

Contents

1	MILLENNIAL PRELUDE	1
2	TAKING STEPS: 1900–1918	8
	The Meanings of Modernism · Fauré · Puccini · Elgar and Delius · Debussy · Satie · Ravel · Debussy Analysis · Mahler · Sibelius · Richard Strauss · Ives · Rakhmaninov · Skryabin · Stravinsky · Schoenberg · Bartók · Berg and Webern · Webern Analysis · Busoni	
3	SYMPHONIC MUSIC AFTER 1918: I	52
	Nielsen · Sibelius · Vaughan Williams · Roussel, Ravel	
4	OPERA	72
	The Background · Richard Strauss · Analysis: <i>Capriccio</i> · Busoni and Weill · Janáček · Ravel, Szymanowski · Prokofiev · Britten	
5	BÉLA BARTÓK	96
	1915–1927 · Analysis: String Quartet No. 3 · Bartók after 1927	
6	IGOR STRAVINSKY: 1913–1951	116
	New Paths? · New Techniques · Analysis: <i>Oedipus Rex</i> and Symphony in C · Stravinsky in the 1940s	
7	SYMPHONIC MUSIC: II	134
	Preliminaries · The Early Hindemith · String Quartet No. 3 · Hindemith after the Third String Quartet · Prokofiev · Analysis: Prokofiev's Symphonies Nos. 5 and 6 · Shostakovich · Analysis: Shostakovich's Symphony No. 10 · Other Symphonists	
8	ARNOLD SCHOENBERG	160
	Schoenberg in Transition · Schoenberg's Twelve-Note Practice · Twelve-Note Music and the Voice · Schoenberg in America · Analysis: String Quartet No. 4 (Largo) · Late Works · The Schoenberg Debate	
9	ALBAN BERG	184
	<i>Wozzeck</i> · Chamber Concerto · <i>Lyric Suite</i> · <i>Der Wein</i> · <i>Lulu</i> · Violin Concerto	
10	ANTON WEBERN	201
	The Path to Twelve-Note Music · Twelve-Note Mastery · Analysis: String Quartet Op. 28 · Webern after Op. 28	
11	THE SPREAD OF SERIALISM	221
	Stravinsky · Sessions · Gerhard · Dallapiccola · Babbitt	

12 THREE INDIVIDUALISTS	239
Tippett 1 · Messiaen 1 · Carter 1 · Tippett 2 · Messiaen 2 · Carter 2 · Carter 3 · Messiaen 3 · Tippett 3	
13 RADICALS AND RITUALS	266
Carmina Mundana · Varèse · A Context for John Cage · Cage · The Forceful and the Passive: Nancarrow, Feldman	
14 MUSICS OF CHANGE: SEVEN EUROPEANS	286
Lutosławski · Xenakis · Ligeti · Berio · Boulez · Henze · Stockhausen	
15 THE MINIMALIST EXPERIMENT	325
Young and Riley · Reich · Glass · Adams · The Sacred and the Simple · Andriessen and Others	
16 LAMENTS AND CONSOLATIONS	346
Bernd Alois Zimmermann · Symphonists · Takemitsu · Silvestrov, Schnittke · Kurtág · Nono	
17 POLARITIES, PLURALITIES	364
Lachenmann · Scelsi · Donatoni, Kagel · Maxwell Davies · Birtwistle · Ferneyhough · Murail, Lindberg · An End-of-Century Mainstream? · The Musicologist Speaks . . .	
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	393
<i>Bibliography</i>	398
<i>Index</i>	409

1 MILLENNIAL PRELUDE

In 1989, Alexander Goehr described a fundamental feature of twentieth-century music with exemplary concision:

a great deal of music written in the last seventy years or so cannot be regarded as a straightforward continuation of Classical and Romantic music, either in the way it is conceived or in the way it is meant to be listened to. Background–foreground perception is inapplicable here because, in reality, insufficient background is implied. Continuity is fragmented or constructed of events unrelated to each other, pitch succession too complex to be memorable, and constructional procedures too difficult to be perceived as aural logic.¹

