

HISTORY OF WESTERN MUSIC I

MUS 3314-1

Dr. Tony Mowrer

Chapter 19

European Music from the 1870s to World War I

Post-Romanticism

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At the beginning of the 20th century, there was increased unrest---social tension. This marks the end of the *classic/romantic* and the conventions of tonality as had been understood. Composers struggled to NOT imitate Wagner. But, they wound up doing so in spite of themselves.

One characteristic feature is the *fairy tale opera*---an opera based on a fairy tale. One from this genre is *Hansel and Gretel* by Inglebert Humperdink.

Hugo Wolf (1860-1903)

Wolf wrote 250 lieder. Coming from ideas found in Wagner's music dramas, there is found here a new equality of words and music.

Play Wolf

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Mahler is the last of the great *post-romanticists*. He writes touching art songs. Notable among his works is his cycle, *Kindertotenlieder*---Songs of the Deaths of Children. Mahler's symphonic works require huge forces. His 8th symphony, for example, is called *The Symphony of a thousand!*

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Writes symphonic poems and noted operas.

Also Sprach Zarathustra

Salome

In Russia, we have *The Mighty Handful* or *The Russian Five*

Borodin

Mussorgsky

Cui

Rimsky-Korsakov

Balakirev

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United States

The first really important US composer was *Charles Ives* (1874-1954). He mingles many elements together and tended to scorn technical procedures.

Play Ives

England

Edward Elgar

Elgar follows the intonation patterns of the British, but not that of the British folk tradition. *Pomp and Circumstance* is one of his noted works.

France

Music from France tended to be classical in nature. One of the leading French composers of this time was *Gabriel Fauré* (1845-1924). He was the founder of the National society for French Music. His music is refined and civilized. He writes lyrical melodies. His music is instrumentally conceived, but uncomplicated. It is clear, balanced, and serene.

Play from Requiem

Another important French composer is *Claude Debussy* (1862-1926). His work has been termed *impressionistic*. Impressionism was a French artistic movement. These painters, Monet, Degas, Renoir, et al were interested in giving an impression of things. They recognized that light changed and with that change, things changed in their appearance. Impressionistic music is to evoke moods, mainly through harmony and tone color. The impressionistic composer would evoke an atmosphere through titles.

Possibly the most famous work of this genre is Debussy's *Prelude <l'après-midi d'un faune*. It is based on a poem by Mallarmé

Play *Prelude <l'après-midi d'un faune* and *Nuages*

Chords are not used for tension and release. Rather, they are used and considered to be a tonal unit on their own.

Debussy also composed *Peleas et Melisande*, his only opera.

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Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) also adopted the impressionist technique, but maintained his affinity for clean, melodic contours, distinct rhythms, and firm classical structures. Ravel was a brilliant colorist and orchestrated many works, especially those by Mussorgsky. He incorporated waltz rhythms and jazz elements. Ravel's *best-seller* might be *Bolero*.

Italian Opera

The Italians turned to *verismo*. In this, they chose a libretto that presented everyday people in familiar situations acting violently under the impulse of primitive emotions. Music was composed that was appropriate to the libretto. Among verismo operas are:

I pagliacci, Leoncavallo

Tosca, Puccini

Il tabarro

Madame Butterfly