

Teaching guide: Area of study 7 – Art music since 1910

This resource is a teaching guide for Area of Study 7 (Art music since 1910) for our A-level Music specification (7272).

Teachers and students will find explanations and examples of all the musical elements required for the Listening section of the examination, as well as examples for listening and composing activities and suggestions for further listening to aid responses to the essay questions.

Glossary

The list below includes terms found in the specification, arranged into musical elements, together with some examples.

Melody

Modes of limited transposition

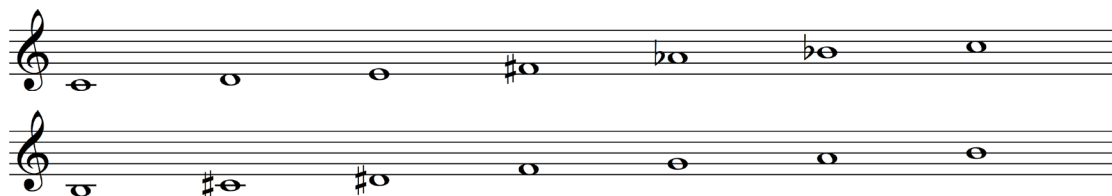
Messiaen's melodic and harmonic language is based upon the seven modes of limited transposition. These scales divide the octave into different arrangements of semitones, tones and minor or major thirds which are unlike tonal scales, medieval modes (such as Dorian or Phrygian) or serial tone rows all of which can be transposed twelve times. They are distinctive in that they:

- have varying numbers of pitches (Mode 1 contains six, Mode 2 has eight and Mode 7 has ten)
- divide the octave in half (the augmented 4th being the point of symmetry - except in Mode 3)
- can be transposed a limited number of times (Mode 1 has two, Mode 2 has three)

Example: Quartet for the End of Time (movement 2) letter G to H (violin and 'cello) Mode 3

Whole tone scale

A scale where the notes are all one tone apart. Only two such scales exist:



Shostakovich uses part of this scale in String Quartet No.8 (fig. 4 in the 1st mvt.) and Messiaen in the 6th movement of Quartet for the End of Time.

Octatonic scale

An eight-note scale which alternates semitones and tones. There are three available transpositions of this scale:



Messiaen called this scale mode 2, and he uses it distinctively at the start of movement 7 of Quartet for the End of Time.

Pentatonic scale

Any scale of just five notes. Normally this refers to a major scale which omits the 4th and 7th notes of the scale, removing all semitone steps, but many other versions are possible, including ones with some semitone steps. The minor version shown here is the same as the major one, but transposed and starting on the 5th note. It is similar to the blues' scale, omitting the \flat 5th.



Hexatonic scale

A scale which uses six different pitches. Usually this will be similar to a major scale with one pitch missing.

Steve Reich uses a hexatonic scale as the basis for the ostinato in Electric Counterpoint (mvt.III):

Tone row

In serialism this refers to the order of the twelve pitches of the chromatic scale which define the melodic (and harmonic) construction of the piece. The 'prime order' will be subject to inversion, retrograde and inverted retrograde as well as transpositions of each of these, leading to a possible 48 versions of the tone row.

Shostakovich's String Quartet No.12 starts with such a row, although it is not used systematically throughout the movement.

Note addition and subtraction

In minimalism this refers to the gradual addition and subtraction of notes to the cell (or motif) which forms the basis of the composition.

In Steve Reich's 'Six Planos', players 4 and 5 gradually build up the cell from none to one note (or pair of notes) to eight notes (or pairs of notes) over the course of the first 90 bars of the piece (each bar to be repeated between 6 and 10 times).

Resultant melody

A resultant melody occurs in a minimalist composition when two or more cells are combined and a third pattern emerges from the texture. In Reich's 'Six Planos' the sixth piano emphasises the resultant melody emerging from pianos one and three at fig. 12.