Goehr associated this situation with an avant-garde attitude on the part of composers:

where earlier composers intended to communicate a particular aesthetic impression, and to do so aimed at clarity, subjugation of detail to broadly moving melody and rhythm, and a carefully graded relationship of certainties and ambiguities, avant gardists prefer saturation and prolixity of musical phenomena, aiming so to kick over their traces and thereby create what might be described as a magical effect. This music is to be instantaneously perceived either in a state of shock created by rapid alterations, or in dreamy states brought about by an apparently endless extension of constantly repeating and more or less identical patterns.²

Here Goehr introduces an opposition, often defined as that between ‘complexity’ and ‘minimalism’, which is a well-established phenomenon on the contemporary scene, and the tone of his writing indicates his own preference for a less radical, more classical approach than either. Not only does he argue that ‘total and continuous fragmentation of texture and continuity rapidly leads to incomprehensibility’,³ but he claims that the modernist project itself is ultimately self-destructive: ‘creating new conventions is the inevitable fate of all modernisms, but it also marks the end of them’.⁴ Here Goehr seems to join forces with the aesthetician Roger Scruton, who argues forcefully that ‘avant-gardism can never be the key to aesthetic renewal’.⁵

To the extent that any ‘new conventions’ enshrine the essence of modernism, their establishment need not mark the end of modernism so much as its

¹ Alexander Goehr, ‘Music as Communication’, in *Finding the Key: Selected Writings of Alexander Goehr*, ed. D. Puffett (London, 1998), 231.

² Ibid. 233.

³ Ibid. 295.

⁴ Ibid. 94.

⁵ Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford, 1997), 470.

stabilization. In twentieth-century compositional practice, radical modernism or avant-garde extremism has coexisted with a no less resourceful concern to explore possible accommodations between modernism's tendency to proliferate and classicism's impulse to integrate. The traffic between these two apparent alternatives has occurred so pervasively because of the very factor singled out by Goehr—the concern of composers to preserve something memorable, something akin to 'aural logic', in music that does not rely on all the functional relationships and form-embracing hierarchies of traditional tonality. For most of the twentieth century, progressive composers seeking some fundamental continuity with the past have attempted to ensure that sound is perceptible as tone⁶ by relying on the repetition and development of motivic material and textural patterns to make the shape of structures perceptible, and the absorbing evolution of such shapes and moods can convey a distinctive musical coherence, even in the absence of traditional harmonic strategies. This does not mean that vertical pitch relations are no longer relevant to or detectable in such 'post-tonal' music, but it underlines that the music can still convey or represent meaning as character, atmosphere, or mood, not least through allusions to particular 'topics'—potent musical shapes which, even in radical twentieth-century styles, can still evoke certain fundamental genres, often to do with varieties of song (like the lament) or dance.

As the drift of the previous paragraph indicates, not even a study focusing on twentieth-century technical preoccupations and procedures can ignore the wise musicological dictum that 'even as we define problems and relationships in apparent autonomy, we are reflecting complex interactions with society of which we are largely unconscious'.⁷ Another musicological voice adds the no-less-significant truth that

it is a formalist prejudice that an artwork receives aesthetic value commensurate to the degree that it can be analyzed as an autonomous entity. But no musical piece is born in a vacuum. Every composition exists along a plurality of continuums: the composer's own artistic development, the historical unfolding of a given genre or style, evolving social and aesthetic forces, and so on.⁸

Even if much of my own text may appear to subscribe to the outmoded heresy of autonomy, treating its chosen compositions in isolation from any contexts other than the particular technical features selected by the author, some hint of the world outside the work will break in from time to time. It is the composition as music which dominates, even so, for there is always a sense in which the work of art, with the inevitable element of consolation in face of an alarming world

⁶ See Scruton, *Aesthetics*, 16–18, for a definition of the distinction between 'sound' and 'tone'.

⁷ Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis, 1991), 147.

