Your notes

GCSE Music: revision notes

Western classical tradition since 1910

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The strands (AQA)

- The orchestral music of Copland.
- British music of Arnold, Britten, Maxwell Davies and Tavener.
- The orchestral music of Kodály and Bartók.
- The **minimalism** of Adams, Reich and Riley.

20th-century styles

- Copland wrote music with an American sound, using folk tunes, **open fifths**, syncopation and bright orchestration, such as in his ballets.
- Kodály and Bartók used folk music from Hungary, with modal melodies, irregular rhythms and dissonance.
- British composers such as Britten wrote operas and choral music; Tavener's music is often slow and spiritual.

Minimalism

- **Minimalism** uses short repeated patterns (loops or **cells**) that change very gradually.
- Techniques include **phasing** (the same pattern played at slightly different speeds so the parts drift apart), additive and subtractive melody (adding or removing notes), and layering.
- Harmony changes slowly, and there is often a steady pulse. Reich, Riley and Adams are key minimalists.

Other modern techniques

- Atonality, dissonance, **irregular metres**, unusual playing techniques, and music technology.

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Key terms

Minimalism	A style built on short repeated patterns that change gradually.
Phasing	The same pattern played at slightly different speeds so the parts drift apart.
Additive melody	A pattern that grows by adding notes each time.
Cell	A short musical idea used as a building block.
Open fifth	Two notes a fifth apart with no third, giving a bare sound.
Irregular metre	A time signature with an unusual number of beats, such as 7/8.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is minimalism?
2. What is phasing?
3. Which composer is a minimalist?
4. What is additive melody?
5. Which composer wrote orchestral music with an American sound?
6. Which composers used Hungarian folk music?
7. What is an open fifth?
8. How does harmony usually change in minimalist music?

Answers

1. Music built on short repeated patterns that change gradually
2. The same pattern at slightly different speeds so parts drift apart
3. Steve Reich
4. A pattern that grows by adding notes each time
5. Aaron Copland
6. Kodály and Bartók
7. Two notes a fifth apart with no third
8. Very slowly

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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