

## Music History - Chapter 7

### The Beginnings of the 20th Century

#### EUROPEAN MUSIC FROM THE 1870'S TO WORLD WAR I

##### I. The German Tradition

###### A. Overview

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw an increasing tendency for composers to develop a style so individual that it departed from the shared conventions of common-practice tonality. These new styles were sometimes hard for listeners to understand or accept. Wagner was a strong influence on many composers.

###### B. Hugo Wolf

Hugo Wolf (1860-1903) is best known for his 250 lieder, which brought to the art song Wagner's harmony and fusion of voice and instrument. Wolf sought an equality between words and music, choosing only excellent poets and writing collections of lieder on poems by a single poet or group as if to keep poet and composer on an equal basis. The musical continuity is often in the piano, while the voice has a speechlike arioso.

###### C. Mahler

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) made a career as a conductor, including serving as director of the Vienna Opera (1897-1907) and the New York Philharmonic (1907-11). He completed nine symphonies and five song cycles with orchestra.

###### D. Mahler's Symphonies

Mahler's symphonies are long and often programmatic. He uses a large orchestra but creates delicate effects with solo instruments and unusual combinations. Several symphonies are based in part on his songs, and four include voices, most notably the Second (Resurrection) and the Eighth, which is in two large choral movements. Mahler included a greater diversity of elements and styles than did earlier symphonists, seeking to suggest a world in all its variety. His music often suggests irony or parody. Several symphonies begin and end in different keys.

###### E. Mahler's Lieder with Orchestra

The orchestral song cycle *Kindertotenlieder* (Songs on the Death of Children, 1901) uses the large orchestra and chromatic harmony of Wagner in a spare, haunting style. *Das Lied von der Erde* (The Song of the Earth, 1908), on poems translated from Chinese, captures both ecstasy and dread in a very

symphonic song cycle. Heir to the 19th-century symphony and the Viennese tradition, Mahler was a primary influence on Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern in the next generation.

###### F. Richard Strauss

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) is renowned for his symphonic poems, most of them written before 1900, and operas, most from after 1900. Like Mahler, he also wrote lieder and was well known as a conductor.

###### G. Strauss's Symphonic Poems

Symphonic poems may have a philosophical program, like Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration* (1889) and *Also sprach Zarathustra* (So Spoke Zoroaster, 1896, after a poem by Nietzsche), or a descriptive tale, like his *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* (Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks, 1889) and *Don Quixote* (1897). In each, the transformation of motives with extramusical connections helps to convey the plot, as in Wagner's music dramas.

###### H. Operas

Strauss achieved new fame as an opera composer with *Salome* (1903-5), whose decadent subject he captured with heightened dissonance and contrast. *Elektra* (1908) uses even sharper, apparently unresolved dissonance contrasted with diatonic passages to tell the tragic story, along with leitmotifs and the association of certain keys with characters. *Der Rosenkavalier* (The Cavalier of the Rose, 1910) has a lighter setting and plot and is thus much less dissonant, while using the same Straussian techniques of leitmotifs, key association, and colorful orchestration. *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Ariadne at Naxos, 1912, rev. 1916) hearkens back to the sounds and conventions of the Classic era.

###### I. Humperdinck, Reger, and Pfitzner

Engelbert Humperdinck's opera *Hansel und Gretel* (1893) combined Wagnerian leitmotifs with folklike melodies, while Hans Pfitzner's *Palestrina* (1917) used Wagner's approach to relate the legend of the Pope Marcellus Mass. Max Reger (1873-1916) combined Brahms's interest in form and counterpoint with Wagner's chromatic and modulatory harmony.

##### II. Nationalism

###### A. General

Nationalism in the 19th and early 20th centuries was an attempt to capture in music the character of one's own people, through the choice of patriotic

subjects or topics drawn from national literature; the use of national, folk, or folklike melodies or rhythms; or setting texts in one's national language. It lay behind Wagner and Verdi's choice of subject matter and Brahms and Mahler's use of folk styles and poetry. Composers in Russia, eastern Europe, England, France, and the United States especially sought a national style.