⁸ Thomas Christensen, review article in *Music Theory Spectrum*, 15 (1993), 110.

which it brings with it,⁹ represents a triumph over the world and not a mere reflection of it. It is a product of the world that transcends its context. When Scruton writes that 'music inspires and consoles us partly because it is unencumbered by the debris that drifts through the world of life'¹⁰ this is not just a pious poetic fantasy.

It will, I hope, be obvious that a text conceived in the way I have described cannot be regarded as a history of twentieth-century music. Opinions about what could constitute such a history are bound to vary, but I feel sure that there would be a very large consensus in favour of a far fuller account of musical institutions and social factors bearing on the lives of composers and other musicians than is offered here. A proper historical account would give no special priority to the composers and works included in my text. It would be as much about popular or commercial activities as so-called art music, and (in all likelihood) devote more space to the social, political, and cultural forces impinging on, and inevitably affecting, musicians of all kinds than to the description and interpretation of whatever 'serious' composers happened to write down. Where my book may be judged to have become historical (and/or ideological) is in the linkage it accepts between the nature of compositional procedures and the result of those procedures interpreted not purely technically but as manifestations of more general aesthetic attitudes: above all, as demonstrating some relation either to modernism—the embrace of discontinuity as something more than a means of diversifying a unity—or to modern classicism, as the resistance to this strategy.

Such an emphasis can be legitimized on grounds of its association with the kind of attitudes that historians of twentieth-century ideas identify as (in part) the legacy of Nietzsche—'what is needed above all is an absolute scepticism towards all inherited concepts'¹¹—and inscribed in the writings of such crucial figures as T. E. Hulme, who declared before 1914 that 'I am a pluralist. . . . There is no Unity, no Truth, but forces which have different aims, and whose whole reality consists in those differences.'¹² One particularly cogent late twentieth-century view of 'politics and culture at the close of the modern age' refers in comparable terms to 'a condition of plural and provisional perspectives, lacking any rational or transcendental ground or unifying world-view',¹³ on the way to the suggestion that 'the political forms which may arise in truly post-enlightenment cultures will be those that shelter and express diversity—that enable different cultures, some but by no means all or even most of which are dominated by

⁹ See Raymond Geuss, 'Berg and Adorno', in *The Cambridge Companion to Berg*, ed. A. Pople (Cambridge, 1997), 43.

¹⁰ Scruton, *Aesthetics*, 122.

¹¹ Cited in Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe, 1990–1916* (Oxford, 1994), 2.

¹² *Ibid.* 209.

¹³ John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London, 1997), 153.

liberal forms of life, different world-views and ways of life, to coexist in peace and harmony'.¹⁴ Such a development would not of itself imply that the forms of artistic expression that have evolved since the Renaissance and have survived, so far, since the Enlightenment, would cease to have any relevance. But it suggests that the rampant diversity within 'liberal practice' of twentieth-century art music would be likely to yield to different understandings of 'art'—especially those understandings less beholden to what John Gray terms 'the power of calculative thought'.¹⁵ Gray is enough of a pessimist to refer to the inherent 'nihilism' of contemporary Western culture, and a similar attitude can be deduced in Roger Scruton's analysis of a late twentieth-century situation in which 'democratic man is essentially "culture-less", without the aspirations that require him to exalt his image in literature and art'.¹⁶ 'New conditions' exist in which 'it is not only art and music that have undergone a fatal metamorphosis. . . . The human psyche itself has been thrown out of orbit', and Scruton looks to a reaffirmation of tonality as the most likely way to engage with that 'new bourgeois audience' that 'is emerging—one which does not feel the force of modernism's bleak imperatives'. His conclusion is that 'a musical equivalent of *Four Quartets* is needed—a rediscovery of the tonal language, which will also redeem the time. Many of our contemporaries have aimed at this—Nicholas Maw, John Adams, Robin Holloway, and Alfred Schnittke. But none, I think, has yet succeeded'.¹⁷

