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Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Schoenberg today

THE VIEWS OF SOME CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS

Three years ago CONTACT began a series of articles on the music and ideas of Arnold Schoenberg. Though there was already a sizeable body of writing more or less easily available on the composer, it seemed to me then, as an undergraduate wishing to find out more about how the music worked, that there was very little published material in English that was sufficiently generalised to be intelligible to even the more than averagely interested music student and yet at the same time was sufficiently detailed to be of use. Writing which lay somewhere between the proliferating detail of the articles in PERSPECTIVES OF NEW MUSIC which, by their attitude of reverential awe (Schoenberg can do no wrong) and their frequent, apparent abstruseness, succeed in putting off nearly all but the already committed reader, and the vacantly unhelpful platitudes of H.H. Stuckenschmidt's early book.

In only three years this situation has improved, however, and shows every chance of improving much further in the future. Concerning the music, by far the best account to have appeared in book form seems to me to be Arnold Whittall's BBC Music Guide on the chamber music (London 1972) which, though very short, rises way above the superficiality of many of the other books in the series and manages to discuss important points that relate outside its immediate terms of reference. Leo Black's translation of Willi Reich's book under the title Schoenberg: a Critical Biography (1971) adds a good deal which is of largely biographical significance. For the future, the most important items would seem to be the vastly enlarged Style and Idea which Faber have been promising for a very long time and, I believe, the 'official' critical biography from Stuckenschmidt. There will, too, be a Master Musicians book on Schoenberg from Malcolm MacDonald - at long, long last.

In the field of articles, CONTACT's small contribution has consisted of a general account of Schoenberg's Expressionist period by Laurence Williamson (CONTACT 3), a discussion of the Third Act of Moses und Aron by John Drummond (CONTACT 5), an analysis of the Violin Fantasy from Arnold Whittall (CONTACT 6) and an article entitled 'Schoenberg as Rhythmic Innovator' by Richard Emsley (CONTACT 8).

In this, the centenary year of Schoenberg's birth, I had to make a decision. How to make an interesting and significant contribution in a small journal

in so obvious an editors' field day? Was it worth adding to the welter of critical and analytical articles by established writers involved with the phenomenon of Schoenberg (for he is a unique phenomenon, though I have come to dislike applying the term to him)? Centenary articles (this had to be written in June) which will undoubtedly pour off the presses - or SHOULD do - in September and which, typically, PERSPECTIVES has been assiduously producing since 1972.

Eventually I hit upon something far more interesting - and which it's distinctly possible that others may have thought of, too. I decided to ask a number of composers of varying stylistic persuasions to write short articles (no more than 1,000 words) entirely about their personal reactions to Schoenberg's personality, ideas and music. I asked that it should not be a purely historical account and that it should certainly be by no means necessarily an objective one in any sense. To set them off I asked three generalised, but quite specifically and intentionally worded, questions, as follows:

1. What, in your view, is Schoenberg's position today?
2. What is the nature of his rôle in 20th century music in general?
3. What, if any, is Schoenberg's significance for you as a composer working today?

The rationale behind this decision was as follows:

Critics - though they are, we trust, ordinary human beings with ordinary human feelings, predilections and failings (or they shouldn't be critics) - write, or at least are expected to write, from an essentially unbiased viewpoint. At least they give the reader both sides of the argument fairly and, though the concept of a totally uncommitted critic is, in my view entirely spurious (and something which I hope to write about in a future issue of CONTACT), the critics do frequently leave him to judge for himself.

Composers, on the other hand, are, as Schoenberg himself said (see the review of the letters in this issue) "in the first instance fighters for their own musical ideas". Their writings are therefore the least 'reliable' objectively speaking - if it really is possible to speak objectively - since the composer's own inclinations towards certain forms of expression lead him to discard others as having no value for him. Thus, while as a musician he may be willing to accept the validity of forms and styles completely alien to his own, as a composer he is bound to experience a critical barrier which prevents him from always making a just criticism of music far removed from his own creative experience. Or even, perhaps, of music too close to that experience.

