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978-0-521-86542-5 - Schoenberg's Transformation of Musical Language

Ethan Haimo

Frontmatter

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## Schoenberg's Transformation of Musical Language

Arnold Schoenberg is widely regarded as one of the most significant and innovative composers of the twentieth century. It is commonly assumed that Schoenberg's music divides into three periods: tonal, atonal, and serial. It is also assumed that Schoenberg's atonal music made a revolutionary break with the past, particularly in terms of harmonic structure. This book challenges both these popular notions. Haimo argues that Schoenberg's "atonal" music does not constitute a distinct unified period. He demonstrates that much of the music commonly described as "atonal" did not make a complete break with prior practices, even in the harmonic realm, but instead transformed the past by a series of incremental changes. An important and influential contribution to the field, Haimo's findings help not only to reevaluate Schoenberg, but also to redate much of what has been defined as one of the most crucial turning points in music history.

ETHAN HAIMO is a theorist and composer, and is Professor of Music in the Department of Music, University of Notre Dame. He is the co-editor (with Paul Johnson) of *Stravinsky Retrospectives* (1987), and author of *Schoenberg's Serial Odyssey* (1990) and *Haydn's Symphonic Forms* (1995). As a composer, he has written orchestral, chamber, vocal, and solo compositions. His work has appeared in many books and journals, including *The Schoenberg Companion*, edited by Walter Bailey, the *Journal of Music Theory*, *Music Analysis*, and *Journal of the American Musicological Society*.

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Notes on the examples, cover art, and abbreviations</i>	xi
1 “Atonality”: a revisionist thesis	1
2 “Based on tradition”: Four Songs, Op. 2, 1899	8
3 The principle of incremental innovation: <i>Verklärte Nacht</i> , 1899	23
4 Conservative song-cycle, progressive cantata: <i>Gurrelieder</i> , 1900–11	42
5 Programmatic music and its implications: <i>Pelleas und Melisande</i> , Op. 5, 1902–3	66
6 Consolidation: Six Songs, Op. 3, 1903–4	97
7 Abstract form, secret program: String Quartet, Op. 7, 1904–5	112
8 Referential centers? Lieder and fragments, Fall 1905	143
9 Absolute music and its consequences: Chamber Symphony, Op. 9, 1905–6	159
10 Crisis: <i>Friede auf Erden</i> , Op. 13, Ballades, Op. 12, and the reception of Schoenberg’s music, August 1906 to July 1907	190
11 Motivic economy: String Quartet No. 2, Op. 10, movements one and two, March–December 1907	210
12 “Until then I lacked the strength and confidence”: Two Songs, Op. 14, December 1907–March 1908	231
13 Beyond triads: the first layer of <i>Das Buch der hängenden Gärten</i> , Op. 15, March–April 1908	244
14 “On revient toujours?” Returning to Opp. 10 and 15, June 1908–February 1909	268
15 The analysis of Schoenberg’s post-1908 music: Pieces for Piano, Op. 11, Nos. 1 and 2, February 1909	290
16 “Intoxicated by the enthusiasm”: Five Orchestral Pieces, Op. 16; Piece for Piano, Op. 11, No. 3, May–August 1909	318
17 The birth (and death) of new music: August 1909 and beyond	346
<i>Notes</i>	357
<i>Bibliography</i>	412
<i>Index</i>	423

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## Preface

In this book I discuss the extraordinary transformation in Schoenberg's musical language and thought during the period 1899–1909. To that end, I analyze many of the works from this period, sometimes in considerable detail. Where appropriate, I explore aspects of Schoenberg's biography and the reception history of his music. When necessary, I draw upon primary sources (Schoenberg's sketches, drafts, correspondence).

However, I do not provide (and had no intention of providing) comprehensive analyses of any of the works in question. Indeed I do not even discuss every single work from the period: some works (like the Six Orchestral Songs, Op. 8) are passed over almost entirely. Moreover, my analyses do not treat the works in question as autonomous entities, independent of their role in the evolution of Schoenberg's thought. Readers who are looking for comprehensive studies of Schoenberg's biography, reception history, sketches, and correspondence, or who are interested in analyses that treat the works as autonomous aesthetic objects should look elsewhere; there is a plethora of first-rate literature that does exactly that.

