Teaching Notes by Rebecca Clarey

Subject: Music
Theme: Overturning tonality: into the 20th century
Curriculum: UK
Level: Ages 16-18

Rationale

This teaching resource enables A Level students to explore in detail the new and radical changes to composition in the early 20th century. A variety of activities encompassing reading, listening, analysis and composition will support study of the core curriculum, and may be used as a starting point for extension activities and further reading and listening.

Related content

People:
Alban Berg
Arnold Schoenberg
Anton Webern

Works:
Arnold Schoenberg: Five Orchestral Pieces, No. 3

Articles:
The Second Viennese School: Alban Berg, Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern’ by Mark Berry
‘Tonality in crisis? How harmony changed in the 20th century’ by Arnold Whittall

Collection items:
Flyer for the Skandalkonzert, 1913
Arnold Schoenberg: Klavierstück Op. 33a
Five Orchestral Pieces, No. 3
Claude Debussy: Brouillards
Recordings:
Debussy, *Brouillards*: a recording is included in the article [here](#).
Schoenberg, *Five Orchestral Pieces*: a recording is included in the article [here](#).

**Additional material**

For some activities, teachers will need to provide complete scores or recordings. These are generally very widely available.

**Note to teachers:**

These teaching ideas can certainly be used to support the A Level syllabus for all exam boards as outlined below. However, they could also be a possible starting point for extended reading, or form the basis of an extended essay for a university application. Similarly, they could provide a stimulus for questions for EPQ submissions.

**Comprehension**

**Potential areas of relevance:**

The analytical skills, compositional skills and stimuli and general wider contextual listening will be of use to all exam board syllabi.

More explicit suggested links are:

**Edexcel:** New Directions – specified set work – John Cage *Three Dances for two prepared pianos: Number 1*. Suggested wider listening includes Stockhausen, Boulez, Maxwell Davies and Messiaen

**AQA:** Art Music since 1910

**OCR:** Innovations in music 1900 to the present day

**Eduqas:** Into the C20th

**Note to teachers:**

These basic comprehension questions are intended to get students to engage with the scholarly articles before embarking upon the discussion, composition and analysis tasks below. The intention is that this should be done independently by the student prior to the lesson – ideally as flipped learning homework so that the student comes to the lesson with a good understanding of the works and issues ready to start on the subsequent activities.
The Second Viennese School: Alban Berg, Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern’ by Mark Berry

- What does the term ‘Second Viennese School’ mean? Which composers does it normally encompass? (HINT: try to find some differing definitions from different music text books, such as Donald J Grout's *History of Western Music* and even Wikipedia. How do these definitions correspond to what Mark Berry is suggesting?)
- Who was Schoenberg trying to distance himself from? Why?
- What does the term *Klangfarbenmelodie* mean?
- What does Berry define as the three typically Viennese features all three composers exhibit?
- Why is Berg considered to be the most Romantic?

‘Tonality in crisis? How harmony changed in the 20th century’ by Arnold Whittall

- According to Arnold Whittall, what was one of the benefits of using dissonance in music at the start of the 20th century?
- What did much of the excitement that dissonance created rely upon?
- What does the term ‘pan-tonal’ mean? Why can the piece *Brouillards* be described as ‘pan-tonal’? How does it still manage to create some sense of a C major tonality?

Discussion Points

Note to teachers:

These discussion points will work best as group discussions, potentially moving into a whole class discussion. It is recommended that they are used as a starter activity. One suggestion is that each group could have a different question they form an answer to which they then feed back to the class. These groups could be given the questions to focus on as homework whilst reading the articles for the first time, in order to focus their initial reading.

