

Western Music, Cosmic Meaning, and the Great War

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The ancient Greeks thought that mathematical laws governed music and the universe, producing the unheard “music of the spheres” from planetary revolutions, and they thought that audible music reflected the physical and spiritual harmony of the entire world.¹ Greek bards celebrated their gods and heroes in music, and Aristotle believed that music affected moral behavior.² The Israelites claimed that David’s harp cured the madness of Saul and their trumpets toppled the walls of Jericho.³ This intimate relationship between music and the universe has permeated Western culture through the ages. In Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, Lorenzo invites Jessica to hear “the sound of music” on a moonlit night:

Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with pattens of bright gold:
There is not the smallest orb which thou behold’st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls
But whilst the muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.⁴

Because music is thoroughly ingrained in Western culture, it can provide a unique insight into the evolving Western perception of the universe—the worldview held by the composer as well as the

¹ E.g., Pythagoras, Plato, and Ptolemy. J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 9th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), 9-14; Plato, *Republic*, 10 (617).

² Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 14; Aristotle, *Politics*, 8 (1340a-b); *Odyssey*, 8 (62-82).

³ Samuel 16:14-23; Joshua 16:12-20.

⁴ *Merchant of Venice*, Act V, Scene 1, lines 58-63.

composer's society and culture.⁵ This article considers key composers from the modern era to assess how the experience of World War I (1914–1918)—the Great War, that axial event in modern Western civilization—affected their perception and depiction in music of cosmic order and meaning.⁶

The modern era, broadly speaking, began with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment: its confidence in autonomous human reason, respect for individual human rights, reliance upon empirical observation rather than pure deduction, and trust in the underlying order and harmony of nature.⁷ Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead maintained that faith in God's rationality, unquestioned for centuries, had assured Enlightenment science that nature's "every detail was supervised and ordered."⁸ That confidence in the divine ordering and supervision of nature permeates Western music from the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic to the *Fin De Siècle* era. But the Great War, asserts intellectual historian Franklin L. Baumer, radically altered this historical Western worldview and caused "a revolution in European thinking almost beyond compare"; the war toppled the old verities and left humanity drifting without traditional guideposts and experiencing an unprecedented sense of "cosmic alienation."⁹ Western music responded to this metaphysical upheaval in various ways—by indicting the culpable society and its culture; exposing pervasive postwar immorality, corruption, and disorder; creating new musical order through neo-classicism and serialism; striving for human authenticity in an indifferent cosmos; and returning to neo-orthodoxy and traditional religion.

⁵ Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 32, 75, 125–26, and forward.

⁶ "August 1914 is the axial date in modern Western history ..." William Barrett, *Irrational Man* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), 28; "The Great War was to be the axis on which the modern world would turn," Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), 237; "The First World War ... altered the ways in which men and women thought not only about war but about the world, about the culture and its expressions ... it changed reality," Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined, The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), xi.

⁷ E.g., James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 1–11.

⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 12.

⁹ Franklin L. Baumer, *Modern European Thought: Continuity and Change in Ideas, 1600–1950* (New York: McMillan Publishing, 1977), 402, 415.

To set the stage for assessing the war's impact on music, consider works created by two composers immediately before and after the Great War: *Pomp and Circumstance* (1901) and the Cello Concerto (1919) by Edward Elgar (1857–1934); and *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1911) and *La Valse* (1920) by Maurice Ravel (1875–1937). Elgar was the first internationally recognized English composer since the death of Henry Purcell (1695). Works like *Enigma Variations* (1899) and *Cockaigne Overture*, subtitled “In London Town” (1901), display his mastery of orchestration and melody. But *Pomp and Circumstance*, Military March No. 1 in D Major, made Elgar enormously famous.¹⁰ Upon hearing its premiere at the 1901 Proms concert, the audience refused to let Elgar continue until he had conducted the work three times. King Edward VII called for creation of lyrics, resulting in *Land of Hope and Glory*; money, honorary degrees, and knighthood (1904) quickly followed.

Elgar's rousing Military March, with its title drawn from Othello's reminiscence of the “Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!,”¹¹ projected England's global might and pride of Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. In August 1918, while recovering from surgery, Elgar began composing his great Cello Concerto (1919), a somber, elegiac, lyric reflection on an irrational and inglorious war. This plaintive solo cello meditation resembles a war requiem for a lost generation; it “represents Elgar's farewell to composition,” according to musicologist Glenn Watkins, “and in a personal way reflects an artist's depression over civilization's futile battles.”¹² By the end of the Great War, *Pomp and Circumstance* had thoroughly tarnished Elgar's musical reputation, branding him for the next four decades as a jingoistic composer, an anachronism of prewar Edwardian chauvinism.¹³

Just before the war and nine years before composing *La Valse*, Ravel composed *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, a series of seven waltzes for piano. The waltzes evoke the exuberance and aspirations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, followed by a wistful epilogue that

¹⁰ Harold C. Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1997), 497.

¹¹ *Othello*, Act 3, Scene 3, lines 351–54 (“Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump, / The spirit-stirring drum, th' ear-piercing fife, / The royal banner, and all quality, / Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!”)

¹² Glenn Watkins, *Proof through the Night: Music and the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 57.

¹³ Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*, 496–98.

suggests this noble world is slowly fading. Right after the war, Ravel composed *La Valse* for Sergei Diaghilev as a dazzling orchestral invocation of the disintegration and death of this Habsburg Empire. The piece begins softly with a slow, subdued waltz that gradually gains amplitude to project the aristocratic pride and arrogance of Old Europe before racing wildly and destructively into its fading twilight. The waltz tempo gradually accelerates and eventually spins out of control in a brassy, fierce, chaotic climax. “At the close of World War I, Maurice Ravel recorded in *La valse* the violent death of the nineteenth-century world,” writes historian Carl E. Schorske. This is “Ravel’s musical parable of the modern cultural crisis”—a compelling musical metaphor for the ruinous fury of the Great War and the postwar collapse of the Habsburg Empire.¹⁴

Composed fewer than twenty years apart, *Pomp and Circumstance* and *La Valse* musically transit the enormous divide in Western civilization from the stable prewar Concert of Europe to the pervasive postwar breakdown of empire, culture, and worldview. This article broadens the musical arc well beyond those pivotal years surrounding the Great War to include music depicting the Western worldview from the Enlightenment through the mid-twentieth century. First, it considers prominent composers from the previous two centuries—from Bach in the High Baroque to Mahler in late Romanticism. Second, the article examines music composed just preceding and immediately responding to the Great War. Finally, the focus turns to music over the three postwar decades exemplifying the Western search for cosmic meaning in the war’s chaotic aftermath.

Musical Worldview: Baroque to Romantic

Bach: Baroque Music and Universe

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) lived during the scientific revolution and birth of the Enlightenment and represents the pinnacle of German musical composition in the Baroque era (1600–1750). Better known in his lifetime as an organist rather than a composer, Bach nevertheless eclipsed all of his contemporaries in

¹⁴ Carl E. Schorske, *Fin De Siècle Vienna, Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 3-4. See also, Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer As Intellectual, Music and Ideology in France 1914-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 136-38. Music critic Alex Ross also likens the brassy ending “with trombones snarling and percussion rattling” to a flapper gin party of the Roaring Twenties. Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise, Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Picador, 2007), 120-121.

mastery of every existing musical form, except opera.¹⁵ For Bach, most musical composition constituted a mode of worship; he began and ended sacred scores with initials JJ and SDG, signifying, respectively, *Jesu Juva* (Jesus, help) and *Soli Deo Gloria* (Glory to God Alone). Although many of his compositions could serve to exemplify his worldview, Bach's treatment of the fugue is uniquely appropriate in this regard, especially his influential fugue masterwork *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (1721). Each volume of this two-volume work of forty-eight preludes and fugues covers all twelve major and minor keys and illustrates the well-tempered (well-tuned) keyboard.

The fugue, with its elaborate surface complexity and underlying structural order, constitutes the quintessentially Baroque musical procedure and, for musicologist Joseph Kerman, "one of the greatest and most characteristic achievements of Baroque music, indeed of Baroque culture altogether."¹⁶ The fugue is a polyphonic composition consisting of two or more equally important melodies played simultaneously; it employs a fixed number of voices or instruments to develop a single theme or fugue subject.¹⁷ In composing *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Bach wanted to show that well-temperament left each key sounding just as in tune as any other, including even rare keys, like C# Major with its seven sharps.¹⁸ In

¹⁵ Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*, 45, 50 ("His vision was greater, his technique unparalleled, his harmonic sense frightening in its power, expression and ingenuity").

¹⁶ Joseph Kerman, *Listen*, 3d ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 1996), 126.

¹⁷ The term fugue is drawn from the Latin *fuga*, meaning "running away"; the fugue subject appears to fly from one voice to the next. The fugue begins with an *exposition*: the first voice prominently announces the fugue subject, which then appears in the second voice, while the first voice develops a derivative melody or countersubject. After introducing the various voices, the exposition transitions into an *episode*, a highly technical development of the subject or countersubject, which is followed by a *restatement* of the subject or countersubject in a different key or voice. This cycle continues with different developmental episodes following different restatements of the fugue subject. *Ibid.*, 126-28.

¹⁸ Until the fifteenth century, Western musical practice consisted of "just intonation" of the seven pitches in the Pythagorean collection, the standard musical octave derived from the ancient Greeks. Just intonation is based upon a second consonant sound after the 1:2 ratio of vibrating strings that constitutes the musical octave, namely, the 2:3 ratio called the perfect fifth—a unique, not just a higher, pitch. From one perfect fifth below and five perfect fifths above the starting pitch, the Greeks developed the other six white notes in the octave. In just intonation, however, the thirteenth pitch of the rising

Fugue No. 3 in C# Major, for example, three keyboard voices—a soprano, alto, and bass—sequentially introduce the fugal subject, a galloping, cheerful, lilting tune. The C# Major fugue alternates between six distinct episodes, each a highly detailed exploration of the fugal subject, and six distinct restatements of the fugal subject, before ending in a final closed cadence.

