The Modern Period: 1900-present

Since the early 1900s, music has been going through major changes. The main shift has been a reaction against both the German Romantic tradition and the French Impressionist movement. In the quest to create a new language and new forms, composers have developed music that is edgy, experimental and radically different to that of past centuries. Many different styles have developed within the 'Modern' period, as composers followed their desire to be individual.

EXPRESSIONISM: c. 1905 - 1935

The term Expressionism was first used to describe the works of visual artists in Germany, during the first three decades of the 20th century. It was later applied to musicians, writers and filmmakers. Expressionism in music gave voice to the anxieties, inner terrors, and cynicism that people experienced between World War I and World War II.

In contrast to the Impressionists (who were themselves revolting against the Romantics!), the Expressionists felt that strong inner emotions were the only valid source of musical inspiration, therefore any attempt to be objective and emotionally distant was rejected. The music is often atonal or at least distorts traditional tonality. The texture is generally dense and the melody in the traditional sense is often unrecognizable. The intensely emotional quality of Arnold Schönberg's Second String Quartet (1907-08), is a good example of the Expressionist early style, while Alban Berg's, Wozzeck (1925) and Lulu (1935) are examples of the later style.

The main Expressionist composers: Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, Anton Webern, Paul Hindemith and Ernst Krenek (in some of their works).

NEO-PRIMITIVISM: c.1910

'Neo-Primitivism' is a term that has been used to describe a 'new' or more modern primitivism in art as well as in music of the early 20th century. In music, it is a style where rhythm is of primary importance. Unlike Impressionism, Neo-Primitivism uses musical elements that are well-defined and clear. It often uses two keys

simultaneously (bi-tonality). It is energetic and percussive and generally refers to materials from other cultures. The violently irregular rhythmic accents and orchestral outbursts are always unpredictable and confronting. The best example of Neo-Primitivism is Stravinsky's Le Sacre du Printemps (Rite of Spring), completed in 1912.

NEO CLASSICISM: 1920's

Neo literally means 'new' but refers to old musical styles which are revived or revisited. Neo-Classical music is new, contemporary music that shares many qualities with music from the Classical period. The Neo-Classical movement peaked during the 1920s, when composers revolted against what they saw as the excessive orchestration and emotionalism of the late Romantic period. Although the Neo-Classicists used the new harmonic language of the 20th century, they still sought the tightly structured forms, clear textures and light orchestrations of the 18th Century. To be smaller, more spare, more orderly was the new goal. Stravinsky was the most famous of the Neo-Classicists, and there are many echoes of Mozart in his opera 'The Rakes Progress', despite his earlier journeys into the full emotional intensity of Expressionism.

The main Neo-Classical composers:

Igor Stravinsky (later works), Paul Hindemith, Georges Auric, Sergei Prokofiev, Francis Poulenc, Béla Bartók, Alfredo Casella, Gian Francesco Malipiero.

MUSIQUE CONCRETE: 1920s – 1950s

The term 'Musique Concrete' was first used in 1948 by Pierre Schaeffer to describe music which was created from recorded sounds - either from nature, or artificially created. Such a piece might well have been constructed from recordings of birdcalls or machinery or both. In the 1920s & 30s, composers recorded everyday noises and then played them back in a variety of ways. Tape loops were used with superimposed tracks and layers of sound, and even more daring adventures took place with the advent of the synthesizer around 1955. Pierre Schaeffer was the most prominent composer of Musique Concrete. The general term 'electronic music' is now used for all music generated electronically.

SERIALISM / THE TONE ROW: 1920s – 1950s

Serialism (also known as twelve-tone music) appeared in the early 1920s when Arnold Schoenberg devised his 12 note system. In this system, the melodic line and accompanying harmonies are made up of the 12 notes of the chromatic scale, arranged in a particular order called a Tone Row. The tone row then becomes the basis for the composition and may be heard in a variety of formats (inverted, transposed etc.) The most famous pieces demonstrating the new Serial style are probably Schoenberg's Piano Concerto, his oratorio 'Die Jakobsleiter' and his last two string quartets.