For this reason composers who are able to commit (the word is used intentionally) their ideas to paper are frequently more interesting than critics; anyway, they don't have to do it so often, so they don't get so jaded. More than this, though, composers who can use words have, to my mind, an enormous importance, particularly in an age of chronic uncertainty. What the composer lacks in conventional critical balance he makes up for in commitment to his art and his ability to see (we should say 'hear') the

music from the inside. If he is like Schoenberg he will be able to fight "for the life or death" of his ideas, yet at the same time be willing to change his opinions, "to learn something new, to accept the contrary and to digest it, the contrary of all I have believed in my whole life - if it is capable of convincing me" (see Letter 230 in the selected edition). Perhaps composers who are also known as writers on music (though not necessarily 'critics' in the newspaper journalism sense) are the most interesting of all to read. Perhaps not entirely by chance, we have at least three of these represented in the following six articles.

I had thought that, Rufer's collection of composers' notes on their use of twelve note technique apart, I may have been among the first to assemble a series of views of Schoenberg in this way. On doing a little research, however, I discovered that MUSIC AND LETTERS ran a not dissimilar series of 25 (not six!) articles in its October 1951 issue, immediately following Schoenberg's death and just a few months before the publication of Boulez' famous article 'Schönberg is Dead' (THE SCORE, May 1952). This very varied 23-year-old collection of views should be read as an interesting supplement to the present one. Only eleven of the 25 contributors are, to my knowledge, known as composers to any extent. The rest are writers, critics and broadcasters; only one (Sir Adrian Boult, no less!) is known exclusively as a performer. All but nine are still alive. On close examination, I have to admit that all 25 opinions, even the three I personally find the most obnoxious, are almost certainly still quite widely held today.

It would be foolhardy to generalise - even, perhaps especially, about composers' present opinions - from only six viewpoints, particularly since I have unfortunately been unable to get an article in time from any composer under 35 whose present work could be described as being either avantgarde or experimental. (Perhaps this is in itself significant. Readers may like to know that a total of 13 composers of varying ages and persuasions were asked to contribute.) But the idea, in both collections, was the gaining of individual opinions, so the generalisations don't really matter anyway.

But I have said enough. Here are the six views which I have received so far, presented in alphabetical order according to the composers' surnames. The author's copyright is in each case retained. Only one article - that by Virgil Thomson - was not written especially for CONTACT: this is taken from the NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE of 10 September 1944, the article also being republished in Virgil Thomson, The Art of Judging Music (New York 1969), pp. 185-187. Our thanks to Mr Thomson for his permission to republish this.

It is not planned to continue discussion of Schoenberg in the same format beyond this issue, but we will undertake to publish any correspondence which may arise out of these articles. It is hoped to include an article by Martin Dreyer on the use of language in Pierrot Lunaire in the next issue - after the centenary celebrations have died down. With that, our Schoenberg series may be considered to have ended.

KEITH POTTER

SCHOENBERG'S NIGHT LIFE

First of all, let me say that I am writing as one who does not like - no, positively dislikes - most of Schoenberg's music, and devotees of it will probably find what I have to say subjective and irreverent, not to say misinformed. However, it is interesting to try and discover why one reacts to something so strongly, whether negatively or positively, and this I will try to do.

I suppose that most people would agree that, after Debussy, the father-figures of modern music are Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Bartók. Bartók's influence is probably the least widespread, although I think he was a far greater composer than Schoenberg. Stravinsky's influence was - is - very far-reaching, but rather than form a school, he seems to have inspired imitators; his musical personality is so strong that few composers seem to have been able to absorb his style and make it their own. Schoenberg certainly formed a school, most obviously in his pupils Webern and Berg but which is equally apparent in many of the composers who adopted serialism and still persist in writing in a Schoenberg/Webern idiom. Why is this? Why does the lesser composer have the greater following? I think the answer lies in one word - system.

