

SCHOENBERG IN CONTEXT

Contradictory and paradoxical, Schoenberg was responsible for explosively radical innovations in composition – including atonality and the twelve-tone method – that changed the face of music in the twentieth century. This volume explores Schoenberg's life, work and world, offering contributions from internationally recognized musicologists, music theorists, cultural historians, literary scholars and more. Chapters examine the different places where Schoenberg lived, his various approaches to composition, the people and institutions that shaped his life and work, and the big issues and ideas that informed his worldview, including religion, gender, technology and politics. This book is not only essential for students and educators but also accessible to a general audience interested in the intersections of music, modernity, society and culture, offering a variety of fresh, multi-disciplinary perspectives on Schoenberg and his richly variegated world.

ALEXANDER CARPENTER is Professor of Music at the University of Alberta, where he also serves as Director of the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies. He is the author of numerous book chapters and scholarly articles, on topics ranging from Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School, opera and the waltz to popular music and film music.

COMPOSERS IN CONTEXT

Understanding and appreciation of musical works is greatly enhanced by knowledge of the context within which their composers lived and worked. Each of these volumes focusses on an individual composer, offering lively, accessible and concise essays by leading scholars on the many contexts – professional, political, intellectual, social and cultural – that have a bearing on his or her work. Biographical and musical influences, performance and publishing history and the creative afterlife of each composer's work are also addressed, providing readers with a multi-faceted view of how the composers' output and careers were shaped by the world around them.

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SCHOENBERG IN CONTEXT

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For Anastasia

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(*Schönberg und Mozart. Aspekte einer Rezeptionsgeschichte*, Lafite 2004). His publications include music aesthetics and history from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries. One of his relevant publications in the recent past is *Eingebildete Musik: Richard Wagner, das jüdische Wien und die Ästhetik der Moderne* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2019).

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Viennese composer Arnold Schoenberg is one of the most fascinating and influential figures in the history of European art music. He lived through more aesthetic, social and political upheaval and change – including the advent of Modernism and Expressionism and psychoanalysis, the end of the Habsburg monarchy, the rise of Nazism and two world wars – than most of us could fathom. He is a larger-than-life character, a composer whose music and personality are equally monumental and whose work has stoked storms of controversy and division – and even provoked riots – from the very earliest years of his career. Schoenberg is an icon of modern music, and is in many ways emblematic of the travails of the modern artist in the twentieth century.

Schoenberg is also easily one of the most complicated, if not frustrating, characters in music history. He can be dizzyingly contradictory and paradoxical. We can see Schoenberg, on the one hand, passionately advocating a break with past techniques and traditions, and his music becoming atonal, athematic and radically subjective in the service of purity of expression; on the other, we can find him venerating the traditions of Austro-Germanic music going back to Bach, drawing almost exclusively from these traditions to teach his many hundreds of students and also firmly locating himself in that lineage. Schoenberg can be at one moment an arch-modernist, insisting that serious art is not for the masses, and then the next expressing a fervent desire for his music to be heard and appreciated by those same masses. He was severe and uncompromising, but also kind and generous: a strict teacher who, like a guru, fiercely insisted upon the unwavering loyalty of his students, but who was so deeply committed to sharing his knowledge and experience that he taught talented students free of charge if they were too poor to pay. Schoenberg instigated and later institutionalized the dissolution of the tonal system, creating music that still sounds shockingly modern to listeners' ears more than a century later; but one can also hear the lilt of a Strauss waltz, a passage of Brahmsian

counterpoint or wisps of Mozartian melody in his works. The music of past composers inevitably haunts his music, just as Max Graf – the renowned Viennese music critic who was Schoenberg's contemporary and staunch supporter – imagined their ghosts haunting the cobbled streets and concert halls of Schoenberg's hometown, Europe's fabled 'City of Music'.

For the purposes of this book, with its focus on 'context', it could be claimed that Schoenberg – perhaps more so than any other composer – often created his own artistic-aesthetic contexts. Indeed, he effectively created himself. Schoenberg is a famous autodidact, having received very little formal education in practical music-making – he had violin lessons as a child, but he could not play the piano and was reputedly a poor cellist – and he received only ad hoc instruction in counterpoint in lieu of formal compositional training. In one sense, there is almost no context for Schoenberg's emergence, *sui generis*, as a composer with a thoroughgoing understanding and mastery of all of the key elements of musical creation – harmony, counterpoint, motivic manipulation, thematic development, form, orchestration – but, in another sense, context is everything, as Schoenberg's music can and must be understood as a direct inheritance and seemingly total absorption of the Austro-Germanic classical music tradition, in its many facets.

