

"My aim has always been the liberation of sound; to throw open the whole world of sound music." – Edgard Varèse

In your opinion, how has Varèse liberated sound? Refer in your answer to **at least three** works, only **one** of which may be a Focus Work. [30]

Three works: Amériques, Ionisation, Equatorial

In the past, composers often have to comply with the musical conventions of their times. These conventions came in the form of tonality, harmonic functions as well as form and structure. Although they ensure that the music produced is musical and acceptable for the audiences at the time, following such rules restricted access to all of the theoretically possible musical languages one can imagine. Edgard Varèse is one of the first composers who realised the disadvantage of following the rules and decided to liberate the sounds of music in expense of breaking the rules. Moreover, Edgard Varèse explored new timbre through percussion and electronic music instruments. That is probably what he referred to as 'the whole world of sound music'. The way at which he had achieved all these will be explained with three of his works: Amériques, Ionisation and Equatorial, below.

Amériques is the first work which Varèse wrote after he arrived in America. As a Frenchman, his aim for the work is to describe his first impressions of Americas through the work. Having the ultimate goal of liberation of sound in mind, Varèse started the piece with a solo alto flute playing a passage made of dissonant intervals, such as minor seconds, major sevenths and augmented fourths. Moreover, this unusual opening motif is followed by a disruptive percussion and brass descending chromatic tutti loud call, which has no correlation with the opening motif at all, showing no continuity between the two gestures. This way of opening his work is therefore very progressive but at the same time, very free (in terms of composition styles). This way of introducing a piece of music threw the conventions out of the window as traditionally a long-winded exposition section must be present to introduce the main motifs and ideas. Furthermore, the work continues in this fashion of sudden, unexpected and unprecedented development for a full twenty minutes or so. The expression he had used in the work is truly free. Therefore, Varèse has successfully reached the goal of liberating music.

In Ionisation, a work for only the percussion section, Varèse explored heavily on the unique timbres of some special percussion instruments that were not considered in the past. He broadened the definition of instruments from the percussion section by including many day-to-day objects that most people see at only making noise into his percussion line-up. For example, siren held long tones loudly with varying dynamics and duration; crow calls are played in a short motif consisting of three quavers in secession, perhaps resembling real crows found in America; and metal sheets are played as the introduction, suggesting the sounds of a thunderstorm. All these sounds expanded the library of sounds possible to be used in a composition. This is also what it means to throw open the whole world of sound music.

Equatorial is unique piece that heavily explores on electronic music and vocals. This work featured the Ondes Martinot and tenor vocals. The Ondes, the first electronic instrument, was invented in 1924, right before equatorial was written. The Ondes is very expressive, as it is capable of insanely huge dynamics that ranges from very soft to so loud that it stands out from the whole orchestra. Its refreshing timbre produced by electron tubes is very pure and never heard of

at that time. The work is opened by the Ondes, with high, long and loud notes being played. The timbre of the Ondes is clearly pronounced in the whole piece. This way, Varèse had explored the world of sound music as he used timbre never used in the past.