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American Modernism

A truly distinctive American voice in classical music only began to arise at the end of the nineteenth century in conjunction with the movement toward nationalism. Charles Ives (b. 1874) is as avant-garde, if not more so, as any composer we have studied. His experimental and anti-traditional tendencies were furthered in the work of Varèse (b. 1883) and Cage (b. 1912). At the same time, his attachment to the incorporation of American folk tunes, dances and hymns found resonance in the music of Copland (b. 1900). American jazz began to develop around the same time as nationalism (beginning with ragtime [Scott Joplin (b. 1868)] and continuing with contributions from some of the greats represented in Kerman: Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker and Miles Davis). Jazz had a huge impact on classical music in Europe and America. Gershwin (b. 1898) and Bernstein (b. 1918) were both strongly influenced by jazz. Bernstein also wrote music that carried political and social critiques (*West Side Story* is an example). Crumb (b. 1929) expands the sound structures of music to create sound images, some of which (like *Black Angels*) are highly politicized. Reich (b. 1936) deliberately reduces his musical materials, using simple melodic material and repeated rhythmic motives (minimalism), creating a kind of hypnotic sensation. (Minimalistic operas by Philip Glass and John Adams have continued to explore political themes.)

Ives, *The Rockstrewn Hills* (1909) K 4:36-37

This movement from Ives's *2nd Orchestral Set* falls into a kind-of rondo form, where fragments of recognizable tunes (dance, cakewalk, march) are rejected until the hymn tune comes in. The fragmentation is reminiscent of the Funeral March from Mahler's Symphony No. 1, 3rd movement. Mahler provides a narrative: first one hears the funeral march ("Frère Jacques" in minor); this fades into a section with fragments of dance phrases (from the Jewish klezmer tradition), which seem to be memories of happy moments with the deceased; the funeral march cuts back in briefly, leading to a real song of mourning; finally the funeral march resumes. (Mahler and Ives were not far apart in age; they were born respectively in 1860 and 1874.) Ives's fragmentation is less nostalgic than Mahler's and more dismissive, moving through various types of popular music until accepting the hymn tune. In its rejection of motives, the Ives movement is more like the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, where the cellos and basses (in effect) call for music, but angrily reject fragmented reprises of the first three movements in turn. Finally, they accept the "Ode to Joy" (hymn/chorale), which then becomes the basis of an extensive set of variations.

Copland, *Appalachian Spring* (concert suite [1945] based on the ballet) K6:8-11

Appalachian Spring tells the story of a pioneer wedding. The characters/dancers include the bride (danced by Graham), her mother, the groom, the preacher, and four young women of the congregation. The ballet depicts the intricate relations of the bride to her mother, peers and husband-to-be before, during and after the wedding. At the end the preacher directs the mother and young women to leave and he follows them out, as the bride timorously but expectantly joins her husband. Copland's music represents a young, optimistic America. It is imbued with qualities of openness (coupled with geographical spaciousness), energy, simplicity and spirituality.

The concert suite based on the ballet *Appalachian Spring* follows a similar narrative progression. (1) An amorphous, tentative opening leads to (2) a love song (with the same opening phrase as the popular song "When I fall in love, it will be forever") with square dance, to (3) hoedown, and (4) a revivalist sermon. The climax of the suite is (5) the set of variations on the Shaker hymn ("Simple Gifts") (in the ballet the beginning variations

occur in the middle of the drama and represent the wedding itself; the culminating variation comes back at the end). The instrumentation is also different. The ballet is scored for 13 instruments and has a chamber quality. The suite is for full orchestra, and the set of variations is based on instrumental changes of timbre with the theme played in its entirety in different keys and different tempos. The theme is first stated in the clarinet. Variation 1 is played by oboe. Variation 2 begins with the cellos, but ultimately all the strings enter in a fugal texture. Variation 3 is for trumpet. Variation 4 culminates the set with full orchestra. The suite ends by fading back into (6) the love song and opening music.

The ballet was choreographed and danced by Martha Graham in "modern dance." Like Stravinsky's ballets for the Ballet Russes (Russian Ballet), Graham's choreography was unconventional. The choreography for the *Rite* was created to imitate native (and naïve) circle dancing; with its knock-kneed, pigeon-toed jumping, it was the antithesis of classical ballet. However, like classical ballet, the choreography mimed the action. Graham's choreography was less determinedly anti-traditional in its movements, but much more so in its significant rejection of mime. Rather than depicting the narrative outlines of the story, Graham's choreography depicts the emotion and inner turmoil of the events. Graham stated of her work, "I wanted to begin not with characters or ideas, but with movements . . .I wanted significant movement. I did not want it to be beautiful or fluid. I wanted it to be fraught with inner meaning, with excitement and surge."

