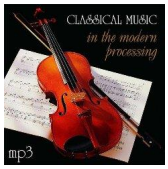
Classical Music For Dummies CD6 - On The Way For Modernity (2010)



01. Richard Strauss - Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra 02. Carl Orff - Carmina Burana 03. Edward Elgar - Pomp and Circomstance 04. Ralph Vaughan-Williams - Fantaisie sur Greensleeves 05. Gustav Holst - Les Planets 06. Benjamin Britten - Simple Symphony 07. Paul Dukas - L'Apprenti Sorcier 08. Erik Satie - Gymnopedie N°1 09. Albert Roussel - Le Festin de l'araignee 10. Maurice Ravel - Bolero 11. Darius Milhaud - Le Boeuf sur le toit 12. Francis Poulenc - Voncerto pour 2 pianos 13. Arnold Shonberg - La nuit transfiguree 14. Anton Webern - Six pieces orchestrales 15. Pierre Boulez - Douze notations pour le piano 16. Leos Janacek - Sinfonietta 17. Bela Bartok - Danses populaires roumaines 18. Jean Sibelius - Concerto pour violon et orchestre en re mineur 19. Manuel de Falla - La vie breve 20. Joaquin Rodrigo - Concierto de Aranjuez 21. Heitor Villa-Lobos - Bachianas Brasileiras N°5 22. George Gerschwin - Rhapsody in Blue 23. Samuel Barber - Adagio 24. Leonard Bernstein - West Side Story 25. Sergui Rachmaninov - Concerto pour piano N°2 26. Serguei Prokoviev - Romeo et Juliette 27. Serguei Prokoviev - Pierre et le loup 28. Igor Stravinsky - Le Sacre du Printemps 29. Aram Khatchatourian - Danse du Sabre 30. Dimitri Chostakovitch - Jazz suite N°2 (Valse) 31. Olivier Messiaen - Quatuor pour la fin du temps 32. Henri Dutilleux - Au gre des Ondes 33. Arvo Part - Spiegel im Spiegle 34. Philip Glass - Fasades

Modernity in music is a multi-faceted and complex phenomenon. The much-used "modernism" is also a catch-all definition which leaves questions still hanging in the air. It is, like socialism or spirituality, a word that can easily be hijacked by partisan voices that then claim ownership of it and thereafter imbue it with their own narrow, specific, pointed, sectarian and self-justifying aura. It has to be said that a particular kind of modernism, specific to certain places, times, ideologies and forceful personalities, has been sublimated into a paradigmatic position in our own time.

A European modernism, with its roots in the Second Viennese School and developed by a small group of post-war composers in certain European towns and cities, has been given a special place in official understandings of the development of modern music. A message has gone out

that composers, and indeed the musical public, should regard this sanctioned path as, not just the way forward, but the way things are and ought to be. State broadcasters, many sharing the aesthetic and political perspective of the composers themselves and their followers, give the oxygen of life, publicity and dissemination to this view of the musical present and future.

This has been especially the case in Germany and France, which are much more controlled by a centralised and top-down view of what high culture should be. A central, pivotal figure in this development is Pierre Boulez, composer, conductor and radically scathing polemicist, at least in his younger days. An Alpha male par excellence in the musical world, a powerful, driven figure, always manoeuvring politically and pushing boundaries imaginatively, he has never hidden his determination to put his biases into operation. It has been suggested that his influence on legions of third-rate imitators over the last few generations has been pernicious. Mediocre acolytes have been bedazzled by the master's encyclopaedic panoply of colouristic subtleties and rhythmic intricacies — so much so, that a lot of modern music is obsessed, fetishistically, with surface detail to the detriment, perhaps, of core profundities.

Nevertheless, Boulez's influence on musical culture as a composer and a conductor has been powerful and meticulously plotted. His choice of repertoire is large and interesting, covering Berlioz, Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, Bartók, Schoenberg and Messiaen. Others are constantly and steadily added — Wagner, Mahler and some major contemporary figures such as Berio and Ligeti. But the omissions from this list are also fascinating and revealing. There is no Brahms and hardly any Schumann. He compares the latter unfavourably (justifiably so, perhaps) to Mendelssohn as showing "little invention and even little skill". Explaining his priorities, Boulez says: "There are composers who possess this gift of instrumental invention and others who, more or less, lack it...If you compare the symphonies of Brahms with the operas of Wagner solely from the viewpoint of instrumentation...one is not bowled over by his [Brahms's] instrumental imagination."

"Solely from the viewpoint of instrumentation" is the key here. Brahms's structural genius in reshaping classical models, his gift for soaring melody and expansive spiritual vision are all subordinated to the ear-tickling skill of instrumental choice. This is understandably French, of course, and Boulez comes from a tradition that has emphasised perfumed delicacies and nuanced subtleties, but it may explain not only his blind spots, but also modernism's over-indulgence of surfaces instead of the deep heart. Perhaps this justifies Boulez's disregard of Bruckner, Hindemith and Sibelius and all the Russians from Prokofiev and Shostakovich to Schnittke.

It may also explain the Anglophobic prejudices of many French musicians — Britten and Tippett

do not appear in Boulez's repertoire and precious little that has been written since. But there are also significant French omissions — no Poulenc or any of the important contemporary figures that follow a different aesthetic and reject the dogmas of L'Eglise Boulezienne. As far as American music is concerned, no Copland, no Adams, but lots of Elliott Carter. ---James Macmillan, standpointmag.co.uk

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