

Schoenberg: 'Peripetie' from Five Orchestral Pieces, Op. 16 (1909)

Learning Objectives:

- To know and understand the origins and features of the genre *expressionism*.
- To know about the life and works of *Arnold Schoenberg*.
- To understand how *Serialist* techniques are used in the set work 'Peripetie'.

Starter:

- What do you think *expressionism* is and what do think expressionist musicians, artists and writers were trying to portray? Use the resources provided by Mrs Dunn to help you!

Key Features of expressionism:

- Expressionist music is *atonal*-it avoids being in one particular key and using the main chords in that key, therefore giving each of the 12 semitones equal importance.
- Each piece generally confines itself to expressing one intense _____.
- Composers make full use of the pitch range of instruments, exploring the difference in instrumental colour that can be heard at the extremes of the instruments registers.
- *Timbre* is felt to be as important as melody-the sound of the instruments is felt to contribute to the melody as much as pitch.
- Extremes of dynamics are common, from as quiet as possible to as loud as possible. This can be even more dramatic in large ensembles when the music can go from just a few instruments playing very quietly to the full ensemble playing very loudly.
- Pieces tend to be quiet short (it is difficult to write a piece of considerable length without the framework of a key structure and the use of the recognisable themes that can be developed!)

Extended learning task:

- Research the composer *Arnold Schoenberg*. Be prepared to share at least 2 facts about his life or his work with your peer's next lesson.

Background to Five Orchestral pieces

- 'Five orchestral Pieces' by *Arnold Schoenberg* is a set of *atonal* pieces for *full orchestra*.
- They all last between one and five minutes and are not connected to each other by the use of any thematic ideas.
- In this piece Schoenberg is concerned with the combination of *timbres* rather than with melody and harmony.

Fact:

- Schoenberg loved to conceal things within his compositions (he believed that the intelligent and attentive listener would hear the deeper meanings within them music, even if it has not been explained to them previously).
- Bach used his name as a musical motif (the notes B-A-C-H in German note translate to Bb-A-C-B natural in English note names). It is suggested that Schoenberg came with the idea of a *hexachord* by finding the musical notes within his name (SCHONBERG= Es (s), C, H, B, E, G, which translates to Eb, C, B natural, Bb, E natural, G) He rarely used this particular *hexachord* in his music, but did use other hexachords closely related to his 'signature' hexachord.

Peripetie: Listen to Peripetie and comment on how each of the elements of music are used:

Dynamics:

Rhythm/Metre:

Structure:

Melody:

Instrumentation/Timbre:

Texture:

Harmony:

Peripetie analysis

It has an unusual structure:

- Schoenberg didn't use a *conventional structure* (there isn't an obvious *melody*). He uses *melody fragments* and *complicated, fragmented rhythms*. Each *fragment* is based on a *hexachord* (a group of 6 notes from the 12 different semitones). The six semitones *not* used in the *hexachord* are called the *complement*.
- It's *atonal*. Schoenberg uses the hexachords to create *dissonance*.
- Peripetie's almost in *Rondo* form, therefore some people say it's a *free rondo* (the same melodic ideas returns a few times). The sections are *different lengths*, and the *textures* and *tempos* change in each section.
- This movement's marked *Sehr rasch* (very fast) and its only 66 bars long. Schoenberg gives other instructions during the piece, like *heftig* (passionate) and *ruhiger* (calmer).
- It's an example of *Klangfarbenmelodie* (a German word that means 'tone colour melody'). The name was made up by Schoenberg, and it's a technique he used to break up a melody by passing it round different parts. It gives the tune variations in the *timbre*.

The instrumentation changes in each section:

- **Section A (Bars 1-18):** ***Every instrument*** in the orchestra gets to play in section A (but only for a bar or two at a time). The instruments play in groups (the clarinets, bass clarinet and bassoons play one *melodic fragment*, followed by trumpets and trombones, and so on-the little bits of tune are passed around the orchestra). This section starts off *very loud*, but drops down to *pp* in bar 6.
- **Section B (Bars 18-34):**

Check your understanding! Fill in the gaps below:

Hexachord:

Atonal:

Dissonance:

Rondo:

Free Rondo:

Melodic Fragment:
