

## UNIT 19: 20th CENTURY STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Change is an underlying factor in all of the history of music. Each generation uses the traditions and established body of technique of past times, which it enriches and passes on. The forces of change have predominated at least three times and "new" became the battle cry. Around 1300, the ars nova brought about a profound breakthrough in rhythmic and harmonic principles and in notation. Again in 1600, new music emerged -- new dissonances now striding over the old comfortable consonances. Almost always, these signs of change appear first in art before they become evident in music. The "new" music that emerged in 1900 continued in the same patterns.

Whenever the new is born, it retains many features of the old. There are, we like to think, eternal principles of law and order which are basic to the discipline of art. But in our century new conceptions have indeed enriched the language of music. There is a vast expansion of musical resources. The harmonic formulae derived from the major-minor system in use since the time of Bach, with its scales, chords, arpeggios, etc., is just not adequate for much of the new music. The unique ideas demand a different vehicle for expression.

However, many of the older techniques remain intact, i.e.: imitation, repetition, augmentation, diminution, fragmentation of motives, and all the ways to vary and develop the musical idea. These are made fresh by our changing concept of harmony and tonal combinations, new textures, unusual rhythmic patterns, and even electronic media. The Bartok Mikrokosmos volumes are a rich resource of many established contrapuntal techniques. Many employ modes.

These pieces form a bridge to the more dissonant and complex tonal materials used by later 20th century composers, because they retain much of the conventional material and practices used earlier.

Vol. I, Nos. 22, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 35, 36 -- use of canon, imitation, inversion. No. 33 -- basso ostinato with modification

Vol. IV, No. 97 -- basso ostinato  
 No. 103 -- polytonality  
 No. 105 -- pentatonic scale  
 No. 107, 110 -- tone clusters and nontriadic combinations  
 No. 112 -- variations  
 No. 113, 115 -- rhythmic asymmetry and basso ostinato  
 No. 120 -- triads used in unconventional way, expanded harmonic function  
 No. 121 -- 2 part invention in new tonal design

Vol V, No. 122, 134, 135 -- tone clusters  
 No. 123 -- canon  
 No. 124 -- pedal tone in distinctly different framework  
 No. 125, 138 -- ostinato pattern  
 No. 126, 133 and Vol. VI, No. 148, 153 -- changing meter  
 No. 129, 132, 144 -- one specific interval generating force of whole piece

No. 131 -- quartal harmony  
No. 136 -- whole tone scale

Vol. VI, No. 145 -- canon at Aug. 4th in 2 parts A and B can be played on 2 pianos (double canon)

Clearly this is rich in both older techniques used in a new way, and some distinctively contemporary stylistic devices.

Also see:

Bartok, Improvisations No. 20  
Contemporary Collection for Piano Students, ed. Goldstein, Kern, Larimer, Ross and Weiss. Summy Birchard  
Adler, Gradus I-II-III (Oxford)  
Agay, The World of Modern Piano Music (a compilation - MCA)  
Canaday, Contemporary Music for the Pianist (Alfred)  
Svoboda, Children's Treasure Box, Vol. I-II-III-IV (Stangland)-- This work contains many easy to moderately difficult pieces, not very dissonant, and gives examples of many 20th century devices.

Our 20th century music is defined by multiplicity and diversity, unique in the historical process. Our concept of musical sound has been enriched by contact and exposure to Afro-American, East European, Asian and African elements. Even science and technology have opened up resources for the imagination of the contemporary composer. Experimentation with electronic media has given huge potential for sound, density, timbre, and indeed questions are being raised about the future role of conventional instruments and of performance techniques.

"It may well be -- I take it upon myself to predict it -- that the apotheosis of the machine age will demand a subtler tool than the tempered scale, capable of setting down arrangements of sounds hitherto neglected or unheard . . ."

Le Corbusier

"What we want is an instrument that will give us a continuous sound at any pitch. The composer and the electrician will have to labor together to get it."

Edgar Varèse, in 1922

So the major-minor system should be taught as a system relative to certain periods in music history which can be changed, expanded, or at times discarded.

Melody then, not being confined to major-minor, may come from pentatonic, whole tone, or modal scales. It may be ethnic in origin: African, Arabic, Slavic, etc., or it may be contrived or invented by the composer for a specific work (see Example 19.4). It may be disjunct, having zig zag leaps, irregular and asymmetrical, as in Example 19.1 and 19.2, or derive its identity from a rhythmic motive, as in Example 19.3.

Example 19.1 Anton Webern: Wozzeck

Example 19.2 Schönberg: Sechs Kleine Klavierstücke, Op.19, No. 4

Example 19.3 Bartok: Mikrokosmos V, No. 133

Example 19.4 Hovhannes: Sonatina, Op. 120

Musical score for Hovhannes' Sonatina, Op. 120. The score is written for piano and consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a 5/4 time signature. The middle and bottom staves are in bass clef with a 7/4 time signature. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and chromatic movement.

Anson: Whirl-a-Jig

Musical score for Anson's Whirl-a-Jig. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a 6/8 time signature. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a 7/6 time signature. The music is characterized by a lively, rhythmic melody with many accidentals.

Bartok: Mikrokosmos IV, No. 107 (Melody in the Mist)

Musical score for Bartok's Mikrokosmos IV, No. 107 (Melody in the Mist). The score is written for piano and consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. The bottom staff is in bass clef with a 7/4 time signature. The music features a slow, atmospheric melody with a focus on texture and timbre.