Much of the discussion in this study, written well before Scruton's assessment appeared, can be read as an attempt to argue that modernism and tonality are not incompatible: if, that is, we allow for tonality to be enriched by the evolutionary strategies, deriving from such composers as Debussy, Stravinsky and Bartók, whose roots reach down deeply into the music of the nineteenth century. In fact, Scruton himself, while arguing in general that tonality is essentially the full functional system, not dependent for its existence on the Schenkerian concept of a deep structure but never floating free of functional identities, reveals a degree of equivocation when he allows that tonal harmony can be viewed as either 'tending towards' the tonic 'or away from it'.¹⁸ A modernism that works with the opposition of stable (often symmetrical) and unstable elements may tend to reflect the fractured time as much as 'redeem' it. But I firmly believe that such modernism can be authentically affirmative, enabling the music-lover to accept its modernity and be inspired by it as a positive attribute, appropriate for its time and place: indeed, it can be so without any 'tonality' at all, as Scruton acknowledges when he refers to Elliott Carter's *Concerto for Orchestra* as 'a work which succeeds in turning an uncompromising modernism to the service of joy'.¹⁹

The possible connections between what the composer writes down and the

¹⁴ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, 155.

¹⁵ Ibid. 184.

¹⁶ Scruton, *Aesthetics*, 505.

¹⁷ Ibid. 507–8.

¹⁸ Ibid. 240.

¹⁹ Ibid. 494.

contingent world within which that writing takes place will tend to reinforce a view of many of the compositions discussed here as both revolutionary and rear-guard action, attempting to preserve the composer's special position in society (an inheritance of the nineteenth century) by transforming some or most of the ways in which that position was represented in the notated work. Twentieth-century composers have, on occasion, sought to present themselves as the hapless victims of circumstance in which irresistible historical forces have driven them to adopt the role of arrogant and self-indulgent outsider, in a kind of exaggerated parody of romanticism's reverence for the quasi-divine otherness of the creative genius. In an essay dating from his early years in America, Schoenberg declared that 'Music is only understood when one goes away singing it and is only loved when one falls asleep with it in one's head and finds it is still there on waking up the next morning.'²⁰ Three years later he returned to the topic, declaring that

I always insisted that the new music was merely a logical development of [existing] musical resources. But of what use can theoretical explanations be in comparison with the effect the subject itself makes on the listener? What good does it do to *tell* a listener, 'This music is beautiful,' if he does not feel it? How could I win friends with this kind of music?²¹

Schoenberg's outbursts may have been uttered in rare moments of self-pitying disillusionment; on another occasion he acknowledged a more sober possibility, that 'the laws of art work in a way that contradicts the way the popular mind works'.²² Yet these comments serve to reinforce the argument that, in many varieties of twentieth-century music, certain kinds of 'logical development'—above all, perhaps, of linking tonal and atonal composition by way of motivic processes, or adapting tonal consonance to octatonic modality²³—make it impossible for many to sense any 'beauty' in the result. So, while the initially formidable challenges of Beethoven's late string quartets and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* ceased to prevent audiences from recognizing their stature well before the end of the nineteenth century, Schoenberg's own early challenges, like the *Five Orchestral Pieces* and *Erwartung*, and those of other twentieth-century pioneers from Ives to Webern, have not managed a comparable degree of acceptance, still less elevation to the summit of the canon.

For Schoenberg enthusiasts, and devotees of progressiveness in general, this is a price worth paying, an acknowledgement that what is most distinctive about twentieth-century music reinforces its relevance to 'the laws of art', rather than to the imperatives of commerce or other even less worthy factors: after all, Schoenberg's works have not disappeared, and the century's shift of emphasis

²⁰ Arnold Schoenberg, 'Why No Great American Music?', in *Style and Idea*, ed. L. Stein (London, 1975), 180.

²¹ Schoenberg, 'How one Becomes Lonely', in *Style and Idea*, 50.

²² Schoenberg, 'About Ornaments, Primitive Rhythms, etc., and Bird Song', in *Style and Idea*, 299.

²³ An octatonic (eight-note) scale consists of alternating semitones and tones, or tones and semitones.

from live to recorded performance has helped to preserve their presence, and to validate the special qualities of 'serious' musical art.

