

Twentieth-Century Music

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~ Elliott Antokoletz ~

Twentieth-Century Music

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Preface

An unprecedented departure from established musical traditions characterizes much of the music composed during the first decade of the twentieth century. Despite the passage of more than three quarters of a century, many works written around 1910 are still referred to as "modern." No changes of musical style or technique have ever produced such a sense of historical discontinuity as those that gave rise to our own era. This condition may be traced directly to the radical change in the basic premises of the musical language itself, a revolutionary transformation stemming most prominently from the works of Ives, Scriabin, Debussy, Bartók, Stravinsky, and members of the Vienna Schoenberg circle.

The prevailing political conditions that surrounded both World Wars contributed to the isolation and divergency of the new musical idioms. Pre-World-War-I conflicts between the Triple Alliance (Prussia, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and, temporarily, Italy) and the Triple Entente (Russia, France, and England) led to a weakening of the Germanic musical sphere of influence in Europe. While German late-Romantic music continued to exert an influence primarily in Germany and Austria in the early twentieth century, many non-Germanic composers turned fervently toward new sources for their musical languages and styles. Nationalistic demands induced composers to look toward Eastern Europe, France, and their own national treasures in literature, the arts, and folklore as the basis for new sources for composition. Thus, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, three conflicting musical forces were prevalent: German late Romanticism, national styles first evident in Russia and spreading to other countries, and new French styles as manifested in the distinctive approaches of Debussy and Satie.

Motivation by many composers to break away from the German musical hegemony of the late nineteenth century led to two extremes of tonal orientation in the early twentieth century. The ultrachromaticism of Wagner, Bruckner, and Mahler evolved into the more dissonant chromaticism of Richard Strauss and the expressionistic atonality of the Vienna Schoenberg circle, while the pentatonic-diatonic modalities of folk music were to serve as the basis for transformation into new kinds of scale systems found in the music of Debussy, Scriabin, Stravinsky, Bartók, Kodály, and other composers of diverse national backgrounds. The most significant of these modal transformations are the various hybrid modal types and "cyclic-interval" scales, for instance, whole-tone and octatonic (the latter, an eight-note symmetrical scale based on alternating whole-steps and half-steps, or vice versa, is formed by joining any two of the three diminished-seventh chords, i.e., "minor-third cycles"). Stemming from these two opposing sources, German ultrachromaticism and the modal sources of folk music, it was inevitable that the new music would reveal irreconcilable differences in details of phrase, rhythm, pitch organization, and large-scale formal construction.

Despite their fundamental differences, the special premises that underlie each of these two broadly polarized categories could only have been established by

the liberation of meter and rhythm permitted by the disappearance of traditional tonal functions in the early twentieth century. In the major-minor scale system, the basic concepts of consonance and dissonance were tied inextricably to the regular barline, but the emergence of new systems of pitch organization was to foster the new autonomy in meter, rhythm, and the other musical parameters. Many composers who drew from folk-music sources, especially from outside of Western culture (Eastern Europe, Russia, Asia, and Africa), introduced unequal-beat patterns from both dynamic dance rhythms in strict style (“tempo giusto”) and free vocal style (“parlando rubato”) into their contemporary idioms. Thus, certain musical divergencies in the twentieth century can be traced to the basic split in the late nineteenth century between Germanic and non-Germanic political, social, and musical spheres.

Traditional Italian operatic styles, like the German sources, also permeated various musical cultures, including those of Eastern Europe (for instance, Hungary) and Latin America (for instance, Mexico and Argentina). Although the musical cultures of Italy and Germany are as “national” as any other musical culture, their historical influences and global dissemination point to their essential international role in the course of early twentieth-century musical developments. However, by the end of World War I, the German and Italian influences were superseded largely by new international sources, which had emerged originally as part of the early twentieth-century tendency toward national individuation. Of the new sources, the impressionism of Debussy and the primitivism of the Russian works of Stravinsky were among the most prominent aesthetic and stylistic models to be absorbed by composers world wide, the influence of Debussy having already been in evidence since the first decade of the century and that of Stravinsky by the early 1920s. To these sources must be added the influence of Bartók, Webern, and several others of varied national backgrounds, all of whom also contributed to international musical developments. The organization of the chapters in this book is intended partly to reflect these changing emphases.

