

Twentieth Century

Characteristics and Context:

* *Culture, music, scientific discoveries splintered the world into chaotic branches and the abandonment of tradition – there was no single defining style of the 20th century. Many composers worked in multiple styles, combined styles within a single piece*

* *Radical experimentation with musical style, chromaticism, non-traditional tonalities*

* *disintegration of realism, traditional narrative, tonality*

Styles of the 20th century and relevant vocabulary:

Impressionism gentle and pleasant sounding music started by Debussy, blends subtle sounds to suggest a mood or subject, typically lulling music with surging back and forth, no distinct cadences or climaxes, more chromatic notes and dissonance to the point of abandoning traditional harmony or tonality, influenced by painters Monet, Renoir, and Picasso, also typically shorter than traditional symphony or concerto. Other composers include Maurice Ravel, representative works include Debussy's *La Mer* and *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Fawn*.

Aleatoric randomness or chance

Atonal increased chromaticism obliterated underlying sense of scale, composers associated with "harsher" atonal music include Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, composers of lyrical atonal music include Bela Bartok and Aaron Copland. Representative pieces include *Pierrot Lunaire* (Schoenberg) and Berg's *Wozzeck*.

Sprechstimme "speech song" of atonal vocal works like *Pierrot Lunaire*

12-tone method Rigid system of composition created by Schoenberg in which the 12 chromatic tones are each used in a pre-determined order

tone row the pre-determined order of 12 chromatic pitches in 12-tone

serialism 12-tone evolved into serialism, in which dynamics, rhythms, and pitches to create a composition, representative composer – Milton Babbitt.

Indeterminacy leaves aspects of the music to chance – performers choose notes to play or the decision is based on a random event such as rolling dice, composers who used this include John Cage.

Polytonality pieces written in two or more keys at the same time, or two completely different pieces played at the same time, representative composers/works include Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, Ives *Variations on a National Hymn*, Darius Milhaud's *L'homme et son desir*.

Microtonality divides the octaves into smaller units for an “out of tune” non-Western sound, representative composers include Bela Bartok and Charles Ives.

Minimalism Hypnotically repetitious, simple melodies and rhythms arose in response to increasing complexity of music. A simple melodic motif is often repeated with slowly evolving modifications, made popular by Phillip Glass, Steve Reich, and John Adams.

Musique Concrete (“concrete music”) pioneered by Pierre Schaeffer, Edgard Varese, Frank Zappa – made by recording everyday sounds and recombining them, the birth of electronic music

Electronic music created with tape recorders, computers, and synthesizers to generate, modify, and combine all types of sounds. Notable composers include Cage, Stockhausen, Varese, Risset, and Iannis Xenakis.

Neoclassicism/Neoromanticism Return to classical concept that all elements of the composition should contribute to the overall structure of a piece, used formal ideas from the baroque and classical era with new ideas about tonality. Representative composers include Igor Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Hindemith, and Elliot Carter.

Nationalism & Folk Music Aaron Copland, Charles Ives introduced American folk and religious music into classical forms, others included Bartok (Hungarian), Janacek (Czech), Vaughan Williams (English).

Third stream new musical style pioneered by Gershwin & Copland that combined jazz and classical work, Representative works include *Rhapsody in Blue*, *An American in Paris*, and *Sketches of Spain*.

Important Musical Forms of the 20th Century:

Symphony Expanded upon traditional symphonic form with extreme dissonance, jagged rhythms, experimental styles, examples include late Mahler symphonies.

Opera First 50 years influenced by romantic era, Strauss bridged the romantic and modern eras, Puccini continued Italian grand opera tradition, in latter 50 years Benjamin Britten wrote operas for children, church, and television, Stckhausen and Penderecki pushed opera's musical boundaries, and Phillip Glass and John Adams introduced multi-media elements, political commentary, and rock music

Ballet Apart from ballets like the Rite of Spring, companies returned to staging new productions to existing music

Musical Theater combined opera, American vaudeville, and European music hall traditions through the works of composers like Bernstein and Sondheim.

Film Music neoclassical and neo-romantic music found a popular outlet in film

Important Composers of the 20th Century:

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) transitional composer bridges Romantic era and 20th century, composed romantic/neoromantic opera full of characterization, sentiment, and craftsmanship. Mastery of melody and orchestration,

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) French impressionist composer represents the transition between romantic era to impressionism, influenced by Eastern music and whole-tone and pentatonic (5 note) scales, predominately wrote for piano and orchestra.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) French impressionist composer, pianist, and orchestrator known for poignant, rich music for piano, orchestra, and chamber music

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) German pianist, conductor, and composer of richly melodic operas and orchestral tone poems

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) Russian conductor, pianist, writer, and composer of many styles, from early career traditional neo-national Russian ballets to (French period) progressive and dissonant works such as the *Rite of Spring*, to (American period) late career neoclassicism, and finally a return to experimental 12-tone and serial works. Most famous for the *Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *Rite of Spring* (1913)

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) Austrian conductor and composer who pioneered the 12-tone system the “emancipation of dissonance,” teacher to Webern and Berg, Most famous works include *Pierrot Lunaire* and *Chamber Symphony*

Alban Berg (1885-1935) Austrian 12-tone and serial composer who brought emotion and less strict atonality than Schoenberg

Charles Ives (1874-1954) One of the first famous American composers of art music, created music with clashing rhythms and tonalities, tone clusters, polytonality, and quartertones.

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) One of the first famous American composers of art music, the “dean of American composers,” created a distinctly American style, influenced by rural America, melodic and emotional but not sentimental, he was a neo-romantic who experimented with tone rows, polytonality, and poly-rhythms. Composed for the concert hall and silver screen

Vaughn Williams (1872-1958) Famous pieces include *The Lark Ascending*, influenced by English folk songs and collected more than 800 with Gustav Holst, wrote chorale music, solo songs, folk song suites, 9 symphonies, 6 operas.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) wrote 13 operas, highly influenced by English folk music, popular pieces include *Peter Grimes* (opera), “England’s Second Purcell,”

John Cage (1912-1992) avant-garde composer of aleatoric music, “the apostle of indeterminacy in music,” created the prepared piano and the first piece for prepared piano *Bacchanal* and *4’22”* (1952). Strange and

unorthodox combinations of instruments,

**For More Music History Notes, Music & Art Resources,
Original Music, Visual Art, Video Art, and Writing from
Underground Artists**

Visit <http://ALARANA.NET>