CHAPTER25

CHAPTER 25: THE CHANGING WORLD OF MUSIC SINCE 1945

Chapter Outline

Prelude. (CHWM 621)

During the postwar years, living composers shared less and less common ground, with little consensus on style, aesthetic, or purpose.

I. Heirs to the Classical Tradition (CHWM 621–26, NAWM 184–86)

Many postwar composers used traditional media, developing individual styles within the classical tradition.

1. ***Olivier Messiaen***  
   *Olivier Messiaen*(1908–1992), the most important French composer born in the twentieth century, was also an organist and teacher of many important younger composers. Messiaen composed many pieces on religious subjects, such as the*Quatour pour la fin du temps*(Quartet for the End of Time, 1941).
   1. Music as contemplation   
      Messiaen sought to embody ecstatic contemplation in music, focusing on a few ideas that are juxtaposed rather than developed. **Music: NAWM 184**
   2. Harmonic stasis   
      Messiaen repeated chord series to create a sense of stasis or meditation.
   3. Rhythmic stasis   
      Messiaen treated rhythm as a matter of duration, not meter, sometimes using repeated patterns of durations like those of medieval isorhythm.
   4. Ethereal sounds   
      Messiaen preferred beautiful timbres and colorful harmonies.
2. ***Benjamin Britten***  
   The English composer *Benjamin Britten*(1913–1976) was concerned primarily with communicating emotions and ideas, including humanitarian concerns, in his music.
   1. Homosexuality   
      Britten was homosexual, and several of his operas have themes related to homosexuality.
   2. *Peter Grimes*  
      Britten established his reputation with *Peter Grimes*(1944–45), the first English opera since Purcell to enter the international repertory. **Music: NAWM 185**
   3. *War Requiem*  
      Britten’s pacifism is expressed in his *War Requiem*(1961–62).
3. ***Tonal Traditionalism***  
   Many twentieth-century composers developed individual styles without departing radically from the past.
   1. Samuel Barber   
      The American composer *Samuel Barber*(1910–1981) offered a novel blend of traditional tonality with modern resources. **Music: NAWM 186**

II. Serial and Nonserial Complexity (CHWM 626–30, NAWM 190–92)

After World War II, young composers in Germany and elsewhere adopted twelve- tone methods, adapting them to their own purposes.

1. Politics and institutional support   
   Government and university support for serial music was crucial, since there was never a large audience for it.
2. The Darmstadt school   
   The ideas fostered in centers for new music, like the one in Darmstadt, inspired experiments by composers in many countries.
3. ***Extensions of Serialism***  
   Beginning in the late 1940s, composers applied serial procedures to parameters other than pitch, such as duration and dynamics, resulting in *total serialism*.
   1. Milton Babbitt   
      *Milton Babbitt*(b. 1916) first applied serial principles to duration in his Three Compositions for Piano (1947). His music grew even more complex because of the maximum interrelatedness of its musical materials.
   2. Karlheinz Stockhausen   
      Independent of Babbitt, composers in Europe explored similar ideas.*Karlheinz Stockhausen*(1928–2007), who used complex serial processes to create *Kreuzspiel*(Cross-Play), continued to develop serial procedures but also moved in many other directions, combining serialism with other methods. **Music: NAWM 190**
   3. Pierre Boulez   
      In his best-known piece, *Le marteau sans ma”tre*(The Hammer without a Master, 1953–55), *Pierre Boulez*(b. 1925) fused his serial methods with a sensitive musical realization of the text. Boulez created a unique approach to serialism that provided him with flexibility and expressive potential.**Music: NAWM 191**
   4. The listener   
      Totally serial compositions are based on principles, but they give listeners an impression of randomness and have appealed principally to a small set of enthusiasts.
   5. The new virtuosity   
      In the postwar years, a new generation of extraordinarily proficient performers encouraged composers to write pieces to challenge their skills.
   6. Luciano Berio   
      Each of the works in *Sequenza*, a series of works by *Luciano Berio*(1925–2003),were for a different unaccompanied solo instrument and composed for a specific virtuosic performer. **Music: NAWM 192**
   7. Elliott Carter   
      *Elliott Carter* (b. 1908) wrote music only the most proficient performers could play and developed what he called "metric modulation." In his String Quartet No. 2 (1959), Carter gives each instrumental part a distinctive personality that interacts with the others.

