

Week 4: 1900 - 1945 - the "isms"

"Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth" - Muhammad Ali

GENERAL NOTES:

- moved from one new practice to another very rapidly
- Primitivism, Neoclassicism, Impressionism, Expressionism, Serialism, Minimalism
- consequence of the Nationalists trying to find their own sound
- invention of the phonograph and radio music easily sourced and free
- Fascism (Italy) and Communism (Germany) condemned all non-traditional creativity
- many of the artists from these countries fled.
- Soviet Union was cut off from mainstream musical influences with the rise of Stalin
- The church was not as involved in the music of the period
- Opera continued its growth throughout the 20th Century
- invention of the radio popularised artists and composers which lead to concert series
- motion picture industry who provided a new outlet for the 20th Century composer

MELODIC ELEMENTS:

- alternate scale forms like the whole tone scale, folk scales, synthetic scales and modes
- helped to create the different "nationalistic" sounds
- "Objet Sonore" (loosely translated as sonorous object)
- led to a favour for a tonal centre rather than a tonality
- textural techniques where the horizontal layering of notes created the harmony through blending techniques.
- wide intervallic leaps, rhythmic complexity and extreme ranges
- Symmetrical phrasing became a thing of the past, voting for a more motivic, fragmented style of writing melodies
- Melodic notes played over a number of octaves or divided between different instruments in order to vary the timbre.
- Sprechstimme (intoned speech) where it is not fully sung yet not fully spoken.
- Harmonically - bitonality (two simultaneous tonalities), atonality (there is no tonal centre), polytonality (many tonalities pitted against each other) and the use of the central tone.



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TEXTURE:

- silence as a tool to explore thinner textures which highlighted the tonal qualities of the instruments and the lines.
- focus on the connection between the instrumental timbres.
- Focus on unusual combinations of instruments in small groups to enable the composer to explore the contrast between the differing timbres.
- favour of a more even playing field with wind instruments being used more often for solos.
- equal treatment in both melodic and accompanying roles.

SCORES:

- Score writing varied during this time
- scores allowed freedom to the performer, something previously only seen in the cadenza or the romantic period.
- Performance directions were found less in Italian and more in the vernacular.
- Form is not unique to the 20th Century.
- Most overtures of the 20th century were short symphonic poems.
- Variation regained popularity but with a focus more on tonal colour and rhythm rather than melodic or harmonic movement.

QUESTION EXAMPLE

For example, alternate scales - if you are writing an exam question response that asks “How has the melodic material been treated” then you might mention the use of alternate scales.

For example you might write,
“this melody, played by the flute, uses the whole tone scale “.

That’s a good response but a more in-depth response might be:

“ the **sonorous** flute melody in its mid **register**, uses the whole tone scale **which helps to blur the harmonic movement and create a calming variety for the listener.**”

You can see in this response I added a tone colour word to explain the instrument, I added the pitch location which was mid register, and I also gave a reason why the composer might have chosen this particular tonality. The first sentence “describes” where as the second sentence tells me “how it has been used”. There is a distinct difference.



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What you might find	Why it is there
alternate scales - whole tone, folk scales, synthetic scales, modes	helps to remove the traditional form of harmonic movement and provide harmonic variety for the listener
Objet Sonore (sonorous object)	creates a blended approach to provide contrast to melodic lines
tonal centre	
Melodies - wide intervallic leaps, complex rhythms, extreme ranges	Engage the listener, create a form of shock
Melodic notes played over a number of octaves or divided between different instruments	varies the timbre
Sprechstimme	intoned speech removes some of the pitch thus allowing a more expressive intonement of the lyric.
Bitonality, atonality, polytonality, central tone	removal of the traditional harmonic movement in order to destabilise the tonality and provide unexpected diversity for the listener.
Silence used as a tool	explores thinner textures and highlights the tonal qualities of the instrumental/ vocal lines
Contrapuntal writing modified	focus on the connection between the layers to create interest
Unusual, small combinations of instrumental groupings.	Explores the contrast between different timbres and family groupings. Challenges the traditional functions of the instrumental roles.
Score writing allowed for freedom with performance directions having more detail in english	Clarity for the performer and conductor to achieve the composers vision.



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COMPOSER	STYLISTIC ELEMENTS WORTH NOTING
Leos Janacek	Czechoslovakia - Folk tunes
Edward Elgar	English - folk tunes, nationalistic and romantic influenced
Claude Debussy	French - Impressionism
Erik Satie	French - Impressionism
Ralph Vaughan Williams	English - Folk tunes and modes
Arnold Schoenberg	Austrian - Serialism (Expressionism)
Charles Ives	American - Folk tunes and modes
Maurice Ravel	French - Impressionism
Bela Bartok	Hungarian - Primitivism
Igor Stravinsky	Russian - Primitivism, Post Impressionism and Neo Classicism
Anton Webern	Austrian - Serialism (Expressionism)
Sergi Prokofiev	Russian - left in 1918 for the USA only to return in the 30's. Later works folk tune based
Aaron Copland	American - Folk tunes and modes
Alban Berg	Austrian - Serialism (Expressionism)
Edgar Varese	French born but spent a lot of time in the USA. Emphasised timbre and rhythm in "organised sound"
Paul Hindemith	German - late romantic and expressionism
Dmitri Shostakovitch	Russian - Neo Classicism

Youtube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCk6JwBggrhS5QqdUkkDm39A>