OTHER BOOKS BY ARNOLD SCHOENBERG

Fundamentals of Musical Composition
Preliminary Exercises in Counterpoint
Arnold Schoenberg: Letters (edited by Erwin Stein)

STYLE AND IDEA
SELECTED WRITINGS OF
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his opponent to win), no mathematician would invent something new in mathematics just to flatter the masses who do not possess the specific mathematical way of thinking, and in the same manner, no artist, no poet, no philosopher and no musician whose thinking occurs in the highest sphere would degenerate into vulgarity in order to comply with a slogan such as 'Art for All'. Because if it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art.

Most deplorable is the acting of some artists who arrogantly wish to make believe that they descend from their heights in order to give some of their riches to the masses. This is hypocrisy. But there are a few composers, like Offenbach, Johann Strauss and Gershwin, whose feelings actually coincide with those of the 'average man in the street'. To them it is no masquerade to express popular feelings in popular terms. They are natural when they talk thus and about that.

He who really uses his brain for thinking can only be possessed of one desire: to resolve his task. He cannot let external conditions exert influence upon the results of his thinking. Two times two is four—whether one likes it or not.

One thinks only for the sake of one's idea. And thus art can only be created for its own sake. An idea is born; it must be moulded, formulated, developed, elaborated, carried through and pursued to its very end.

Because there is only 'Part pour l'art', art for the sake of art alone.

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In the best sellers of 150 or 200 years ago there frequently appeared a character—an old cavalier, generally no less than a marquis—whose extreme generosity perplexed and astounded both his fellow characters and the reading public of that day. Whether or not such a character ever really existed, the grandeur of his generosity was impressive. When he met with a slight accident—whether to himself, to his horse, or only to his equipage—he would reward the person who came to his rescue by throwing to him his whole purse, which, of course, contained nothing but gold pieces—small change his hands would not touch. On other occasions he might dispense a few handfuls of louris d'or among a crowd. Such was his generosity in minor accidents.

Imagine then what he might have done in case of a serious accident! He then might have taken the rescuer to his castle and either made him heir to his fortune and title, or offered him his sister in marriage. Even if she were not the most beautiful woman in the world, she was full of charm, and, besides, would have a respectable dowry!

At any rate, as a true nobleman he insisted on paying a price which surpassed the value of the service rendered, and he would have been ashamed to disappoint the faith of lower-class people in the generosity of the nobility. On the other hand, one must not forget that, fictitious or real, this nobleman was convinced of the inexhaustibility of his fortune, was convinced that he need not care what price he paid, and was only afraid to pay less than his social rank required.

What a man! What people! What times!

While the nobleman not only did not ask the price of what he bought, but rather, did not want to know it, we poor people are bound to know prices in advance. All the same, whether we buy a house, a pair of shoes, or an automobile—we must know their value and whether it justifies the price. We must know whether the house has the desired number of rooms, whether the neighbourhood is good, how high the taxes are, whether there is a chance of selling it without too great a loss after some years, and so forth. Similar questions will be asked about the shoes. They must fit, they should not be of an obsolete fashion, the material should be adequate, etc. We would also refuse to pay more for an automobile than it is worth, even if we possessed the money, because, of course, our revenues are not inexhaustible. Moreover, we hate to pay more for a thing than it is worth—if possible, we prefer to pay less. This is—on the average—human nature, and people of all ranks behave similarly. They love to pay less than it is worth.

If we justify such caution in the case of a house, a pair of shoes, and an automobile, merits or shortcomings of which are no secret and do not require the judgement of an expert, how much more is caution justified in the case of art objects, where criteria of evaluation are really only within the domain of the experts and where experts are as rare as a good judgement.
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True, the styles of houses, of shoes and of automobiles change, but at least, as they serve a definite purpose, their usability remains the same, and one who judges only that will not fail.

But style in art changes approximately every ten to fifteen years. And almost inevitably evaluation changes with style. One of the safest methods of acquiring attention is to do something which differs from the usual, and few artists have the stamina to escape this temptation. I must confess that I belonged to those who did not care much about originality. I used to say: 'I always attempted to produce something quite conventional, but I failed, and it always, against my will, became something unusual!' How right, then, is a music lover who refuses to appreciate music which even the composer did not want to write!

And is it unreasonable that one who commissions his portrait hates to look as an expressionist painter, whose idea is based on psychoanalysis, thinks it should look? Others, again, do not want to appear as victims of a candid camera's sincerity. It may be the morals, the philosophy, the political viewpoint of a writer to which you are opposed. It may be old-fashioned for an author to come personally to the foreground as Goethe did in Die Wanderjahre, when at a certain point he inserts a story without any coherence with the preceding, saying '...because we want to prove that we are not lacking in inventiveness'—the inventiveness to produce a nice little story. Strindberg would not have done this; perhaps Balzac would have, or perhaps Shaw—in one of his prefaces but not in the text.