By thoroughly exploring the melodic potential of its subject, the fugue is rather like a detailed scientific investigation of a single melodic idea. Despite its surface complexity, however, the fugue remains procedurally controlled throughout by a steady rhythm and standard structure—a perfect musical metaphor for the Enlightenment universe of natural complexity and cosmic order. Bach pursued well-temperament based upon the methods of keying instruments developed by Andreas Werckmeister (1645-1706), an organist, musical theorist, and a Lutheran religious philosopher. Werckmeister had a powerful influence on Bach, explains musicologist Hans-Joachim Schultz, because both “were deeply religious, believing in music as a (mathematically expressible) reflection of divine order and purpose.”¹⁹ *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, therefore, was not just a technical study of well-temperament but Bach’s exploration of God’s own voice.²⁰

Haydn & Mozart: The Viennese Classical Style

keyboard collection of perfect fifths is about 1/8 semitone sharp. This lack of true tonality created a keyboard that no longer satisfied the expressive demands of composers like Bach, who used different keys farther from the central key of C major. With equal temperament, however, each fifth is about 2/100 of a semitone flat, but approximately in tune throughout the entire keyboard (Milton Cross and David Ewen, *The Milton Cross New Encyclopedia of the Great Composers and Their Music*, rev. ed. [Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1969], Vol. 1, 37-38). Bach did not employ equal temperament, however, because the know-how for such perfect tuning was lacking at the time, as Andreas Werckmeister acknowledged. Because equal temperament was still only a theoretical concept, Bach’s subjective tuning was just well-tempered. Martin Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach, Life and Work*, trans. John Hargraves (Orlando FL: Harcourt, 2006) 534-35; also, Kyle Gann, “An Introduction to Historical Tunings” <http://www.kylegann.com/histune.html> (accessed January 22, 2018).

¹⁹ Hans-Joachim Schultz, “Bach in the Early Twenty-first Century,” in *The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach*, ed. Raymond Erickson (New York: Amadeus Press, 2009), 303.

²⁰ Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*, 50 (“Bach honestly believed that music was an expression of divinity”).

Enlightenment thinkers started questioning biblical authority, querying whether God was a providential deity or an absentee Creator, and seeking empirical proof of God's existence.²¹ At the same time, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) was seeking social justice for humanity against the corrupting influence of society and disparaging the artificial complexity of Baroque music in favor of tuneful and “natural” music expressive of the human voice.²² With Bach's death in 1750, music began to turn away from the increasing ornamentation and ordered complexity of Baroque polyphony toward the natural simplicity and clarity of homophony, which emphasized one melody and used flexible dynamics and rhythms to achieve “pleasing variety.” This classical music style developed largely in Vienna, capital of the Habsburg Empire and crossroad between Northern Protestantism and Southern Catholicism and between German and Italian music. Haydn and Mozart exemplified the Viennese Classical Style, which reached its high point in the decade of 1780–1790 and epitomized eighteenth-century aristocratic stability and Enlightenment reason—a harmoniously ordered society and universe.

Haydn. Serving for three decades as Kapellmeister (orchestra and choral director) for Vienna's great music patron Hungarian Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) composed symphonies, quartets, concertos, operas, and masses, among other genres, imbued with a new lyrical, harmonic, and expressive content that soon made him the most famous musician of his era.²³ Like Bach before him, Haydn began and ended each new work with praise for the Lord, even as the era's musical focus shifted from the church to the palace and eventually to the concert stage. His Symphony No. 88 in G Major (1787), scored for small orchestra in four movements, typifies the Viennese Classical Style, from its playful, decorative, and tuneful sonata-allegro first movement to its buoyant fourth movement Rondo with its surprising trumpet fanfare finale. Sonata-allegro form presents an exposition of at least two themes, each typically introduced through repetition, conjoined by a modulating bridge, and concluded with the cadence theme. A developmental section follows the exposition, contrasting and re-orchestrating the two themes to heighten the dramatic tension and impart an expressive and narrative character generally lacking in

²¹ Baumer, *Modern European Thought*, 182–200.

²² Kerman, *Listen*, 150–58.

²³ Cross and Ewen, *Great Composers and Their Music*, Vol. 1, 474–75, 468.

Baroque era procedures.²⁴ Haydn's cheerful G Major Symphony responded to the desire of his Enlightenment audiences for natural melody, none more hauntingly beautiful and expressive than his slow second movement Largo.

Mozart. From an early age Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) displayed a prodigious compositional and instrumental talent and produced a remarkable musical output. In 1781, Mozart extracted himself from the position of court musician for the Archbishop of Salzburg to spend his last and most productive ten years in Vienna (1781–1791).²⁵ Mozart's exemplary *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1787), composed a few months after the death of his imperious father Leopold, is a cheerful serenade. It opens with a double-themed march, followed sequentially by a charming romance, a sprightly minuet, and a final rondo. As beautiful as any music Mozart ever composed, *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* has the homophonic expressivity and accessibility of the human voice, satisfying Enlightenment demands of clarity, beauty, and elegance. Like Haydn, Mozart brought a lyrical balance to complementary and contrasting musical ideas and a natural sound to music, intended to please and entertain the growing eighteenth-century middle-class in its pursuit of the good life. Both composers saw the rise of public concerts, away from court and church patronage; the appearance of new orchestras with enlarged woodwinds and brass sections for added harmonic texture, rhythm and dynamics; and the growth of the classical era symphony, expressing to a wider listening public a sense of shared social and cosmic beauty, harmony, and order.²⁶

Beethoven: Musical Revolutionary

Although a student of Haydn, Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) soon abandoned the elegant restraint of the Viennese Classical Style and introduced an unprecedented emotionalism, excitement, and urgency into classical musical genres, especially the symphony. Whereas Bach, Haydn, and Mozart considered themselves skilled musical craftsmen, Beethoven defined himself as a creative artist, superior even to royalty, and his creative originality elevated the musical genre to an accepted form of high art.²⁷ By their length and expressivity, Beethoven's first two symphonies tested the limits of the

²⁴ Kerman, *Listen*, 163–166.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 150–163.

²⁷ Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*, 113–15.

classical symphony, but his powerful Third Symphony (*Eroica* or *Heroic*; 1803–1804) was the turning point in his compositional life and in musical history.²⁸ *Eroica* displayed unprecedented harmonic complexity, compositional intensity, and personal expressivity as well as a heroic testament to human aspiration and personal courage in confronting his degenerative hearing condition. The six symphonies of his heroic period (Nos. 3-8), in Joseph Kerman's concise characterization, possessed a "rhythmic drive," "motivic unity," and "psychological progression" famously exemplified in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (1808).²⁹ In Movement 1, "Fate knocks at the door" with four hammer-blow notes in C minor, and Beethoven builds the entire symphonic structure on these four notes. Movement 4 concludes the heroic struggle with a C major triumph over Fate.³⁰

Beethoven experienced a religious as well as musical awakening during his heroic period, yet his third period (1818–1827), according to biographer Maynard Solomon, began a still more introspective quest for his "spiritual trinity"—"Humanity, God, and Nature."³¹ *Missa Solemnis* (1822) represents his personal yet universal struggle with doubt and ultimate confession of faith, and the Ninth Symphony (1824) his utopian aspiration for human brotherhood based on divine love. Both works convey an abiding hope for a divine reunion, reflected in Friedrich Schiller's "Ode to Joy" sung in the Ninth Symphony: "Brothers, above the starry vault, there surely dwells a loving Father."³² With its groundbreaking use of solo and choral

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 115-16; Kerman, *Listen*, 208. In an 1802 letter to his younger brothers Karl and Johann (his so-called Heiligenstadt Testament), Beethoven conveyed his suicidal despair upon discovering his progressive hearing loss. Yet he emerged triumphant from this epistolary *cri de coeur*, with a new heroic persona and self-expressive creativity manifested in his breakthrough *Eroica*.

²⁹ Kerman, *Listen*, 207.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 209-214. The quote is attributed to Beethoven.

³¹ Maynard Solomon, *Beethoven*, 2d., rev. ed., (New York: Schirmer Trade Books, 1998), 341-42. According Beethoven biographer Jan Swafford, Beethoven was in "unconventional deist" who revered "nature as the true scripture, the immediate revelation of divine grace and order"; as he aged, however, Beethoven "turned toward faith in a God who was present and all-seeing, who listened to prayers (though none of this was anathema to deists)." Jan Swafford, *Beethoven, Anguish and Triumph* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 51, 739.

³² Solomon, *Beethoven*, 404, 409, quoting Schiller's "Ode to Joy." Swafford considers *Missa Solemnis*, not a triumph of faith, but an expression of "Beethoven's personal faith as an individual reaching toward God, not an

voices, the Ninth Symphony, for the Romantics like Wagner and Mahler, constituted the essential Beethoven—"a defiance of form, a call for brotherhood, a titanic explosion, a spiritual experience."³³ Early critics like Adolph Bernhard Marx in *Idealmusik* (1859) thought Beethoven had elevated music to the level of spiritual revelation, universal ideal, and divine manifestation.³⁴

Wagner & Mahler: Romanticism

After Beethoven's death in 1827, Classicism faded as Romanticism flourished in music—part of a wider cultural protest against Enlightenment rationalism and empiricism and toward a personal search for deeper understanding of the human condition through intuition rather than reason and through self-discovery and self-transcendence rather than rational endeavor. Romanticism replaced "the abstract and authoritative character of classicism" with "an effort to create order out of the experience individually acquired," writes cultural historian Jacques Barzun. Romanticism sought to achieve direct union with God and creative work for humanity: "it combines the infinite worth of the individual soul in its power and weakness, the search for union with the infinite, and the gospel of work for one's fellow man."³⁵ Two giants of the Romantic era exemplify this personal quest for cosmic meaning through music: Wagner and Mahler.

Wagner. Both the writings and music of Richard Wagner (1813–1883) embody romantic themes: his protest against decadent German culture, especially the theater, and his exaltation of the music-drama for its special redemptive power. To restore culture and drama Wagner championed reintegration of the arts as they coexisted in Greek tragedy—drama, music, and dance reunited in opera, his comprehensive artwork (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). By combining

assertion of the credos and dogmas of the Holy Roman and Apostolic Church." Swafford, *Beethoven, Anguish and Triumph*, 824-25. Beethoven gives answer to his questing faith in the Ninth Symphony: "The last words in the Ninth are 'God-engendered!,' completing the circle of human and divine but firmly planted on earth." *Ibid.*, 854. For Beethoven, "The road to Elysium begins with the enlightenment of each individual, extends to one's brothers and lovers, and from there to the world." *Ibid.*, 855.

