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Twentieth Century Composition

A Guide to the Materials
of Modern Music

Third Edition

Leon
Dallin

Compositi

Techniques of
Twentieth Century
Composition

A Guide to the Materials

of Modern Music



Leon Dallin

California State University
Long Beach

Third Edition

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*To those who made this book possible—
my teachers, my students, my colleagues,
and most especially my wife,
who is the real writer in the family.*

Preface

THE training of musicians no longer begins with the music of the eighteenth century and ends with that of the nineteenth century. Older and newer music deserve and are receiving added emphasis in colleges, universities, and schools of music. This book is devoted to the music of the twentieth century.

The approach is appropriate for composers exploring contemporary idioms, for performers learning to cope with the innovations of modern music, and for teachers developing their understanding and appreciation of the music of our time. All three categories are served by this text. It is designed to provide essential knowledge of the techniques and materials of twentieth-century music and to bridge the gulf between traditional academic training and current practice.

Courses in harmony and counterpoint are prescribed for prospective composers, performers, and teachers alike. The study of composition is a logical and necessary continuation. In conventional idioms technical proficiency and artistic discrimination are acquired, after familiarity through listening and performing, by analyzing and writing. Using this approach for modern music accomplishes the same purposes and reveals the functional relationships between antiquated resources and their contemporary counterparts. Systematic utilization of new materials in creative exercises teaches composers to write the musical language of our time, performers to speak it, and listeners to understand it. The individuality of composers is asserted by the choices they make from the infinite possibilities when they are deliberately imitating established styles. Besides, individuality is not so much something to strive for as something which emerges spontaneously with maturity and technical proficiency. Performers and teachers turn to their particular specialties before reaching this level of attainment, but their musical insight is immeasurably enriched by temporarily assuming the role of the composer.

The techniques and materials of twentieth-century music are surveyed and illustrated with more than 300 examples drawn exclusively from the works of recognized composers. The coverage is comprehensive, and all significant styles and procedures are represented. The sources of the ex-

amples are identified by composer, title, page or movement, date, and publisher, and recordings not listed in the *Schwann Record and Tape Guides* are specified. To facilitate the reading of the examples by less experienced musicians and to make them readily playable on the piano, the treble and bass clefs are used. Orchestral scores have been transposed and reduced, with few exceptions, and unessential elements have been omitted. Contemporary devices with direct antecedents in the music of the past are explained using conventional terminology and symbols. The components of complex sonorities, for example, are arranged on the staff to reveal their underlying structures, obviating the need for a new system of analysis.

The present volume evolved from efforts extending back to the 1940s to develop a logical and systematic presentation of the techniques and materials of twentieth-century music to classes in composition and theory. Teachers who have specialized in other areas of music and composers who are more interested in creating new works than in organizing and systematizing their knowledge for the benefit of students should find it equally useful as a text. I wish to express my appreciation to the students who inspired and tested the original edition and to the teachers whose suggestions contributed to the present edition and whose adoptions made it possible. I also wish to thank the composers and publishers who generously granted permission to quote from copyrighted works.

Leon Dallin

Suggestions for the Use of This Book

THE examples constitute a vital feature of this text. They are taken from works for which scores and/or recordings are generally available. Page numbers for the examples refer to their location in the edition indicated, if any; otherwise in the Kalmus¹ score. Dates other than in the copyright notices are approximate dates of composition, publication, or first performance. Recordings of works not listed under the composer's name in the *Schwann Record and Tape Guides* are identified. The musical examples in the text, or better still the works from which they are taken, should be studied and played in class or as outside assignments. Comments in the text are focused on the subject of the particular chapter, but other aspects of the examples can be considered as they arise in the process of classroom discussion. When the examples are observed in context and heard in the original medium, the techniques illustrated are perceived as elements of style, and their contribution to musical values can be assessed. Systematic exposure to the broad spectrum of twentieth-century music represented in the text is essential if musicians are to understand, perform, and appreciate properly the music of our time.