One may wonder, if the great Goethe did it, can it be entirely wrong? And should such a procedure be entirely excluded from art? And, if so, only because it is old-fashioned? Or perhaps because 'to show inventiveness' is no proper reason for inclusion in a work of art, because there should appear only that which derives from and is related to the subject, at least indirectly?

But what if the continuation were to disclose the relation of this story with the subject?

There might still remain the objection to the manner in which it is introduced—in order to show inventiveness—which is one of the personal interests of an author, but should manifest itself silently. Then the reader, with enthusiastic admiration, might explain: 'What richness of imagination and inventiveness.'

It seems that the man in the street and other uninitiated people have still some access to the evaluation offered by the subject, or the object, or the story of works or literature, painting, sculpture, architecture and other arts. How in-

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adequate such viewpoints are can best be seen in the case of the great number of painters who have already been admitted into the Academy of Immortals: the El Grecos, the Van Goghs, the Gauguins, the Kandinskys, the Kokoschkas, the Matisses, the Picassos.

Since changes of style in the arts do not always mean development, it might be extremely difficult to establish criteria which remain valid in every period of art. But the futility of evaluation deriving from external criteria remains evident throughout the centuries.

At least a wrong evaluation can be based on superficial judgement in the aforementioned arts. No such thing is possible in music. There is no story, no subject, no object, no morality, no philosophy or politics which one might like or hate. Rejection of musical works in the last one and a half centuries has been based primarily on features which obstructed comprehensibility: too rich modulation, use of dissonances, complicated formulation of ideas. It was the time when towns were growing into cities, when the development of industrialism was bringing fresh but uninhibited people into the cities. It was the time when concert halls had to become larger and larger, because more people became participants in the audiences.

Before this time audiences had been small and had consisted solely of music lovers most of whom were able to play what they liked, many of whom had at least semi-professional knowledge, if not more. Their judgement was then to some degree based on terms which today only the experts are entitled to use—though also others do. Musicianship of such high degree enables recognition of evaluating criteria. Knowing music meant knowing it—at least partly—from memory. Many persons were able to remember a piece after a single hearing. Do not forget that Mozart wrote down the forbidden music of Allegri's Miserere after hearing it only once.

Yes, the role of memory in music evaluation is more important than most people realize. It is perhaps true that one starts to understand a piece only when one can remember it at least partially. But memory must be nursed and given an opportunity to function. Before the first World War I met a man who told me that he had seen The Merry Widow twenty times. And during the war, when I conducted Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, a man came into the artists' room to tell me that this was the fiftieth performance of the work he had heard from beginning to end. Imagine how well these people knew every note of their favourite music!
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One could not, of course, expect such capacities of freshly acquired devotees of the arts. While J. S. Bach was allowed to write music of a kind which in its real values only the expert is capable of understanding, very soon the composers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came to feel that their real independence had gone. Even a Beethoven, democratic as he was, must have felt it. But Mozart was told, after the first performance of his Don Giovanni in Vienna, by the Emperor Joseph II: 'This is no music for our Viennese.' 'No music for our Viennese?' At that time already it was not the highest quality of art Mozart should produce, but he was supposed to express himself as broadly as popular understanding required.

I would not contend that later composers consciously gave in to these popular demands for comprehensibility—demands which do not correspond entirely to the demands of higher art. But there is no doubt that much in Schubert's melodic construction—his juxtaposition of motives, which are only melodically varied, but rhythmically very similar—accommodated, probably instinctively, to the popular feeling. As a true child of his time, he reflected involuntarily the feeling of his contemporaries. Robert Schumann's style is a further proof of the same kind of accommodation; his extremely frequent repetitions of a rhythmic character indicate this.

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Accommodations to the popular demands became even more imperative when Wagner's evolution of harmony expanded into a revolution of form. While preceding composers and even his contemporary, Johannes Brahms, repeated phrases, motives and other structural ingredients of themes only in varied forms, if possible in the form of what I call developing variation, Wagner, in order to make his themes suitable for memorability, had to use sequences and semi-sequences, that is, unvaried or slightly varied repetitions differing in nothing essential from first appearances, except that they are exactly transposed to other degrees.

Ex. 2 Wagner Sequences

Why there is a lesser merit in such procedure than in variation is obvious, because variation requires a new and special effort. But the damage of this inferior method of construction to the art of composing was considerable. With very few exceptions, all followers and even opponents of Wagner became addicts of this more primitive technique: Bruckner, Hugo Wolf, Richard Strauss, and even Debussy and Puccini.