³³ Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*, 123.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁵ Jacques Barzun, *Classic, Romantic, and Modern* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1961), 88, 94-95.

words and music in his Ninth Symphony, Beethoven had led the way. Wagner dispensed with dramatic logic and formal symphonic structure of theme, repetition, and recapitulation to create a continuous web of melody that carries most of the dramatic burden and draws the audience into the powerful emotional states of the characters—their suffering, yearning, fear, triumph, and love.³⁶ In 1854, after reading Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), Wagner realized that his own written intellectual musings differed from his intuitive poetic motives in the early operas, which emphasized redemption through “the sublime tragedy of renunciation [and] the negation of the will.”³⁷ Wagner quickly accepted Schopenhauer’s view of music as the primary interpreter of reality and the medium “in which the world immediately displays its essence.”³⁸ He abruptly abandoned his *Ring Cycle* at midpoint to begin composing *Tristan and Isolde* (1859), the most effective expression of his artistic vision and tragic worldview.

Tristan and Isolde contains little dramatic action, as the characters surrender themselves entirely to sensibility: their psychological tensions over life and death, earthly love and unearthly bliss, and ultimate salvation in death. For musicologist Ernest Newman, the opera’s prelude constitutes “the spiritual essence of the drama in a highly concentrated form.”³⁹ From its opening cello motif, the prelude conveys feelings ranging from the pain, resignation, and hopelessness to the passion and ecstasy of love. At the end of Act I, the orchestra again sounds these themes after Tristan and Isolde have drunk the potion expecting death but instead finding love. In the love duet of Act II, these mounting yet unresolved chromatic harmonies continue in the lovers’ paean to day’s illusion and night’s holy truth. Only in the *Liebtestod* at the opera’s end do they achieve resolution, as the restless rising harmonies of the love duet become the slower, serene cadences of love’s mystical acceptance in death. As Joseph Kerman convincingly

³⁶ See generally, Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 683–95; Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*, 268–88. Also see, Richard Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama*, eds. Albert Goldman and Everett Sprinchorn, trans. H. Ashton Ellis (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1964).

³⁷ E.g., *The Flying Dutchman* (1843), *Tannhäuser* (1845) and *Lohengrin* (1848); Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama*, 278–79.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 184, 186.

³⁹ Ernest Newman, *Stories of the Great Operas and Their Composers* (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1930), 99.

argues, *Tristan and Isolde* is a religious drama of “progress towards a state of illumination which transcends yearning and pain” and culminates with the recognition that “love is not merely an urgent force in life, but the compelling higher reality of our spiritual universe.”⁴⁰ Although Wagner was not religious, his philosophical approach to redemption implies something beyond the temporal world where the lovers will reunite and never part.⁴¹

Mahler. One of the last German Romantics and an early Modernist, Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) was not only an extraordinary composer but also the preeminent conductor of his day, leading the Vienna Royal Opera to become the world’s premier musical institution. As a convert from Judaism in Catholic Vienna and a perfectionist in performance preparation, however, Mahler was widely disliked and felt misunderstood and alienated: “I am thrice homeless, as a native of Bohemia in Austria, as an Austrian amongst Germans, as a Jew throughout the world. Always an intruder, never welcomed.”⁴² Mahler focused on composing symphonies rather than operas, but his nine symphonies have a dramatic as well as spiritual character. They dramatize his quest for answers to life’s great questions, about suffering, death, eternity, God, and the nature of

⁴⁰ Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (New York: Vintage, 1956), 194–95.

⁴¹ As Wagner wrote in his Prelude to *Tristan*, “it is the bliss of quitting life, of being no more, of last redemption into that wondrous realm from which we stray the furthest when we strive to enter it by fiercest force. Shall we call it death? Or is it not night’s wonder world, whence—as the story says—an ivy and a vine sprang up in locked embrace o’er Tristan and Isolde’s grave?” Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama*, 273. Wagner was neither religious nor Christian and his metaphysics are vague. But his last opera *Parsifal* (1882) has an indisputable transcendental focus and its Christian mythology induces a powerful individual response and begs a religious interpretation. Owen Lee focuses on the psychic integration of conflicting forces of good and evil in *Parsifal*. (*Wagner: The Terrible Man and His Truthful Art* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007], 24.) Bryan Magee considers the opera entirely Schopenhauerian: denying the will, rejecting the physical world of suffering, and emerging in death into the metaphysical Will. (*Tristan Chord*, 276–285.) And Harold Schonberg calls Wagner’s belief system “a vague pantheism.” (*The Lives of the Great Composers*, 287.) Even Magee, however, recognizes that *Parsifal* is almost entirely focused on “transcendental concerns” that “might be made compatible with an interpretation in terms of Christian mysticism.” (*Tristan Chord*, 276, 279).

⁴² Quoted in Deryck Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to His Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 7.

reality: “all my works are anticipations of a future life.”⁴³ For musicologist Deryck Cooke, Mahler “stepped up the psychological tension in romanticism,” “express[ed] a whole new world of feeling,” and “[made] music take in the whole of life.”⁴⁴ In his first four symphonies (Nos. 1–4), Mahler grapples with the overwhelming cosmos; in his next four (Nos. 5–8), he becomes a musical metaphysician searching for answers to cosmic mystery; and in his last completed symphony (No. 9), he struggles with death and finds an inner and transcendent comfort.⁴⁵

Advised that his heart condition was terminal, Mahler relives his dark night of the soul in Symphony No. 9, beginning with the Movement 1 orchestration of his own weak and fluttering heartbeat and subsequent heart attack. Thereafter, explains Cooke, the symphony transits an “agonized despair, a deep love of life, and a resigned sense of valediction” to a courageous acceptance in the final Adagio.⁴⁶ Mahler died on May 18, 1911, barely three years before outbreak of the Great War. His symphonic works constitute profound spiritual encounters with death and transcendence and provide an illustrative musical evocation of the *fin de siècle* Western worldview. In 1910, Thomas Mann attended the Munich premiere of Mahler’s Symphony No. 8, the so-called *Symphony of a Thousand*, with its powerful opening chorus of the medieval Catholic hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* (Come Creator Spirit) celebrating Christ’s resurrection and humanity’s redemption at Pentecost. Inspired to write Mahler a letter after attending this performance, Mann called Mahler “the man who, as I believe, expresses the art of our time in its profoundest and most sacred form.”⁴⁷ Mahler’s uniquely personal yet universal art expressed the Judeo-Christian worldview in the waning prewar years of the Romantic era.

The Coming of War

Schoenberg & Stravinsky: Prewar Cultural Revolution

The Great War took Europeans by surprise, but *fin de siècle* culture had already conveyed ominous warnings to Europe. The Italian Futurists rejected their Renaissance past and glorified war in F. T. Marinetti’s 1909 Manifesto; the German expressionist Ludwig

⁴³ Cross and Ewen, *Great Composers and Their Music*, Vol. 1, 568.

⁴⁴ Cooke, *Gustav Mahler*, 5, 11, 17.

⁴⁵ Cross and Ewen, *Great Composers and Their Music*, Vol. 1, 569, characterizing symphonic groupings by Mahler biographer Paul Stefan.

⁴⁶ Cooke, *Gustav Mahler*, 114–16.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 9.

Meidner depicted a nightmarish war in two paintings entitled *Apocalyptic Landscape* (1913); and the British writer Thomas Hardy imagined naval gunfire as apocalyptic trumpets calling forth bloody war and final judgment day in the poem “Channel Firing” (1914). The Viennese composer Arnold Schoenberg and the Russian composer Igor Stravinsky portrayed a dark and primitive side of humanity in revolutionary musical works like Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* (Anticipation) (1909) and *Pierrot lunaire* (Moonstruck Pierrot) (1912), and Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps* (The Rite of Spring) (1913).

Schoenberg. In 1908, Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) broke with traditional musical aesthetics by moving away from chromaticism toward atonality and abandoning melody and harmony around a key center. Instead, Schoenberg aimed at “the emancipation of dissonance,” which he thought no longer needed resolution in consonance.⁴⁸ Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* is a dissonant, athematic, expressionist opera for a lone soprano who becomes hysterical, distraught, and terrified upon encountering the dead body of her lover in a dark forest by moonlight. The light–dark, love–death symbolism and the soprano’s final lament recall Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*. But *Erwartung* employs an expressive new idiom without themes or motives, “only isolated gestures, shocks, and outbursts.”⁴⁹ Even more famous and revolutionary is Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire*, which employs five instrumentalists and a soprano who performs *Sprechstimme* (speech-song), that is, vocalizing between speaking and singing. Based on a collection of poems by the Belgian poet Albert Giraud, *Pierrot lunaire* includes the twenty-one songs by Pierrot, the traditional sad clown. Pierrot describes “his obsession with the moon, his onerous frustrations, his neurotic aspirations, his pranks and adventures,” including his own beheading by the moonbeam for his crimes.⁵⁰ *Pierrot lunaire* is groundbreaking

⁴⁸ Robert P. Morgan, “The Modern Age” in *Music and Society: Modern Times, from World War I to the Present*, ed. Robert P. Morgan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 6.

⁴⁹ Schoenberg makes this comparison with Wagner in *The Lives of the Great Composers*, 582. The quotation is from Wolfgang-Andreas Schultz, “Avant-Garde and Trauma: Twentieth-Century Music and the Experiences from the World Wars,” trans. Carola Maack, https://www.wolfgangandreasschultz.de/schultz_avantgarde_en.pdf (accessed November 12, 2017).

