decoration, ornamentation, fast scale passages and demanding playing techniques particular to the solo instrument e.g. **glissandi on the piano, double stopping and use of harmonics on the violin**. Where cadenza sections were often improvised by the soloist in Classical Concertos, Romantic composers wrote out their cadenzas specifically to maintain control over the final product and particularly to control a most virtuosic element.

![Cadenza section from Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor](image)

**Cadenza section from Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor** – notice the many trills and appoggiaturas, the use of “double stopping”, extremes of pitch and frequent changes in tempo, dynamics and articulation.

The Nineteenth-century public was captivated by virtuosity – Clara Schumann, Niccolo Paganini (who earned his living as a violin virtuoso), Franz Liszt (a touring virtuoso) and Frederick Chopin were Romantic composers as well as virtuoso performers. In Romantic Concertos, the conductor continues to follow the soloist and the orchestra follows the conductor. The soloist’s **INTERPRETATION** of the music is now more important due to music being more dramatic and powerful and the soloist and conductor continue to meet before performances so ensure that the orchestra follows the soloist’s interpretation.

More freedom and expression was contained within the music – whereas Classical composers focused on form and structure and elegance and balance, Romantic composers wrote music that expressed their inner most feelings and the regular 4 and 8-bar phrases of the Classical Concerto were less important as greater flexibility was now key.
During the Classical Concerto, the appearance of the soloist was often “delayed” until later during the first movement. However, in the Romantic Concerto, the soloist often entered immediately sharing themes with the orchestra – a device used by Beethoven and then taken up by other Romantic composers.

Romantic Concertos continued to have a standard **THREE MOVEMENT STRUCTURE** although some composers used this flexibly – Mendelssohn wrote “linking sections” between the three movements and Liszt wrote pieces with one movement. The three movements traditionally have the following characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>FIRST MOVEMENT</strong></th>
<th>Sonata Form</th>
<th>Allegro – soloist plays virtually throughout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SECOND MOVEMENT</strong></td>
<td>Ternary or Variation Form</td>
<td>Slow, lyrical and song-like often short and acting mainly as an introduction to the very fast and highly virtuosic finales. Composers sometimes linked the slow movement to the final movement without pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THIRD MOVEMENT</strong></td>
<td>Rondo, Variation or Sonata Form</td>
<td>Fast and Cheerful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Romantic Concertos often changed tempo and time signature frequently. Melodies were long and often dramatic – loud and powerful or warm and emotional. Dynamics were extreme to deal with the expression of the music and Romantic composers gave performers specific indications of how to play e.g. *espressivo, dolce* etc. The Texture of Romantic Concertos was still mainly **HOMOPHONIC (MELODY AND ACCOMPANIMENT)** but more complex than previously. The Harmony was mainly **DIATONIC** but Romantic composers added chromatic harmony and added note chords *e.g. 9ths* to create dramatic effects.

The Romantic Period is from 1820-1900. Famous composers of Romantic Concertos include:

BEETHOVEN  
BRAHMS  
LISZT  
MENDELSSOHN

The Industrial Revolution saw the improvements in mechanical valves and keys that most woodwind and brass instruments use. The new and innovative instruments could be played more easily and were more reliable. Baroque and Classical composers lived on the patronage of the aristocracy performing to small audiences of the upper class who were often knowledgeable about music. Romantic composers now wrote for public concerts and festivals with large audiences of paying customers – “urban middle class society” - who were not necessarily “musically educated”. Because of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, many aristocrats could no longer afford to maintain private opera houses, orchestras and composers in residence. The rise of the “urban middle class” led to the formation of many orchestras and the development of regular subscription concerts. Also, the piano had become a fixture in every middle-class home. Romantic composers wrote primarily for middle-class audiences whose size and prosperity had increased because of the Industrial Revolution and as such larger concert halls had to be built to keep up with this demand for public concerts.
Violin Concerto In E Minor

I

*Allegro Molto Appassionato*

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, (1809-1847) Op. 64

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**Fast, Very Passionately**

**Allegro, Molto Appassionato**

**Long Chordal Accompaniment**

**Soloist enters immediately with the THEME**

**Gentle Broken Chord Upper Strings Accompaniment**

**Pizz = Pizzicato (plucked) example of a playing technique**

**Romantic Orchestra**

Flutes I, II

Oboes I, II

Clarinets in B♭ I, II

Horns in F I, II

Trumpets in B♭ I, II

Timpants

Violin Solo.