In 1960 Elliott Carter defined these qualities as follows:

serious music appeals to a longer span of attention and to a more highly developed auditory memory than do the more popular kinds of music. In making this appeal, it uses many contrasts, coherences, and contexts that give it a wide scope of expression, great emotional power and variety, direction, uniqueness, and a fascination of design with many shadings and qualities far beyond the range of popular or folk music.²⁴

Carter could not honestly claim that the post-tonal composer had more immediate access to these desirable qualities than his tonal contemporaries or predecessors, but (as the discussion of his work below will try to demonstrate) he could develop certain kinds of interaction between stable and unstable factors which reflect the new tonal thinking that emerged early in the century. Such interactions tend naturally to make for a certain degree of complexity. The sheer diversity of twentieth-century serious styles, intensifying as it has during the century's final decades, has meant that it has become possible for music to be both extremely serious and extremely simple, with a wider appeal for composers like Górecki and Pärt than was conceivable in the more polarized climate prevalent before 1980. Yet the differences between their work and that of 'popular' musicians remain great. It is scarcely surprising that 'simple' music should be more immediately accessible than 'complex' music. But it is a characteristic of the time that the boundaries of even these apparently distinct categories soon become blurred, as part of composers' inherent scepticism, and of that commitment to multiplicity which is twentieth-century culture's principal inheritance from Nietzsche.

This present attempt to tell this story has its own quite intricate history. When I began *Music Since the First World War* in 1975, the century was already three-quarters past, and yet it seemed (not least because the book was to be loosely aligned with others dealing with early twentieth-century developments and with more genuinely contemporary perspectives²⁵) that concentration on those composers then perceived as the century's most important in the years between 1918 and 1970 would be most useful. It still seemed useful, in 1988, to provide a reprint with a minimum of correction and updating, avoiding any radical overhaul. At the century's end, however, the possibility of offering a wider overview was too tempting to resist, and what has emerged is a structure in which the core chapters of *Music Since the First World War* are retained, revised, and in some cases radically rewritten, within the frame of new surveys of composers

²⁴ Elliott Carter, 'Shop Talk by an American Composer', in *Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937–95*, ed. J. W. Bernard (Rochester, NY, 1997), 217.

²⁵ Jim Samson, *Music in Transition: A Study of Tonal Expansion and Atonality, 1900–1920* (London, 1977); Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music: The Avant Garde since 1945* (London, 1981).

and their work before 1918 and since 1975. The result offers a very clear contrast between the detailed technical narratives, emphasizing certain incontrovertibly significant composers from Strauss to Shostakovich, and the much shorter, at times impressionistic sketches of many other composers. With greater (though still very selective) comprehensiveness comes even less detailed discussion than was the case in the earlier versions. But this is not accidental, reinforcing my primary objective of providing an introduction, a way into an immensely elaborate, immensely rewarding subject. The character of the new chapters, especially those which end the book, is inevitably much influenced by my own experiences during the years since 1975, as listener, performer (in private!), teacher, writer, and reviewer; indeed, I make no apology for the fact that certain turns of phrase have migrated from reviews in *Gramophone*, *Music and Letters*, and other journals, where I feel their role as registering immediate and strong impressions of certain compositions has retained its value. Such immediacy may well tend to encourage that quality of 'built-in obsolescence' which is the fate of all interpretative writing, but especially of that with recent or contemporary subject-matter, and pious platitudes about an art most notable for its unsparing reflection of the particular tragedies and turmoils of its time can only contribute to the impression that such surveys are undertaken more out of a sense of duty than of pleasure. I remain defiant in claiming to enjoy twentieth-century music. Yet the upbeat assertions with which I ended my 1977 Preface—'there can be little doubt that society is changing in such a way as to make it more likely that the most radical and experimental aspects of present-day musical life will ultimately achieve wider acceptance than those aspects which seek to conserve the actual linguistic formulae of the past'—can certainly not be blithely reasserted now, despite that carefully inserted 'ultimately'. So this time I will simply affirm my long-standing conviction that there is more than enough to stir the spirit and fascinate the mind in the kind of twentieth-century music considered in these pages to prompt the conclusion that its future disappearance would be a tragic loss to any civilized society.