

21M011 (spring, 2006)
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Lecture XI

European 20th-century music

Twentieth Century

Literature and poetry: freed from rigid structure: James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, e. e. cummings; symbolist poets (Mallarmé, Maeterlinck), Brecht, Sylvia Plath

Visual Arts: movement from representation to abstraction: impressionism, expressionism, cubism, etc.; Kandinsky, Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Matisse, Munch, Brancusi, Klee, Dali,

Sculpture at MIT includes: Alexander Calder (*The Big Sail* by the Green Building), Henry Moore (*Three piece reclining figure, draped* in Killian Court) and many others

Architecture: Louis Sullivan, Antonio Gaudi, Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto (Baker Dormitory), Eliel Saarinen (MIT Chapel), Eero Saarinen (Kresge), I. M. Pei (Wiesner Building), Frank Gehry (Stata Center)

Science, engineering and industrialization: travel (car, air); communication (telephone, fax, computer))—affecting sense of time; space exploration—affecting sense of time and space; entertainment (movies, film, television, video, DVD; atomic power and weaponry; Kerman rightly emphasizes the centrality of Einstein, Darwin, and Freud

[impact of technology on the arts; recording industry on music composition]

Politics: Russian Revolution (1917); Totalitarianism; WWI; “the” depression; Nazi Germany; WWII; Communism; Soviet Union; Korean War; Viet Nam War; fall of Soviet communism (1989)

Style characteristics:

Timbre: new emphasis on individual instrumental colors (Stravinsky, Webern); new sounds from “old” instruments (Crumb); recorded sound, musique concrète (Varese); electronic (created) sound, synthesizers; electronic (altered) sound, tape especially; aleatoric (chance) music (Cage); computer music

Harmony: freeing from major/minor harmony; “new” scales: pentatonic: Musorgsky, Debussy; octatonic: Debussy, Stravinsky; whole-tone: Debussy; “emancipation of the dissonance”: atonality, serialism (Schoenberg, Berg, Webern)—leading to mid-century efforts to serialize (strictly control intellectually) all aspects of music, in many respects a retreat from freedom, an attempt to gain control following WWII, and its opposite: aleatoric (or chance) music (see under *timbre*)

Rhythm: mechanistic rhythms; influence of jazz; rhythm and rhythmic structure as organizing principle, deliberately related in some cases to the driving rhythms of the Baroque era

Melody: fragmented (atomized) in stark contrast to the extended surging melodies of the 19th century, but compare to the motivic structure of Haydn and Beethoven

Texture: mostly contrapuntal, both imitative (Copland, Bartok, Reich) and, especially in serialism, non-imitative; replacement of voice leading with sound blocks or clusters (Ligeti)

Form: variation principle (Berg, Copland, Reich, Bernstein, Ellington), and think of serialism as a kind of variation, too, even though it's not meant to be heard that way; through-composition; use of sound or rhythm as organizing principle instead of form

Key terms: nationalism, exoticism, impressionism, expressionism, neoclassicism

Stravinsky, *Rite of Spring* (10' 41") 1913 K 5:25-31

Kerman/Tomlinson calls this piece "tough, precise, barbaric," "abstract," and "utterly unemotional." As opposed to the opulent Russian ballets of Chaikovsky which preceded it, or even Stravinsky's own *Firebird*, written only three years previous and depicting a romantic fairy tale about a magical firebird, *The Rite of Spring* "boldly and brutally depicted the fertility cults of prehistoric Slavic tribes." At its premiere riots broke out due to the brutality of the story, the violence of the music, and the modern choreography which eschewed traditional ballet (*en pointe*) for tribal circle dancing and stomping. The brutality of the music, choreography and story represent a form of **expressionism**.

