

Music 111 – Music Appreciation

The 20th Century (1900-present)

INTELLECTUAL CHARACTERISTICS

A time of great violence (Two World Wars, atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a global economic depression between the wars, other armed conflicts around the world, and an extended cold war.) It was also a time of amazing scientific progress (from the Wright brother's first powered flight to men landing on the moon, discovery of the structure of DNA, computers and the internet, etc.) Arts characterized by rapid changes and breaks with the past. Artists sought to shock their audiences. Increased emphasis on pluralism. United States (New York & Los Angeles) replaced Paris and Vienna as centers of contemporary art and culture.

MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

- An age of musical diversity (An age of musical “-isms.”)
- Tone color more important than ever before
 - Percussive sounds used more frequently
 - Uncommon playing techniques become normal
 - Instruments are played in extreme high and low registers
 - Percussion instruments are numerous and prominent
 - Unusual groupings of instruments in ensembles
 - Less emphasis on blended sound
 - sharply contrasting tone colors
- “Emancipation of dissonance”
- New chord structures : Quartal (4th chords), polychords, tone cluster
- Alternatives to traditional tonal system
 - Bitonality – music in two keys at the same time
 - Polytonality – music in two or more keys at the same time
 - Atonality – the absence of tonality or key (12-tone system)
- Rhythmic vocabulary of music expanded
 - Emphasis on irregularity and unpredictability
 - Jazz rhythms, influences from non-western cultures
 - Syncopation
 - Changing meters & odd meters (groups of 5, 7, etc.)
 - Polyrhythms
- Ostinato – use of repeated rhythmic and melodic patterns to help unify a work
- Melodies often contain wide pitch leaps and are difficult to sing
- Use of new and different scales: 12-tone, Pentatonic, Whole-tone, church modes
- Expanded range of musical influences: recorded music, television & film, internet, ease of travel, historical research
- Universities and conservatories become new patrons for composers

AN AGE OF MUSICAL DIVERSITY

Composers expanded on the Romantic era quest for individuality of musical style and tended to rebel against the conventions of the past. In the process they created many distinct, radically different musical styles, many of which are categorized as musical “-isms.” Many composers changed their own personal style throughout their careers.

Impressionism – Led by French composers (Claude Debussy) music creates “fleeting moods and misty atmosphere.” Stress is placed on tone color and fluidity. No sudden shifts in dynamic level. Ambiguous tonality is achieved through the use of parallel chord movement, whole-tone and pentatonic scales, and chromaticism.

Neoclassicism – features emotional restraint, balance, and clarity. Uses musical forms and stylistic features of 18th century (classical period) music to organize music written with 20th century harmonies and rhythms. (Stravinsky, Hindemith)

Primitivism – 20th century music designed to evoke the prehistoric (primitive) ritual and dance of ancient societies. Most closely associated with Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*.)

Expressionism – stressed intense, subjective emotion and attempted to explore the inner feelings and workings of the mind rather than outward appearances. Primarily associated with German and Austrian composers. (Schoenberg, Berg, Webern) Usually atonal music which stresses harsh dissonance, fragmentation, unusual instrumental effects, and extreme registers.

Serialism – Music composed in adherence with **Arnold Schoenberg's 12-tone system**. Atonal music, using all twelve tones of the chromatic scale arranged by the composer into a series called a **tone row**. Tone rows can be played in original order, or in reverse order (retrograde), or upside down (inversion), or upside down and backward (retrograde inversion.) Schoenberg's vocal works often use **Sprechstimme (speech-voice)** an unusual style of vocal performance halfway between speaking and singing. Pitches and rhythms are notated to create a "sing-song" speech-like effect.

Nationalism – Many composers followed the lead of their predecessors in the Romantic era and sought to rediscover and redefine the traditional music of their homelands. They often incorporated folksongs and patriotic songs in their works, sometimes reinterpreting them with 20th century ideas on harmony, rhythm, and tone color. (Bartok, Ives, Copland, Gershwin, Still)

Minimalism - characterized by a steady beat, clear tonality, insistent repetition of short melodic patterns. Minimalist musical works develop and change slowly, gradually, and almost imperceptibly over time. (Reich, Glass, Riley, Adams)

Chance Music (Aleatory Music) – composers devise a method in which pitches, tone colors, and rhythms for a musical work are selected randomly (by throwing dice, drawing cards, or watching fish swim behind a musical staff, etc.) (John Cage)

Quotation Music – deliberately makes extensive use of "quotations" from previously written musical works juxtaposed with newly composed material. The "quoted" music often conveys a symbolic meaning or is varied to convey a different meaning from what was originally intended. (Ellen Taaffe Zwilich)

Electronic Music – Composers use synthesizers and computers to create new tone colors and melodic and rhythmic patterns which often cannot be replicated with traditional instruments and performing techniques. **Musique concrète** was an early form of electronic music which involved cutting, splicing, and otherwise manipulating pre-recorded (taped) audio material (music, sounds, etc.)