

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-02832-5 - Schenker Studies 2
Edited by Carl Schachter and Hedi Siegel
Excerpt
[More information](#)

ARCHIVAL STUDIES

Levels of understanding: an introduction to Schenker's *Nachlass*

Robert Kosovsky

One of the more unusual results of the first International Schenker Symposium, held at the Mannes College of Music in 1985, was the creation of a petition signed by over 300 people – attendees and their colleagues. Addressed to the New York Public Library, this petition was a request for making accessible to the public the Oster Collection – a major portion of Heinrich Schenker's papers. This impressive demonstration of academic support helped in the Library's efforts to obtain a preservation grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Since 1990 access to the collection has been provided not only for Library visitors, but also – by means of microfilm – for individuals and institutions throughout the world.

Heinrich Schenker's *Nachlass*, made available fifty-five years after the appearance of his last publication, has opened entirely new paths of access to the study of this unique individual and his theories. His archive, with its tens of thousands of documents, is a veritable treasure-trove of information. These papers will no doubt serve to inform, reshape, and redirect our thinking about Schenker and his theories; they may also influence the future course of the discipline, with Schenker source studies becoming a field in its own right. Even the most enthusiastic researcher, however, will encounter numerous problems. Not the least is Schenker's handwriting, which is often barely legible. The *Nachlass*'s peculiar arrangement also portends some difficulties. The plethora of documents – 18,000 in the Oster Collection alone – presents an immediate obstacle: there is quite literally an overabundance of data. In defining such problems and suggesting solutions, this article hopes to serve as a preliminary guide to source studies involving Schenker and his papers.

Essential to an understanding of the *Nachlass* is an awareness of its history. For several months after Schenker's death, on January 14, 1935, his widow Jeanette tried to continue her husband's activities. In a manner poignantly revealing of her devotion to his work, she continued to clip notices and paste them into their scrapbook, and managed to make a few more entries in Schenker's diary. No doubt to alleviate her new financial burden as well as to ease the emotional pain of her bereavement, she moved from their apartment at Keilgasse 8 to Cottagegasse 21, an address further from the center of Vienna. Moving may have a disorienting effect on people and often creates disorder in their belongings; this was true in Jeanette Schenker's case. Schenker's own arrangement of the papers was largely ignored, and the *Nachlass* was packed haphazardly. After

moving, Jeanette Schenker was confronted with a disorganized mass of papers. Realizing the necessity of instituting some kind of arrangement, and unable to restore the original order, she renumbered the files and created an inventory. The resulting *Verzeichnis* lists eighty-three files (*Mappen*), whose contents reveal the confused state of the papers. For example, analyses of Chopin are found in two disparate locations, files 10 and 32; material for *Der freie Satz* is even more widely scattered. But the *Verzeichnis* did serve the purpose of identifying the material, even if it was not in an optimal arrangement.

It served another purpose as well. Just as the widow Constanze Mozart sought to keep her husband's work "alive" by publicizing her desire for people to complete his fragmentary works, so did Jeanette Schenker compile her list with the aim of having some of her husband's works published. She was careful to mention locations of analytical graphs, particularly those that were *Reinschriften* – "clean copies" – that would be suitable for publication. On occasion she added editorial comments. To her listing of the contents of file 12 (which contains writings on non-musical topics), she added the note, "Very worthwhile for the magazine!"¹ The reference is to the periodical *Der Dreiklang*, founded shortly after Schenker's death by two of his students, Oswald Jonas and Felix Salzer. In fact, the first issue of this periodical contained an article giving an overview of Schenker's papers,² and successive issues published several "worthwhile" fragments.

Like Constanze Mozart, Jeanette Schenker, too, needed to raise funds for her survival. Thus, the division and dispersal of Schenker's papers came about as a means of assisting his widow. Most of his books and scores, including many unusual editions, were sold to the dealer Heinrich Hinterberger. Papers were sold to students, including Wilhelm Furtwängler and Felix Salzer.