Any composer trying to find himself at the turn of the century had problems, and would look to a variety of methods to solve them. Stravinsky had the innate, intuitive genius virtually to turn his back on the 19th century and produce, intuitively as he himself said, The Rite of Spring. Bartok was more obviously aware of his immediate musical past, but he too was able to create a fresh new language, partly by incorporating folk elements into his music. But Schoenberg seems to have been overwhelmed by his musical forbears. His early works show that at heart he was a late romantic, and as he became increasingly aware that romanticism was a cul-de-sac, he had to look for a way out. Not having the natural intuitive genius of Stravinsky or Bartók, what better method than a system? But it is interesting that two of his most successful and widely performed works, the Five Orchestral Pieces and Pierrot Lunaire, were written before the serial method was crystallised.

Seeing how these three men found themselves as composers throws up some interesting thoughts on the very nature of composition. If you believe, as I do, that all great art is intuitive and to do with the unconscious, dreams etc., then apply this thesis to these three composers. Stravinsky said that he didn't 'compose' The Rite, he was merely the 'vessel' through which The Rite passed; also the Octet came to him in a dream. Bartok's night music is not merely a romantic evocation of night-time noises, but shows him truly in touch with the 'other' world of the unconscious, dreams and sleep. When Schoenberg, on the other hand, writes a night piece it is, significantly, a night-mare piece - Pierrot Lunaire. Apart from the early Verklärte Nacht he didn't, as far as I know, write any other dream pieces; the system took over shortly after Pierrot, and dreams and systems don't have much in common.

I wonder if Schoenberg ever met Freud? They lived in the same city at the same time. It would be interesting to know how Schoenberg viewed psychoanalysis, and in what way it might have affected his work - and consequently the course of 20th century music.

(C) 1974 by GEOFFREY BURGON

ON SCHOENBERG

"...musical ideas must correspond to the laws of human logic; they are part of what man can apperceive, reason and express."(1)

'Schoenberg' is a pinnacle of musical complexity. It is not complexity for its own sake: to adapt his own image, complexity came to Schoenberg's nature almost as ineluctably as apples to an apple tree. What is the meaning of stretching the powers of pattern-comprehension of mankind in this way? Man has developed his pattern-comprehension, his algebra, to an extraordinary peak. This development has involved us in many losses on the spiritual side, yet the materialism and positivism and the current paradigm of objectivity - all that we have achieved - are not to be put aside as the gathering reaction against them would wish. We have become individuals, separated from each other and the universe by reason. Having left the fold of spiritual group-consciousness to achieve this proud, rational independence, we are now in a position <u>freely</u> to make an act of reunion. It is by an act of <u>choice</u>, not by virtue of <u>belonging</u> that we are to rejoin the fold of spiritual unity where we belong. As with the prodigal son, the father will welcome us with a joy far in excess of any poured out to those who stayed at home. They didn't choose. Their acts of love were conditioned, not free. Until one is free from pressures - of family, church, state, tribe or instincts - one cannot claim to act freely. To be free from pressures, one must understand them in full consciousness; only the scrutiny of reason can liberate. Schoenberg reasoned, he was free. Unlike the Romantics, he achieved his spontaneity, his naturalness by way of a free choice from an independent standpoint. He embraced the recent achievements of intellectual man together with ancient traditions and innate knowledge of the spiritual life. The two joined within him in a new synthesis. Those who nowadays are tempted, in their disgust at our 'descent into matter' which has turned sourly into 'materialism', to reject the extraordinary precision that the measurement of the universe has put at our disposal, must face the charge that they are retrogressive. They would move back to the tribal soul; they have been shown, and learnt nothing. Schoenberg is a perpetual challenge to such attitudes. An awkward reminder who continues to dwarf nearly all other composers of our century. Some dismiss his serial works as pedantic. In the best of those works we are stretched to our full powers as 20th century man, equipped with minds which can measure and understand dense complexes

of relationships. The multiplicity of levels of meaning (purely musical ones) approaches or equals that of the great classical composers of the tonal system. That their apprehension is difficult is no criticism. And shining through this, permeating it with light, is the spirituality and love of a great artist, an integrative force uniting soul with soul, soul with God. As he said:

"...there is only one content, which all great men wish to express: the longing of mankind for its future form, for an immortal soul, for dissolution into the universe - the longing of this soul for its God. This alone, though reached by many different roads and detours and expressed by many different means, is the content of the works of the great;..."(2)

Schoenberg's road remains, even now, one of the newest and bravest.

