

Ricky Myint
20th Century Music
Dr. Comberati
12/09/02
Term Paper

If one follows the progression of human history, one will discover two things: humans are more often than not a sorrowfully tragic race, and history proceeds as a logical progression of ideas. These ideas often span centuries from conception, through practice, and then finally reaching their logical conclusion. For example, American democracy developed as a result of a need to change the existing systems of other, similarly constructed governments in Europe. The constitution lends itself towards constant revision and evolution to suit the purposes of its constituents. As another product of mankind, music also lends itself to the same kind of logical development that changes itself to suit the needs of the people.

Although music fulfills a different social and cultural purpose than government, it too followed a logical progression of events that have contributed to the status of music today. The history of tonal music in the western hemisphere spanned several centuries from conception to breakdown. The tradition of tonal composition was so strong in western tradition that when the natural evolution of that very tradition reached the point where tonality no longer served the artistic purposes of

the composers, the public often shunned the later developments and retreated back towards familiar territory. The emergence of composers Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951) and Igor Stravinsky (1881-1971) are human examples of the evolution of concepts over time. The works of Schönberg and Stravinsky are firmly rooted within the tonal tradition. These men were placed within a unique position within history and as such granted an opportunity to change the whole nature of composition. Although the musical world would later "polarize" with respect to Stravinsky and Schönberg's respective schools of composition, the underlying principles from which their compositions sprang share marked similarities.

Arnold Schönberg was born on September 13, 1874 in a suburb of Vienna (Reich 1). Schönberg recounts his early years and describes an early start to his compositional career,

As a child less than nine years, I had started composing little and, later, larger pieces for two violins, in imitation of such music as I used to play with my teacher...Thus I progressed in composing in the measure I progressed in playing... (Reich 2)

Schoenberg's musical background was firmly rooted within the 19th century tradition. Schönberg himself recollects the fact that every compositional effort before the age of 17 was just an

imitation of that which he was playing (Reich 3). In the years to come, Schönberg would come to visit and take brief study with several well-known Viennese composers and subsequently develop a style that was not unlike that of Johannes Brahms. Soon thereafter, Schönberg would become a self-proclaimed "addict" of the music of Brahms and Wagner as well as Liszt, Bruckner, and Hugo Wolf (Reich 6). The level of reverence given to the preeminent composers of the 19th century shows more than just a passing interest in their styles of composition. For example, one of Schönberg's most successful early compositions, *String Quartet in D Major* (1897) shows a lot of Brahmsian influence. The Quartet contains plenty of motivic development and makes use of a sonata form as well (Vinson). The next major work, *Verklärte Nacht* Op. 4 (1899) would be the piece that shows more of a Wagnerian influence in Schönberg's music.

Verklärte Nacht is a programmatic work written for chamber ensemble, indeed the first kind of work for chamber ensemble (Reich 7). The piece was the musical representation of a poem, written by Richard Dehmel, about a conversation between a man and a woman concerning their illegitimate child (Vinson). The work itself is in one long movement, and while the piece is tonal, it is highly chromatic in the style of Wagnerian harmony, an essentially Romantic innovation. Although it does find its roots in Wagnerian tradition and harmony, Schönberg takes the

chromaticism to unprecedented levels "previously considered forbidden" (Vinson). Although the piece was written in 1899, it was not performed until 1903, a testament to the conservative nature of the performance institutions in Vienna at the time. *Verklärte Nacht* would provide some of the quakes to the tonal foundations that would eventually lead to Schönberg's atonal period and even to his development of serialism many years later.