The techniques and materials examined are in general use, and much is to be gained by searching out additional examples similar to those printed in the book. Alert performers and perceptive listeners will strive continually to identify and assimilate the twentieth-century practices to which they are exposed in their various musical activities.

The expectation is not that all types of modern music will be found equally attractive, but to make cogent evaluations and to produce mature compositions, all must be familiar. It is preferable to explore every phase of contemporary composition, however briefly, than to concentrate on one to the exclusion of another. The relative amount of time spent in listening,

1. Edwin F. Kalmus Music Publishers, P. O. Box 1007, Opa-Locka, Florida 33054.

analyzing, and writing will depend upon the objectives, interests, and abilities of the students.

Courses in composition and modern music are offered at different levels with varying prerequisites. These studies can be undertaken successfully with a minimal background of traditional harmony. Training in counterpoint, orchestration, and form is helpful but not essential.

In addition to doing specific assignments, students should be encouraged to do free creative writing in the style most natural for them at the moment. Compositions should be in forms and for mediums which are familiar and appealing. Even in the specified writing assignments the creative and expressive aspects should be emphasized. The concept should be one of sound rather than of abstract symbols. This manner of thinking is stimulated by writing for a particular instrument or ensemble with complete tempo, phrasing, dynamic, and articulation indications.

Whenever possible written exercises should be played with due regard for interpretation on the instrument(s) for which they are intended. For practical reasons much of the writing will be for piano, which is both versatile and accessible. It is wise in the early stages to avoid extraneous problems and to write for instruments one plays or with which one is familiar, but before the end of the course all available resources, including electronic, should be explored.

Students should see and hear each other's work and participate in discussions. Active participation motivates the class. Analysis of the mistakes and accomplishments of its members is informative and illuminating.

Sketchbooks of thematic ideas and files of creative exercises should be maintained as storehouses of raw material for future works. The muses are elusive and not always at the composer's beck and call.

A public performance of a new work is a stimulating experience for the composer and an illuminating experience for the performers. The full cycle of composition is achieved only when a work has been conceived, written, played, and heard. Through participation in the complete sequence composers become intimately aware of the practical problems of producing and presenting their scores. This helps them to discover simple and effective ways of notating and developing their ideas. If the performance is recorded, they have the added advantage of repeated, undistracted hearings and opportunities to evaluate their works objectively after the heat of creation has cooled. The value of such experiences cannot be rivaled by abstract instruction.

The reasons for all serious students of music to be interested in the mystic and mechanics of composition are compelling in this age when performers, and even listeners, are increasingly involved in the realization of musical events and when avant-garde styles are departing so radically

from the sounds and symbols of the past. During periods of diversity and change like the present, becoming familiar with all of the trends is difficult but important for the future of the art. One final suggestion—the validity of which is most certain—the only way to learn to compose is by composing.

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Introduction

STUDENTS majoring in music invariably complete a series of courses dealing with the theoretical aspects of traditional music. Logically, studies in contemporary music and composition should follow to update the students' knowledge and to encourage their creativity. Certainly those who have experienced the problems and pleasures of composing bring added insight to their other musical activities, and composing is one of the best ways to develop that intangible but highly significant quality ambiguously called, for want of a more precise term, musicianship. It is accepted as normal for composers to play. Should it not be just as normal for players to compose?

Composition is too often regarded as a mystic art the practice of which is limited to a few great men of genius. A more realistic view is that the potential ability to compose is as widespread as the ability to play an instrument or to sing. Few attain the stature of a Beethoven or a Stravinsky in composition, but how many attain the stature of a Heifetz or a Rubinstein in performance? The answer to this question does not discourage thousands from starting the study of violin and piano every year, and it should not discourage embryonic composers. The urge to compose may come later and be more difficult to express, but it is very likely just as innate and prevalent as the urge to sing and play.

The study of composition has suffered from romantic emphasis on its inspirational elements and neglect of its technical aspects. Young composers are conditioned to think that inspiration cannot be taught or learned and should come therefore as readily to the novice as to the master. Even if this were true, it would not eliminate the necessity for training in composition any more than great talent eliminates the necessity for study and practice in performance.