#### B. Russia

Milhail Glinka (1804-1857) was the first Russian composer to be recognized for a distinctively Russian style, notably in his operas *A Life for the Tsar* (1836) and *Ruslan and Lyndmila* (1842). Tchaikovsky was more a cosmopolitan than a nationalist, but chose Russian subjects for his operas. The *Mighty Handful* (or *Mighty Five*) was a group of five composers who sought a fresh Russian style. Cesar Cui is the least well known today. Mily Balakirev (1837-1910) collected folksongs and used folk melodies in a romantic style. Alexander Borodin (1833-1887) was a chemist best known for symphonic works, quartets, and his opera *Prince Igor*; he seldom used folk tunes, but his lovely melodies have some of their flavor.

#### C. Musorgsky

Modest Musorgsky (1839-1881) was the most original of the Five, best know.. for the piano suite *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874) and the opera *Boris Godunov* (premiered 1874). His vocal melodies follow Russian speech accents closely and imitate Russian folksongs, which move in a narrow range, repeat rhythmic motives, and are modal rather than tonal. Musorgsky's harmony is innovative and his music depicts physical gestures realistically.

#### D. Rimsky-Korsakov

Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) was one of the Five but later developed a smoother, more correct idiom. He was less interested in nationalism than in exotic and fairy-tale subjects. His main works were symphonic poems and operas, which often rendered human characters in a diatonic, modal style and supernatural characters and events in a chromatic, fanciful style marked by whole-tone and octatonic scales (respectively, scales made up of all whole tones or whole and half steps in strict alternation). Rimsky-Korsakov taught Alexander Glazunov and Igor Stravinsky. Sergei Rakhmaninov (1873-1943), a virtuoso pianist, wrote passionate, melodious piano concertos and other works in a style that was Romantic and sometimes Russian but not deliberately nationalist.

#### E. Skryabin

Alexander Skryabin (1872-1915) wrote mostly for the piano, beginning in a style derived from Chopin

and evolving to an individual style that was no longer tonal but used a complex chord or collection of notes as a reference point akin to a tonic chord. He sought a synthesis of the arts and intended his orchestral work *Prometheus* (1910) to be performed with changing colored lights.

#### F. Central Europe

Bedrich Smetana (1824-1884) and Antonfn Dvorak, the leading 19th-century Czech composers, are nationalist in choosing national subjects for program music and operas and in incorporating national dance rhythms and folklike tunes. Leos Jana'cek (1854-1928) collected folk music and cultivated a style based on Czech speech and song; he is best known for operas, in addition to choral works, chamber music, and symphonic works.

#### G. Norway

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) was a nationalist who incorporated Norwegian national traits particularly in his short piano pieces and vocal works.

#### H. Other Countries

Nationalist composers were also active in Poland, Denmark, and the Netherlands.

#### I. Finland

Finnish composer Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) drew programs and song texts from the literature of Finland, especially the national epic the *Kalevala*. He does not use or imitate folksongs. He is best known for orchestral program music, seven symphonies, and the *Violin Concerto*. Sibelius is most original in his themes, his treatment of form, and the way his themes grow, develop, and interact.

#### J. England

Edward Elgar (1857-1934) wrote in a style derived from Brahms and Wagner rather than from English folksong.

#### K. Spain

Spanish nationalism was sparked by the operas of Felipe Pedrell (1841-1922) and the piano music of Isaac Albeniz (1860-1909). The major Spanish composer of the early 20th century was Manuel de Falla (1876-1946), whose earlier works use rhythms and melodic turns of Spanish popular music and whose later works are more neo-Classic.