Cells and motifs

A cell (in minimalist or serial compositions) or motif (in other types of composition) is a small musical unit – usually a melodic idea – which is repeated and developed to form the principal building block of the piece, providing unity and cohesion to the composition. (Example: opening four notes from Different Trains (mvt.1) by Steve Reich.

Metamorphosis

The gradual transformation of a musical idea (usually by changing one note at a time) into a new musical idea. In the first movement of Electric Counterpoint, each of the opening chord changes is achieved through a process of metamorphosis, for example in bars 21 - 25 from an extended C major chord to one of Em 9.

Harmony

Non-functional harmony

Progressions of chords which do not define a prevailing tonality.

For example, in bars 19 -23 from Macmillan's Seraph (mvt 1) the rising pattern of root position chords (Bb - B - C) do not show progression towards a tonic key.

Chord extensions

Chords with added notes to provide for greater harmonic colour.

The opening two bars from L'Ascension feature two of Messiaen's favourite extensions – the chord of the added augmented 4th (bar 1, quaver 6) and the added 6th chord (bar 2, quaver 8).

Cluster chords

Any chord where the constituent pitches are very close together.

The dramatic opening to the Gloria in Macmillan's Magnificat features a type of cluster chord.

Static harmony

A passage of music where the harmony doesn't change. Minimalist pieces invariably feature long sections where the harmony is static.

In Steve Reich's 'Six Planos', the D harmony which starts the piece is sustained until fig.H, possibly for as many as 400 bars, before rising to Em.

Open fifths

A chord comprising only the root and fifth.

In the first movement of Shostakovich's 5th Symphony the first subject material is harmonised by an open fifth chord at bars 4 - 7.

Tonality

Bitonality

The use of two keys simultaneously.

During the development section of MacMillan's *Seraph* (1st mvt), the passage at bars 66 and 67 has the upper parts in G major whilst the lower parts are in F# minor.

Tonal ambiguity

A passage of music where the key is not clearly established. For example, Reich's *New York Counterpoint* (mvt 2) ends in a state of tonal ambiguity.

Atonality

Music without a tonal centre.

The opening of Messiaen's *Vocalise, pour l'Ange* is atonal, using all twelve notes of the chromatic scale.

Modality

Music where the melody and harmony are based on one (or more) of the Greek modes, such as Phrygian, Dorian, Lydian etc.

The opening of the slow movement of Shostakovich's *Piano Concerto No.2* is in the Aeolian mode.

Structure

Cyclical structures

A work in which several movements are unified through the recurrence of a theme or motif.

Shostakovich's *String Quartet No.8* has a cyclical structure, the DSCH motto theme appearing in various transformations in all five movements, the final movement ending with a reworking of the start of the opening movement.

Ostinato

A musical idea which repeats itself unchanged through a significant passage of music.

In Reich's *Clapping Music*, player 1 repeats the same one-bar rhythmic pattern throughout the whole piece.

Cadenza

A section in a concerto where the soloist plays alone. Traditionally this occurred towards the end of the first movement, and was improvised in free time developing ideas from earlier in the movement in a virtuosic fashion.

There is a cadenza near the conclusion of the first movement of Shostakovich's *2nd Piano Concerto*. It is unusual in that it is in two-part counterpoint, in strict time and is not improvisatory. The piano solo at fig.11 of the first movement of *Turangalila* has many of the characteristics of a cadenza.

Sonority

Organ stops (eg reeds, mixtures, swell pedal, tremulant)

The **foundation** stops fall into two main categories:

- the **diapasons** (metal pipes) which are strong and full bodied (largely *mf - f*)
- the **flutes** (wooden pipes) which are quieter and often feature a clear 'chiff' in the attack (largely *p - mp*).

In each of these categories, the sound can be strengthened, and the timbre changed, by adding:

- a 16' stop (doubling an octave lower to thicken the sound)
- a 4' stop (doubling an octave higher to brighten the sound)
- a 2' stop (doubling two octaves higher to give a more brilliant sound).

The addition of further **mutation** stops (such as the Nazard ($2_{2/3}$) sounding a 12th higher, and the Tierce ($1_{3/5}$) sounding two octaves and a 3rd higher) changes the timbre more distinctively by highlighting the higher harmonics of the 8' sound.