The score of *The Rite of Spring*:

Harmony: "grindingly dissonant"

Rhythm: "dazzling and unpredictable"; "exhilarating" syncopation

Meter: "heavy, exciting"

Melody: "obsessive" fragmented, folk melodies; melodic ostinati; "primitive rhythmic and sexual energy, rather than picture-postcard charm"

Dynamic: "enormously loud"

Texture: [homophonic] pounding

Timbre: huge orchestra, lots of percussion; extreme use of solo instruments for color (and intensity): opening bassoon solo in impossibly high register, use of E-flat clarinet (compare Berlioz), folksong #1 for bassoons and contrabassoons, #2 for French horn, flutes, #3 for trumpets, #4 for piccolos (compare Debussy who also identifies his themes with instruments: a = clarinets and bassoons, b = English horn, d = flute and harp)

Ballet as "total work of art":

impresario: **Sergei Diaghilev** (Ballets Russe in Paris), who commissioned and produced many of Stravinsky's works, as well as works by Debussy, Ravel and others

choreographers: Stravinsky first worked with the choreographer Mikhail Fokine, who said of traditional ballet that it "lacked its most essential element: presentation to the spectator of an artistically created image." Fokine, following the operatic imperatives of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* argued that all aspects of a ballet (its scenario, mime,

dancing, lighting, costume, stage design, and music—should be integrated into a unified dramatic image) a “total work of art” (Craig Wright and Bryan Simms, *Music in Western Civilization*, p. 604). When Fokine dropped out of the *Rite of Spring* project, he was replaced as choreographer by the dancer **Vaslav Nijinsky**.

costumes and scenery: Nicholas Roerich

Use of folk history, folk music= **nationalism**

Dissonance tempered by the underlying rhythmic propulsion
continual change of meter and offbeat accents (syncopation) while maintaining regularity of the beat

(Tape of Boston PBS TV (WGBH) broadcast of recreation of original choreography by Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer)

Schoenberg, *Pierrot Lunaire* (3' 18") 1912

Sprechstimme

macabre, dangerous—consider how Don Giovanni or the Erlking would sound in

Sprechstimme, extreme emotional depiction = **expressionism**

individual instrumental sound

“Night” K 5:32

--‘sinister giant black butterflies’ block out the sun

lowest range (piano, bass clarinet, cello)

downward motion, suffocating

“passacaglia” –ostinato (similar to Schumann’s cipher in *Carnaval*—using intervals based on E-flat, C, B, or in German: eS C H); soprano sings the ostinato on

“vershwiegen” (not quite correctly)

“Moonfleck” K 5:33

high range (piano, piccolo, clarinet, violin, cello)

skittery motives, obsessive

fugues and canons—“lacework of sounds”

Berg, *Wozzeck* (1923) K 5:34-38

Opera based on play by Georg Büchner (1813-1837), who after beginning studies in medicine became involved in the revolutionary politics of Germany. He wrote a pamphlet advocating the right of the peasants and the overthrow of the German princely states, the distribution of which led to a series of arrests. Büchner tried to warn his friends, but many were imprisoned, and Büchner was forced to flee into France (compare Wagner in 1850). The play in 24 scenes in no particular order was discovered after his death from typhoid at the age of 23.

The play tells “the tragic story of Wozzeck, a downtrodden German soldier, imposed upon by all and respected by few, the object of contempt of his captain, [an experimental subject of the regimental doctor], scorned by his mistress as she has an affair with a handsome drum major, Wozzeck seeks vengeance and stabs Marie to death near a pond

into which his weapon falls. In trying to retrieve it, he is drowned” (summary from the MIT Barton catalogue!)

