

CARL MARIA VON WEBER*

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Abstract

For middle school and up, an introduction to the early Romantic German composer.

1 Background and Influence

Carl Maria von Weber's musical career, like that of Ludwig van Beethoven, came at the beginning of the Romantic era¹. Although it is not nearly as well-known, Weber's music, like Beethoven's, had a major influence on the course of Romantic music. The German folk opera genre that Weber established would eventually lead to the operas of Wagner; and Weber's highly ornamented, virtuoso-style piano music influenced the styles of Schumann, Liszt, and Chopin.

Weber's operas were, of course, influenced by earlier opera, including Mozart's, but Weber also had a strong sense that he was creating a new, distinctly German, tradition. Weber's melodies often have the flavor of German folk song. And his **librettos** (texts) and plots were strongly influenced by Romantic-era German literature. His operas are stories of good and evil taken from local legends and fairy tales. The characters are of humble origin, and their fates are affected both by nature - a powerful element of mystery and danger - and the supernatural, both favorite subjects in Romantic literature.

2 Biography

Carl Maria von Weber was born in Eutin (near Lubeck) on November 18th, 1786. The "von" was an affectation; his family was not really aristocracy. His mother was a singer. His father, who was Kapellmeister for a prince bishop and then director of a travelling theatre company, was determined that Carl should be a musical prodigy like Mozart. So young Weber's youth was spent on tour. At age four he could not yet walk properly, because of a congenital disease of the hip, but he could already sing and play piano. He first published a composition at age eleven.

Weber began his adult career as a concert pianist. His first opera (which has been lost) was produced in 1800 in Freiberg. Soon he was Kapellmeister at Breslau. A later job as the private secretary to Duke Ludwig at Stuttgart did not go well for Weber (it actually led to a short term in prison), but subsequent jobs included director of the Prague Opera and director of the Dresden Court Opera. He exhibited a singular drive, vision, and organized dedication when directing opera companies, but seemed to lack self-discipline in other areas of his life, living a rather Bohemian, financially insecure lifestyle in between directing jobs.

In spite of failing health, Weber continued directing, composing and touring as a performer until his death (of consumption) on June 5th, 1826, in London, where his final opera had premiered. His body was eventually returned to Germany eighteen years later; the graveside speech was given by Richard Wagner.

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¹"The Music of the Romantic Era" <<http://cnx.org/content/m11606/latest/>>

3 Music

Weber's operas, with their powerful, inventive, and dramatic music, were his master works. *Der Freischuetz* (1821), in particular, was tremendously popular and influential, but *Euryanthe* (1823), and *Oberon* (1826) also contained powerful music that influenced later Romantic composers.

Weber's virtuosic piano compositions were similarly influential. He also composed songs, and two symphonies.

Carl Maria von Weber



Figure 1
