

Twentieth-Century Music

Three empty musical staves, each consisting of five horizontal lines, are arranged vertically in the center of the cover below the title.

~ Elliott Antokoletz ~

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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

Quebrando a
hegemonia alemã
do final do séc. XIX

Dois "extremos de
orientação tonal",
citados por
R. Bass (1994)

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