The early 20th century was a fascinating time for music, as composers began exploring paths less traveled by their predecessors. One such avenue was atonal music, a radical departure from traditional tonality that defied expectations. Think of composers like Arnold Schoenberg, who broke away from conventional tonal harmony and delivered compositions that kept listeners on their toes.

This era also saw Western music embracing influences from around the globe. A prime example is Claude Debussy, who was profoundly influenced by the sound of gamelan music from Bali and Java. His compositions blend Western and Eastern elements, resulting in a unique musical style that many associate with the impressionist movement.

And let's not forget Igor Stravinsky. His ballet score for "The Rite of Spring" was a game-changer. Stravinsky's daring musical approach in this piece was so revolutionary, that its premiere sparked a riot amongst the audience.

The dawn of the 20th century was a time of fresh ideas and bold experimentation in music, but it was also a time of significant upheaval. World War I, happening from 1914 to 1918, cast a long shadow over the era. The war brought about drastic changes in society, and these shifts were reflected in the music of the time. Composers began to express the complexity of the human experience, including the profound pain and uncertainty brought about by the war.

However, from the ashes of war, a creative spark was ignited. The post-war period saw the emergence of jazz from America, which would later give birth to the Jazz Age. Artists like Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald started making waves with their soulful and innovative sounds, laying the foundation for many popular music genres to come, crafting a distinct and dynamic musical language that was all about feeling and spontaneity. This fusion of various music styles led to the birth of big band swing, which became wildly popular and marked an important milestone in the Jazz Age.

Another crucial development of the early 20th century was the birth of electronic music. This was truly groundbreaking, as it opened up a whole new sound world previously unimaginable. Composers such as Edgard Varèse began experimenting with electronic instruments and new technologies, resulting in unique compositions that broadened the horizons of what music could be. Also worth noting is the Theremin, one of the first electronic musical instruments, invented by Leon Theremin. It was played without physical contact and had a distinctive sound that's often associated with eerie, sci-fi movie soundtracks.

In summary, the early 20th century was an era marked by trailblazing innovations and genre-blending experimentations, resulting in a rich tapestry of musical expressions that continue to influence music to this day.