

20th Century music

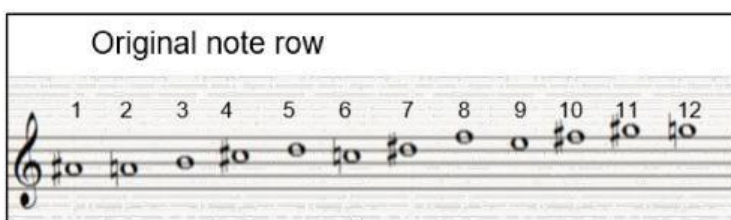
• Serial	• Neo classical	• EDM	• Contemporary jazz
• Retrograde	• Sprechgesang	• Tritone	• Polytonality
• Bitonality	• Tone row/ note row	• Augmented triad	

Serialism is a highly structured, almost mathematical method of 20th-century composition invented by **Arnold Schoenberg**. Instead of writing in a traditional key, the composer organizes all 12 notes of the chromatic scale into a specific, fixed order called a **Tone Row (or Note Row)**. No note can be repeated until all other 11 notes have been played, ensuring the music remains completely **atonal**.

To create variety while maintaining unity, the composer manipulates the original row using four strict mathematical variations:

- **Prime (Original):** The basic, unaltered sequence of the 12 notes.
- **Inversion:** The row turned completely upside down. If the original melody moves up a minor 3rd, the inversion moves down a minor 3rd.
- **Retrograde:** The row played entirely backwards, starting from the final note and ending on the first
- **Retrograde-Inversion:** The upside-down version of the row played entirely backwards.
- **Transposition:** Any of the variations above shifted bodily up or down to start on a different starting pitch.

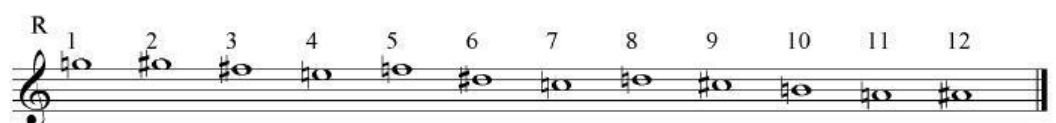
Schoenberg created this system to escape the gravity of traditional major and minor keys. The resulting music is intensely dissonant, features jagged vocal or instrumental leaps, and completely lacks a tonal home centre. It represents the absolute extreme of Expressionism



INVERSION: start on the first note and move the same intervals but in the opposite direction.



RETROGRADE: You can also play the row backwards. This is called a **retrograde order (R)**.



RETROGRADE INVERSION: Backwards and inverted



This is a tone-row by Arnold Schoenberg from his work *Variations for Orchestra* Op. 31

Four musical staves showing the prime, retrograde, inversion, and inverse retrograde forms of a tone-row. The Prime form is in G-flat major (one flat). The Retrograde form is the reverse of the Prime. The Inversion form is the Prime with each note moved to the same interval above or below the original. The Inverse Retrograde form is the reverse of the Inversion. A red arrow points from the Prime form to the Retrograde form.

Here it is with rhythm and dynamics added, as used in the piece

Four musical staves showing the original, retrograde, retrograde inversion, and violin part of the tone-row. The original staff is labeled "[original]" and includes the instruction "p zart". The retrograde staff is labeled "[retrograde]". The retrograde inversion staff is labeled "[retrograde inversion]". The violin part staff is labeled "(Vlns.)" and includes the instruction "pp sehr ruhig [inversion]". A red arrow points from the Prime form in the previous block to the original staff.

Other features of Serial Music

- **Unresolved dissonances** throughout the music (when two or more notes are sounded together which clash with one another).
- **No clear metre/ no regular pulse.** You cannot work out the time signature.
- **Large leaps** in melodic lines. This movement is described as disjunct. You cannot whistle the melody.
- Extremely **complex rhythmic patterns**
- **Augmentation** – increasing the value (length) of all notes by an exact amount
- **Diminution** – decreasing the value (length) of all notes by an exact amount
- As the music is so difficult to play, it tended to be written for **small groups of players** (usually chamber music)

• Tritone

A **tritone** is an interval made up of three whole tones (or six semitones). It divides the octave exactly in half. It is notoriously the most unstable and clashing interval in Western music, historically nicknamed "Diabolus in Musica" (The Devil in Music). It is an **augmented 4th**, eg C–F sharp or F–B. It is made up of three whole tones.