⁵⁰ Kerman, *Listen*, 313.

new sound “that inhabits a ghostly, miniature, imagery-ridden world full of blood symbolism.”⁵¹

Stravinsky. Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) is equally revolutionary and prescient with his ballet *Le Sacre du Printemps*, evoking birth and death in pagan bronze-age Russia during brutal prehistoric fertility rites. At its premiere *Le Sacre* startled the Paris audience with its unprecedented percussive, arrhythmic sonority and almost provoked a theater riot. Part 1, “Adoration of the Earth,” opens with a lone bassoon at the top of its register followed by accumulating sounds as various instruments enter to suggest the emergence of plant, insect, and animal life and provide a musical metaphor for nature’s awakening in spring. Abruptly the music shifts into a powerful, discordant, thumping chord repeated thirty-two times in unexpected irregular beats, while a ballet corps of adolescents dance to ever more frantic and violent rhythms. Part 2, “The Sacrifice,” builds from a menacingly quiet to an explosively violent dance of death by the sacrificial virgin, which concludes this groundbreaking music considered “barbaric” by his prewar listeners.⁵²

With Schoenberg’s atonal expressionism and Stravinsky’s arrhythmic primitivism, musical Romanticism had reached its end and a more modern idiom entered the musical aesthetic. As musicologist Robert P. Morgan explains:

Many had come to believe that a more modest conception of the arts was required, one that was more down-to-earth and closer to everyday experience. This view was in direct opposition to attitudes that had prevailed during the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century: the Romantic cult of personality, the preference for extreme subjective expression and emotional effusion, and the idea of art as a sort of substitute religion. Only after the war broke out could a new and unmistakably twentieth-century aesthetic begin to form.⁵³

Midway through the war that new aesthetic emerged.

Satie, Ravel, Stravinsky & Holst: War and Its Immediate Impact

⁵¹ Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*, 583.

⁵² Kerman, *Listen*, 308.

⁵³ Morgan, “The Modern Age” in *Music and Society: Modern Times*, 8.

On August 4, 1914, the principal European nations launched a senseless and disastrous war only thirty-seven days after the June 28 assassination in Sarajevo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife Sophie. “The protagonists of 1914 were sleepwalkers,” writes historian Christopher Clark, “watchful but unseeing, haunted by dreams, yet blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring into the world.”⁵⁴ Upon announcement of war, all the European capitals erupted in wildly supportive crowds, and young men, caught up in the “August Madness,” eagerly volunteered for military service. But the war’s horrific reality manifested itself almost immediately. By August 14, the French suffered their worst casualties and lost many of their best soldiers attacking German fortifications in Lorraine; and by September 14, after the Battle of the Marne, which halted the German invasion, each side had suffered one-half million casualties.⁵⁵ Opposing forces quickly dug in and began industrialized siege warfare along the Western Front, which soon extended from the North Sea to Switzerland, and changed little over the next four years of human carnage.⁵⁶ Combatants eventually came from every continent and fought on every ocean, but the Western Front proved to be the decisive battleground.

Generals on both sides promised victory by Christmas 1914, but the war continued with futile and costly assaults through 1915 and into 1916. Then, on February 21, 1916, the Germans began a massive attack on the French salient at Verdun, costing one half million total casualties for essentially no military gain by either side.⁵⁷ On July 1, 1916, the British Army answered by launching the Battle of the Somme, and suffered its largest single-day losses ever—almost 60,000 casualties, including almost 20,000 dead. By the end of the Somme campaign four months later, the British line had advanced in places a mere five miles, yet both sides to the conflict had endured a combined total of more than one million casualties.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers, How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 562.

⁵⁵ Taylor, *The First World War, An Illustrated History* (New York: Perigee, 1980), 25, 34-35; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 9.

⁵⁶ Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World, Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 116-18.

⁵⁷ Taylor, *The First World War*, 121-26.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

Historian A.J.P. Taylor observed that “idealism perished on the Somme,” yet the war dragged on for another two years.⁵⁹ On April 6, 1917, America declared war on Germany, and in 1918, U.S. “doughboys” entered combat, helping turn the tide of battle. Despite its late entry into the war, the United States still experienced 115,000 military deaths, including more than 26,000 during the Meuse–Argonne offensive in fall 1918—the deadliest battle in U.S. military history. By the Armistice Agreement on November 11, 1918, the Great War had caused almost ten million combatant deaths, averaging 6000 deaths per day over 1500 days, and another fifteen million combat casualties, an almost fifty-percent casualty rate—a terrible toll worsened by millions more civilian deaths and casualties.⁶⁰

Satie. In 1916, the riotous anti-art Dada Movement exploded in Zürich and New York in outrage over the senseless slaughter in an irrational war. Dada was like shock therapy for the culpable bourgeois society and its complicit civilization.⁶¹ Dada spread quickly to Paris, Berlin and other German cities, and even to far-off Japan, as “Dadaists assailed the Western humanist belief in the supremacy of reason, the efficacy of the rational ego, and the essential goodness of human nature.”⁶² Zürich’s Cabaret Voltaire inaugurated provocative, confrontational performances consisting of “phonetic” poetry, riotous dance, constant drumbeats, and music.⁶³ “For the Dadaists,” writes musicologist Robert P. Morgan, “all art, including music, became an essentially negative force, a tool for protest and caricature, for deflating the pretensions and ambitions of the ‘masterpieces’ of the Western artistic tradition.”⁶⁴ Eric Satie (1866–1925) joined Dada’s cultural sabotage by creating “outlandish and

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (Great Britain: Penguin Press, 1998), 295; Richard L. Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History, The Holocaust and the American Future* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1978), 7; Mortimer Chambers, et al., *The Western Experience*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 800.

⁶¹ David Hopkins. *Dada and Surrealism, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 1-2.

⁶² Richard Sheppard, *Modernism—Dada—Postmodernism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 178-79, 183.

⁶³ Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism*, 1-9, 27.

⁶⁴ Morgan, “The Modern Age” in *Music and Society: Modern Times*, 8.

shocking” music for Diaghilev’s Paris ballet *Parade* (1917), which included sets by Pablo Picasso and libretto by Jean Cocteau.⁶⁵

Parade is about low culture supplanting high culture: the managers of a traveling theater try to entice passersby to enter the theater by staging various outside attractions using music hall performers, but the sideshow becomes so enticing that no one enters. Satie’s music for *Parade* is “borrowed liberally from café music and ragtime and used revolver shots and clicking typewriters as essential components of the score.”⁶⁶ *Parade* proved a defining moment in postwar music, for Robert Morgan, because it coalesced among six composers (Les Six) living in Paris, including Satie. Les Six were dedicated to “everyday music” that was “clear in structure, direct in appeal, light in tone and free of the trappings of the concert hall; it was not afraid to draw inspiration from various types of vernacular music.”⁶⁷ The stylistic departure from the unrestrained personal expression of Romanticism soon gave rise to the dominant interwar aesthetic of neoclassicism. The new everyday music was unencumbered by the prewar emphasis on masterpieces and intent on returning to earlier eighteenth-century music, with smaller orchestras, and “a cooler, more detached and hard-edged expressive language.”⁶⁸ Maurice Ravel and Igor Stravinsky produced wartime examples of the new aesthetic, whereas Gustav Holst turned to modernist choral works.

Ravel. Ravel volunteered as a convoy driver at the Verdun Front after being rejected for military service in the French Air Corps because he was only about five feet tall and underweight. After Ravel contracted tuberculosis and was discharged in 1917, he composed a solo piano suite, *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (Memorial for Couperin) (1917), dedicating each of its six movements to a friend killed in the war. Ravel sought to distance himself from wartime trauma by turning to neoclassicism in *Le Tombeau*, which looks back reflectively to the Baroque harpsichord music of Francois Couperin. Each movement employs a traditional classical form: prelude, fugue, minuet, toccata, etc. The final Movement 6, Toccata, to

⁶⁵ Ibid., 9–10. Fulcher characterized Satie’s intent as “seditious” and “a subtle kind of provocation that aimed to expose and ridicule the cultural orthodoxies imposed on artists during the war” (*The Composer As Intellectual, Music and Ideology in France 1914–1940*, 82).

⁶⁶ Morgan, “The Modern Age” in *Music and Society: Modern Times*, 9–10.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 10–11. Les Six notably included Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Arthur Honecker, as well as Satie

⁶⁸ Ibid., 14.

musicologist Glenn Watkins, suggests Ravel's effort to relive his dream of becoming an aviator: "the steep ascent of the aircraft followed by the plummeting dive; a series of swooping spirals; the hypnotic regularity of the engine and propeller, and, when deployed in a series of repeated staccato notes in various ranges, a rain of meticulously coordinated and deadly machine gun fire at both high and low altitudes."⁶⁹ Ravel dedicated the Toccata to Captain Joseph de Marliave, and induced Marliave's widow, the pianist Marguerite Long who had abandoned her career out of grief over her husband's death, to return from retirement and give the premiere in 1919.⁷⁰

Stravinsky. In 1918, Stravinsky composed *L' Histoire du Soldat* (*The Soldier's Tale*) as a small theater piece using a libretto by C. F. Ramus. *Soldier's Tale* calls for a miniature cabaret-sized orchestra (clarinet, bassoon, cornet, trombone, violin, double bass, and percussion)—"the antithesis of his large-scale productions of the pre-war years"—and includes a narrator and three actors: the soldier, the devil, and the princess.⁷¹ The production concerns the soldier's Faustian bargain with the devil, selling his soul in exchange for vast riches. Whether the music was influenced by American jazz as Stravinsky claimed, his use of a "Ragtime" dance to cure the sick princess implicitly recognizes America's contribution to ending the war. *Soldier's Tale* suggests Stravinsky's view that the war itself was a devil's bargain influenced by greed.⁷²

Holst. Like Ravel, English composer Gustav Holst (1874–1934) immediately volunteered for military service only to be embarrassed by his rejection on medical grounds. In May 1914, just before the war, Holst began his most famous work, *The Planets* (completed in 1917), which transits the vast expressive distance from Mars to Neptune, from violent war to infinite space. Astrology and Eastern mysticism, however, not anticipation of war, inspired Holst to compose *The Planets*, with its seven planets arranged over seven

⁶⁹ Watkins, *Proof through the Night*, 178.

⁷⁰ Fulcher, *The Composer As Intellectual*, 68–70; Cross and Ewen, *Great Composers and Their Music*, Vol. 2, 759; Linda Kobler, "The Great War: What a Difference a Day Makes" (National Public Radio, Classical and Popular Selections from the Time of World War I) (New York: Sony Classical, 1999), 13.

⁷¹ Mark Devoto, "Paris, 1918–45" in *Music and Society: Modern Times*, 38.

