



# Music Virtual Learning

## Music Appreciation/Impressionism and Neoclassicism in 20th Century Music

April 29, 2020



Lesson: April 29, 2020

**Objective/Learning Target: Students will be introduced to impressionism and neoclassicism in 20th Century music.**

# Bell Work:

1. What are 3 facts you remember from yesterday regarding modernism in 20th century music?
2. Discuss what you remember regarding Atonality and 12-tone music.
3. What are some technological advances that allowed music to be more accessible to a wider variety of audiences.

# What we know.

The 20th century was about experiencing music in new ways, reaching all people from all walks of life, and pushing the traditional ways of composing music to the extreme. Modernism was a big influence as we discussed yesterday. There are two more ideas that pervade the era pertaining to classical music. They are impressionism and neoclassicism.

# Impressionism- 1872-1926

Impressionism is defined as a style or movement in painting originating in France in the 1860s, characterized by a concern with depicting the visual impression of the moment, especially in terms of the shifting effect of light and color.

The main idea in regards to impressionism is that artists, or in our case composers, are writing music to convey a visual impression of the moment or mood. We talked about program music in the Romantic era. Many of the impressionistic works qualify as program music because they are descriptive in nature. They have a specific theme and are trying to paint a picture through sound of a specific mood or image.

# Musical Characteristics of Impressionism

Instruments- The range of instruments is expanding to much lower more mello sounds, mutes are introduced to brass instruments and new percussion instruments such as bells, glockenspiels and triangles are being added for special effects.

Chords- Notes are being added to the traditional chords to expand the harmonic palate and create more of an ethereal sound in the music. Many times music will not resolve or sound finished. It's just kind of left there for interpretation.

Harmony- Like modernism, atonal music pervades impressionism as you never feel like you are anchored in a key center. Use of medieval modes, and the pentatonic (5 note) scale, and whole tone scale were very popular.

Rhythm- Also like modernism, rhythms will be free and not necessarily reveal a steady beat.

# Composers

The two biggest impressionistic composers were Claude Debussy (1862-1918) and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937).

Debussy was similar to Bach in that many of his colleagues did not like his music. He describes his music by saying: "*I love music passionately. And because I love it I try to free it from barren traditions that stifle it.*" Debussy was clear that he was not going to conform to the traditional rules from the past.

Ravel stated, "*Music, I feel, must be emotional first and intellectual second.*" Ravel and Debussy were similar in lots of ways, but Ravel was transparent about wanting to have his own reputation as a composer.

# Impressionistic Music

Much of the music is inspired by nature and the mysterious.

Debussy-Arabesque No. 1- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yh36PaE-Pf0> This piece is a celebration of the shapes found in nature.

Ravel- Je Deux- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J\\_36x1\\_LKgg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_36x1_LKgg) This piece describes the many movements of water.



# Mid-Lesson Reflection

1. What is Impressionism?
2. What are Impressionistic qualities in music?
3. Who were the two main Impressionistic composers?
4. What are topics composers were inspired to write about?

# Neoclassicism

- Period between WWI and WWII 1918-1939
- Composers returned to aesthetic precepts associated with "classicism," namely order, balance, clarity, and emotional restraint.
- Minimalism- small range of notes, very little changes in dynamics, very few vocal parts, little drama, and text driven.
- Smaller performing forces, mostly homophonic texture, limited harmonies, no feelings-It's just music for music's sake-prima prattica style

# Igor Stravinsky-1882-1971

- Loved music and studied piano as a boy, but his parents wanted him to study law instead.
- Never finished his law degree, but did become a composer.
- Married his ½ cousin in 1905
- Traveled extensively-Russia, Switzerland, France, U.S.. Buried in Venice.
- Died of heart failure in New York City in 1971.

# Stravinsky's Music

- Pulcinella-said to have reflections of melodies by baroque composer Pergolesi-What Era does this sound most closely resemble? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShlYpjSYoZI&t=458s>
- Symphony of Psalms-written for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Based on the 150<sup>th</sup> Psalm. Text is Latin. Contains fugues and polyphonic writing from the Baroque/Ren. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqWZGUO\\_eoc&t=122s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqWZGUO_eoc&t=122s)
- Stravinsky said that “it is not a symphony in which I have included Psalms to be sung. On the contrary, it is the singing of the Psalms that I am symphonizing.”
- What are some neoclassical characteristics you hear?

# Paul Hindemith-1895-1963

- Born in Germany
- Violist and violinist
- Served in WWI-Said to have survived grenade attacks only by good luck.
- Was not popular with Hitler-Deemed degenerate music and called an atonal noise maker.
- Hindemith believed he was an ambassador for the German culture.
- Became an American citizen in 1946.

# Hindemith's Music

- Symphony for Band- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvVgCoORNHM>
- Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Carl von Weber- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RthuLePDo3A>

# Your turn

- Search for 1 neo classic work and 1 impressionistic work using the composers above.
- There are not many composers, but there are many works.
- Explain the history of the composer, the history of the work, when and why it was written, and the characteristics that make it neoclassic.

# Lesson Reflection

1. Impressionism and Neoclassicism continue to push music beyond the boundaries of traditional music composition.
2. Impressionism works to depict an image, mood or experience.
3. Neoclassicism returns to the forms and writing styles of the past, but within the progressive writing styles of the 20th century.
4. Both types of music were not widely popular during their time, but gained popularity as the century progressed.



