MUSIC IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

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through collage and other forms of repurposing. In 1917 the French artist Marcel Duchamp famously scandalized the art world by presenting a urinal as a sculpture sardonically entitled *Fountain*.

THE NEW MORALITY OF THE ROARING TWENTIES

This sense of rupture from traditional values and beliefs permeated many aspects of life. Hyperinflation in Germany, which made the currency practically worthless, turned Weimar society on its head by punishing those who had scrimped and saved while rewarding those who lived for the moment. Widespread food shortages and the collapse of normal channels of distribution forced even law-abiding citizens to trade on the black market. In the United States, the enactment of Prohibition in 1919 led illegal speakeasies to flourish. Social and moral structures were further undermined by the unrestrained speculation, corruption, and get-rich-quick schemes that fueled the precipitous economic growth of the Roaring Twenties, and then led to its collapse in the devastating worldwide depression of the 1930s.

No musical genre commented more effectively on the new morality, or lack of it, than the mordantly satirical songs popularized in the cabarets of Berlin and other German cities. "Alles Schwindel" (It's All a Swindle, 1931), by the cabaret and film composer Mischa Spoliansky and lyricist Marcellus Schiffer, made light of the country's pervasive criminality. Not only do "Papa" and "Mama" swindle, the song claims, but so does "Grandmama" and even the family dog: "Nowadays the world is rotten / honesty has been forgotten / Fall in love but after kissing / check your purse to see what's missing."

As "Alles Schwindel" suggests, the postwar years also saw significant changes in the relationship between the sexes. Despite a decline in organized women's movements compared to the first decade of the century, the 1920s and 1930s were the heyday of the New Woman, as women shifted in the workforce from farm and domestic employment to urban industry and the service sector. Women also played a larger role in politics; the constitution of the Weimar Republic gave them the right to vote in 1919, and the United States followed suit the next year. Increasing mobility and visibility brought a range of new images of and by women, from the representations of the urban poor by female artists such as Käthe Kollwitz and Hannah Höch to the "modern" young woman with short bobbed hair in the photograph *Secretary at West German Radio in Cologne* (1931) by August Sander (Fig. 5.2).

THE NEW OBJECTIVITY

The "New Objectivity" (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) that developed between the wars in music, painting, architecture, and literature was defined by a rejection of the intense emotions and subjectivity that characterized both Romanticism

Figure 5.2: *August Sander,* Secretary at West German Radio in Cologne *(1931)*

and Expressionism (see Chapter 3). In his essay "Women and the New Objectivity" (1929), the Czech literary critic Max Brod wrote of the "hard, cold, masculine tone" that characterized recent literature and music. He attributed it to the disillusionment of the younger generation, who as a result of the war had "justifiably learned to mistrust everything that partook of the passions of the heart."

The new fashion was for irony, sarcasm, parody, or simply no emotion at all. The American composer George Antheil, discussed further later, wrote in his memoir *Bad Boy of Music* (1945) that living in Berlin after World War I had served "to house-clean out of me all the remaining old poesy, false sentimentalism, and overjuicy overidyllicism. I now found, for instance, that I could no longer bear the mountainous sentiment of Richard Strauss or even what now seemed to be the fluid diaphanous lechery of the recent French impressionists." The music Antheil liked best was Stravinsky's, which he described as "hard, cold, unsentimental, enormously brilliant and virtuous." As we will see in Chapter 6, Stravinsky became a standard bearer for the idea that music was "essentially powerless to *express* anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, or a phenomenon of nature."

Brecht's dispassionately factual text for *Lindbergh's Flight* illustrates the new desire for clarity, simplicity, and objectivity. The pilot's description of the plane and the preparations for his flight are hardly the stuff of great poetry, and that is precisely the point. In this and other works, Brecht sought to elicit a detached response from the audience so that the artwork became less an entertainment than a "lesson" (*Lehrstück*). Indeed, the subtitle of *Lindbergh's Flight* was *Radiolehrstück*, underscoring Brecht's goal of encouraging listeners to learn from the performance by reflecting on their own situations.

One of the most famous products of the anti-Romantic reaction is *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Threepenny Opera, 1928), which attracted crowds in thousands of performances across Europe and the United States. In this satirical theater piece, Weill and Brecht skewer all sectors of society; the main character, Mack the Knife, is a murderous criminal who develops a strong attraction to Polly Peachum, the daughter of a couple who make their living running a racket of fake beggars. Instead of celebrating love, the opera's songs mock sentimental romance.

The Threepenny Opera is modeled on a work written exactly two centuries earlier, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) by the British composer John Gay (1685–1732). Gay was satirizing the dominant opera composer of his time, George Frideric Handel, whose work enjoyed a major revival during the Weimar Republic. In the postwar years, the clarity and logic of Handel's music (and even more significantly of J. S. Bach's) offered a welcome escape from subjectivity and emotion. We will return in Chapter 6 to the revival of Baroque and Classical forms and genres that was central to the Neoclassicism of the 1920s and 1930s.