Bartok: Mikrokosmos VI, No. 144

A musical score for a piano piece in 4/4 time. The score is written on two staves. The right hand part consists of a series of chords, many of which are marked with a sharp sign (#) and a flat sign (b). The left hand part features a more complex rhythmic pattern with some notes marked with a sharp sign (#) and a flat sign (b). The piece is characterized by its intricate harmonic structure and rhythmic complexity.

Morton Feldman: Last Pieces

A musical score for a piano piece in 7/8 time. The score is written on two staves. The right hand part features a series of chords, many of which are marked with a sharp sign (#) and a flat sign (b). The left hand part features a series of chords, many of which are marked with a sharp sign (#) and a flat sign (b). The piece is characterized by its intricate harmonic structure and rhythmic complexity.

Wallingford Riegger: New and Old, No. 12

A musical score for a piano piece in 2/4 time. The score is written on two staves. The right hand part features a series of chords, many of which are marked with a sharp sign (#) and a flat sign (b). The left hand part features a series of chords, many of which are marked with a sharp sign (#) and a flat sign (b). The piece is characterized by its intricate harmonic structure and rhythmic complexity.

## Paul Hindemith: Easy Five Tone Pieces, No. 5

A musical score for Paul Hindemith's 'Easy Five Tone Pieces, No. 5'. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in 3/8 time. The melody in the treble clef is composed of eighth notes, with some notes marked with a sharp sign (#). The bass clef accompaniment features chords and eighth notes, also with some sharp signs. The piece is written in a five-tone scale.

## Schönberg: 6 Kleine Klavierstücke, Op. 19, IV

A musical score for Arnold Schönberg's '6 Kleine Klavierstücke, Op. 19, IV'. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in 2/4 time. The treble clef staff shows a sequence of chords and eighth notes, with some notes marked with a sharp sign (#). The bass clef staff has a few notes, including a triplet of eighth notes. The piece is written in a 12-tone serial style.

A continuation of the musical score for Arnold Schönberg's '6 Kleine Klavierstücke, Op. 19, IV'. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in 2/4 time. The treble clef staff shows a sequence of chords and eighth notes, with some notes marked with a sharp sign (#). The bass clef staff has a few notes, including a triplet of eighth notes. The piece is written in a 12-tone serial style.

In 12 tone composition, also called serial or dodecaponic, the 12 chromatic notes of the scale are formed into a tone row, or series, and from this row three other transformations are derived; the inversion, retrograde and inversion of the retrograde. Together these comprise the total vertical (harmonic) and horizontal (melodic) resource for the entire work. Transposition to any of the other 11 pitches may be done. When all the tones are used, either the row is repeated or one of the transformations is used. Fragments of any part of the row, or its permutations are often employed, thus creating a

great potential for the inventiveness of the composer. Other musical elements may also be serialized, such as rhythmic values, rests, dynamics, register, articulation, etc. This is called total serialization, of which Stockhausen and Boulez are exponents. Another example is Webern's Op. 11, No. 1 for Cello and Piano. The elements are organized in sets of 8.

- 8 tempo changes
- 8 different note durations
- 8 pitches
- 8 sonorities
- 8 dynamics
- 8 rests

Arnold Schönberg, the innovator of 12 tone technique, developed it only gradually. His early works may be described as post-Wagnerian romanticism. Here belong the *Verklärte Nacht* and the *Gurre Lieder*. Later, in the 3 Piano Pieces, Op. 11, a new atonal idiom became apparent with loss of home key, much more dissonance and contrapuntal procedures. The highly organized system of 12 tone writing was ushered in with his Five Piano Pieces, Op. 23, and the Suite for Piano, Op. 25. This system has been widely adopted by many composers, including Anton Webern, Alban Berg, Karl Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, Luigi Dallapiccola, and many others.

Tone rows can be of varying lengths. Stravinsky used a 5 note row in the Prelude of *In Memoriam Dylan Thomas*, and Gunther Schuller devised a 35 note row as an ostinato in *Little Blue Devil* from *Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee*. Some composers are less strict about following the row exactly. Modifications are always possible. Keep this in mind when analyzing. Dallapiccola uses 2 rows simultaneously.

The Op. 15 by Hans Jelinek is a large work for piano comprising 3 volumes. All the pieces in the work are based on one single row and its transformations. The row and all its forms are given below. Notice how it is used both melodically (horizontally) and harmonically (vertically).

Original Row: O

Inversion: I

Retrograde of original row: R

Inversion of retrograde: RI

Enharmonic equivalents may be used at any time, i.e., Fb for E.

Jelinek: No. 4 from Six Short Character Sketches, Op. 15, No. 2

In the 1st piece from this same opus, 8 straight repeats of the row are used. In Opus 15, No. 1, 2-part invention, the entire piece used the retrograde version of the row.

Other pieces from the Op. 15, based on this same row can be studied in the Vol. 8 of International Library of Piano Music, ed. Felix Greissle (University Society, Inc.).

In the Webern example following (19.5) notice how he designs the row so as to have many half steps, and by octave displacement achieves those vertical combinations he had in mind. Even the grace notes are row members. This piece may be found in the Vol. IV Anthology of Piano Music, The Twentieth Century, ed. Denes Agay.

Example 19.5

0 = row

Example 19.5, continued:

Anton Webern: Piano Piece, Op. Posth. Im Tempo eines Menuetts

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Anton Webern's Piano Piece, Op. Posth. Im Tempo eines Menuetts. The score is written on three systems of grand staves, each with a treble and bass clef. The music is in 3/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and rests. The score includes various dynamic markings such as sfpp, pp, p, sf, and f. There are also numerous fingering numbers (1-10) and slurs. The notation is dense and characteristic of Webern's style.