(C) 1974 by JONATHAN HARVEY

Notes

(1) Arnold Schoenberg, 'Composition with Twelve Tones' (1941), Style and Idea (London 1951), p. 109.

(2) Arnold Schoenberg, 'Gustav Mahler', Style and Idea, p. 26.

SCHOENBERG: A PERSONAL VIEW

Anyone superficially acquainted with my musical style would not readily name Schoenberg as a major influence upon it. The only time that this has ever been done, to my knowledge, was in a review by Colin Mason of my Piano Concerto in which he referred to it as 'Schoenbergian' in texture. I think, however, he was mistaken: the work is not Schoenbergian at all, except in a special sense which I will come to later. Nor have I ever embraced serialism as a technique, except in a very limited and rudimentary way. The critic who praised the last movement of my String Trio for its twelve note fugue subject had simply miscounted: it consists of ten notes, and has clear tonal implications.

Yet I have always felt that Schoenberg mattered. In my early days as a university teacher I acquired the records of the Violin Concerto and the complete String Quartets from a friend in America long before they became available here. I acquired Style and Idea - still not available here(1) - at about the same time and from the same source. Whence then did my sense of his importance spring?

On reflection I think it stemmed more from his example than from his art.

The music itself I still find impenetrable and I suspect I always will. It is based on premises I cannot wholly accept, anomalies I cannot wholly resolve. It remains a perpetual challenge but also a perpetual enigma. Yet the single-minded devotion to his art, the commitment to traditional values, the sheer moral and intellectual stamina: these are heroic qualities which command respect and deserve emulation.

There is, of course, more than one Schoenberg. The Schoenberg of the early Expressionist period is the one most foreign to me. It is a world I cannot enter. I can admire the teeming instrumental invention of Pierrot Lunaire and Erwartung, but I admire from afar, uninvolved and unmoved. I am aware that this may well be a limitation in my own artistic make-up, but I am nevertheless convinced that Expressionism as an aesthetic has outlived its relevance. Limited and limiting, it is tied ineluctably to its time and place - the hot-house atmosphere of pre-1914 Vienna.

Then there is the Schoenberg of the philosophical and/or religious works. This is a Schoenberg I can identify with far more closely, though I recognise that the affinity is more a matter of subject than of musical style. Hearing Friede auf Erden for the first time only recently I realised through the medium of hindsight that this was exactly what I had been trying to do in my own Pro Pace motets of twenty years ago. The symbol of Jacob's Ladder is another unconscious link. Forty years after Die Jakobsleiter the story turns up again in the first part of my oratorio Urbs Beata, and, totally different though the musical treatments of the theme may be, its significance as an image is fundamental to both works. Moses und Aron, a noble attempt to express the ultimately inexpressible, is, like Die Jakobsleiter, doomed to honourable but perhaps inevitable failure. It is no accident that both works remain unfinished. Unfinished too, and no less tragically, are the Modern Psalms on which Schoenberg was working when he died. The texts for these, by Schoenberg himself, breathe the same spirit of ethical mysticism to be found in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's prose-poems, Stations on the Road to Freedom, which form the basis of a recent work of my own for unaccompanied chorus.

