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This collection of essays looks at the music of Webern from several new perspectives. The most recent Webern scholarship, based on the sketches and other primary material now owned by the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York and the Library of Congress in Washington, has emphasised Webern's lyricism, and this is a theme running through *Webern Studies*. Other techniques not generally associated with Webern are explored as well: two of the chapters illustrate and examine his apparent early interest in octatonic and pitch-specific motivic collections. Most of the essays are the result of work with primary material, much of which has not been published elsewhere. The volume includes, for example, previously unpublished entries from Webern's diaries, and all of the row tables for his twelve-note music. A new and comprehensive Webern bibliography covers thoroughly the period since Zoltan Roman's bibliography of 1978.

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Preface and acknowledgments

I should like to have dedicated this volume to Arnold Whittall, on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, but since he is one of the contributors (for which the book is richer) it seemed inappropriate to do so. The thought is there nonetheless.

Several of the contributors to this volume have benefited from the generosity and good will of the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel and the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, and I am sure they join me in acknowledging the debt that Webern scholarship owes these institutions. I am particularly grateful to Felix Meyer, Curator of the Sacher Stiftung's Webern collection, for his considerable help and support during various stages of the project. I am also grateful to Penny Souster of Cambridge University Press, for her patience and good humour.

It is a pleasure as well as a duty to acknowledge permissions when they have been so graciously forthcoming. The extracts from the early Avenarius songs which appear in Chapter 1, those from the Op.7 pieces in Chapter 5 and the row tables in Chapter 6 are all the authors' transcriptions from materials in the Sacher Stiftung's Sammlung Anton Webern; the plates in Chapters 5 and 6 are reproductions of materials also in this collection and are used with the permission of the Sacher Stiftung. Excerpts from Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* and Webern's Opp.25 and 30 in Chapters 2, 7 and 8 are used with the kind permission of Universal Edition Ltd, those from the songs of Opp. 3 and 4 in Chapters 3 and 4 with the permission of Universal Edition and European American Music. Excerpts from the Five Songs after poems by Richard Dehmel and the Four Stefan George Songs appear by permission of Carl Fischer, Inc.

*Kathryn Bailey
Cambridge, 1995*

Introduction

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13 September 1945 was Arnold Schoenberg's seventy-first birthday. How this occasion was celebrated is not generally known, but it is probably safe to assume that for Schoenberg the day did not pass without some memories of and a certain longing for his two most illustrious students and faithful friends: Alban Berg, who had died a premature death nearly ten years earlier, and Anton Webern, who had remained in Vienna throughout the dreadful war that had been the reason for Schoenberg's own removal twelve years earlier to what must have seemed to him a very alien land. It is certain that for Webern the day was one of nostalgia and thoughts of his friend and of better times. Fourteen months earlier he had written to Willi Reich, asking how Reich planned to celebrate Schoenberg's seventieth and confessing his own 'unspeakable longing' for their mutual friend.¹

Two days later Webern was himself dead, a bizarre casualty of that war which Berg and Schoenberg had in different ways both escaped, and which had been over for four months. In an obituary published some four months later in *The Musical Times* Erwin Stein wrote that 'the circumstances of his death have so far not been revealed. Some tragic accident seems to have ended the life of one of our finest musicians.'² At the end of 1946 Humphrey Searle described the cause of Webern's death as 'a stray bullet fired by an Allied soldier'.³ As the war had kept Webern's music from being known, so the politics of its aftermath kept even the exact circumstances of his death – which was, it might seem, even more than ordinarily in such situations senseless and absurd – concealed for some time. The result of a bullet, certainly, but a stray bullet, not exactly. In any case, we have just

¹ Letter dated 6 July 1944, given in *Anton Webern. Weg und Gestalt*, ed. Willi Reich (Zurich: Verlag der Arche, 1961), p. 67.

² *The Musical Times*, January 1946. Reprinted in Stein, *Orpheus in New Guises* (London: Rockliff, 1953), pp. 99–102.

³ Searle, 'Webern's last works', *The Monthly Musical Record*, December 1946, p. 231.

