In the 1820s and 30s Paris was not only the heart of Europe, she was the heart of the newly emerging Romantic movement. While the previous ages had been dominated by men in Germany and Italy, this new age was more cosmopolitan, welcoming men (and women, as we shall see) from across Europe. But Paris was the hub.

In 1830 Beethoven had been dead only three years but his influence was spreading. Hector Berlioz heard Beethoven’s 3rd and 5th symphonies and it changed his life forever. And he in turn changed musical history.

Berlioz (1803-69) started in medicine but after seeing his first dissection of a dead body (actually only part, because he ran), knew it was not for him. He went to Paris to study music, but was refused because he didn’t play an instrument. At this time an English Shakespeare company was touring Europe and after one “sighting” he fell madly in love with the leading lady. “Madly” isn’t strong enough. In his memoirs he says “obsessed.” Although neither spoke the other’s language they began a relationship and wanted marriage. Their families fought it and things became bad enough that Berlioz attempted suicide. He used opium—and had what a person from the 1960’s would call “a really bad trip; a real bummer.”

This became the basis for his most successful work *La Symphonie Fantastique.* Using Beethoven’s idea of letting the music be emotional and tell a story, *La Symphonie* tells of two lovers who meet, spend time at picnics and balls, but when love cools he tries an overdose of opium, only to have horrible dreams and nightmares, with a recurrent theme that haunts him everywhere he goes. Berlioz even included program notes (something very new) so the listener would be
ensure to get the correct picture.

This symphony was a complete departure from the formal structure of the previous age and gave the new era three new concepts: program notes, our modern orchestra (over 100 players), and theme music. Today’s world can easily hum Darth Vader’s theme, or that of McDonalds (I’m loving it), but it would not be possible without Berlioz. He invented the *idée fixe* (fixed idea); we would say theme music.

Thanks to Beethoven, Berlioz used his music to describe. He painted with sound, and became known for sounds previously unheard (For dancing goblins he had his string players turn their bow over and play with the wood. Yes, that was new.)

The emotion of the day crept into music, for France was in the throes of another revolution. Things were violent; Berlioz said he walked the streets at night with a pistol in his hand.

Then came Niccolo Paganini, who in 1831 gave a performance that rocked the musical world of Paris. He stood alone on the stage with no more than his violin and dazzled a packed house. This was new. In only a few years music had changed from something for the upper classes to something for everyone. Rather than some form of intellectual exercise, like a Bach fugue, music was more and more to simply entertain. And Paganini could entertain.

By age 18 he knew his talents were far beyond average and he used them now. His name means “little pagan” so he used that too. Reasoning that a normal person simply cannot play that many notes, people concluded he was in league with the devil. That trait brought in even more people to his concerts. In short, he knew how to work a crowd; he was successful.

That same evening a young Hungarian was in the crowd and he too watched the magic. Franz Liszt was as good on the piano as Paganini on the violin and that night he too decided to become a performer (he had been contemplating becoming a monk!).

Another born showman, Liszt played with emotion. He bent over the piano and crashed out huge chords, or caressed the keys. Women fainted. He tossed his head of blond hair; more fainted. Women fought over his gloves, intentionally left behind. Legend has it that he was the first to have...
Franz Liszt was simply the world’s first rock star. It must be said that even today he remains one of the greatest pianists of history; he played things others simply cannot.

He would never marry, but spent many years in many liaisons. One of his daughters would later marry Richard Wagner, a man whose musical influence was so great that when the aged Liszt heard Wagner’s *Tristan* he declared it “the music of the future.”

The Paris Connection was composed of the Who’s Who of the day: Liszt, Victor Hugo, Georges Sand, Delacroix, Berlioz, Balzac, Flaubert and Chopin. There were others but the main group met at the home of Aurore Dudevant, a novelist and a fiery, free thinking, liberated intellectual. Her pen name was Georges Sand, the name we still use for her today. She was the brains, the glue, the center of the group. She had liaisons with most of the members of the group—something rather typical for the day,
Romanticism

The half-French, half-Polish Chopin was another top pianist, famous for his shorter works like the *Preludes* or *Etudes*, whose depth and subtlety earned him the title “poet of the piano.”

He too spent time with Georges. Nine years, in fact, and he said they were some of the best years of his life. His music is that of the “salon” (sitting room) of the day. “After playing Chopin,” said Oscar Wilde in 1891, “I feel as if I had been weeping over sins that I had never committed and mourning over tragedies that were not my own.” Unlike Liszt and Paganini, he enjoyed small audiences at home, not huge concert halls. His music is some of the world’s most difficult to play.