Serial music is atonal in style i.e. it has no tonal centre. The notes of the chromatic scale are used without reference to a specific tonal 'pull' or direction.

Schoenberg, together with Alban Berg and Anton Webern, formed the 'Second Viennese School' which promoted Serialism and atonality, despite the many critics voicing disapproval of the new style. The Second Viennese School greatly influenced the establishment of what was called the 'New Music' in the 1950s. Composers in this later period include Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, Krzysztof Penderecki, and Milton Babbitt.

NATIONALISM: 1900 - c.1950

Nationalism has been strongly represented in contemporary classical music during the first half the 20th century. Often it is more of a tendency or influence than a complete style, and the source is generally folk music from the composer's mother country or music that has a folk-like feel. This music has been used in large scale compositions by composers such as Vaughan Williams (England), Bela Bartok (Hungary), Heitor Villa Lobos (Brazil), Aaron Copland (USA), Peter Sculthorpe (Australia), Isaac Albeniz (Spain) and Witold Lutoslawski (Polish).

MINIMALISM: 1960s

Minimalism is a term that was used in the United States during the 1960s for experimental music that was deliberately tame rather than dynamic.

It was possibly a reaction to the complexities of Serialism, and like Impressionism

some years before, the term 'minimilism' had originally been applied to the visual arts. Minimalist music is based mostly on non-clashing, consonant harmonies, and it almost always has a steady pulse with much repetition of musical phrases. It includes any music that works with limited or minimal materials: pieces that use only a few notes or a few words of text, or pieces written for very limited instruments, such as antique cymbals, bicycle wheels, or even whiskey glasses. Often the inspiration comes from the musical repertoire of Asia: the Indian ragas, and repetitive phrases of Javanese and Balinese gamelans.

The movement grew from its humble San Francisco origins to become quite a force in 20th century music. The most renowned minimalist American composers were Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass and La Monte Young, while in Europe, famous minimalists included names such as Louis Andriessen and Michael Nyman. A good example of minimalist music is Steve Reich's 'It's Gonna Rain'.

INDETERMINATE OR ALEATORIC / CHANCE MUSIC: 1945 - c.1970

Indeterminate music (sometimes called Aleatoric Music or Chance Music) is a very random style of music where much of the composition is left to chance. The term was devised by the French composer Pierre Boulez to describe works where the performer was given certain liberties with regard to the order and repetition of parts of a musical work. Indeterminacy means to compose without any personal input; the composer or the performer may randomly pick musical materials and turn them into a piece of music (for example, the composer may choose notes by rolling dice). The performer may improvise on the piece or invite the audience to improvise along with him in some way. Composers who have used chance as part of their compositional style are Witold Lutoslawski, Karlheinz Stockhausen and John Cage. In Cage's Imaginary Landscape No.4, there are 12 radios all playing at the same time, but all tuned to different stations.

NEO-ROMANTICISM (POST ROMANTICISM): c.1920 - present

Neo-Romanticism is a term used to describe contemporary music that imitates the emotional qualities of the Romantic Period. The term carries various shades of meaning. In the 1920s, the style referred to a more subdued sort of emotionalism, in which the excessively Romantic gestures of the Expressionists were somewhat

toned down. It has also been seen as a sort of reaction against the Neo-Classical movement of the 1920s. In its current sense, the term refers to a wide spectrum of music where emotional expression is the primary focus.

Main Neo-Romatic composers:

Paul Hindemith, Gustav Holst, Arnold Schoenberg

ELECTRONIC MUSIC: c.1940 - present

'Electronic Music' is an umbrella term which describes the newest trend in music of the 20th & 21st centuries. Electronic music takes electronically generated sounds as the building blocks for musical composition. The sounds may be composed on a synthesizer or computer or they may be digitalized or 'sampled' from a variety of sources and then manipulated through computer technology. The final array of sounds and rhythms are often combined with traditional instruments to produce very interesting and imaginative effects.

Composers who have worked with electronic music include Piere Boulez, Luciano Berio, and especially Karlheinz Stockhausen.