“Büchner’s play was inspired by the real life story of Johann Christian Woyzeck, who was beheaded in Leipzig in 1824 for the murder of his mistress. Prior to his execution, Woyzeck was interviewed by a doctor to determine whether he could be held responsible for his actions. In his writings, the doctor concluded that Woyzeck was ‘of sound mind and that any aberrations were due to his physical constitution and moral degeneration’.” (Program book, *Woyzeck*, The Gate Theatre, London, 2004)

Comparison to Berlioz *Symphonie fantastique* is instructive: both are brutal, but where the Berlioz is based on fantasy, *Wozzeck* is based in fact; Berlioz is heavily invested in, and softened by, emotion, whereas Berg presents a realistic, brutal depiction. Like Mahler, Berg makes use of “ambient music” (Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol 4 [New York, 2005], p. 508): folksongs, marches, waltzes; like Ives (to be studied next week), these are reflected through a dissonant and, in Berg’s case, atonal mirror. But what can be difficult or impossible to accept in the concert hall (for some people, Ives) becomes immensely powerful when tied to a dramatic presentation (think Stravinsky or, in general, film music).

Unlike the narrative structures that are dependent on the dramatic flow for their form (Berlioz, Schubert’s *Erlking*, Stravinsky, even Debussy to a point), *Wozzeck* is tightly organized by formal structures, communicating a sense of constriction and paralleling the absolute rigidity experienced by *Wozzeck*. “Thus the five scenes of Act 1, an exposition that introduces the five main characters in turn and delineates *Wozzeck*’s relationship to them, are designated as a series of five character-pieces; Act 2, the opera’s dramatic development, is a symphony in five movements, while the five scenes and final orchestral interlude of Act 3 (‘catastrophe and epilogue’) are a sequence of six inventions on single musical ideas” (Andrew Clements, “*Wozzeck*,” Grove Music Online, ed. Laura Macy). The use of such traditional structures is a form of **neo-classicism**.

Act I:

- i. Captain: suite (prelude, pavane, gigue, gavotte, air, prelude [backwards])
- ii. *Wozzeck*: rhapsody
- iii. Marie: military march and lullaby
- iv. Doctor: passacaglia
- v. Drum Major: rondo

Act II: 5-movement symphony, in Berg’s words:

- i. “sonata,” in which Marie, preening herself after her night with the Drum Major, nevertheless accepts money from *Wozzeck* to care for their child, and experiences a moment of bad conscience
- ii. “fantasia and fugue,” in which the Captain and the Doctor, taunting *Wozzeck*, plant the first inkling in his mind that Marie has been unfaithful
- iii. “largo,” in which *Wozzeck* confronts Marie, who is cold and defiant
- iv. “scherzo,” in which *Wozzeck* sees Marie dancing in the arms of the Drum Major

- v. “introduction and rondo,” in which the Drum Major beats Wozzeck and gloats over him

Act III (Kerman excerpt in box; in class we watched to the end of the opera):

- i. invention on a theme=six variations and a fugue (Marie reads from the Bible and repents)
- ii. invention on a note=the murder (the note B held out on a bass pedal, sung by Wozzeck to the word “nothing” in response to Marie asking what is bothering him, screamed by Marie as Wozzeck plunges the knife into her throat, a final set of unison B’s played by the orchestra in a deafening crescendo)

iii. invention on a rhythm=Wozzeck’s mounting fear and guilt (after killing Marie, Wozzeck has returned to the tavern where he had seen her dancing with the Drum Major. The rhythm is first heard in the bass drum at the outset of the scene and serves as the rhythmic ostinato of the scene. This rhythm underlies the disjointed barroom piano rag played on “an out-of-tune upright piano on stage,” Margaret’s song, and the dialogue itself, but it appears in many different tempos and meters. Like all the forms in Berg’s opera, it is not necessarily meant to be “heard” but rather experienced as a kind of claustrophobic oppression or inexorable fate.

- iv. Two related inventions

- a. invention on a chord=Wozzeck’s drowning (Wozzeck returns to the pond where he killed Marie to find the knife; he thinks himself covered in blood and senses everything turning blood red: the moon, the pond water. He sings in *Sprechstimme*, which you have already heard in Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire* songs, and which is undoubtedly related, especially because of the monologue on the moon; like Pierrot, Wozzeck is hallucinating and mad at this point. His primary enemies, the doctor and the captain, scurry by without helping; it is striking that they speak and do not sing.

