

Chapter 27: Nationalism in Music: 1890–1930

- I. Introduction
 - A. Composers outside Germany combined twentieth-century musical ideas with elements of nationalism, using the folk music, language, and culture of their own countries.
 1. Modernist concerns and practices had a wide range, and twentieth-century music became unusually diverse.
 2. National interests and traditions affected the art of Germans as well.
 - B. Composers faced the challenge of creating an indigenous national music in relation to the classical musical tradition, especially during and after World War I.
- II. Finland's Jean Sibelius
 - A. Sibelius was one of the earliest of these composers to become famous internationally.
 1. His life established a pattern that many subsequent composers followed: traditional music training abroad, study with Modernist composers, interest in his own national traditions, fame at home that resulted in an international reputation.
 2. From Finland and speaking Swedish (because of Swedish domination of Finnish culture and politics), Sibelius studied with Busoni in Helsinki.
 3. He used Finnish native literature, such as epic poetry (see his *Kalevala*), in his music.
 4. Sibelius's most famous tone poem was *Finlandia* (1900).
 5. His symphonies and Violin Concerto owe some debt to Tchaikovsky.
 6. Sibelius wrote less and less as he got older, even though he became something of a national monument (his birthday is a national holiday). He came to be seen as the embodiment of "the North."
- III. England: Elgar and Vaughn Williams
 - A. Since the eighteenth century, England's musical life was dominated by imported composers. This changed in the late nineteenth century.
 1. Elgar was the most prominent English composer at the turn of the century.
 2. The famous conductor Hans Richter promoted Elgar's music.
 3. The most prominent composer of the next generation was Ralph Vaughan Williams.
 4. Vaughan Williams frequently used English folk songs and early music (Tudor).
 5. His *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* exemplifies his use of early music.
 6. His first two symphonies contain aspects of sounds from English landscapes.
 7. Vaughan Williams thought it important to cultivate a national style.
- IV. The allure of Spain: Manuel de Falla
 - A. Spain's musical heritage stretches back centuries.
 1. Falla met leading figures in Paris in 1907.

2. He did not quote directly from folk songs but chose to combine indigenous folk material with international compositional techniques.
- V. Folk and Modernist synthesis: Béla Bartók
- A. Bartók was one of the first ethnomusicologists (ethnomusicology typically studies music outside of the Western classical tradition using fieldwork methods originally found in anthropology).
 1. He soon turned to his native Hungary for inspiration and study of folk music.
 2. With Kodály, Bartók sought to find “real” Hungarian music, not the typical “Gypsy music” (*style hongrois*) heard in cafes and the like.
 3. The two transcribed peasant songs and published them in 1906.
 4. Bartók said that this act “liberated” him from having to use only major or minor keys.
 - B. Adopting folk traditions to Modern music
 1. Bartók developed theories about the relationship between “peasant” and “Modern” music, which he published in Budapest.
 2. Of the three ways detailed in the text, Bartók’s third way relates to some of the others we have studied.
 3. Bartók did not stick to Hungarian music but broadened his interests to include a larger geographical area that included Romania, Serbia, Croatia, and Slovakia. He even extended into Turkey and North Africa.
 4. Bartók felt that Modern music needed a foundation in “nature.”
 5. An early example of how Bartók incorporated folk elements into his Modern music are the fourteen Bagatelles for piano, Op. 6.
 6. The *Dance Suite* does not use folk songs but references folk elements, bringing several different nations together in the final dance.
 7. His six quartets show how Bartók used traditional, established genres and imbued them with his own aesthetics of folklore, newness, and advancement.
- VI. Modernism in Eastern Europe: Karol Szymanowski and George Enescu
- A. Small Central and Eastern European countries experienced oppressive control from stronger outside forces.
 1. The preeminent early Modernist composer from Poland was Szymanowski, who also featured elements of his native land in his music.
 2. Enescu was the prominent Romanian composer of the early twentieth century.
- VII. The oldest Modernist: Leoš Janáček
- A. A Czech composer (born in Moravia), Janáček came into his own as a composer late.
 1. He was initially seen as a provincial composer.
 2. The work that brought him international fame was *Jenůfa*, a “Czech verismo shocker.”
 3. The success of *Jenůfa* caused Janáček to compose many more works, including several operas. He was sixty-two.

