1 Tonal oder Atonal?

The Complicated, Contradictory Nature of Schoenberg's Middle-Period Music (Op. 11, No. 1)

Any study of the music of Arnold Schoenberg's middle period (traditionally understood as beginning around the time of the Op. 15 songs and the last two movements of the Op. 10 String Quartet and ending after the Op. 22 songs) must begin by reconsidering the label that has traditionally been assigned to it in literature on music: "atonal." It is well known that Schoenberg himself detested this label, protesting that the only music that could be rightly called "atonal" would be music that lacked tones altogether. He preferred to call his music "pantonal," a music that gave equal status to every tonality.[1] And Ethan Haimo, following the composer, claims that it is counterproductive, at least, to subject Schoenberg's music to the binary opposition that "tonal" and "atonal" represent, suggesting instead that we understand the middle period (the first part of it, at least) as moving incrementally away from traditional means of pitch organization. He argues for a long transition from chromatic tonality in 1899 to the music of 1908–09, a sudden break with tradition that he calls "New Music" in August 1909, followed by a recapturing of an older means of organization after 1911.[2]

Still, despite Schoenberg's and Haimo's aversion to the label "atonal," it persists. One reason may be that it does represent, quite well, two radical changes that Schoenberg's middle-period music made in the realm of pitch organization and that he acknowledged. Haimo is justified in arguing that

[1] Two similar expressions of Schoenberg's distaste for the term "atonal" can be found in his *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy E. Carter (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 432–33; and the essay "Hauer's Theories," in *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 210–11. It is interesting that both of these passages make reference to Josef Matthias Hauer. According to Bryan Simms, Schoenberg, or at least his followers, may actually have *approved* of the term "atonal" until 1920, when Hauer used it in *Vom Wesen des Musikalischen* to describe his own music. Simms shows clearly that Schoenberg was always careful to make a clear distinction between his own style and traditional tonality, using the term *Tonart* (key) to represent the traditional notion, and *Tonalität* to represent a broad spectrum of ways of organizing tones, including his own later approaches that did not admit a central tone. See Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg 1908–1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 8–10.

[2] Ethan Haimo, *Schoenberg's Transformation of Musical Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 1, pp. 1–7, conclusion, pp. 351–56.

these changes were accomplished gradually between 1899 and 1908. Even so, by the time Schoenberg reaches his Op. 15 songs, final movements of his Op. 10 String Quartet, and Op. 11 Piano Pieces, there are two basic features in his music that abrogate the principal tenets of traditional tonality to such an extent that a label representing a diametric opposition becomes appropriate. First, he replaces the basic harmonic elements of tonal music, triads and seventh chords, with a much larger variety of sonorities that are mostly more dissonant (it is true that conventional triads and seventh chords still appear occasionally, but not often enough to be heard as basic elements). This is a move that Schoenberg explained and justified not long after the beginning of his atonal period in the seventeenth chapter of his *Harmonielehre* (1911), on "Non-Harmonic Tones":

> There are no non-harmonic tones whenever one discovers such principles. For the natural prototype, the tone [Schoenberg has been speaking of the overtone series in the preceding paragraphs], can be used to explain, as chords, still other harmonic combinations entirely different from these simple ones. And our relation to this prototype is that of the analyst, of the seeker; in imitating it, we discover more or fewer of its truths. The creative spirit strives for more, more and more; those who merely seek enjoyment are satisfied with fewer.[3]

Rather than treat every chord of the vast, dissonant spectrum equally, however, in his middle-period music Schoenberg tends to favor families of chords that grow out of certain pairs of intervals. Chief among these are the half-step and minor third and the half-step and major third. When both intervals have the same direction, the former pair creates set class 3-3 (014) and the latter 3-4 (015). These set classes, supersets of them such as set class 4-19 (0148), 5-21 (01458), and 6-Z19 (013478), and the symmetrical "hexatonic" collection that is created by alternating half-steps and minor thirds, 6-20 (014589), are all basic elements in his atonal chord repertory. Another family that plays a crucial role is the one stemming from the Viennese Trichord, a combination of a perfect fourth with a tritone. Schoenberg often uses the chord in that particular voicing (as does Webern, hence the name), but also reorders and transposes its notes to form different members of set class 3-5 (016), and adds notes to 3-5 to form supersets such as 4-8 (0156) and 4-9 (0167). I will also touch on several other groups of chords, some associated with other large collections such as octatonic and whole tone, in the analyses that make up the body of my book.[4]

[3] Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, p. 319.