- b. invention on a key=orchestral elegy on Wozzeck’s death (the most romantic and emotional moment in the opera, as the six-note chord resolves unambiguously into D minor, implying that Wozzeck only finds resolution in death)

- v. invention on an eighth-note motion=coda during which Wozzeck and Marie’s uncomprehending, young son is cruelly taunted by older children who have found Marie’s body.

DVD: Berg, *Wozzeck*, Wiener Staatsoper, Claudio Abbado, conductor (Image Entertainment, [2001], 1987)

Bartok, *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* (6’ 59”) 1936, first movement

K 6:1-7

A symphony in four movements; Kerman/Tomlinson gives the second movement, which is in sonata form. Like Stravinsky and Berg, Bartok, in reaction to the time, wrote music that was brutal and dissonant: Kerman/Tomlinson mentions the *Allegro barbaro* (1911); also the opera *Bluebeard’s Castle*, composed in 1911 and first performed in 1918, where Bluebeard’s new bride demands the keys to the seven doors in his castle, which

symbolically represents his mind; sequentially she finds in the first six a torture chamber, armory, jewel house, gardens, Bluebeard's domain, and a lake of tears, all of which is seeped in blood. When she opens the eighth, she sees Bluebeard's previous wives, who have been murdered, step out, and she ultimately, having opened the door, must go with them back into that chamber. As Bartok wrote in 1919 to his wife about his balletic pantomime, *The Miraculous Mandarin*: "I've also been thinking about the Mandarin; if it works out, then it will be a fiendish piece of music. At the beginning - just as a short introduction before the curtain rises - there will be a frightful noise, strident clashes, horns hooting: I shall lead the gentle listener down to the apache den from the bustling streets of a city,' where the city is "a symbol of the modern world and its destruction of human feelings, a society in decay."

However, Bartok was always fascinated by the folk music of his homeland of Hungary, and this **nationalism** often takes the edge off of even his most dissonant and **expressionistic** works. In 1934 Bartok achieved a full-time position as an ethnomusicologist at the Budapest Academy of Science, where from 1934 to 1940 he worked with his compatriot Kodály to create an encyclopedia of Hungarian folk song. His music from this period is increasingly inflected by it.

Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta (1936), like Berg's *Wozzeck*, is infused with **neo-classicism** in its use of classical forms. Although the unusual timbre, complicated rhythms and dissonant harmonies are clearly 20th century, the form of the work follows a variation of the four-movement symphonic pattern:

first movement, fugue;
second, sonata form;
third, arch or bridge (ABCBA);
fourth, rondo.

The clarity of the sonata form in the second movement is most similar to that of the first movement of Mozart's 40th Symphony, but with strikingly different content, most closely related to Stravinsky. Sometimes bitingly dissonant but always rhythmically energized, the melodic and modal aspects (as well as the rhythms) relate strongly to Hungarian folk music, just as these same aspects of the *Rite of Spring* relate to Russian folk music.

Some common features of 20th-century music

Each era we have studied has focused on specific elements of music: the Middle Ages on melody; the Renaissance on polyphonic textures; the Baroque and Classical eras on the development of independent formal structures; the Romantic era on extended harmony. The focus of the Twentieth century was on sound and rhythm as independent attributes of music and as organizing principles.

sonority

(instrumental timbre)

Debussy
Stravinsky
Bartok
Webern
Crumb
Varèse

rhythm

(ostinato)

Stravinsky
Schoenberg
Bartok
Berg
Reich

*(Sprechstimme and other
vocal innovations)*

Schoenberg
Berg
Ligeti
Saariaho

(ragtime/jazz elements) (blues/jazz)

[Stravinsky] **Thomas/Wallace**
Berg **Ellington**
Ives **Parker**
Gershwin **Davis**
Ravel
Bernstein

(new scales)

Debussy
Schoenberg
Berg

(folk melodies)

Stravinsky
Bartok
Ives
Copland

(use of chant)

Ligeti
Crumb (compare Berlioz)
Reich