

MHL 603 - 12-TONE-3: FREE TREATMENT OF 12 TONES

A. Copland Piano Quartet (1950)

I. Free treatment

12-tone procedures seem very limiting, and many composers complain about these limitations and give up on them – But other composers found them liberating, because the procedures free them from: the habits of 19th-century music, the harmonic limitations on melody, rules about the use of dissonance

Many of these composers use 12-tone procedures quite freely:

They don't follow Rufer's 5 procedures consistently

They allow for triads and cadences

They use the row as a melody

They allow repetition – horizontally and vertically

They use tonal materials as well – simultaneous with 12-tone or in alternation

You heard many of these features in the Copland Piano Quartet

These freer 12-tone pieces tend to be among the most durable, most performed, and most accepted by audiences

Is this because:

1) Breaking the “rules” allowed the composers to write better music?

2) Tonal reminiscences and audible procedures make the music more acceptable to audiences?

2. Alban Berg - Violin Concerto (1935) (The last piece Berg finished)

Everyone's favorite 12-tone piece!

Berg began using 12-tone techniques after *Wozzeck* - The Violin Concerto is a 12-tone piece, but it retains some of the characteristics of *Wozzeck*, especially tonal reminiscences and folk elements - It also quotes directly from tonal music (a Bach chorale)

HANDOUT - Row presented by violin at m.15 - (The very first presentation is by basses and violas from m.11)

PLAY beginning - What is unusual about row and its presentation?

Row isn't heard at the beginning of piece

Row is made up of thirds, then whole-tone scale

Presentation by basses and violas is overwhelmingly triadic

In violin presentation the pitch-level is important - i.e. octaves aren't equivalent – we hear it over and over again as consecutive thirds, sometimes ascending, sometimes descending (inversion)

Accompaniment isn't derived from row (at least not as directly as in Schoenberg)

What is the relation of the opening to the row? - Every other note (making open 5ths), but it's also the open strings on the violin

Why the whole-tone scales at the end of the row? - You don't know yet, but it's because these are the first 4 notes of a well-known Bach chorale, "Es ist Genug" (see handout) – Berg uses 4 whole tones repeatedly to end phrases, often with last note displaced by an octave

Thus the row is meaningful in a way that it seldom is for Schoenberg and never is for Webern - This is typical of Berg - This concerto is dedicated to Manon Gropius (daughter of Alma Mahler), whom Berg and his wife often looked after but who died at age 18 - The Bach chorale comes from a cantata which is a meditation on death - Near the end of the first movement we hear a folk tune (HANDOUT – “plum tree song”) which also had a personal meaning for Berg

Besides features of the row and quotations from other pieces, other aspects of this movement are strongly reminiscent of familiar music – orchestration, violin playing styles, dance rhythms

PLAY first movement excerpts- Listen for dance rhythms: Waltz at 8:45, Ländler at 9:15, Plumtree song at 10:10 - You will also hear passages that sound a great deal like Mahler, whom Berg admired very much

Much more than any music by Schoenberg, the Berg concerto refutes any notions of 12-tone music being mechanical or unmusical – The concerto is beautiful and expressive in ways analogous to Bach, Beethoven and Mahler – 12-tone techniques give Berg more room for expression, not less – This is because: 1) expression is his goal; 2) he uses the techniques very freely; 3) he makes many connections with familiar sonorities, pieces and musical styles

3. Agon (1957) –

We covered basics in previous unit – Ballet for Balanchine at NY City Ballet – Mixes 12-tone and tonal music – sometimes separate, sometimes overlapping – Basic trajectory is from tonal to serial and back to tonal at the very end

Coda I (p.40) - HANDOUT - This is first 12-tone movement – But it mixes 12-tone and tonal techniques – some instruments are mostly tonal (violin, trumpet), some are mostly atonal (piano, trombones, flutes)

Only prime form of row is used, no transpositions

P₀ in m.185, 191

I₀ in 190 (flutes)

R₀ in 208

Row is conjunct – mostly half and whole steps – But Stravinsky displaces the octaves, so it sounds disjunct

PLAY beginning – What's unusual about how row is used? – Stravinsky repeats notes before you've heard them all [bracketed notes in cello part] – You'll find repetition also in m.204

Massive repetition from m. 211 on, pretty much a literal recap in the same scoring – This is very contrary to Schoenberg's principle of "developing variation," but it makes it a lot easier for the listener to hear what's happening

Row is characteristically shared by pairs of instruments: harp/cello, piano/trombone, flute/flute – this is Klangfarben technique as in Webern

Other mannerisms of Webern scoring – harmonics, fluttertongue, use of plucked instruments

PLAY – CD 9 - What is violin doing? – Still playing in C major – Mandolin and trumpet are often (though not always) tonal too

(if time) PLAY Pas de deux

PLAY trios and recap