

Identify and describe Romantic characteristics in the solo piano music of one of the following composers. Illustrate your answer by referring to specific musical examples.

Chopin

Schumann

Liszt

The word romanticism was first used to describe new ideas in painting and literature, towards the end of the 18th century. However it was later taken up by musicians to describe the changes in musical style. Unlike Classical composers, Romantic composers aimed for a powerful expression of emotion, which would reveal their personal thoughts and feelings.

Romantic is not only about the emotion of love but can also be about hate or death. Positive or negative feelings. Romanticism describes the expansion of formal structures within a composition, making the piece more passionate and expressive. Many composers took an interest, and based their compositions on programmatic music, (music that tells a story), such as: Far off lands, the distant past, dreams, night and moonlight, rivers, lakes and forests, nature and the seasons, the joy and pain of love, fairy tales, the supernatural and magic. The era of Romantic music is defined as the period of 'European classical music' that began in 1812 to around the end of the 19th century.

Composers of the Romantic period wanted their pieces to have a large structural harmonic plan, which was earlier demonstrated by composers such as Haydn and Mozart, however they wanted to show the advancement in chromatic modifications. Composers were also influenced by the technological advances at the time, for example, the increase in the range and power of the piano and improved chromatic abilities and more dynamic power.

The main characteristics of Romantic music in solo piano included a freedom in form and design, emphasis on lyrical, songlike melodies, adventurous modulation, richer harmonies with striking use of dissonances, bold dramatic contrasts, exploring a wider range of pitch, dynamics and tone-colours. There was a vast variety of types of piece, ranging from songs and fairly short piano pieces to huge pieces which were very long in time structures because of recurring themes, that had dramatic and dynamic climaxes. The technical virtuosity of the pianist increased dramatically.

Franz Liszt was a Hungarian composer, virtuoso pianist and teacher. He became famous throughout Europe during the 19th century for his skill as a performer. It was said that he was the most technically advanced

pianist of his age. He was also a very important and inspiring composer, piano teacher etc, that contributed vastly throughout the development of the piano. Liszt was very natural when playing the piano. He played according to his feelings. Liszt's piano works are divided into two; there are his 'original works', and his 'transcriptions', 'paraphrases' of 'fantasies', which were works by other composers.

In some of Liszt's piano pieces he supported a programmatic style of music. Program music particularly peaked in the Romantic era. Liszt wrote many Romantic pieces for solo piano, for example, twelve Etudes d'exécution transcendante, three Caprices-Valses, six Lieder von Goethe, by Beethoven, Concerto Pathétique, Fantaisie sur l'opéra hongroise Szép Ilonka de Mosonyi and Liebestraum No.3, etc.

The Liebestraum No.3 is the last of the three that Liszt wrote and is thought to be the third of three pieces split into three sections, each divided by a fast cadenza requiring tremendous fingerwork and a high degree of technical ability. The rhythm includes many underlying triplets. The melody is a flowing line of quarter and eighth notes and is always in the mid/upper range of the piano. The supporting triplet rhythms are always in the mid/lower range. The chord progression is very advanced, switching sometimes once every two measures. This shows how far Liszt was ahead of his time. The moving triplets and bright cadenzas give the piece a light, bubbly feel. The piece shows a Romantic love and gives the listener a window into Liszt's heart, which was a main characteristic of Romantic music.

In conclusion I find that Franz Liszt composed many Romantic pieces for piano, and was a massive contributor to the Romantic era.