III. New Sounds and Textures (CHWM 630–36, NAWM 193–95)

One prominent strand in twentieth-century music was the exploration of new musical resources.

1. ***New Instruments, Sounds, and Scales***  
   Some composers built new instruments and explored new scales.
   1. Harry Partch   
      *Harry Partch* (1901–1974) developed new instruments that could play in scales based on pure intervals.
   2. George Crumb   
      *George Crumb*(b. 1929) used ordinary instruments and objects to create new sounds. His unusual effects provide material for juxtaposition and variation and usually evoke extramusical associations. **Music: NAWM 193**
2. ***Non-Western Styles and Instruments***  
   Composers explored music of other cultures with respect for its uniqueness.
   1. Colin McPhee   
      *Colin McPhee* (1900–1964) transcribed Balinese gamelan music for Western instruments and composed works that drew on Balinese materials.
   2. Henry Cowell   
      After World War II, Cowell composed several works that blended Asian and Western elements.
   3. Lou Harrison   
      In the 1960s and 1970s, *Lou Harrison* (1917–2003) combined his interest in just intonation and his penchant for inventing new instruments with his enthusiasm for the music of Asia.
3. ***Electronic Music***  
   Electronic recording, production, and manipulation of sounds were first explored in art music but ultimately became more significant for popular music, especially after 1970.
   1. *Musique concrète*  
      *Pierre Schaeffer* pioneered *musique concrète*, which entailed recording sounds, manipulating them, and assembling them into collages.
   2. Electronic sound   
      Some new sounds were produced electronically, beginning with electronic instruments like the theremin and the ondes martenot.
   3. Electronic music studios   
      Electronic music studios made possible a whole new realm of sounds.
   4. Karlheinz Stockhausen   
      Some composers used recorded sounds alongside electronic ones, as in*Gesang der Jünglinge*(Song of the Youths, 1955–56) by Stockhausen.
   5. Varèse   
      Varèse’s *Poème électronique*(Electronic Poem, 1957–58) combined electronic sounds with recorded ones and represented the pinnacle of his concept of spatial music.
   6. Synthesizers   
      Electronic sound synthesizers made the process of recording and mixing much easier, and in the mid-1960s, popular artists also began using them.
   7. Role of performers   
      The electronic medium gave composers complete, unmediated control over their compositions.
   8. Milton Babbitt   
      Since audiences expect to have performers to watch and respond to, composers began to create works that combined prerecorded tape with live performers, as in Babbitt’s *Philomel*(1964). **Music: NAWM 194**
4. ***Music of Texture and Process***  
   Inspired by Varèse’s concept of spatial music and by electronic music, some composers wrote pieces creating interesting and novel textures, organized by gradual or sudden processes of change.
   1. Iannis Xenakis   
      *Iannis Xenakis* (1922–2001) was among the first composers to write music based on texture and process for acoustic instruments, in works such as*Metastaseis*(1953–1954).
   2. Krzysztof Penderecki   
      *Krzysztof Penderecki*(b. 1933) wrote *Threnody: To the Victims of Hiroshima*(1960), one of the best-known pieces based on texture and process, which uses high clusters, glissandos, and special effects on string instruments to create music that sounds electronic. He also used similar techniques in dramatic works. **Music: NAWM 195**
   3. New thinking   
      Pieces using new sounds and textures demand new thinking about music from their listeners as much as from their composers.

IV. The Avant-Garde (CHWM 636–42, NAWM 187–89)

In some discussions of twentieth-century music, all postwar developments are lumped together as avant-garde, but this view of history does not account for the different motivations behind those developments. Modernist, experimentalist, and avant-garde composers had different motivations—respectively, seeking a place in the classical repertoire, trying new methods for their own sake, and challenging accepted aesthetics while focusing on the present.