There’s more. His last years found him physically weak from tuberculosis; he died at a young 39. During his last concerts he was coughing blood. Like Mozart, too young, yes, but it’s what next happened that made the history books. Legend says that a friend brought a handful of Polish soil and scattered it over Chopin’s grave, so he could rest easier in a Paris grave (remember he was Polish). There’s still more. Rather than stop there, Chopin’s heart was cut out, sent to Warsaw, and enshrined in a church, where it still resides today. There once again is the nationalism of the age taken to an extreme.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) came shortly before the Paris group but he too changed things by introducing a new element into what one did during those evenings with friends. Along with some short works for the piano, he wrote *art* songs, German songs or *lieder* (lee-der), and they became extremely popular. The art song is the union of poetry and music; its usual theme is *nature* or *love*, and it utilized the newest household instrument, the piano. A singer, a piano, and a group of intellectuals over for the evening—was the Paris salon. (New York did the same in the 1950’s but the music was jazz.)

Poor Schubert was all caught up in the war cries of his day and wanted to be a man, join the army and wear a fancy uniform, but he had two serious problems: he was only 5’1” and he had terrible eyesight—he even had to wear glasses (in a day when no one wore glasses). So he turned his efforts to the salon and its music. Like so many others, his gifts
appeared early. As a teen he was constantly writing songs. In his short life—he only lived 31 years—he composed over 600 lieder, more than half before he was 19! He was known to write six in one evening. Music poured from him as it had from Mozart; it just flowed. His famous *Trout Quintet* was already mentioned in a previous reading.

Shubert’s life mimicked the definition of the new Romantic (bohemian) artist: he was poor, was known for wearing odd clothing combinations, lived alone in an attic—the cheapest of apartments—or with friends, didn’t marry, was highly emotional, and buried himself in his art. This is not to say it was a desirable life; it was simply the origin of today’s definition of the typical “starving artist.”

Eugene Delacroix (Del-a-qua) (1798-1863) reshaped the art world by abandoning the clean lines of the Neo-Classic in preference to pure, raw color and the feelings it evoked. He too was colorful and possessed a raw power; it was said that when he entered the room all conversation would cease, heads would turn, and women would melt. He had an animal magnetism that was almost tangible.
His works were emotional, showing everything from exotic foreign lands to Dante’s trip through Hell. Everything he painted brought first an emotional response, and then a study of the painting, but it was emotion that first caught your eye. His subjects were new; people weren’t used to boat rides in Hell or harems of Algeria. Exoticism had found her advocate. Still, he painted scenes from the Bible and was seen as a proponent of religion. In all he drew or painted almost 3,000 items. Thanks to high connections and good health (everyone around him seemed to die young) he became the leader of the Paris group. (A comment on dying: Liszt once said, “to die, and to die young, what happiness!” It was the best anyone could wish, for you still had your youth, none of the problems of age, and left life at the crest. Many shared his view.)

Others of the Paris group were Dumas, Balzac and Hugo. Alexandre Dumas is well known today
Th e Paris Connection


dumas

for The Three Musketeers, The Count of Monte Cristo, and The Black Tulip. A high-roller who either flashed lots of money or was broke, he lived life on the edge. Yet his novels were about earning honor, and being a gentleman. Having a Haitian slave as his grandmother may have prompted this.

Honore de Balzac was another writer. Working at his desk for 14-16 hours at a stretch, he produced more than 90 novels; yes, 90. His palette was society and the motivations behind human actions. He studied everything, from country customs vs. city customs to the evils of the social ranking of his day. He also introduced the literary device of returning characters, using the person from a past novel to reappear in another. Today it’s easy enough for us to understand, with reoccurring characters in episodes of Harry Potter or Indiana Jones.

Victor Hugo (1802-1885) is the final member to consider. As a major writer he too changed the world around him. Best known for The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1831) and Les Misérables (1862), he later became quite political, advocating the rights

The Women of Tangiers, Delacroix

Dumas
of the common man. When the political coup of 1851 put a king back on the French throne Hugo feared for his life and fled to England, spending the remaining 20 years of his life there. He might find it satisfying to hear that *Les Misérables* is still playing in the London theatre, but not in Paris.

By now you can see that this rather small group of individuals succeeded in changing forever our artistic landscape. No similar group has appeared in the almost 200 years since.