[4] Bryan Simms has a different (but perhaps complementary) description of, and rationale for, the chord vocabulary of Schoenberg's early atonal music from mine. He suggests that Schoenberg was attracted to four-note supersets of the major and minor triads, and

In addition to replacing the old repertory of chords with a new one, the second sea change that occurs by the time Schoenberg's middle period begins has to do with the ways chords are combined into larger patterns. In the music leading up to Schoenberg by composers he emulated (Wagner, Brahms, Mahler, Strauss), and in Schoenberg's own music during his first period, the familiar progressions of diatonic triads and seventh chords around a tonal center had been deemphasized, to the point where they generally emerged only at phrase endings. Alternatively, one could say that late nineteenth-century German music preserves the contrapuntal structures of traditional harmony (well-supported Schenkerian 3- and 5-lines, linear intervallic patterns and the like), but fills them in with unexpected chords. In some of Schoenberg's first-period music, the tonal cadences are spaced even more widely than his immediate predecessors, sometimes disappearing for many measures (Haimo illustrates this effectively using the string sextet, *Verklärte Nacht*).[5] But by the time Schoenberg reaches his middle period, these rare tonal pillars are omitted altogether, the contrapuntal structures that linked them disappear, and the organizational functions of those elements are taken up by different kinds of procedures. Nevertheless, most of these procedures, formal and motivic ones, are borrowed from tonal music. Schoenberg described this state of affairs in his essay from *Style and Idea*, "Problems of Harmony":

> We further conclude that the manner of composition of a piece abandoning tonality in the traditional sense must be different from that in which tonality is followed. From this angle tonality is seen as *one of the means* which facilitates the unifying comprehension of a thought and satisfies the feeling for form. But since this means alone does not achieve the goal, it may be said that tonality accomplishes but a part of the purpose. If the function of tonality be dispensed with, but the same consideration be given to unity and feeling of form, this effect must be achieved by some other function. (italics are Schoenberg's)[6]

Now, an analyst can still find chord or note progressions that invoke tonic, dominant and predominant in Schoenberg's atonal music. In fact, beginning with his monodrama *Erwartung*, Op. 17, we hear occasional

particularly the minor triad with added major seventh, which forms set class 4-19. The examples in Schoenberg's chapter on non-harmonic tones in his *Theory of Harmony* are full of such sonorities. Simms, however, asserts that Schoenberg moved away from this chord repertoire later in his career, which does not seem to agree with the evidence – 4-19 and other chords with triad subsets will continue to play central roles in all of the analyses in this book. See Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg*, pp. 16–19.

[5] Haimo, *Schoenberg's Transformation*, ch. 3, pp. 23–41.

[6] Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, pp. 284–85.

segments of music that unmistakably function within some key for a brief moment within a larger atonal context. The passages in *Erwartung*, as we will see in Chapter 4, are quotations from a D minor song, "Am Wegrand," Op. 6, No. 6 – the first in E♭ minor and the second in the song's original key. These quotations have a text-painting function; the ultimate arrival in D minor representing a woman's final realization that her beloved is dead. In the music after *Erwartung*, we begin to hear brief tonal segments that attempt to resolve in a key but are thwarted by the surrounding music – these also will be shown either to have text-painting significance or to contribute to a more abstract kind of narrative. I will discuss three examples in Chapter 5 in my analysis of Op. 19, Nos. 3 and 6, and several more in Chapter 6 in my analysis of "O alter Duft," the final recitation of *Pierrot lunaire*.[7]

Therefore, my main argument regarding functional tonality in Schoenberg's middle-period music is that tonality relinquishes its role as guarantor of large-scale coherence around the time of the first *George-Lieder* Op. 15 (in early 1908), and only later begins to reappear in a much more limited role as occasional expressive devices – the "specters" of my sub-title. Much more central to any of Schoenberg's atonal pieces is a combination of all or some of the following procedures, which can be shown to have their origin in Schoenberg's own tonal musical language and that of his predecessors, but are realized through non-tonal pitch structures:

1. A large narrative of conflict, elaboration of that conflict, and resolution, expressed intervallically and rhythmically, which Schoenberg called the "musical idea."[8]
2. The "basic image" (my term; though it is similar in concept to Kathryn Bailey Puffett's "structural imagery"): a visual and/or aural pattern

[7] Michael Cherlin discusses the phenomenon of tonal fragments in a larger atonal context in Schoenberg's music in "Schoenberg and *Das Unheimliche*: Spectres of Tonality," *Journal of Musicology* 11/3 (Summer 1993): 357–73. He compares it to Freud's concept of "das Unheimliche": something familiar and old that had been repressed, but recurs briefly, in a dream or work of literature. Cherlin's concept is a little broader than mine in that he allows pitch-class successions that are removed from their original harmonic context to serve as "spectres of tonality." I will limit my discussion to brief segments of music that are more or less completely controlled by traditional tonal harmonic functions in all their voices: thus my term "specters of tonal *function*."