Following the logical extension of Wagner's experimentations with tonality to the brink in *Tristan and Isolde* (Year) Schönberg would eventually break from tonality altogether and compose music that was atonal - that is music without any kind of tonal center. Through all of the subsequent explorations of compositional techniques, Schönberg would search for a means by which he could organize music in his own way - a direct outgrowth of the tradition in which he was raised. The atonal compositions, which fall into Schönberg's Expressionist period (*Erwartung* (1909) and *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912)), were composed in a style that was the direct outgrowth of what he had done in *Verklärte Nacht*. The chromaticism was taken to such an extreme that it could no longer even be considered chromatic, as chromaticism is an aspect of tonality. The result was a piece that was organized in such a fashion to avoid any kind of pitch center whatsoever. Although dissonance and disjunct melodic

structures are abundant, Schönberg uses these aspects of music to set increasingly dark subject matter in the form of expressionist poetry.

Erwartung was a monodrama (a drama for one performer) that sheds light on many of the Schönberg's insights on subconscious thought that may or may not have been shared by Viennese contemporary Sigmund Freud (Reich 53). *Erwartung* has also been described as "a realistic study of hysteria," which suggests that the piece is a study on the psychological aspects of feminine hysteria (Simms 93). In *Erwartung*, Schönberg makes use of "melodic fragmentation and discontinuity" in order to effectively set the expressionist libretto (Watkins 175). As the subject matter becomes more and more intense, so do Schönberg's choices regarding the musical setting. The music in *Erwartung* is described as being "music (that) follows the text in a stream of consciousness," - such considerations would be quite conducive towards the setting of a drama in which self-reflection and self-analysis are dominant themes (Watkins 175).

Pierrot Lunaire, Op. 21 (1921) is a different kind of work than *Erwartung* as it is a setting of a poem cycle by Albert Giraud (1860-1929) instead of a monodramatic work. The subject matter of *Pierrot Lunaire* is as dark if not darker than that of *Erwartung*, and Schönberg's setting complements the text very well. The main significance of *Pierrot Lunaire* is the

introduction of "Sprechstimme" into Schönberg's arsenal of compositional tools. Sprechstimme is a form of singing that, rather than specify the exact pitch to be sung, gives the performer an approximate pitch contour to follow. The result is somewhere in between what is considering a "singing tone" or a "speaking tone" (Watkins 185). The title is a reference to the popular stock character that was common to the comic operas of previous centuries. Taking advantage of the versatility of many woodwind players, Schönberg writes *Pierrot Lunaire* for five performers doubling on a variety of instruments, flute/piccolo, violin/viola, clarinet/bass clarinet, cello, and piano. Each of the 21 settings uses a different combination of the instruments listed above. The resulting sonority was somewhere in between the traditional German lieder tradition with the soloist accompanied by solo piano, and the symphonic poems made popular by the efforts of Mahler and other 19th century composers. The main difference, of course, being Schönberg's characteristic twists in the use of tone colors and extremes in volume to produce a frantic, typically expressionist setting of the poem cycle. The music is at once evocative of the imagery associated with expressionist poetry.

The problem with the atonal style in which *Pierrot Lunaire* was written was that since the material had to be so disassociative with regard to pitch center or motivic

development that it became increasingly difficult to effectively write music that met those prerequisites. The difficulty associated with this expressionist means of composition was what led to Schönberg's development of the twelve-tone serial method. The beginnings of what would become the most influential school of composition in the 20th century can be found in 1914-1915. There accounts that Schönberg sketched out part of a symphony that used all twelve chromatic tones as the basis for unification (Reich 96). Although this method of organization was not so much as to make up a significant part of the symphony, it does suggest that even as early as 1915 Schönberg was experimenting with alternative means of pitch organization that was neither expressionistic, atonal, or romantic. The subsequent method of composition would change the nature of composition for the better part of the coming century.

