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MUSIC IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

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inner rhythm" (SR 179:1339; 7/10:69). But his music also shows how such technologies were only one facet of a whole new conception of art. Born in France, Varèse was trained as an engineer before turning to music. Moving to the United States in 1915, he soon gained celebrity through a series of works that evoked science, the city, and the modern world; the American critic Paul Rosenfeld described him in 1929 as "the poet of tall New Yorks." Varèse used the language of the New Objectivity to characterize his 1924 chamber work *Octandre* as "hard of surface and machine-sharp of edge."

The first work that brought Varèse wide attention was the short but intense *Hyperprism* (1923), which, in keeping with his concept of music as an "Art-Science," took its name from the multidimensional geometric form. The music is scored for a massive battery of percussion, including a siren and lion's roar (a kind of drum played by a cord pulled through the head), combined with brass and woodwinds; Varèse pointedly omitted string instruments as too expressive and sentimental (Ex. 5.1). In the opening measures, he dramatically reduces the roles of melody and harmony in favor of what he described as a counterpoint of sound masses differentiated by textures and timbres: "When these sound masses collide, the phenomenon of penetration or repulsion will seem to occur. Certain transmutations taking place on certain planes will seem to be projected onto other planes, moving at different speeds and at different angles" (SR 179:1340; 7/10:70).

One plane is an 11-measure tone-color melody centered on C♯ and moving between trombone and French horns, which animate it through constantly shifting rhythms, dynamics, and special performance effects. The other plane consists of a complex constellation of brief rhythmic gestures in the percussion. Some later passages include more extended melodies and blocklike harmonies, but rather than emerging as the focus of attention, melody and harmony serve to define the contrasting sound masses along with different rhythms, textures, and instrumental configurations. Varèse relied even less on pitch in his *Ionisation* for percussion ensemble (1931), which anticipated the textural approaches we will discuss in Chapter 12, and after World War II he became a pioneer of electronic music (see Chapter 11).

ANTHEIL'S *BALLET MÉCANIQUE*

One of the most famous works of machine art was George Antheil's *Ballet mécanique* (Mechanical Ballet), which premiered in Paris in 1926; its scandalous U.S. premiere at Carnegie Hall followed a year later (Ex. 5.2). Antheil described the work as the first piece of music on Earth "that has been composed OUT OF and FOR MACHINES." With its 16 player pianos, large percussion section, siren, electric bells, and stage-mounted airplane propellers, this raucous "ballet" of mechanical instruments was one of several works from these years designed to capture the sounds of trains, automobiles, and factories. Indeed, the Carnegie

Hall concert was preceded the day before by a performance of *Pacific 231* (1923), by the Swiss composer Arthur Honegger (1892–1955), which vividly captures the sonic effect of a train lurching into motion. At nearby Steinway Hall was the influential Machine Age Exposition that brought together artworks and industrial objects. Antheil's piece was conceived together with an experimental film by the French artist Fernand Léger (see Chapter 6), also called *Ballet mécanique*, that featured looping mechanized images of technology, abstract shapes, people, and animals. Other related Machine Age compositions from the time include *Iron Foundry* (1927), from the ballet *Steel* by the Soviet composer Alexander Mosolov and Sergey Prokofiev's ballet *Le pas d'acier* (The Steel Step), performed that same year by the Ballets Russes (see Chapter 6).