e.g. *Maria* (*West Side Story*)



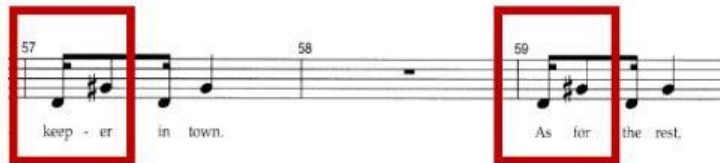
e.g. *The Simpsons*



The Thenardiers in Les Misérables have a number of tritones in their songs, giving an edgy, mocking and villainous sound to their songs. In 'Castle on a cloud' Mme Thenardier interrupts Cosette's beautiful and sweet song with phrases that have lots of tritones.



• In 'Master of the House, there are also tritones, giving a mocking, harsh tone.



• e.g. *Someday my prince will come* – features **AUGMENTED TRIADS** and a **TRITONE**



• Sprechgesang

Sprechgesang (literally "Spoken Song") is a 20th-century Expressionist vocal technique that sits halfway between speaking and singing. The performer strictly follows the written rhythm but only hits the precise pitch momentarily before immediately letting it drop or rise, creating an eerie, theatrical effect

- It was developed to convey dark, intense, and unstable psychological states.
- The vocal lines are completely atonal and avoid traditional key centres.
- The "melody" is characterised by wide, jagged, and awkward leaps (such as tritones or major 7ths) instead of smooth, step-wise movement



Listen to Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* This features a female vocalist reciting surrealist poems accompanied by a small chamber ensemble.

Bitonality & Polytonality

- **Bitonality:** The simultaneous use of **two** different keys or tonal centres in different layers of the music at the same time.
- **Polytonality:** The simultaneous use of **three or more** different keys across the ensemble.



Listen to Stravinsky – *Petrushka* (1911)

Stravinsky famously uses bitonality to represent the puppet Petrushka's fractured psychological state. This specific clashing sound is known globally as the "**Petrushka Chord**."

(from 0:26) The 1st clarinet plays an arpeggiated melody in **C major** (no sharps/flats), while the 2nd clarinet simultaneously plays a matching melody in **F# major** (6 sharps). This technique creates an intensely dissonant, clashing, and unstable **20th-century texture**.



- What interval is C-F#? _____
- What is the effect of pairing two bright keys this interval apart?



Listen to Milhaud – *Copacabana* (1920)

Milhaud provides an example of bitonality influenced by jazz and popular idioms.

- The left hand of the piano or lower orchestra chugs along in a clear **G major**, while the right hand or upper melody sings a distinct line in **B major**.
- Unlike the harsh clash of *Petrushka*, Milhaud uses bitonality to create a rich, sun-drenched, and shimmering multi-layered atmosphere.

The use of two (**bitonality**) or more keys (**polytonality**) played or sung at the same time, e.g. the melody might be in the key of C major whilst the accompaniment might be in E major. This device was used by many 20th-century composers.

e.g. Stravinsky's ballet *Petrushka*, where the 1st clarinet plays a melody in the key of C major while the 2nd clarinet plays nearly the same melody in the key of F# major.

This is heard at 0:26

Cl. I (Sib)
Cl. II (La)
Fag. I, II
Tr. I
V. I.

e.g. Milhaud – 'Copacabana' – play from 0:55

- **Neo classical**

Neo-Classicism is a 20th-century style where composers reacted against intense Romantic emotionalism by returning to the balanced structures, smaller orchestras, and absolute forms of the Baroque and Classical eras, but infusing them with 20th-century harmonies and rhythms



Stravinsky: *Pulcinella* (1920)

A direct re-working of 18th-century music that seamlessly blends old and new styles:

- **The classical Template:** Stravinsky uses a small“ classical chamber orchestra (double woodwinds without clarinets, two horns, trumpet, and trombone).
- **Baroque Structure:** The strings are partitioned into a traditional **Concerto Grosso** format, contrasting a small soloist group (**Concertino**: two violins, viola, cello, bass) against the full string section (**Ripieno**).
- **The 20th-Century Twist:** Traditional textures are updated with sudden, biting **dissonances**, unexpected rhythmic accents, and modern instrumental techniques.



