**Futurist Music**

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Francesco Balilla Pratella (1880-1955) was the first composer to associate with the Futurist movement and to outline an aesthetic of Futurist music, though he was ultimately superseded in this regard by the painter-turned-musician Luigi Russolo (1885-1947), who became most closely associated with this stylistic. In his three manifestos on the subject, written between 1910 and 1912, Pratella echoes F.T. Marinetti’s call to revolutionize art and reject the stultifying effects of *passéism*. He does not provide a coherent or convincing programme for how this might be achieved in music, however, and his efforts to realise Futurist music in practice – one of which, *Inno alla Vita* (*Hymn to Life*, 1913) involved whole-tone scales – were not especially radical. Russolo proposed an altogether more fundamental rethinking of what Futurist music might be. In his 1913 manifesto L'arte dei rumori (*The Art of Noises*), Russolo argues that the sounds offered by a symphony orchestra are a poor match for the acoustic force and timbral complexities of a modern city. He proposes to transform noise using newly invented instruments, aestheticizing and spiritualizing it in the process. He devised a system of enharmonic notation, and, with the help of the painter Ugo Piatti, constructed the *intonarumori* (noise intoners) that were to constitute the new Futurist orchestra. Russolo’s noise instruments consisted of rectangular, plywood boxes containing motorized mechanics that made unique sounds that an operator (musician) could manipulate in terms of pitch by pulling on a lever. The orchestra of *intonarumori* included such instruments as the exploder, crackler, buzzer, stamper, gurgler, screamer, rustler, whistler, thunderer, and the croaker. Pieces Russolo composed for the *intonarumori* include *Risveglio di una città* (*Awakening of a City*) (1913) and *Convegno di automobili e di aeroplani* (*A Meeting of Motorcars and Aeroplanes*) (1913). Noise music was played sporadically at Futurist performance events and concerts in Europe over the next decade or so and achieved notoriety, though performances were often met with incomprehension and derision.

In the Russian avant-garde, a notable example of what might be termed Futurist music was a mass concert designed by Arseny Avraamov entitled *The Symphony of Sirens*, which took place in Baku in 1922. Avraamov’s symphony was a grandiose expression of proletarian music-making, i.e. music made by and for workers, and featured ‘instruments’ of modern technology and industry that workers could perform themselves, such as factory whistles, guns, and modes of transportation.

In making music out of worldly sound (including that which may be deemed to be noise), Futurist music contributed to the modernist expansion of aesthetic possibilities; it serves as an important precedent for the work of later composers, John Cage in particular.

References and further reading

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