Modern Art Music Terms

Aria: A lyrical type of singing with a steady beat, accompanied by orchestra; a songful monologue or duet in an opera or other dramatic vocal work.

Atonality: In modern music, the absence (intentional avoidance) of a tonal center.

Avant Garde: (French for "at the forefront") Modern music that is on the cutting edge of innovation..

Counterpoint: Combining two or more independent melodies to make an intricate polyphonic texture.

Form: The musical design or shape of a movement or complete work.

Expressionism: A style in modern painting and music that projects the inner fear or turmoil of the artist, using abrasive colors/sounds and distortions (begun in music by Schoenberg, Webern and Berg).

Impressionism: A term borrowed from 19th-century French art (Claude Monet) to loosely describe early 20th-century French music that focuses on blurred atmosphere and suggestion. Debussy "Nuages" from *Trois Nocturnes* (1899)

Indeterminacy: **(also called "Chance Music")** A generic term applied to any situation where the performer is given freedom from a composer's notational prescription (when some aspect of the piece is left to chance or the choices of the performer).

Metric Modulation: A technique used by Elliott Carter and others to precisely change tempo by using a note value in the original tempo as a metrical time-pivot into the new tempo. Carter *String Quartet No. 5* (1995)

Minimalism: An avant garde compositional approach that reiterates and slowly transforms small musical motives to create expansive and mesmerizing works. Glass *Glassworks* (1982); other minimalist composers are Steve Reich and John Adams.

Neo-Classicism: Modern music that uses Classic gestures or forms (such as Theme and Variation Form, Rondo Form, Sonata Form, etc.) but still has modern harmonies and instrumentation. Copland "Variations on a Shaker Hymn" from *Appalachian Spring* (1944)

Neo-Romanticism: Modern music that avoids harsh avant garde experimentation to sound more lyrical and Romantic in style, but still uses more modern sounding harmonies and tone colors. Barber *Adagio for Strings* (1944)

Orchestral Soundmass: A musical texture that obscures the boundaries between sound and noise, focusing more on dynamics, texture and tone color than on individual pitches. Xenakis *Metastaseis* (1954)

Pointillism: A musical texture promoted by Webern in which the pitches of a melody are presented just a few at a time (isolated "points" of sound) rather than in a traditional continuous melodic line in the same instrument. This technique is closely associated with *Klangfarbenmelodie* (which is the multi-colored melody that is produced when the pitches played by the instruments are taken as a single melodic whole).

Polytonality: The simultaneous use of more than one harmonic center.

Post-Modernism: The borrowing of forms, procedures, and/or values of the past that can be found in the works of many 20th-century composers. Post-modernism comes after modern (and react to it), and it is not a style or historical period--it is an attitude that has a disdain for structural unity, can simultaneously blend elements of the past and present, and embrace contradictions.

Prepared Piano: The process of installing every-day objects at strategic places between the strings of a piano in order to allow it to create a myriad of new sounds.

Primitivism: A movement in modern Western art and music that evokes images of prehistoric peoples. Stravinsky *The Rite of Spring* (1913)

Program Music: ("programmatic music") Instrumental music intended to tell a story, or give an impression of an image or specific idea.

Second Viennese School: The term associated with the early 20th-century "school of thought" centered in Vienna of Schoenberg and his most prominent students--Berg and Webern. (The "First Viennese School" was Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven in the Classic era.)

Serialism: The ordering of pitch so that all 12 chromatic tones (and their octave equivalents) are given equal emphasis. A 12-tone row and 12 x 12 pitch matrix are constructed and used to control the melodic and harmonic

sonority of the work. All four forms of the 12-tone row can be used and transposed to any chromatic pitch as a starting point:

- *Prime* (forward order of pitches #0-11)
- *Retrograde* (backwards, #11-0)
- *Inversion* (forward order, but the intervals of the Prime row are inverted)
- *Retrograde Inversion* (backward order with the intervals inverted)

Sprechstimme: A vocal style somewhere between agitated speaking and expressive singing, which uses wide leaps and glissandos. (Half-sung, half-spoken melodramatic vocal delivery, indicated in the musical score by "x" note-heads).

Stochastic Music: A slowly-evolving mass of sound that gradually makes "a symptotic (based on probability theory) evolution towards a stable state." (In Probability Theory, a "Stochastic System" is one whose state is non-deterministic). Xenakis *Metastaseis* (1954)

Theme: A melodic idea that stands on its own (has a complete harmonic progression and cadence).