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Double Basses

Large Romantic Orchestra

Bassoons I, II
The Romantic Orchestra

The Romantic concerto used a large orchestra: and composers, now challenged by the brilliant technical ability of virtuoso performers, made their solo parts increasingly more difficult. The element of "polite competition" found in Classical concertos now became transformed into an exciting and powerful conflict between apparently unequal forces: a single soloist opposed to the weight and power of a large orchestra. However, due to the brilliance of the player's technique and skilful writing on the part of the composer, the soloist always emerges from the battle with flying colours!

The Classical Orchestra

During the Romantic period, the orchestra grew even larger with some new and exciting timbres and instruments being added. Romantic orchestras continued to be led by a conductor who, once he had met with the soloist and agreed their interpretation of the Concerto, led the orchestra as an accompaniment.

The Strings section was enlarged yet again, often with the addition of Harps.

New instruments were added to the Woodwind section such as the Double Bassoon, Cor Anglais, Bass Clarinet and Piccolo.

The Brass section saw the permanent addition of Trombones and a Tuba along with an extra Trumpet and two more French Horns.

The Percussion section now featured a vast array of drums, cymbals, pitched percussion and other timbres which could be hit, struck, banged or plucked!
# Romantic Solo Concerto

ROMANTIC SOLO CONCERTOS continued to be instrumental works for a single solo instrument with orchestral accompaniment but became much more dramatic and emotive. Sometimes DOUBLE CONCERTOS were written for 2 solo instruments.

**Harmony & Tonality**

Harmony continued to be mainly DIATONIC but much more use of CHROMATIC HARMONY, DISSONANCE (clashing notes and chords) and ADDED NOTE CHORDS e.g. 9ths to create dramatic effects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Form &amp; Structure</th>
<th>Texture</th>
<th>Dynamics</th>
<th>Melody</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Movement</td>
<td>Sonata Form</td>
<td>Homophonic (Melody and Accompaniment) but more complex than in Classical Concertos.</td>
<td>Extremes of dynamics common (ppp, fff) and specific Expression Markings e.g. espressivo, dolce, appassionato</td>
<td>The regular and balanced phrases of the Classical Concerto were less important with composers giving more freedom to expression within their melodies which were now often long and dramatic, loud and powerful or warm and emotional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Movement</td>
<td>Ternary or Variation Form</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Movement</td>
<td>Rondo, Variation or Sonata Form</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rhythm, Tempo & Metre**

Frequent changes of time signature and tempo.

**Soloists (and Articulation)**

The soloist’s part became even more difficult, VIRTUOSIC and technically difficult to play. CADENZA sections continued to allow the soloist to “show off” becoming more complex and difficult with lots of MELODIC DECORATION, ORNAMENTATION and FAST SCALE PASSAGE and demanding playing techniques particular to the solo instrument e.g. glissandi on the piano, double stopping and harmonics on the violin. Cadenzas were now written out and not improvised by the performer. Soloist often enters immediately (NO ORCHESTRAL INTRODUCTIONS) at the start of the 1st movement sharing themes with the orchestra.

In the Romantic period, the soloist stepped forward as a “heroic figure” with the orchestra slipping back into a more “subordinate” role, but these changing roles also added to excitement and drama and more “competition” between soloist and orchestra. The conductor continues to follow the soloist and the orchestra follows the conductor. The soloist’s interpretation of the music is now more important due to the music being more dramatic and powerful.

**Soloists vs. Orchestral Accompaniment**

Many Romantic Solo Concerto composers were also VIRTUOSO PERFORMERS e.g. Franz Liszt, Chopin, Clara Schumann and Niccolo Paganini (Violin Virtuoso) who wrote and performed in large-scale public concerts, subscription concerts and festivals. Larger concert halls had to be built due to the rise of the “middle class” concert goer.

**Venue**

The Romantic orchestra was large and often contrasted dramatically with the soloist. With the growth of the Romantic orchestra, new TIMBRES and SONORITIES became available to composers who explored rich and colourful orchestration. The STRINGS section was enlarged again, often with the addition of Harps. New instruments were added to the WOODWIND section such as the Double Bassoon, Cor Anglais, Bass Clarinet and Piccolo. The BRASS section saw Trombones and a Tuba added along with an extra Trumpet and two further French Horns and the PERCUSSION section now featured a vast array of Drums, Cymbals, Pitched Percussion and other instruments which could be hit, struck, banged or plucked! There could be between 90-100 players in a Romantic orchestra. Romantic composers wrote Solo Concertos for almost any orchestral instrument, but the PIANO and VIOLIN continued to be popular choices as solo instruments.

**Instrumentation – Typical Instruments, Timbres and Sonorities**

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**Romantic Solo Concerto Composers**

- Beethoven
  - Late Concertos
- Brahms
  - Violin and Piano Concertos
- Mendelssohn
  - Solo Violin Concerto
- Liszt
  - Piano Concertos
- Franz Liszt
  - Violin Violinoromo