As a result of the Nazis' annexation of Austria in 1938, many of the students and other members of Schenker's circle left Vienna. One exception was Oswald Jonas's student Ernst Oster, who had made his way from Germany to Vienna shortly after Schenker's death, and who was unable to leave the city immediately. When it became possible for him to leave, Jeanette Schenker, apparently unwilling to emigrate herself, entrusted to Oster the majority of the remaining working papers while holding on to some of the musical scores, most of the correspondence, and items of a personal nature. After Oster had left the country, and when she finally realized her own danger, she gave the remaining items in her possession to another member of Schenker's circle, Erwin Ratz, for safe-keeping. She was deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1942, where she died only a few months before the camp was liberated. The papers she had given to Ratz survived intact, and in the 1950s he passed them on to his friend Oswald Jonas, who had settled in the United States.

Today the bulk of the *Nachlass* is divided between two collections. The Oster Collection in the Music Division of the New York Public Library holds the items brought by Ernst Oster to New York City from Vienna: the majority of

1. "Sehr wertvoll für die Zeitschrift!"

2. "Der Nachlass Heinrich Schenkers," *Der Dreiklang* 1 (April 1937), pp. 17–22. This article is unsigned; it was probably written jointly by Jonas and Salzer, with the possible collaboration of other Schenker students.

Schenker's working papers in the form of numbered files, as well as a significant number of his musical scores. The Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection at the University of California, Riverside, holds the manuscripts for Schenker's published works, a larger portion of his scores, the bulk of the correspondence, and Schenker's diary, along with other personal papers and memorabilia.³

Archival materials relating to Schenker are also found in other collections. The papers of notable musicians such as Ferruccio Busoni, Wilhelm Furtwängler, August Halm, Rudolf Réti, and Arnold Schoenberg include correspondence to and from Schenker, as do the archives of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna. Over 400 letters from Schenker to his publisher, Universal Edition, are owned by the Vienna Staats- und Landesbibliothek. A few numbered files of working papers (completing the series in the Oster Collection) are in the possession of Mrs. Felix Salzer, who also owns graphs prepared by Salzer and annotated by Schenker. The papers of other Schenker students provide additional archival sources: this is by no means a complete list.

When the contents of the Oster Collection were transferred to the New York Public Library, the papers were found in a more jumbled and confused state than suggested by Jeanette Schenker's orderly list. They were virtually unusable, and a decision had to be made regarding their arrangement. There appeared to be three possible solutions: to attempt a reconstruction of the original ordering used by Heinrich Schenker, to set up an ordering based on Jeanette Schenker's list, or to devise a new arrangement sorting the papers according to type. Since any new arrangement would destroy intellectual evidence, the third solution was felt to be undesirable. Though tempting, the first solution was resisted as well. In certain cases it was clear that several files belonged together and actually constituted a single file, yet it was impossible to deduce how Schenker had ordered every existing file. Following the organization of Jeanette Schenker's list seemed the most logical choice, as that list clearly preserves a particular historical state of the *Nachlass*, and is the most detailed documentation concerning the collection.

Leaving aside the arrangement of the collection itself, it is useful to survey the contents by type. Most of the papers fall into one of five categories: clippings, published items, correspondence, writings, and analyses.

1. *Clippings*. There are several hundred clippings in the Oster Collection, dealing with both musical and non-musical topics. Articles on such subjects as literature (including poetry), literary criticism, painting, architecture, politics, government, religion, and philosophy reflect the wide range of Schenker's interests. An examination of such ephemera often allows us to view his ideas in a broader context; his annotations and glosses on what he read provide corroborative justification for many of these ideas. A case in point is his preoccupation with Albert Einstein: Schenker clipped articles by and about the famous physicist. In annotating these clippings, Schenker refined the thoughts

3. See Robert Lang and JoAn Kunselman, *Heinrich Schenker, Oswald Jonas, Moriz Violin: A Checklist of Manuscripts and Other Papers in the Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

on the notion of “genius” that he was later to set down in *Free Composition*.⁴

A large group of clippings are collected in a scrapbook. Started by Schenker in 1902, this scrapbook later became one of Jeanette Schenker’s pet projects. It sheds light on Schenker’s little-known early activities: several notices that predate his theoretical publications refer to him as being well known in Viennese circles as a pianist specializing in the music of Bach. Schenker always clipped reviews of his published works, and in addition often saved articles which, though not containing any direct mention of him, revealed his growing influence upon the musical world. An amusing example is a review of the 1927 première of the opera *Jonny spielt auf*, in which a naïve critic misuses Schenker’s new vocabulary and complains that Ernst Krenek’s music lacks an *Urlinie*.⁵