After a 6-year hiatus from composition, Schönberg finally unveiled his new method of composition: the twelve-tone method. Schönberg developed a system in which the twelve pitches of the chromatic scale are organized in such a way that the pitches are related only to each other. Biographer Willi Reich describes the basic rules of the twelve-tone system:

...those pieces of music which are in every respect - melodically and harmonically - built exclusively from one row, the so-called 'basic set,' which contains all

twelve tones of the chromatic scale in a fixed order that remains unaltered throughout the entire piece. The following forms are derived from the basic set and are used in the same way, as basic points of reference: the inversion of the basic set (produced like a reflection in a horizontal mirror), the retrograde, in which the tones of the basic set are read from the end backwards (this amounts to a reflection in a vertical mirror), and the retrograde inversion; moreover, the transpositions of the basic set and of its three derivatives can also be used...So the composer has a total of 48 twelve-tone rows at his disposal for any piece. (132)

The first piece that was written in this style was five piano pieces Op. 23 (1923). Although this was the first in which Schönberg applied the 12-tone method, only the last movement of this piece has a complete 12 tone row (Palisca 717).

Shortly after five piano pieces, Op. 23, Schönberg wrote *Suite for Piano* Op. 25 in which he adhered to the laws of his twelve-tone method in a very strict fashion. The *Suite for Piano* is divided into six movements, Prelude, Gavotte, Musette, Intermezzo, Minuet, and Gigue. The organization of each of these movements is based upon a single tone row, E, F, G, Db, Gb, Eb, Ab, D, B, C, A, and Bb (Reich 140). Although the pitch

organization is quite progressive, the structure is based upon the dance movements of days past. This neo-classic structure once again demonstrates the fact that Schönberg's is a style that looks both forward and backward at the same time. Although the Suite for Piano was quite successful in its adherence to the laws of the twelve-tone system, *Variations for Orchestra* Op. 31 (1928) is the perhaps considered Schönberg's most skillful application of the twelve-tone system while incorporating traditional elements.

In *Variations for Orchestra* Op. 31, Schönberg applies his twelve-tone method while at the same time incorporating more traditional elements. The theme and variation form is a somewhat backwards looking form, but after Schönberg alters it for his purposes. The piece opens with an introduction, described as "surrounded in a veil of mystery," and is followed by a 24-measure statement of the tone row on the original pitch labeled P-0 (Palisca 717). Nine variations of the theme are then heard and followed by a finale. Unlike other twelve-tone compositions by Schönberg, the tone row in *Variations for Orchestra* is not simply stated in the beginning. The row emerges "one tone at a time, from the general orchestral sound" within an essentially romantic introduction (Reich 164). Each of the subsequent variations is masterfully crafted and the

resultant sonority is something that achieves an "entirely new world of sound" (Reich 165).

Schönberg's foray into the unknown with new pitch organizing methods was hardly the only thing going on in western music during this era. Igor Stravinsky came onto the scene with his own ideas on how music should proceed in the 20th century. Stravinsky's ideas would, most of the time, prove to be in direct contrast to that of Schönberg's. These contrasts would prove to be so drastic that much of the musical world would migrate towards one side or the other. Although they were so different in style and organization, they did share some principles that link them directly to the European tradition from which they sprang.

Igor Fredorovich Stravinsky was born near the Gulf of Finland in Russia on June 17th 1882 (White 3). Like Schönberg, Stravinsky had early exposure to the musical world because his father, Feodor Ignatievich Stravinsky, was a well-known Bass in Kiev (White 3). The fact that his father was engaged as the first bass in the Kiev Opera House shows that Stravinsky's first experiences with music would be the large-scale productions of a major Opera company. Such experiences would shape the overall essence of Stravinsky's work to come. Stravinsky would come to study with one of Russia's great composers, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908). Their time together was mostly spent with

Rimsky Korsakov teaching Stravinsky the elements of composition and orchestration (White 10). Rimsky-Kosakov's music can be considered representative of the Russian nationalist tradition in the late 19th century. His sonorities were typically Russian in origin, and his writings were for large groups. All of these factors shaped Stravinsky's development as a composer.

Stravinsky would burst onto the world scene with his first major ballet commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev (1872-1929) the famous founder and director of the Ballets Russes (Palisca 702).

