

TWENTIETH CENTURY: EXTENDING THE DEFINITION OF MUSIC (1)¹

AN INTRODUCTION TO TWENTIETH CENTURY ON THE DEFINITION OF MUSIC

MOST BASIC DEFINITION OF MUSIC

(The first two sentences taken from my home page)

Because of the many differences in each country's culture, the definition of music will vary. In general terms, music is an art form whose medium is sound and silence. This medium is accomplished by the use of melody and rhythm. Traditionally, when people think of tonal sounds, they think of sounds produced by any note on a traditional piano played by a musical instrument or sung by means of the human voice any note that is on a specific pitch. Twentieth Century changes all that. No longer can the thought of traditional music be limited to the simplicity of melody, rhythm and a traditional Western musical note. Enter: Twentieth century music.

WHAT EXACTLY IS TWENTIETH CENTURY MUSIC?

Twentieth century music is an era in musical history that essentially throws out the rules of traditional Western music as well as puts a new "twist" on defining music. The notes of a chromatic scale within the span of an octave are broken up into 12 semitones in traditional Western music. Twentieth and twenty-first century music changes this. Some twentieth (and even 21st) century composers are creating and using unique harmonies and rhythms, as well as micro or quarter tones.

TONIC OR TONAL CENTER

The tonic is the first scale degree of a diatonic scale and the tonal center or final resolution tone. For example, if a piece was written with one sharp and in a major key, the final tone of the scale would resolve on the tonic of the key (one sharp refers to G major, so usually the piece would end on the note G; but could also end on a B or D, the other notes of the tonic, or main tonal triad). The tonal center in traditional western music (From the Medieval era, up to and including some 21st century music) is the most important of all the different tone centers in any musical composition.

MICROTONAL MUSIC

The term "microtonal music" usually refers to music containing very small intervals but can include any tuning that differs from Western twelve-tone equal temperament (or equal temperament tuning). Countries from all over the world have music that is microtonal. Studies and research have been done by various countries as to experimentation and use of microtones and music that is based on mean-tone temperament tuning.

SECOND VIENNESE SCHOOL

Refers to the group of composers that comprised Arnold Schoenberg and his pupils and close associates in early 20th century Vienna, where he lived and taught, sporadically, between 1903 and 1925. Their music was initially characterized by late-Romantic expanded tonality and later, following Schoenberg's own evolution, a totally chromatic expressionism, without firm tonal center (also called atonality), and later still, Schoenberg's serial twelve-tone technique.

¹ Selected definitions as well as microtonal music and the Second Viennese School will be discussed further in the next part "Extending the Definition of Music (2)."