“Schoenberg – Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow”
by Josef Rufer
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From this we can infer that Schoenberg never once searched for originality. Rather, recall his assertion regarding the chords in fourths in Pelleas - it had intruded "against his will" - unconsciously. The unconscious dominated his creativity everywhere and at all times, and what he produced thereby he esteemed more highly and more profoundly in each case. "When more happens than one can imagine," he said, "then it can only happen unconsciously."

It was fifty years ago that Schoenberg, with his "Method of Composition with Twelve Tones Related Only to One Another," succeeded in finding a firm basis on which to construct non-atonal music. He was now (as he wrote to J. M. Hauer in 1923) "in a position to compose without hesitation and with imagination, as one does in childhood, and yet work under a precisely defined aesthetic control."

The public's reaction was predictable: Schoenberg was now decried as a "musical design engineer". He was convicted for all time. The catchword was unsurpassable as an argument. For it relieved everyone of having a personal opinion beyond the slogan "we said it all along," and of the responsibility of listening to these musical designs and coming to grips with them. Had those who had been chosen to be musicians and musical scholars done so at the time, they could have found the path to the music which lay within and behind these designs. Had they but heeded what Schoenberg indicated - both orally and in writing - in the way of advice to his students, friends, and anyone who cared to listen: that it was a matter of twelve-tone compositions, not twelve-tone compositions, i.e., of intellectual, sonic, and musical substances; that these were works of a musical conception and not mathematical designs; and that twelve-tone music certainly requires no more design work than is demanded by what is known as "motivic work" in tonal music. Moreover, to what extent is design to be looked upon with such contempt? Surely augmentation and diminution, inversion and other mirror forms of counterpoint need not be taken entirely as phantoms, especially if the other voices simultaneously contribute to the thematic material. "But," wrote Schoenberg to his brother-in-law, violinist Rudolf Kolisch "although I am not ashamed of a solid design basis in a composition even where I have consciously produced it - where, in other words, it is less valid than in the places where it was conceived instinctively and subconsciously - still, I do not wish to be regarded as a design engineer because of a little serial combination, since that would signify too little reciprocal accomplishment on my part."

"What can be designed with these twelve tones," he stated on another occasion, "depends on the inventive powers of the individual. Expression is limited only by the creative ability and personality of the composer." For Schoenberg, the twelve-tone method of composition was "rather a method of a workmanlike nature, which could exercise a decisive influence on neither the structure nor the character of a work. This is a question of the treatment of the material, in the sense of a characteristic refinement of its stipulations, which determines the form. As such, however, it is of a very great importance."

And here, within the scope of our topic "Schoenberg yesterday, today, and tomorrow," we must address ourselves to a fundamental misconception concerning his twelve-tone method of composition: the mechanical transfer of the concept of the row [Reihenidee] to all the elements involved in the creation of music - rhythm, dynamics, tone color, and so on - as has been practiced in so-called serial music. Whoever rejects this procedure and denies it the name Music is comparable to, and thus apparently branded as, an arch-opponent of Schoenberg, in a parallelism as illogical as it is superfluous. In so doing, one forgets or neglects only that the premises in the two cases are fundamentally different. Underlying serial music is a conscious intellectual effort, an artistic manipulation by which an idea - that of Schoenberg - is taken over mechanically. Underlying Schoenberg's twelve-tone music, however, is a musical inspiration, thus an unconscious act. For the tendency toward dodecaphony was intuitive and, long before its recognition and
formulation by Schoenberg, was clearly recognizable in the music of Reger, Hindemith, Bartók and - last, but not least - Schoenberg and Berg. Schoenberg did nothing but "hear out" the inspirations of this genre with all their possibilities of development. **And he did this not for the sake of effect or of being original, but out of a necessity: to compensate for the loss of the supremely structural functions of tonality.** He himself used the term "necessity" in this connection. For the transfer of the row concept to all other parameters of music, there was no such necessity; on the other hand, only this necessity legitimizes, in the realm of art, that which would otherwise remain arbitrariness, or at best exhibitionistic contrivance.

Hand in hand with this misconception there goes another; **the conscious and radical rejection of all tradition on the part of serial composers.** In sharp contrast to this, Schoenberg's theory demands the complete mastery of Classical and pre-Classical compositional techniques as an unconditional prerequisite for composition with twelve tones. But here the boundaries are clearly drawn, as the incompatibility and, moreover, the contradiction between serial and twelve-tone music are apparent. To this it must be added marginally that the welfare of music is in no way dependent on the use of Schoenbergian methods; that these in no way will guarantee the quality of a work; and that most twelve-tone works - written and as yet unwritten all over the world - may be just as dubious as is most tonal music at all times. **Value is determined neither by style nor by label, but by whether the music says something; whether we are moved, stirred, or inspired by it. This is the gist of Schoenberg's saying that “the difference between old and new music is smaller than the difference between good and bad music”**. And in justifying the necessity of the development toward nontonal music by the richness of its combinations, ideas and tone pictures, which a priori predestined it to a higher level, he closes with the characteristic sentence: "But everything depends not on material, but on genius, as is always true in Art."