#### III. New Currents in France

##### A. General

The National Society for French Music, founded in 1871, gave performances of living French composers and revived French music of the 16th through 18th centuries, helping to strengthen an

independent French musical tradition. Three traditions coexisted in French music after 1871: a cosmopolitan tradition around Franck and d'Indy, a French tradition around Saint-Saens and Faure, and a new style developed by Debussy.

#### B. The Cosmopolitan Tradition

Cesar Franck and his student Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931) represent a cosmopolitan tradition in France influenced by Wagner and German counterpoint.

#### C. The French Tradition

French music from Couperin to Gounod is typified by emotional reserve, lyricism, economy, refinement, and interest in well-ordered form rather than self-expression. The works of Camille Saint-Saens (1835-1921) and the operas of Jules Massenet (1842-1912) combine this tradition with Romantic touches. Gabriel Faure (1845-1924) studied with Saint-Saens, worked as an organist, helped to found the National Society for French Music, taught composition at the Paris Conservatoire, and became its director. He is esteemed in France for his refined songs, piano pieces, and chamber works marked by lyrical melodies, lack of virtuosic display, and harmony that does not drive toward a tonic resolution, but instead suggests repose. His students included Ravel and Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979), a famous teacher of composition.

#### D. Debussy

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) exercised a major influence on 20th-century music. His style, called impressionism (a term he disliked) by analogy with the impressionist painters, suggested a mood or atmosphere rather than expressing the deep emotions of Romanticism. He absorbed influences from many composers, including Wagner, Musorgsky, and Liszt. Although his music usually has a tonal center, the harmony is often coloristic and the strong pull to resolution is missing, creating a sense of movement without direction and of pleasure without urgency. His most important music includes orchestral pieces, many songs and piano works, and the opera *Pelleas et Melisande*. He was one of the most influential composers of the 20th century.

#### E. Satie

Erik Satie (1865-1925) was an avant-garde iconoclast who changed his style but consistently opposed sentimentality. His early piano pieces challenged Romantic pretension through deliberate simplicity and a modal, nonfunctional harmony that paved the way for impressionism. His later piano works mocked impressionism with parodistic music,

surreal titles, and satirical commentary printed in the score. *Socrate* (1920) for singers and chamber orchestra is strangely moving in its austere simplicity, stylistic monotony, and avoidance of emotion.

#### F. Ravel

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) looked back to the 18th-century French tradition in *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (for piano 1917, orchestrated 1919) and other works. He preferred clear forms and more pungent harmonies than Debussy but also wrote several impressionist works, such as the ballet *Daphnis et Chloe* (1909-11). Some of his music, such as the famous *Bolero* (1928), uses Spanish idioms.

#### IV. Italian Opera

One trend in Italian opera in the late 19th century is verismo (realism or naturalism), which sought a realistic depiction of everyday people in extreme dramatic situations. Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) was an eclectic composer who combined realism and exoticism with intense emotion through a style focused on melody over spare accompaniment.

#### THE EUROPEAN MAINSTREAM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

##### I. Introduction

After World War I, the division of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, the rise of totalitarian regimes in Russia, Italy, Germany, and Spain, and a worldwide economic depression in the 1930s led to a greater cultural isolation between nations and thus a greater diversity in musical trends. Compositions without tonal centers or goal-directed harmony moved beyond common-practice tonality. Neo-Classical music evoked concepts, forms, and styles of the 18th century. Folk and traditional music from eastern Europe and Asia offered new possibilities in rhythm and pitch organization. Composers of film music and of *Gebrauchsmusik* (workaday music) for schools and amateurs sought a more accessible idiom. The Soviet and Nazi regimes controlled music in Russia and Germany and condemned most modern music. After World War II, many composers turned to aleatoric and serial music, which had little audience appeal; in reaction, the search for a more popular idiom led to new approaches after about 1970, such as minimalism and neo-Romanticism. Recordings, radio, and television created new audiences and furthered the spread of both popular music and art music around the world. The diversity of music in the 20th century is unprecedented, as composers sought individual

solutions to the problem of how to write music for the permanent repertory of musical classics.