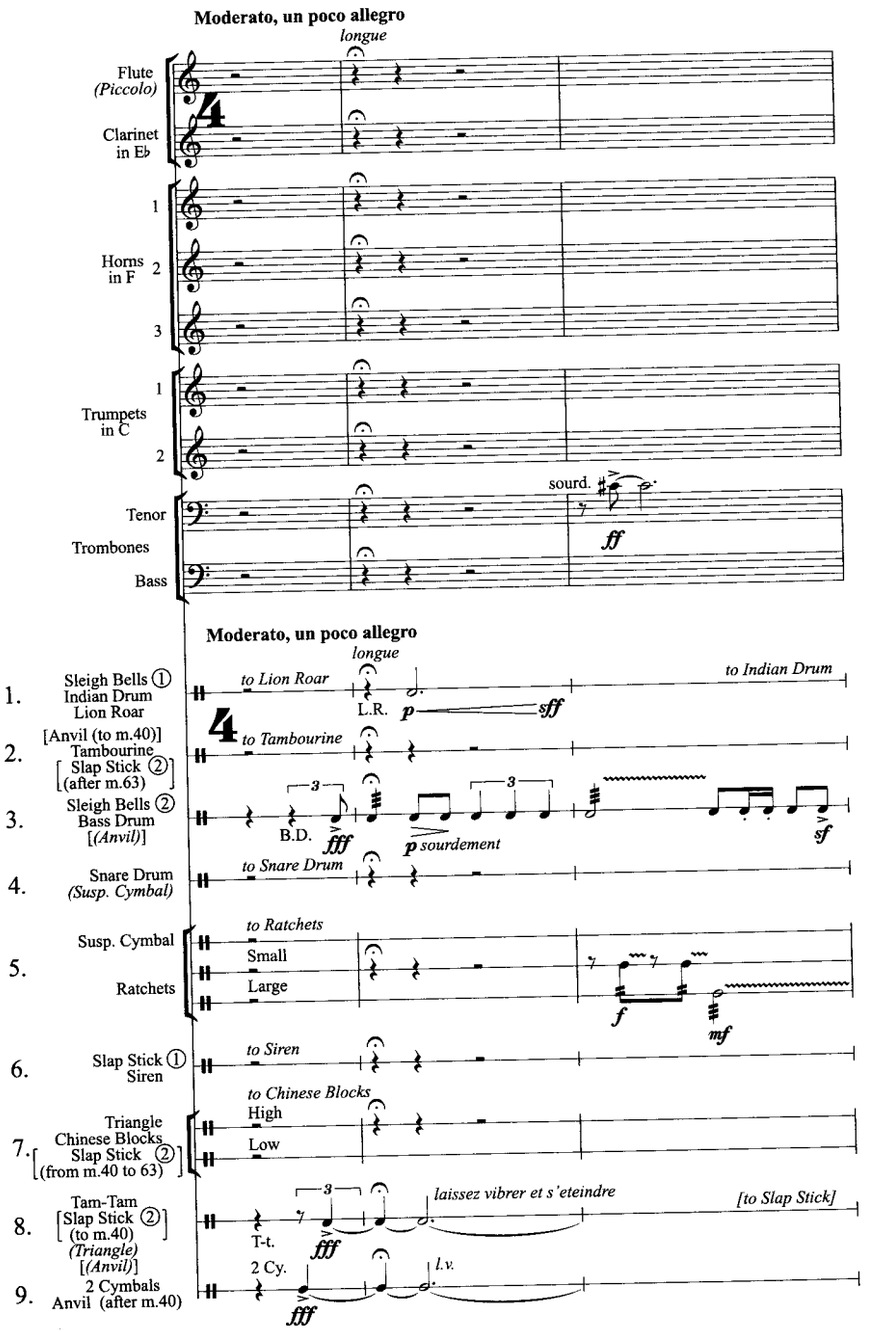
The *Ballet mécanique* exemplifies a set of musical markers for the Machine Age, common to all these pieces, including the layering of ostinatos, a high level of dissonance, the juxtaposition of incongruous materials, and the use of "noise" and sounds with indeterminate pitch. More surprising is Antheil's incorporation of the popular music of the city: amid the agitated evocation of industrial pistons, belts, and wheels, the ragtime tune "Oh My Baby" suddenly emerges, first interrupting and then absorbed into the chaotic mechanical dance. Antheil heard connections between machine art and urban African-American music, which he highlighted by featuring his *Jazz Symphony* (1925), performed by an all-black orchestra, on the first half of the Carnegie Hall concert with the premiere of the *Ballet mécanique*.

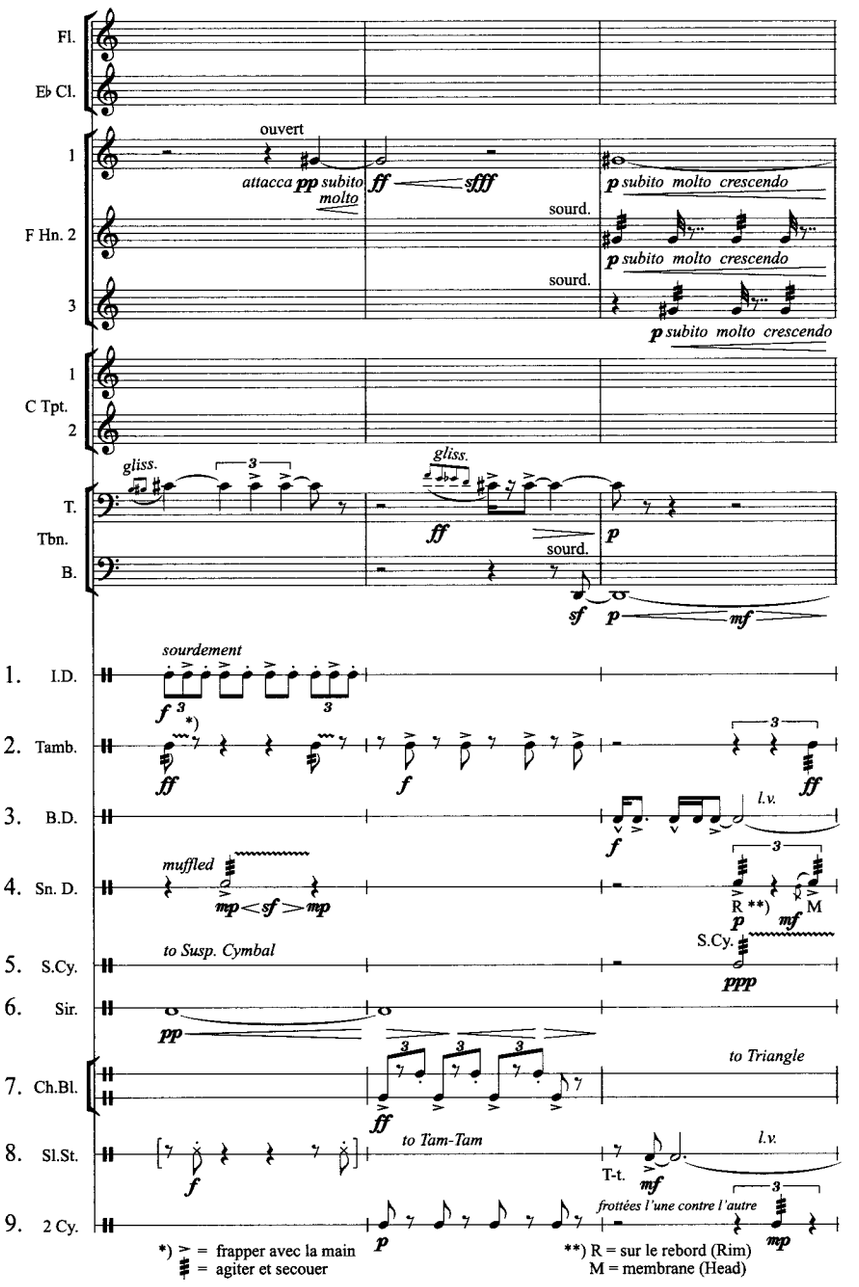
The architect Le Corbusier's remark that "Manhattan is hot jazz in stone and steel" reflected the increasing racial heterogeneity of city life in the United States, a consequence of the massive northward migration of blacks in the 1920s. These racialized connotations of the Machine Age underlie the ballet *Skyscrapers* (1926) by the American composer John Alden Carpenter, a musical representation of the New York skyline's transformation in the years leading up to the completion of the Empire State Building in 1931. The manic opening closely resembles Antheil's work, while later sections include interludes of jazzlike music as well as an extended banjo solo.