2. *Published items*. Throughout his adult life, Schenker acquired a large library of publications – both musical and non-musical. Most are listed in the 1936 catalogue of the antiquarian Heinrich Hinterberger, to whom they were sold.⁶ Of the many published books Schenker once owned, the Oster collection contains just a handful. One of the most interesting is an annotated copy of Gustav Jenner’s book on Johannes Brahms.⁷ One can trace the transformation of Schenker’s glosses into the detailed notes that prepared the way for his article “Erinnerungen an Brahms.”⁸ Also important – especially for the preparation of new editions or translations – are the copies of Schenker’s own publications that contain his corrections or emendations.

Fortunately, Schenker’s collection of musical scores has survived, and is divided between the Oster and Jonas Collections. Recent articles have discussed the value of studying Schenker’s annotated scores from the point of view of the performer.⁹ In some cases, Schenker’s markings bear directly on his analyses: one finds a correlation between Schenker’s notes and analytical graphs and the markings in the scores.¹⁰ A study of these scores is thus an essential component of further research on Schenker’s analytic work.

4. See *Free Composition*, p. xxiv. Schenker’s anti-democratic political views and pan-German nationalism have attracted a growing amount of scholarly attention in recent years. How important these views are for an understanding of his musical ideas remains a controversial topic. While study of the *Nachlass* will certainly not settle this controversy, it will at least provide a useful basis for discussion and argument.

5. Hans Liebstöckl, “Krenek spielt auf,” *Die Stunde* (Jan. 1928), Oster Collection, file 2, p. 74. (Unless otherwise specified, all subsequent references to files from the *Nachlass* are to those in the Oster Collection.)

6. A copy of the catalogue is in the Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection, box 35, folder 2; see Lang and Kunselman, p. 96. A facsimile is printed as Anhang II of Martin Eybl, *Ideologie und Methode: Zum ideengeschichtlichen Kontext von Schenkers Musiktheorie* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1995), pp. 161–92.

7. Gustav Jenner, *Johannes Brahms als Mensch, Lehrer und Künstler*. Schenker owned the second edition (Marburg an der Lahn: N.G. Elwert’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung G. Braun, 1930). It is preserved in file 30, together with Schenker’s notes (items 42–51).

8. The article was published in the *Deutsche Zeitschrift* (a continuation of *Der Kunstwart*) 46/8 (May 1933), pp. 475–82.

9. One example, drawing on items in the Jonas Collection, is William Rothstein’s “Heinrich Schenker as an Interpreter of Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas,” *19th-Century Music* 8/1 (1984), pp. 3–28.

10. Examples may be found in the scores of works by Chopin and Brahms, among many others.

3. *Correspondence.* The majority of Schenker's correspondence is located in the Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection. The letter files in the Oster Collection are mostly confined to specific topics. Several files include correspondence with his students and with other theorists, such as August Halm and Rudolf Réti. There is a file containing an exchange of letters between Schenker, Wilhelm Furtwängler, and Ludwig Karpath (a leading Viennese music critic) concerning an unsuccessful attempt to secure a teaching appointment for Schenker. Another contains the final correspondence received by Schenker before his death.