⁷² Watkins, *Proof through the Night*, 151 (musicologist Richard Taruskin also suggested that it may reflect Stravinsky's dismay that the Bolshevik coup destroyed the liberal promise of the Russian Revolution).

movements in their astrological rather than astronomical order.⁷³ Yet, the first movement, Mars, the Bringer of War, enters with throbbing, repetitive, descending semitones played by the brass in steadily rising volume and culminates in an unprecedented, explosive, and terrifying martial coda. Holst's biographer Michael Short considers *The Planets* "an uncanny premonition of the mechanized warfare" about to envelop the Western Front.⁷⁴

"The waste of life and futility of the war," including the death of numerous friends, motivated Holst to compose and dedicate to them his *Ode to Death* (1919).⁷⁵ In the *Ode* Holst used stanzas from Walt Whitman's elegy for Abraham Lincoln and American Civil War dead, *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*. Neither the chosen words nor the gentle music of the *Ode*, however, express national gratitude or offer spiritual comfort for the countless human sacrifices. Instead, the words express ironic "joy to thee O death" and sardonic "praise! praise! praise! / For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death," reflecting Holst's own ineffable feelings about such needless death.⁷⁶ The serene and heart-wrenching conclusion of the *Ode* offers neither patriotic nor spiritual consolation, nor emotional or spiritual solace for the unspeakable human wastage of the tragic war.

The Postwar World

The Riven Postwar Cosmology

The war decimated a generation of young men, destroyed four great empires, precipitated bloody civil wars throughout Europe, and spawned the militaristic Bolshevik, Nazi, and Fascist ideologies. Bolsheviks instituted a barbaric civil war and *in terrorem* rule in Russia, the Weimar Republic became wracked by violence in Berlin and Bavaria, and a long and bloody civil war erupted in Ireland. How does one talk about cosmic meaning after the Great War?

⁷³ Imogen Holst, *Gustav Holtz, A Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 51.

⁷⁴ Michael Short, *Gustav Holtz, the Man and his Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 123.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 177

⁷⁶ Holst, *Gustav Holtz*, 79. Holst was heavily influenced by Hindu philosophy and religion: "I am Hindu enough to believe that comradeship becomes transmuted into Unity, only this is a matter that lies beyond all words." *Ibid.*, 51; Short, *Gustav Holtz*, 177, 343. Given the tragic loss of his friends on the Western Front, however, Holst's praise of death seems laced with bitter irony.

Perhaps Nietzsche's prewar declaration was right after all: "God is dead," and we are "straying as through an infinite nothing."⁷⁷ Philosophy seemed unable to provide reassurance and largely abandoned metaphysical inquiry: for the logical positivist Rudolf Carnap, metaphysics provides only "the illusion of knowledge" and is merely expressive, "like laughing, lyrics, and music."⁷⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre considered existence to be without inherent meaning and responded with an existentialist quest for personal authenticity. Whereas Sartre accepted cosmic meaninglessness in his existentialist novel *Nausea* (1938), Franz Kafka anguished over the experience of cosmic homelessness in *The Castle* (1926). Ernest Hemingway sought cosmic insight by means of a stoical code of conduct: "All I wanted to know is how to live in it," says Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). "Maybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about."⁷⁹

To address this postwar crisis of cosmic alienation, mainstream Christian and Jewish thinkers turned toward neo-orthodoxy, seeking answers in the Bible as the Word of God.⁸⁰ Karl Barth trumpeted

⁷⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882) in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 95. Before the Great War religious leaders construed Nietzsche's writings as a call for religious reform rather than a challenge to theism per se. Only after the war did Nietzsche become a rallying point for atheistic existentialism and materialism. Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 86, 203–05, 213.

⁷⁸ Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *PHILOSOPHY, History & Problems*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), 425. Martin Heidegger considered metaphysics no longer a matter of academic philosophy, Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* in *Basic Writings from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 111–12. Ludwig Wittgenstein limited philosophy to the logical clarification of thoughts, considered metaphysical speculation philosophical "nonsense," and relegated transcendental and mystical matters to the arts. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (n.p.: Seven Treasures Publications, 2009), secs. 4.111, 4.112. 6.421, 6.522, 6.52.; William Barrett, *Irrational Man* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), 45–49.

⁷⁹ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 148.

⁸⁰ Charles A. O'Connor III, *The Great War and the Death of God: Cultural Breakdown, Retreat from Reason, and Rise of Neo-Darwinian Materialism in the Aftermath of World War I* (Washington DC: New Academia, 2014), 77–100; Charles A. O'Connor III, "Judaism and the Rise of Scientific Materialism after the Great War," *Confluence* XXII, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 101–18

this theme in his famous *The Epistle to the Romans* (1819, 1921) and led a group of German Crisis Theologians urging humanity to recognize God as “wholly other” and approaching God through faith instead of reason.⁸¹ At the same time, a materialist cosmology gained new postwar prominence, maintaining that at bottom the universe consisted only of “senseless, valueless, purposeless” matter reconfigured by indifferent physical and natural laws without transcendent meaning or purpose.⁸² Vladimir Lenin readily embraced that materialist worldview in his atheistic politics and metaphysical philosophy.⁸³ Some of the most powerful and affecting music of the era reflects this riven postwar cosmology.

Weill: Immoral and Godless Society

Spared military service because of his youth, Kurt Weill (1900–1950) after the Armistice headed for Berlin, the cultural center of the Weimar Republic (1918–1923). There he enrolled in a music master class of the unconventional teacher Ferruccio Busoni, and experienced the powerful influence of Stravinsky at a performance of *Soldier's Tale*.⁸⁴ Stravinsky's music displayed Busoni's theories about interweaving naïve folk tunes into traditional musical structures, and Weill resolved to eclipse Stravinsky's success by composing use-music (*Gebrauchsmusik*). He integrated jazz idioms, popular tunes, and dance rhythms into music for theater and, in an innovative collaboration with the playwright Bertholt Brecht (1898–1956), produced the wildly successful, shockingly entertaining, scathing indictment of postwar society *The Threepenny Opera* (1928).⁸⁵

⁸¹ Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 1, in Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God, Protestant Theology in the Twentieth Century*, trans. R. A. Wilson (New York: Harvest Book, 1966), 22–24.

⁸² Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 17, 54–55.

⁸³ Baumer, *Modern European Thought*, 467–70.

⁸⁴ Weill was only fourteen when the war broke out but he experienced the war indirectly: seeing his two brothers drafted, suffering fainting spells from food shortages, and deliberately failing his medical examination by ingesting 100 aspirin upon turning eighteen and fearing the draft. Pamela Katz, *The Partnership: Brecht, Weill, Three Women, and Germany on the Brink* (New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 2015), 41–42; Ross, *The Rest Is Noise*, 204–05; Stephen Hinton, “Germany, 1918–45” in Morgan, *Music and Society*, 89.

⁸⁵ Stephen Hinton, “Germany, 1918–45” in Morgan, *Music and Society*, 88–97; Stephen Hinton, ed., *Kurt Weill: the Threepenny Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 50, 145; Burkholder, Grout, and

Adapted from John Gay's ballad opera *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) and reset in Victorian England, *Threepenny Opera* implicitly condemns Weimar's alignment of official morality with widespread poverty and obvious criminality. Macheath (Mack the Knife), a notorious bandit, is in a league with a corrupt Police Chief, his wartime buddy Tiger Brown, thereby linking former soldiers and government officialdom with endemic corruption. Macheath's foil is Peachum, who illicitly traffics in human misery. Peachum outfits and trains people to masquerade as pitiable and handicapped beggars who solicit handouts from wealthy citizens willing to donate their loose change but unwilling to redress societal poverty. The opera opens with the now famous Ballad of Mack the Knife, a rhythmic melody producing sympathy for this charming rogue, despite his gruesome trail of death tallied in the lyrics. "As the verses go by and the body count rises, the accompaniment changes from a harmonium, imitating the barrel organ of the eighteenth-century street singer, to a jazz band with piano, banjo, percussion, trombone, trumpet, and saxophone; the effect is to gradually bring the story into the present day and to suggest its relevance as a parable for modern society."⁸⁶ When Macheath marries Peachum's daughter Polly, Peachum schemes to have Macheath hanged, and Macheath's jealous ex-lover, the prostitute Jenny, betrays Macheath to the police. During Macheath's imprisonment Polly evolves from innocent ingénue to his criminal business manager, refuses to purchase his release from police custody, yet rejoices as does Jenny at the opera's end when the Queen spares Macheath and awards him freedom, peerage, and pension.

Whereas *Threepenny Opera* constitutes a humorous and playful satire of a corrupt society, the next Weill–Brecht collaboration, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930), offers no comic relief in depicting a soulless, materialistic city devoid of moral restraints. *Mahagonny* revolutionized opera by presenting society itself as its centerpiece. The score is far more operatic than *Threepenny Opera*, with thirty rather than seven musicians, professional operatic singers, and unconventional instruments (banjo, zither, bass guitar, and bandoneon) interspersed within a classical orchestra. Widow Begbick enters with her criminal cronies fleeing the law, when their old truck breaks down in the desert. At that very spot they decide to establish

Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 881. *Threepenny Opera* was an international sensation by 1933, with 130 different productions totaling more than 10,000 performances in nineteen languages.

⁸⁶ Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 881.

the new city of Mahagonny and make money from nearby gold-miners enticed there in pursuit of pleasure. The lighthearted entrance aria “Alabama Song” of the prostitute Jenny describes her search for new johns at the next whiskey bar, parodying both grand opera and smarmy operetta while introducing unconventional harmonics ranging between tonal and atonal music.⁸⁷ Jenny and her girls now live in Mahagonny, along with four rich lumberjacks from Alaska—Jim, Jack, Bill, and Joe—and they celebrate their salvation from a threatening killer hurricane as a sign that they can live in unrestricted and uninhibited depravity without fear of punishment or guilt.