## II. Ethnic Contexts

### A. Collecting Ethnic Musics

New recording technologies aided the collection and study of the music of traditional peoples. Rather than changing this music to fit art music, as had been done in the 19th century, composers used folk elements to create new styles.

### B. Bartok

Be'la Bartok (1881-1945) collected and published folk tunes from his native Hungary, Romania, and elsewhere. Besides arranging folk tunes or incorporating them in his music, he synthesized a personal style that united folk and art music. He was also a pianist and a piano teacher, and his *Mikrokosmos* (1926-37) is a series of graded piano pieces that encapsulates his style. He worked in traditional forms, with a distinguished series of six string quartets, two violin concertos, a piano sonata and piano concerto, the *Concerto for Orchestra* (1943), and *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta* (1936). From the Western tradition he took imitative and fugal techniques, sonata and other forms, and thematic development; from eastern Europe, modal and other scales, irregular meters, harmonic seconds and fourths, and certain kinds of melodic ornamentation; from both, the concepts of music with a tonal center, phrases, and motives that can be repeated and varied. He was also intrigued by symmetry, as in mirrors and retrogrades.

### C. Kodaly

Zoltan Kodaly (1882-1967) also collected Hungarian folk tunes and developed a strongly nationalist style. He was well known as a music educator.

## III. The Soviet Orbit

### A. Prokofiev

Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953) left his native Russia after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, toured as a pianist, and composed on commission. He returned to the Soviet Union in 1934 and wrote some of his most popular music there, including the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* (1935-36) and *Peter and the Wolf* (1936) for narrator and orchestra. Soviet authorities demanded that composers adhere to the concept of socialist realism and attacked Prokofiev for formalism.

### B. Shostakovich

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1985) was the most prominent composer to spend his entire career under the Soviet state, which both supported him and sought to control him. His opera *Lady Macbeth*

of Mtsensk (1932) was an international success until it was condemned by the official newspaper *Pravda* in 1936. His popular *Fifth Symphony* was written in part to win back favor from the authorities. He is best known for his fifteen symphonies and eight string quartets, some of which use his musical signature D-EI'-C-B (D-Es-C-H in German, for Dmitri Shostakovich).

## IV. England

### A. Vaughan Williams

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958), the leading English composer of the early 20th century, drew inspiration from English folksong, hymnody, and earlier English composers. (His first name is pronounced "Rafe," and his last name is Vaughan Williams, not Williams) He wrote hymns, choral music for amateur singers, operas, and nine symphonies in a mixed tonal and modal style.

### B. Holst and Walton

Gustav Holst (1874-1934) and William Walton (1902-1982) are also significant English composers.

### C: Britten

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976), the most important English composer of the century, is known for his choral works, especially the *War Requiem* (1962), and his operas, inaugurated with Peter Grimes (1945). Marked by lyrical melodies often accompanied by drones or sustained chords and by mixtures of diatonic tonality with modal and chromatic effects, his music uses simple means to convey deep human emotions.

### D. Tippett

Michael Tippett (b. 1905) has incorporated into his music elements of historical styles, African-American music, and Javanese gamelan music. Like the other English composers, Tippett frequently uses modal melodies in a diatonic setting.

## V. Germany

### A. The Nazi Regime

Nazi policies in the 1930s hindered modern music in Germany and led many musicians to leave.

### B. Hindemith

Paul Hindemith (1895- 1963) was important as a composer and as a teacher. His music from the 1920s is thoroughly modernist, but in the 1930s he began to compose *Gebrauchsmusik* in an accessible style and to give his art music a more Romantic quality. His best-known work is his symphony *Mathis der Maler* (*Matthias the Painter*, 1934), drawn from his opera of the same name. Hindemith used a procedure he called harmonic fluctuation, in which phrases start with relative consonance, move

toward greater dissonance, and return to consonance.