The fact that everyone begins the study of music as a performer

complicates the problem of teaching composition. Prior experience as performer and listener develops the ability to criticize and evaluate far beyond the ability to create. It requires patience on the part of the aspiring composer to develop his creative talents to the point where he is satisfied with his own efforts. During this developmental period, it is reassuring to realize that the works generally known of even the greatest composers come from their mature period and are not representative of their earliest efforts. Activities as a performer and listener are invaluable for the composer, but they do not automatically provide him with compositional skill.

A further complicating factor is the strong emphasis on the music of the romantic period in our musical conditioning. The musical idiom with which we are saturated is ill suited to contemporary ideas. In this regard, the traditional theoretical training provides little direct help. However, if creativity has been encouraged in prior theoretical studies and discipline has been based on general principles rather than on rigid rules of a particular style, the transition can be made with minimal difficulty.

The current practice of basing the early theoretical training of musicians on the music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has the advantages of a vast literature which has stood the test of time and in which the materials and procedures are relatively uniform and comparatively simple. No such advantages exist for new music, but between the old and the new lies a body of twentieth-century music which can be analyzed and described in terms of its relationship to traditional practices. Exploring these relationships helps to bridge the gap between familiar and unfamiliar styles. The course charted on the following pages leads from the post-romantic idioms of the first half of this century to the most recent developments using a typical undergraduate background in tonal music as a point of departure. The suggested assignments for this chapter can be used to assess competence in traditional styles and to reveal any deficiencies that should be remedied by review.

Suggested Assignments

1. Harmonize the following chorale melody in a conventional four-part style observing the traditional principles of chord choice, voice leading, spacing, and doubling.

Ex. 1 VULPIUS: *Chorale*

Adagio

Musical score for Ex. 1, *VULPIUS: Chorale*, marked *Adagio*. The score consists of three staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The melody is written on the top staff, and the accompaniment is on the two lower staves. The piece ends with a double bar line.

2. Harmonize the following folk song in a free piano style using conventional chords and progressions.

Ex. 2 FOLK SONG: *The Ash Grove*

Moderato

Musical score for Ex. 2, *FOLK SONG: The Ash Grove*, marked *Moderato*. The score consists of four staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The melody is written on the top staff, and the accompaniment is on the three lower staves. The piece includes a first ending (1.) and a second ending (2.) marked with first and second endings.

Melodic Contour and Organization

OF all the aspects of musical composition, the ability to write effective melodies is the most elusive, the most dependent upon natural gifts, and the most difficult to teach. But if one must rely upon natural gifts for the original conception of a melody, he can employ technique to put it in its most effective form and to make the best use of it.

Some composers seem to have been fortunate enough to conceive perfect melodies spontaneously. Mozart and Schubert apparently had this facility to a remarkable degree, but more often the original concept requires careful revision before it achieves maximum effectiveness. The sketchbooks of Beethoven provide ample proof of both the necessity and the value of such revision.

Example 3 shows various versions of the first eight measures of the second movement theme of Beethoven's *Third Symphony*. The first five versions, with certain alternate measures, appear in Beethoven's sketchbook for 1803 as edited by Nottebohm (Breitkopf and Haertel, 1880). The final version is the theme as it appears in the symphony. Beethoven wrote no key signature in the sketches, but the three flats appear to be intended throughout, corresponding with the final form. A study of these sketches reveals the evolution of a commonplace germ idea, through various stages, into a classic melody. They also reveal how a master craftsman like Beethoven approached the problem of perfecting a crude original melodic thought. The lack of interest in the second phrase of the first version is corrected, and the dotted rhythm which occurs only once in the first version becomes a characteristic unifying factor in the later versions. Every feature of the completed melody appears in the sketches, but none is exactly like it. The finished product is a composite of the best elements arrived at progressively. There is but slight hint of strength and beauty in the original idea, but Beethoven had the technique and perseverance to