The New Objectivity also influenced performance by fostering a rejection of what came to be regarded as overly effusive Romantic interpretations, marked above all by the constant use of rubato. The new fashion was for strict metronomic tempos, particularly in the performance of Baroque music. Stravinsky and others left no doubt that these practices, as well as the move away from the large orchestras of the nineteenth century, were intended to repudiate the expressivity of Romanticism. "Now, I go back to Bach," he wrote, "not Bach as we know him today, but Bach as he really is. You know now they play Bach with a Wagner orchestra and make him sound very pleasant, so people will like him."

An equally important influence on the performance of both early and modern music was the steady time kept by the rhythm sections of jazz and dance bands. We can also see the influence of the New Objectivity in the appeal to many composers of the player piano, which accounted for more than half of total piano sales in the early 1920s, both because of its precision and because it removed the element of interpretation from performance. Stravinsky prepared definitive versions of many of his works for the mechanized instrument, and Antheil brought player pianos on stage as an integral part of his *Ballet mécanique* (see p. 94).

RADIO, RECORDING, AND FILM

Novel technologies also had a far-reaching impact on musical composition, performance, and reception between the wars. By the time of the broadcast of *Lindbergh's Flight* in 1930 there were over three million radio receivers in Germany. The gramophone, which used flat lacquer discs rather than the cylinders of Edison's phonograph, experienced equally explosive growth; in the United States in 1927 alone nearly one million phonograph players were sold, along with more than one hundred million discs. In contrast to the state-controlled radio stations in Europe, radio in the United States was developed by what soon became major media corporations, including RCA (Radio Corporation of America) and NBC (National Broadcasting Company), founded in 1919 and 1926, respectively. After many years of experimentation and competing technologies, film with a synchronized sound track hit the mainstream in 1927 with *The Jazz Singer,* starring the popular blackface performer Al Jolson. Many of the composers we will discuss in the following chapters wrote film scores; for some it even became an important focus of their work.

Weill was involved with radio from early in his career, starting in 1925 as chief critic for a weekly radio magazine. He and many others viewed radio as an important tool for creating new music and reaching new audiences; works like *Lindbergh's Flight,* Weill believed, represented "an independent and valid art form." He wrote in 1926:

> We can see the artistic significance of radio only in the development of this specifically radio art, not at all in the continuation of the existing concert life. . . . For only radio can replace those more superficial formal concerts, which have become superfluous, by a worthwhile and really fruitful mass art: it alone can guarantee that widest dissemination which will produce the artistic public of the future.

Seeking to make their music accessible to radio's mass audience, composers like Weill rejected the complexities of prewar Modernism. In an essay titled *Shifts in Musical Production* (1927), Weill wrote that what was required in the new music was "clarity of language," "precision of expression," and "simplicity of emotion" (SR 186:1395; 7/17:125).

Weill's interest in small ensembles, simple textures, sharply defined rhythms, and clear melodies can be attributed in part to the sonic characteristics of early radio technology. Radio's limited frequency range produced a weak bass register, and the obtrusive background noise rendered soft dynamics inaudible. High voices sounded better than low voices, while instruments like the trumpet, clarinet, and saxophone came across better than strings. The phonograph presented its own technological constraints to which composers likewise had to adapt. Thus when Stravinsky wrote his Serenade in A for piano (1925), he made sure that each movement fit the three-minute maximum of a disc turning at the

then-standard rate of 78 revolutions per minute, just as rock bands in the 1950s and 1960s would tailor their songs to the length of the 45-rpm single and today's pop stars keep in mind the 10- to 30-second duration of successful ringtones.

Radio and phonograph technologies allowed a musical performance to travel through space and time to reach listeners wherever they happened to be. Hermann Hesse's novel *Steppenwolf* (1927) features a character who appears sometimes as Mozart and other times as a "Spanish or South American" jazz saxophone player. In a climactic scene involving a radio broadcast of a Handel concerto grosso, the character exclaims:

> Observe how this crazy funnel apparently does the most stupid, the most useless and the most damnable thing in the world. It takes hold of some music played where you please, without distinction, stupid and coarse, lamentably distorted, to boot, and chucks it into space to land where it has no business to be; and yet after all this it cannot destroy the original spirit of the music; it can only demonstrate its own senseless mechanism.

In contrast to this unfavorable view, the German critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin argued in his influential essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) that such technologies represented a fundamental change in the nature of art, the artist, and the audience. Benjamin noted that Western art had traditionally served cult or ritual purposes for the wealthy and powerful, depending on unique objects of great age and value being kept locked away in museums, palaces, or churches. Technologies of reproduction and transmission shattered that tradition by bringing an unlimited number of copies up close to the new mass audience.