The Firebird (1910) would be the last work of Stravinsky's that was still steeped in the romantic tradition. Palisca describes *Firebird* as a work that "stems from the Russian nationalist tradition, and has the exotic orientalism and rich sensuous orchestration of Stravinsky's teacher Rimsky-Korsakov" (Palisca 702). *Firebird* was a success in the Paris ballet scene and for the first time, composers such as Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Manuel De Falla would know the name Stravinsky. Stravinsky's first major effort towards ballet was so successful, in fact, that Diaghilev commissioned another Stravinsky ballet for the 1911 season.

The ballet that Stravinsky would write for the season in Paris would be *Petrushka* (1911). While *Petrushka* would take many folk elements from Russian culture just as *Firebird* did, *Petrushka* had many more progressive elements. Instead of

reworking the folk melodies and folk material into "artful arrangements" Stravinsky leaves them in their natural environment (Palisca 705). This ballet also marks the point where Stravinsky employs several progressive techniques in a major performance venue. What became known as the *Petrushka* chord was a C chord and an F# chord juxtaposed against each other. The result was an early appearance of polytonality. *Petrushka* also marks the first of what would become a Stravinsky trademark - the octatonic scale. The Octatonic scale is also known as the diminished scale, it alternates whole tones and semitones. The particular octatonic scale used in *Petrushka* was C, C#, D#, E, F#, G, A, and A#. Stravinsky also makes use of abrupt changes of meter that cause a disorienting, discontinuous feeling when listening to his music (Palisca 703). With the successes of both *Firebird* and *Petrushka* Stravinsky behind him, he was free to develop the best known of his pieces, *Le sacre du printemps* (1913) (The Rite of Spring).

The Rite of Spring was one of Stravinsky's most notable works. It achieves the very height of the primitivistic style that Stravinsky had explored in both *Firebird* and *Petrushka*. Subtitled "scenes of pagan Russia," the *Rite of Spring* would be something far more progressive and would raise quite a few more eyebrows than either of his previous collaborations with Diaghilev. Watkins describes Stravinsky's distinctive sound in

Rite of Spring as consisting of mostly bitonal "conglomerations" mixed with extroverted orchestration and irregular rhythms (215). Close collaborations between Stravinsky and the choreographer allowed for a near perfect union of motion and sound. The ballet was based upon several different scenes that depicted the pagan practices of ancient Russians. The scene titled, "Dance of the Adolescent Girls" was not well met by the audience. The combination of the bitonal chords being hammered by the orchestra and the suggestive movements of the dancers on stage caused a small riot to break out at the ballet's premiere (White 27). While *Rite of Spring* was quite progressive in both its musical and dramatic qualities, it still is a ballet, a medium that was popular in ages past.

Yet another trip into the world of neoclassicism was *Pulcinella* (1920) another neoclassical ballet commissioned by Diaghilev. Here, Stravinsky scores a ballet (that White describes as more of an *action dansante* than a real ballet) in a particularly satirical fashion. The music is written for an orchestra that might have been common in the time of Haydn or Mozart (the entire orchestra was 33 players). The ballet is set within the popular framework of *commedia dell'arte*, yet another neoclassic aspect of the production. Stravinsky takes over many of Pergolesi's soprano and bass lines and leaves them unaltered. Instead of altering the existing melodies, Stravinsky places

them within a context that he creates. He inserts his characteristic discontinuous figures (such as an occasional 5/4 measure in the decidedly 4/4 overture). Stravinsky uses his skill as an orchestrator to set a piece that would normally sound very familiar and at first glance show a lot of appeal to a reactionary audience in such a way as to incorporate several progressive elements without the audience even knowing.

Pulcinella was the first time that Stravinsky began to look far backwards into history while at the same time attempting to incorporate his own style (Watkins 316).