Jim and Jenny appear headed for genuine romance, but Jack dies from overeating, Joe dies in a boxing match, and Jim loses all his money betting on Joe and then faces capital punishment because he cannot pay his debts. When Jenny, Bill, and other friends refuse to pay Jim’s debts, Widow Begbick, serving as judge, sentences Jim to die by electrocution, and then she orders performance of the play “God in Mahagonny.” During the play, Mahagonny citizens mock God’s intent to damn them: “For we *are* in hell and always have been!”⁸⁸ With Jim’s death, Mahagonny becomes a godless city of hopelessness and despair—dark, brutal, pessimistic, and desolate. *Mahagonny* presages the end of bourgeois society, Weimar culture, and cosmic meaning.⁸⁹ “The slow marching song that ends the Opera,” writes music critic Alex Ross, “is nothing short of apocalyptic, with the Beethovenian rhythm thundering on the drums and a death motive descending like Mahler’s hammer blows of fate.”⁹⁰

Berg & Shostakovich: The Materialist Cosmos

Berg. Alban Berg (1885–1935) confronted the European society responsible for the war in the grim, atonal, and accusatory opera

⁸⁷ Bertholt Brecht, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, trans. W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman (Boston: David R. Godine, 1976), 34–35. Pamela Katz elaborates Weill’s musical innovations in *The Partnership*, 224–25.

⁸⁸ Brecht, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, 104.

⁸⁹ By contrast with the first night audience of *Threepenny Opera* that arose in joyous applause, the audience at the second Frankfurt performance of *Mahagonny* erupted in violence, fueled by 150 Nazi Brownshirts. Ross, *The Rest Is Noise*, 224. “The audience was thus a mirror of the times,” writes Katz, “signifying the descent from hope to despair, a sign that the brief golden years of the Weimar Republic had come to an end.” Katz, *The Partnership*, 287.

⁹⁰ Ross, *The Rest Is Noise*, 224.

Wozzeck (1919–1921). Berg based *Wozzeck* on a famous drama by Georg Büchner (1813–1837), which he saw performed in May 1914. *Wozzeck* is a poor, limited, and ordinary German soldier who is abused, tormented, and driven to homicidal rage and suicide by his sadistic superior officers: a drum major, a captain, and a doctor. These three tormentors embody the violent and irrational world responsible for a terrible war, and the antihero *Wozzeck* embodies the relative sanity of a simple Everyman figure. *Wozzeck* lives with his mistress Marie and her illegitimate child and, for musicologist Peter Burkholder, becomes “a hapless victim of his environment, despised by his fellow men, forced by poverty to submit to a doctor’s experiments, betrayed in love, and driven finally to murder and madness.”⁹¹ Bored with *Wozzeck*, Marie has an affair with the drum major. When confronted by *Wozzeck* about this offense, the drum major beats and humiliates him, flaunting Marie’s seduction before *Wozzeck* and his fellow soldiers. In a jealous rage, *Wozzeck* kills Marie but becomes remorseful and terrified of being discovered for his crime. By the pond where he has killed Marie, *Wozzeck* goes mad trying to wash Marie’s blood from his hands and drowns searching hysterically in the water for his knife, the murder weapon.

After being hospitalized for asthma during combat training in 1915, Berg sketched out *Wozzeck* while reassigned to a miserable, three-year desk job under an awful superior. In a 1918 letter to his wife, Berg wrote, “there is a bit of me in [*Wozzeck*’s] character since I have been spending these war years just as dependent on people I hate, have been in chains, sick, captive, resigned, in fact humiliated.”⁹² After the murder–suicide scene, Berg introduced into *Wozzeck* an interlude, which he described as “a confession of the author who now steps outside the dramatic action on the stage...an appeal to humanity through its representatives, the audience.”⁹³ The interlude begins with an adagio for *Wozzeck*, a wordless oration in the woodwinds and percussion that recounts the tragic deaths of Marie and *Wozzeck* and laments the child they abandoned. The intermezzo is an atonal outcry for war victims, some two million widows and ten million orphans, and an ominous warning for future society.

Wozzeck represents Berg’s fatalistic view of life, a Nietzschean cycle of eternal recurrence that tragically dooms not only *Wozzeck* and Marie but also their orphaned child seemingly fated to repeat

⁹¹ Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 824.

⁹² Quoted in Ross, *The Rest Is Noise*, 73–74.

⁹³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 78.

the father's tragic end. Berg scholar Douglas Jarman summarizes the opera's dark message:

Trapped in an inescapable cycle of time, the characters of *Wozzeck* inhabit a mechanistic universe. It is, as the mechanically repeating ostinati that represent the croaking of the toads around the pool before and after *Wozzeck's* death demonstrate, a universe that continues on its predetermined course untouched by the human tragedy that unfolds.⁹⁴

In *Wozzeck* Berg portrays a brutal, dismal, and fatalistic human condition persisting within an impersonal, indifferent, and determinist cosmos.

Shostakovich. Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, Vladimir Lenin promulgated materialism as Soviet dogma, and this atheistic cosmology helped legitimize his *in terrorem* rule of the former Russian Empire.⁹⁵ Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975) lived through the Revolution and spent his entire adult life struggling to survive and compose under Bolshevism's brutal regime and dark worldview. Acclaimed as one of the best new Soviet composers following reception of his Symphony No. 1 (1925), Shostakovich was summarily ostracized in 1936 after Joseph Stalin attended a performance of his *verismo* opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* (1934). Stalin stormed out of the theater and then railed against the opera as “degenerate” art in a follow-up editorial entitled “Muddle Instead of Music” published in the official Soviet organ, *Pravda*. Stalin accused Shostakovich of “Formalism,” meaning music that uses modern or dissonant tonalities rather than Russian folk melodies, expresses pessimistic rather than positive and uplifting themes, and fails to eulogize the Soviet state and its heroic workers.⁹⁶

Fearing loss of livelihood and home as well as imprisonment and even death, Shostakovich was terrified, a marked man, “an enemy of the people”: “I was near to suicide. The danger horrified me and I saw

⁹⁴ Douglas Jarman, “‘Remembrance of things that are to come’: Some Reflections on Berg’s Palindrome,” in *Alban Berg and His World*, ed. Christopher Hailey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 217.

⁹⁵ Baumer, *Modern European Thought*, 469–70; Ferguson, *The War of the World*, 159.

⁹⁶ Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*, 529–31.

no other way out.”⁹⁷ Despite his fears, however, Shostakovich composed his Symphony No. 5 in D Minor (1937), assuring the Soviet cultural authorities his symphony was joyous and optimistic even as it mocked the Soviet leaders and derided their oppressive regime.⁹⁸ Questions among some Western critics still surround Shostakovich’s politics and music, but posthumous revelations convincingly show Shostakovich’s intense loathing of Stalin and the communist regime and his courageous honesty and integrity in music.⁹⁹ While publicly acquiescing to Soviet demands as a survival mechanism, Shostakovich privately anguished in abject terror even as he eloquently protested in his music. He deceived his Soviet cultural handlers who mistook his musical message, but his Russian listeners understood the real meaning of Symphony No. 5.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 531.

⁹⁸ Allan B. Ho and Dimitry Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (Exeter, UK: Toccata Press, 1998), 166 (quoting Russian soprano Galina Vishnevskaya).

⁹⁹ Music critic Terry Teachout summarized the controversy surrounding Shostakovich’s politics and music in “The Problem of Shostakovich,” *Commentary* 99, n. 3 (February 1995): 46–49. Many Western critics dismissed Shostakovich’s Fifth and his subsequent works as formulaic Soviet realism, a view no doubt reinforced by his obsequious pro-Soviet statements like the one made at the notorious 1949 Waldorf Peace Congress. In 1979, Solomon Volkov’s *Testimony: the Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich* maintained that his Soviet handlers prepared the statements that Shostakovich parroted under extreme duress, and that throughout his adult life Shostakovich remained a “secret dissident” who loathed Stalin and the Soviet regime. In 1980, the American musicologist Laurel Fay challenged Volkov’s *Testimony* as plagiarized in part from articles signed by Shostakovich. In 1998, however, Ho and Feofanov defended Volkov’s *Testimony* as entirely credible, although they too subsequently came under criticism. But the well-reviewed 1994 biography of Shostakovich by Elizabeth Wilson, now in its 2006 second edition, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), largely supports the Volkov’s *Testimony*, as do the opinions of Shostakovich’s son Maxim and numerous Soviet émigrés who knew Shostakovich. Terry Teachout, “The Composer and the Commissars,” *Commentary* 108, n. 3 (October 1999): 53–56.

¹⁰⁰ Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, 150–163; Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, 166. American music critics have come to recognize and appreciate Shostakovich’s use of irony in music to cope with Soviet repression—“the phenomenon of double-voicedness, that is, the ability to communicate two or more opposed meanings that once.” Jennifer Gerstel explains that “to lie and tell the truth at the same time was the

Movement 1 opens with a moderately paced exchange between high and low strings, transitions into an expressive and slightly ominous theme, and ends in a jolting, awkward, and threatening March that epitomizes Stalin's arbitrary and dreadful rule. The Movement 3 Largo is the aching expressive centerpiece; the melody confesses his unconcealed anguish and restrained rage at life under Soviet oppression. One witness at the premier reported that the Largo brought members of the audience to tears—not surprising considering that “every member of the symphony's early audiences had lost friends and family members during the black year 1937, loved ones whose deaths they had had to endure in numb horror.”¹⁰¹ A brutish, pounding, terrifying March opens Movement 4, like “the iron tread of a monstrous power trampling man,” as one first listener remarked.¹⁰² The Symphony ends with 252 consecutive eighth-note A's hammered into the listeners' ears to the sound of marching drums. Despite Shostakovich's program note describing this Symphony (ironically) as “a lengthy spiritual battle, crowned by victory,” the initial Russian audience instantly recognized the work as Shostakovich's answer to Stalinist terror.¹⁰³

The audience leapt to its feet, while the conductor waved the score over his head. Mstislav Rostropovich recalled the event:

The applause went on for an entire hour. People were in an uproar, and ran up and down through the streets of Leningrad till the small hours, embracing and congratulating each other on having been there. They had understood the message that forms the “lower bottom,” the outer hull, of the Fifth Symphony: the message of sorrow, suffering, and isolation; stretched on the

supreme act of subversion during Stalin's tyranny. And no one did it better, or with more wit, humor, sarcasm, and irony than Shostakovich.” “Irony, deception, and the political culture in the works of Dmitri Shostakovich,” *Mosaic (Winnipeg)* 32, n. 4 (December 1999): 35–51. Also, Terry Teachout, “Composers for Communism,” *Commentary* 117, n. 5 (May 2004): 57–62.

¹⁰¹ Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich, A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 100; Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, 655 (quoting musicologist Richard Taruskin).

¹⁰² Solomon Volkov, *St. Petersburg: A Cultural History*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Free Press, 1995), 423–25, quoted in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, 165.

