

MHL 603 - 12-TONE - 1: SCHOENBERG AND CLASSIC 12-TONE PROCEDURES

1. 12-tone music seems like "history" now

Narrative with a beginning, middle and apparently an end - Three phases:

1) Beginnings, c.1921-1945

"Crisis of tonality" 1900-1914 - Evident in many composers and works: Debussy, Scriabin, Strauss, Stravinsky, Mahler, Ives, Cowell - Search for extensions of or alternatives to major-minor tonal system - "Emancipated dissonance" (atonal music) of Schoenberg, Webern, Berg

1923 - Schoenberg announced that he had devised a new method of "composition with 12 notes related only to one another" - Performed and published several pieces using this technique: Piano Pieces, Op. 23 (1923) (partially 12-tone); Piano Suite, Op. 25 (begun in 1921, pub. 1925), Wind Quintet (1924) - His associates (Berg, Webern) quickly embraced the technique

1925-1945 - One modernism among many - Only a few practitioners, mainly in German-speaking countries - Notorious but not particularly popular - The works that people heard of Schoenberg and Berg were mainly pre-12-tone

2) Postwar ascendancy, 1945-1975

Enthusiasm of younger composers who wanted to break with compromised past - e.g. Boulez, Stockhausen, Berio, Nono, Eimert

"Conversion" of older composers - e.g. Stravinsky, Copland, Dallapiccola, Britten, Ginastera, Sessions

Serialism and "ultra"-serialism -

Formalization of 12-tone theory - Perle, Babbitt

12-tone domination of contemporary music institutions - e.g. European music festivals, radio stations, American universities

By the mid-1960s 12-tone music and serialism seemed like the only kind of modern music worth playing - Criticism of serialism seemed "reactionary"

3) Decline and fall, 1975-2000

Persistent resistance from some composers - e.g. Messiaen, Cage, Xenakis

Overwhelming resistance of audiences

Apostates - i.e. composers who stopped composing 12-tone music - various reasons - most often had to do with "expression" - e.g. Harbison, Rochberg, Berio,

New sorts of modernism - minimalism, aleatoric etc., improv, electronics, politics, baroque performance practice, pop and world music crossover

By the 1980s was seen as outmoded - Some composers from its heyday continued to use the techniques and the style, but few young composers write 12-tone music - Twelve-tone styles sound "dated"

Still haven't gained much audience acceptance - Will there be a revival? (like the Bach-revival of the 19th century) - I'd like at least to revive some of the best pieces - I'll present some of my favorites

2. Schoenberg and his followers

Also called "2nd Vienna School" or "New Vienna School" -- What was 1st Vienna school? (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven) -- This is a pretty self-serving title

3 major figures (Know how to spell names and approximate dates):

Arnold Schoenberg (Schönberg) (1874-1951) - Older than his colleagues, but outlived both of them - clearly acknowledged founder and leader, but very collegial relations -- emigrated to USA in 1934

Anton Webern (von Webern) (1883-1945)

Alben Berg (1885-1935)

Webern and Berg both became Schoenberg students in 1904 (Berg via newspaper ad by Schoenberg for students) - They followed Schoenberg's experiments first in atonal, then in 12-tone music

Schoenberg had a messianic attitude: that he had found a way to "save" modern music, in particular German music; that he should expect rejection and isolation; that history would prove him right - You may hear this tone in his writings

What were Schoenberg's motivations? - He didn't state them clearly -

- 1) Modernism - Compose music that was "new," that didn't rely on old habits or recall previous music - Schoenberg prided himself on being the first to compose atonal music
- 2) Expression - Compose music that conveyed strong emotions - often hidden or socially unacceptable emotions
- 3) Tradition - Perpetuate Western art music traditions - specifically German traditions (Bach, Brahms, Wagner) - Rationalization but also sincere

3. Tonal vs. Atonal vs. 12-tone music

Tonal = Begins and ends on same pitch (exceptions to beginning)

Other pitches hierarchically referred to that pitch - i.e. functional harmony - NB dominant is crucial here

Possibility of modulation - i.e. pitches referred to a different pitch

Can music be tonal without harmonic function? - Depends on how you consider "modal" music - What are other ways of establishing pitch center?