Several facets of Stravinsky's later career would also reflect his love affair with the past. *Symphony of Psalms* (1930) was another project that had neoclassic elements. The Baroque features are listed as being "ubiquitous ostinato constructions and the fully developed fugue of the second movement 'Expectans expectavi Dominum'" (Palisca 709). Settings of religious texts for chorus and orchestra have been around since the renaissance, what makes *Symphony of Psalms* different is that neither group is given precedence (White 321). The name of the piece is also cause for wonder because a *Symphony* is usually a piece of music written for orchestra and *Psalms* are usually vocal settings of sacred works. The combination of these two terms is somewhat unorthodox and reflects the genre-bending tendencies of Stravinsky as a composer. *Symphony of*

Psalms was commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra to commemorate its 50th anniversary (White 321). Stravinsky makes use of unusual key movements as well as prolonged fugal subjects as major components of this work. He chose a specific instrumentation, avoiding clarinets and violins because he did not want the vibrato associated with such instruments to sully the sacred text.

Stravinsky's career, not unlike Schönberg's was one that at times hearkened back to ages past, and at other times, saw so far ahead of the rest of the world that their music was rejected, shunned. Although their careers would go in two opposite directions and lead them to very different places with regard to musical philosophy and musical composition, they would share some very fundamental ideas and develop logically from their respective beginning points.

Both Schönberg and Stravinsky emerge out of the Romantic tradition. In *Verklarte Nacht* and *Firebird* by Schönberg and Stravinsky respectively, both composers display the influence that the previous era had on their musical composition. *Verklarte Nacht* is very much a piece that reflects how heavy Wagner's influence was in Schönberg's early music. While *Verklarte Nacht* does take Wagner's chromaticism to the next level, it is nonetheless a Romantic composition very much in the vein of composers such as Wagner and Brahms. The work was very

well received at the time and allowed Schönberg enough notoriety to continue on his path towards more progressive work.

Similarly, *Firebird* and *Petrushka* display Stravinsky's links with the Russian nationalist tradition of the 19th century. Both ballets show the heavy influence of Stravinsky's teacher, Rimsky-Korsakov. Just like Schönberg used progressive elements in his essentially romantic opus, Stravinsky set these two ballets to the background of Russian folklore and music. The first major compositions of both composers to appear on a national level reflect their roots in the style of the Romantics.

Their careers would split off into very different paths, Schönberg choosing atonalism, expressionism, and then finally, developing the serial technique, and Stravinsky choosing discontinuity and other innovations in his exploration of composition. The paths did diverge, but even in their most polar of attitudes towards each other, their musical creations still shared that small vein of similarity. Each composer searched for an organizing principle that was different from that which came before. Schönberg searched for several years and wrote *Erwartung* and *Pierrot Lunaire*, two compositions that were not Romantic, but not yet truly indicative of what was to come. The organizing principles began to emerge in his music and after several years of tinkering, Schönberg came up with the

twelve-tone serial method. Similarly, Stravinsky developed his own style of organizing music. While his music may have seemed more mainstream than Schönberg, his music was very progressive in another way.

Stravinsky searched for a unifying principle in his music, in fact, for many years it was "fashionable to accuse Stravinsky, like Picasso, of artistic inconsistency: of embracing a series of manners instead of achieving a personal style" (Cone 18). Stravinsky makes use of abrupt breaks from every basic musical element, harmony, melody, rhythm, dynamics, etc (Cone 18). These moments of discontinuous musical movement are what would become part of Stravinsky's trademark. He would come to specialize in pieces that seem traditional on the surface but would have elements, varying from slight to drastic, of discontinuity. For example, in a work such as *Pulcinella* he would take an 18th century orchestra, write a suite for it based upon the melodies and bass line from a previous composer, and modify the inner voicings and orchestration in such a way to make the work completely his own. The beginning of *Pulcinella's* Overture sounds very much like it might have been written 200 years ago, however, Stravinsky inserts a 5/4 measure in keeping with his trends of discontinuity. The 5/4 measure stuck in for, excuse the term, good measure, would be disorienting to anyone attempting to keep strict time. Even for those listeners who

were passive in their listening, they would soon realize that something was off in the pulse. In *L'Histore du Soldat*, The Soldier's Tale (1918), Stravinsky writes a Bach-style chorale for Brass and Organ. The chorale is beautifully written and very much in the style of times past, however once again, he inserts a bit of his discontinuous style and calls for the piece to be performed with an out of tune church organ. Through examinations of both composers work, we can feel the development of distinct personal styles, whether they be the development of a whole new organizing principle like Schönberg or just an essentially diatonic style with additions that make it discontinuous like Stravinsky, each has musical merit.

