

Music Appreciation - Chapter 8 The 20th Century

ATONALITY, SERIALISM, AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY EUROPE

I. Schoenberg and His Followers

A. Schoenberg's Development

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) began as a late-Romantic composer writing in a style derived from Wagner, Mahler, and Strauss. Around 1905, he turned to smaller forms and a more concentrated language with complex rhythms and counterpoint and angular melodies.

B. Atonality

In about 1908, Schoenberg began to write music that was atonal, meaning that it avoided any sense of a tonal center (whether through traditional tonal harmony or any new way of establishing a central pitch). This extended the tendency among late-Romantic German composers to obscure the key through chromaticism and extensive modulation. Instead of treating each pitch and chord in terms of its function within a key and requiring dissonant notes and chords to resolve, all notes were equal and all sonorities possible; Schoenberg called this "the emancipation of the dissonance," since dissonance was freed of its need to resolve to consonance. *Pierrot lunaire* (Moonstruck Pierrot), Op. 21 (1912), for female voice and chamber ensemble, is his best-known atonal piece. In addition to atonality, it uses *Sprechstimme* (speech-voice or speech-song) and creates unity through a variety of motivic devices.

C. Expressionism

Pierrot lunaire is an example of expressionism, which portrayed extreme inner feelings such as anxiety, fear, and despair through extreme musical means.

D. Twelve-Tone Method

Seeking a way to compose unified longer works without a tonal center and without depending on a text, Schoenberg by 1923 had devised the twelve-tone method. (This systematized two traits of his atonal style: accompanying melodic motives with harmonies derived from the same group of notes [often transposed or inverted], and using all twelve chromatic notes in almost every phrase or unit.) The twelve chromatic notes are ordered in a series or row. Tones from the series (or from a contiguous subset of the series, such as the first three or four notes) may be sounded in succession as a melody or simultaneously as a chord, in any octave and rhythm. (The order of notes in the row is not

arbitrary, but is based on the motives and chords the composer plans to use in the piece, which are embedded in the row.) The series may be used in its original (prime) form, in inversion (upside down), in retrograde (backward), in retrograde inversion (upside down and backward), or in any transposition of these four forms. Each statement of a row includes all twelve notes, but different statements can appear simultaneously. Schoenberg first used twelve-tone methods in the last of five piano pieces, Op. 23 (1923), and the Piano Suite, Op. 25 (1921-23). He wrote many twelve-tone works in standard forms, including the Wind Quintet, Third and Fourth String Quartets, Variations for Orchestra, Violin Concerto, Piano Concerto, String Trio, and Fantasy for Violin and Piano.

E. Alban Berg

Alban Berg (1885-1935) was Schoenberg's student and used many of his techniques. Berg's expressionist opera *Wozzeck* (1917-21) is atonal (not twelve-tone) but looks back to earlier music in several ways: by using leitmotifs and continuous music, as did Wagner; by imitating in atonal style the rhythms and sounds of folk tunes, dances, marches, and other familiar musical types; and by casting each scene as a traditional form, such as suite, passacaglia, sonata, or rondo. In the opera *Lulu* (1928-35) and the Violin Concerto (1935), Berg used the twelve-tone method in a way that allowed him to introduce elements of tonal music, such as triads and quoted melodies. (The use of tonal effects and familiar types of music helped him to convey strong emotions in a language listeners could understand.)

F. Anton Webern

Anton Webern (1883-1945) also studied with Schoenberg and adopted his atonal and twelve-tone methods. But Webern's works are usually brief, extremely spare, often canonic, and without tonal references. He conceived of melodies that change tone color as well as pitch, so that a single line may pass from one instrument to others in turn. The effect of Webern's very spare texture is often one of individual points of sound, called pointillism.

II. After Webern

A. The Spread of Twelve-Tone Methods

After World War II, several younger composers (as well as Stravinsky) took up the twelve-tone system, usually looking to Webern as a model.

B. Serialism

By 1950, composers at the Darmstadt summer courses and elsewhere began to apply the serial procedures of twelve-tone music to aspects other than pitch, such as duration and dynamics, resulting in total serialism. Such works can seem random, since pitch, rhythm, and other parameters are not being used to define and develop themes or to establish goals and create momentum, but instead produce a succession of unique and unpredictable events. Pierre Boulez (b. 1925), the most important European exponent of total serialism, moved beyond it to a more flexible but still pointillistic language in works such as *Le Marteau sans maître* (The Hammer without a Master, 1954).

C. Messiaen

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) was an organist, composer, and teacher (Boulez was his student). His music often has religious subjects, as in the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (Quartet for the End of Time, 1940-41), on the Apocalypse. He devised his own musical system, incorporating transcribed birdsongs, repeated rhythmic series (related to medieval isorhythm and music theory of India), nonretrogradable rhythms (durational patterns that are the same forward and backward), avoidance of regular meter, whole-tone and octatonic scales, and other devices designed to create music that suggests mystical contemplation rather than dramatic action or emotional expressivity.

III. Recent Developments

A. New Timbres

Composers after 1945 continued to introduce new sounds into music, as composers had done in the first half of the century.

B. Electronic Resources

Electronic music introduced new sonic resources through electronically generated sound. *Musique concrète* used recorded natural sounds that were manipulated through tape and electronic procedures. Both depended on the invention of tape recorders. Unlike music for live performers, music on tape allowed composers total control and an unlimited range of sounds.

C. New Technology

Technology developed quickly, from oscillators, to synthesizers, to computers and digital encoding of music. Since the invention of portable synthesizers, and especially since the rise of portable computers and the MIDI interface, it has become possible to create electronic music in real time, rather than solely on tape.

D. Influence of Electronic Music

Electronic music in turn suggested new sounds for traditional instruments and voices and a renewed interest in the spatial effects of locating performers in different places around a performing space. Edgard Varese's *Poème électronique* was a tape piece created for the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels; played from 425 loudspeakers throughout the Philips Pavilion while colored lights and slides were projected against the walls, it gave a sense of sounds moving through space.

E. The Pitch Continuum

Partly influenced by electronic music, composers increasingly used the entire continuum of pitch, rather than only the discrete pitches of the chromatic scale. *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* for string orchestra (1960) by Krzysztof Penderecki (b. 1933) uses traditional instruments to make electronic-sounding sounds through such means as glissandos, extremely high notes, and bands of pitch within which every quarter-tone is played simultaneously, and he created new notation for each of these novel effects. Penderecki's more recent music is written in standard notation and is more Romantic in style. György Ligeti (b. 1923) also used quasi-electronic sounds in such works as *Atmosphères* for orchestra (1961). Ligeti's work, like Penderecki's, has been stylistically diverse.

F. Indeterminacy

Throughout the history of notated music, performers have made choices or filled in what is not specified in the notation. Some 20th-century composers tried to exercise greater control over performance through very specific indications in the score. But composers have also explored indeterminacy, in which certain aspects of the music, such as the order of events or the precise coordination of parts, are not determined by the composer. Karlheinz Stockhausen (b. 1928) has used this in *Klavierstück XI* (Piano Piece No. 11, 1956) and other works. Several of his works use fragments of existing music. Witold Lutosławski (1913-1994) used indeterminacy to allow individual players to play at varying speeds or create a cadenza-like elaboration on a figure within controlled boundaries. New notations have evolved for these new playing techniques.

THE AMERICAN TWENTIETH CENTURY

I. Introduction

The United States became the center for new music in the classical tradition after World War II. American music grew out of the European tradition,

as European composers emigrated to the United States, or lived there for a period, and many Americans studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris or with other European teachers at summer festivals. But American music also drew from its many ethnic and popular traditions.

II. The Historical Background

A. Music in the Colonies

The colonists in New England sang psalms, and singing schools were established in the 18th century to teach singing from notation. William Billings (1746-1800) is the best known of the Yankee tunesmiths, who wrote psalm and hymn settings and anthems. Most of his hymns were simple harmonizations, but many were fusing tunes, which include a middle section in imitation or free polyphony with staggered entrances. Billings did not follow the rules of "correct" counterpoint, but allowed parallel octaves and fifths and often used chords without thirds.

B. German Immigration

German-speaking immigrants brought their musical culture. The Moravians, Protestants from Czech and Slovak regions, encouraged music in church, including arias, motets, and anthems. Bohemian-born Anthony Philip Heinrich (1781-1861) wrote program symphonies and became perhaps the first American composer with an international reputation. German immigrants were prominent as music teachers, conductors, and performers, and American composers often studied in Germany. Lowell Mason (1792-1872), trained by a German immigrant, introduced music into the public school curriculum and sought to replace the music of the Yankee tunesmiths with hymns harmonized in the "correct" European style; many of his hymns are still sung today. The Yankee tunes remained in use in the shape-note hymnals in the South. The folk tradition of slave spirituals was popularized after the Civil War by the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

C. Brass and Wind Bands

In the 19th century, almost every town and city had an amateur wind or brass band, and in the 20th century almost every high school and college had one. The 19th-century repertory included marches, dances, song arrangements, and solo display pieces. John Philip Sousa (1854-1932), leader of the U.S. Marine Band and later his own touring band, wrote more than 100 marches. Brass bands and dance orchestras played an important role in African-American social life and provided training for black musicians.