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passed the half-century mark of this appalling error, and the following collection of essays on Webern's music constitutes one of the celebrations of that watermark: not a celebration of the anniversary of a death, which is a grotesque idea, but a celebration of a life and an *œuvre* – and, particularly, of our present understanding of both.

Not only Webern's death, but the last years of his life and the history and reception of the music of these years, were shaped by the horrific situation in Europe at the time. As his music had been banned in his own country and he had little success in getting it published and performed elsewhere during the final years of his life, it was not widely known at the end of the war, though Webern himself was a well-known figure and his activities were the subject of great interest to young composers who had little or no experience of his music. Although it is often the case that the death of an artist elicits a sudden burst of interest in his work, in Webern's case the timing of the first blossoming of interest in his music had more to do with the end of the war than with the death of the composer.

The first decade following Webern's death saw frenetic activity amongst the young composers who frequented Darmstadt, and for whom Webern acquired the status of father-figure and mentor. They imagined that they saw in his carefully structured music signposts pointing the way to their own obsession with precompositional schemes. Boulez, who studied for a time with René Leibowitz, produced three important harbingers of integral serialism in 1948: the *Livre pour quatuor*, his Second Piano Sonata and *Le soleil des eaux*. His first essays date from this time as well. 'Propositions', in which his discussion of canonically organised rhythms makes reference to Messiaen rather than to either Schoenberg or Webern, appeared in 1948;⁴ in 'Trajectoires: Ravel, Stravinsky, Schönberg', the following year,⁵ we see his zeal for a new organisation focusing on the latter two composers, and we encounter perhaps for the first time the opinion that was to be expressed on so many subsequent occasions: that it was Webern, not Schoenberg, who understood the nature and potential of serial technique.

⁴ *Polyphonie 2* (1948), pp. 65–72; trans. Stephen Walsh in *Stocktakings of an Apprenticeship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 47–54.

⁵ *Contrepoints 6* (1949), pp. 122–42; trans. in *Stocktakings*, pp. 188–208.

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The serial madness reached its zenith in 1951–2. Boulez was particularly prolific during this time. *Polyphonie X* appeared in 1951, and in 1952 he not only produced the work that will probably stand for all time as the classic example of this genre – *Structures I* for two pianos – but two of the most important essays in the field as well. ‘Schönberg is dead’, in which he castigates Schoenberg roundly for not going all the way with his new discovery and once again presents Webern as a better model –

Schoenberg’s serial music was doomed to stalemate. First, the investigation of serialism was one-sided: it neglected rhythm, and even, strictly speaking, sound, in the sense of dynamics and mode of attack ... But the real reason for the stalemate lies in a profound misunderstanding of serial FUNCTIONS as such, as engendered, that is, by the actual serial principle ... a certain Webern ploughed the same furrow; admittedly ... hardly anyone has heard of him ... Perhaps we might, like this Webern, investigate the musical EVIDENCE arising from the attempt at generating structure from material. Perhaps ...⁶

– appeared in February, and its obvious sequel, ‘Eventuellement ...’ –

The only one, in truth, who was conscious of a new dimension in sound ... was Webern ...

... We need ... to link rhythmic to serial structures through a common organization which will also embrace the other characteristics of sound: dynamics, mode of attack, timbre; and then to expand this morphology into an integrated rhetoric.⁷

– in May. Webern’s name was never far from the surface in these essays; a short piece that appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune* on 28 December 1952⁸ ended

Webern is the threshold ... let us have the insight to regard him as such ... we shall dismember his face, for there is no reason to surrender to hypnosis. Nevertheless music is not about to sink that face into oblivion.

⁶ Originally published in English in *The Score* 6 (Feb. 1952), pp. 18–22; repr. in *Stocktakings*, pp. 209–14. Capitalisation as in original.

⁷ *La Revue musicale* no. 212 (May 1952), pp. 117–48; trans. as ‘Possibly ...’ in *Stocktakings*, pp. 111–40 (current references pp. 114 and 115).

⁸ ‘A note to tonight’s concert: Webern’s work analysed’, *NYHT* sect. 4, p. 4; repr. as ‘Incipit’ in *Stocktakings*, pp. 215–16.