4. Janáček felt that music should be stylistically accessible to the people from whom it drew its themes.
- B. Speech melodies
1. Janáček felt that music should also reflect speech patterns.
 2. In the 1890s he began writing down “speech tunelets,” known in English as “speech melodies.”
 3. These followed melodic curves and rhythms of speech.
 4. Janáček sought to capture the rhythmic style of the Czech language in his music.
- VIII. Alexander Scriabin: from expression to revelation
- A. Maximalism in Russia reached its height with Scriabin.
1. He traveled extensively in Western Europe and the United States and showed no interest in Russian folk music.
 2. Scriabin was involved with “mystical Symbolist” groups and avant-garde theology, and he joined the theosophy movement.
 3. For theosophists, art was a medium of Gnostic revelation. They saw Scriabin as a prophet.
 4. Scriabin’s music moved from mystical (sometimes sublime) to revelation.
 5. His symphonies show a penchant for maximalism in the same vein as Strauss and Mahler.
 6. Scriabin moved away from the diatonic scale (which represents the known human world), although the circle of fifths and other remnants of tonality remain in some ways.
 7. *Vers la flamme* (1914) is a late work that depicts Scriabin’s juxtaposition of harmony with visionary aspirations.
- B. Scriabin’s *Mysterium*
1. Toward the end of his life, Scriabin was working on a piece he called *Mysterium*, which he felt would be his ultimate statement.
 2. He wrote a text for it that summed up theosophist doctrine.
 3. He came to envision the work as something that would last for seven days, bring the participants to a state of enlightenment transcending humanly time and space. Ultimately it would end human history.
 4. The sketches that exist for the work that substituted for *Mysterium*, *Acte préalable*, show where Scriabin was headed harmonically.
- IX. Charles Ives: American Modernist
- A. In the nineteenth century, much of the music in America was imported from Europe, but some people worked to produce home-grown pieces.
1. The first writer to promote these ideas was Emerson, in a movement known as Transcendentalism.
 2. New England Transcendentalism inspired Ives, perhaps the first great American composer.
 3. Ives studied with Horatio Parker at Yale and began composing in a style much influenced by Dvořák.
 4. After the premiere of his *The Celestial Country* in 1902, Ives renounced a career in music.

B. Reactions to Ives's music

1. Ives suffered health problems in 1918 that plagued him for years and effectively ended his creative life, but at the same time his music began to be heard.
2. The first public performance of the *Concord Sonata* in 1939 received positive reviews.
3. That Ives composed so modern so early could lead critics to devalue his music aesthetically.
4. The idea of dating exactly when Ives was "modern" is foreign to Ives's own ideas about manner versus substance.
5. The *Concord Sonata* brings to mind Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; the opening motive pervades the composition.

C. Nostalgia in Ives's music: *Three Places in New England*

1. Some of Ives's works do not seem to blend so easily with Transcendentalism and are disruptive, humorous, and heavy.
2. Similar to Beethoven's scherzos, they might be considered "scherzoids."
3. These programmatic pieces often display aspects of America's pastoral primitivism—views of unspoiled, abundant countryside over the polluted and corrupt big city.
4. The most famous and characteristic of these compositions is "Putnam's Camp" from *Three Places in New England*.
5. Like Scriabin and Schoenberg, Ives also worked on a huge orchestral piece, which he called the *Universe Symphony*.

X. The nationalists' legacy

A. All of the composers in this chapter come from different geographic areas, but commonalities exist among them.

1. Many studied abroad and then tried to use their native culture in their compositions.
2. Most came to be seen as national monuments.
3. They also demonstrated a sense of commitment to society in other ways, such as education, practical music making, and composition, with pedagogy in mind.