It is hard to draw absolute or neat distinctions between Classical era and Romantic era music. It was an evolving process away from Classical form to Romantic expressiveness. There was a continual increase in self-expression, and, at the same time, there were challenges in moving too far away from maintaining form. Using forms (such as sonata form) in music gave the audience and the composer a common ground. Hayden and Mozart and Beethoven maintained a structural coherent line. The audience knew what to expect, and could maintain connection with the composer. The dilemma of what could replace the contrast, variation and development in sonata form but still have the spontaneity and creative freedom of the Romantic era was not easily solved.

In Beethoven’s Symphony no. 6, the first and second movements are in sonata form, and the fourth is in sonata rondo form. The expressive emphasis is emotionally cheerful in the first movement, depictions of flowing water and birds in the second, a gathering of country folk in the scherzo, and, in the fourth, a thunderstorm that goes seamlessly into the fifth, a shepherd’s song. Romantic with form.

Beethoven used the forms according to his expressive need. Many tried to follow the Beethoven way and could not. Remember Tchaikovsky said throughout his life, “I cannot maintain form”. It was never easy to shoehorn Romantic impulses into an 18th century sonata form.

Cutting edge Romantic era composers had some tough decisions to make: What do I do to balance creative impulses with some coherence?

Three structures were created or revisited to maintain connection between composer and audience: “miniature” compositions, such as lieder and small piano pieces, grandiose compositions such as oratorios, and program music. These new forms worked to a point.

The first new structure, the “miniature” is a composition that evokes a single emotion, a single mood, or a single state of mind. Many composers used this new form with great success.

The second, the oratorio, used narrative, solo voices, choruses, and orchestra. Although not new, it had a new expressive emphasis. Problem: It was expensive and couldn’t compete with opera.

The third is Program music, which is based on a poem or story or other literary source. Problem: If the audience knows the poem or the story, you can follow the piece, but what if the audience doesn’t know it? What if they can’t follow the composers’ ideas, even if they know the story? A solution was the use of thematic unity, which is bringing back certain themes across the total piece. You will notice that structure in Scheherazade.
Another way of being self-expressive in the ultra-expressive Romantic era was through musical nationalism. After the defeat of Napoleon and the Russian revolution, pride in Russian-ness swelled. After years of listening to Italian or Viennese opera or instrumental music, Russian composers began to want Russian music. In the beginning of the 19th century Russia had no symphonic tradition and by the end of the century Russian opera and orchestral music thrilled the concert stage across the world.

This musical century began with Mikhail Glinka, the godfather of Russian music. A wealthy man, he quit his day job to attend to his passion, music. He followed his muse to Milan and Berlin, and returned to Russia, deciding to concentrate on composing Russian music. At age 32, he wrote an opera in Russian about Russia. The first. It was *A Life For The Tsar*, (1836) and he followed with another, *Ruslan and Ludmilla*.

Glinka inspired a man named Mily Balakirev, who founded the Moguchaya Kuchka, the Big 5: Balakirev, Alexandr Borodin, Modest Mussorgsky, Cesar Cui, and Nikolay Rimsky Korsakov, all amateur composers. Their youth added to their exuberant nationalism. The eldest, Borodin was 28, Rimsky Korsakov, 18.

The Five insisted on music that sounded Russian, and they were brimming with ideas. No need for any trace of German-ness. Mussorsky said, “When a German thinks, he reasons his way to a conclusion. Our Russian Brother starts with a conclusion and amuses himself with some reasoning.” Others of the five said, “We are not Cud Chewers” (referring to the development section of sonata form). We do not put ourselves in a German box. It was less important to some of the Romantics to connect with the audience; it was more important to express oneself … and in the Russian language (in opera) or the rhythm of the Russian language (in orchestral pieces) and with Russian folk music. The Five wanted music Russians would know in their bones. They were intensely nationalistic, and produced incredible music still in the global repertoire; their influence is incalculable.

Anton Rubenstein, head of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, took a liking to Rimsky Korsakov, who had written his first symphony at 17. When he was 27, Rubenstein offered him a position at the conservatory, even though Rimsky Korsakov was a dilettante who had never conducted an orchestra, nor had any formal education in music theory, harmonics, orchestration or counterpoint. He accepted, keeping one step ahead of his students. He obtained the education he needed at the conservatory while teaching, and left the Big Five. The Five called him a traitor and a soulless renegade. Rimsky Korsakov became a bridge between Russian Musical Nationalism and Western Form for the Big Five, and for his students. He became the most famous composer and teacher in Russia, the teacher of Glazanov, Stravinsky and Prokofiev.

In Rimsky’s *Scheherazade* we see a great example of program music as well as thematic unity.