As a teacher, Graham trained and inspired generations of fine dancers and choreographers. Her pupils included such greats as Alvin Ailey, Twyla Tharp, Paul Taylor, Merce Cunningham, and countless other performers, actors, and dancers.

DVD: *Martha Graham in Performance* (Kultur, 2002)

Bernstein, *West Side Story* (1957) K 6:36-37

Bernstein's *West Side Story* marked a new approach to musical comedy. The story, based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, is powerfully dramatic; the score is not simply a sequence of songs set within a spoken dialogue but has an orchestral and motivic continuity derived from Wagner and Berg with brilliant lyrics by Steven Sondheim; and instead of having dance "numbers," the dance element was essential, narrative and balletic. The dazzling choreography was by Jerome Robbins (b. 1918), whose legacy in Musical Theater equals that in classical music through the New York City Ballet and Ballet Theater. (A number of musical comedies before *West Side Story* might be singled out as predecessors or models for Bernstein, among them Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* [1935] and *Carousel* [1945] by Rogers and Hammerstein with choreography by Agnes De Mille). Robbins and Bernstein first worked together in 1944 on the short ballet *Fancy Free*.

The story takes place in New York City. Competing street gangs, the lower West Side Jets and the Puerto Rican Sharks, replace the warring families (the Capulets and Montagues) of Shakespeare's play, thus changing the story from the effects of an older generation's bitter enmity on their children to the horrible results of gang warfare.

One important aspect of the orchestral score is its motivic continuity. The gangs and their girlfriends come together at the "dance at the gym." After a hapless social worker tries unsuccessfully to get the groups to mix by initiating a circle dance (based on a cakewalk—see Ives), the kids break into a hot mambo. When Tony (a Jet) and Maria (sister of a leader of the Sharks) see one another, everything else fades and a quiet (but very controlled) cha-cha (a Cuban dance popularized at that time) begins. The melody uses a sequence of intervals (a tritone—"the devil in music"—resolving up a half step and

returning to the first note) that becomes the basis of a series of movements within the musical. The same intervals are used for Tony's song of love, "Maria," which is logically based on the music of their meeting, which leads into their duet "Tonight." In the Broadway show, the dance number "Cool," where Riff (the leader of the Jets) tries to get the gang to cool down and act "cool" before a planned rumble (gang fight), follows immediately (in the movie it is moved to the second act, after Riff is killed, which damages the dramatic and motivic connections). It, too, is based on the "cha-cha" and "Maria" motive, entwining the hatred between the gangs with the love of Tony and Maria. (The hatred and love are also interwoven when Tony and Maria's "Tonight" is sung simultaneously with the gangs singing "We're gonna rumble tonight.")

Note: Kerman/Tomlinson state that the recording they provide is from the soundtrack of the 1961 movie (p. 407); however, their recording is the original Broadway cast, which is preferable in any event, for the reasons given above.

The fugue that follows "Cool" is then based on a theme that relates to the intervals that begin the duet "There's a place for us" for Tony and Maria. The duet uses a large and yearning dissonant interval (minor seventh) on the words "there's a" and resolves it appropriately on "place." In the fugue the "resolution" is instead "ominous snap" (as Kerman/Tomlinson puts it).

The motive relationships in *West Side Story* can be compared to Berg's *Wozzeck*, where there are sets of variations on various kinds of material (inventions on a note, rhythm, chord, theme). It is also possible to see the succession of dances (cakewalk, mambo, chacha) leading to a set of variations (cha-cha, Maria, Cool) as similar to Copland in its narrative structure. The fugue is accompanied by a jazz beat and big band sound (Bernstein was very influenced by jazz); the use of fugue to depict the anger and emotional turmoil of the Jets can be related to the use of fugue in Chaikovsky (also based on *Romeo and Juliet*) and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, V "Dream of a Witches Sabbath."

