

# THE ROMANTIC ERA GENRES:

## CHARACTER PIECES

### What is a character piece?

A character piece is a brief musical composition, usually for piano or small ensembles but never for voice. A character piece is expressive of a specific **mood**, or non-musical idea. Character pieces were often named after the composer's inspiration from literature (Schumann's *Kreisleriana*), personal experiences (Schumann's *Scenes from Childhood*), national or geographic images (Chopin's polonaises, mazurkas etc).

A character piece can belong to other genre's too. A polonaise can also be a character piece so long as it is performed on a piano or with a small ensemble expressive of a mood or non-musical idea.

### Examples

Felix Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte* (1830; *Songs Without Words*) covered a particularly wide range of styles and moods, while Chopin tended to favour musical-literary genres, such as ballades, and more-generalized idyllic or melancholy associations, such as nocturnes. Many, though by no means all, character pieces are relatively simple in design, emphasizing expressive melody and harmony, not unlike the contemporaneous German lied. Although they may feature elaborate keyboard figurations, especially in Chopin's case, the 19th-century character piece may be identified as an instrumental song intended, like its German vocal counterpart, primarily for home rather than concert performance.