One of the most voluminous correspondence files in the Oster Collection (file 52) concerns Schenker's publisher, Universal Edition. Containing over 900 items, this file not only documents the history of Schenker's publications, but also traces the rise of one of the most important and influential music publishers of the twentieth century. The earliest letters in this file date from 1901, and are addressed to the men who founded that adventurous publishing firm. As a witness to the founding of Universal Edition, Schenker developed a close personal relationship with Emil Hertzka, the firm's director during its first two decades. At first Hertzka took a great interest in Schenker's work. When Schenker submitted the first issue of a publication he called "Kleine Bibliothek" ("Little Library"), there was some question about whether the title was appropriate. The correspondence shows that it was Hertzka who suggested that the title be changed to *Der Tonwille* (literally, "The Tone-Will").¹¹ In the course of time, however, Schenker fell out of favor with Hertzka, who promoted contemporary music as the centerpiece of his publishing house. Partly because of his concern for the negative attitude toward contemporary music that Schenker projected, Hertzka had *Der Tonwille* published under the imprint of an imaginary publisher, the "Tonwille-Flugblätterverlag," thereby disassociating Schenker from the imprint of Universal Edition – an association that Hertzka increasingly came to see as detrimental. By 1924, Schenker felt that Hertzka was not doing enough to promote his publications and, while looking for another publisher, brought legal action against Universal Edition to release him from his contract. Letters concerning this legal action show that it took up the greater part of an entire year. After Hertzka's death in 1932, Schenker was able to resume cordial relations with Universal Edition and with Hertzka's successor, Alfred Kalmus.

4. *Writings.* There are many writings on musical and non-musical topics in the Oster Collection. These range in size from a tiny scrap of paper, containing just one word, to substantial manuscripts. There are in fact several lengthy unpublished texts. One of these, entitled "Das Tonsystem," is identified by Jeanette Schenker as one of Schenker's earliest theoretical formulations.¹² Comprising

11. Although the title may have been Hertzka's, the idea behind it – that musical tones embody will – is Schenker's. In the preface to *Harmony*, for instance, he writes: "I should like to stress in particular the biological factor in the life of tones. We should get used to the idea that tones have lives of their own, more independent of the artist's pen in their vitality than one would dare to believe." See *Harmony*, p. xxv; *Harmonielehre*, p. vi.

12. Located in file 31, items 360–86.

eighty-nine typewritten pages and left unfinished, it probably dates from Schenker's years as a music critic before the turn of the century. Another unfinished work, "Niedergang der Kompositionskunst,"¹³ dates from the time of World War I. In it, Schenker discusses the problems of modern music and its failure to synthesize musical resources. Also among Schenker's unpublished works is "Eine Lehre vom Vortrag," which includes an alphabetically arranged dictionary of topics relating to performance. The original manuscript notes for this work are in the Jonas Collection. The copy in the Oster Collection was made by Ernst Oster; it is supplemented by his own annotations and additional examples.¹⁴

The most extensive and perhaps the most important of the unpublished works is an early version, dating from between approximately 1915 and 1920, of Schenker's magnum opus, *Der freie Satz*. Like many of Schenker's unpublished writings, it consists of lengthy portions of text on long strips of paper (written down from dictation by Jeanette Schenker) interleaved with little scraps of paper containing Schenker's notes and emendations. Together with its musical examples, this document contains over 5,000 items. In Jeanette Schenker's arrangement, these items are divided among four separate files. This unfortunate dismemberment presents a challenge. How could accessibility be improved without disturbing the arrangement? I found a solution to this problem by making a detailed reconstruction of the table of contents, listing all paragraph headings, and identifying their location within the collection.¹⁵

5. *Analyses*. There are several files of analyses, which are organized by composer. The majority of these analyses are not of complete pieces, but of individual movements, particular sections, or even small passages. A substantial number of them appear to be related to Schenker's continuing work, over a period of more than twenty years, on *Der freie Satz*. Indeed, some of them exist in several versions. For example, there are numerous representations of the diminutions in Chopin's Nocturne in F# major, Op. 15, No. 2, the earliest dating from about 1909. Other analyses appear to have come about as the result of Schenker's teaching activities. Sometimes two nearly identical graphs are found side by side – one in Schenker's hand and one by a student – indicating that the copying of his graph by a student was part of his pedagogical method. The pedagogical purpose of many analytical graphs helps explain the limited scope of the analyses found in the Oster Collection. The overwhelming majority are from the literature of solo piano music, mainly of works by Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, and Chopin. There are, however, a few extensive analyses of works for orchestra, and it is intriguing to discover that Schenker left us analyses of music by composers such as Bruckner, Richard Strauss, Wagner, Wolf, and others not usually associated with his analytical repertory.