What this book does is to use the available evidence to answer one simple (but I daresay, crucially important) question: How did Schoenberg's compositional language get from what it was in 1899 to what it became by 1909 and what were the essential stages in this transformation? In short, this is a history of the evolution of (musical) ideas. It was this framework that guided my choices of what to discuss and what to leave unsaid, what to analyze and what to ignore. Although the temptation was strong to say everything possible about every work, I have tried to restrict my remarks only to those aspects of the compositions that reveal important stages in the evolution of Schoenberg's thought.

It is commonly assumed that Schoenberg's "atonal" music made a revolutionary break with the past, particularly in terms of its harmonic structure. The core argument of this book is that this assumption is wrong. There was no revolution in harmony that led to a complete sweeping away of all prior truths. Rather, there was an incremental path of evolution that began around 1899 and lasted until approximately July 1909. That evolutionary transformation is the topic of this book.

It is my honor and pleasure to have the opportunity to thank those who have helped bring this project to fruition. A grant from the National

Endowment for the Humanities was crucial in the early stages of writing this book. The Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at the University of Notre Dame generously provided grants to fund my research trips to Vienna where I was able to examine first-hand the extraordinary treasures of the Arnold Schönberg Center. I owe a big debt of gratitude to the extraordinary professional staff of the Arnold Schönberg Center – a wonderfully run research institute if ever there was one (and a credit to its director, Christian Meyer). I would like to single out Therese Muxeneder for particular thanks and praise: she consistently responded with alacrity and accuracy to my innumerable requests. Special thanks are also due to Lawrence Schoenberg, Nuria Schoenberg-Nono, and Ronald Schoenberg for their constant support and encouragement. Through his wonderfully perceptive criticisms and suggestions, my series editor, Arnold Whittall, has helped improve this book in more ways than I could possibly count. The warmest of thanks are due to Maria Stäblein (Illinois State University) who helped me decipher what I had been sure was completely undecipherable script in letters by Arnold Schoenberg, Mathilde Schoenberg, Anton Webern, Richard Strauss, and others. I would also like to thank Severine Neff (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), Joseph Auner (State University of New York Stony Brook), Paul Johnson, Peter Smith, and Susan Youens (all three, University of Notre Dame), Christopher Hailey (Franz Schreker Foundation), Stephan Weytjens (Catholic University of Leuven), Christian Martin Schmidt (Technische Universität, Berlin), Walter Frisch (Columbia University), Walter Bailey (Rice University), Sabine Feisst (Arizona State University), David Banga, and Michael Vidmar-McEwen (both graduate students, University of Notre Dame), all of whom at one point or another in the past decade answered questions, provided information that I needed for this book, and/or tried to steer me away from making foolish errors. Whatever errors and mistakes that remain are mine and mine alone (all the more so since I sometimes ignore the advice of others).

Finally, I want to thank my mother, Deborah Tepper Haimo (to whom this book is dedicated) for a lifetime of support and encouragement. Ph.D. in Mathematics, Harvard University (1964), Professor of Mathematics at the University of Missouri (now retired), President of the Mathematical Association of America (1992–3), Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, Trustee Radcliffe College (1975–81), Member Harvard Board of Overseers (1990–5) and much more, she was a real trailblazer in academe (which, to put it mildly, did not welcome women with open arms in the 1950s) all the while raising five children. *Ad meah v'esrim, ima.*



Notes on the examples, cover art, and abbreviations

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The texts of the musical examples (other than for Op. 16) are based on the ongoing complete critical edition of Schoenberg's compositions *Sämtliche Werke*, edd. Rufer, et al (Schott/Universal: Mainz, Vienna, 1966– ). For obvious practical reasons, it was not possible to present all of the examples in full score. Therefore, many of the examples are reductions and I have not hesitated to make extensive simplifications (omission of articulations, dynamics, phrasing, doublings, and so forth) in the interests of clarity.

The following abbreviations are used for frequently cited items:

- SI* (Style and Idea): Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Robert Black (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975).
- SW* (Sämtliche Werke): Arnold Schoenberg, *Sämtliche Werke*, edd. Rufer, et al (Schott/Universal: Mainz, Vienna, 1966– ).
- HL* (Harmonielehre): Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy Carter (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).