For Benjamin this development was both destructive and cathartic: destructive in that all the old Romantic ideas of art such as genius, eternal value, and mystery were lost, together with the inherent value of the unique, original work of art; cathartic in that this painful but necessary process made it possible for art to serve a vastly expanded audience, while reaching each listener in his or her own particular situation. Writing after Hitler's Third Reich had replaced the Weimar Republic—when it seemed that democracy had failed, fascism would triumph, and communism was the only hope—Benjamin believed that art had to engage with the new world:

> For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the "authentic" print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics.

Radio was of special interest to left-wing artists and intellectuals like Benjamin, Brecht, and Weill because it could reach an audience that was not circumscribed by national boundaries. This is underscored in the 1930 broadcast of *Lindbergh's Flight*, which featured introductions to each scene in German, English, and French. Those on the political right saw the potential of radio as well; Hitler remarked that without it the Nazi Party never would have been able to gain control of Germany.

MUSIC FOR USE

Weill's call for a "specifically radio art" marked a major shift away from the Romantic ideology of "art for art's sake," which insisted on art's freedom from a function or purpose other than aesthetic contemplation. The new slogan "music for use" (*Gebrauchsmusik*) required composers to create works tailored to the intended audience's needs and preferences, as well as to the specific medium used (we return to *Gebrauchsmusik* in Chapter 7). In contrast to the Romantic ideal of the divinely inspired and unconstrained artist, composers were once again drawn to the image of the musician as craftsman, with Bach as their favorite model. That Weill and Hindemith originally shared the composing duties for *Lindbergh's Flight* similarly reflects an attempt to move away from individualistic approaches to art. The challenges of actually living up to this ideal are evident in Weill's replacement of all of Hindemith's movements with his own versions shortly after the premiere.

Rather than writing works mainly for the concert hall or the private salon, many composers became involved in music for children and the expanding youth movement, music for workers, and music with specific didactic purposes. Brecht and Weill adapted *Lindbergh's Flight* for use in schools by replacing the solo sections with simplified settings for children's chorus. In subsequent versions, Brecht also sought to downplay the "individualistic" aspects of Lindbergh's feat by portraying it instead as a collective triumph of humanity over adversity. Later, appalled by the aviator's Nazi sympathies, Brecht expunged Lindbergh entirely and changed the title of the cantata to *Der Ozeanflug* (The Ocean Flight).

NEW INSTRUMENTS, THE SOUNDS OF THE CITY, AND MACHINE ART

In the preface to his *1922* Suite, with its popular dance-inspired movements, Hindemith advised pianists to "play this piece very ferociously, but keep strictly in rhythm like a machine. Regard the piano here as an interesting kind of

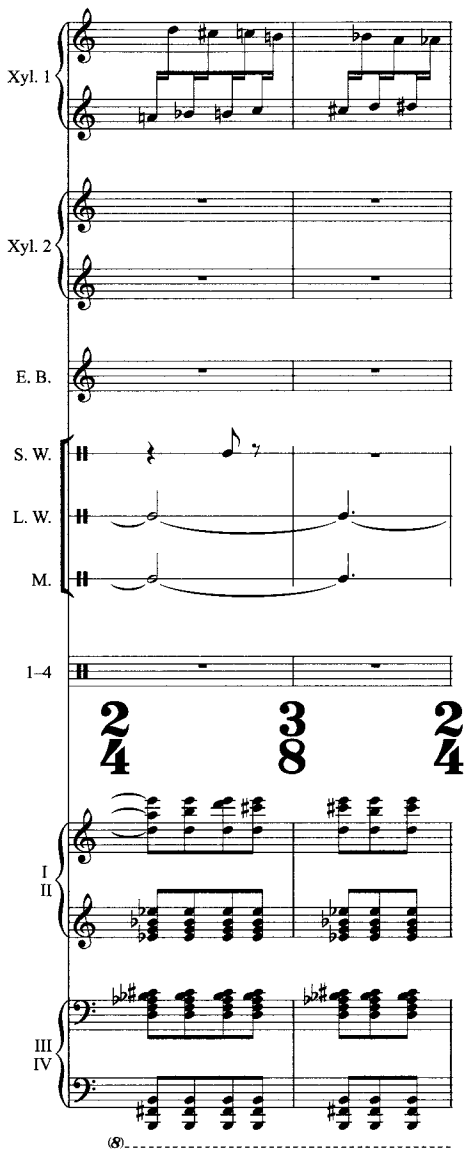
Hall concert was preceded the day before by a performance of *Pacific 231* (1923), by the Swiss composer Arthur Honegger (1892–1955), which vividly captures the sonic effect of a train lurching into motion. At nearby Steinway Hall was the influential Machine Age Exposition that brought together artworks 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).



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

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