13. Located in file 31, items 28–153.

14. Schenker's writings on performance, edited by Heribert Esser and translated by Irene Schreier, will be published by Oxford University Press in the near future.

15. Robert Kosovsky, *The Oster Collection: Papers of Heinrich Schenker. A Finding List* (New York: New York Public Library, 1990), Appendix A.

How is a scholar to approach this collection? “Did Schenker make a graph of a particular work?” is the question most often asked, whether by performers, musicologists, music theorists, professors, students, or amateurs. All are usually seeking information about a specific work or group of works, and they view Schenker’s archive as a means of acquiring this information. Although their question is certainly legitimate, it can lead to a limited and even distorted perspective on how Schenker’s papers might best be used. Archival collections like this one are not really analogous to a large reference tool that one might consult in order to find instant answers to questions. Taking from the *Nachlass* only what is immediately needed – and ignoring the circumstances of its creation – makes it impossible for the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of either the musical work in question or the development of Schenker’s ideas.

It must be remembered that the Oster Collection is an archive that contains documents in various stages of completion. To be sure, there are a good many graphs that Schenker might have published had he lived longer, but there are also graphs that he probably wished to leave unpublished. Like many others, he would try out ideas on paper as a kind of experiment, without necessarily committing himself to them. While the inexperienced researcher may be seeking specific bits of information (analogous to a “foreground” view), archivists are interested in entire collections of documents. Gathering information on the physical and intellectual contents of documents and on the context in which those documents were created is seen as integral to understanding. Once the large organizational picture (the “background” view) is obtained, the significance of each individual document will become clear. Thus, in order to do justice to the *Nachlass*, it is necessary first to determine how Schenker generated and used his papers.

One of the most striking impressions conveyed by the *Nachlass* is of Schenker’s seemingly compulsive drive to commit a thought or idea to paper. At times he appears to have had an almost maniacal desire to use what was at hand, grabbing whatever he could, whenever the moment.¹⁶ For instance, after an analysis had been published, he would often cut up the manuscripts and drafts (which he had little interest in retaining) and use the blank sides for making new notes. A beautiful, multicolored graph of the Preludio from Bach’s E Major Partita for solo violin was reused, cut up, and placed in several different locations.

Once committed to paper, these voluminous notes were placed into files. What were Schenker’s organizing principles? While many files deal with current or ongoing projects such as lessons with students, others have a more complex origin. Schenker’s procedure seems to have been an almost unbelievably thoroughgoing application of the basic mental process first identified by the

16. There are notes written on nearly every imaginable type of paper: unused sides of letters he received, drafts of his own letters, proof sheets for his publications, unpublished compositions, unwanted graphs, bills from restaurants in Vienna or from hotels in the Austrian Alps, gas and electric bills, insurance bills, legal documents, solicitations from charitable organizations, blank portions of newspapers and magazines, appointment calendars, maps, streetcar tickets, lottery tickets, electioneering handbills – even the wrapping paper from his bathroom tissue.

philosopher John Locke as the association of ideas. Schenker gradually built up a structure of thought by developing and cultivating associations between a large number of ideas, some obviously related, and others seemingly unrelated.¹⁷ For Schenker a single idea can give rise to innumerable associations.¹⁸

In some cases the archive reveals how Schenker brought together ideas scattered on several snippets of paper.¹⁹ After his wife had copied these fragments into a longer text, he cut up and distributed the new pieces among other files, thereby creating new associations. It is not an exaggeration to say that virtually every item in the collection can be found to have some kind of association with several other disparate ones. Thus even the smallest detail could have multiple meanings for Schenker and would lead him to discover new connections and insights. Wilhelm Furtwängler describes Schenker's thought process and breadth of knowledge, characterizing him as "a person, who not only took an active interest in everything possible, but . . . [was] one who knew personal, productive answers to a thousand questions which on the surface had nothing to do with music theory. For the questions which Schenker addressed . . . were of universal relevance."²⁰

