Schoenberg and Redemption

Schoenberg and Redemption presents a new way of understanding Schoenberg’s step into atonality in 1908. Reconsidering his threshold and early atonal works, as well as his theoretical writings and a range of previously unexplored archival documents, Julie Brown argues that Schoenberg’s revolutionary step was in part a response to Wagner’s negative charges concerning the Jewish influence on German music. In 1898 and especially 1908 Schoenberg’s Jewish identity came into confrontation with his commitment to Wagnerian modernism to provide an impetus to his radical innovations. While acknowledging the broader turn-of-the-century Viennese context, Brown draws special attention to continuities between Schoenberg’s work and that of Viennese moral philosopher Otto Weininger, himself an ideological Wagnerian. She also considers the afterlife of the composer’s ideological position when, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the concept of ‘redeeming’ German culture of its Jewish elements took a very different turn.

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Schoenberg and Redemption

Julie Brown
For Štěpán Kaňa
So the time of the emancipation had come, and every young Jew at that time ... longed to be redeemed from being held in a state of contempt for which he was not to blame, and because he wished to be accepted into the community of revered and admired human beings whom he regarded as higher beings ... The hope for ‘redemption’ was cruelly disappointed ... Many of us have become conscious of our guilt only through our misery [Not], and only few among us can bring ourselves to recognize it completely, to confess to it fully, and to attempt to exonerate ourselves by endeavouring to reverse everything [alles rückgängig zu machen].

(Schoenberg, ‘Every young Jew’, 2 February 1934)
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Music examples

Example 1  *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, Op. 15, Song 8, bb. 1–2.
Used by permission of Belmont Music Publishers, Los Angeles. 142

Example 2  *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, Op. 15, Song 9, bb. 1–4.
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Acknowledgements

‘Als Neuling trat ich ein in dein Gehege . . .’

This book has taken longer than anticipated to shape and articulate. Its reading of Schoenberg develops and nuances an argument that I first published in 1994, as ‘Schoenberg’s Early Wagnerisms: Atonality and the Redemption of Ahasuerus’, and initially approached in my PhD on Das Buch der hängenden Gärten. Although the project has been on the back-burner, its eventual completion was due in no small part to the faith shown in it by a number of friends and colleagues, who know who they are. I am especially grateful to Peter Franklin, Klára Móricz, Alan Street and John Deathridge, who offered valuable feedback on the complete manuscript, and Arnold Whittall, Alexander Goehr and Roger Parker, who have at various times also kindly read and commented upon this material. I owe Wayne Shoaf of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute (Los Angeles) a particular debt of gratitude; in the early 1990s, when I was a young and archivally very inexperienced post-doctoral scholar, he immediately understood what I was working on and supplied copies of a large number of valuable documents. Much remained untranslated, however. I am therefore deeply indebted to the kind assistance of Irene Auerbach, who clarified considerable amounts of German-language material for me; she also formalized translations where needed, helped refine some already good translations made available to me in Los Angeles (notably by Maja Reid and Anita Luginbühl), and widened my sense of the personal repercussions of the rise of National Socialism by sharing with me her own family story of being German refugees in Britain. Others I would like to thank include Therese Muxeneder for facilitating my visit the Arnold Schönberg Center (Vienna) to complete last-minute checks, Regina Busch for her very kind assistance with the Webern–Schoenberg and Webern–Berg letters, and Lawrence Schoenberg for permission to reproduce the musical examples and excerpts from Schoenberg’s prose writings, some for the first time. Rita Crane has generously allowed me to use the splendid photographic portrait of Schoenberg by Ralph Crane on the cover at no cost, and for that I am very thankful; to me, her father’s portrait (a gifted signed proof, a different version of what was published at the time) captures something of the relationship between the younger and older Schoenberg. I am also indebted to Cambridge
University Press, especially Vicki Cooper, for trusting that the book might eventually emerge, and to the editors of this series (Ruth Solie, Anthony Newcomb and Jeffrey Kallberg) for their patience. Colleagues at Emmanuel College Cambridge, University of Southampton and Royal Holloway, University of London have all provided help of various sorts, as well as supportive environments within which to develop a big project such as this. Some of the material here has already appeared in press in earlier versions: Chapter 2 in ‘Understanding Schoenberg as Christ’ in Jane Fulcher (ed.), Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music (2011), and appears here by permission of Oxford University Press, USA; Chapter 3 in Otto Weininger and Musical Discourse in Turn-of-the-Century Vienna’, in Julie Brown (ed.), Western Music and Race (2007), reproduced with permission. Chapter 4 is a thorough reworking of ideas originally explored in ‘Schoenberg’s Early Wagnerisms: Atonality and the Redemption of Ahasuerus’ (Cambridge Opera Journal, 1994), reproduced with permission.

A word is perhaps due about my approach to translations of German sources. The digitization of the Schoenberg Nachlass held at the Arnold Schönberg Center in Vienna has made access to facsimiles of German originals of Schoenberg’s writings and letters, and generally also transcriptions (in the case of the writings), fairly straightforward, as too has the internet made many original published German sources readily accessible. As such, I will only reproduce the original text in endnotes if it is not easily available. Where I have inserted a fragment of German text into my prose, I have tried to avoid a clash of ‘case’ between the original German and its new context in the English prose. Where this was unavoidable, for ease of reading I have made changes to declension without indication, in order to avoid potentially baffling successions of, for instance, empty square brackets where endings have had to be removed.

One crucial factor that has facilitated the completion of this book is the splitting of my life over the last twelve years between London and Brno, Czech Republic. Brno lies only a couple of hours up the road from Vienna, shared and played a part in many aspects of its cultural history, and has even more layers of complex, recent cultural and political history of its own; one elderly person’s lifetime might embrace several regime changes and utterly different political systems, plus one or two wars. Living there has provided me – a white country Australian, a true New World cultural outsider – with a perspective on this subject matter that might not otherwise have been possible. My partner Štěpán has kept me close to Viennese modernism through his passion for architectural history and love of its music. This book is for him.

Acknowledgements
Abbreviations

ASC  Arnold Schönberg Center. Vienna. Repository of the Schoenberg Nachlass, 1998. Material digitized on the website of the Arnold Schönberg Center is cited as follows: ASC [call number].


Harm  Schoenberg, Arnold. Harmonielehre (Vienna: Universal, 1911).