Third Stream: In 1961, Gunther Schuller defined *the third stream* as "a new genre of music located about halfway between jazz and classical music." It incorporates jazz instruments, jazz phrasing, jazz rhythms, and improvisation, into orchestral and chamber music. *Sketch for Double String Quartet* (1959) with Schuller conducting the Modern Jazz Quartet and the Beaux Arts String Quartet

Tone Cluster: The use of groups of pitches in an unbroken continuum of microtonal gradation in voices or string instruments, or striking a large continuous section of black and white keys as a block (cluster of tones) on a piano. Cowell *The Banshee* (1925)

Total Serialism and Multi-Serialism: Using the relative digits within a 12-tone row and 12 x 12 pitch matrix to control many ("multi-serialism") or all ("total serialism") structural aspects of a work (melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics, articulation, choice of instruments, etc.). Webern experimented with multi-serialism in some of his later works (such as *Cantata No. 1* Op. 29), and then total serialism was promoted by mathematician/composers such as Babbitt (*Philomel*, 1964).

Genres Used in the Modern Era

Ballet: A fully-staged programmatic theatrical work for dancers and orchestra. In the modern era, ballet became an important format for new kinds of musical sound and dance. Stravinsky *The Rite of Spring* (1913), Copland *Appalachian Spring* (1944)

Cantata: Traditionally this is a short, unstaged multi-movement Lutheran liturgical sacred work for solo singers, chorus and small orchestra, but in the Modern Era, Schoenberg also used this genre (with chorus, orchestra, and a narrator/soloist reciting in Sprechstimme) as the inspiration for a different type of religious commentary about the genocide of Polish Jews during the Holocaust of World War II (*A Survivor from Warsaw*, 1946).

Character Piece: A one-movement programmatic work for solo piano.

Concerto: A 3-movement work that pits a soloist vs. orchestra.

Electro-Acoustic Music: Modern music that blends electronic or computer-generated sounds with traditional voices/instruments.

Lied: A German art song, performed by one singer accompanied by either piano or orchestra.

Musique concrète: Recording sounds from the natural world and manipulating them electronically to create entirely new sounds. Varese *Poème électronique* (1958)

Nocturne: A programmatic piano genre suggesting quietness of night. In the Modern Era, Debussy expanded the term to describe orchestral works that evoked similar imagery. Debussy "Nuages" from *Trois Nocturnes* (1899)

Opera: Invented by Italians in the early Baroque, this is a large-scale fully-staged dramatic theatrical work involving solo singers, chorus, and orchestra. In the Modern era, traditional types of serious and comic opera still thrived, but more experimental and sometimes controversial models also arose such as
- Debussy *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902-Impressionist opera)
- Berg *Wozzeck* (1922-Expressionist opera)
- Gershwin *Porgy and Bess* (1935-called "an American folk opera" that uses the blues and other Afro-American musical developments as its inspiration)

- Bernstein *West Side Story* (1957-Musical Theatre, and a merging of classical, pop, jazz in a street-gang rivalry modernization of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*)
- Glass *Einstein on the Beach* (1975-Minimalist opera)

Song Cycle: A set of art-songs arranged intentionally as a cycle to depict an ongoing story, or based on the same literary source. They are for one singer accompanied by either piano or orchestra. Schoenberg *Pierrot lunaire* (1912)--a cycle of Lieder

String Quartet: A chamber ensemble of four string players (2 violins, viola, cello); also the term for a multi-movement work for string quartet. Bartók: *String Quartet No. 5* (1934); Carter *String Quartet No. 5* (1995); Crumb amplified his ensemble with special effects and used unusual performance techniques in his string quartet *Black Angels* (1970).

Suite: In previous eras this was a collection of dances performed by a solo keyboard instrument or orchestra. In the Modern Era, the structure was loosened to go beyond courtly dance movements or ballet excerpts, so it could include picturesque or programmatic movements often of an exotic or international flavor. Villa-Lobos *Bachianas Brasilieras* No. 7 (1942)

Symphony: In the Modern era, this was still a multi-movement work for orchestra, but now written with modern harmonies and instrumentation. Webern *Symphonie Op. 21* (1928)

Symphonic Poem: a one-movement programmatic work for orchestra. Debussy "Nuages" from *Trois Nocturnes* (1899)

Forms Used in the Modern Era (internal designs of individual movements)

Arch Form: A design that creates a symmetrical arch with its structure

- *Within a sonata form movement*: Theme 1 - Theme 2 - Development - Theme 2 - Theme 1
                                    (Exposition) | (Recapitulation in reverse order)
                                                   |_____|
                                        |_____|

- *In a multi-movement structure*: Movement 1 - Movement 2 - Movt 3 - Movement 4 - Movement 5
                                    (similar to 5)   (similar to 4) | (similar to 2)   (similar to 1)
                                                   |_____|
                                        |_____|

Coda: A (means "tail" in Italian) A brief, final musical section often appended to a movement to bring it to a satisfying conclusion.