Mixtures use ranks of three or four pipes to each pitch to add an even greater brilliance to the sound. These will typically be 19-22-26, which reinforce octaves and fifths at an even higher pitch.

The **reed** stops have a more distinctive character, often sounding like the oboe or trumpet. The sound is produced by a brass tongue at the bottom of the pipe which vibrates as the air passes through in a similar way to the reed on a clarinet. These stops can be used to single out a solo melody line, or in ranks of 16', 8' and 4' together to create the 'full-organ' timbre.

String stops imitate the sounds of violins or 'cellos, generally quietly as the pipes have a smaller diameter than the flutes and diapasons. The addition of a celeste adds a shimmering quality to the string timbre as it is tuned slightly sharp to create beats.

The stops in the **swell** division of the organ will be enclosed in a wooden box with shutters which open and close under the control of the swell box by the player's feet. This enables a more subtle *crescendo* and *diminuendo*. (Example: opening phrases of *L'Ascension*)

The **tremulant** stop makes no sound itself, but is a device which varies the wind pressure within the pipe causing a *tremolo* effect. It is normally reserved for the quieter reed stops (imitating the oboe for example) or the strings.

Studio effects (eg reverb, sampling)

Much of Steve Reich's music features effects such as stereo panning (bass guitar parts in *Electric Counterpoint*), reverb and sampling (vocal samples in *Different Trains*).

Unusual instruments (eg ondes Martenot)

The ondes Martenot is an early electronic instrument first patented in 1928. Usually played from a special keyboard, the sound is produced by varying the frequency of oscillations in vacuum tubes. The sound resembles a bowed string instrument combined with a sinewy vocal quality, with added effects such as vibrato and glissando. Messiaen used the instrument in many of his works, and with particular

acclaim in Turangalila. Movements two and six feature the instrument prominently in melodic role.

Unusual effects (eg col legno, harmonics)

The instruction *col legno* requires string players to strike the string (or strings) with the wood of the bow, thereby producing a percussive sound in addition to the pitch of the note. Most famously used by Holst at the start of *The Planets* (Mars), but also by Messiaen in his *Turangalila Symphony* (movement 2 fig.9) in the violins (also quadruple stopping).

Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* explores the glassy sound of artificial harmonics in the violoncello part through the first movement. Here the player additionally touches the string a perfect 4th higher than the written note (lightly with the fourth finger) to produce the second harmonic (sounding two octaves above the fundamental note).

James MacMillan's *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* calls for an extraordinary array of tuned and non-tuned percussion instruments, both traditional and exotic, with unusual muting effects (brass) and harmonics (strings) before concluding with the whole orchestra playing bells and loud clanging metal pieces to proclaim the Risen Christ at Easter.

Texture

Looping

The process of repeating short musical ideas over and over again like an ostinato. In minimalist music it might also refer to tape loops, including that of speech, such as in Steve Reich's *Different Trains*.

Layering

Building the texture of the music by adding new lines one at a time to create a complex counterpoint, often in a close pitch range such that they interact in unusual ways.

Layered textures interlock the ostinato patterns in Reich's *Electric Counterpoint*, for example in the passage at bar 210. The 'live' guitar part is at the top of the texture, featuring a resultant melody.

A cappella

Meaning 'to the Chapel' this is a term which refers to unaccompanied vocal music. 'O radiant dawn' by James MacMillan is a typical example.

Drones

Similar to a pedal point (such as a tonic pedal or dominant pedal), but usually referred to as a drone in music in a folk idiom, especially if it extends throughout a whole piece, or section of a piece.

James MacMillan's *Strathclyde Motet 'In Splendoribus Sanctorum'* calls for a periodic drone (on the pedal of the organ), and the long sustained notes in Shostakovich *Quartet No.8* might reasonably be called drones too, especially as they are on open strings.