[8] In Chapter 1 of my book, *Schoenberg's Twelve-Tone Music: Symmetry and the Musical Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), I introduce Schoenberg's concept of "musical idea" in much more detail, through copious quotations from his writings, and careful consideration of the "idea's" cultural and philosophical forebears.

summarizing the text of a vocal piece, which is translated into intervals and rhythms.[9]

3. Tonal conventions of motivic process (such as the incremental expansion or contraction of intervals), phrasing and musical form.

I plan to show that these procedures carry over from piece to piece, and in this way my book will also push back against the notion of "contextuality" in Schoenberg's atonal music – I claim that there are indeed structural features, as well as harmonic and motivic ones, that are *not* unique to individual works, but span the entire period.[10]

I will now illustrate those features that enable one to identify a Schoenberg piece as "atonal" by comparing one of his tonal songs, the Op. 2 song "Jesus bettelt (Schenk mir deinen goldenen Kamm)," with the opening and closing sections of what has become his best-known atonal piece, the first Piano Piece, Op. 11. "Jesus bettelt" is Haimo's example of the beginning stages of Schoenberg's incremental process of change in *Schoenberg's Transformation of Musical Language*. I will approach it through a Schenkerian voice-leading graph to show how the song can be understood (more conservatively than Haimo does) in terms of traditional contrapuntal structures ornamented by voice-leading patterns, especially linear intervallic patterns. The opening and closing sections of Op. 11, No. 1 will also be approached using a voice-leading graph, which will

[9] Bailey Puffett introduces her notion of "structural imagery" in two articles describing the three melodramas in *Pierrot lunaire* that are heavily dependent on traditional contrapuntal devices such as canon and fugue: No. 8, "Nacht," No. 17, "Parodie," and No. 18, "Der Mondfleck." (Kathryn Bailey, "Formal Organization and Structural Imagery in Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*," *Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario* 2/1 (1977): 93–107; and Kathryn Bailey Puffett, "Structural Imagery: *Pierrot lunaire* Revisited," *Tempo* 60/237 (2006): 2–22.) She argues that the choice and use of such contrapuntal devices that structure the pieces as wholes, in addition to other aspects of the music, can be heard as determined by images that summarize the text. My concept of "basic image" extends the same notion to pieces within *Pierrot lunaire* that do not involve traditional contrapuntal devices, and to other Schoenberg opus numbers as well. I want to show that images summarizing the text can be heard as driving musical structure in a variety of ways from the beginning of Schoenberg's middle period (the Op. 15 songs) all the way through to Op. 22.

[10] The notion of Schoenberg's atonal music as contextual, that is, without "self-consistent, generally applicable compositional procedures," was put forward by George Perle in his *Serial Composition and Atonality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 9, and was adopted by numerous other scholars, including some who disagree on most other aspects of Schoenberg's music, such as Ethan Haimo, *Schoenberg's Serial Odyssey: The Evolution of his Twelve-Tone Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 69, and Martha Hyde, "Musical Form and the Development of Schoenberg's Twelve-Tone Method," *Journal of Music Theory* 29/1 (Spring 1985): 98.

ultimately prove to be unsuccessful – I want to demonstrate visually just how tonality "relinquishes its role as guarantor of long-range coherence." Then a motivic and set-class analysis will account for the changes that have taken place in its chord repertory, and its large organization will be explained through parallels to tonal motivic process, phrasing, form, and "musical idea," in the absence of a Schenkerian contrapuntal structure.

But before embarking on my comparison of Op. 2, No. 2 with Op. 11, No. 1, I would like to address a question that those familiar with recent books on the "extended common practice" (Dmitri Tymoczko's term) may be asking. Namely, why use an older analytic method like Schenker as a yardstick to distinguish between Schoenberg's tonal and atonal music, when newer, finer, measures have been proposed by Tymoczko and Daniel Harrison to distinguish the many varieties of late nineteenth-, twentieth-, and early twenty-first-century tonal music from each other, as well as from atonality?[11]

My answer would be that Schoenberg's tonal music before 1908 is something essentially different from Prokofiev's, Hindemith's, or Brian Wilson's (a few of the many "extended" tonal composers Tymoczko and Harrison discuss). As I have asserted already, it is very much late nineteenth-century German/Austrian music. Like his predecessors Wagner, Brahms, and Mahler (as well as his mentor Alexander von Zemlinsky), Schoenberg's tonal music "preserves the contrapuntal structures of traditional harmony (well-supported Schenkerian 3- and 5-lines, linear intervallic patterns, and the like), but fills them in with unexpected chords" (see page 3). These unexpected harmonies generally do not appear at the beginnings or ends of contrapuntal structures (i.e., beginnings or ends of formal sections and subsections), but in the middles.

