

## 20<sup>th</sup> Century Music

This century has seen rapid change and development in all aspects of life. These changes are reflected in the arts. In music the composers struggle to find new means of expression. In doing so they may have lost touch with the concert-going public.

The seeds of modern music were sown by **Richard Wagner**. His adventurous harmonies, constant key changes and discords made the home key uncertain and tonality was lost. This move away from tonality was continued in the music of **Richard Strauss**, **Claude Debussy** and later **Arnold Schoenberg**.

The melody, up to this century, had been predictable. Each phrase ended with a *cadence* and each melody suggested certain suitable accompanying chords. Debussy's use of *pentatonic* and *whole - tone scales* required new harmonies and suggested new possibilities. He built *chords on fourths*. Rhythm was developed in the music of **Stravinsky from Russia and Bartok from Hungary**. They used folk rhythms of their own countries. They introduced frequent changes of time signature. So the elements of music were freed for further experiment.

The **Viennese composers, Schoenberg, Webern and Berg** advocated the next the next development which was *atonal music* (the absence of a key centre and traditional harmony and scales are avoided). Schoenberg introduced *the 12 - note system* called *serialism*. This system treats all the notes of the chromatic scale equally.

**Neo - classical** composers like Stravinsky used old forms such as *concerto, suite* and *symphony*, but employed modern techniques. **Jazz** was one of the elements these composers used. It's freshness and vitality appealed to them. **Vaughan Williams** looked to the *old modes* and forms, he also used *parallel organum in fourths and fifths* as in *medieval music*. **Polytonality** was another feature developed by **Bartok and Stravinsky**. It consists of music using two different keys at once. Many composers have experimented with tapes and artificially produced sounds. Some music now has gaps in the score, where the performers are encouraged to *improvise*. Sometimes ordinary musical notation is abandoned and new symbols and signs are used.

Surprise, uncertainty and harshness are features of 20<sup>th</sup> century music. Orchestral instruments are no longer the only sources of musical sound. The human voice, traffic or machinery may be included and the orchestral instruments themselves are made to produce unexpected noises. Piano composers like **John Cage** attack the piano strings with wire brushes and drumsticks. **Electronic instruments and computers** are brought to the concert platform.

The true musical upheaval of the 20<sup>th</sup> century came with the first 3 ballet scores of **Igor Stravinsky**. A lot of encouragement came from the extraordinary Russian, **Serge Diaghilev**, creator of the ballet *Russe* in Paris in 1909. *'The Firebird'* immediately impressed Paris with its exotic colours. *'The Rite of Spring'* was far from a hit, it caused a scandal. The audience was in uproar shouting and howling so loudly that the dancers could not hear the orchestra. To many, the music of Igor Stravinsky still sounds unruly, dissonant and difficult.