Tempo, metre and rhythm

Additive rhythms

Typically in music, rhythms are created as divisions of a beat. That is, the beat is constant and rhythms are varied within the metrical structure. With additive rhythms, a unit of rhythm (usually a quaver or semiquaver) is the constant and the beat varies according to the different additions of this rhythmic unit.

Messiaen also uses the term **added value** to describe the addition of a dot, or a shorter rhythmic value, to create a sense of ametrical rhythm. An example can be heard in the quiet section near the start of Dieu Parmi Nous (dotted quaver).

Palindromic rhythms

These are rhythmic units which are the same played forwards or backwards. Messiaen called them non-retrogradable rhythms. A short example of this can be found in movement VI of Quartet for the End of Time (4 bars after letter I), and a longer example in the violoncello rhythmic pedal in movement 1 (the 4th – 15 notes).

Metrical displacement

This is the repetition of a rhythmic pattern starting in a different part of the bar, usually therefore displacing the metrical accentuation.

Phasing

This is a technique often used in minimalism where two parts in the texture play an identical phrase, firstly in unison, but with one of the two parts playing at a slightly faster, or slower, tempo so that the two parts gradually move out of phase with each other. Steve Reich's Violin Phase demonstrates this technique. It can also apply when one part periodically adds a unit of duration to the phrase so that the two parts of the texture become further and further displaced. Steve Reich's Clapping Music is such an example.

Augmentation and diminution

Repeating a motif or phrase in longer or shorter note values. Look at the clarinet part in Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time, movement VI (bar after letter J), where the three-note motif F - C# - A appears in four different guises.

Listening activities

Activity one

Shostakovich Piano Concerto No.2 (3rd movement – fig.56 to the end)

- Q1 What are the two time signatures heard in this excerpt? (2)
- Q2 The piano plays a descending chromatic scale early in the excerpt.
What is the interval between the two parallel parts? (1)
- Q3 The movement finishes in F major. What other chord (apart from the tonic chord) is repeatedly heard in the final section of the excerpt? (1)

D major D minor D ♭ major D ♭ minor

Q4 Identify two percussion instruments heard in this excerpt. (2)

Activity two

MacMillan Lux Aeterna (from The Strathclyde Motets)

Q1 The alto is the first voice to enter. Give two ways (one rhythmic and one melodic) in which the alto line is different in character from the other vocal parts. (2)

(a) rhythm

(b) melody.....

Q2 What structural term best describes this type of vocal line? (1)

Q3 Describe the texture of the music. (1)

Q4 Give one way in which MacMillan's treatment of dissonance is unconventional in the 'Amen' phrases. (1)

Q5 On which mode is this motet based?

Aeolian Dorian Phrygian Ionian (1)

Activity three

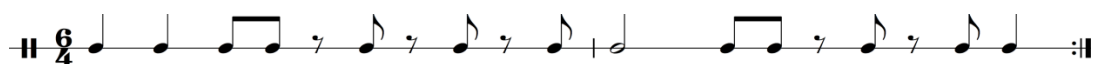
Messiaen Oiseaux exotiques (fig 6 - 9) 3'00" - 4'10" approx. (or fig. 10 4'25")

This passage of music depicts the sounds of birdsong. Analyse the features of rhythm, melody, texture and timbre which contribute to this pictorial sound world.

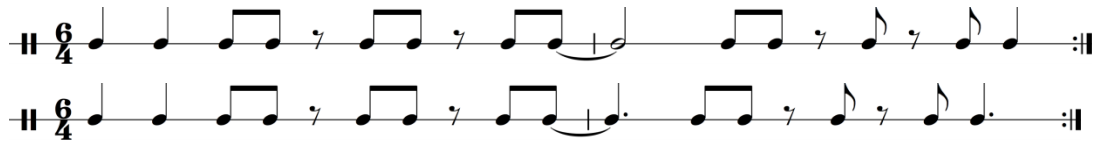
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Activity four

Steve Reich New York Counterpoint (movement 3) 0'00" - 1'00"



Q1 Which of the following rhythms shows the pattern of the opening two bars (repeated)? (1)



Q2 Which of the following scales is the melody based on?