Finally there is the neo-classical Schoenberg - the Schoenberg of the Wind Quintet, the Third and Fourth String Quartets, the Variations for Orchestra and the concertos. This is also the serial Schoenberg; the Schoenberg for whom serialism has replaced tonality as a long-range structural principle. That serialism was somehow historically necessary is a received idea which urgently requires re-examination. But historical necessity or not, it was obviously a necessity for Schoenberg. Perhaps as an autodidact he wanted to beat the academics at their own game. He has certainly provided researchers with a happy hunting-ground since twelve-note analysis has achieved an academic respectability secondary only to musicology itself. The hermetic quality of serialism is perhaps part of its attraction: the oft-quoted remark by Schoenberg to Rufer about a mysterious new discovery which would "ensure the future supremacy of German music" always strikes a rather chilling note, almost as though he had devised some sort of secret weapon...

That serialism could be combined with neo-classicism, however, is typical of the duality of Schoenberg's creative make-up. He is at the same time both a traditionalist and a revolutionary innovator. Boulez's jibe that Schoenberg seems to have invented serialism in order to re-compose the music of the past is, on the face of it, irrefutable. Yet Schoenberg is not the first composer whose development has followed a similar trajectory: both Schumann and Brahms evolved from an early 'romantic' period to one in which classical values are re-asserted and classical forms re-validated. Indeed neo-classicism was almost the dominant aesthetic movement of the inter-war years. But for most of the composers of this period, Stravinsky included, the spirit of classicism informed only the outward aspect of the music. To pseudo-baroque motor rhythms was added the sharpness of definition so typical of the age of Reason, while satire, parody and pastiche lent pungency to the new anti-romantic spirit. Schoenberg, however, was the first to make the very forms and processes of the 18th century his own. The fact that he had also evolved a way of denying tonality in order to compose in tonal forms implies a contradiction which I, for one, find an insurmountable barrier to the total acceptance of his music. But the intention behind his particular brand of neo-classicism - i.e. to get behind the superficies to the very spirit which animates the form - that is something I feel I can share in and make common cause with. And if anybody again describes my music as 'Schoenbergian' - which is unlikely - that is the sense in which I hope they will mean it.

(C) 1974 by JOHN JOUBERT

Note

(1) To be published shortly in a revised and much expanded form by Faber (Ed.).

SCHOENBERG'S MUSIC

On September 13 Arnold Schoenberg,(1) the dean of the modernists, will be seventy years old. And yet his music for all its author's love of traditional sonorous materials and all the charm of late 19th century Vienna that envelops its expression, is still the modernest modern music that exists. No other Western music sounds so strange, so consistently different from the music of the immediately preceding centuries. And none, save that of Erik Satie, has proved so tough a nut for the public to crack. Only the early Verklärte Nacht has attained to currency in our concerts. The rest remains to this day musicians' music.

Musicians do not always know what they think of Schoenberg's music, but they

often like to listen to it. And they invariably respect it. Whether one likes it or not is, indeed, rather a foolish question to raise in face of its monumental logic. To share or to reject the sentiments that it expresses seems, somehow, a minor consideration compared with following the amplitude of the reasoning that underlies their exposition. As in much of modern philosophical writing, the conclusions reached are not the meat of the matter; it is the methods by which these are arrived at.

This preponderance of methodology over objective is what gives to Schoenberg's work, in fact, its irreducible modernity. It is the orientation that permits us to qualify it as, also, in the good sense of the word, academic. For it is a model of procedure. And if the consistency of the procedure seems often closer to the composer's mind than the expressive aim, that fact allows us further to describe the work as academic in an unfavorable sense. It means that the emotional nourishment in the music is not quite worth the trouble required to extract it. This is a legitimate and not uncommon layman's opinion. But if one admits, as I think one is obliged to do with regard to Schoenberg, that the vigor and thoroughness of the procedure are, in very fact, the music's chief objective, then no musician can deny that it presents a very high degree of musical interest.

This is not to say that Schoenberg's music is without feeling expressed. Quite to the contrary, it positively drips with emotivity. But still the approach is, in both senses of the word, academic. Emotions are examined rather than declared. As in the workings of his distinguished fellow citizen Dr. Sigmund Freud, though the subject matter is touching, even lurid, the author's detachment about it is complete. Sentiments are considered as case histories rather than as pretexts for personal poetry or subjects for showmanship. Die glückliche Hand, Gurre-Lieder, and Pierrot Lunaire, as well as the string sextet, Verklärte Nacht, have deeply sentimental subjects; but their treatment is always by detailed exposition, never by sermonizing. Pierrot's little feelings, therefore, though they seem enormous and are unquestionably fascinating when studied through the Schoenberg microscope for 45 minutes of concert time, often appear in retrospect as less interesting than the mechanism through which they have been viewed.