The composers also share the fact that they both like to resurrect dead forms to suit their needs. Boulez remarked once that,

Stravinsky's and Schönberg's paths to neo-classicism differ basically only in one being diatonic and the other chromatic...Both composers adopt dead forms, and because they are so obsessed with them they allow them to transform their musical ideas until these too are dead. (Watkins 337)

Schönberg's work with the *Suite for Piano* and his *Variations for Orchestra* both reflect a backwards look in terms

of form. The *Suite for Piano* is divided up into six dance movements, and the *Variations for Orchestra* is essentially a theme and variation technique. Although both compositions are clearly written in Schönberg's twelve-tone style, they each display the distinct characteristics of the dead forms they wish to emulate. The *Suite for Piano* takes the serial pitch organization and sets them against the characteristic rhythmic motives of the dance-like nature of the piano suite. *Variations for Orchestra* takes the serial technique that Schönberg devised and successfully melded it with idea of theme and variation. The original row is stated and then varied several times by several instruments.

Stravinsky's work with pieces such as *Pulcinella* and *Symphony of Psalms* show that he was looking backward as well. *Pulcinella* is scored for a group of 33 instruments, much like an orchestra one might find days of Haydn or Mozart. The Suite is composed for Diaghilev's ballet, a genre that became popular last century. Furthermore, Stravinsky adopts many of Pergolesi's melodies and bass lines and adapts them for his own purposes (White 246). In *Symphony of Psalms* Stravinsky sets out to write a piece that is at once representative of the 19th century orchestra and at the same time quite different from the form of the 19th century symphony which Stravinsky found "apathetic" (White 321). What he achieved was a synthesis of

Orchestra and Chorus that would become one of his most popular works.

The composers would be regarded by future generations as perhaps the two preeminent composers of the 20th century. Their contributions to the musical world shaped the lives of many people around the world including several composers that would continue the innovations that these two men began. Schönberg's students, Alban Berg (1885-1935) and Anton Webern (1883-1945) would prove to be seminal composers in the 20th century. Stravinsky's influence on American composers in the 20th centuries is equally as indispensable. Although in the end it would be Schönberg's compositional philosophy, not Stravinsky's, which would dominate American conservatories for the next $\frac{3}{4}$ of a century, one should not marginalize Stravinsky's influence. Each composer brought with him a distinct personal background and creative process that led to the development of some of the most influential music the world has ever seen. Although their compositional philosophies would differ drastically, both men used the past as a tool with which they could tell stories of the future.

Bibliography

- Cone, Edward T. Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method. ERES (Electronic Reserves at Manhattanville College Library). 12 Dec 2002.
- Fisch, Walter Ed. Schoenberg and his World. Princeton, Princeton University Press. 1999.
- Griffiths, Paul. Igor Stravinsky: The Rake's Progress. Cambridge University Press. 1982.
- Grout, Donald Jay & Claude V. Palisca. A History of Western Music. 6th ed. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc: New York. 2001
- Reich, Willi. Schoenberg: A Critical Biography. Trans. Leo Black. Longman Group Ltd: London. 1968.
- Simms, Bryan R. The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg 1908-1923. Oxford University Press: New York. 2000.
- Sutchell, Benjamin. "Russian Folk Melodies in Rite of Spring." Bela Bartok Essays. New York. p. 343-391.
- Vinson, Duncan. "Schoenberg the Romantic." 1995.
<<http://www2.tcd.ie/Music/Course%20stuff/schoenberg.html>>.
- Watkins, Glenn. Soundings: Music in the Twentieth Century. Schirmer/Thompson Learning: Belmont, California. 1995.
- White, Eric Walter. Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works. 2nd Printing University of California Press: Berkeley, California. 1966.