III. Vernacular Music

A. Ragtime

Ragtime developed from a joining of the march with elements of African music. A typical rag, such as Maple Leaf Rag (1899) by Scott Joplin (1868-1917), used march form in duple meter and presented a syncopated melody over a steady bass.

B. Blues

Black laments evolved in the early 20th century into a style called blues, featuring a text in rhymed couplets, the first line repeated; a standard 12-bar harmonic framework; blue notes, lowering the third, fifth, or seventh degree of the major scale; and improvised "breaks" between lines.

C. Jazz

Jazz is a form of group or solo improvisation over a blues or popular tune. The basic procedures, from uneven rhythms and anticipated beats to trading solos, were developed by black musicians and imitated by white bands as early as 1915. A leading band was King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, which used the typical instrumentation of cornet, clarinet, trombone, piano, banjo, and drums.

D. Big Bands

The popularity of jazz brought larger performing spaces, leading to the big bands of Duke Ellington (1899-1974) and others, which had trumpets, trombones, saxophones, and clarinets in sections and a rhythm section of string bass, piano, guitar, and drums. Big bands performed from an arrangement or chart, which still provided some opportunities for improvised solos. This style is also called swing, from the swinging uneven rhythms.

E. Modern Jazz

Bebop (or bop) of the 1940s and 1950s used smaller groups, more improvisation, and new techniques, some borrowed from modern classical music, to create a serious art music in the jazz tradition.

F. Country Music

Country-and-western or country music blended traditional music of the Appalachian and Ozark Mountain regions, derived from Anglo-American ballads and fiddle tunes, with cowboy music of the West and some elements of jazz and other African-American styles. Singers often accompanied themselves on guitar or were backed by a band of violins, guitars, and rhythm section.

G. Rhythm-and-Blues

Rhythm-and-blues was a black urban style combining blues with an unrelenting rhythm emphasizing the offbeats and often using electric guitar and bass.

H. Rock & Roll

Rock & Roll, or rock, emerged in the mid-1950s from a blending of white country and black rhythm-and-blues styles. Like those two styles, it was promoted and virtually created by the recording industry and radio. The great success of Elvis Presley (1935-1977) in the 1950s and of The Beatles in the 1960s made rock the main style of popular music world-wide for the second half of the 20th century.

I. Musical Comedy

The Broadway musical (or musical comedy) has been the main genre of musical theater in the United States throughout the 20th century. Many popular songs by Cole Porter, Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, and George Gershwin (1898-1937) were written for Broadway shows. Gershwin also wrote works that blend popular with classical traditions, such as his blend of jazz with the Romantic piano concerto in *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) and his folk opera *Porgy and Bess* (1935)

V. Foundations for an American Art Music

A. Charles Ives

Charles Ives (1874-1954) had an unusual career, making his living in insurance while composing in a number of very diverse styles from Romanticism to radical experiments. Trained in American band and church music and in European art music, he blended these diverse traditions in his symphonies, symphonic poems, chamber music, and art songs, evoking 19th-century America through modernist techniques. He often used existing music, especially American tunes, as a basis for his own, reworking borrowed material in a variety of ways and with various meanings. His music was not published or performed until 1920 and later, starting with his *Second Piano Sonata, "Concord, Mass., 1840-60"* (known as the *Concord Sonata*). When his music became widely known, his independence of mind, innovations, use of popular materials, and multilayered textures inspired many younger composers to seek their own paths.

B. Carl Ruggles

Carl Ruggles (1876-1971) wrote a small number of atonal, very original works, of which the best known is *Sun-Treader* (1926-31).

C. Henry Cowell

Henry Cowell (1897-1965) explored new effects on the piano, including tone clusters in *The Tides of Manaunaun* (1912) and other works and strumming or playing directly on the strings in *The Aeolian Harp* (1923) and *The Banshee* (1925). His later

music uses elements of folk and non-Western music. Cowell was also important as a promoter and publisher of new music.

D. Ruth Crawford Seeger

Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901-1953) composed in a modern atonal style, creating a series of very individual works, before changing her interests to transcribing and arranging American folksongs.

E. Edgard Varese

Edgard Varese (1883-1965) was born and trained in France and moved to New York in 1915. Rather than using themes, harmony, or conventional rhythm, *Inte'grales* (1925) and other works use pitch, duration, dynamics, and timbre (including many percussion instruments) to create sound masses that move and interact in musical space.