While Schoenberg would insist that his music was evolutionary and historically inevitable rather than revolutionary, and that he was simply next in line in a centuries-old musical tradition, it is also true that in 1908–9 Schoenberg broke decisively with that tradition and began to compose in a new way, achieving what he described as 'an ideal of form and expression' driven by 'an inner compulsion'.¹ This explosively creative but short-lived period of free atonality – coincident with other epochal shifts in Vienna in painting, literature, poetry and psychology – was succeeded by the advent of dodecaphony, creating yet another context: Schoenberg thought that his new method of composing with twelve tones, developed in the aftermath of the First World War, would have an international impact, guaranteeing the hegemony of German music for the century to come. While this might have been an overly ambitious claim, dodecaphony has certainly permanently reshaped the landscape of composition, even as it continues to provoke decidedly mixed opinions from musicians and audiences to this day.

¹ Quoted in Charles Stratford, '15 Gedichte aus "Das Buch der hängenden Gärten" von Stefan George für eine Singstimme und Klavier [The Book of the Hanging Gardens], Op. 15 (1907–1909)'. ASC. www.schoenberg.at/index.php/en/joomla-license-3/15-gedichte-aus-rdas-buch-der-haengenden-gaer-tenl-op-15-1908-1909.

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Arnold Schoenberg is also a likely subject for a book concerned with context because of the people he knew and the places he inhabited, the manifold ways in which he interacted – directly and indirectly – with these people and places and the fascinating times in which he lived. Schoenberg spent significant portions of his life in Vienna, Berlin and Los Angeles, drawing inspiration from but also inspiring and shaping the cultural and intellectual life of each place. In *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, he could be found in the city's bustling cafés, encountering Viennese literati, artists and intellectuals over a cup of coffee. In Berlin, he was the music director of a cabaret and later a teacher at a prestigious music academy (eventually losing his position when the Nazis came to power). As an émigré in Los Angeles, Schoenberg would be neighbours with Shirley Temple, would give composition lessons to Hollywood film composers and would play tennis with George Gershwin. Throughout his entire life, his circles of friends, colleagues and correspondents included some of the most important creative and intellectual figures of the twentieth century, including Wassily Kandinsky, Oskar Kokoschka, Adolf Loos, Gustav and Alma Mahler, Thomas Mann, Ferruccio Busoni, Otto Klemperer, Richard Strauss, Kurt Weill, Karl Kraus and Theodor Adorno (to name just a few).

I have often thought that Schoenberg's life story – with its dynamic interplay of people, places and events, framing a heroic, lifelong stand in support of modern music – would make a fascinating movie. But what to include in such a film, when his life, world and work was so richly variegated? Schoenberg was born in Vienna in 1874, during the halcyon days of the Habsburg Empire – 'Ringstrasse Vienna' – and was still living in the city when the empire finally collapsed in 1918; born a Jew, he became a Protestant, reconverted to Judaism and then became a Zionist; as a young man he was offered a music scholarship from Brahms; at one point, he lived down the street from Sigmund Freud; he served in the Austrian army during the First World War; and later in life he moved to Los Angeles, where he hobnobbed with Orson Welles, Charlie Chaplin and Albert Einstein. A visionary, Schoenberg – who once opined that he was writing music that would only be fully understood a half-century after his death – anticipated new technologies and made predictions about their effects on the performance, reception and interpretation of music. He rather tragically foresaw his own future importance to the history of music, even in the midst of sometimes debilitating poverty and the constant struggle to be heard and understood, and while his work was regularly being decried by critics as the worst sort of modern noise.

In today's terms, we would also have to credit Schoenberg not only with being a great composer, teacher and music theorist, but also for his sundry 'side hustles': prolific writer, amateur painter, inventor, graphic designer, book binder and game developer were but a few of the many hats Schoenberg wore at one time or another. As his daughter, Nuria, has pithily observed, and as *Schoenberg in Context* aims to demonstrate, 'he was a lot of different things'.

...

Part I of *Schoenberg in Context* is titled 'Schoenberg in Place'. It begins with a glimpse into his day-to-day life at home, via memories shared by Nuria Schoenberg-Nono. In this opening chapter, readers will discover how 'home' was a very special place for Schoenberg, and will encounter the 'boogeyman of modern music' making lunch for his children, playing games, hosting garden parties for his American students and singing Christmas carols. The other chapters of 'Schoenberg in Place' offer readers a series of portraits of the important places Schoenberg lived: not only the great cities of Vienna, Berlin and Los Angeles, but also the quaint, unassuming town of Mödling on the outskirts of Vienna, where Schoenberg first worked as a conductor and where he would later develop the twelve-tone method. This overview tracks the changes in Schoenberg's fortunes and the growth of his reputation, but also the evolution of the places he lived themselves, as loci of culture.