ORGANIZATION

This text is organized in two large sections, which reflect the two fundamental waves of modernism in the twentieth century. The first wave, which appears to have grown out of the reaction to the Romantic era, became evident entirely by the first decade of the century. The second wave, which gained momentum after World War II with the revival of serialism and the disappearance of censorship of the avant garde, blossomed fully by the early 1950s. *Part I: Music to the Late 1940s* is organized as follows: Chapters 1-3 explore chromaticism both within and beyond the limits of tonality in Germany and Austria; Chapters 4-8 cover diverse national developments, which include the new folk-music orientation and other aesthetic and stylistic assumptions that arose from the increasing awareness of national and cultural identity; Chapters 9-12 discuss various facets of the Neoclassical ideal, which also includes a strong tendency toward a national sense in some cases; Chapter 13 is based on early interests in color, noise, and new sonorities, which appear to have resulted from dissolution of the traditional major-minor scale system and the need to establish new

means of expression and structural organization; and Chapter 14 provides a history of the extensions of the twelve-tone system both in and outside of Vienna from the mid-1920s through the 1940s. *Part II: Music Since the Mid-1940s* explores both the continuation and development of trends that were established prior to World War I as well as the newer trends that began to emerge in the decades between the wars: Chapters 15-17 explore the multiplicity of atonal and twelve-tone techniques that became widespread after World War II; Chapters 18-19 deal with the contrasting compositional assumptions that were emerging prominently in the *musique concrète*, electronic, and aleatoric movements; and Chapter 20 provides discussions of many composers who continued, in varying degrees, to absorb elements from their own national idioms as well as other early twentieth-century trends. All of these post-World-War-II musical developments are viewed in the context of the new political, social, and economic conditions—these include the aftermath of the Nazi holocaust, reaction to the political conditions and life styles of the interwar years, advent of the atomic and space age, and new electronic and computer technologies—all of which were to contribute either directly or indirectly to the increasing multiplicity in all areas of the arts.

Major book-length studies of twentieth-century music have been proliferating over the past several years. Notwithstanding the important contributions that many of these studies have made to our understanding of the music, the tendency has been to provide either an encyclopedic historical overview, i.e., with little or no in-depth theoretic-analytical discussion of the compositions themselves, or to provide a compendium of compositional techniques, i.e., with limited or no emphasis on historical aspects. The intention of this text is to provide as thorough and balanced a perspective of the music of our century as possible. Thus, detailed theoretic-analytical studies from a broad spectrum of musical idioms form a significant part of this study within larger discussions of the political, social, and cultural framework.

Certain composers have received greater attention than others in these chapters according to criteria not always based on artistic merit. Such determinations may have been dictated by the following factors: impact of a composer on his own and/or future generations; contribution to the development of a particular theoretic-principle; role in the dissemination of prevalent aesthetics, styles, and techniques through teacher-pupil or other types of associations; stature as a national figure; popularity as reflected in the number of score publications and recordings; and so on. At the same time, relatively unknown composers are given more attention than certain more established ones occasionally because of the intrinsic quality of their music, which is deserving of this opportunity for public exposure.

Because of the extraordinary number of composers and the diversity of music that one must contend with in producing a history of twentieth-century music, it seems impossible to provide an entirely fair or balanced representation in the discussions. Several early twentieth-century composers as well as many younger ones of true artistic worth could not be given more than brief mention or, in some cases, had to be excluded altogether. Decisions for inclusion were made on the basis of what might best contribute to a coherent historical understanding of the general aesthetic, stylistic, and technical principles that characterize the music of our century. Such decisions have been based on my own intensive study and intimate

contact with the music itself, these experiences having come from over fifteen years of teaching a variety of courses in twentieth-century music, personal contact with composers, and participation in contemporary music ensembles in performances of much of the string quartet literature and other genres.