That his genius developed in the fertile soil of the German musical tradition is not only evident in his music but also in numerous self-critical documents. In Schoenberg's Nachlass I found a pencilled remark on a yellowed sheet of paper, probably dating from the First World War, at which time German music was boycotted abroad:

> "Whenever I think about music, nothing ever comes to mind - whether intentionally or unintentionally - but German music.** Whoever is its opponent will often have to take the responsibility for utter starvation before this knowledge becomes natural to him. But German music thrives in times of hunger; deprived of nourishment, its silent power will create and fill banquet halls in eternity. And it will always be reaching toward Heaven, where rampant inferiority boasts artistry. (sic)"

More than a decade later, during the composing of Moses und Aron, Schoenberg commented on his deep identification with German music in a paper entitled Nationale Musik:

> "The fact that no one has yet recognized this is due not only to the difficulty of my music but also, and to a greater extent, to the laziness and arrogance of those who sit in judgment. For it is quite apparent. But I will say it once more myself; my teachers were Bach and Mozart primarily, and Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner secondarily."

And then, having summarized what he learned from these masters - it turns unwittingly into an embracing compositional method in key words he continued:

> "I have never closed my ears to anyone, and therefore can safely say that my originality derives from having imitated immediately whatever good I saw, even when I did not see it in others at first. I might add that, often enough, I saw it first in myself. For I have not stood still with what I perceived: I acquired it in order to possess it; I developed and expanded it, and it led me to new things. I am convinced that people will some day recognize how intimately this New is related to the very best of what was given to us as models. I claim credit for having composed truly new music, which, since it is founded on tradition, is destined to become tradition."

But no one paid any attention to him. That was yesterday, more than forty years ago. His name and his music seemed to fall into oblivion after 1933. In the 1930s the young Dallapiccola, who made an effort to learn something about Schoenberg and his twelve-tone music, was advised not to waste his time on something that had been considered passé for a long time. **The surprise was all the greater when the free world became accessible to us once again in 1945: Schoenberg's ideas, in the meantime, had found resonance everywhere, especially among young people - all over Europe, in all corners of the earth.**
Today (ed: 1974) Schoenberg has become the center of musical development in twentieth-century music, which does not mean that he is universally understood and accepted. That will still require considerable time, and today nothing is in shorter supply than time. But there exists no composer of yesterday, today, or tomorrow who can avoid coming to grips with Schoenberg. It can be said, without exaggeration, that not only Alban Berg and Anton Webern would not be what they are without him, but also Dallapiccola and Krenek, Henze and Giselher Klebe, Fortner, Luigi Nono, and Boulez, the last of whom (as H. H. Stuckenschmidt wrote) :

with unsuspecting naïveté wrote his Schoenberg est mort and then, as a conductor, took ten years to acquaint himself with what he had defamed, as the rebel disciple who had betrayed Schoenberg. As once before, namely Hindemith in the 1920s, so the admittedly defenseless Webern, who lost his life in 1945, was crowned a sort of antipope to Schoenberg, commensurate with his boundless admiration of the master. The idea that Webern's music, in its essential forms, is thinkable without Schoenberg, is as absurd for any knowledgeable person as that a pupil could have a formal influence on his teacher. But the power of fanfare, with which nearly every adherent to the Boulez-Stockhausen generation blared out Webern's simple countenance is leveled, both quantitatively and qualitatively, at their own standard-bearer. It does not diminish Webern's greatness to assert objectively that, in his work and specifically in his adoption of the twelve-tone technique, the elements are a simplification of Schoenberg ad usum delphini.

This also is part of the picture "Schoenberg today" and I could not have expressed it any better. The noise from the fanfare has long since faded away. Perhaps it was needed to chase away the great shadows which lay beneath this generation. Tomorrow and the future will bring new sounds, probably without fanfare. But they will, as before, encircle the focal point called Schoenberg and - we hope - understand him as a great living tradition. And out of this recognition, the strength will be drawn for future developments. Until then Schoenberg will have the last word, as is the case here and now.

Around 1930 he had an interview with Dr. Eberhard Preussner and Dr. Heinrich Strobel on the Berlin radio network. May his concluding remarks from then be also those of today:

"Herr Strobel, do not underestimate the extent of the circle that has formed around me. It will expand out of the thirst for knowledge of an idealistic younger generation, which feels itself drawn more to the mysterious than to the everyday. But however this may turn out, I can only think and say what my mission prescribes. Gentlemen, do not call that arrogance; I would rather have had greater success. It is in no way my wish to stand on a pedestal as a stylite. As long as I am permitted to consider my thinking and imagination as correct, I will not be able to believe anything except that my ideas must be thought out and expressed, even if they cannot be understood. I personally do not believe that my ideas are so utterly unintelligible. But let us consider: should great incontestable ideas, like those of a Kant, not be permitted to be thought or expressed, simply because to this day honest people must admit that they cannot follow them? To whomever the Lord God has given the mission to say unpopular things, he has lent the power to resign himself to the fact that it is invariably the others who are understood.

- Translated by William Drabkin