

Futurism

Futurism was a movement that began in literature, and continued in visual arts and music in Italy at turn of century. After their political unification in mid 19th century, Italians had been waiting for social and cultural rejuvenation. A poet named Marinetti wrote *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism* (1909). The manifesto explains certain ingredients of futurism: reverence for the dynamism of urban life; glorification of speed and velocity; interest in noises of the machine age

- **Music Directly Inspired by Futurism:** Italian painter **Luigi Russolo** wrote manifesto *The Art of Noises* and invented noise machines or intoners; these were the “instruments of the futurist orchestra.” Noises fit into categories:
 1. rumbles, roars, explosions, crashes
 2. whistles, snorts
 3. whispers, murmurs
 4. screeches, creaks, buzzes
 5. percussive sounds (metal, wood, skin, stone)
 6. voices of animals and people
 - Unfortunately the machines were all destroyed in WWII
- Other composers interested in the machines, e.g. Stravinsky was present at a concert of the futurist orchestra in Milan in 1914; later many composers denied this interest for political reasons: certain Futurists were close to Mussolini; Futurism suffered guilt by association
- Stravinsky was fascinated with one application of machines: the **player piano** (brand name **Pianola**); he made transcriptions of many works (*Pulcinella*, *Petrushka*, *Les Noces*)
- **Music Indirectly Inspired by Futurism:** There was some music that used sounds generated by machines, and other music that imitated sounds of machines
 - Actual machines: one example is **George Antheil's *Ballet Mechanique*** (1925): uses airplane propeller, siren

- **Arthur Honegger** (1892-1955) ***Pacific 231*** (1924): a study in rhythm: portrays a train accelerating and slowing down. Title comes from type of locomotive
- Futurism was also popular in **Russia**, e.g. Shostakovich's opera ***The Nose***, about police suppression; has percussion ensemble interlude, then series of noises from Category 6
- A more subtle approach to machine sounds was to make them more abstract but still suggestive of machinery. **Prokofiev** did this in **Fifth Symphony** (mvt. 2), which begins with machine-like perpetual motion
- **More repercussions:** led composers to search for **new sound sources**.
 - Familiar instruments used in unfamiliar ways: **Henry Cowell** (1897-1965) experimented with piano. Early experiments were to get clusters by placing forearm on piano; by the 20's he had developed set of extended techniques: producing harmonics, plucking and scraping strings. Two works which demonstrate: ***The Aeolian Harp*** (1923) and ***The Banshee***.
 - **Edgar Varèse** (1883-1965): very active with innovative ideas about music: had worked with **Ferruccio Busoni** in Berlin: Busoni had very progressive ideas
 - Varèse worked to promote the newest ideas in music, e.g. founded an orchestra in NYC devoted to contemporary music, in 1921 founded International Composer's Guild, whose purpose was to present music (of living composers) that hadn't been performed before
 - Varèse hoped to develop new sound resources based on technology; this wasn't achieved until the 1950's with electronic works. Varèse's earlier works achieved new sounds with more traditional instruments: orchestras and esp. percussion
 - **Musical style:**
 - Melodies limited to 2 or 3 note cells; harmonies very dissonant; harmonies were used repeatedly
 - Used varieties of timbres; e.g. one piece for solo flute; up to large orchestras with unusual wind and percussion instruments from around the world

- He thought of music as shapes which became solid building blocks which piled up in great, spatial juxtapositions
- His use of pitch is unusual compared to other composers.
 - first, he downplayed the importance of melody; rhythm and accent were more important determinants to form than melody
 - expanded concept of pitch: instead of discrete steps, he thought of pitch as being on a continuum, with no steps between. An example is ***Ionisation*** (1931), which uses sirens: pitch with infinite gradations. Scored for 13 musicians to play 37 instruments, mostly percussion
- ***Integrales*** is another early work for winds and percussion, demonstrates some other principles:
 - melody of limited pitch content
 - dense harmonies in building blocks, defined by rhythm and accent more than pitch content