This text is based on both in-depth and brief analyses of a variety of compositional idioms, which have been selected for their relevance and comprehensiveness in demonstrating the basic principles of a particular musical language and in reflecting a given historical tendency. At the same time, the analytical discussions are by no means intended to cover every aspect of a composer's style or technique, but rather to point to the most salient features that might pave the way for more comprehensive and detailed studies of individual compositions and, ultimately, the larger output of a given composer or group of composers. Musical discussions range from contexts based on both traditional (sometimes even harmonically functional) pitch constructions and less traditional modal (often folk-music-derived) forms to the most abstract melodic and harmonic constructions as well as materials organized by means other than pitched sounds. Where pitch relations are removed from traditional tonal means of organization, new terms and labels, many of which have by now become standard, are employed in order to avoid the conceptual implications of the traditional tonal system, which may no longer be relevant to the new idiom. The introduction of the relevant terminology in this textbook will facilitate students' awareness and understanding of fundamental twentieth-century compositional approaches, since the terminology is connected inextricably to the concepts themselves.

Primary instances of such terminological issues are found in the twelve-tone serial idiom as well as in music based on non-twelve-tone pitch-sets, in which alphabetical names of pitch classes have been replaced in analytical studies by numerical nomenclature (numbers 0 through 11 being assigned to the twelve pitch classes, with the octave designated by either 0 or 12). While such numerical substitution has been in use since the first half of the century, the present text employs numbers for pitch classes according to a principle that has not yet been adopted universally. In order to establish a more unified analytical approach to the vast array of compositions based on pitch-sets, we arbitrarily assign 0 (=12) to pitch-class C. Transposition numbers of pitch collections will also be designated by numbers from 0 to 11. We will assume a referential order (as we do for triads and the major and minor scales in the traditional tonal system) in assigning a transposition number to a scale or pitch collection: the pitch-class number of the "first" note will designate that collection. If a referential collection is "based" on C, its transposition number is 0 (=12). If the collection is transposed so that its "first" note becomes C#, its transposition number becomes 1 (=13).

The logic of the latter is the same as that in naming tonalities or keys in traditional tonal music, in which the alphabetical nomenclature is fixed. For instance, we know immediately what is meant when we say a piece is in B \flat major or G# minor—it would be absurd to assign "A major" or "A minor" to the first (or basic) key of every tonal piece simply because "A" is the first letter of the alphabet. Nevertheless, such designations have been standardized in analyses of serial or pitch-set compositions, in which "O" is assigned automatically to the initial pitch-class of

the first (or basic) statement of the twelve-tone row regardless of that pitch-class. Thus, if we say that the basic row statement in Schoenberg's *Fourth String Quartet* is "P-2," we would like to know that the first note of that "prime" form of the row is D. Such fixed designations (with C=0) are applied consistently to non-twelve-tone (serial or nonserial) as well as twelve-tone sets throughout the present study. For compositions based on the church or folk modes, the standard terminology (Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, etc.) will be used. These and other terms and concepts will be defined more explicitly in the course of the analytical discussions. In order for the reader to derive maximum benefit from the musical analyses, it would be helpful to supplement the illustrative musical examples within the text by keeping in hand the musical score of the work under discussion.

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1 Toward expressionism and the transformation of nineteenth-century chromatic tonality

Transformation of German late-Romantic musical styles into more concentrated expressionistic idioms in the early twentieth century was concomitant with, and to an extent dependent upon, certain new tendencies in literature and psychology. Reaction by many turn-of-the-century dramatists against the naturalistic tendencies of nineteenth-century theatre appears to have been based on a new interest in psychological motivation and the projection of spiritual rather than naturalistic actualities. Some of the most prominent among these new dramatists were Strindberg, Yeats, Ibsen, Chekhov, Toller, Joyce, and other figures of diverse national backgrounds. In Vienna, these new literary assumptions were primarily manifested in the dramas and novels of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Jacob Wassermann, and Arthur Schnitzler, who founded the group known as "Young Vienna" in 1900 in opposition to the German naturalist school of drama. These writers were to reveal new psychological insights into the pathology of their individual characters. As the seat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and a scientific and cultural center, Vienna had also attracted such musical figures as Brahms, Bruckner, Mahler, Richard Strauss, and Schoenberg.

