Chapter 34: Starting from Scratch: Music in the Aftermath of World War II

I. Germans
A. Introduction
   1. World War II left the world divided by a new set of alliances.

B. Zero Hour: The Impact on the Arts
   1. As with World War I, the scale of devastation and destruction haunted people everywhere. Now, however, there was a threat of the future as well.
   2. Art for the people was associated with communism; “high” art was associated with capitalism. With the growing tensions of the Cold War, the gulf between high and low art increased as well.
   3. German writers identified a “zero hour” that defined a time without a past.
   4. The Nazis had banned Schoenberg and all things associated with his music. These now came to be seen as a sort of resistance.
      a. Webern emerges as the precise model for subsequent serialists to follow, which was applying serial techniques to all matters in a composition.

C. Total Serialism: Messiaen’s *Mode de valeurs et d’intensités*
   1. Boulez proposed to serialize pitch, rhythm, dynamics, and timbre.
   2. The first famous work to accomplish this was Messiaen’s *Mode de valeurs et d’intensités*.
   3. The next step was total serialism, accomplished in Boulez’s *Structures* (1951).
      a. He applies the technique to pitch, duration, dynamics, and attack.
      b. Boulez noted that the time for performance of scores had passed; now it was time to analyze only.

D. Darmstadt
   1. The zero hour composers were situated in Darmstadt, an American-controlled town in Germany.
   2. Total serialism offered a way out of expression and subjectivity that was abstract, pure, and unemotional.
   3. Critics of total serialism noted a misappropriation of scientific prestige; others saw it as nihilist.

II. Americans
A. Interdeterminacy: John Cage and the “New York School”
   1. The American counterpart to the European post-war avant-garde centered around Cage.
   2. Like the Europeans, the American sought to eliminate the artist’s ego and personality from the product.
   3. Cage’s ideas were an extension of the earlier American experimentalists.
   4. He worked to counter the supremacy of traditional pitch organization as the basis for making music.
   5. He sought to redefine music.
B. Music for Prepared Piano
   1. Cage invented the “prepared piano.”
   2. At a stage in his life when he decided to give up composition unless it did more than communicate, Cage began to study Zen Buddhism.
   3. Cage mixed Zen with *I Ching*. The predetermination of the *I Ching* yielded the music-producing algorithm sought by the zero hour composers, but Cage then added chance instead of serial operations as the path of progression for a work.
   4. The music of Cage and Boulez ultimately sounded similar but was reached by opposite means.

C. Silence
   1. One of Cage’s main contributions was to challenge the way people think about music.
   2. He questioned the nature of the musical work.
   3. His 4’33” is his ultimate experiment in indeterminacy.
   4. In this work, Cage said he was trying to erase the boundary between art and life.

D. “Permission”: Cage’s Influence
   1. Cage’s influence extended beyond musicians.
   2. Following Cage’s ideas, Earle Brown began to challenge concepts of notation.
   3. Cage influenced theater, most famously with “happenings.”

E. Preserving the Sacrosanct: Morton Feldman
   1. Feldman was an associate of Cage who competed with him in the search for aesthetic autonomy.
   2. Cage’s music required a meticulous and demanding methodology.
   3. Feldman’s was more abstract from the beginning.
   4. Some of Feldman’s pieces are quite long, the result of which is a special aesthetic experience.
      a. His music is associated with the artwork of Mark Rothko.

F. Conversions
   1. American music also had a group of composers that were similar in ideas to the German zero hour composers.
   2. Copland moved to serial techniques.
   3. The most surprising convert to serialism was Stravinsky.

G. Academicism, American Style
   1. Craft conducted Stravinsky’s *Requiem Canticles* at its premiere at Princeton University.
   2. Princeton was a leading school for composition and theory at this time, thanks largely to the efforts of Milton Babbitt.
   3. Babbitt was a trained mathematician as well as musician.
   4. He developed “set theory” in 1946 as a basis for the analysis of twelve-tone technique.
      a. Some of the terms he used have become standard in the analysis of twentieth-century music.
5. He also composed in a manner similar to the zero hour composers, a little prior to their works, but did not publish the compositions (with one exception). This left him with some resentment, because they had credit for the new ideas that he had also developed.

6. Babbitt was criticized for being “too academic,” but he relished this label.

7. The increase in funding for the sciences in the United States, spurred on by the success of Sputnik, resulted in an increase in new-styled composition in the United States, the “new PhD music.”

III. Electronics

A. Electronics: An Old Dream Comes True

1. Composers such as Varese and Cage had been searching for something that could create new sounds. The answer was electronic music.
2. Many saw music as needing to be free, and electronics offered that option.
3. New instruments, such as the theremin, were invented.
4. The possibility of “played back” sound developed in Germany in the 1930s. This allowed the splicing of performances to eliminate mistakes.
5. Tapes opened new doors to ideas about music composition.

B. Musique concrète versus Elektronische musik

1. The use of electronics opened the door for two distinct camps. One sought to incorporate sounds of the real world in music; the other to create new sounds.
2. In 1948 French engineer Pierre Schaeffler coined the term musique concrète to described the real-world approach.
3. In Italy, Berio promoted musique concrète. His crowning achievement is Thema.
4. Zero hour composers took a different approach to electronic music, calling theirs Elektronische musik.
5. A rivalry between the French (clarity and wit) and Germans (profundity) ensued.
6. The two were reconciled in Stockhausen’s works in which he uses both approaches: real sounds and synthesized sounds.

C. The New Technology Spreads

2. The composers associated with computer music were in the universities, notably Columbia and Princeton.
3. Varese began composing his last large work, Déserts, in 1949.
5. Cage did not attach himself to any particular academic institution but did compose electronic music.

D. Electronics and Live Music

1. From its beginnings, the issue of live performance and electronic music was an issue.
2. In the 1960s composers from Eastern Europe began to write music that sounded like electronic music but was performed on traditional instruments.
3. One of these was Ligeti.
4. He tried to achieve music without articulation.
5. Others in this group include Penderecki, Lutoslawski, and Gorecki.
6. Penderecki wrote orchestral tone clusters and structured his “sonority pieces” based on timbres.
7. The best known of his compositions is *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*.
8. Avant-garde music made some commercial success, particularly in film.

IV. Elliott Carter
A. Music in History: Elliott Carter
   1. The most prominent American “intellectual” composer at the end of the century was Carter.
   2. He was not part of the university “PhD music” crowd.
   3. He tried his hand at various techniques but ultimately focused his energies on rhythm.
   4. Carter sought to find a way to bridge objective time with subjective (psychological) time.
   5. The technique most associated with Carter is “tempo modulation” or “metrical modulation.”

B. Carter’s Later Career
   1. Carter’s reputation continued to grow after his First Quartet, including a Pulitzer Prize for the Second Quartet.
   2. He became associated with the Modernist movement.

C. “Who Cares If You Listen?”
   1. Much of the music composed in the early twentieth century eventually received approval from audiences.
   2. The composers in this chapter, however, did not win such popular approval.
   3. Babbitt provided the reasoning behind their music in a lecture originally entitled “The Composer as Specialist,” which is now known by another title: “Who Cares If You Listen?”