Cyclic Form: The same motive or theme used in more than one movement of an instrumental work.

Rondo Form: A form that has its main melodic idea--the fast and catchy "rondo" theme [A])--return two or three times after contrasting melodic material and key.
There is a 5-part Rondo (ABACA) used in slower movements, and a 7-part Rondo (ABACABA, used in fast movements):

Sonata Form: (also called "sonata-allegro form") The most important structural design of the Classic era, denoted by three dramatic divisions (in the Modern Era, composers who used sonata form expanded the harmonic distance between the opposing keys):
- Exposition: Two themes in opposing keys--Theme 1 (home key), Theme 2 (other key)
- Development: Harmonically unstable (explores distant keys from home)
- Recapitulation: Return of Theme 1 and Theme 2 in the home key

Ternary Form: A form having both opposition and return ("A B A")--it is the musical reflection of a circle (start at "A" at the top, go around the circle to "B" at the bottom, then continue around the circle back to "A

Theme & Variations Form: A form that presents a musical "theme" and then a series of variations on that theme:
- Theme 1 - Variation 1 - Variation 2 - Variation 3 - Variation 4 (etc.)

Through-composed Design: A musical structure that has no discernible form--the music keeps changing as it goes on, with no returning themes.

Modern Art Music Composers (in chronological order)

Early-Modern Art Composers

Claude Debussy (1862-1918): This ground-breaking leader of the French "impressionist" movement is known for his colorfully-evocative piano works, symphonic poems, and songs. "Nuages" from *Trois Nocturnes* [impressionist nocturne] (1899)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937): An important composer of French impressionism and a greatest orchestrator *Pictures at an Exhibition* (orchestration of Musorgsky's piano suite) [orchestral suite] 1922

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951): This Austrian composer promoted the revolutionary early 20th-century concepts of atonality, serialism, expressionism, and Sprechstimme. *Pierrot lunaire* [song cycle] 1912; *A Survivor from Warsaw* [cantata] 1946

Anton von Webern (1883-1945): He was among Schoenberg's most famous pupils and is known for the brevity of his works, as well as his creative use of serialism and pointillism. *Symphonie, Op. 21* [pointillist symphony] 1928

Alban Berg (1885-1935): He was also among Schoenberg's most famous pupils and is known for his lyrical approach to atonality and serialism. *Wozzeck* [expressionist opera] 1925

Charles Ives (1874-1954): The first US composer to design an innovative, nationalistic approach to art music. He used polytonality and experimental textures, harmonies, and rhythms while incorporating American themes.

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971): This Russian-born composer participated in and gave impetus to most of the significant musical developments of the first half of the 20th century. *The Rite of Spring* [primitivist ballet] 1913

Henry Cowell (1897-1965): This American composer was one of the earliest experimental composers of the 20th century. Primarily known for *The Banshee* [character piece] 1925, played directly on the strings inside the piano.

Béla Bartók (1881-1945): He was a daring pioneer in the scientific study of folk music in Hungary and other eastern European countries. *String Quartet No. 5* [string quartet] 1934

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953): A leading Russian composer of the first half of the 20th century, known for his intense symphonies, piano works, and his narrated symphonic poem for children--*Peter and the Wolf* (1936).

Mid-20th Century Art Composers

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963): He was the leading German composer of the first half of the 20th century, and an important music theorist.

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959): This mid-20th century composer was the chief representative of musical nationalism in Brazil. *Bachianas Brasilieras No. 7* [orchestral suite] 1942

Edgard Varèse (1883-1965): This French-born, American-raised composer was an early avant garde visionary. *Poème électronique* [musique concrète] 1958

Samuel Barber (1910-81): This American composer promoted neo-Romanticism (the new Romanticism). *Adagio for Strings* [symphonic poem] 1936

Aaron Copland (1900-1990): The first truly internationally-renowned American composer, known for his nationalistic ballets, songs, choral music, and orchestral works. *Appalachian* [ballet] 1944

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-75): A leading Russian composer in the mid-20th century, known for his intense symphonies, chamber music, and piano works.