DVD: *West Side Story* (MGM Home Entertainment, [2003], 1961)—video of the movie

George Crumb, *Black Angels*, for Electric String Quartet (1970) K 6:19-22

"a strikingly dramatic, surreal allegory of the Vietnam War" (Richard Steinitz, "Crumb, George" *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy)

1. "new sounds":
    1. electric (amplified) instruments, use of gongs, speaking…
    2. playing techniques: *col legno*, playing on the bridge, above the bridge, harmonics, playing on the fingerboard below the left hand, using thimbles for trilling
2. exoticism: imagery of Asian music through
    1. pentatonic melodies,
    2. evocation of bells and wood flute
3. neoclassicism
    1. suite-like construction
    2. borrowing from "Dies Irae" chant (compare Berlioz) and Saint-Saens's *Danse macabre*
4. social/political statement (compare Berg--not to mention Mozart, who aims at class structure, or Beethoven, who praises individual liberty)
5. "night music" like Bartok, *Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, mvt. 3, or opening of Stravinsky, *Rite of Spring*

DVD: *Kronos on Stage* (Image Entertainment, 2002)

Steve Reich, *Tehillim* (1981) K 6:26-30

Minimalism represents a sharp break with the complexities of expressionism at the beginning of the 20th century and of a type of intensely contrapuntal, difficult and atonal music prevalent at mid-century. "Minimalism" is not simple in construction—indeed it is quite complex, but it uses deliberately restricted and simple materials which are repeated and manipulated over a very long time span. Reich and fellow minimalist John Adams have explored political and social themes in their operas; Adams's operas have been based strikingly on topics of the very recent past: *Nixon in China* (1987) and *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991).

Reich's music developed out of his manipulation of taped music and speech where identical or similar material is made to move in and out of synchrony, what Reich called "phasing." He describes his musical mentors as including Perotin, Bach and Stravinsky. Typically, Reich's music consists of "a repeating figure, to which other figures are added one by one, each figure, including the first, subject to gradual alteration, so that within a context of constant recycling there is constant change" (Paul Griffiths, "Reich, Steve," *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy).

"Reich's work with Ghanaian and Balinese musicians had caused him to think about what tradition he belonged to, and the result was a period of study in 1976–7 of Hebrew, of the Torah and of cantillation, for which he went to Israel to hear singers from different eastern Sephardic communities. Out of this finally came *Tehillim* (1981), a setting of psalm verses – his first work since the early tape pieces to incorporate words. What he had heard in Israel went into the background, against which he wrote melodies that give his characteristic regular pulses, ambivalent meters and repetitions a quite original freshness and bounce. Generally the three rhythmic layers comprise a quick one of percussive pulsation and a slow one of wind-string harmony, with an intermediate level of vocal activity, sprung against the pulse and the harmony" (Paul Griffiths, "Reich, Steve," *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy).

The excerpt in Kerman consists of the fourth and final section of a longer piece. It is shaped as a free theme and variation movement. The theme falls into the pattern *abcc'*. It is then heard (1) in 2-part canon, (2) 4-part canon, (3) 2 voices with clarinets and drums (not imitative), (4) climatic high note.

21M.011 Chronology of twentieth-century <u>composers</u> studied in Kerman:

Schoenberg (1874-1951)
Ives (1874-1954)
Ravel (1875-1937)

Bartok (1881-1945)
Stravinsky (1882-1971)
Webern (1883-1945)
Varese (1883-1965) Berg (1885-1935)

Armstrong (ca. 1898-1971)
Gershwin (1898-1937)
Ellington (1899-1974) Copland (1900-1990)

Bernstein (1918-1990)
Parker (1920-1955)
Ligeti (b. 1923)
Davis (1926-1991) Crumb (b. 1929)

Reich (b. 1936)

Saariaho (b. 1952)

20th-century <u>compositions</u> in Kerman

1909 Ives, *The Rockstrewn Hills*
1912 Schoenberg, *Pierrot lunaire* 1913
Stravinsky, *Rite of Spring*
Webern, *Five Orchestral Pieces*

1923 Berg, *Wozzeck*
1926 Gershwin, Prelude No. 1
1927 Sippie Wallace (performer), "If you ever been down"

1931 Ravel, *Piano Concerto in G* 1936
Bartok, *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*

1940 Ellington, *Conga Brava*
1945 Copland, *Appalachian Spring* 1948
Parker, *Out of Nowhere*

1952 Cage, *4' 33"*
1957 Bernstein, *West Side Story*
1958 Varese, *Poème électronique*

1966 Ligeti, *Lux aeterna*
1969 Davis, *Bitches Brew*

1970 Crumb, *Black Angels*

1981 Reich, *Tehillim*
1988 Saariaho, *From the Grammar of Dreams*