What we are about to see and hear in the top voice of "Jesus bettelt," therefore, is not merely the "conjunct melodic motion" that Tymoczko proposes as a tonality-defining feature, nor even Harrison's "S-lines" (S for Schenker), which move by step in a single direction, beginning and ending on notes of the underlying chord.[12] Instead, Schoenberg's tonal song is filled with lines that descend stepwise from scale degrees $\hat{5}$ or $\hat{3}$, which are ornamented by other stepwise lines, chord skips, and stepwise neighbor motions. Likewise, the harmonic progression of Op. 2, No. 2 does not

[11] Dmitri Tymoczko, *A Geometry of Music: Harmony and Counterpoint in the Extended Common Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Daniel Harrison, *Pieces of Tradition: An Analysis of Contemporary Tonal Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[12] Tymoczko, *A Geometry of Music*, p. 5; Harrison, *Pieces of Tradition*, pp. 83–84.

merely surround its tonic with some orderly pattern of "harmonic fluctuation" (Harrison, after Hindemith), nor does it only display "harmonic consistency" (Tymoczko),[13] but its soprano and bass come together consistently to outline harmonic progressions that feature traditional tonic–predominant–dominant–tonic sequences at their beginnings and ends, and incorporate different inner voices and (less often) chromatically altered bass notes in their middles.

A related question the reader might also ask is "why use Schenker as a measuring stick to distinguish Schoenberg's tonal music from his atonal music, when Schoenberg had his own, well worked-out, theory of tonal harmony, introduced in the *Theory of Harmony* (original edition, 1911) and updated for his American students in the *Structural Functions of Harmony* (original edition, 1954)?"[14] And, though Schoenberg's tonal theories have many interesting points of contact with his tonal music, the answer must be the same as before: Schoenberg's tonal music has multiple melodic, contrapuntal, and harmonic features that align with Schenker's conception of tonal structure, and some of those features (particularly the melodic and contrapuntal ones) are more completely described using Schenker's method than the composer's. In my opinion, this is because Schoenberg's books were not principally intended to function as analytic introductions to his *own* harmonic and melodic practice, at least not in the sections where he discusses tonal harmony (however, some of the passages where he discusses dissonance and its treatment, like the famous seventeenth chapter of *Theory of Harmony* on "nonharmonic tones," can be read as apologetics for his turn to atonality (as I suggested on page 2). Rather, Schoenberg's books on tonal harmony were guides for his students to help them make good harmonic and voice-leading choices in *their* compositions.

Understanding Schoenberg's harmony books as primarily pedagogic rather than analytic explains why the section on "connection of the diatonic primary and secondary triads,"[15] seems to prefer the progressions I–iii–V–I and I–IV–ii–V–I to more normative progressions such as I–ii–V–I and I–IV–V–I: the first two progressions are easier for students to voice lead, owing to their common tones. (However, the more normative progressions do begin to appear more frequently in *Theory of Harmony* after Chapter 7, "Directions for Better Progressions.") By way

[13] Harrison, *Pieces of Tradition*, pp. 45–68; Tymoczko, *A Geometry of Music*, p. 6.
[14] Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*; Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony*, rev. ed. Leonard Stein (New York: Norton, 1969).
[15] Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, pp. 38–46.

of contrast, the most common underlying progression in the first 100 measures of Schoenberg's tonal masterpiece, *Verklärte Nacht*, is not I–IV–ii–V–I, but i–ii^{ø}7–V–i and its incomplete version, i–ii^{ø}7–V (mostly in D minor), thus without the intervening iv and with ii^{ø}7 often inverted; where it appears, this progression invariably can be read as supporting scale-degree descents such as $\hat{3}$ – $\hat{2}$ – $\hat{1}$ or $\hat{3}$ – $\hat{2}$.[16]