C: Carl Orff (1895-1982) is best known for his choral work *Carmina burana* (1936) and for a method for teaching music to children in schools.

#### D. Weill

Kurt Weill (1900-1950) composed operas in Berlin on librettos by Bertolt Brecht, notably *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1927-31) and the very successful *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*, 1928), adapted from John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. Brecht and Weill sought to promote a social ideology, and Weill used an easily understood musical language that parodied American popular music. After the Nazis rose to power in 1933, Weill emigrated to the United States and had a second career writing Broadway musical comedies.

#### VI. Latin America

Major composers of Latin America include Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) of Brazil, Carlos Chavez (1899-1978) of Mexico, and Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) of Argentina.

#### VII. Neo-Classicism in France

##### A. Neo-Classicism

Composers in the first half of the 20th century frequently imitated styles, genres, and procedures from earlier periods. Music that referred directly to 18th-century models and deliberately avoided Romanticism was often called neo-Classic. (When the reference is to the early 18th century, some writers now prefer the term neo-Baroque, and neo-Renaissance and neo-medieval music was also written.)

##### B. Honegger

Arthur Honegger (1892-1955) is best known for *Pacific 231* (1923), an orchestral impression of a train, and for his opera-oratorio *King David* (1921).

##### C. Milhaud

Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) was extremely prolific in almost every genre. He absorbed a variety of influences, including earlier French composers, Brazilian music, ragtime, the blues, and jazz. He frequently used polytonality, in which two or more streams of music, each implying a different key, are superimposed.

##### D. Poulenc

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) wrote in an engaging style influenced by French popular song and 18th-

century French composers and, like them, light and witty more often than serious or ponderous.

#### Igor Stravinsky

##### A. Career

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) took part in most major compositional trends during his lifetime. He made his reputation with three early ballets commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev for the Russian Ballet in Paris.

##### B. Early Works

All three ballets feature plots from Russian culture and use Russian folk melodies. *The Fire Bird* (1910) continues the exoticism and colorful orchestration of Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky's teacher. Some of Stravinsky's distinctive stylistic traits emerge in the second ballet, *Petrushka* (1911), including octatonic and polytonal sonorities; ostinatos or repetitive melodies and rhythms over static harmony; blocks of sound that alternate without transitions; and independent layers of sound that are superimposed on one another. *Le Sacre du printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*, 1913) adds to this new orchestral effects; a greater level of dissonance (often octatonic or derived from superimposed triads); and rhythm that, through changing meters and unexpected accents and silences, negates regular meter and emphasizes instead the basic indivisible pulse, suggesting a musical primitivism. *Le Sacre* precipitated a riot at its premiere, but this apparently had more to do with the dance than with the music. All three ballets have since become Stravinsky's most popular works and among the most popular in the entire century.

##### C. 1913-1923

Owing partly to the stringent wartime economy, Stravinsky's works during and just after World War I are for smaller ensembles.

##### D. Stravinsky's Neo-Classicism

From the 1920s to the opera *The Rake's Progress* (1951), Stravinsky adopted a neo-Classic approach that abandoned the Russian tunes and extramusical concerns of his earlier works and sought to create abstract, objective music based on historical models. This was inaugurated by his reworkings of 18th-century music by Pergolesi and others in the ballet *Pulcinella* (1919) and continued in a series of works that revived genres and alluded to (but never directly imitated) styles of previous eras from Machaut to Tchaikovsky. The most frequent target is the Classic era, as in the *Symphony in C* (1940, modeled after Haydn and Beethoven symphonies) and *The Rake's Progress* (modeled after Mozart

operas). Despite Stravinsky's evocations of earlier styles, his music continued to show the personal characteristics listed above and exemplified in *Le*

*Sacre du printemps*. In works of the 1950s and 1960s, he adapted the serial techniques of Schoenberg and Webern.