¹⁰³ Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*, 151.

rack of the Inquisition, the victim still tries to smile in his pain. The shrill repetitions of the A at the end of the symphony are to me like a spear-point jabbing in the wounds of a person on the rack. The audience at the first performance could identify with that person. Anyone who thinks the finale is glorification is an idiot.¹⁰⁴

Russian listeners recognized Shostakovich's music as a courageous artistic stand against the oppressive Soviet regime, but to the end of his life Shostakovich felt ashamed and cowardly for having kowtowed to Soviet arbitrary demands in his public remarks.¹⁰⁵ "In his music," however, "he was always honest and uncompromising," wrote composer Rodion Shchedrin. "Let people judge me by my music," implored Shostakovich, "my music says it all."¹⁰⁶ Most Western listeners, explains critic Terry Teachout, have come to recognize his body of music "as a permanent and supremely eloquent protest against the foulest tyranny the world has ever known."¹⁰⁷ In his late works, especially Symphony No. 14, Shostakovich remained preoccupied "with somber thoughts, a premonition of death." The materialist Soviet cosmology, of course, contemplates no afterlife, and Shostakovich considered death "the real end; there will be nothing afterwards, nothing."¹⁰⁸ While doing what he thought necessary to survive within the oppressive Soviet system and indifferent materialist cosmos, Shostakovich bravely confronted this dark existential reality by creating genuinely authentic and powerfully expressive music.

Schoenberg: Restoring Musical and Cosmic Order

Schoenberg believed his mission as a composer was to foster and build upon the Austro-German musical tradition from Bach and Beethoven to Mahler—a task requiring constant innovation.¹⁰⁹ For Schoenberg, the extensive chromaticism and dissonance of nineteenth century

¹⁰⁴ Volkov, *St. Petersburg: A Cultural History*, 423–25, quoted in Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, 165n182.

¹⁰⁵ Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, 235–36.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 23, 262; Fay, *Shostakovich, A Life*, 104.

¹⁰⁷ Teachout, "The Problem of Shostakovich," 56.

¹⁰⁸ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Volume 17, ed Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), 270; Ho and Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered*, 234.

¹⁰⁹ Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 813.

music had weakened tonality and required his prewar turn to atonal music with its unresolved dissonance. But the Great War interrupted his compositional output until the 1920s. In 1914, Schoenberg had embraced the August Madness, claiming that the war was a justified assault on bourgeois France and its decadent culture, including the music of Bizet, Ravel, and Stravinsky.¹¹⁰ Called up in 1915, Schoenberg luckily spent his war service in a military orchestra until his discharge in 1917. During his compositional hiatus, Schoenberg concluded that free atonality had become musical anarchy and needed a new ordering. In 1923, he revealed his solution—a new compositional method rigorously applying a series of twelve tones of the chromatic scale in order to avoid the emotional extremes of atonal composition.¹¹¹

Schoenberg's compositional subject and starting point is the chosen sequence or row of twelve tones, each tone of equal importance. The row can vary from its original form to an inverted form (e.g. ascending versus descending), a retrograde form (backward rather than forward), or a retrograde inversion, and these four possible variations applied to each of the twelve steps within the row permits forty-eight different approaches. Further subdividing the row into smaller chordal groupings enables innumerable other formations to achieve desired melody, harmony, or counterpoint. Rhythm may vary throughout, but the system has no tonal center and generally requires all twelve pitches of the series to sound before proceeding to any other forms.¹¹² Schoenberg's twelve-tone serialism may seem just a logical progression from free atonality, but some critics consider it as his means of coping with wartime trauma and postwar chaos.¹¹³ Musicologist and composer Wolfgang-Andreas Schultz thinks Schoenberg was probably "searching for order in a kind of music that conveys coldness, toughness, and distance rather than sensitivity and vulnerability."¹¹⁴ For Schultz, however, Schoenberg's serialism creates

¹¹⁰ Ross, *The Rest Is Noise*, 72.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹¹² Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 820–21.

¹¹³ E.g., Schultz, "Avant-Garde and Trauma: Twentieth-Century Music and the Experiences from the World Wars"; also, Harriet Harding, "Music in Modern Times" (August 20, 2017), considering the works of Schoenberg et al. before and after the First World War. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/8579692/WWI-s-affect-on-composers> (accessed January 11, 2018).

¹¹⁴ Schultz, "Avant-Garde and Trauma: Twentieth-Century Music and the Experiences from the World Wars," 2–3.

only an “aura” of order without the audible order of a Bach fugue or the “soft” order of a Mozart Symphony; instead, “one can sense the fear and chaos against which the order is established.”¹¹⁵

In 1926, Schoenberg left Vienna to take over Busoni’s master class in Berlin where he began work on his twelve-tone operatic masterpiece *Moses und Aron* (Moses and Aaron) based on the book of Exodus.¹¹⁶ The opera opens with an offstage chorus of six soloists intoning the Voice of God from the Burning Bush that directs Moses to return to Egypt and deliver the Israelites from slavery. Cast in a dramatic bass-baritone speaking role developed in *Pierrot lunaire*, Moses points out his lack of eloquence and the Voice responds that his brother Aaron will serve as his mouthpiece. In Act I, Moses proclaims the invisible and almighty God, but in soaring song Aaron replies that people must see to believe and forthwith performs three miracles that convince the Israelites. In Act II, while Moses is on the mountain for forty days receiving God’s laws, the Israelites, feeling abandoned by God, demand return of their old gods, and Aaron obliges. He fashions a golden calf to which the Israelites offer human and animal sacrifice in a drunken sexual orgy until Moses returns from the mountain. Moses summarily vanishes the calf and demands an explanation from Aaron. Unsatisfied with Aaron’s explanation, Moses smashes the legal tablets and despairs over his inability to express the idea of God: “O word, the word, that I lack!”¹¹⁷ By 1932, Schoenberg had completed Acts I and II but not the music and only the text of Act III foretelling “unity with God”; the music for Act III remained incomplete to his death.

Schoenberg was fifty-two years of age and at the height of his career when he began composing *Moses und Aron*, which represents his mature political, aesthetic, and religious convictions. Schoenberg actively resisted the postwar musical innovations from neoclassicism to use-music, which pitted him against popular composers like Weill and Stravinsky. But it also emboldened Schoenberg, who claimed

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁶ Schoenberg removed the letter “a” from Aaron, superstitious of the opera’s title having thirteen rather than twelve letters. But the truncated spelling of Aron is also an anagram of Schoenberg’s first name, suggesting his affinity for Aaron because of Aaron’s inability to express the inexpressible Idea of the Infinite. Joseph Auner, “Schoenberg is Moses and Aaron,” *The Opera Quarterly* 23, no. 4 [Autumn 2007]: 373–384, 373–74.

¹¹⁷ Libretto quotations from Karl H. Wörner, *Schoenberg’s ‘Moses and Aaron’*, trans. Paul Hamburger with libretto (London: Faber and Faber, 1959).

that his twelve-tone compositions occupied the Austro-German musical mainstream.¹¹⁸ Although he had much earlier converted to Protestantism, Schoenberg still faced anti-Semitism in Austria and Germany. This led him in the mid-1920s to revisit his Jewish heritage, and in 1933, to re-convert to Judaism after fleeing to France when the Nazis purged Jews from academe. Moses's Act III railing against the Israelites likely evokes Schoenberg's own views of Weimar's decadent culture and anti-Semitic politics: "You have betrayed God to the gods, the idea to images, his chosen folk to others, the extraordinary to the commonplace."

Schoenberg scholar Joseph Auner explains: "the 'Idea' was something eternal, timeless, and unchanging," for Schoenberg, and "could be grasped only indirectly."¹¹⁹ Schoenberg identified with Moses: they both grasped the Idea but felt misunderstood and alone in an increasingly secular and morally compromised society. "Like the Idea," writes Auner, "the twelve-tone row is imperceptible as a whole but pervades all that one hears."¹²⁰ For Carl Schorske, the underlying twelve-tone row posits "a subliminal, inaudible world of rational order" surrounding the audible dissonance of humanity "adrift and vulnerable in the ungovernable universe."¹²¹ Thus, Schoenberg's twelve-tone serialism constitutes a fitting musical representation of his divinely-ordered cosmology amid postwar human chaos—the largely imperceptible underlying presence of the Infinite.

Stravinsky: Return to Religious Orthodoxy:

While Shostakovich courageously confronted a hostile regime and indifferent universe in existentially authentic and expressive music, and Schoenberg struggled to evoke cosmic order amid societal disorder in serial music, Igor Stravinsky found spiritual consolation in religious orthodoxy. After observing his wife's return to the Russian Orthodox religion following her tuberculosis and breakdown in 1925, Stravinsky experienced his own existential crisis and religious epiphany during Holy Week in 1926. He began to fast "out of extreme mental and spiritual need," and he grieved intensely when Sergei Diaghilev, his surrogate father and professional mentor, died suddenly in 1928.¹²² The neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain counseled Stravinsky

¹¹⁸ Auner, "Schoenberg is Moses and Aaron," 375.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 378.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 379.

¹²¹ Schorske, *Fin De Siècle Vienna, Politics and Culture*, 362.

¹²² Ross, *The Rest Is Noise*, 125–26.

to turn away from “art for art’s sake” and toward the sacred. Stravinsky’s answer was his *Symphony of Psalms* (1930), which harkens back to traditional Western church liturgy and music.

From its opening *Exaudi orationem meam, Domine* (Hear my prayer, O Lord) to its concluding *Alleluia* and *Laudate Dominum* (Praise God), a chorus intones Psalms in the Latin vulgate, giving *Symphony of Psalms* the liturgical sound of Gregorian chant. The work “call[s] into our mind the mosaic-gilded interior of one of the Byzantine domes,” observes critic Paul Rosenfeld, “from whose vaulting the Christ and his Mother gazed pitilessly down upon the accursed human race.”¹²³ *Symphony of Psalms* deviates from traditional tonality and harmony, contains Baroque features like its second movement fugue, and eschews the Romantic expressivity of strings “to create something new, a unique combination of the modern and the familiar.”¹²⁴ *Symphony of Psalms* is not only movingly sacred but personally confessional music, expressing Stravinsky’s “terrors and longings,” writes Alex Ross, “a bulwark against an increasingly indifferent culture” and “a growing discomfort with modernity itself.”¹²⁵

Copland: American Fundamentalism

In America, religious fundamentalists responded to the Great War by linking German militarism with Nietzschean godlessness as a dual threat to Christian religion and American youth and by holding out the Bible as God’s revealed Word.¹²⁶ Along with this fundamentalist revival, the postwar era also saw the emergence of genuine American music, following its long-delayed development. During the nineteenth century, America had focused on economic rather than cultural development, with yeoman pioneers pushing the American frontier ever farther west. Unlike Europe, culture and music never defined America, which also lacked a wealthy hereditary class able and willing to fund their development. Ironically, it was the Germans who brought instrumental concert music to America

¹²³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 128.