Prokofiev: *Classical Symphony* (1917)

An original work modelled on the clarity and elegance of Haydn’s classical style:

- **Classical Structure** Adheres to the traditional four-movement Classical symphony design:
 - Allegro: A lively opening movement written in strict Sonata Form.
 - Larghetto: A lyrical, song-like slow movement.
 - Gavotte: A courtly French dance that replaces the traditional Minuet or Scherzo.
 - Finale: A rapid, high-energy Rondo closure.
- **The 20th-Century Twist:** Prokofiev fuses Classical orchestration and structure with sudden harmonic surprises, unexpected modulations to distant keys, and crisp, modern sonorities.



Listen to the 3rd movement of the Classical Symphony and fill in the missing banks

The articulation of the strings and the woodwind at the beginning is

_____ and the leaps in the melody are the interval of an

_____. The texture is largely _____ and the cadence heard

at the end of the first section is _____. At the start of the middle

section there is a _____ in the cello/basses and timpani while the

_____ and the clarinets play the melody. The melody then passes to the

_____ while the _____ plays a _____

alongside. On the return of the first section the strings play _____

Electronic Dance Music (EDM) is a broad umbrella term for a wide range of percussive, electronic music genres designed primarily for nightclubs, festivals, and raves. It is typically structured around a continuous, loop-based pulse where a DJ seamlessly crossfades and mixes tracks into one fluid performance.

Early EDM relied heavily on hardware like standalone **drum machines**, analogue **synthesisers**, and hardware **sequencers**. Modern tracks are mixed and produced entirely inside computers using Digital Audio Workstations

Built using complex layers of audio **sampling**, digital **effects** (e.g. reverb, delay, filters), and intensive **multitrack recording**.  Listen to *Daft Punk – One More Time (2000)*

- **Vocal Effects:** The vocals use heavy Auto-Tune to create a robotic, electronic sound.
- **Loops:** The main backing track is built entirely around a short, repeating brass sample (ostinato).
- **The Breakdown:** A section where the main heavy drum beat completely stops to break up the repetition and build intense suspense.
- **The Filter Effect:** During this breakdown, a digital filter blocks out the high notes, making the music sound muffled and distant. As the song builds toward the "drop," the filter opens back up to let the crisp high notes back in until the full, high-energy track explodes.

Contemporary Jazz is an umbrella term for all jazz music played from the 1980s up to the present day. It blends the freedom of traditional jazz with modern production, world music, and avant-garde styles. It encompasses two main branches: Modern Jazz and Smooth Jazz. Key Features:

- **Adventurous Harmonies:** Uses highly complex, chromatic chords that can sound beautifully blurred (like Impressionism) or completely clashing (atonal).
- **Rhythmic Innovation:** Features heavy rhythmic experimentation, including rapid changes in time signatures, complex cross-rhythms, and unpredictable accents.
- **Groove-Based Writing:** Instead of traditional chord progressions, pieces are often built on a hypnotic groove using just two or three repeating chords.
- **Extended Performance Techniques:** Instruments are pushed to their absolute limits. Melodic instruments (like the saxophone or double bass) are played percussively, and players use advanced features like harmonics.
- **New Instrumentation:** Incorporates world music influences and prominently features instruments previously rare in jazz ensembles, such as the flugelhorn, flute, or oboe.



Listen to Diana Krall – "Devil May Care": sleek modern vocal jazz, showcasing a driving swing groove, and virtuosic piano improvisation.



Listen to Tommy Smith – Live at the Blue Lamp, Aberdeen:
Showcases intense rhythmic experimentation, blistering speeds, avant-garde improvisations, and advanced saxophone techniques like multiphonics and overblowing.



- Question 6 – Compare the following two extracts

Categories	Excerpt 1	Excerpt 2
Melody/ harmony		
Rhythm/ texture/ structure/form/timbre		

FINAL ANSWER

(i) Excerpt 1

2

(ii) Excerpt 2

2

Question 6 (continued)

(b) This question has two parts.

(i) Analyse the two excerpts you have just heard.

In your extended answer you should refer to six similarities/
differences across the following categories

- Type of work
- Melody/harmony
- Rhythm/texture/structure/form/timbre

(ii) Conclude your analysis with a statement on the style/period of
each excerpt and justify your answer.

ROUGH WORK

Rough work

FINAL ANSWER

(i) Analysis

Comment on six similarities/differences you hear in the excerpts. Your final answer should be a written description of what you have heard and not simply a list of similarities/differences.

4

(ii) Conclusion

Write a statement on the style/ period of each excerpt and justify your answer

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