JAZZ, RACE, AND THE NEW MUSIC

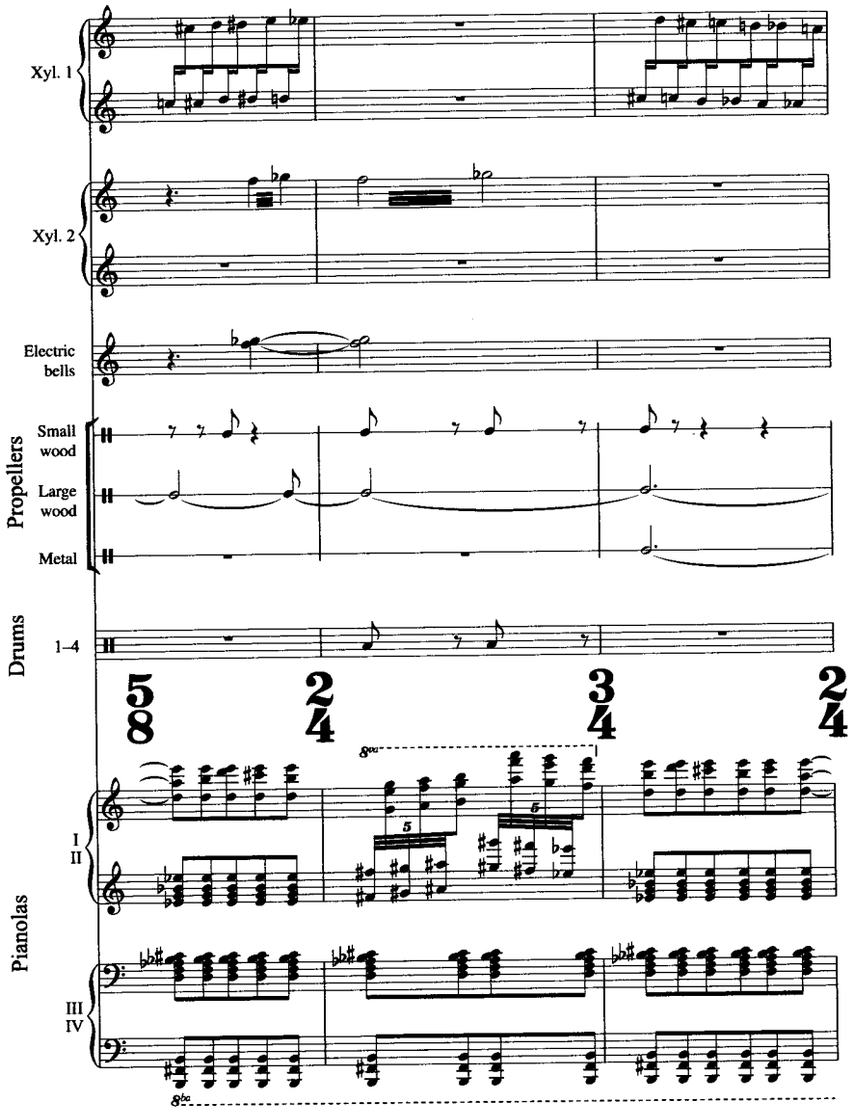
Jazz, whose rich history and legacy lie outside the scope of this book, was an important influence on many of the composers we will study. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band began releasing records in 1917 and toured widely in the United States and England. Bix Beiderbecke, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Paul Whiteman, and other accomplished jazz musicians, both black and white, developed a range of popular styles, often in association with new dance forms (for example, the Lindy Hop, named in honor of Charles Lindbergh, featured acrobatic moves and aerial effects).

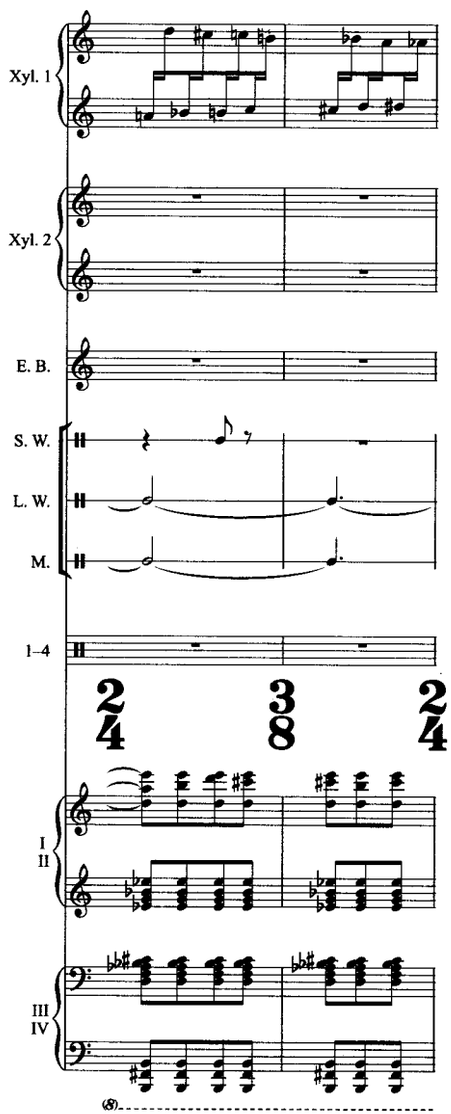
Example 5.1: *Edgard Varèse,* Hyperprism, *mm. 1–5*





Example 5.2: *George Antheil,* Ballet mécanique, *mm. 6–10*





American jazz quickly made its way to Europe through recordings and live performances. A popular dance band called the Harlem Hellfighters was formed by a group of African-American soldiers stationed in France after the war. The French composer Darius Milhaud, who had traveled to London eager

to hear a jazz band "straight from New York," was impressed by its innovative sound:

> The new music was extremely subtle in its use of timbre; the saxophone breaking in, squeezing out the juice of dreams, or the trumpet, dramatic or languorous by turns, the clarinet, frequently playing in its upper register, the lyrical use of the trombone, glancing with its slide over quarter-tones in crescendos of volume and pitch, thus intensifying the feeling; and the whole, so various yet not disparate, held together by the piano and subtly punctuated by the complex rhythms of the percussion, a kind of inner beat, the vital pulse of the rhythmic life of the music.

European musicians soon got into the act by forming their own jazz ensembles, such as Stanley Weintraub and the Syncopators, featured in the Marlene Dietrich film *The Blue Angel* (1930). Jazz solved many of the challenges composers faced in the period between the wars: In addition to speaking to a broader public than "classical" music, it provided a rich repertory of up-to-date rhythms, melodies, harmonies, and timbres that could be incorporated into other musical genres.

Opera, regarded by many as a vestige of a bygone era and threatened with obsolescence by the arrival of sound film, seemed particularly in need of resuscitation through jazz. The title character of *Jonny spielt auf* (Jonny Strikes Up, 1925), by the Austrian composer Ernst Krenek (1900–1991), is an African-American jazz musician (originally performed by a singer in blackface) who inspires an ineffectual white Modernist composer named Max. Along with such symbols of modernity as trains, taxis, and radio loudspeakers, Krenek's score includes allusions to jazz and popular dance forms such as shimmy, blues, and tango. Other composers similarly incorporated modern subject matter and sounds into the new genre of the *Zeitoper* (opera of the time).

As we will discuss further in Chapter 6, composers and artists often conflated contemporary African-American culture with stereotypical images of "primitive" Africa. In 1934 Antheil published a racially charged essay arguing that music since the time of Wagner had been energized by two "gigantic blood transfusions—first the Slavic, and, in recent times, the Negroid." In his view Negro music, "hard and as beautiful as a diamond," was the only path to the future. Like machine art, jazz represented the possibility of a new music that was relevant and popular but also masculine and unsentimental. Krenek described the meaning of all the modern technologies that were featured in *Jonny spielt auf* in language that vividly demonstrates how these disparate ideas of the new music, the New Objectivity, machine art, jazz, race, Primitivism, and the modern world could be jumbled together:

> Showing these completely soulless machines is the shortest way of demonstrating the antithesis which inspires the piece—the antithesis between man as a "vital" animal and man as a "spiritual" animal—as incarnated in the diametrically opposed figures of Jonny and Max. In this sense Jonny is actually a part of the technical-mechanical side of the world; he reacts as easily, as gratifyingly exactly and amorally as a well-constructed machine. His kingdom is of this world, and as a matter of course he is the one who gains mastery over life here below, over the visible globe. He is in direct contrast to Max, who, starting out from spirituality, never comes to grips with problems he is set by external life, which is so attuned to vitality today.

In this deeply problematic formulation, which depends on racist assumptions widespread at the time, we can see some of the limitations and prejudices that shaped responses by composers, performers, and audiences to the challenges they faced in the radically transformed cultural, social, and political terrain after World War I.

Krenek's opera ends with Jonny standing on top of a globe while a dancing mob below sings, "The radiant New World comes across the sea to take over old Europe through dance." The image strikingly anticipates the conclusion of *Lindbergh's Flight*, which celebrated another hopeful arrival of the New World, bringing new kinds of art for new kinds of people. But just as the sight of a plane flying overhead can arouse for us today both optimism and anxiety, Jonny's moment of triumph also brings to mind the familiar metaphor for these years of "dancing on a volcano." For all their excitement and vitality, the 1920s and 1930s were also marked by many ominous developments that set the stage for the Second World War and its Cold War aftermath.

FOR FURTHER READING

Auner, Joseph, "Soulless Machines and Steppenwolves: Renegotiating Masculinity in Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*," in *Siren Songs*, edited by Mary Ann Smart, 222–236 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000)

Cook, Susan C., *Opera for a New Republic: The Zeitopern of Krenek, Weill, and Hindemith* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988)

Hailey, Christopher, "Rethinking Radio: Music and Radio in Weimar Germany," in *Music and Performance during the Weimar Republic*, edited by Bryan Gilliam, 13–36 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

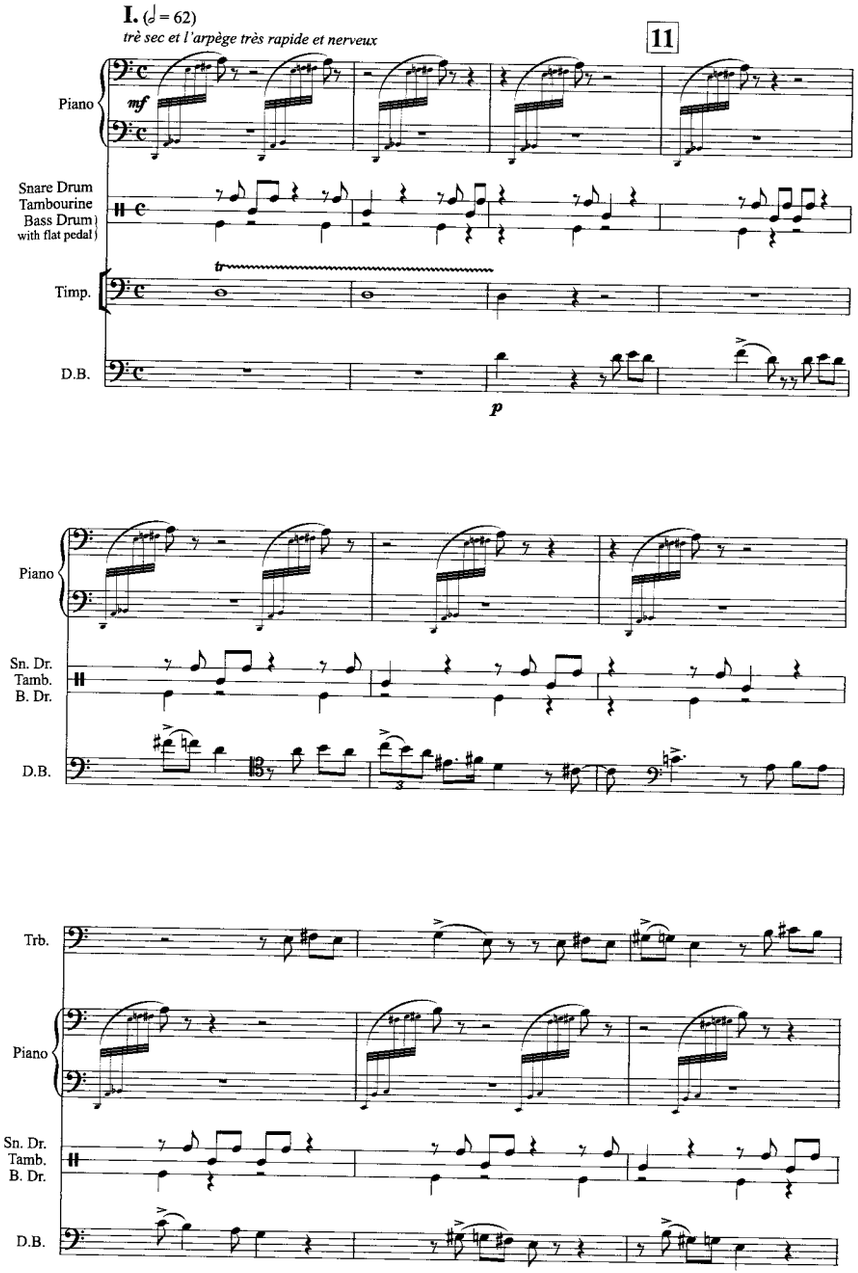
THE ART OF THE EVERYDAY

Stravinsky, Satie, Milhaud, and others employed elements of jazz and popular music in much the same way, manipulating them while at the same time holding them at arm's length. The intent was not to write actual jazz or popular music, but to incorporate "everyday" material to give their music greater relevance, vitality, and modernity. Here, too, *Parade* was seen as leading the way; Poulenc wrote of the work that for the first time the music hall had "invaded Art with a capital A." Satie evoked popular styles primarily through a collage of short fragments of simple tunes, familiar chord progressions, and dance rhythms. The only substantial quotation in *Parade* is from "That Mysterious Rag" by the American composer Irving Berlin. Appearing in the "Little American Girl" section, the quoted passage stands out sharply from the surrounding music due to the length of the song's melody, balanced phrase structure, and conventional harmonic motion.