Benjamin Britten (1913-76): He was the leading British composer of the 20th century, known for his operas, choral, orchestral and chamber music.

Later Modern Art Music Composers

Olivier Messiaen (1908-92): A French 20th-century composer, known for his complex rhythmic and harmonic orchestral, chamber and organ works.

Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007): The leading German composer of the late 20th-century avant garde. Known for his electronic music, electro-acoustic music, serial compositions, chamber and orchestral works.

Leonard Bernstein (1918-90): A multi-faceted and highly influential American composer, conductor, author and teacher. *West Side Story* [jazz-influenced musical theatre] 1957

John Cage (1912-92): Perhaps the most important philosopher-composer of modern times, he challenged everything about musical sound and construction. He is mostly remembered for "prepared piano" works such as *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano* (1948), and those based on indeterminacy ("chance music") such as *4'33"* (1952)--but he did much more than just that, constantly searching for "the music I haven't heard yet."

Milton Babbitt (1916-2011): This Princeton University professor of mathematics and music composition was associated with the compositional principles of total serialism. *Philomel* [electro-acoustic music] 1964

Iannis Xenakis (1922-2001): This Greek-born, French-naturalized composer, theorist and architect-engineer was one of the most important post-World War II avant garde thinkers. He is most known for his post-modernist stochastic music and orchestral soundmass compositions based on probability theory. *Metastaseis* (1954)

Elliott Carter (1908-2012): A Pulitzer-Prize winning American composer, who wrote an enormous amount of music in almost every traditional classical genre. Known for his use of metric modulation. *String Quartet No. 5* (1995)

Pierre Boulez (born 1925): This composer/conductor is the leading French avant garde composer, known for his complex total-serialized works.

Gunther Schuller (born 1925): This contemporary American composer coined the phrase "third stream" music (blending art music and jazz into a third category), and has incorporated jazz elements into many of his works. *Sketch for Double String Quartet* (1959) with Schuller conducting the Modern Jazz Quartet and the Beaux Arts String Quartet [third stream work]

George Crumb (born 1929): This professor emeritus at Princeton is one of the leading figures of the American avant garde movement. *Black Angels* [electric string quartet] 1970

Steve Reich (born 1936): One of the leading composers of the American avant garde minimalist movement. *Violin Phase* [minimalist composition] 1967

Philip Glass (born 1937): One of the leading composers of the American avant garde minimalist movement. *Glassworks* [minimalist composition] 1970

John Adams (born 1947): One of the leading composers of the American minimalist and avant garde movements.

Late Romantic style continues into the 20th century

early Modern   **MODERN**   **Avant Garde**

Post-Modern

Timeline markers: 1900 · 1920 · 1945 · 1970 · 2000

Germany & Austria

"The 2nd Viennese School"

(Austrian) **SCHOENBERG**
Pierrot lunaire (1912)
song cycle

(Austrian) **BERG**
Wozzeck
opera

expressionism
atonality

(Austrian) **WEBERN**
Symphonie Op. 21
symphony
Klangfarbenmelodie
pointillism
serialism

(Austrian) **SCHOENBERG**
A Survivor from Warsaw
cantata
(Sprechstimme)
serialism

(German) **HINDEMITH**

France

DEBUSSY
Trois Nocturnes (1899)
symphonic poems
impressionism

RAVEL

MESSIAEN

BOULEZ

STOCKHAUSEN

Russia

STRAVINSKY
The Rite of Spring (1913)
ballet
primitivism

PROKOFIEV

SHOSTAKOVICH

United States

IVES

COWELL
The Banshee
character piece
tone clusters

COPLAND
Appalachian Spring
ballet
neo-Classicism

BARBER
Adagio for Strings
symphonic poem

VARESE
Poeme electronique
musique concrete

CAGE
4'33"
character piece
indeterminacy
(chance music)

BABBITT
Philomel
electro-acoustic music
total serialism

BERNSTEIN
West Side Story
musical theatre

REICH minimalism

GLASS
Glassworks

CRUMB
Black Angels
string quartet
electrified

SCHULLER
"third stream"
blend of jazz and classical

CARTER
String Quartet No. 5
string quartet
metric modulation

ADAMS

Other

(Hungarian) **BARTOK**
String Quartet No. 5
string quartet

(Brazilian) **VILLA-LOBOS**
Bachianas Brasilieras No. 8
orchestral suite

(English) **BRITTEN**

(Greek, but worked in Paris and US)

XENAKIS
Metastaseis
orchestral soundmass
stochastic music

TERMS