The designing and perfecting of this mechanism, rather than the creation of unique works, would seem to have been the guiding preoccupation of Schoenberg's career; certainly it is the chief source of his enormous prestige among musicians. The works themselves, charming as they are and frequently impressive, are never quite as fascinating when considered separately as they are when viewed as comments on a method of composition or as illustrations of its expressive possibilities. They are all secondary to a theory; they do not lead independent lives. The theory, however, leads an independent life. It is taught and precticed all over the world. It is the lingua franca of contemporary modernism. It is even used expertly by composers who have never heard any of the works by Schoenberg, by Webern, and by Alban Berg that constitute its major literature.

If that major literature is wholly Viennese by birth and its sentimental preoccupations largely Germanic, the syntax of its expression embodies also

both the strongest and the weakest elements of the German musical tradition. Its strong element is its simplification of tonal relations; its weak element is its chaotic rhythm. The apparent complexity of the whole literature and the certain obscurity of much of it are due, in the present writer's opinion, to the lack of a rhythmic organization comparable in comprehensiveness and in simplicity to the tonal one.

It is probably the insufficiencies of Schoenberg's own rhythmic theory that prevent his music from crystallizing into great, hard, beautiful, indissoluble works. Instrumentally they are delicious. Tonally they are the most exciting, the most original, the most modern-sounding music there is. What limits their intelligibility, hamstrings their expressive power, makes them often literally halt in their tracks, is the naive organization of their pulses, taps, and quantities. Until a rhythmic syntax comparable in sophistication to Schoenberg's tonal one shall have been added to this, his whole method of composition, for all the high intellection and sheer musical genius that have gone into its making, will probably remain a fecund but insupportable heresy, a strict counterpoint valuable to pedagogy but stiff, opaque, unmalleable, and inexpressive for free composition.

There is no satisfactory name for the thing Schoenberg has made. The twelve-tone technique, though its commonest denomination, does not cover all of it. But he has made a thing, a new thing, a thing to be used and to be improved. Its novelty in 1944 is still fresh; and that means it has strength, not merely charm. Its usage by composers of all nations means that it is no instrument of local or limited applicability. Such limitations as it has are due, I believe, to the fact that it is not yet a complete system. So far as it goes it is admirable; and it can go far, as the operas of Alban Berg show. It is to the highest credit of Schoenberg as a creator that his method of creation should be so valuable a thing as to merit still, even to require, the collaboration of those who shall come after him.

(C) 1944 by VIRGIL THOMSON

Note

(1) I have taken the liberty of altering Mr. Thomson's 'Schönberg' to the now more familiar 'Schoenberg', which the composer asked should be used in English-speaking countries. (Ed.)

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QUESTION: What in my view is Schoenberg's position today?

ANSWER: Not central.

Q What is the nature of his rôle in 20th century music in general?

A What 20th century music? '20th century music in general' casts an impenetrable cloud over my reasoning faculties - Strauss, Debussy, Hindemith, Varèse, Stravinsky, Webern, Tippett, Britten, Tavener, modern jazz, and so on ad infinitum. No-one has a 'role' in anything; it merely serves as something for critics to talk about.

Q What is Schoenberg's significance for me as a composer working today?

A I believe Schoenberg spoke sense when he wrote:

"Personally it is on the word Composition that I place the emphasis. Unfortunately most would-be followers of this method do something removed from the idea of composing music."(1)

Also, I am very much in agreement with his remark:

"The belief in technique as a saving grace must be discouraged, and the striving after truthfulness encouraged."(2)

'Truthfulness' is a famous philosophical stumbling block - what can it mean? One definition could be: 'Truthfulness in art means never writing what has not passed completely through the sieve of the whole personality'. For example, a composer who is 'the victim of his own facility' must have written down much which has not had to withstand the criticism of his own integrated personality.