Hexatonic Octatonic Pentatonic Whole-tone

(1)

Q3 When the 3rd (live) and 4th clarinets first enter (in bar 5), what is the rhythmic displacement of their canonic entry?

(1)

Q4 Give one other way in which these parts are different from the opening melody.

(1)

Q5 Which new instrument enters for the first time at 00'49"?

(1)

Q6 Identify one way in which the music develops over the course of the excerpt. (1)

Composition exercises

Exercise one

Write a canon for two solo instruments using either or both of these non-retrogradable rhythms and their augmentations and diminutions, based on the third mode of limited transposition.

Rhythm A

Rhythm B

Mode 3

Exercise two

Write a short dialogue for voices and trumpet based upon the following fragments:

Andante
p *cresc.*

Soprano
Sanc - tus, Sanc - tus, Sanc - tus Do - - mi-nus

Alto
p *cresc.*
Sanc - tus, Sanc - tus, Sanc - tus Sanc - tus

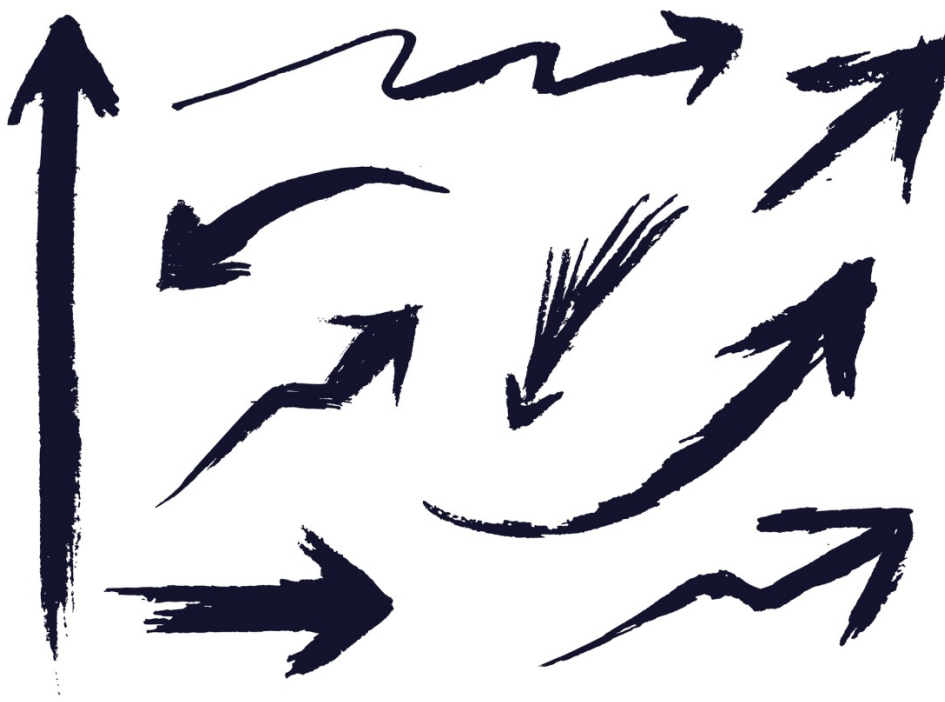
Tenor
p *cresc.*
Sanc - tus, Sanc - tus, Sanc - tus Do - - mi-nus

Bass
p *cresc.*
Sanc - tus, Sanc - tus, Sanc - tus Sanc - tus,

Exercise three

Trumpet **Allegro**

mp *lontano*



Use this image to inspire a minimalist style composition which explores techniques of cell metamorphosis, phasing and inversion.

Exercise four

Compose a short fugal exposition based on this opening subject.



Further listening

The following four pieces are offered as ideal material for further study, complementing the recommended listening lists for this Area of Study and chosen for their musical enrichment and wealth of compositional techniques useful for examples in essay writing and to support candidates' composing work.