F. Aaron Copland

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) studied in France with Nadia Boulanger, who helped him gain a polished technique. His early works use jazz elements and dissonance, but in the mid-1930s he turned to a more popular style marked by thin, simple textures, diatonic writing, and folk tunes, as in *Appalachian Spring* (1944). In the 1950s, his music again became more abstract, and he adopted some twelve-tone methods. Music: NAWM 145

G. Other National Idioms

Roy Harris (1898-1979) is best known for symphonic music that evokes the American West through modal themes and open textures, as in his *Third Symphony* (1939). Critic and composer Virgil Thomson (1891-1989) studied with Boulanger but was attracted to the playful, simple music of Satie. He is best known for two operas on texts by Gertrude Stein, *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1928) and *The Mother of Us All* (1947), in a diatonic style that drew on the styles of 19th-century American hymns, patriotic songs, and dance music. William Crant Still (1895-1978), composer of the *Afro-American Symphony* (1931), Florence Price (1888-1953), and Ulysses Kay (b. 1917) were among the best-known African-American composers of art music. Other prominent American composers were William Schuman (1910-1992), Howard Hanson (1896-1981), and Walter Piston (1894-1976).

A. Abstract Idioms

Roger Sessions (1896-1985) wrote dissonant, complex music in an individual style based on continuous development. Elliott Carter (b. 1908) is noted for using metric modulation (or tempo modulation), in which the meter and tempo change in such a way that a fraction of the beat in the old meter becomes the beat in the new meter (for

example, a dotted eighth in 4/4 becomes a quarter note in 4/4 at a proportionally faster tempo). Inspired by Ives's layered textures, Carter often gives each instrument a different rhythmic and melodic character to create a counterpoint of thoroughly independent lines, as in his String Quartet No. 2 (1959).

B. The University as Patron

In the United States and Canada, composers of music in the classical tradition have been supported during the 20th century largely through teaching positions in universities and colleges. This has isolated composers from the public and has sometimes encouraged avant-garde experimentation, but it has also been the major way younger composers have been trained. Important universities for composers have included Harvard (where Piston taught), Yale (Hindemith), the University of California at Berkeley (Ingolf Dahl), Mills College (Milhaud), UCLA (Schoenberg), Princeton (Sessions and Milton Babbitt), the University of Illinois (Gordon Binkerd and Ben Johnston), the University of Michigan (Ross Lee Finney), and the Eastman School (Hanson).

C. The Post-Webern Vogue

Webern exercised a strong influence on composers in the universities who sought an objective approach free from Americanism and the influence of popular music. Milton Babbitt (b. 1916) extended twelve-tone music in new directions, applying serial principles to duration and other parameters before the Europeans did so and devising ways to derive new series from the basic row.

D. New Sounds and Textures

Conlon Nancarrow (b. 1912) anticipated the precision of electronic and computer music by using player-piano rolls to create pieces whose complex rhythmic relationships and rapid gestures were beyond the capacity of human performers. Harry Partch (1901-1974) rejected equal temperament as untrue, formulated a 43-note scale of unequal steps using only the pure harmonic ratios of just intonation, and built new instruments

that used this scale. His works typically use these instruments to accompany dancing and singing; because his music cannot be played on standard instruments, it is seldom performed. Ben Johnston (b. 1926) applies just intonation to traditional instruments, such as piano or string quartet. George Crumb (b. 1929) draws unusual sounds from traditional instruments to create emotionally powerful music in an eclectic style, as in *Black Angels* (1970) for amplified string quartet.

J. Post-Modern Styles

Recent post-modernist architects have incorporated elements of earlier styles into their designs, and so do a number of post-avant-garde composers. George Rochberg (b. 1918) revisits and deconstructs the style of J. S. Bach in *Nach Bach* (After Bach, 1966). *Sinfonia* (1968) by Luciano Berio (b. 1925) quotes virtually an entire Mahler symphony movement and superimposes upon it more than 100 quotations from other works and verbal commentary from eight speakers. David Del Tredici (b. 1937) has written a number of works based on parts of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, using a style derived from Wagner and Strauss in order to communicate with an audience and match the innocence and whimsy of the stories.

VI. Conclusions

The four characteristics that have defined Western music since the Middle Ages have been challenged in the 20th century. Composition has been augmented in some music by chance procedures or improvisation. Notation has expanded to include graphic and other notation. Principles of order do not always rule in chance or indeterminate music and are not always perceptible in serial music. Polyphony and harmony continue in novel forms. "Serious" music has found only a small audience, and radical experimentation a still smaller one. Recent composers have sought ways to please a broader public, often by incorporating ideas from popular music, non-Western music, or music of the past.