In many cases, composers took the art of the everyday and set it even further apart by integrating it within the very different contexts of eighteenth-century styles and forms. The first movement of Ravel's Piano Concerto in G incorporates a Gershwinesque second theme, with blue notes and jazzy instrumentation, into a full-scale sonata form (see Anthology 9). This appears, in turn, as the first movement of a concerto in its "Classical" formulation, with three movements organized as fast, slow, fast and concluding with a rondo. Ravel had long been interested in jazz and had included a blues movement in his Sonata for Violin and Piano (1927). In 1928 he undertook a four-month concert tour of the United States that included a visit to New York, where he published an article titled "Take Jazz Seriously!" He also had an opportunity to meet Gershwin, and shortly after his return to Paris he heard the American's *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) for piano and orchestra, an important early effort to create a "highbrow" jazz suitable for the concert hall.

One of the most striking fusions of jazz, eighteenth-century allusions, and Primitivism is Milhaud's ballet *La création du monde* (The Creation of the World, 1923). After a short introduction, a four-voice fugue based on a syncopated, bluesy theme is played first by a solo double bass, then by trombone, saxophone, and trumpet. Milhaud creates a polymetric effect similar to his technique of polytonality by superimposing the melody in four beats per measure on top of an accompaniment played by piano and percussion in triple meter (Ex. 6.4). The fugal passage ends up sounding something like an improvisatory Dixieland band, and this is precisely the point, as is clear from Milhaud's description of a performance by Jean Wiéner and the banjo and saxophone player Vance Lowry: "Without any transition these two would pass from fashionable ragtime and fox-trots to the most celebrated works of Bach. Besides syncopated music calls for a rhythm as inexorably regular as that of Bach himself."

Example 6.4: *Darius Milhaud,* The Creation of the World, *movement I, mm. 1–10*



JAZZ AND "THE PRIMITIVE"

Cocteau's essay *Cock and Harlequin* points to more troubling implications of such stylistic fusions. In explicitly racist terms, Cocteau wrote:

> The music hall, the circus, and American negro bands, all these things fertilize an artist just as life does. To turn to one's own account the emotions aroused by this sort of entertainment is not to derive art from art. These entertainments are not art. They stimulate in the same way as machinery, animals, natural scenery or danger. (SR 171:1292; 7/2:22)

Milhaud's *Creation of the World* offers insight into the French fascination with what was then known as *l'art nègre* (black art). Like Primitivism and Exoticism before the war, *l'art nègre* was shaped by racial stereotypes and pervasive ideas of cultural evolution that placed Europeans at the culmination of human development and "primitives," governed by primal forces and sexual vitality, somewhere earlier along the continuum. Yet as we noted in connection with Krenek's opera *Jonny spielt auf* (see Chapter 5), the new element after the war was the peculiar fusion of African and Polynesian tribal art with an enthusiasm for African-American musical forms, including ragtime and jazz.

Thus it did not seem incongruous at the time for Milhaud in *The Creation of the World* to combine the melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and instrumentations of American jazz with a scenario based on African creation myths collected by the Swiss-French poet Blaise Cendrars. Cocteau proclaimed that Cendrars was the "one among us who best embodies the new exoticism. Mix of motorcars and black fetishes." The Cubist painter Fernand Léger drew on African sculpture for the ballet's backdrop, which showed three gods overseeing the act of creation, as well as for the props and costumes depicting the successive stages of creation: first plants, then animals, then a man and woman who enact a dance of desire (Fig. 6.3). The choreography was by Jean Börlin, who had made a name for himself performing African dances in ostensibly authentic costumes.

To varying degrees, all the collaborators were pursuing an ideal of ethnographic accuracy, while no doubt sincerely attempting to celebrate their African and African-American sources. Yet the ultimate effect of *The Creation of the World* was to perpetuate Primitivist myths and flatten out any sense of the dancers' individuality or humanity. Léger described the purpose of his stage design as making man "a mechanism like everything else: instead of being the end, as he formerly was, he becomes a means." A similar transformation takes place over the course of the jazz fugue, which mutates into an increasingly chaotic and dissonant mass of sound that evokes Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.