Shostakovich – Festive Overture

Shostakovich's Festive Overture is a wonderful antidote to the intensity of expression found in the 5th Symphony and 8th String Quartet. Written in just three days ahead of its premiere in 1954 to commemorate the 37th anniversary of the October Revolution, it bears fruitful comparison with the Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* for its fast-paced exuberance, playful melodic style, colourful orchestration and compact form.

With Shostakovich in gleeful mood, this six-minute work is full of joie de vivre and provides plenty of material to discuss (pedal points, rhythmic augmentation, sequence, tertiary modulations etc) Rhythmically energised, tunefully diatonic and embracing many features of melodic development, the structure is essentially truncated sonata form inside opening and closing fanfares. There is much to enjoy in the lively counterpoint and antiphonal textures and the orchestration is imaginative and varied, featuring all sections of the orchestra with élan. The bold harmonic twists are enshrined in a strongly tonic – dominant relationship giving the piece a neo-classical flavour much akin to the music of *Prokofiev*.

MacMillan – Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis

James MacMillan's Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis, composed for the BBC's first Choral Evensong broadcast in 2000, provides a liturgical setting not found elsewhere in the recommended listening. Indeed, this area of study is the only opportunity to discover sacred music in any form across the specification. MacMillan sets the 1662 text in a way which is both extraordinary, yet captures many features which recall styles of English choral writing from the great Renaissance (Tallis and Byrd), Baroque (Purcell) and Victorian (Stanford) composers. Both versions of the work bear fruitful study – the original organ one is a favourite amongst many of our cathedral choirs and is interesting in its imaginative use of organ stops (such as the sesquialtera and other mutations), and the orchestral arrangement features woodwind solos, tuned percussion and parallelisms reminiscent of Ravel's *Bolero*.

The choral writing in the Magnificat is largely homophonic and syllabic with increasingly fervent and expansive melismatic setting towards the ends of phrases, the opening whispered verses from the choir interspersed by plaintive and improvisatory melodic patterns on the organ, invoking the sounds of birdsong from a quite different chromatic and rhythmic language. Of especial note is the remarkable build up to the climax (from '*He hath filled the hungry*') as the vocal texture grows part by part, rising in pitch and dynamic over a two-bar ostinato accompaniment to a thrillingly vibrant and expectant dissonance before the start of the Gloria. The Nunc Dimittis expresses the profound text of Simeon from deep bass voices in the Aeolian mode, pitted against a unison melody from the other three voices in mid-register, initially in the Phrygian mode. The organ part once again has flavours of Messiaen in its rhythms, modes and chordal structures.

Messiaen – Dieu parmi nous (No.9 from La Nativité du Seigneur)

As a companion to the opening movement of L'Ascension, this final section of La Nativité offers a complementary insight into Messiaen's organ writing. Composed in 1935 and first performed on the Cavaillé-Coll organ in La Trinité in Paris, this is indeed one of Messiaen's masterworks. It is immediately engaging and descriptive, rhythmically exciting and typifies the composer's imaginative approach to organ textures and registration. Where L'Ascension is slow and majestic, quiet and mystical, Dieu parmi nous is largely *Vif et joyeux*, brightly proclaiming the Christmas message in gloriously energised rhythms which explore the full potential of the instrument's sounds of diapasons, mixtures, reeds and 32' pipes.

The opening statement represents the descent of the Word of God from heaven to earth in an explosive chordal passage on the manuals succeeded by a falling melody in the pedals, later to return in triumph, using the 2nd mode of limited transposition. An immediate contrast (in the quieter string timbre) gently reflects upon the sweetness of the union of Christ with his people, the one-bar melodic phrase being repeated and developed as it sits on a dominant pedal. Antiphonal sections (fast unison statements on the great mixtures against slower chordal descents on the swell reeds) juxtapose Mary's joyful Magnificat with the opening theme before the long central portion of the movement develops further the theme of Christ's union over a fast and rhythmic accompaniment, featuring Messiaen's 'added value' rhythms. A return of the opening descent of the Word of God, now in ten-note chords, is immediately followed by a contrary motion appearance in octaves, heralding the famous toccata which is one of Messiaen's most memorable pieces of music. Here the manual chords repeat in typically French brilliant and virtuosic style whilst the Word of God descends on full reeds, now a third higher in the resplendent key of E major. The work concludes with a series of increasingly intense dissonant chords before ending triumphantly on a chord of the added 6th.