In order for this kind of associative thinking to be effective, it must be continuously at work. Persistent examination, revision, and reshaping are necessary if the ideas are to be fully integrated.²¹ Schenker's working system for controlling this process is manifested by two words frequently scribbled on many of the fragments: "Paralipomena" and "Wolle." Schenker had his own private meaning for the term "Wolle," which is not usually applied to the classification of ideas: he may possibly have used it in the sense of "raw material," denoting ideas in rough form.²² He used "Paralipomena" as a kind of catch-all heading for supplementary material or ideas not fully put to use.²³ I am suggesting that many of Schenker's "Paralipomena" were items he wished to keep in "active" files so that he could continue to make additions or revisions and eventually integrate them in new ways. The items he regarded as rough ideas, probably unsuitable for development, he would place in the "Wolle"

17. Among modern philosophers these ideas are most prominently articulated by Michel Foucault, particularly in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

18. A similar thought process may be observed in *Free Composition*, where Schenker not only makes frequent references to his earlier works, but also supplies numerous cross-references to ensure comprehension.

19. Examples may be found in files 12 and 83.

20. Wilhelm Furtwängler, "Heinrich Schenker: A Contemporary Problem," trans. Jan Emerson, *Sonus* 6/1 (Fall 1985), p. 2. This is a translation of "Heinrich Schenker: Ein zeitgemäßes Problem," in *Ton und Wort* (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1954), pp. 198–204.

21. This is evident in the various files dealing with the early version of *Free Composition*. Schenker made copious revisions in the text – there are at least six versions of the heading for the opening paragraph in which Schenker defines the relationship between harmony and voice leading.

22. The phrase "in der Wolle gefärbt" comes to mind ("dyed in the wool," i.e., while in a raw state).

23. This usage is not unique to Schenker. Schopenhauer's collected writings, which Schenker knew well, include a volume entitled *Parerga und Paralipomena: kleine philosophische Schriften*. Schopenhauer describes this volume as a gathering of essays and ideas on a variety of subjects that either did not directly belong within the systematic plan of his works or were conceived too late to be included. See the preface (dated 1850) to Vol. 7/1 of Arthur Schopenhauer, *Werke* (Zurich: Diogenes, 1977).

files.²⁴ Most of Schenker's unpublished writings and graphs reflect this ongoing process; they are "Paralipomena" slated for further revision and new associations. In essence, this is the major challenge posed by Schenker's papers. One cannot isolate a graph or text and disregard its physical, chronological, and intellectual context. Each document should be regarded as a detail in a complex web of interrelated documents. Researchers who expect to work on only a portion of Schenker's papers must necessarily become familiar with most, if not all, of the related papers in an attempt to recreate Schenker's path of thought.

As part of my work at the New York Public Library I compiled a finding list of the Oster Collection. Funds were insufficient for a complete itemization, so my list does not always go into the detail that many scholars would find useful. But would a detailed finding list be enough? I believe it should be supplemented by other research tools. Better intellectual access could be provided by creating reference sources from the most significant works. An index to Schenker's 4,000-page diary would have a high priority. In addition, an index to Schenker's lesson books, which record in detail the lessons he gave to students over a period of twenty years, would provide information concerning the chronology and context of Schenker's studies of musical works.²⁵ An annotated index to Schenker's correspondence would provide more than just biographical information; there are many letters in which Schenker set down philosophical and musical insights not found in other sources. As stated over fifty years ago, "a collection of these letters would yield a compendium of theories on performance and composition."²⁶

With the availability of the Oster Collection, and the accessibility of other archival sources, we are about to see a significant increase of new information and research concerning Heinrich Schenker. In recent times, journals in the field of music theory have published articles about Schenker or his theories in virtually every issue, and a good number of these articles include observations based on work with the Oster Collection. Schenker's *Nachlass* is indeed on its way to becoming a fundamental research tool. It is hoped that by learning more about the nature of the collection, students and scholars will reach a new level in their understanding of Heinrich Schenker's lifework.

24. Some files may have been discarded altogether. On the cover of file 76, one of the files containing "Wolle," there is an instruction to burn its contents after it has been checked. Though that file has survived, there are probably many others which did not.

25. I am currently in the process of preparing such an index.

26. "Der Nachlass Heinrich Schenkers," *Der Dreiklang* 1 (April 1937), p. 18.