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Stockhausen first visited Darmstadt in 1951, and in that year composed his *Kreuzspiel*, to be followed shortly by *Kontra-Punkte* and the first of his *Klavierstücke*. The ideas of hyperserialisation were not restricted to Darmstadt: Milton Babbitt was doing similar things in the United States, but Darmstadt was the main centre of activity. *Die Reihe 2*, published in 1955,⁹ was the first consolidated presentation of the Darmstadt view of Webern. Stockhausen and Boulez are there – but, significantly, the Boulez of December 1952 (his contribution is the piece from the *New York Herald Tribune* quoted above)¹⁰ – as well as Herbert Eimert¹¹ and one Armin Klammer, who tells us more than anyone ever wished to know about the third movement of the Op.27 Variations.¹² But for all its appearance of dogma, *Die Reihe 2* represented a view of music that was already moribund. *Le marteau sans maître* appeared in the same year, and already in November of 1954 Boulez had written, in ‘Recherches maintenant’:

Webern only organized pitch; we organize rhythm, timbre, dynamics; everything is grist to this monstrous all-purpose mill, and we had better abandon it quickly if we are not to be condemned to deafness. One soon realizes that composition and organization cannot be confused without falling into a maniacal inanity, undreamt of by Webern himself.¹³

And by 1957 Boulez, in his famous essay deploring the current ‘obsession’ with chance, was equally scornful of the ‘schematisation’ and ‘number fetishism’ of which he had been a pioneer only a few years earlier.¹⁴

Thus the initial – and probably the most colourful – response to the music of Webern lasted almost exactly a decade. The subsequent thirty years saw the publication of hundreds of analyses of music from all periods of Webern’s life as well as a significant number of books about Webern. These

⁹ *Die Reihe 2*, ed. Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen (Universal Edition, Vienna), trans. Leo Black and Eric Smith (Bryn Mawr: Theodore Presser, 1958).

¹⁰ See Stockhausen, ‘For the fifteenth of September, 1945’, pp. 37–9, and, especially, ‘Structure and experiential time’, pp. 64–74; Boulez, ‘The threshold’, pp. 40–1.

¹¹ ‘Interval proportions’, pp. 93–9.

¹² ‘Webern’s piano variations, pp. 27, 3rd movement’, pp. 81–92.

¹³ *La Nouvelle Revue française* 23 (Nov. 1954), pp. 898–903; trans. in *Stocktakings* as ‘Current investigations’, pp. 15–25 (current reference p. 16).

¹⁴ ‘Alea’, *La Nouvelle Revue française* 59 (Nov. 1957), pp. 839–57; *Stocktakings*, pp. 26–38.

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represented a wide spectrum of attitudes and perspectives, ranging from those whose primary concern was to define Webern's achievements in terms of the German-Viennese tradition (which was so important to him) to those who saw in his music revolutionary procedures which could be adequately explained only in terms of numbers, proportions and mathematical relationships. Great interest was shown, naturally, in Webern's symmetrical arrangements and in particular his love of the musical palindrome, as in his oft-expressed concern for a synthesis of the horizontal and the vertical, a concern he shared with Schoenberg but which originated in his engagement with the theories of Goethe. All of these perspectives have something to offer in our quest for a truer understanding of the unique music of Webern; all have helped to fill out the profile of a body of music which was initially rather enigmatic. But none can claim to tell the whole story, and even taken together the composite seems somehow lacking.

The outlines were fleshed out considerably with the publication, in 1978, of the Moldenhauers' biography.¹⁵ Here for the first time one caught a glimpse of the wealth of primary materials – sketches, letters, diaries and so on – that would one day give a more comprehensive picture of Anton Webern and his work. The most important single event in the progress of Webern scholarship occurred in 1986, when Moldenhauer's considerable collection of Webern materials, which until that time had for the most part been locked up and inaccessible, was finally made available for inspection and study, at the Library of Congress, the Stadt- und Landesbibliothek in Vienna and the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel. At last it was possible to see how the man had worked, to examine his methods and to read his voluminous diaries and letters, the contents of which had been virtually unknown until the late 1970s¹⁶ and from 1978 known only secondhand, through Moldenhauer's filtering of

¹⁵ Hans and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern: a Chronicle of his Life and Work* (London: Gollancz, 1978; New York: Knopf, 1979).

