In Europe, the 19th century in music started with a few different events. Some folks might say it all started when Franz Schubert dropped his song "The Erlking" in 1815 or when Ludwig van Beethoven checked out in 1827. Pinning down when this whole period ended is a bit trickier, though. There's a whole bunch of stuff that went down, like when Claude Debussy brought Impressionism to music – a style that was a total 180 from the vibes at the end of the century. His "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun" in 1894 was a real game-changer.

Now, the music from this century is usually split into two major trends: ROMANTICISM, which kinda ruled the first half of the century, and NEO-ROMANTICISM, which took over for the second half and into the final years.

What's cool about the music from this time was that it was all about the composer's unique style and what they were into. The focus was on inspiration and feeling the music, man. Composers weren't just writing tunes because some king or bigwig told them to; they were writing from the heart, trying to share their emotions. They still used classical techniques, but they kicked things up a notch: longer pieces, bigger orchestras that made some serious noise, more contrast, more feels. They also played around with harmony until they totally blew up the whole major-minor key thing.

This was also the time when program music – or "thematic music" – was born. This kind of music came with a plan, a description, titles, the works. Think of "The Moldau" by Bedřich Smetana, this epic musical story about the journey of the biggest river in Czech and the landscapes it cuts through. On the flip side, you've got absolute music like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 16 in C major, K. 545, which doesn't follow any specific story or plan.

When we look at how music developed in the 19th century, there's a big emphasis on different national trends or schools. Composers all over Europe started using their music to show off their national tradition, history, and identity. So, we've got the German, Italian, French, Russian, Czech, Finnish, Norwegian, Spanish, Slovak, Ukrainian, and Polish styles, all doing their own thing. They were using folk music, national instruments, dance rhythms, and their native languages to create vocal and instrumental pieces like songs or operas. And this wasn't just about the music; it was a response to what was happening in the world. The 19th century saw a lot of national liberation movements, and music was a way for people to hold onto their national identity during those tough times.

During this time, music was all about the feels. It was about expressing emotions, dealing with anxiety, exploring themes like loneliness, confusion, longing, romance, mystical experiences, fascination with nature, transcendence, dreams, you name it. There was also a big resurgence of interest in religious music.

The 19th-century composers gave us a lot of piano, violin, symphonic, chamber, vocal, and opera music. They played around with all sorts of genres: symphony, symphonic poem, instrumental concerto, nocturne, etude, ballade, sonata, song, opera. The list goes on and on. And the music from this time? Man, it's rich. It's so rich, in fact, that it's still the basis for a lot of the music we listen to in concerts today.

And we can't forget about the big names of this time: Robert Schumann, Franz Schubert, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Fryderyk Chopin, Franz Liszt, Hector Berlioz, Niccolò Paganini, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Richard Wagner, Gustav Mahler, and so many more. They were the ones who really defined the 19th century in music.