

ORCHESTRATION AND INSTRUMENTATION: TWENTIETH CENTURY AND ONWARD

PART 1: A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Symphonic and orchestral works in the twentieth century saw many changes to that of prior musical periods. Instruments were used in ways not heard of, and extended techniques of the individual instruments themselves were becoming more widely used and accepted. Although twentieth century symphonic works saw many changes, these works always stayed true to the usage of the form “symphony”, displaying both a degree of sophistication and a seriousness of purpose.

INSTRUMENTATION

Changes in both orchestration (scoring) and the instruments themselves were seen. Since the Romantic symphony (orchestra), the brass instrument the trombone was added. The combination of bass drum, triangle, cymbals and sometimes piccolo, used as a colouristic effect in Turkish music, was used more often during the second half of the 19th century, regardless of genre.

ORCHESTRA SIZE AND LENGTH OF WORKS

The size of the orchestra increased again in the 20th century from that of the Romantic symphony. This was due in part to both the size of the string and wind sections of the orchestra increasing in size, but also the growth and expansion of the concert halls themselves. By the twentieth century, some of these orchestra sizes were unheard of, not just in the instrument players themselves, but also in the number of voices. One example of a symphony with a large number of singers is Gustav Mahler’s Eighth Symphony, nicknamed the “Symphony of a Thousand” because of the large number of voices required to perform the choral sections. Also, depending on the number and length of movements, symphonies in the twentieth century can easily be over 1.5 hours (90 minutes).

FORM AND STRUCTURE

Twentieth century composers changed both the form and structure of works, not just in the individual movements, but also in the number of movements comprising that particular work. A concern with unification of the traditional four-movement symphony into a single, subsuming formal conception had emerged in the late 19th century; this is referred to as a “two-dimensional symphonic form.” An example of varying symphonic length is Jean Sibelius’ Symphony No. 7, which is in one movement, whereas Alan Hovhaness’s Symphony No. 9, Saint Vartan, is in twenty-four.

TYPES AND STYLES OF WORKS

The twentieth century includes all the various styles of works found in the prior periods as well as new styles. Prior styles include orchestral works, chamber music, solo instrumental works (including keyboard music), electronic music, choral music, songs, operas, ballets, concertos, symphonies, and related forms, as well as fantasies, rhapsodies, fugues, passacaglia’s and chaconne’s, variations, oratorios, cantatas, and suites. Improvisational and newly developed formal concepts such as variable and mobile forms were also written and performed, as they have been 1900. This era was without a dominant style and composers have created highly diverse kinds of music.