



## Modernism vs. Neo-Classicism



## What is Modernism?

- ◆ Before 1914: self-conscious search for a language of music adequate and reflective of the contemporary moment
- ◆ Notion of modernity dominated by science, technology, industry, positivism etc. Found musical response in heightened sense of individual; isolation of the individual
- ◆ Overtly departs from immediate past and models
- ◆ Continuous search for “new”

## Bela Bartok (1881-1945)

Sought a synthesis of classical traditions and “peasant music,” not to create a backwards looking music, but something entirely new and modern



At the same time that composers are actively seeking to create “Modern” works, others reject that aesthetic and many of its premises...

## Music and the New Objectivity

- ◆ Reject claims that music is self-contained; seek communication and reference to external subjects
- ◆ Musicians seek broader basis—avoid complexity, include familiar elements
- ◆ Embrace popular culture (esp. Jazz), Classical repertoire

Composers:

Paul Hindemith, Ernst Toch, George Antheil, Kurt Weill

## France: Neo-Classicism

- ◆ 1914-23 “neo-classical” used pejoratively for abstract, architectural, pure, direct, objective art
  - ◆ Opposite of metaphysical, symbolic, sentimental, subjective
- ◆ Growing anti-German sentiment early 1920s
- ◆ “Les Six” groups of French composers; seek to deny expressive intentions of music (Honegger, Milhaud, Poulenc, Taillefer, Aruic, and Durey)

- ◆ 1923 term first used to describe Igor Stravinsky's new music. . . But Stravinsky's new style begins earlier than that
- ◆ 1918: *L'histoire du soldat*
  - ◆ Includes vernacular music: Ragtime, Tango; tonal simplicity
- ◆ 1920: *Pulcinella* for Ballets Russes
  - ◆ Reworking of music originally by Pergolesi (1710-36); notes and rhythms altered
  - ◆ Not so much a *return* to past, but revitalization of certain traditions

### Symphony of Psalms (1930)

- ◆ Three-movement setting of Latin Psalms for chorus and orchestra (first mvt: Psalm 38)
- ◆ Neo-Classical:
  - ◆ Use of old / abstract forms
  - ◆ Create tonal center by repetition (not function)
  - ◆ Avoid emotionalism: detachment and objectivity

### Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979)

- ◆ French composition teacher and conductor
- ◆ taught American students esp. Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Roy Harris
- ◆ Advocate for Stravinsky's neo-classical style; encouraged students in same vein
- ◆ Largely responsible for growth of Neo-Classicism in the USA 1920s-30s



### Darius Milhaud (1892-1974)

- ◆ Member of "Les Six": Reject excessive "Romanticism" and excessive foreign influence
- ◆ Value: clarity, accessibility, emotional restraint
- ◆ Greatly influenced by popular music outside France: Brazilian dance, Jazz and ragtime (less of a nationalist than others in his circle)

### La création du monde (1923)

- ◆ Composed for Balles Suédois (Swedish ballet)
- ◆ Uses jazz as expression of African-American experience rooted in ancient African traditions
- ◆ Blends "classical" music traditions with energy of jazz: piano, saxophone
- ◆ First tableau: fugue + blues scale + jazz rhythms + polytonality + polyrhythms