STRAUSS, HOFMANNSTHAL, AND THE VIENNA OF SIGMUND FREUD

Between 1906 and 1908, Hofmannsthal and Strauss began their collaboration with the operatic setting of *Elektra*.¹ In many of his librettos, Hofmannsthal approached the subject of love and hate from a profound human perspective, concerning himself with psychological motivation, more lucid character delineation, and the symbolic transcendence of external reality. It was during this time in Vienna that Freud was developing his theory of psychoanalysis in *Studien über Hysterie* (1895; *Studies in Hysteria*, 1955) and *Die Traumdeutung* (1899; *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1953). These psychoanalytic studies were instrumental in establishing the premise of subconscious domination over the conscious mind. The connection between Hofmannsthal's psychological approach to *Elektra* and Freud's theories is a direct one.² When the Austrian theatre director Max Reinhardt expressed to Hofmannsthal his disinterest in what he considered to be the dullness of the ancient Greek dramatic style, Hofmannsthal was impelled to turn to a study of Rohde's *Psyche* as well as

¹ See Richard Strauss und Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Briefwechsel: Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Franz and Alice Strauss, rev. Willi Schuh (Zurich: Atlantis Verlag AG, 1952, enlarged 2/1955; Eng. tr. Collins, 1961), letters from 1906 through 1909 *passim*.

² See William Mann, *Richard Strauss: A Critical Study of the Operas* (Cassell and London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1964), p. 68.

Freud's *Studien über Hysterie* before producing his version of the *Elektra* play in 1903. These psychoanalytic influences obviously led Hofmannsthal to his more intense and powerful version of the original Sophocles model.

In conjunction with these developments in literature and psychology, composers sought new technical means to express the more profound psychological states underlying emotions. The ultrachromaticism of Wagner, Bruckner, and Mahler reached its most intensive stage in the dissonant chromatic tonality of *Elektra*, a landmark in Strauss' operatic development that epitomizes late Romantic music on the threshold of the new chromatic idiom. While the expressionistic quality as well as certain "nontonal" aspects of *Elektra* predate the free-tonality of Schoenberg's *Erwartung* (1909) and Berg's *Wozzeck* (1914–1922), Strauss never crossed that threshold. After *Elektra*, in his operas *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1911–1912), he reverted to classical techniques and forms. *Elektra* foreshadowed certain characteristics of the new idiom, especially in its overall tonal organization based on a specific scheme of chromatic relations. The trend toward equalization of the twelve semitones of the chromatic scale and the dissolution of traditional tonal functions in the compositions of the Vienna Schoenberg circle were already suggested in *Elektra*, where traditional triadic roots are symmetrically distributed around the central tonality of D.³ For instance, *Elektra's* leitmotif is based on two triads a tritone apart (mm. 12–15), the B and F roots of which are symmetrical to D (B–D–F). As part of this scheme, the symmetrical polarization of the tonalities (B \flat , at No. 36, mm. 6ff., and F \sharp , No. 130, mm. 3ff.) of Agamemnon and Klytaemnestra on either side of the B–F motif of the child (F \sharp /B–F/B \flat) is essential both to the psychological structure of the opera and the more chromatic harmonic conception. In Classical harmonic progressions, the derivation of triads from common or closely related diatonic scales permits maximal intersection of triadic content, whereas in Strauss' opera the symmetrical organization of triadic roots produces maximal chromatic and dissonant relations between the triadic constructions themselves. Strauss' approach to harmonic progression, dissonance, and the overall symmetrical tonal scheme in *Elektra* represents a radical departure from nineteenth-century chromaticism, the new musical principles providing expanded possibilities for expressing the psychological symbolization of the drama.⁴

Ethan Mordden places *Elektra* in proper perspective: "a monumental nexus of revenge tragedy, psychological study, and classical reinvestment—the regeneration of old themes via modern interrogation . . . the heroine's

³ This tonal organization is outlined by Elliott Antokoletz in "Strauss' *Elektra*: Toward Expressionism and the Transformation of Nineteenth-Century Chromatic Tonality," *Musik und Dichtung* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1990): 449.

⁴ These musico-dramatic relations are discussed in detail in Antokoletz, "Strauss' *Elektra*" (see note 3 above).