Atonal = 1) no tonal center, music is not "in a key"

2) no functional harmonies, chords don't create expectations

What are pitch principles? - No general rule - Up to taste of composer or momentary principle (e.g. melodic cell, motto chord, imitation)

NB "atonal" was not Schoenberg's word but a pejorative term of the critics - Schoenberg preferred to speak of the "emancipation of dissonance"

12-tone - Also atonal but with pitch principle - Each of 12 notes heard before any is repeated (more detailed discussion to follow) - Also called "Serial" and "Dodecaphonic"

Thus 12-tone music is one particular kind of atonal music - a subset of possible atonal musics

4. 12-tone principles and methods

Schoenberg worked out 12-tone methods during the First World War and its aftermath - He was trying to compose a large oratorio (Jacob's Ladder) in an atonal idiom and he was giving a composition seminar - He felt need to work out principles which could serve as a basis for atonal composition

Schoenberg discussed his methods with his pupils and friends, but he never formulated them in writing - He wrote a Harmony text (1911) but never a 12-tone text - What we know about his methods comes from occasional remarks, analysis of his works and testimony of his students

Concise and useful formulation by Josef Rufer in an essay called "Composition with 12 notes related only to one another" (1952) - Rufer was the student to whom S. first disclosed technique in 1920, thus probably very accurate rendition of S's view - 5 principles:

1. "The series" = All 12 notes of chromatic scale arranged in specific order - Also called "row," or "set" - A pitch may be given in any octave (principle of "octave equivalence")
2. No repetition - No note of the series may be repeated until whole series has been heard (NB immediate repetition is allowed)
3. 4 forms of the row - Prime (the order of pitches as first heard), Inversion (upside down),

- Retrograde (backward), Retrograde Inversion (upside down and backward)
4. Transposition - Each of the 4 forms may be transposed to begin on any note of the chromatic scale
 5. Horizontal = Vertical - The series, or portions of the series, can be stated horizontally or vertically (NB This is crucial because it allows series to fill both "melodic-contrapuntal" and "harmonic-accompanying" functions)
(From Jarman, 1979, p.80)

What is purpose of these rules?

- 1) to guarantee atonality - i.e. if you follow these rules you'll write music that can't be heard "in a key," and it's almost impossible to create functional harmonies
- 2) to provide a rationale for "emancipated dissonance"
- 3) to provide a non-tonal scaffolding for larger forms and longer pieces - Successive segments of a piece can be based on different transformations and combinations of one row - Possibility of formal moves like antecedent-consequent, "development," "variation," "recap," etc.

The analogies with 18th and 19th century musical forms were very important to Schoenberg - He proposed to: "replace those structural differentiations provided formerly by tonal harmonies"

For a review, read David Cope (assigned for Prep)

Wind Quintet shows his focus on using row as melody, and his adherence to neoclassical forms

Timings for Schoenberg Wind 5tet

2 nd group	m.42	1:44
Double bar	m.72	3:00
Devel	m.73	5:50
Recap	m.128	8:25

6. Anton Webern - First Cantata (1939)

I'll cover 1st movement only

Webern goes in the opposite direction from Schoenberg - Instead of emphasizing connections between 12-tone music and classical-romantic music, he emphasizes differences

Some typical Webern techniques:

Choose rows for their formal properties rather than for how they sound as melodies

Use a lot of octave displacement

Distribute row among many instruments (Klangfarben technique)

Avoid dance rhythms or any regular rhythms

Vertical sonorities constructed with counterpoint and canon rather than harmonies

The result is that Webern is harder to listen to than either Schoenberg or Berg and was played less in the 30s - But he was much admired by the postwar serialist composers like Stravinsky and Boulez - and his works became very fashionable in the 60s

Text by Hildegard Jone - Austrian poet (woman) - close friend of Webern - from the mid-1920s on Webern set only her poetry - This poem is about the how creative force of Nature = the creative force of God's word - READ

The row - HANDOUT of choral entrance

Each voice sings a row form from beginning to end - Identify from magic square:

Soprano = P₀; Alto = I₁₁; tenor = P₁₀; bass = I₉

Alternates between chords in sets of 3 - 1st and last chords are identical (though rescored) - middle chord features open 5ths - This is produced almost

mechanically by properties of the row

Effect is to create a harmonic expectation (like melodic expectations above)

PLAY - listen for row at vocal entrance - Listen also for "lightening" in m. 13

Row characteristics - HANDOUT magic square

Dominated by 3rds and half-steps - Thirds are occasionally heard as 6ths, half steps often as 7ths and 9ths -

Inversion sounds very similar (because of 3rds)

Inversion is a transposed retrograde - $R_0 = I_5$ ($P_0 = RI_5$) - Therefore there are really only 24 versions of the row

Result is that melodies and harmonies begin to sound very uniform over course of the piece - you begin to form an expectation

PLAY beginning again

Klangfarben (sound colors)

Webern moves the row from instrument to instrument - Thus sound color of the row is continually changing

HANDOUT - You hear 4 row forms, each played by several instruments

PLAY beginning again

Note also symmetry of 3 chords at beginning and 3 at end, with row back in original locations - Symmetry is very characteristic of Webern

Thus, although we probably don't "hear the row" or its transformations - both melody and harmony begin to sound "right," even during a very short piece, because expectations are created and fulfilled