¹²⁴ Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 839.

¹²⁵ Ross, *The Rest Is Noise*, 128–29.

¹²⁶ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture, the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 141, 149–52, 214–15; Ronald L. Numbers, “The Creationists,” in *God in Nature, Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 391–99.

after they immigrated here following mid-nineteenth-century European revolutions and crop failures.¹²⁷ But American participation in the Great War diminished German influence, and postwar isolationism drew attention increasingly to Americana, including jazz, ragtime, and folk music, which American composers began synthesizing into concert pieces.

Much postwar music of Aaron Copland (1900–1990) epitomized the populist postwar style, no composition more effectively than *Appalachian Spring* (1944). Martha Graham commissioned *Appalachian Spring* as a ballet, and Copland turned his commission into a Pulitzer prize-winning ballet and later concert piece celebrating basic fundamentalist values in pastoral America. *Appalachian Spring* begins with a distant fanfare, suggesting the vast American landscape, transitions to a religious sentiment, and then initiates a dance of the bride and her intended. As Copland explains, the music here signifies a revivalist festival with square dancers and country fiddlers (“The Revivalist and his flock”) capped by the bride’s ever faster solo dance, with its “pre-sentiment of motherhood,” and its “extremes of joy and fear and wonder.”¹²⁸ The centerpiece of the ballet is five variations on Joseph Brackett’s 1848 Shaker hymn “Simple Gifts,” which “is subtly transfigured and its essence is absorbed in music that sincerely and simply expresses the spirit of rural life in American terms.”¹²⁹ Copland describes the ballet’s closing section as “calm and flowing [in] scenes of daily activity for the Bride and her Farmer-husband.” *Appalachian Spring* evokes the American myth of self-sufficient rural life and fundamentalist faith. At the work’s conclusion, as Copland explains, a righteous couple settles down “quiet and strong in their new house” as “muted strings intone a hushed prayer-like passage.”¹³⁰

Britten: Sacred and Secular Entwined

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) has been called “the most successful composer of the twentieth century, with the possible exception of Stravinsky.”¹³¹ He demonstrated extraordinary musical precocity, playing the piano and viola at an early age and learning musical composition by age seventeen at the Royal College of Music in

¹²⁷ Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 753.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Cross and Ewen, *Great Composers and Their Music*, Vol. 1, 252.

¹²⁹ Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 899.

¹³⁰ Quoted in Cross and Ewen, *Great Composers and Their Music*, Vol. 1, 252.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 194.

London. Britten achieved international recognition with *Peter Grimes* (1945), an opera about a fisherman accused of murdering his apprentice but proven innocent at trial. Yet to his townsfolk, Grimes remains suspect, causing him to become ugly even to his love, Ellen Orford. Grimes later engages a new apprentice who also dies accidentally; the townsfolk descend on Grimes accusingly and drive him to commit suicide at sea. “Grimes represents man against the narrow society,” explains Britten. “He is a little different; he has a little more imagination. You have to sense his pride and his helplessness.”¹³² Britten develops a similar theme in *Billy Budd* (1951), an opera based on the Herman Melville story. Budd is the victim of a false accusation of treason by master at arms John Claggart. Budd kills Claggart in anger over this slander, and the ship Captain sentences Budd to death, while recognizing the injustice of his punishment.

Like *Peter Grimes* and *Billy Budd*, Britten’s *A War Requiem* (1962) is also a serious critique of society, here Western civilization itself, for causing two world wars. Britten combines a traditional Requiem Mass with the World War I poetry of Wilfred Owen, who died on the Western Front one week before the Armistice. The result, according to music critic and historian Irving Kolodin, is “a work more dramatic than any opera Britten has composed.” *War Requiem* “ris[es] through successive climaxes to a *Libera me Domine* which can best be described as a frenetic outcry, musically conveyed by resources hitherto unsuspected in the composer.”¹³³ Commissioned for the consecration of the newly restored Coventry Cathedral, which stands beside the broken remains of the old Cathedral destroyed by Nazi air attacks in November 1940, *War Requiem* had its first performance in the Cathedral on May 30, 1962. The performance fittingly included a Russian soprano, German baritone, and British tenor as well as boys and adult choirs singing verses of Owen’s poetry following each section of the standard Requiem Mass.¹³⁴

After the opening *Requiem Aeternam* (Lord, grant them eternal rest), the tenor gives voice to Owen’s *Anthem for Doomed Youth*: “What passing-bells for these who die like cattle?” The *Dies Irae* (Day of wrath) follows and then the baritone intones the words of another Owen poem: “Bugles sang, saddening the evening air, / And bugles answered, sorrowful to hear.” After the Offertory, tenor and baritone

¹³² Ibid., 204.

¹³³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 200.

¹³⁴ Russian soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, and British tenor Peter Pears.

alternate singing the words to Owen's *Parable of the Old Man and the Young*. The poem draws upon the biblical story of the angel sent by God to tell Abraham not to sacrifice his son Isaac but, instead, a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. The poem ends with a disobedient Abraham slaughtering Isaac and half of European youth:

But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

Abraham's defiance of God's will in Owen's poem signifies the craven failure of Western civilization to practice its own religious creed by perpetrating a worldwide bloodbath. *War Requiem* ends with the *Libera me* (Deliver me) followed by Owen's poem *Strange Meeting*. In the poem, a British soldier imagines his descent into hell where he encounters his alter ego, a German soldier whom he has killed that very day. Baritone, tenor, soprano, and chorus join in this final reconciliation of enemies: "Let us sleep now."

"One of the most gripping factors about Britten's work," according to Glenn Watkins, "was the fact that this most potent testimony to World War I was forged some forty-three years after the signing of the Armistice. For although it was an ostensibly delayed reaction to the Holocaust of World War II, Britten's 1961 *War Requiem* was in fact a retrospective recognition of the global impact of the Great War for the entire century." Even though *War Requiem* reflects on a cathedral destroyed in a subsequent war, Watkins observes that "the meaning as well as the meaninglessness of the Great War had found a new and resonant echo."¹³⁵ Britten's attempt to reconcile the sacred and the secular and repair a riven cosmos provides a fitting coda to this review of relevant music surrounding the Great War.

Conclusion

From Bach in the Enlightenment to Shostakovich in Soviet Russia, from Elgar to Ravel in *fin de siècle* Europe, Western music has reflected the evolving worldview surrounding the Great War. In the Baroque era, Bach composed joyous polyphonic music as a manifestation of God's abiding presence within the complexity and order of nature. In the classical era, Haydn and Mozart rendered cosmic and societal order more widely accessible to a growing middle-class public through the simplicity and clarity of

¹³⁵ Watkins, *Proof through the Night*, 427–29.

homophony. Then, Beethoven emerged as a musical watershed, expressing his own personal feelings, emotions, and thoughts about life and reality, including his triumph over adversity and affirmation of the transcendent. After Beethoven, nineteenth-century critics considered music “an alternative route to spiritual consolation as conventional religion succumb[ed] to the onslaught of science.”¹³⁶ They believed that Romantic music conveyed the meaning and enhanced the experience of reality. Thus, Wagner and Mahler sought through their music a deeper insight into the real world than reason alone could provide. For Wagner, music itself constituted reality, the life force seeking transcendence; for Mahler, music expressed his personal anguish, philosophic curiosity, and ultimate affirmation of a transcendent reality. But the Romantic musical aesthetic reached its end in *fin de siècle* Europe with revolutionary works like Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* and Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps*. These modernist composers infused music with a newly dissonant and arrhythmic musical idiom and simultaneously cast a foreboding shadow over prewar Europe.

The Great War ultimately shattered prewar Western stability and transcendent optimism: Ravel depicted the unwinding of an Empire in *La Valse*; Holst mourned the decimation of a generation of young men in *Ode to Death*; Berg exposed the cruel indifference of European leadership in *Wozzeck*; and Weill indicted society itself for its immorality, criminality, and godlessness in *Mahagonny*. Their powerful music projects the disturbing image of an unwinding old and threatening new worldview. Like William Butler Yeats in “The Second Coming” (1920), these postwar composers reflected a similarly ominous worldview: “Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.” Along with Yeats, these composers also seemed to be asking: “And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?” Berg’s despairing portrait of an indifferent materialist cosmos in *Wozzeck* becomes the dismal existential reality of Weill’s *Mahagonny*. Within the dystopian world that Berg and Weill dramatize so effectively, Shostakovich endeavored to live and compose courageously, giving authentic and eloquent reply to Stalinist terror and cosmic indifference in Symphony No. 5.

In postwar Weimar, Schoenberg engaged in a lonely aesthetic struggle to restore musical order and metaphysical meaning through

¹³⁶ Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, 36.

his twelve-tone opera *Moses and Aron*. Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* and Copland's *Appalachian Spring* also gave musical voice to postwar cosmic meaning, respectively, through religious orthodoxy and American fundamentalism. Various, these postwar compositions nostalgically evoke the divinely-ordered world destabilized by the Great War. Britten's *War Requiem* captures the religious ambiguity of the era by integrating the powerful antiwar poetry of Wilfred Owen into the traditional Requiem Mass. The tenor sings from Owen's *Anthem for Doomed Youth* (1917) that prayers only insult those who have died like cattle: "No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells; / Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—/ The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells; / And bugles calling for them from sad shires." The Great War toppled the old verities and caused spiritual upheaval, with atheistic existentialists seeking personal authenticity amid cosmic indifference and committed theists looking for personal reassurance in traditional religion. Music surrounding the Great War mirrors this profound transition in Western society and its worldview.

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