Some of the remarks of Schoenberg's followers, which are appended at the end of Rufer's book, make appalling reading - e.g. Humphrey Searle:

"...two series are used which are formed by taking every third and sixth note respectively of the basic series (leaving out the first)..."(3)

What banality! He then goes on to say that the work (Gold Coast Customs) is divided into "four movements (Allegro, Adagio, Scherzo and Finale) played without a break" and that the third movement is "often in jazz-rhythm". The use of jazz rhythms and a scheme of tempi in this way is completely at variance logically with the use of a series, which should generate its own rhythms and contrasts of tempi - as was later seen to be a necessary development of the method and a consequence of its initial employment. But this then makes clear that the whole concept of serialisation is completely sterile as a system - it leads inevitably, when rigorously applied, to complete mechanisation of 'composition', and to the exclusion of those irregularities of outline in which the whole of art resides - as has been seen to be so by many others more avantgarde than myself.

Of course it has remained possible to write meaningful and valuable music

employing the twelve note system in its less developed forms, but only by ignoring its implications, and thus invalidating its use.

(C) 1974 by STUART WARD

Notes

(1) As quoted in Josef Rufer, Composition with Twelve Notes related only to one another, tr. Humphrey Searle (London 1954), p. 2.

(2) Ibid, p. 4.

(3) Ibid, p. 193.

QUESTION: What is the nature of Schoenberg's rôle in 20th century music in general?

ANSWER: 'Rôle' is cliché: either he was a good and great composer or he wasn't. That in the course of composing he changed the face of western music for good, should be as secondary a consideration for us as it obviously was for him. Schoenberg was a man of intense all-round creativity, of which his triple persona as musical theoretician, composer and teacher was only a part, though a central one: a combination of eminence so rare in musical history and consequently so hard to believe in, that each one of his reputations has somehow damaged the other two. With hindsight you can trace the process of historical inevitability which he himself at the end of his life described more simply as "falling into an ocean of boiling water". If you look at western music from Tristan onwards, you can see how completely so many of the problems thrown up by a rapidly evolving language were solved, and how many of its leading tendencies fulfilled, by Schoenberg's work - but these facts are, or should be, the merest commonplaces of a university history outline course. He was 'necessary' - like Galileo, Newton, Darwin, Marx, Einstein - to 'take the next step': this is obvious to us now, but possible to achieve at the time, as always in human history, only by an exceptionally gifted individual.

The use of scientists' names is not accidental: for the logic of the Method of Composing with Twelve Notes as a solution to a historical situation, its 'rightness', its essential simplicity, all give it the air of a scientific discovery. That its essentials are apparently easier to grasp than Schoenberg's music itself is to understand, caused the Theoretician to be more widely known and appreciated during his lifetime (and in a different, even more lamentable way, after his death) than the Composer: the last thing he would have wanted.

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The Method has been of such enormous importance, significance and usefulness to the whole musical world, attracting all kinds of different composers over the 50 years that have now passed since the Serenade Op. 24, that we cannot imagine the musical world without it. Yet in Schoenberg's creative life it was only one factor among many other preoccupations, explorations, discoveries, achievements. Let us remember that 22 opus numbers - nearly half his output - precede the serial works. Even better: let us not distinguish between 'before and after Op. 23', but listen to his whole output as <u>music</u>. For in the end it is the individual pieces of music that a great genius has created and which contribute to our artistic heritage which matter, and nothing else.

The difficulties which the honest listener still experiences in listening to Schoenberg spring from causes far more complex - and interestingly musical - than either simply atonality, or twelve note technique. One is the speed at which Schoenberg's mind worked, and the consequent compression of his creative thought. Another is the dual nature - not at all peculiar to him - of being both conservative and revolutionary at the same time: for he was particularly aware of the tension between past and future in which his art existed. We can regard him today as the final, consummating figure of three centuries of a certain type of music-making - for it is now easy to hear in his music what is traditional. But his contemporaries would have found such a view incomprehensible and ridiculous: for they could hear only what was new and unheard-of: for them, therefore, his music could only belong to the remote future. Both interpretations are still correct, and the German joke about <u>Zukunftsmusik</u> still has a certain wry force.

Q What in my view is Schoenberg's position today?

A Schoenberg's proud epigram: "The second half of this century will spoil by over-estimation whatever the first half by under-estimation left unspoilt" still remains a piece of optimism about posterity. But the present situation is rich in paradox. His music has not broken through as repertoire into the great world of concert-giving: every performance of a major Schoenberg work, except <u>Pierrot Lunaire</u>, is still something of a special event. The general public, no longer an educated one as were their 19th century predecessors, continues to find his music difficult. At the same time his influence has been diffused over the whole musical world, and is most marked amongst those who react against it. Our older contemporaries are sometimes to be found glancing nervously over their shoulders in a jokily defensive manner - when, for instance, they insert gratuitously a row-motto in their otherwise tonal-thematic work.

For the young, he is in eclipse. Serialism itself has long since ceased to be an issue: but the rigour its use implies is now despised, and Schoenberg's counterbalancing consciousness of tradition is largely incomprehensible to the badly educated and to the wilfully ignorant. With Webern now in similar eclipse, there is a declining interest even in distinguishing between pitch levels: Messiaen and Varèse remain as

father-figures, but other preoccupations of a sensational, a trivially decorative, or a spuriously mystical nature hold the centre of the stage. In the days of the global village and of the total instant availability of all archaic and exotic music cultures, Arnold Schoenberg, the one-time revolutionary, seems strangely circumscribed in his Austrian garden, still plucking the last fruits of the Viennese symphonic tradition: an Art Nouveau pedant who taught people Bach chorales and wrote Kokoschkasierte Brahms.

Is it perhaps necessary to emphasise how completely nonsensical such a view is? Besides anything else, Schoenberg was a daring, prolific and wide-ranging speculative thinker, and many of the apparent innovations of the New Music since the war were in fact anticipated by him long ago. But, more generally, the whole situation in which we all live and work could never have come about without his existence. All the things which living composers take for granted were once fought for by Schoenberg. What was for him a leap into the unknown, a step which took up years of his life to dare to accomplish, has now become just a stage in growing up for a bright music student. Just as adolescents can never bear to hear what their fathers did during the war, so this generation is reluctant to recognise how much they owe to Schoenberg. Yet all revolts against his influence are in essence revolts of the son against the father who gave him life. As for the really silly squad, the pseuds on the fringe who in their smart ignorance shit on Schoenberg's memory, they need only to be reminded of the story of the Monkey and Buddha: for they could fly to the end of the world and still only find themselves within the palm of his hand.

Q What is Schoenberg's significance for me as a composer working today?

A Simply - I cannot imagine a world in which he had not existed. I came to his music rather late, in my mid-twenties, and since then have been constantly aware of his presence in my work, and have never wished it to diminish. Saying this does not make me lay claim to any special understanding of his work, for there are many things in it that I do not understand; nor to exceptional knowledge of it, for I am no Schoenberg scholar; nor, in particular, to a commitment to strict serial technique, a subject about which I know very little - I have never from this point of view analysed even a single piece by Schoenberg from beginning to end. But it does mean that I wish to express a deep love of and respect for his music - for the actual sounds it makes, its whole mode of expression, the spiritual world of high seriousness that it inhabits, the noble place that it occupies in tradition. I can imagine no greater privilege in life than to have been a member of his composition class, though I can't see myself for very long surviving the rigour of such a training not only in music-making but also in self-discovery. (If that Dummkopf Cage did, perhaps I could have managed to.) But since I lived too late for that, the next best thing is to make use of what he gave us through his works, and bear witness to it through my own works.

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