Reich – Electric Counterpoint

Electric Counterpoint provides many of the principal facets of Steve Reich's compositional techniques within each of its relatively short movements. Written for guitar (either acoustic or electric) and 12 pre-recorded guitars (two of which are bass guitars), the work was commissioned by the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Brooklyn Philharmonic and given its first performance by jazz guitarist Pat Metheny during the New Wave Festival in 1987.

The first movement starts somewhat incongruously with a long homophonic section which quickly builds up a rapidly repeating static, diatonic chord. It uses six different pitches of the G major scale (no F#), in an eight-part texture, the 'live' guitar prominent at the top on G and the middle voices clustered in adjacent pitches, all based on the supertonic in octaves in the bass guitars. After a crescendo and fade

out, the chord metamorphoses part by part down a third on to a new inversion of the chord, the bass rising in contrary motion. Further similarly presented chord changes suggest a modal E minor and then C minor tonality in a non-functional harmonic progression, before returning to G major. At bar 102, a melodic idea of just four pitches with an African flavour, emerges from the texture and gradually the chordal pulsing fades away. Now the counterpoint begins, the 'live' guitar playing fragments of the motif in canon with the first recorded guitar part, gradually adding notes until the theme is complete, at which point a second guitar doubles the line, fading in as the 'live' guitar fades out. A third line joins in, in parallel 5ths with the first, and the texture grows into 8 parts, being two canonic lines each doubled in 5ths, octaves and 2nds in a repeating ostinato. At bar 210 the 'live' guitar initiates a resultant melody from the highest pitches of the two canonic lines and the 9th and 10th guitars thicken the texture with a five-part dissonant cluster chord over an octave E in the bass. Abrupt changes of tonality occasionally structure the wholly diatonic harmonic palette as different resultant melodies are highlighted from the dense contrapuntal texture.

Olivier Messiaen (1908 – 1992)

Olivier Messiaen is one of the most significant French composers of all time. His writing spans the greater part of the twentieth century and is characterised by a style which is distinctive and ground-breaking. He was born in Avignon as the elder son of literary parents – his mother was a published poet and his father an English teacher – and at the age of eleven he entered the Paris Conservatoire, having already been transfixed by the 'modern' music of Debussy and Ravel. His composition teachers included Charles-Marie Widor and Paul Dukas (of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* fame), and he learned the organ from Marcel Dupré. It was here in this musical environment that Messiaen became interested in the exotic sounds of Hindu rhythms, the ancient Greek modes and Gamelan sounds from the island of Bali. Later in his life, Messiaen returned to the Paris Conservatoire as a teacher where he influenced many of the most significant avant-garde composers of the time, including Pierre Boulez, Stockhausen, Goehr and Xenakis.

Messiaen was organist at L'Eglise de la Sainte-Trinité, Paris for over sixty years, playing on the famous Cavaillé-Coll organ for which he wrote many of his most-admired works. He was inspired by his devotion to the Roman Catholic faith and was an inveterate transcriber of birdsong. Fascinated by mathematics, his musical structures are often based on prime numbers; he was also interested in the potential for musical harmonies to create colours (synaesthesia).

Steve Reich (1936 –)

American composers during the twentieth century have been at the forefront of movements challenging established concepts about music and sound, and especially their relationship with the aesthetics of art and performance. Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, Elliott Carter and John Cage (for example with his *Sonatas for Prepared Piano* and infamous 4'33") all in their different ways explored new compositional techniques. Steve Reich studied with Darius Milhaud and Luciano Berio and was strongly influenced by the work of Terry Riley in music which experimented with tape loops and the constant repetition of ostinato patterns which gradually moved in and out of phase with each other. Much of his music explores rhythmic and tonal ambiguities, frequently repeating small cells in complex layered textures, often based on a uniform timbre of instrumental sounds, using long sections of static harmony.

In 1970, Reich went to Ghana to study African drumming, and later to Bali to study gamelan music and much of his output during that decade (*Clapping Music*, *Drumming*, *Music for Pieces of Wood*) explored music for percussion. His Jewish heritage is evident in works such as *Tehillim* (1981) and *Different Trains* (1988), a

work which began a fruitful relationship with the Kronos Quartet. Reich's music influenced other Minimalist composers, such as Philip Glass, John Adams and Michael Nyman, and the style has been mimicked in much rock and electronic pop music in recent years, as well as providing soundtracks for films and television programs.

James MacMillan (1959 –)

James MacMillan was born in Kilwinning in North Ayrshire in 1959, and was introduced to music by his grandfather, a coal miner. He learned to play the piano and trumpet and started composing at an early age, being influenced in his teenage years by music of the Renaissance and rock and roll. He studied composition at Edinburgh and Durham Universities and became interested in the music of contemporary classical composers, such as Penderecki and Arvo Part. He first came to public prominence with the performance at the Proms in 1990 of *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, and he has subsequently become the foremost British composer of our times.

MacMillan's music encompasses a broad range of sacred and secular genres, both vocal and instrumental, and gains its inspiration from his deep Catholic faith and Scottish roots. Faith is central to his writing as can be seen by the wealth of his liturgical and non-liturgical compositions for the church, and he has stated that 'musicians are the midwives of faith'. He continues to direct a church choir in Glasgow and writes for its amateur singers and congregation as well as writing immense and demanding large-scale works for the concert platform. In this regard, he follows in the footsteps of a previous generation of British composers such as Benjamin Britten. He believes that the role of the composer is to 'imagine music that other people cannot imagine'.

Since the turn of the century, MacMillan has forged a parallel career as a conductor, firstly with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra and subsequently the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic, conducting his own works as well as championing the music of other contemporary composers.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906 – 1975)

Shostakovich is widely regarded as the preeminent symphonist of the twentieth century, his considerable output all the more remarkable for the circumstances under which most of his music was written. Much of his work portrays the struggle of the individual against the society in which he exists, most particularly this is true of the intensely personal and expressive string quartets, symphonies and violin and violoncello concertos, but there are also pieces which exhibit great energy, excitement and considerable humour too.

The composer was born in St. Petersburg (later in 1924 to be renamed Leningrad and then restored in 1991), the son of a Siberian engineer, in 1906. He quickly displayed musical talent and an extraordinary ear for musical recall, and he entered the Petrograd Conservatory at the age of 13. As well as studying the piano, Shostakovich took composition lessons and was quickly absorbing the music of Stravinsky and Prokofiev, writing his *First Symphony* as his graduation piece. After the early death of his father, he supported his mother and sisters by playing the piano in a local cinema and then later in a youth theatre. During the late 1920s and early 1930s his music was experimental, often highly dissonant and satirical, if coloured by bright orchestration, influenced by modern trends in Western music. He wrote two operas, *The Nose* and *The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* which initially

received great success for the composer, but was subsequently to have such a catastrophic impact on his life.

Much has been written about the political impact on Shostakovich's work after Stalin's intervention in 1936 and the 'success' of his 5th Symphony. Suffice to say that his music is remarkable for its eclecticism, largely tonal and traditionally structured, yet full of wit, sarcasm and intense expression, frequently exploring the starkest moods of the human soul. He occasionally explored tone rows, having rejected serialism, and was not averse to the influence of jazz. Other influences include Bach's 24 Preludes and Fugues for solo piano, Beethoven (String Quartets) and Mahler (Symphonies). His output is astonishing – 147 works encompassing film scores, incidental music for plays, ballet scores, vocal music and sonatas for violin, viola and violoncello.