1. ***John Cage***  
   *John Cage*(1912–1992) was the leading composer of the postwar avant-garde. In the late 1930s and 1940s, he focused on new sounds, and his experimentation with timbre culminated in his invention of the *prepared piano,*essentially a one-person percussion ensemble. In the 1950s and 1960s, Cage created opportunities for experiencing sounds as themselves, not as vehicles for the composer’s intentions. **Music: NAWM 187**
   1. Chance   
      Cage used *chance*operations, in his *Music of Changes*for piano (1951) and other works, to make some of the decisions normally made by the composer. **Music: NAWM 188**

**In Performance: John Cage and Musical Notation**  
Cage composed his *Music of Changes*using chance operations to make certain choices within parameters he had designed in advance, yet he notated precisely every detail of the music.

* 1. Indeterminacy   
     Different from chance is *indeterminacy,*in which the composer leaves unspecified certain aspects of the music, such as the precise notes and rhythms or the coordination of parts. By using chance and indeterminacy, Cage invites the listener to simply hear sound as sound and not to expect music to communicate meaning.
  2. Blurring the boundaries   
     Beginning in the 1950s, Cage created pieces that blurred the boundaries between music, the other arts, and the rest of life.

1. ***Indeterminacy in Works of Other Composers***
   1. Morton Feldman   
      *Morton Feldman*(1926–1987) was inspired by New York abstract expressionist painters to trust instinct and reject compositional systems and traditional forms of expression, as seen in his *Projection I*for solo cello.**Music: NAWM 189**
   2. Earle Brown   
      *December 1952*(1952) by *Earle Brown* (1926–2002) is a piece in graphic notation in which nothing is specified.
   3. Significance of indeterminacy   
      Indeterminate pieces utilize new kinds of notation and are never performed the same way twice, drawing into question the nature of "the musical work."
2. ***Digital Technologies***  
   Since the 1970s, new *digital*technologies have altered the ways musicians work with music and listeners consume it.
   1. Sampling   
      One significant new technique is *sampling,*patching together digital segments of recorded sound.
   2. Computer music   
      Advances in computing offered new possibilities that composers explored, including computer-synthesized sounds and computer transformations of sound.

**A Closer Look: Digital Technologies**  
In the 1970s and early 1980s, music joined the digital revolution, and musicians in both popular and classical traditions were using digital synthesizers. Some musicians combined live performers with synthesized or computer-generated music.

V. Minimalism and Postminimalism (CHWM 642–48, NAWM 197–98 and 205)

*Minimalism*is an approach to music in which materials are reduced to a minimum and procedures simplified. It began as an aesthetic but became a set of techniques, as composers of minimalist works absorbed a variety of influences to create what has been called the leading musical style of the late twentieth century.

1. Minimalism in art   
   Minimalist artworks focused on basic forms and materials and did not seek to express feelings.
2. Early minimalism in music   
   A movement paralleling minimalism in art was nurtured among musicians such as La Monte Young (b. 1935) and Terry Riley (b. 1935).
3. ***From Avant-Garde to Widespread Appeal***  
   Three other Americans brought minimalist procedures into art music intended for a broad audience.
   1. Steve Reich   
      *Steve Reich*(b. 1936) developed a minimalist effect called *phasing.*He attracted a wide range of listeners, and by the 1980s, applied minimalist techniques to works with significant emotional content, works sometimes called *postminimalist*. **Music: NAWM 197**
   2. Philip Glass   
      *Philip Glass*(b. 1937) writes music that emphasizes melodiousness, consonance, and simple harmonic progressions. He secured his reputation with a series of major works.
   3. *Einstein on the Beach*  
      Glass’s opera *Einstein on the Beach,*which premiered in 1976, avoids narrative and consists primarily of repeated musical figures sung on solfège syllables and played on electronic instruments, woodwinds, and solo violin.
   4. John Adams   
      *John Adams*(b. 1947) began his career writing minimalist works (like*Phrygian Gates*, 1977–1978) and then blended minimalist techniques with elements from popular and classical music in works like his orchestral fanfare *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*(1986). Adams has won a broad and enthusiastic audience by integrating traditional procedures with minimalist ones. **Music: NAWM 198**
   5. Influence of minimalism   
      Since the 1970s and 1980s, minimalist techniques have grown increasingly common in popular music and film music.
4. ***Interactions with Non-Western Musics***  
   Many currents in Western music were inspired by the musics of Asia and Africa.
   1. Bright Sheng   
      Some composers, including Chinese-born *Bright Sheng*(b. 1955), drew directly on Asian musics, as illustrated in his solo cello suite *Seven Tunes Heard in China*(1999). Such works go beyond nineteenth-century exoticism in the respect they show for the intrinsic value of the traditions on which they draw. **Music: NAWM 205**

VI. The New Accessibility and Other Trends (CHWM 648–57, NAWM 199–204)

While many composers made a living teaching at universities or conservatories, obtaining repeat performances of their music was difficult. Some composers continued to write as they had before, while others sought to attract wider interest by writing more accessible music.