- Both articles refer to the ‘common practice era’.
  - What do you think this definition suggests?
  - What does Arnold Whittall suggest is meant by this term?
  - Is this a pejorative definition?
- Why do you think the twelve-tone system was met with (according to Berry), anger and hostility AND devotion?
- Is *emancipated dissonance* a more apt term than *atonality* to describe the music of the Second Viennese School?
- Does knowing that Schoenberg felt his third Orchestral Piece represented ‘sunlight glistening on the Alpine lake’ change the way we should listen to it/analyse it?
**Listening**

**Note to teachers:**

The nature of the pieces mean they are generally unsuitable for melodic or rhythmic dictation practice. However, they certainly offer useful material for unheard listening questions (identifying musical features, for example) and wider listening for examined set works.

**Skandalkonzert, programme:**

Anton Webern, *Six Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 6* (1909)

Alexander von Zemlinksy, *Six Songs after Poems by Maeterlink, Op. 13* [Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 5]

Arnold Schoenberg, *Chamber Symphony No. 1, Op. 9* (1906)

Alban Berg, *Five Orchestral Songs on Picture-Postcard Texts by Peter Altenberg, Op. 4* [Nos. 2 and 3]

Gustav Mahler, *Kindertotenlieder* (1904)**

**Fighting broke out and the concert had to end during the Berg songs, so the Mahler was not performed.**

- Choose ONE of the pieces from the notorious *Skandalkonzert*, selected from the promotional flyer. The new music performed provoked such outrage in its audience that a riot broke out and the concert could not be completed. Brainstorm all of the features that you can hear that you think could explain the reaction of the audience to this concert. You could structure your listening as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First listening</th>
<th>Brainstorm any features you can hear which would explain the outrage of the audience.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second listening</td>
<td>Sort the features into the following headings: Melody, Rhythm, Texture, Structure, Dynamics, Instrumentation, Harmony.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third listening</td>
<td>Look to see which headings you have least information for. Focus on these to add as much as possible for the next listening.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis

- Listen to the *Five Orchestral Pieces* with the score. Find examples of aspects of the music that could be described as ‘delicate and thinned down’ – a vision Schoenberg was hoping to achieve to distance himself from composers such as Wagner.
- Look at the first six chords of *Klavierstück* Op. 33a. Which of the opening six chords can be heard as major chords with an additional note? What key do you think they potentially suggest? Is this key undermined/destabilised?
- Look at the third orchestral piece. Trace the use of *Klangfarbenmelodie* throughout the piece, highlighting different examples of where the same melody is heard in a different tone colour.
- Compare and contrast *Klavierstück* Op. 33a with the Schoenberg’s third Orchestral Piece using the musical elements below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Klavierstück Op. 33a</th>
<th>Orchestral Piece No. 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rhythm</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
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<td>Texture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
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Note to teachers:

Scores of this nature can be incredibly daunting to students, so it is recommended that teachers adapt them in accordance with the needs of the class. Skeleton scores, short extracts or annotated scores are a good way to make the music more immediately accessible to students.
• Look at Debussy’s *Brouillards*. Find an instance where a C major sonority is firmly established, and an instance of a destabilising force upon this suggestion.

Composition

Note to teachers:

It is suggested that these brief compositional tasks could be completed at the start of Year 12 as students are initially exploring composing at A Level. They offer an opportunity to consider harmonisation and text setting which they could then incorporate into their own compositions later on in the year.

• Write your own tone row using the dodecaphonic technique. Explore different ways of presenting this with a different tone colour – you could consider using different instruments, dynamics, tessitura, instrumental techniques etc. For each iteration, suggest an idea of what that tone colour might represent (as Schoenberg did with his ‘sunlight glistening upon an Alpine lake’). Give a justification of why you think each particular tone colour you have created would be suitable for its accompanying image.

• Put your tone row in the following iterations: Retrograde, inversion, retrograde inversion.

• Extension: Try to create the exposition of a sonata form piece using two different versions of your tone row for the traditional ‘Theme A’ and ‘Theme B’.

• Composers sometimes explored the idea of ‘stacking’ the notes of the tone row on top of each other to form chords. This technique was known as **verticalisation**. Use this principle to try and add accompanying chords to your melody.