One of the very few places Schoenberg analyzes his own tonal music in his harmony books is the final two pages of Chapter 10, "Extended Tonality," in *Structural Functions*.[17] His account of the first eleven measures of his Op. 6, No. 8 song, "Der Wanderer," seems to support my point about the good fit between his tonal music and Schenker's theories. It is a Roman numeral analysis consisting mostly of diatonic and altered I, ii, IV, and V chords, in the tonic (D major), flat mediant, and flat submediant regions. The chords combine into normative I–ii–V and I–IV–V progressions (which usually modulate after stopping at the V), but more importantly for my argument, they do not account for every verticality in the passage. As Schoenberg himself puts it, there are "apparently free passing notes and suspensions . . . [that are] merely melodic but not harmonic."[18] Thus it could be argued that Schoenberg's harmonic analysis of his tonal song makes use of the Schenkerian concept of middleground harmonic progression (though he probably did not think of it as such). And it would be possible, I think, to tease out middleground melodic lines (consisting mainly of $\hat{3}$ – $\hat{2}$ interruptions in the various regions Schoenberg indicates) and bass lines to create an underlying contrapuntal structure, on the basis of Schoenberg's analysis – but, because *Structural Functions* is a harmony book, he has not suggested anything like that (except for a few roots as bass notes in parentheses).

There are numerous other examples I could provide of the close fit between Schoenberg's tonal music and Schenker's concept of tonality, but that topic could fill up its own book (and perhaps will someday). For now, let us proceed to the Schenkerian analysis of Op. 2, No. 2. In his discussion of "Jesus bettelt," Ethan Haimo comments on its "almost uninterrupted succession of seventh chords" and suggests two quite unusual basic principles for chord progession (among others). First, "adjacent chords are rarely answerable to a single diatonic collection," and, probably as a corollary, "the circulation of the total chromatic is common within

[16] Instances of the i–ii^{ø}7–V–I and i–ii^{ø}7–V progressions (sometimes missing the initial tonic) may be found at mm. 25–29, 33–34, 35–36, 37–38, 53–54 (in E♭ minor), 69–72 (in F minor), 73–74, and 100–05 (in E major).

[17] Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony*, pp. 110–11. [18] Ibid., p. 110.

phrases."[19] But such a characterization of Schoenberg's chord progressions is subject to the same criticism Haimo directs at the term "atonal": it attempts to define them in terms of what they do *not* do (stay within the same diatonic scale, as all the voices progress from chord to chord). It seems better to take the approach suggested by Walter Frisch in his analysis of the same song: understanding the chord successions as "basic cadential succession[s], in which . . . the diatonic *Stufen* are harmonized with vagrant chords."[20] A Schenkerian analysis of the song, like the one I provide in Examples 1.1–1.3, is bound by its nature to emphasize the conventional contrapuntal structures that Schoenberg fills in in unconventional ways.

For example, consider measures 1–7, the opening phrase, sketched in Example 1.1.

An F♯ minor tonic chord progresses via three chromatic or almost-chromatic lines, F♯–E–E♭–D (bass), C♯–C–B (tenor and soprano), and F♯–G–A♭ (alto, which in the full score transfers down to the tenor), to arrive at a chord with B, the fourth scale degree, in the soprano and bass D in m. 2. But instead of the diatonic iv^6 that would normally fill in such a counterpoint, Schoenberg chooses a fully diminished $iv^{\circ 6}_{5}$, no doubt under the influence of the chromatic line in the alto that has landed on A♭. Here, a conventional tonal contrapuntal structure, C♯–B supported by F♯–D, is being filled in with an unusual chord. The remainder of the phrase can be understood similarly: Schoenberg spells A♯, the third scale degree in F♯ major, enharmonically as B♭ in the second half of m. 2, and harmonizes it, unconventionally, with a minor seventh chord on ♭II. This chord then gives rise to a 10–7–6–7 linear intervallic pattern in mm. 3–5 that prolongs an interval of the ♭II chord in the soprano, B♭–G. Though Schoenberg harmonizes the 10–7 part of the pattern in the usual way as dominant and minor seventh chords with roots moving down by fifth, the fact that it starts on ♭II minor 7 makes it seem like a foreign object in an F♯ minor or major context. After the linear intervallic pattern completes itself in m. 5, Schoenberg again moves chromatically in the soprano, G–F♯–E♯, and ascends by third in the bass, A–C♯, to arrive back at a dominant seventh chord that resolves to the tonic. Though some of the chords and the internal linear intervallic pattern seem at odds with it, the underlying skeleton of this opening phrase is still, essentially, a descending 5-line in F♯ with harmonic support of $i–iv^6–♭II–V^7–I$.

[19] Haimo, *Schoenberg's Transformation*, pp. 11, 21–22.
[20] Walter Frisch, *The Early Works of Arnold Schoenberg, 1893–1908* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 102.

Example 1.1 Score and Schenkerian analysis for Schoenberg, "Jesus bettelt," Op. 2, No. 2, mm. 1–7. Copyr
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