1. ***Accessible Modernism and Radical Simplification***  
   Some composers wrote accessible music in a modernist idiom.
   1. György Ligeti   
      In *Vertige*(Vertigo, 1990), by *György Ligeti*(1923–2006), the constant repetition of simple material reflects the influence of minimalism, while the texture of overlapping continuous lines comes from electronic music.**Music: NAWM 199**
   2. Ellen Taaffe Zwilich   
      *Ellen Taaffe Zwilich*(b. 1939) joins continuous developing variation with older formal devices of recurrence and contrast. **Music: NAWM 200**
   3. Arvo Pärt   
      *Arvo Pärt*(b. 1935) used simple materials influenced by Baroque and medieval traditions to create a highly individual style. The method he called *tintinnabuli*joins a simple diatonic melody with other voices that sound only the notes of the tonic triad. **Music: NAWM 201**
2. ***Quotation, Collage, and Polystylism***  
   Many composers of varying orientations borrowed existing music, evoking older music through *quotation*and *collage*to carry new meanings.
   1. Postmodernism   
      Another approach was *postmodernism,*in which all styles were equally available as musical material, to be employed as the composer saw fit.
   2. Alfred Schnittke   
      *Alfred Schnittke*(1934–1998) followed new Western trends during the 1960s and then turned to what he called "*polystylism*," a combination of new and older styles created through quotation or stylistic allusion. **Music: NAWM 203**
   3. John Corigliano   
      John Corigliano (b. 1938) frequently juxtaposes styles to convey meaning.
3. ***Neo-Romanticism***  
   Some composers adopted the tonal idiom of nineteenth-century Romanticism, a trend known as *neo-Romanticism*.
   1. George Rochberg   
      Having turned from serialism to quotation in the 1960s, *George Rochberg*(1918–2005) moved to a mix of neo-Romanticism and early modernism in the 1970s.
   2. David Del Tredici   
      *David Del Tredici* (b. 1937) embraced neo-Romanticism to create whimsical, immediately comprehensible music to set texts from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* in *Final Alice*(1975).
4. ***Extramusical Imagery and Meanings***  
   Some composers invoked extramusical meanings and imagery, hoping that listeners would accept unusual sounds if their meanings were clear.
   1. Sofia Gubaidulina   
      The works of *Sofia Gubaidulina*(b. 1931) often have a spiritual dimension. Her sonata *Rejoice!*expresses the transcendence from ordinary reality to a state of joy. **Music: NAWM 202**
   2. R. Murray Schafer   
      *R. Murray Schafer* (b. 1933) traversed a wide variety of styles, but his most striking innovation is what he calls "environmental music."
   3. Joan Tower   
      Many works by *Joan Tower* (b. 1938) are based on images.
5. ***Evoking Popular Musics***  
   Other composers incorporated elements from popular music to connect to listeners directly while creating a distinctive musical personality.
   1. Ástor Piazzolla   
      *Ástor Piazzolla* (1921–1992) combined the Argentine tradition of the tango with elements of jazz and classical music to create a new style.
   2. Osvaldo Golijov   
      *Osvaldo Golijov* (b. 1960) draws on classical styles, Piazzolla’s style, synagogue music, and klezmer in his compositions.
   3. Michael Daugherty   
      *Michael Daugherty*(b. 1954) writes works that combine modernist structural principles with elements of popular music. **Music: NAWM 204**
   4. Direct communication   
      By the 1990s, most composers sought to maintain individuality yet write music that nonspecialist audiences could grasp.

Postlude (CHWM 657)

Music today is too diverse and trends change too quickly to know now what music of the recent past will be remembered in the future.