Part II, 'More than a Composer', takes a broader view of Schoenberg's creative output, considering his many different creative and professional identities: as a teacher, an artist, a theorist and a writer.

Part III, 'Approaches to Composition', provides a survey of Schoenberg's three compositional paradigms – tonal composition, atonality and the twelve-tone method – and makes it clear that these are not so much discrete periods but rather reflective of a highly integrated, non-linear evolutionary path, with dodecaphony presaged in Schoenberg's earlier chromatic and atonal music and tonality continuing to haunt his oeuvre up to his death.

Part IV presents a collection of 'Paradoxes and Predicaments', including Schoenberg's music in the context of the gender issues of the early twentieth century, his complicated financial circumstances and his ambivalent relationship to the world of popular music.

Part V, 'Schoenberg's Others', locates Schoenberg in the wider musical world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, profiling his most important and influential precursors, pupils and peers, including

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Richard Wagner, Johannes Brahms, Alexander Zemlinsky, Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, Igor Stravinsky, Alban Berg and Anton Webern.

Part VI, 'Viennese Institutions', considers the context of early twentieth-century Vienna – its cafés, theatres, Freudian Zeitgeist and crumbling empire – and its profound influence on Schoenberg's music and thought.

Part VII, 'Performers and Critics', surveys the interpretation and dissemination of Schoenberg's music, from the sharply contrasting perceptions of performers and critics.

Finally, Part VIII, 'Ideas, Beliefs, and Interventions', offers a perspective on Schoenberg through the lens of some 'big ideas', including religion, philosophy, literature and technology.

...

I would like to express my gratitude to all of the contributors to *Schoenberg in Context*. My own bookshelves contain the works of many of the very fine scholars who appear in this volume, and I am honoured to be in their company. When I began contacting potential contributors, almost everyone immediately agreed to take part, which testifies not only to the generosity and enthusiasm of this special community of researchers and writers but also to the obvious quality and value of the Composers in Context series, which offers fascinating and varied perspectives on the great names in the western musical canon, bringing their lives, work and milieux into focus for a wider audience.

I am likewise grateful to Kate Brett, Abi Sears and the team at Cambridge University Press. Some time ago, after contacting Kate about something entirely different, I mentioned in passing how much I admired the Composers in Context series – I was reading *Mozart in Context* at the time – and I opined that Cambridge should publish *Schoenberg in Context* some day. Before I knew it, this had become my own project, and Kate's wisdom and guidance along the way ensured that it remained a labour of love from start to finish.

I am very thankful to the staff at the Arnold Schönberg Center (ASC) in Vienna – especially Eike Feß, Therese Muxeneder and Karin Nemec – for their ongoing collegiality, openness to this project and expert assistance. I would certainly not be a Schoenbergian today if not for the many fruitful hours spent at the ASC over the past twenty years. I would also like to thank Larry Schoenberg for his generosity and kindness, and Nuria Schoenberg-Nono for her willingness to be part of this project.

A number of institutions were gracious enough to give permission to include images of Schoenberg's painting and drawings in *Schoenberg in*

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Finally, I would like to thank my family – my wife, my children and my grandchildren – for their unwavering love, faith and support. I am sure that most of the time they regard my scholarly endeavours as arcana (which is fair enough), but they have always believed in me and have always understood and been patient while I was away on research trips for many weeks at a time, or while I spent countless hours reading, musing and writing in semi-seclusion. Everything I do is for them.

Abbreviations

ASC	Arnold Schönberg Center (Vienna).
ASL	Schoenberg, Arnold. <i>Letters</i> . Edited by Erwin Stein, translated by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser. London: Faber and Faber, 1987.
<i>Auner</i>	Auner, Joseph. <i>A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life</i> . New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.
<i>SI</i>	Schoenberg, Arnold. <i>Style and Idea</i> . Edited by Leonard Stein, translated by Leo Black. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
<i>Stuckenschmidt</i>	Stuckenschmidt, H. H. <i>Schoenberg: His Life, World, and Work</i> . New York: Schirmer Books, 1977.
<i>TH</i>	Schoenberg, Arnold. <i>Theory of Harmony</i> . Translated by Roy E. Carter. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.