¹⁶ Moldenhauer allowed a carefully rationed supply of sketch materials and unpublished works to seep into circulation via six international Webern conferences which he helped to organise, the first in 1962, the publications of forty-seven pages of sketches published in facsimile in 1968 – *Anton von Webern: Sketches (1926–1945)* (New York: Carl Fischer) – and the occasional release for publication of early works (for example, in 1966 the world was introduced to several early songs, the 1905 String Quartet, an early slow movement for string quartet and *Im Sommerwind*).

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them for publication in his biography. Since 1986 a number of people, including most of the authors whose work appears in the following pages, have become to some extent familiar with these materials from Webern's own hand. This familiarity will surely be – indeed, has been already – decisive in giving our portrait of Webern the breath of life.

One of the most important outcomes of our getting to know Webern firsthand is the realisation that he was perhaps first and foremost a lyricist. This is a theme which has already been explored by Anne Shreffler in two major works – a book examining Webern's compositional process in the writing of the Trakl songs of Opp. 13 and 14, and her study of his mercurial engagement with twelve-note technique in writing the subsequent songs of Opp. 15–18.¹⁷ Webern's consuming interest in German turn-of-the-century lyric poetry is the subject of Susanne Rode-Breymann's chapter in the present volume on the early settings of texts by Ferdinand Avenarius, and lyricism is a theme that surfaces again in Christopher Wintle's essay on the first of the Op. 25 Jone songs. Arnold Whittall, in his essay, quotes a letter written by Webern to Berg following a trip to the Hochschwab, in which he articulates his faith in contemplation of the mysteries of nature as the path to self-knowledge and revelation: a belief which was wholly in tune with that of the turn-of-the-century lyric poets and the painters with whom they were associated aesthetically. Whittall goes on to examine the Op. 30 Variations for Orchestra as a discourse on Goethe's concepts of metamorphosis and self-knowledge.

Die Reihe 2, which contained so much that supported the Darmstadt view, opened with a section which, in contrast, was truly Webern's: testimonials, and letters written by him. In a famous epigraph Stravinsky refers to 'his diamonds, his dazzling diamonds' (p. vii). The poetess Hildegard Jone, whose words Webern had so often set, describes her first hearing of the Op. 29 Cantata, and of 'its illuminating grace . . . this "perfection" of unearthly gentleness' (p. 7). Also present is Schoenberg's oft-quoted foreword to Webern's Op. 9 Bagatelles, in which he refers to Webern's expression of 'a novel in a single gesture, a joy in a breath' (p. 8). And the 'Hochschwab' letter to Berg is given, in which Webern relates his great pleasure in the discovery of 'a tiny

¹⁷ *Webern and the Lyric Impulse: Songs and Fragments on Poems of Georg Trakl* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and "'Mein Weg geht jetzt vorüber": the vocal origins of Webern's twelve-tone composition', *JAMS* 47/2 (1994), pp. 275–339.

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plant, the winter-green, which he describes as ‘a little like a lily of the valley, homely, humble and hardly noticeable. But a scent like balsam! What a scent! For me it contains all tenderness, emotion, depth, purity.’¹⁸

Webern’s lyricism is not something that has gone entirely unnoticed until recently. In the obituary cited above Erwin Stein described Webern as ‘primarily a lyricist in the same sense as Schubert and Debussy were’ and goes on to remark that ‘the lyrical quality of his music distinguishes Webern from Schoenberg whose faithful disciple he was.’¹⁹ And in 1955, the year of *Die Reihe 2*, Adorno, in his essay ‘Webern der Komponist’, wrote that ‘Webern’s idea [*Idee*] is one of absolute lyricism: the attempt to dissolve all musical principles and all objective elements of musical form in the sheer sound of the subject.’²⁰ Later in the same essay, in an attempt to define more clearly the quality of lyricism in Webern, Adorno draws a parallel with the work of Paul Klee. He sees an affinity between the two artists in terms of both intention and technique. Both men turned their backs on sentimentality and excess, and their work is eminently recognisable because of what Adorno describes as its ‘linear restraint’ and ‘a strange kind of graphics [which he later likens to doodling, and to Kafka’s prose style], ... at the same time definite and mysterious’, and possessing the same spirit of enchantment that results from accidents of colour in children’s art:²¹

Both Webern and Klee travel along an imaginary border between colour and outline. The constructions of both are shaded rather than coloured. Colour is never used autonomously, there is no insistence on it as an essential element of composition, nor is there an organised pattern of sounds.