This Primitivist reimagining of jazz took place in spite of a considerable African-American presence in Paris, including groups like the Harlem Hellfighters (see Chapter 5). The extent to which jazz was viewed through the distorting prism of *l'art nègre* can be seen in the popular stage show *La revue*

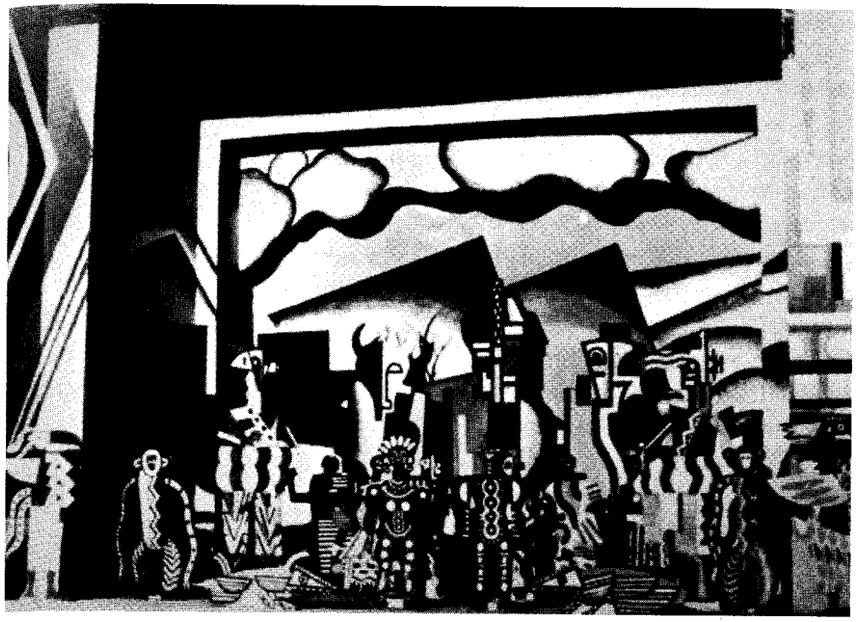


Figure 6.3: *Fernand Léger's costumes and backdrop for Darius Milhaud's* The Creation of the World

nègre (The Black Revue, 1925), starring the St. Louis–born singer and dancer Josephine Baker. During rehearsals for the elaborate production, the French directors encouraged the African-American performers to dispense with their carefully choreographed swing dance routines in favor of "authentic" Primitivist numbers such as Baker's *Danse sauvage*, which she performed in a skirt made of bananas. Baker, who had previously performed in Ellington's "jungle" shows at New York's Cotton Club, capitalized on the vogue for *l'art nègre* by leading a pet leopard through the streets of Paris and appearing in successful films like *Princess Tam Tam* (1935), in which she played a Tunisian woman brought to Paris disguised as a princess from India.

Baker's strange conflation of identities in the film demonstrates how *l'art nègre* made little distinction between sources from Africa, Polynesia, and North and South America, and Parisian composers were no exception to its influence. Milhaud spent the years 1916–18 in Rio de Janeiro as secretary to the writer Paul Claudel, who was serving as a government official. His exposure to Brazilian popular music bore fruit in *Le boeuf sur le toit* (The Ox on the Roof, 1919), which quoted from and celebrated the works of a number of well-known Brazilian composers. Yet back in Paris Milhaud worked with Cocteau in 1920 to transform the orchestral work into a nonsensical ballet set in Prohibition-era America and featuring as its characters a "Boxer," a "Negro Dwarf," a "Lady of Fashion," and a "Red-headed Woman, dressed as a man."

Danzón cubano for two pianos (1942), based on a stately Cuban folk dance, was another outgrowth of his desire to foster a pan-American culture. As we will see in Chapter 9, however, the Cold War fundamentally changed attitudes toward these and other such efforts, with damaging ramifications for the careers of Copland, Robeson, and many others.

STILL AND THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

The lone African-American composer represented in *American Composers on American Music* was William Grant Still (1895–1978), who contributed the essay "The Afro-American Composer's Point of View." At home in both the classical and jazz worlds, Still depicted various aspects of the African-American experience in such compositions as the song cycle *Levee Land* (1925), the cantata *And They Lynched Him on a Tree* (1941), and a trilogy of programmatic orchestral works: the *Afro-American Symphony* (1930), the Symphony in G Minor, subtitled *Song of a New Race* (1937), and the symphonic poem *Africa* (1928–35).

Born in Alabama into a musical family, Still spent his early years in Little Rock, Arkansas, where he learned to play the violin and oboe and aspired to become a composer. His studies at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music were interrupted by his service in the Navy during World War I. He then went to Memphis to play in the band of the noted blues composer W. C. Handy. Following Handy's band to New York, Still built a career writing orchestral arrangements for theater and radio, and later film and television. At the same time he pursued his interest in composition, influenced by both the traditional idioms of George Whitefield Chadwick, with whom he studied in Boston, and the Ultra-Modernist approach of Varèse, who gave him composition lessons in New York.

Still achieved his first major success with the *Afro-American Symphony*, which was performed by major orchestras in the United States, Europe, and Japan. He described the work's four movements as a narrative tracing the elevation of the "sons of the soil" from "Longing" and "Sorrow" to "Humor" and "Aspiration." His conception of the African-American experience was shaped in part by writers and artists associated with the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s, including Alain Locke and Langston Hughes. Still's attitude toward African-American musical materials, particularly the distinctive melodic and harmonic aspects of the blues that was so important to his works, also can be linked to the racialized frameworks of Exoticism and Primitivism discussed in previous chapters.

