

Chapter 32: Music in the Aftermath of World War II: 1945–70

- I. Introduction
 - A. Composers had different responses to World War II, including serialism, indeterminacy, and electronic music.
 1. Art music became increasingly separated from popular music.
 2. Milton Babbitt's 1957 lecture "Who Cares If You Listen?" became one of the most hotly debated musical manifestos of the twentieth century.
 3. John Cage began to create works based on the principle of chance or indeterminacy.
 4. Early composers of electronic music fell into two rival groups: *musique concrète*, created by taping and manipulating sounds from the real world, and *Elektronische Musik*, based exclusively on electronically generated sounds.
- II. The aftermath of World War II
 - A. As with World War I, the scale of devastation and destruction haunted people everywhere. Now, however, there was a threat of the future as well.
 1. Art for the people was associated with communism; "high" art was associated with capitalism. With the growing tensions of the Cold War, the gulf between high and low art increased as well.
 - B. The revival of serialism
 1. German writers identified a "Zero Hour" that defined a time without a past.
 2. The Nazis had banned Schoenberg and all things associated with his music. These now came to be seen as a sort of resistance.
 - C. Toward total serialism: Olivier Messiaen's *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités*
 1. Boulez proposed to serialize pitch, rhythm, dynamics, and timbre.
 2. The first famous work to accomplish this was Messiaen's *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* (1949).
 3. The next step was total serialism, accomplished in Boulez's *Structures* (1951).
 - D. The Darmstadt School
 1. The Zero Hour composers were situated in Darmstadt, an American-controlled town in Germany.
 2. Total serialism offered a way out of expression and subjectivity that was abstract, pure, and unemotional.
 3. Critics of total serialism noted a misappropriation of scientific prestige; others saw it as nihilist.
 - E. Conversions to serialism
 1. American music also had a group of composers that were similar in ideas to the German Zero Hour composers.
 2. Copland moved to serial techniques.
 3. The most surprising convert to serialism was Stravinsky.
 - F. American academic music
 1. Craft conducted Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles* at its premiere at Princeton University.

2. Princeton was a leading school for composition and theory at this time, thanks largely to the efforts of Milton Babbitt.
 3. Babbitt was a trained mathematician as well as a musician.
 4. He developed “set theory” in 1946 as a basis for the analysis of twelve-tone technique.
 5. He also composed in a manner similar to the Zero Hour composers, a little prior to their works, but did not publish the compositions (with one exception). This left him with some resentment because they had credit for the new ideas that he had also developed.
- III. Interdeterminacy: John Cage and the “New York School”
- A. The American counterpart to the European postwar avant-garde centered around Cage. (“One of the most influential creative figures in the world.”)
 1. Like the Europeans, the American sought to eliminate the artist’s ego and personality from the product.
 2. Cage’s ideas were an extension of the earlier American experimentalists.
 3. He worked to counter the supremacy of traditional pitch organization as the basis for making music.
 - B. Music for prepared piano
 1. Cage invented the “prepared piano.”
 2. Cage mixed Zen with *I Ching*. The predetermination of the *I Ching* yielded the music-producing algorithm sought by the Zero Hour composers, but Cage then added chance instead of serial operations as the path of progression for a work.
 3. The music of Cage and Boulez ultimately sounded similar but was reached by opposite means.
 - C. Silence
 1. One of Cage’s main contributions was to challenge the way people think about music.
 2. He questioned the nature of the musical work.
 3. His *4'33"* (1952) is his ultimate experiment in indeterminacy.
 - D. “Permission”: Cage’s influence
 1. Cage’s influence extended beyond musicians.
 2. Following Cage’s ideas, Earle Brown began to challenge concepts of notation.
 3. Cage influenced theater, most famously with “happenings.”
 4. Cage led various schools and other educational workshops.
 - E. Morton Feldman: preserving the avant-garde
 1. Feldman was an associate of Cage who competed with him in the search for aesthetic autonomy.
 2. Cage’s music required a meticulous and demanding methodology.
 3. Feldman’s was more abstract from the beginning.
 4. Some of Feldman’s pieces are quite long, the result of which is a special aesthetic experience.
- IV. Electronics: an old dream comes true
- A. Composers such as Varèse and Cage had been searching for something that could create new sounds. The answer was electronic music.

1. New instruments, such as the theremin, were invented.
 2. The possibility of “played back” sound developed in Germany in the 1930s. This allowed the splicing of performances to eliminate mistakes.
- B. *Musique concrète* versus *Elektronische Musik*
1. The use of electronics opened the door for two distinct camps. One sought to incorporate sounds of the real world in music and the other to create new sounds.
 2. In 1948, French engineer Pierre Schaeffler coined the term *musique concrète* to describe the real-world approach.
 3. In Italy, Berio promoted *musique concrète*. His crowning achievement is *Thema*.
 4. Zero Hour composers took a different approach to electronic music, calling theirs *Elektronische Musik*.
- C. The new technology spreads
1. “Computer music” began in the United States in 1957.
 2. The composers associated with computer music were in the universities, notably Columbia and Princeton.
 3. Varèse’s *Poème électronique*, for tape alone, premiered at the World’s Fair in 1958.
- D. Electronics and live music
1. From its beginnings, the combination of live performance and electronic music was an issue.
 2. In the 1960s, composers from Eastern Europe began to write music that sounded like electronic music but was performed on traditional instruments.
 3. One of these was Ligeti.
 4. Others in this group include Penderecki, Lutoslawski, and Gorecki.
 5. Avant-garde music made some commercial success, particularly in film.
- V. Music in history: Elliott Carter
- A. The most prominent American “intellectual” composer at the end of the century was Carter.
1. He was not part of the university “PhD music” crowd.
 2. He tried his hand at various techniques but ultimately focused his energies on rhythm.
 3. Carter sought to find a way to bridge objective time with subjective (psychological) time.
 4. The technique most associated with Carter is “tempo modulation” or “metrical modulation.”
 5. Carter’s reputation continued to grow after his First Quartet, including a Pulitzer Prize for the Second Quartet.
 6. He became associated with the Modernist movement.
- B. “Who Cares If You Listen?”
1. Much of the music composed in the early twentieth century eventually received approval from audiences.
 2. The composers in this chapter, however, did not win such popular approval.

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3. Babbitt provided the reasoning behind their music in a lecture originally entitled "The Composer as Specialist," which is now known by another title: "Who Cares If You Listen?"