Nine years earlier Erwin Stein had also used the language of visual art to describe Webern’s lyricism, and, though the reference is not explicit, again the magic squares and wonderfully enchanting line drawings of Paul Klee come to mind:

¹⁸ Letter of 1 August 1919, on p. 17. This is an important letter of which I quote only a small portion here, since it is quoted at greater length elsewhere in this volume: see Rode-Breyman, p. 18; Bailey, p. 173; and Whittall, p. 264.

¹⁹ Stein, in *Orpheus in New Guises*, p. 100.

²⁰ In *Klangfiguren*. This essay was reprinted in *Merkur* 13/3 (March 1959), pp. 201–14; my page references are taken from this reprint (current reference, p. 202).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

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Webern remains the lyricist. His phrases are fitted together like coloured patterns into a mosaic.

... Ecstasy was his natural state of mind; his compositions should be understood as musical visions. Webern imagined a music of ethereal sounds ... The avoidance of strong beats and of symmetrical groupings often imparts the feeling of hovering suspension ... The timbre changes perpetually, like colours and shapes in a kaleidoscope.²²

But in spite of these early voices Webern analysis has until very recently tended not to be enchanted by the naïveté of his lyricism so much as bewitched by the complexity of his symmetries. As Anne Shreffler has written, the association of his music ‘with a cerebral, detached aesthetic remains strangely unaffected’ by voices ‘raised now and then in favour of a more humanist Webern’.²³ It is to be hoped that the present volume may help to redress this imbalance. If the several essays to follow share a common thread, it is that they all look at a familiar figure from unfamiliar perspectives. Several chapters were referred to above, those that are concerned specifically with lyricism and with Goethean theories of metamorphosis. Other perspectives are represented as well. Allen Forte and Robert W. Wason offer convincing proof of Webern’s use, early in his compositional life, of two musical means that have not traditionally been associated with him: octatonicism and specific pitch repetitions. Derrick Puffett speculates – seriously, in spite of his tongue-in-cheek transcription of a little-known sketch using Wagner tubas – on the course that Webern’s music might have taken had he not got caught up with the person of Arnold Schoenberg and with the latter’s Expressionist/abstract proclivities and teaching. Felix Meyer and Anne Shreffler examine in detail the interaction between composition and performance with particular reference to the Op.7 pieces for violin and piano. And I report on the changes in my own view of the composer as the result of time spent with the row tables from which he composed. Not one of these essays follows a ‘party line’. Finally, Neil Boynton has compiled a new Webern bibliography containing specific references for the wealth of primary materials that have become accessible in the past decade, as well as a comprehensive list of secondary sources that

²² In *Orpheus in New Guises*, pp. 101, 99–100.

²³ *Webern and the Lyric Impulse*, p. 3.

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either were omitted from Zoltan Roman's bibliography of 1978²⁴ or have been published since that time. This will be an invaluable tool for those wishing to get better acquainted with the Webern who has begun to emerge from behind his canons and mirrors in the past few years.

Sometime around 1908 Webern chose a poem by Stefan George to set to music; the resulting song is one of those examined by Robert Wason in Chapter 3. Some ninety years later the text seems a particularly appropriate plea from a composer whose lyricism has been for so long submerged in a mire of numbers and theorems:

This is a song
 for you alone:
 of childish dreams
 and pious tears . . .
 Lightly it wings its way
 through morning gardens.
 Only for you
 it wants to be
 a song that stirs the heart.²⁵

²⁴ This appeared first in Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern*, pp. 757–73. It was then published separately: *Anton von Webern: an Annotated Bibliography* (Detroit: Information Coordinators Inc., 1983).

²⁵ 'Dies ist ein Lied', the first poem of George's *Der siebente Ring* and the first song of Webern's *George Lieder*, Op. 3. Translation by S. S. Prawer in *The Penguin Book of Lieder* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1984).