Though to very different ends than a figure like Cocteau (see Chapter 6), Still implies a Primitivist distinction between the "natural and deep-rooted feeling for music, for melody, harmony, and rhythm" he associated with African-American blues and jazz, and the more "intellectual" conventions and techniques of classical

music: "Our music possesses exoticism without straining for strangeness. The natural practices in this music open up a new field which can be of value in larger musical works when constructed into organized form by a composer who, having the underlying feeling, develops it through his intellect." Still's approach to this synthesis can be seen in his use of standard forms in the *Afro-American Symphony*, such as sonata form in the first movement and a scherzo in the third. It is also illustrated by Still's combination of traditional developmental techniques and his richly chromatic, jazz-inflected harmonic language.

Still's notes on the three sections of *Africa—Land of Peace, Land of Romance,* and *Land of Superstition*—suggest the piece's links to the notion of invented traditions: "An American Negro has formed a concept of the land of his ancestors based largely on its folklore, and influenced by his contact with American civilization. He beholds in his mind's eye not the Africa of reality but an Africa mirrored in fancy, and radiantly ideal." As Still points out, there is little reference in the work to actual African music beyond the evocation of drumming at the beginning of the first movement, which owed more to the "jungle" style of jazz heard in Harlem's Cotton Club than to any specific African sources.

Land of Romance opens with a languorous blues theme accompanied by lightly strummed chords in the piano anchored by an open-fifth pedal in the low strings (see Anthology 14). The orchestration clarifies the complex texture as other layers are added to the melody in the solo bassoon, with each layer given its own distinctive sound, including interjections from a harp and a countermelody by a flute chorus. Still attributed his approach to instrumentation to jazz, which offered "an entirely new style of orchestration." As he wrote in 1939, "Jazz (as one black form) has given one important thing to American music as a whole: great variety and charm in instrumental effects that were unknown to classic composers." But as the *Land of Romance* continues Still also introduces elaborate developmental techniques, passages that evoke the orchestral scores of Debussy and Ravel, and progressions that fuse jazz harmonies with Wagner's "Tristan" chord, as if to overcome the assumptions of incompatibility and difference that defined Debussy's *Golliwogg's Cake-Walk* (see Chapter 1).

The first version of *Africa* was premiered by the Rochester Philharmonic in 1930, followed by other performances across the United States and in Europe. The coming years brought Still wide attention, awards, commissions from major orchestras, and many "firsts." Among other distinctions, he was the first African-American composer to have an opera produced by a major opera company. *Troubled Island*, presented by the New York City Opera in 1949, was based on a libretto by Langston Hughes about the 1791 revolution that ended slavery in Haiti. Despite the enthusiastic reception, however, the opera had only three performances; like many other African-American composers at the time, Still had difficulty getting his works performed and published. With the exception of the belated premiere in 1972 of *Treemonisha* (1910), by the ragtime composer-

pianist Scott Joplin, it would be nearly 40 years before another opera by an African-American composer was staged by one of the major houses: Anthony Davis's *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, which premiered in 1986 at the New York City Opera (see Chapter 13).

MCPHEE'S IMAGINARY HOMELAND IN BALI

The music of the Canadian composer Colin McPhee (1900–1964), also featured in *American Composers on American Music*, offers a very different model for creating a musical style in its fusion of classical techniques, Indonesian gamelan music, and the rhythms and harmonies of jazz. Along with Henry Cowell and Lou Harrison, McPhee helped invent a cross-cultural tradition that bore fruit in the Minimalism and Postminimalism of the late twentieth century (see Chapter 14); the World Beat and Afrobeat of pop musicians like Youssou N'Dour, Paul Simon, and Peter Gabriel; and the global border crossings by today's emerging generation of composers (see Chapter 15).

The gamelan, as we saw in Chapter 2, has inspired composers ever since the 1889 Universal Exposition in Paris. But for McPhee the music and culture of Bali played a more profound role as a kind of invented homeland offering both artistic and personal fulfillment. During World War II he reflected on the years he spent on the island: "Everyone carries within him his own private paradise, some beloved territory whose assault is an assault on the heart. Some felt this when Paris was taken, others when Britain was bombed. For me it was Bali, for I had lived there a long time and had been very happy." Yet the life of privilege that McPhee experienced in Bali was to some degree an artificial reality. Nor was the island paradise free of conflict: it had been forcibly colonized by the Dutch, whose arrival in 1906 was greeted by the mass suicide of members of the royal families.

McPhee devoted over half his life to gamelan music, as both scholar and composer. His book *Music in Bali* (1966) remains an important resource, and he is credited with not only reenergizing gamelan traditions in Bali, but also establishing the foundation for the now-thriving gamelan scene in many North American colleges and universities. Some of McPhee's gamelan-inspired works remain close to the original sources; his *Balinese Ceremonial Music* (1934), for example, is essentially a transcription for two pianos of well-known examples from the gamelan repertory. The piece illustrates his talent for evoking with Western instruments what he described as the "strange beauty of the sound" of the bronze gamelan percussion orchestra. But McPhee's most famous piece, *Tabuh-tabuhan: Toccata for Two Pianos and Orchestra* (1936), is remarkably eclectic, bringing together many of the elements discussed in this and previous chapters. According to his program note from the score: