

## Proclaiming the mainstream: Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern

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Of all the new musical developments in the years following the First World War, none has been entangled in more controversy than the claim made by Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, and Alban Berg that their music, and ‘the method of composing with twelve tones related only to one another’ on which much of it was based (otherwise known as serialism), represented the culmination of the mainstream of the Austro-German tradition and thus, by implication, of the mainstream of music in general. All three composers maintained that theirs was the one true path, and drew on historical, national, and even metaphysical arguments to justify their claims. Schoenberg’s ‘National Music’ (1931) traced his lineage from Bach and Mozart, through Beethoven, Wagner, and Brahms, concluding, ‘I venture to credit myself with having written truly new music, which being based on tradition, is destined to become tradition’.<sup>1</sup> In a series of lectures from 1932–3, Webern pushed the origins of ‘The Path to Twelve-Tone Composition’ back past the Netherlanders all the way to Gregorian chant; insisting on the historical inevitability and necessity of twelve-tone composition, he charted a progression from the breakdown of the system of the church modes, through to Wagner’s chromatic harmony, the end of tonality, and finally to twelve-tone composition, writing, ‘It’s my belief that ever since music has been written, all the great composers have instinctively had this before them as a goal.’<sup>2</sup> And in the essay ‘Why is Schoenberg’s Music so Difficult to Understand?’, published in 1924 in celebration of his teacher’s fiftieth birthday, Berg not only insisted on Schoenberg’s pre-eminent place among contemporary composers and his status as ‘classic’, but laid claim to the future as well: by ‘drawing the farthest conclusions’ from ‘all the compositional possibilities provided by centuries of music’, Schoenberg had ensured ‘not only the predominance of his personal art, but what is more that of German music for the next fifty years’.<sup>3</sup>

1 Arnold Schoenberg, ‘National Music’, in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg* (ed. Leonard Stein, tr. Leo Black), Berkeley, 1984, p. 174.

2 Anton Webern, *The Path to the New Music* (ed. Willi Reich, tr. Leo Black), Vienna, 1975, p. 42.

3 Alban Berg, ‘Why is Schoenberg’s Music so Difficult to Understand?’, in Willi Reich, *Alban Berg* (tr. Comelius Cardew), New York, 1905, pp. 189–204; pp. 202, 204.

Yet the vehemence of such assertions is a clear sign of the intensity of the opposition they expected, and indeed received, from all sides. **Claims to the mainstream are by their very nature implicated in counter-claims of marginalization.** And for Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, these efforts to marginalize them came from many different directions. To the relatively small circles of listeners who had actually heard their music, as well as to the considerably larger numbers who knew them only by reputation, Schoenberg and his school had become associated with the most extreme radicalism and hypermodernity. Through their writings, well-publicized concert scandals, and the first performances in the 1920s of many of their ‘expressionistic’ works, the three had come to represent a rejection of the past and a deliberate spurning of the audience. Hans Mersmann in his 1928 history of modern music brands Schoenberg as ‘the single greatest revolutionary in music of our time . . . he breaks all boundaries, destroys all that music previously affirmed’.<sup>4</sup> But to many composers of the younger generation and the critics who championed them, Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern appeared outmoded and out of step with the ‘New Music’. In contrast to composers like Weill, Eisler, Krenek, Hindemith, Milhaud, and Stravinsky, and with all the associated slogans and catch phrases that were emerging, such as neoclassicism, *Neue Sachlichkeit* [new objectivity], and *Gebrauchsmusik* [music for use], it was easy to portray the Viennese triumvirate as distant indeed from the mainstream. Perhaps most strikingly, this expulsion to the margins was often self-inflicted. In a newspaper notice from February 1933 concerning his lecture on ‘New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea’, Schoenberg remarks: ‘I stand, with my pupils Berg and Webern, alone in the world. The younger generation of composers, who should regard me as their forerunner, have stopped at nothing to fight against me and my music and have done their utmost to free themselves from me.’<sup>5</sup>

If Schoenberg’s, Berg’s, and Webern’s claims to the mainstream were controversial when they were initially made, how much more problematic they appear from the perspective of our own *fin de siècle!* The extreme passions their music and writings have provoked in partisans and detractors have only intensified in the hundred years since the first performances of their works. In order to evaluate such claims and counterclaims in the midst of so much contradictory evidence, a crucial first step is to examine our understanding of the idea of a musical ‘mainstream’. This is particularly important from present perspectives when the whole notion of a mainstream, together with its corollary master

4 Hans Mersmann, *Moderne Musik seit der Romantik*, Potsdam, 1928, p. 132 (author’s translation).

5 ‘Arnold Schönberg, der Kürzlich in Wien einen Vortrag hielt . . .’, *Bohemia*, Berlin, 18 February 1923 (author’s translation).

narratives of the canon, universal values, and progress, have been significantly undercut epistemologically, as well as by simple observation of the diversity of the current musical scene:<sup>6</sup> do we locate the mainstream in continuities of musical style, through subsequent compositional developments, by statistical studies of performances and publications, or in the discourses of institutional power and influence? The way in which we define the musical mainstream thus determines the kinds of material and evidence we will consider, and accordingly will have a profound impact on our conclusions. Through his focus on the development of compositional techniques, and on the continuities of forms and genres, Donald Tovey's 1938 essay, 'The Main Stream of Music', can serve as an example of what has arguably become the dominant way of defining the term in historical and theoretical studies. Tovey's notion of the mainstream insisted on the timeless quality of the masterworks that made it up, which he reluctantly acknowledged were primarily German: 'musical history is full of warnings against facile attempts to trace the qualities of music to the non-musical history of the time. The musical composer is the most detached of all artists.'<sup>7</sup>

Questions of compositional technique and musical structure are, of course, central to how the composers of the Second Viennese School defined their own relationship to tradition and to how they have been viewed by others. But such structural concerns need to be seen in counterpoint with the full range of their activities, including their writings, teaching, involvement with performance, institutional affiliations, and interactions with contemporary developments.<sup>8</sup> That these aspects have tended to be de-emphasized can be attributed to one of the founding myths of modernism, namely its opposition to mainstream culture and society:<sup>9</sup> Theodor Adorno, who is responsible for the most influential account of the Second Viennese School, made their isolation a measure of the ultimate authenticity of their music.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, such isolation was not only acknowledged by Schoenberg and his pupils, but was at times even embraced. In an unpublished note from 1928 entitled 'Alone at last', Schoenberg described his shame, guilt, and depression when he had found himself in the years after the war, 'suddenly surrounded, hemmed in, besieged, by a circle of admirers

6 Robert Morgan, 'Rethinking Musical Culture: Canonic Reformulations in a Post-Tonal Age', in Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman (eds.), *Disciplining Music: Musicology and its Canons*, Chicago and London, 1992, pp. 44–64.

7 Donald Tovey, *The Main Stream of Music and Other Essays*, Cleveland, 1964, p. 347.

8 See Martin Thrun, *Neue Musik im Deutschen Musikleben bis 1933*, Band 75: 'Der Orpheus – Schriftenreihe zu Grundfragen der Musik', ed. Martin Vogel, 2 vols., Bonn, 1995.

9 Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Bloomington, 1986, pp. 53–4.

10 Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, Cambridge, 1993, p. 105.

I had not earned'. Now that they were gone, having fallen away 'like rotten fruit', he rejoiced in his solitude – 'Finally alone again!'<sup>11</sup>

Yet rather than accepting such a statement as reflecting the reality of the situation for Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern in the 1920s and 30s, it should be viewed much more as a strategic act. Ultimately, there is little to be gained by attempting to resolve the question of their relationship to the mainstream, since this will be renegotiated retrospectively by each generation. Instead the focus here will be to consider why and how the tension between the mainstream and the margin became such a central part of the identity of Schoenberg and his school. This chapter will argue that their desire simultaneously to seize the mainstream and challenge it was a powerfully productive force for each of the composers, evident in every aspect of their works, writings, and institutional roles. Such a dialectical stance is evident in the familiar formulations of Schoenberg as the 'conservative revolutionary', and in the competing figures of Moses and Aron from his 1930–2 opera – with the isolated Moses as keeper of the incommunicable truth and Aron dominated by the urge to be understood. A public engagement with history and tradition provided not only legitimation and material, but also means for demonstrating the degree to which they had opened up new territory. But just as importantly, this inherently critical, dialectical stance towards the mainstream allowed them to engage productively with contemporary aesthetic and cultural developments, new technologies, and new audiences, while preserving their purported isolation. Thus through the act of proclaiming the mainstream their music continually evolved and expanded, while the very notion of the mainstream was contested and redefined.<sup>12</sup>

### Institutions and performances

On 21 June 1932 a concert took place in the main hall of the Musikverein in Vienna that almost seems to have been designed to illustrate the many facets of Schoenberg's, Berg's, and Webern's complex relationship to the mainstream. The concert included two works by Schoenberg, the early tonal chorus *Friede auf Erden* (Peace on Earth), op. 13, and his recently completed film music for an imaginary film, *Begleitungs-musik zu einer Lichtspielszene* (Accompaniment

<sup>11</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, 'Alone at Last!' [Endlich allein!], 4 February 1928, Arnold Schoenberg Centre, Vienna; published by permission of Lawrence Schoenberg. See also Schoenberg, 'How One Becomes Lonely', in *Style and Idea*, pp. 52–3.

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion of the twelve-tone method and aesthetic developments in the music of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, see Robert Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America*, New York, 1991, pp. 187–219.

to a Film Scene), op. 34; the Viennese premiere of Berg's concert aria, *Der Wein*, featuring the soprano Ruzena Herlinger; and Mahler's Second Symphony. In the light of present-day perceptions of their elitism, it is noteworthy that the event was part of a series of Workers' Symphony Concerts, and featured Anton Webern conducting the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, together with two choral groups (including the workers' chorus Freie Typographia). But virtually every aspect of the event is equally striking in the degree to which it challenges common perceptions of their position in the musical life of the time.

The first thing to note is the fact of the performance itself. Although music by Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern undoubtedly occupied a minority position on the concert stages during these years, as it does today, their works were widely performed and they themselves were active in speaking and writing about music to ever-broader audiences. All three were very involved with various performing and educational institutions, and worked with many of the most prominent performers and conductors of the day. Of course, to establish the fact that their works did receive many performances during these years does not constitute a measure of their success. It is undeniable that many performances of works by Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern were met with incomprehension and even hostility. But at the same time, it is clear that the prevailing view of their isolation has caused us to overlook the considerable number of successes they had as well. A review of the Workers' Symphony Concert that appeared in a Dresden newspaper was generally very complimentary about the pieces, Webern's conducting, and what the concert represented for the musical life. Of *Friede auf Erden*, the critic Otto Janowitz wrote that it was 'simply a beautiful work', while the film music was 'interesting, coloristically and musically'. Although he had some reservations about Berg's piece, he calls him 'the aristocrat of the school', and comments on the 'unusual manner and depth' of his creativity.<sup>13</sup>

That each of them had had to travel a considerable distance to reach their new positions of authority is undoubtedly a major reason for their vigour in proclaiming the mainstream. Indeed a defining characteristic of the Weimar period in general was the 'outsider as insider', marked by the sudden prominence of those formerly on the fringes of political, cultural, and social life: accordingly, in taking such public roles they sought to preserve an oppositional stance towards these institutions and organizations. The same productive tension and ambivalence characterized Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern's position

<sup>13</sup> Otto Janowitz, 'Im Arbeiter-Sinfoniekonzert hörte man . . .', *Dresdener Neueste Nachrichten*, 18 February 1923, Steinger Sammlung, Berlin.

in relation to the mainstream. For example, the June 1932 concert was held in celebration of the tenth Festival of the International Society of Contemporary Music, which was going on at the same time;<sup>14</sup> both Berg and Webern had held important posts in the ISCM, and at the time of the concert Webern was the president of the Vienna section. The concert, however, was not officially connected to the ISCM festival, since Schoenberg had prohibited his works from being performed at ISCM concerts after being offended by an incident at the Venice festival in 1925; according to Stuckenschmidt, when Schoenberg had overrun his rehearsal time for the *Serenade*, op. 24, he was asked by Edward Dent, the President of the ISCM, ‘if he thought he was the only composer in this festival. Schoenberg said yes.’<sup>15</sup>

Their formation of the Society for Private Musical Performances (Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen) is perhaps the best example of the complexity of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern’s relationship to the public sphere. Between 1919 and 1921 the Society presented over a hundred concerts, the result of enormous expenditures of energy by all three composers.<sup>16</sup> In an attempt to challenge the power of critics, to eliminate the ‘corrupting influence of publicity’, and to avoid the disruptions that had accompanied many performances, programmes were not announced in advance, only members were admitted, and any expressions of approval or disapproval were banned. As a result, the Society is often seen as a rejection of the mainstream and a precursor of a self-enforced withdrawal of new music to the academy after the Second World War. But the larger purpose of the society was to reform concert life and ultimately increase the audience for modern music. And in this pedagogic aim Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern were continuing efforts with which Schoenberg had been involved as early as 1904 with the Society of Creative Musicians, which proclaimed as its purpose ‘to create such a direct relationship between itself and the public; to give modern music a permanent home in Vienna, where it will be fostered; and to keep the public constantly informed about the current state of musical composition’.<sup>17</sup>

The emphasis on extensive rehearsal and frequent repetitions of works resulting in a high level of performance for the musicians together with a greater familiarity with the works for the audience were the central aims of the later Society. Thus while the number of people who were officially involved with the Society was small, about 320 members in 1919, the ultimate impact through

14 Programmes for the other concerts, dated June 16, 17, 20, 21, are given in Nicolas Slonimsky, *Music Since 1900*, 5th edn, New York, 1994, pp. 347–8.

15 Hans and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work*, New York, 1979, p. 370; Hans Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World, and Work*, New York, 1978, pp. 308–9.

16 Joan Allen Smith, *Schoenberg and His Circle: A Viennese Portrait*, New York, 1986, pp. 81–102.

17 Willi Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography* (tr. Leo Black), New York, 1971, p. 19.

the composers involved, and just as importantly through performers such as Rudolf Serkin, Rudolf Kolisch, and Eduard Steuermann, has been considerable. The approach to performance practice established at the Verein is accordingly a significant aspect of the Second Viennese School's attempt to redefine the mainstream. The reduction of the social dimension of the concert experience, the emphasis on structure over surface appearance (a central motivation for the use of chamber-music reductions of orchestral works), and the notion that performance practice must adapt to present-day circumstances and musical developments, were all important parts of this legacy. In an unpublished essay entitled 'Styles of Musical Interpretation', Steuermann describes interpretation as an ongoing process shaped by the performer's cultural milieu. He accordingly places great emphasis on a commitment to contemporary music, both for its own value and as a means of better understanding the past: 'the true immersion in the music of the present brings us closer to past epochs.' Echoing Schoenberg's remarks about the relationship of style and idea, he writes: 'For the modern artist there is only modern music! It becomes music only if it is modern music. The performing artist exists to be a mirror, a circuit, a microphone, a transformer, so as to establish contact between eternity and the living moment.'<sup>18</sup>

At this time Schoenberg was living in the Viennese suburb of Mödling, where he also taught privately; his only institutional affiliation from these years was with a school run by the progressive educator Eugenie Schwarzwald, where he offered a seminar in composition in 1917. His situation changed dramatically at the end of 1925, when he was offered the directorship of a masterclass in composition as Busoni's successor at the Prussian Academy of the Arts in Berlin. The move coincided with a period of considerable compositional productivity, a very large number of writings, and many important performances throughout Europe and in the United States. Schoenberg himself conducted many concerts, and others were presented by figures such as Furtwängler and Scherchen; the *Accompaniment to a Film Scene*, for example, was premiered under Otto Klemperer on 6 November 1930 in a symphony concert at the Kroll Opera in Berlin.

Significantly, this performance was preceded a few months earlier by a radio broadcast with the Frankfurt Symphony under the direction of Hans Rosbaud. Although he had reservations about the technical limitations of the new medium, as well as concerns about how it would transform the act of listening, Schoenberg saw the radio as an ideal means for bypassing the critics and

<sup>18</sup> Clara Steuermann, David Porter, and Gunther Schuller (eds.), *The Not Quite Innocent Bystander: Writings of Eduard Steuermann*, Lincoln, 1989, pp. 91–2, 117.

musical experts to reach listeners directly;<sup>19</sup> he used the radio for broadcasts of his works, and for lectures aimed at helping listeners understand his music. That such efforts had an impact is clear in a review of a broadcast lecture on the Variations for Orchestra, op. 31, from 22 March 1931, prior to a concert performance under Rosbaud:

On Sunday morning it was not just any musician – not even just one of the most famous composers – but Arnold Schoenberg who, in the Frankfurt station of Southeast Radio and South Radio, allowed us to take a deep look into his workshop, into the ways and principles of his work. The most influential stimulus in the new music movement, the first master of a compositional method emancipated from the tonal system and the principles of construction of the classic-romantic era, explained and analyzed in rough outlines his Variations on his own theme for orchestra.<sup>20</sup>

Berg's fortunes also changed dramatically after the war. The success of *Wozzeck* marked the major turning point in his career. After an extended period of composition, he had completed the opera in 1922, and published the piano score at his own expense the next year. Following the successful performance in 1924 of the concert suite *Drei Bruchstücke aus 'Wozzeck'*, in Frankfurt under Scherchen, Erich Kleiber conducted the premiere at the Berlin Staatsoper at the end of 1925; despite the controversies that surrounded the performance, it was revived for a second season in Berlin, and then staged in many opera houses throughout Europe and beyond. Webern's professional life, too, got on firmer footing in the 1920s through a publication arrangement with Universal Edition (starting in 1920) and more regular conducting positions in Vienna, including the Workers' Symphony Orchestra and Vienna Workers' Chorus (1922–34). Webern conducted his first concert for the Austrian radio in 1927, and thereafter conducted twenty radio concerts over the next eight years. Performances of his works also became more frequent in Europe and abroad: for example, the Symphony, op. 21 was premiered on 18 December 1929 in New York at a League of Composers concert, and was again performed at the ninth ISCM festival in Oxford, included in a concert with Gershwin's *An American in Paris*. On 13 April 1931 the first all-Webern concert took place, featuring performances of tonal, atonal, and twelve-tone works by the Kolisch Quartet and Eduard Steuermann, and shortly after this event Webern was awarded the Music Prize of the City of Vienna.<sup>21</sup>

19 See Christopher Hailey, 'Rethinking Sound: Music and Radio in Weimar Germany', in Bryan Gilliam (ed.), *Music and Performance During the Weimar Republic*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 13–36.

20 Cited in Joseph Auner, 'Arnold Schoenberg Speaks: Newspaper Accounts of His Lectures and Interviews, 1927–1933', in Walter Frisch (ed.), *Schoenberg and His World*, Princeton, 1999, pp. 265–82; p. 276.

21 Biographical information on Webern from Anne Shreffler, 'Anton Webern', in Bryan Simms (ed.), *Schoenberg, Berg, Webern: A Companion to the Second Viennese School*, Westport, 1999, pp. 251–314, and Bailey, *The Life of Webern*, Cambridge, 1998.



## The idea of the Second Viennese School, tradition, and contemporary developments

That the 1932 Workers' Symphony Concert brought Schoenberg together with his two most famous students is not coincidental but reflects the fundamental part that teaching played in defining and perpetuating the mainstream. Berg and Webern also had important pupils, but it was Schoenberg's role as a teacher in Vienna, Berlin, and later in the United States that became an integral part of the public identity of the group. In addition to his direct involvement with a large number of students, Schoenberg also published extensively on all aspects of music, and still more of his teaching materials have been published posthumously. Over the course of his life, Schoenberg had contact with hundreds of students, among them many figures who have had a significant impact on the composition, criticism, and performance of music in the twentieth century. But in the 1920s and 30s the focus was increasingly on Berg and Webern, and it was as a group of three composers that the Second Viennese School took shape.<sup>22</sup>

The formation of the Second Viennese School became central to their mainstream claims and had significant ramifications for how they positioned themselves in reference to the Austro-German tradition as well as to contemporary trends. Many factors contributed to the deserved reputation of Berg and Webern as the most important students, including their compositional achievements, their prominent roles in the Society for Private Musical Performances, and their adoption of the twelve-tone technique. **It is no coincidence that the limitation to three and the emphasis on Vienna allowed for clearer connections to the earlier Viennese school of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven.** Analogies with the First Viennese School became increasingly common in writings about Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern: for example Adolph Weiss's essay on 'The Twelve-Tone Series', from the 1937 collection *Schoenberg*, compares the different approaches to the twelve-tone system by the three composers to the way in which 'Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn and others used practically the same harmonic formulae, those of the diatonic system.'<sup>23</sup> And **the appeal to tradition became a central part of the group's identity.** Numerous examples could be cited from the writings of all three composers in the inter-war years challenging the radical label and arguing for their connections to the past. This strategy took many forms, such as Berg's guide to *Pelleas und Melisande* (1920) which demonstrated how Schoenberg preserved a classical approach to form, or his

<sup>22</sup> See Joseph Auner, 'The Idea of the Second Viennese School', in Simms (ed.), *Schoenberg, Berg, Webern*, pp. 1–36.

<sup>23</sup> Adolph Weiss, 'The Twelve-Tone Series', in Merle Armitage (ed.), *Schoenberg*, New York, 1937, pp. 76–7.

‘Credo’, published in 1930, which compares Schoenberg’s historical position to Bach’s.<sup>24</sup>

This turn to the past arose from many sources. All three composers were deeply engaged with the music of the Austro-German tradition, as I will discuss further below, and their music similarly is fundamentally shaped by a profound interaction with this musical tradition. The renewed interest in traditional forms and genres as a means of ensuring comprehensibility reflected pronounced shifts in their own compositional aesthetics. Their image as isolated radicals came increasingly into conflict with the realities of their professional successes and ties to the musical establishment. But at the same time the evocation of tradition after the war also served important strategic purposes in how they sought to define their position and the mainstream itself. The need to proclaim a mainstream in the 1920s and 30s thus reflects the emergence of many competing trends, styles, and schools, as well as the increasing impact of the new technological and social developments that were profoundly changing the nature of the music and music-making; the perception of competing movements and schools had been much less strongly pronounced in the years before and immediately following the First World War. One sign of this was in the programming for the Society for Private Musical Performances: consistent with the statement in the prospectus that ‘no school shall receive preference’, concerts included works by Debussy, Ravel, and Stravinsky.<sup>25</sup>

Yet with the many slogans and trends circulating in these years around such terms as neoclassicism, polytonality, *Gebrauchsmusik*, and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and the direct challenges from the younger generation such as Krenek, Hindemith, and Weill, it became necessary to stake out a clearly defined party platform.<sup>26</sup> That Schoenberg sought in effect to position his school against all other contemporary trends clarifies why it became so important to lay claim to the mainstream of the Viennese classical tradition. Schoenberg’s *Three Satires*, op. 28 (1926), for example, defines the boundaries between his school and the ‘quasi-tonalists’ and those who ‘nibble at dissonance’ without drawing the full conclusions; ‘those who allege to aspire to “a return to . . .”’; folklorists; and ‘all “ . . . ists”, in whom I can see only mannerists’. Again, Webern’s *The Path to the New Music* defines the new music as twelve-tone composition, ‘for everything else is at best somewhere near this technique, or is consciously opposed

24 Alban Berg, ‘*Pelleas und Melisande* Guide’, tr. Mark DeVoto, *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 16 (1993), pp. 270–92; p. 273. Berg, ‘Credo’, *Die Musik* 22/4 (1930), pp. 264–5.

25 The complete prospectus is printed in Smith, *Schoenberg and His Circle*, pp. 245–8.

26 See Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of the Concept Through the Schoenberg–Stravinsky Polemic*, Ann Arbor, 1988; Susan Cook, *Opera for a New Republic: The Zeitoper of Krenek, Weill, and Hindemith*, Ann Arbor, 1988; Stephen Hinton, *The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik: A Study of Musical Aesthetics in the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) with Particular Reference to the Works of Paul Hindemith*, New York, 1989.

to it and thus uses a style we don't have to examine further, since it doesn't get beyond what was discovered by post-classical music, and only manages to do it badly'.<sup>27</sup> The controversies that have surrounded their claims to the mainstream have not only served to define their own position, but functioned as a central point of reference for many of the other developments over the century, as Stephen Hinton has observed: 'In the minds of most his contemporaries and in the composer's own mind Schoenberg's music embodied the very antipode of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and *Gebrauchsmusik*'.<sup>28</sup>

That the Workers' Symphony Concert included Mahler's Second Symphony can also be understood as making the point of the triumvirate's Viennese affiliations. The inclusion of the early tonal chorus *Friede auf Erden* served a similar ideological function. Schoenberg felt that his early music would prove his understanding of and respect for tradition, as evidenced by a letter about *Friede auf Erden* to the conductor Werner Reinhart from July 1923:

I may say that for the present it matters more to me if people understand my older works, such as this chorus 'Peace on Earth'. They are the natural forerunners of my later works, and only those who understand and comprehend them will be able to hear the latter with any understanding beyond the fashionable minimum. And only such people will realize that the melodic character of these later works is the natural consequence of what I tried to do earlier . . . *I do not attach so much importance to being a musical bogeyman as to being a natural continuer of properly understood good old tradition!*<sup>29</sup>

As this formulation suggests, the emphasis on tradition by the Second Viennese School also had significant national and political dimensions as the label of revolutionary became associated with Bolshevism and anarchy.<sup>30</sup> In 1922 Schoenberg described Berg and Webern as 'real musicians, not Bolshevik illiterates, but men with a musically educated ear'.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the clearest examples of the relationship of their national claims to the political context are Webern's lectures on *The Path to the New Music* from early in 1933, after Hitler's election to the chancellorship. By demonstrating the inevitability of their compositional developments and their links to the tradition of Beethoven and Brahms, Webern tried to refute the label of "cultural Bolshevism" . . . given to everything that's going on around Schoenberg, Berg and myself (Krenek too). Imagine what will be destroyed, wiped out, by this hate of culture!<sup>32</sup> Many of the school's writings from the 1920s and 30s stress their allegiance to

27 Webern, *The Path to the New Music*, p. 32.      28 Hinton, *The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik*, pp. 102–3.

29 Quoted in Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography*, pp. 146–7 (Schoenberg's emphasis).

30 For more on the political aspects of neoclassicism see Richard Taruskin, 'Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology', *Nineteenth-Century Music* 16 (1993), pp. 286–302.

31 Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World, and Work* (tr. Humphrey Searle), p. 283.

32 Webern, *The Path to the New Music*, p. 19.

the German tradition, most explicitly Schoenberg's 'National Music' (1931), which describes his works explicitly in national and even militaristic terms as 'a living example of an art . . . produced on German soil, without foreign influences . . . able most effectively to oppose Latin and Slav hopes of hegemony and derived through and through from the traditions of German music'.<sup>33</sup>

But if the idea of the Second Viennese School necessitated the formation of such firm aesthetic, stylistic, political, and national boundaries, their compositional activities, writings, and mainstream aspirations represent a much more ambivalent reaction to contemporary developments and other national traditions. Indeed among Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern's works from the 1920s and 30s are significant points of contact with virtually every compositional and aesthetic development in the inter-war period. This is evident at the most general level in the neoclassical characteristics of their turn away from expressionist angst to a more objective and detached emotional character, and in the use of smaller ensembles, thinner textures, and baroque and classical genres and forms. (It was just these features that would earn such condemnation from Boulez and others after the Second World War.) The Workers' Symphony Concert, however, illustrates a more profound engagement with a broad range of contemporary debates about the relationship of high culture to entertainment music and popular dance forms, the urge for art with a social function, and the desire to respond to the technologies of recording, radio, and film.

Berg's *Der Wein* is a particularly clear example of this stylistic permeability, with its references to jazz scoring, quasi-tonal harmonies, and dance rhythms, in particular the tango. Berg interrupted work on his opera *Lulu* to compose the concert aria when he received the commission from the Viennese soprano Ruzena Herlinger in the spring of 1929.<sup>34</sup> A setting of three poems by Baudelaire, in Stefan George's translation, the aria has many similarities to the opera in its scoring, in Berg's handling of the twelve-tone system, and his writing for the voice; it has important links to the sphere of the *Zeitoper*, as does Schoenberg's own foray into the genre with *Von heute auf morgen*, op. 32 (1929). At the same time, the twelve-tone structure of Berg's aria, *Lulu*, and Schoenberg's opera obviously sets them apart from related works by Hindemith, Krenek, or Weill. It is precisely the complex and even contradictory way that these pieces simultaneously participate in and challenge their genre that is most typical of the Second Viennese School's relationship to the compositional and aesthetic trends of the time. Similarly, Schoenberg's compositions for the workers' choral groups, such as those that performed at the Workers'

33 Arnold Schoenberg, 'National Music', in *Style and Idea*, p. 173.

34 George Perle, 'Alban Berg', in Oliver Neighbour, Paul Griffiths, and George Perle (eds.), *The New Grove Second Viennese School*, New York, 1983, p. 170.

Symphony Concert, were also meant as exemplars and critiques of the idea of communal music.<sup>35</sup> Of the Six Pieces for Male Chorus, op. 35, Berg wrote:

it also appears that you (you who have always shown the younger generation the way) for once wished to *show* something *after the fact*, thereby demonstrating that the simple forms generally associated with the low 'communal music' can also *lay claim* to the highest standards of artistry and skill and that their level need not be so debased as to make them suited to be sung only by children or on the street.<sup>36</sup>

As for the *Accompaniment to a Film Scene*, op. 34, it was conceived independently of any specific film or scenario, beyond the sparse programmatic outline, 'threatening danger, fear, catastrophe', indicated in the subtitle. The work was generally well received, though not without protests, a fact that caused Schoenberg some concern, as he wrote to his pupil Heinrich Jalowetz who had conducted it in 1931: 'What you told me about the performance pleases me very much . . . People do seem to like the piece: ought I to draw any conclusions from that as to its quality? I mean: the public apparently likes it.'<sup>37</sup> Schoenberg's irony here reflects the fundamental conflict he felt between the Weimar ideal of art serving the public and his sense of the moral and spiritual mission of the artist – a conflict evident in every aspect of the *Accompaniment to a Film Scene*. On a practical level, the attractions of the marketplace must have played a role in his accepting the commission to contribute to a special series for the Heinrichshofen publishing house, which specialized in scores for the thriving German silent-film industry. Yet while the relatively small orchestra, expanded percussion section, and stripped-down textures reflect the practices of silent-film scoring, the work's complexity, and dissonant, twelve-tone language would have prohibited its performance in a theatre.

This should not be thought of as a miscalculation, but rather, as some critics of the time noted, as a challenge to the new medium: despite its title, op. 34 is not an example but rather a critique of film music. Schoenberg had seen in moving pictures a danger for opera and theatre, and he protested against the vulgarity of the majority of films. But, as with many of his contemporaries, he also had high hopes for the possibilities film offered. In 1927, the year of the first full-length talking film, *The Jazz Singer*, he envisioned film 'as a completely new and independent instrument for innovative artistic expression'. Rejecting marketability of wide mass appeal as the sole factor determining production,

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Auner, 'Schoenberg and his Public in 1930: The Six Pieces for Male Chorus, op. 35', in Frisch, *Schoenberg and His World*, pp. 85–125.

<sup>36</sup> Juliane Brand, Christopher Hailey, and Donald Harris (eds. and tr.), *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence, Selected Letters*, New York, 1988, pp. 412–13. Emphases in original.

<sup>37</sup> Erwin Stein (ed.), *Arnold Schoenberg: Letters* (tr. Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser), Berkeley, 1987, pp. 147–8.

and concentrating on true and deep ideas and emotions, Schoenberg believed film in Germany could rise to the level of its poetry and music.<sup>38</sup>

### Historical necessity and twelve-tone composition

Crucial to the role of twelve-tone composition in the Second Viennese School's claim to the mainstream was that the method was both integrally related to tradition and an extension of it to a higher level of development. In 'My Evolution' Schoenberg described his atonal works as part of a coherent, unbroken development, still tied to the 'ancient "eternal" laws of musical aesthetics' and 'no more revolutionary than any other development in the history of music'.<sup>39</sup> In similar terms, Schoenberg spelled out the historical origins of twelve-tone composition in a letter to Webern containing suggestions for his planned lectures that became *The Path to the New Music*.

I would recommend your possibly arranging the analyses in such a way (by the choice of works) as to show the logical development towards 12-tone composition. Thus, for example, the Netherlands School, Bach for counterpoint, Mozart for phrase formation, but also for motivic treatment, Beethoven, but also Bach for development, Brahms and possibly Mahler for varied and highly complex treatment.<sup>40</sup>

But central to their conception of this historical mainstream was that they had the obligation to continue these developments to an ever higher degree, with the goal being – in the formulation from the 1933 version of 'New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea' – 'to take advantage of the musical space in all its dimensions so that the greatest and richest content is accommodated in the smallest space'.<sup>41</sup>

Thus the mainstream for Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern represented a difficult balancing act between claiming to represent both a 'truly new music' and 'properly understood good old tradition'. Perhaps the most obvious way they approached this challenge was in their recompositions and arrangements of works by Bach, Brahms, Handel, and others, in which they updated the style of earlier works through orchestrations that would clarify motivic relationships, or through more extensive harmonic and formal transformations. Examples of the former include Webern's orchestration of the Fugue (*Ricercar*) from Bach's *Musical Offering*, and Schoenberg's version of the Prelude and

<sup>38</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, 'Art and the Moving Pictures', in *Style and Idea*, pp. 153–7.

<sup>39</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, 'My Evolution', in *Style and Idea*, p. 86.

<sup>40</sup> Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern*, p. 374.

<sup>41</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, 'Neue und Veraltete Musik, oder Stil und Gedanke', *Stil und Gedanke: Aufsätze zur Musik* (ed. Ivan Vojtěch), Frankfurt am Main, 1976, p. 467 (author's translation).

Fugue in E flat, BWV 552 (1928); Schoenberg's Cello Concerto (1932–3), based on Monn's 1746 Concerto per Clavicembalo in D major (one of the works for which Schoenberg prepared a basso continuo realization for the *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich*) reflects a more thoroughgoing process of updating. In a letter to Pablo Casals he described bringing Monn's piece forward through time almost, but not quite, into the present:

I think I've succeeded in making the whole thing approximate, say, to Haydn's style. In harmony I have sometimes gone a little (and sometimes rather more) beyond the limits of that style. But nowhere does it go much further than Brahms, anyway there are no dissonances other than those understood by the older theory of harmony; and: it is nowhere atonal.<sup>42</sup>

If the arrangements can be thought of as retrospectively working with the objects from the past to bring them up to the modern standards, then the twelve-tone method was an attempt to remake the tradition from the inside.

The basic idea of twelve-tone composition can be explained easily enough. In Schoenberg's most extensive statement, 'Composition with Twelve Tones', he defines the method as based on 1) 'the constant and exclusive use of a set of twelve different tones'; 2) an avoidance of creating 'false expectations' of tonality by refraining from the use of tonal harmony and octave doubling that might suggest a root or tonic; 3) the treatment of 'the two or more dimensional space as a unity', which involves the use of the row to generate melodic and harmonic material; 4) and the use of the basic set along with its inversion, retrograde, and retrograde inversion in any transposition, resulting in the forty-eight possible row forms.<sup>43</sup> But to understand why and how the method became the central means for Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern to present their mainstream claims involves, as Carl Dahlhaus wrote, the reconstruction of the 'problems as the solution to which . . . dodecaphony acquired a significance that would hardly have been accorded to it if it had been merely a technique, a procedure capable of being described in a few sentences'.<sup>44</sup>

Schoenberg characterized the method of composing with twelve tones as the product of an extended period of searching for a new way of composing: one that would both replace the system of tonality and formulate 'laws and rules', thereby allowing conscious control of the new means he had 'conceived as in a dream' in the freely atonal pieces. That this was a considerable struggle for Schoenberg reflects both the technical challenges he faced in formulating the 'laws and rules', but also the fundamental reconfiguration of his ideas about

42 Stein (ed.), *Arnold Schoenberg: Letters*, p. 171.

43 Arnold Schoenberg, 'Composition with Twelve Tones', in *Style and Idea*, pp. 218–27.

44 Carl Dahlhaus, 'Schoenberg's Poetics of Music', in *Schoenberg and the New Music* (tr. Derek Puffett and Alfred Clayton), Cambridge, 1987, p. 80.

the nature of art and creativity this necessitated. Indeed, he had already begun experimenting with twelve-note chords and the systematic completion of the aggregate during the composition of *Die glückliche Hand* (1910–13), just as Berg had done in the *Altenberg Lieder* and Webern in the *Bagatelles*, but it would be a number of years before they developed both a technical and an aesthetic basis for working systematically with twelve tones.

Following the completion in 1916 of the Four Orchestral Songs, op. 22, it was seven years before the publication of Schoenberg's next completed new work (the Piano Pieces, op. 23). When asked why Schoenberg might have composed so little during this period Marcel Dick, the violist of the Kolisch Quartet, attributed it to his concentration on the development of the twelve-tone system, claiming 'they were perhaps the most productive years of his life'.<sup>45</sup> Although no works were published in the intervening years, Schoenberg worked on a massive choral symphony that evolved into the oratorio *Die Jakobsleiter*. In *Die Jakobsleiter*, the Piano Pieces, op. 23, and the *Serenade*, op. 24 he experimented with ordered and unordered collections of various length, using a technique he described as 'working with tones of the motif'.<sup>46</sup> The Suite for Piano, op. 25, completed in 1923 and published in 1925, is the first piece to be twelve-tone throughout, while the Wind Quintet, op. 26 (1924) was the first to use a single row for all the movements.<sup>47</sup> After an initial presentation to a small group in 1921, he called his students and friends together in February 1923 to present the method publicly, **an occasion motivated in large part by Schoenberg's concern to defend his claim to be the originator of twelve-tone composition against the Viennese composer Josef Hauer, who was working with related techniques.**

Webern had been in contact with Schoenberg during the period when he was moving towards twelve-tone composition and had already experimented with it prior to the official unveiling. But while it is clear that there was some mutual influence, Schoenberg was reluctant to share all of his discoveries. In *The Path to the New Music* Webern describes visiting Schoenberg in 1917 when he was composing *Die Jakobsleiter*: 'He said that he was "on the way to something quite new". He didn't tell me more at the time, and I racked my brains – "For goodness' sake, whatever can it be?"'<sup>48</sup> Webern first attempted working with a twelve-tone row in the sketches for the song 'Mein Weg geht jetzt vorüber' (1922), though it was not used in the finished piece;<sup>49</sup> his first completed twelve-tone composition was a short piano piece entitled *Kinderstück* (1924, published

45 Smith, *Schoenberg and His Circle*, p. 181.

46 Schoenberg, 'Composition with Twelve-Tones (2)', in *Style and Idea*, p. 248.

47 For details on Schoenberg's development of the twelve-tone method, see Ethan Haimo, *Schoenberg's Serial Odyssey: The Evolution of His Twelve-Tone Method, 1914–1928*, Oxford, 1990.

48 Webern, *The Path to the New Music*, p. 44.

49 Shreffler, 'Anton Webern', p. 285.



posthumously), but the String Trio, op. 20 (1926–7), was the first twelve-tone work he published, and his first large-scale instrumental work in thirteen years. Like Webern, Berg too was kept in the dark about the details of the system. He wrote to his wife in April 1923 that Schoenberg had started showing him his secrets,<sup>50</sup> and used twelve-tone rows in the Chamber Concerto (1925), though much of the material of the piece was not row-derived. His first ‘strict’ twelve-tone composition was the setting of the poem ‘Schliesse mir die Augen beide’ (1925), of which he had previously produced a tonal setting in 1907.

### Twelve-tone composition and defining the mainstream

Beyond what it offered as a compositional resource, the idea of twelve-tone composition served many purposes in defining the school and clarifying their relationship to tradition. In contrast to Bartók, Stravinsky, or Milhaud, for example, whose music was not consistently associated with specific compositional approaches, the Second Viennese School was firmly linked to twelve-tone composition in the mind of the public. The story of the break with tonality and the discovery of twelve-tone composition dominates many of Schoenberg’s later writings, such as ‘Composition with Twelve Tones’ and ‘My Evolution’. Webern equated undertaking twelve-tone composition with entering into a marriage or the revelation of divine truth, writing that in 1921, ‘Schoenberg expressed the law with absolute clarity . . . Since that time he’s practised this technique of composition himself (with one small exception), and we younger composers have been his disciples.’<sup>51</sup>

The function of twelve-tone composition as a visible marker of their identity as a group and of their relationship to the musical tradition also explains Schoenberg’s insistence throughout his life on his ‘priority’ as the discoverer of the method. The importance he placed on this claim for defining his place in the mainstream of music history was played out publicly in his controversy with Thomas Mann about the dangers he saw in attributing the method to the fictional protagonist of Mann’s novel, *Dr Faustus*, Adrian Leverkühn. In February 1948 he sent Mann ‘A Text from the Third Millennium’, which imagined an encyclopedia entry from the distant future that attributed the technique and thus the role as progenitor of subsequent historical events to Mann (while at the same time getting in a few digs at the neoclassical composers around Nadia Boulanger):

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Schoenberg and His Circle*, p. 200.

<sup>51</sup> Webern, *The Path to the New Music*, p. 41.

Probably Mann was in contact with Schoenberg about this time; Schoenberg was living in Vienna, only a few minutes' flight from Munich, where Mann lived. He probably invented the twelve-tone theory at that time (1933), and as he had given up composing himself, he allowed Schoenberg to use it and publish it under his own name. Mann's liberal nature never mentioned this violation of his rights. But it seems that they became enemies in the last years of their lives, and now Mann took his property back and attributed its origin to a person whom he had created himself (Homunculus). So the great American music came into the position of being able to profit from Mann's theoretical invention, and this led to all the progress in American music from the fusion of this with Budia Nalanger's modal methods of producing real old music which works like new music.<sup>52</sup>

As Schoenberg's sarcastic comments make clear, an important aspect of **the role of the twelve-tone method in establishing and maintaining a tradition was the degree to which it could be codified.** For practical and aesthetic reasons, the contextual, intuitive compositional approaches in the years before the war resisted theoretical formulation; while a developed literature has arisen in recent years, none of the composers themselves articulated a theory of 'atonal' composition.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, although all three composers remained ambivalent about the idea of twelve-tone composition as a set of rules or a compositional system, they nevertheless presented the method in ways that others could adopt. The idea of the twelve-tone method as an approach that could be codified and that offered cohesion and organization is also reflected in the new weight that they placed on the compositional process as a public act. They carefully preserved and dated large amounts of sketch material and often referred to sketches in their writings. This marks a significant departure from the years before the First World War when rapid, apparently effortless composition, especially in the case of Schoenberg, became a sign of the emotional authenticity and expressive immediacy of the music. But with the rise of twelve-tone composition, the creative process increasingly involved extensive sketching, row tables, and various twelve-tone devices.<sup>54</sup> All three composers used sketches as evidence of the unity and compositional logic of their works for a sometimes uncomprehending public. The strategy of making public the world of the creative process may shed light as well on the significance of the arrangements and recompositions for Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern. Here the compositional act is made visible by superimposing it explicitly on a pre-existing canvas, i.e. the original work.

52 Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World, and Work*, pp. 547–8.

53 See Ethan Haimo, 'Atonality, Analysis, and the Intentional Fallacy', *Music Theory Spectrum* 18/2 (1996), pp. 167–99.

54 Ibid.

An integral part of the mainstream function of the twelve-tone method was a new relationship to the listener that began to emerge during and immediately following the war years, a development shared by many artists of the time. Several factors contributed to this transformation in their thought, including their desire to reach a broader public, their awareness of the new audiences being created, and the demands of their new positions. The war itself undoubtedly had a significant impact on how they saw their social role: all three composers saw periods of military service during the First World War, and the impact of the experience is evident in many aspects of their work and thought, such as Berg's strong identification with the downtrodden character Wozzeck, Schoenberg's jovial barracks-style chamber work *Die eiserne Brigade* (1916), and in many less obvious ways.

A central goal of twelve-tone composition was the idea of comprehensibility: indeed Schoenberg wrote, 'Composition with twelve tones has no other aim than comprehensibility.'<sup>55</sup> Schoenberg wrestled with defining the idea of comprehensibility in an unfinished theoretical work entitled *Coherence, Counterpoint, Instrumentation, Instruction in Form*, dating from 1917, significantly the same time as he was composing *Die Jakobsleiter*. Most important from the present perspective is the way Schoenberg defines comprehensibility in terms of the size of the desired audience: 'The *more comprehensible* a form and a content, the *larger the circle* of those *affected* by it. The *more difficult to comprehend*, the *smaller*.'<sup>56</sup> Schoenberg had of course discussed the audience in his earlier writings, but in most cases it was to dismiss their relevance to the composer. In 'Why Are New Melodies So Hard To Understand?', from 1913, for example, he points out many features of his music that pose difficulties for the listener, but concludes: 'why should the rights of the slow thinking be respected?'<sup>57</sup> In the 1917 treatise he is also careful to differentiate comprehensibility from coherence, arguing that 'the limits of comprehensibility are not the limits of coherence'. Accordingly, coherence can result from connections 'inaccessible to consciousness', or that may have an effect only on 'those more experienced or trained'.<sup>58</sup> But the crucial difference from his earlier stance is that he then goes on in the rest of the treatise to present systematically all the compositional means for creating coherence and comprehensibility, and always with the question of the size and nature of the audience as a central concern:

55 Schoenberg, 'Composition with Twelve Tones', p. 215.

56 Arnold Schoenberg, *Coherence, Counterpoint, Instrumentation, Instruction in Form* (ed. Severine Neff, tr. Severine Neff and Charlotte M. Cross), Lincoln, 1994, p. 9.

57 Bryan Simms, 'New Documents in the Schoenberg-Schenker Polemic', *Perspectives of New Music* 16/1 (1977), p. 115.

58 Schoenberg, *Coherence, Counterpoint, Instrumentation, Instruction in Form*, p. 9 (translation modified).

*Comprehensibility* depends on the degree to which the essential or inessential features held in common are conspicuously or inconspicuously used or worked out.

It can be reduced to a minimum if the performer is little concerned with his listeners' capacities of comprehension; it must be striven for to the utmost if the author addresses himself to many listeners or to those of limited capacity.<sup>59</sup>

In many writings of the time Schoenberg makes it clear that there was an intimate relationship between the nature of the musical idea, the means of presentation, and the intended audience. Webern wrote in similar terms about the importance of reaching the listener in his orchestration of Bach's Ricercar by revealing the motivic coherence: 'Is it not worth while to awaken this music asleep in the seclusion of Bach's own abstract presentation, and thus unknown or unapproachable by most men? Unapproachable as music!'<sup>60</sup> This is of course not to say that Schoenberg, Berg, or Webern shared the political agendas of the official Social Democratic cultural policy, or of composers such as Weill and Eisler who advocated a social function for art; indeed there is evidence that they opposed these trends to varying degrees, both aesthetically and ideologically. But if there is no doubt that Schoenberg took advantage of the mass media for the purposes of propaganda and for the dissemination of his music, it is also clear that he confronted the more fundamental problem of writing music that would be accessible to the broader public created by these technologies. That Schoenberg did in fact take into consideration the conditions of performance and the intended listeners and performers is particularly evident in his many choral works from the 1920s and 30s, including his tonal and relatively conventional folksong arrangements, the Three Folksongs for Mixed Choir, op. 49 (published in 1930 in the state-sponsored *Volksliederbuch für die Jugend*), and in a more complex way in the Six Pieces for Male Chorus, op. 35 (1929–30), with their hybrid tonal/twelve-tone structure. The Six Pieces arose from a commission from the Deutsche Arbeiter-Sängerbund (the primary national organization of workers' choruses), and two of the movements (no. 4, 'Glück', and no. 6, 'Verbundenheit') were published by the *Deutsche Arbeiter-Sängerzeitung*. The pieces were widely performed, including a presentation in December 1932 of 'Verbundenheit' by the workers' chorus Freie Typographia, the same group that had sung *Friede auf Erden* at the Workers' Symphony Concert the preceding June.

Schoenberg's formulation of a theory of coherence in terms of the audience can clarify why traditional forms and genres became so central to the twelve-tone works of the Second Viennese School. In a section of the 1917 treatise

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> Anton Webern, 'From the Correspondence', *Die Reihe* 2 (1955); English edn, 1958, p. 19.

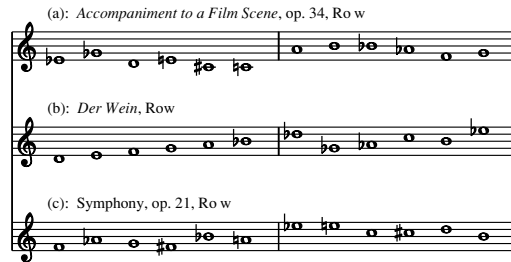
entitled ‘Understanding = Recognition of Similarity’ he writes: ‘To understand a thing, it is necessary to recognize that in many (or, if possible, in all) of its parts; it may be similar or even identical to things or parts that are familiar.’<sup>61</sup> This can refer to aspects of repetition, variation, and development within a work, but also involves establishing relationships between a work and other works already known to us: ‘If a person is meant to understand what another is saying to him, the first presupposition’, Schoenberg writes, ‘is that the speaker use such signs or means of expression as are known to the listener; for example, the words of a language familiar to him’.<sup>62</sup> Thus in marked contrast to the extreme reduction of conventional material during the atonal period in pieces like *Erwartung*, op. 17, Berg’s Four Songs, op. 2, or Webern’s Five Pieces for String Quartet, op. 5, there was a re-emergence in the 1920s and 30s of traditional compositional approaches at every level of organization, including melodic phrase structure, homophonic and polyphonic textural types, conventional rhythms (march, waltz, dance styles), standard forms (sonata, minuet and trio, rondo, variation), and established genres (dance suite, trio, string quartet, concerto, and number opera). Variation forms were particularly well suited to an understanding of comprehensibility based on the ‘recognition of similarity’; besides free-standing works such as Schoenberg’s Variations for Orchestra, op. 31 (1928) and Webern’s Variations, op. 30 (1940), there were variation movements in many works by all three composers, including Berg’s Violin Concerto, Webern’s Symphony, op. 21, and Schoenberg’s Suite, op. 29.

### Serial structure and musical character

A crucial feature of the twelve-tone method for its role in defining the mainstream was its flexibility in allowing each composer to pursue his own compositional concerns within a consistent framework. The three composers came to twelve-tone composition through very different paths; thus it is not surprising that they each developed the system in very individual ways, in terms of both its fundamental assumptions and the musical results. These differences have also helped make the status of the school somewhat resilient in the face of changing fashions since the Second World War. Several generations of composers with shifting compositional concerns have been able to find continuing sustenance in the school by turning their attention from one to another of the composers, or by seeking points of contact with particular stages in their development; this is most obvious in the transition from the strong interest in Webern by

61 Schoenberg, *Coherence, Counterpoint, Instrumentation, Instruction in Form*, p. 11.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 13, and see Alan Lessem, ‘Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Neo-Classicism: The Issues Reexamined’, *Musical Quarterly* 68 (1982), pp. 527–42.



Example 9.1: Rows of Schoenberg's *Accompaniment to a Film Scene*, Berg's *Der Wein*, and Webern's *Symphony*, op. 21.

avant-garde composers in the 1950s and 60s to the Berg revival in the 1970s and 80s, paralleling the resurgence of neo-Romantic and eclectic elements in new works of the time.

The depth of their differences in approach to twelve-tone composition is evident at once by looking at the rows they employed in their works (see Ex. 9.1). To counter the impression that the row was simply a reshuffling of the chromatic scale, Schoenberg emphasized that the ordering of the twelve tones was the 'first creative thought', with far-reaching implications for every aspect of the piece.<sup>63</sup> The close relationship between twelve-tone composition and the earlier idea of composing with the tones of the motive is clear in Schoenberg's claim that 'The basic set functions in the manner of a motive', thus becoming the source for all the melodies and harmonies developed in the piece. By the same token, he de-emphasized the need for the row itself to be heard in the composition as a 'theme or a melody' that would be characterized by 'features of rhythm, phrasing, construction, character, etc'.<sup>64</sup> In the *Accompaniment to a Film Scene*, for example, a linear statement of the row does not appear until bar 9; instead the piece opens with fragmentary motives in the wind instruments against soft string tremolos. On the other hand, in pieces such as the first movement of the *Fourth String Quartet*, op. 37, linear thematic statements of the row do play an important role.

Because of the emphasis on the basic set as a source of motives, Schoenberg tended to structure the rows to produce a great deal of variety in the intervals of the three- and four-note subsets that made up the row. In the row of the *Accompaniment to a Film Scene* (Ex. 9.1a), the first two trichords produce the set 014, the half-step plus a minor third so common to Schoenberg's work, while the two trichords in the second half of the row are 012 (a semitone cluster) and 013. Throughout the piece these three-note motives appear in various

63 Schoenberg, 'Composition with Twelve Tones', p. 219. 64 Ibid.

transformations, particularly in the stylistically retrospective conclusion which recalls the ‘*Muss es sein?*’ [Must it be?] theme of the last movement of Beethoven’s final string quartet, op. 135. (Schoenberg discussed op. 135 as a prototypical twelve-tone piece in ‘Composition with Twelve Tones’.) An overriding concern for Schoenberg in the construction of rows was their capacity for what is nowadays called ‘hexachordal inversional combinatoriality’, meaning that a row can be combined with one of its inversions, most often the inversion a perfect fifth below, without any pitches being duplicated. Accordingly, the inversion of the film music row starting on A $\flat$  produces the following (A $\flat$ , F, A, G, B $\flat$ , B, D, C, D $\flat$ , E $\flat$ , G $\flat$ , E); the first six notes of the original row and the inversion together contain all twelve chromatic notes, and the same applies to the last six notes of each. Schoenberg thus was able to use the combinatorial pair of rows simultaneously to generate melodic and harmonic material without concern for doubling pitches.

In marked contrast to both Webern and Schoenberg, Berg’s rows are often presented linearly in clearly audible form. The first vocal entrance in *Der Wein*, for example, consists of a complete linear statement of the row, followed by an inversion that is again made audible as such because the contour is inverted. Thus row statement and related thematic material can be used to define formal sections.<sup>65</sup> But the rows have a considerably different status in Berg’s works due to his practice of combining twelve-tone and non-twelve-tone movements in a single work, such as the *Lyric Suite*, and of using new rows derived through various means; correspondingly, the row of *Der Wein* (Ex. 9.1b) is non-combinatorial, and the possibility of creating aggregates through the use of combinatorial rows, so central to Schoenberg’s thought, plays little role in Berg’s music. Instead, like the row of Berg’s Violin Concerto, that of *Der Wein* is designed to allow a range of references to diatonic tonality: a D minor hexachord, a G $\flat$  major triad, and an A $\flat$  triad that can be either major or minor. This is even more explicit in the triadic Violin Concerto row (G, B $\flat$ , D, F $\sharp$ , A, C, E, G $\sharp$ , B, C $\sharp$ , D $\sharp$ , F), which also allows functional relationships between the component segments (G minor as tonic and its dominant; A minor as super-tonic followed by its dominant.) But even where functional relationships are not part of the row, as in *Der Wein*, Berg often segments the row to produce chords that recall tonal progressions.

The marked tonal characteristics of Berg’s rows reflect the changing status of tonality for the school. In Schoenberg’s description of the twelve-tone system he often stressed the need to avoid tonal implications, as in ‘Composition with

<sup>65</sup> The discussion of Berg’s twelve-tone music is indebted here and in the following to David Headlam, *The Music of Alban Berg*, New Haven, 1996.

Twelve Tones'. The question of tonality, however, clearly goes beyond purely structural concerns, being intimately bound up with how the Second Viennese School positioned itself in reference to contemporary developments, particularly Stravinsky's music and the bitter debates surrounding neoclassicism in the 1920s and 30s. But the reality of Schoenberg's, Berg's, and Webern's compositional practice is more complex: in keeping with their growing engagement with traditional forms and genres, and in turn with the listener, there was an increasing attempt to control and absorb the tonal tradition more explicitly into their works. In some cases the connections to tonality operate at the level of analogy, as in the use by all three composers of what are called hexachordal levels or twelve-tone areas, whereby the row or combinatorial pair of rows introduced at the opening serves as a sort of tonic. Webern writes in *The Path to the New Music*:

The original form and pitch of the row occupy a position akin to that of the 'main key' in earlier music; the recapitulation will naturally return to it. We end 'in the same key'. This analogy with earlier formal construction is quite consciously fostered; here we find the path that will lead us again to extended forms.<sup>66</sup>

Tonal features also appear at a more surface level, and here an illuminating comparison between Berg and Schoenberg can be drawn. Unlike Berg's rows, Schoenberg's typically do not contain explicit tonal scalar passages or triads. But in some cases, major and minor triads and other tonal formations are available through pitches closely spaced in the row, as for example in the row of the Suite, op. 29 (Eb, G, F#, Bb, D, B, C, A, Ab, E, F, Db). Throughout the piece he partitions (divides up) the row in ways that foreground its triadic qualities,<sup>67</sup> in the third movement, for instance, this tonal potential moves to the surface with a set of variations of a tonal folk tune, anticipating Berg's use of tonal melodies in the Violin Concerto. In the light of Schoenberg's idea of the role of the listener discussed above, it is noteworthy that the Schoenberg pieces which deal in the most far-reaching way with the issue of tonality and twelve-tone composition are the Six Pieces for Male Chorus. The six movements of the choral pieces represent various approaches to both the challenge of finding a common ground with the listener, and that of finding common ground between tonality and twelve-tone compositional techniques. The final movement, 'Verbundenheit', is a tonal work, but the two halves are designed so that the second half is a strict inversion, transposed up a semitone, of the first half. On the other hand, the twelve-tone movements, such as 'Landsknechte', focus on a very limited

66 Webern, *The Path to the New Music*, p. 54.

67 For more on Schoenberg's links to tonality see Silvina Milstein, *Arnold Schoenberg: Notes, Sets, Forms*, Cambridge, 1992.



set of sonorities and have large-scale motions through hexachordal areas that mimic tonal behaviour. The first movement to be composed, 'Glück', integrates the two realms still more closely through an eight-note row that produces harmonies suggesting tonal chords and pitch centrality on A $\flat$  and F.<sup>68</sup>

Berg's approach to the challenge of engaging with the tonal tradition through different means reflects the general permeability of his music. Quotations are common, including passages from Wagner and Zemlinsky in the *Lyric Suite*, folk tunes and references to popular idioms in *Der Wein* and the Violin Concerto, and many points of contact between pieces, such as the quotation in *Lulu* of passages from *Wozzeck* (a work which in turn draws on still earlier compositions by Berg). The tonal tradition is evoked in many ways in the Violin Concerto, from the structure of the row to the substantial quotation of the Bach chorale, 'Es ist genug!' The juxtaposition of twelve-tone and tonal materials in this work strikingly destabilizes the usual terms of the encounter through the use of a twelve-tone row that allows tonal triads and a Bach chorale that begins with a whole tone tetrachord; thus the most 'modern'-sounding part of the row, the last four pitches, is actually the most traditional. Accordingly, the function of the chorale as reconciling or heightening linguistic conflict has been interpreted in strikingly different ways, reflecting the dual nature of the mainstream claims.<sup>69</sup>

Even more so than Schoenberg's, Webern's rows do not function as themes or even as the source of motives in the conventional sense, but rather as a much more abstract background structure. Accordingly, his rows are not usually presented with distinct rhythms or contours, but are instead often disguised through voice crossing and large registral spans resulting from the pointillistic orchestration; the identity of the row as a theme is further obscured by Webern's tendency to use a much larger number of the available row transformations in the course of a piece. Yet if the row receded from the surface of Webern's music, he saw it as ensuring both unity and comprehensibility, and ultimately the historical legitimacy of the music. Anne Shreffler writes how in the early stages of twelve-tone composition Webern's almost religious faith in the row's power to unify gave him the freedom to construct music of 'unprecedented motivic density'.<sup>70</sup> In *The Path to the New Music* Webern discussed the function of the row in terms of Goethe's idea of the *Urpflanze* (primeval plant) from the *Farbenlehre*: just as Goethe viewed the shape of each individual leaf as well as

68 Robert Specht, 'Relationships Between Text and Music in the Choral Works of Arnold Schoenberg', Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1976, pp. 299–306.

69 Anthony Pople, *Berg: Violin Concerto*, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 98–102, and Joseph Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition*, Cambridge, MA, 1990, pp. 139–44.

70 Shreffler, 'Anton Webern', p. 287.

the abundance of forms and colours of plants as all derived from a single model, Webern regarded the row and all its permutations as ‘a manifestation of this order in the aesthetic sphere’.<sup>71</sup> **The mainstream claims for his twelve-tone compositions thus appealed to the highest source: nature.**<sup>72</sup>

This concern for underlying unity and order is reflected in the derivation of Webern’s rows from small generative cells. Webern’s rows, in contrast to those used by both Berg and Schoenberg, tended to limit the choice of intervals; his general preference for the half-step is evident in the row of the Symphony, op. 21 (Ex. 9.1c).<sup>73</sup> In some cases this limitation is the result of generating rows systematically from a smaller collection using the twelve-tone procedures; in op. 21, the second half of the row is the retrograde of the first half transposed a tritone, and the fact that the resulting structure is thus a kind of palindrome has broad implications for how the work develops. Again, the row of the Concerto, op. 24 (1931), is based on a three-note set (B, B $\flat$ , D), followed by its retrograde inversion (E $\flat$ , G, F $\sharp$ ), its retrograde (A $\flat$ , E, F), and its inversion (C, C $\sharp$ , A). In the String Quartet, op. 28 (1937), Webern shows that such techniques are also intimately related to the historical and mainstream claims of the works; here the row is derived from permutations of a tetrachord based on the BACH motive. Thus at the most basic level, the twelve-tone musical structure simultaneously appeals to and conflates nature, genius, and the Austro-German tradition.

More than half of the rows Webern used have the property of combinatoriality that was so central to Schoenberg’s conception of twelve-tone composition. But Kathryn Bailey suggests that Webern was not so much interested in the combinatoriality for its own sake: rather this characteristic resulted from his use of highly symmetrical rows, which in turn tend to be combinatorial.<sup>74</sup> Webern’s passion for order and unity is evident in the importance of symmetrical structures and strict contrapuntal devices in his music. The palindromic structure of the Symphony row, significantly based on the exact tritone division of the octave, is reflected in the appearance of small- and large-scale palindromes, as for example in the third variation of the second movement which contains palindromes at the level of the bar, as well as the overall eleven-bar length of the variation. Such symmetries play an important role in creating the crystalline quality of stillness so typical of Webern’s music, and suggested by his remarks about an expedition in the mountains in a letter to Hildegard Jone from 1930:

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 295.    <sup>72</sup> Julian Johnson, *Webern and the Transformation of Nature*, Cambridge, 1999.

<sup>73</sup> My discussion of Webern’s approach to twelve-tone composition is indebted to Kathryn Bailey, *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern: Old Forms in a New Language*, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 13–29.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

The day of the ascent there was bad weather, rain and fog, but nevertheless it was very beautiful. The diffused light on the glacier was quite remarkable (caused by the overcast sky and the fog). Just a few paces in front of you snow and fog blended together into a completely undifferentiated screen. You had no idea whether you were going up or down hill. A most favorable opportunity to contract snow-blindness! But wonderful, like floating in space.<sup>75</sup>

Webern's use of canon-in-inversion throughout both movements of the Symphony also produces mirror symmetries at every level of structure; Bailey describes the 'comprehensiveness and ingenuity' of the canonic structures of op. 21 as rivalling Bach's *Art of Fugue*.<sup>76</sup> Canon had emerged as an important structural device already in the vocal works written prior to Webern's adoption of the twelve-tone method, such as the Five Sacred Songs, op. 15, the final movement of which is a double canon in contrary motion, and the Five Canons on Latin Texts, op. 16. Webern's view of polyphony as the crowning glory of music reflects his studies of the compositional techniques of the Netherlanders under Guido Adler at the University of Vienna, where he completed a dissertation on Heinrich Isaac in 1906. **That this urge towards unity and symmetry was intimately related to his sense of twelve-tone composition as the ultimate fulfilment and embodiment of the Austro-German tradition is evident in his endeavour to integrate as many different elements of the tradition as possible into his twelve-tone compositions.** Thus Shreffler writes of the String Quartet, op. 28, whose row, as noted above, is itself generated from the BACH motive, as a 'homage to the German musical tradition' marked at the outset by Webern's choice of the 'most Beethovenian of genres'. In a letter to Stein from 1939 Webern discussed how the piece synthesized the main principles of the tradition: 'the "horizontal", or homophonic ("the classical cyclic forms [such as] sonata, symphony and so forth") and the "vertical", or polyphonic ("canon, fugue, and so on")'.<sup>77</sup>

The centrality in Webern's music of both the traditional formal types and the elaborate contrapuntal and symmetrical structures comes up against the fact that in many cases both features can be difficult to perceive audibly. This question of the audibility of musical structures was also an issue for Berg who wrote of *Wozzeck*, 'there is no one in the audience who pays any attention to the various fugues, inventions, suites, sonata movements, variations and pas-sacaglias';<sup>78</sup> comparisons could also be made to Berg's use of large-scale palindromes in *Der Wein* and other works, along with complex numerical symbolism and secret programmes. But rather than a defect, the coexistence in the works

<sup>75</sup> Bailey, *The Life of Webern*, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 130–1.

<sup>76</sup> Bailey, *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern*, p. 95.

<sup>77</sup> Shreffler, 'Anton Webern', p. 299.      <sup>78</sup> Perle, 'Alban Berg', p. 161.

of all three composers of what Bailey calls Webern's 'contradictory (complementary?)' predilections 'for symmetrical constructions and for concealment' is one of the defining features of their music.<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, for Webern, the contrapuntal structures and symmetries were not to be understood as a 'tour de force' of compositional ingenuity, but as having a deeper significance both for the historical claims of the works, and in the service of unity by creating 'as many connections as possible'.<sup>80</sup> This can be linked as well to his idea of the row providing a deep, mystical structure analogous to the hidden unity underlying the diversity of the natural world. Bailey reports that Webern kept minutely detailed accounts of his walks in the Alps, including times of departure and arrival and remarks on all the flora and fauna he encountered, as if there were some underlying patterns and meanings to be gleaned.<sup>81</sup>

### The mainstream after 1933

If the Workers' Symphony Concert of June 1932 can be seen in many ways as affirming the mainstream claims of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, less than a year later their situation had profoundly changed. After Hitler's election as Chancellor in January 1933, it was only four months before Schoenberg and his family left Germany, settling briefly in France, and then emigrating to the United States in October. His last compositional work in Germany was to be the first two movements of the String Quartet Concerto, freely adapted from Handel's Concerto Grosso, op. 6, no. 7. This work, which he completed in France, marks a much more complex and ambivalent stance towards the Austro-German tradition, reflecting his reconversion to Judaism in July 1933 and the new sense of his identity suggested by such remarks as, from a letter to Webern, 'I have definitely separated myself from whatever binds me to the Occident.'<sup>82</sup>

Berg also experienced an enforced withdrawal from the mainstream. Despite the popularity of *Wozzeck*, performances became rare as the right-wing influence grew; he wrote to Webern in June 1933, 'My utter depression over these times has for a long time now impaired my ability to work.'<sup>83</sup> He completed the short score of *Lulu* in 1934, but his final work was the Violin Concerto, completed not long before his death from blood poisoning in December 1935. Meanwhile the rising influence of the Nazis in Austria meant that the

<sup>79</sup> Bailey, *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern*, p. 41.

<sup>80</sup> Webern, *The Path to the New Music*, p. 56.

<sup>81</sup> Bailey, *The Life of Webern*, p. 110.

<sup>82</sup> Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World, and Work*, p. 370, and see Joseph Auner, 'Schoenberg's Handel Concerto and the Ruins of Tradition', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 49 (1996), pp. 264-313.

<sup>83</sup> Perle, 'Alban Berg', p. 186.

workers' musical organizations which had been Webern's main source of employment were disbanded; thereafter Webern survived through work for Universal Edition, a few grants from the *Reichsmusikkammer*, and a very small number of performances until his music was proscribed in 1938, the year of the Degenerate Music exhibition. If the idea of an Austro-German mainstream had splintered for Schoenberg, with Webern it appears to have solidified pathologically, as reflected by his sympathy with National Socialism.<sup>84</sup> As Shreffler writes: 'Given his fanatic reverence for authority, his extreme pan-German nationalism, and his conviction that the music of the Second Viennese School was the culmination of the great German musical tradition, it was perhaps predictable that he would share in the delusion of a great German Reich.'<sup>85</sup> At the close of the war, in 1945, Webern was accidentally shot by an American soldier in the town of Mittersill, near Salzburg, where he had gone to stay with family members.

In his later years, as the only surviving member of the triumvirate, Schoenberg returned to the affirmation of his relationship to tradition in writings such as 'My Evolution' and 'Composition with Twelve Tones'. But his American works are considerably more eclectic, both individually and as a group, than his earlier output, suggesting the breakdown of any sense of a single mainstream or of the possibility of a synthesis of diverse trends. And yet, in an open letter in response to greetings on his seventy-fifth birthday in September 1949, Schoenberg made clear in his somewhat broken English that, if he had given up on the present, he still held out hope for the future:<sup>86</sup>

I have been given during these days much personal appreciation, which I have enjoyed immensely, because this showed me that my friends and other well-meaning people respect my aims and endeavors.

On the other hand, I have for many years closed my account with the world, in bowing to the fact that I may not hope for plain and loving understanding of my work, that is: of all I have to express in music, as long as I am alive. However, I know that many friends have familiarized themselves thoroughly with my manner of expression, and have acquired an intimate understanding of my ideas. They then might be such who carry out, what I have predicted 37 years ago in an aphorism.

'The second half of this century will spoil by overestimation, all the good of me that the first half, by underestimation, has left intact'.

I am somewhat embarrassed by so much eulogy. But, in spite of this, I find in it also some encouragement. Is it readily understandable, that one does not give up, though facing the opposition of a whole world?

<sup>84</sup> Bailey, *The Life of Webern*, p. 170.      <sup>85</sup> Shreffler, 'Anton Webern', p. 302.

<sup>86</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, 'To become recognized only after one's death - - - !' September 1949, Library of Congress; published by permission of Lawrence Schoenberg.

I do not know how the Great felt in similar situations. Mozart and Schubert were too young to be forced to occupy themselves with these problems. But Beethoven, when Grillparzer called the Ninth abstruse, or Wagner, when his Bayreuth plans seemed to fail, Mahler, when everybody named him trivial – how could these men continue to write?

I know only one answer: to say what man must know.

Once, when serving in the Austrian Army, I was asked whether I was really ‘that composer’, A. S.

‘One had to be it’, I said, ‘nobody wanted to be, so I volunteered’.

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