A new technique had to be created, and in this development Max Reger,
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Gustav Mahler, and also I myself played a role. But the destructive consequences did not cease because of that. And unfortunately many of today’s composers, instead of connecting ideas through developing variation, thus showing consequences derived from the basic idea and remaining within the boundaries of human thinking and its demands of logic, produce compositions which become longer and broader only by numerous unvaried repetitions of a few phrases.

I have made here the grave mistake of calling a criterion of compositional technique ‘destructive’ as if it were now proven for all time to come that such a procedure is worthless.

How can a house differ from every other house and express a definite architectural idea, if there is as little variety in its material—bricks—as there is in the unvaried repetitions of a phrase? Need it be disadvantageous to use motives, phrases, and other units in a manner as uninfluential on the final form as bricks on a building?

Could it be the case of Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony be considered as one where harmonies are comparable to bricks, because harmonies of only one kind are used? It was very surprising to me, when, listening to the radio recently, I discovered—and later found confirmed in the score—that in the first three movements Beethoven uses almost no minor chords, except in a very small number of cases, when it is impossible, with respect to the natural laws of harmony, to omit minor triads. Even then he uses an escape by leaving many sections in unison, unaccompanied, when the melody is understandable without harmony. Here the intention is clear: in Beethoven’s musical vocabulary a minor chord expresses sadness. But he wanted to picture the awakening of gay feelings on the arrival in the country!

I am ready to forget this hypothesis in favour of a different one, the result of a changed standpoint in regard to evaluation. At the beginning of my career, still under the influence of post-Wagnerianism, I wrote sequences like my contemporaries. This seemed justified to me by the model of all great preceding composers: Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Wagner and even Brahms, who did not avoid true sequences or slightly varied repetitions. Moreover, since a young composer in this period was intent not only on illustrating the mood and all of its changes, but also on describing every bit of action, a special formulation, the Leitmotiv, seemed obligatory. The Leitmotiv, usually a small phrase, did not consume much space because development, opposition of varied phrases, caden-

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tial limitations and other establishing technical requirements, which demanded the space of eight to sixteen measures, became superfluous. A phrase of two measures followed by a sequence ordinarily required a liquidating addition of one or two measures. Thus a little independent segment could be produced which also did not require an elaborate continuation, and was, so to speak, open on all four sides. Properly employed, an aesthetic merit is gained by using no more space than the ideas demand, and this is why this technique rather proved a stimulant to the Neudeutsche Schule.

It was the Brahman school which at this time fought violently against the sequences of the Neudeutsche Schule. Their attitude was based on the opposite viewpoint that unvaried repetition is cheap. And, in fact, to many composers sequences were a technique to make short stories long—to make out of four measures eight and out of eight measures sixteen or even thirty-two. It is especially the Russian composers, Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky, who must be blamed for this improper application of an otherwise acceptable technique. And it could have happened that this misuse might have eradicated every higher technical ambition.

Much depends upon the viewpoint whether criteria are judged as merits or as shortcomings. When Schumann speaks of the ‘heavenly length’ of Schubert’s music, one might be led to consider length, heavenly or earthly, a merit. But one is disappointed to learn that Hanslick, Wagner’s opponent, blames Bruckner for the length of his symphonies. When Brahms demanded that one hand of the pianist played two or fours while the other played threes, people disliked this and said it made them seasick. But this was probably the start of the polyrhythmic structure of many contemporary scores. There can be no doubt that those who called Mozart’s String Quartet in C major the ‘Dissonance-Quartet’ intended merely a characterization, just as they called another quartet the ‘Drum-Quartet’ and still another the ‘Hunting-Quartet’. It is perhaps no merit to include drums in a string quartet or to describe hunting pleasures. And it does not contribute a thing to their evaluation.

Certainly calling it the ‘Dissonance’ quartet includes a criticism on which an evaluation can be partly based. My own experience proves this. A Viennese society refused the first performance of my String Sextet, Verrührte Nachts, because of the ‘revolutionary’ use of one—that is one single uncatalogued dissonance.

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The expert is in no position to forget what his education has taught him. His code of honour which, for instance, forbids some dissonances, but tolerates composition more highly only if its themes and melodies are significantly formulated if they are interesting enough to hold the attention of a so not to offend musical logic; if they are well connected in size; if monotony is avoided by good contrasts; if all ideas, however, relative to problems of style: Is the time-space adequate for the importance or the unideas in space by adequate proportions as well as in emphasis, so as always to be fied? Is it admissible because of the number of ideas, because of their incapable brief and as condensed a manner as possible! Does the profundity of the real meaning interfere with the elegance of the to the medium, and vice-versa? Are heroic themes ascribed to unheroic instr-passionate emotions adequate for a symphony? Is an instrument as immobile as stylized tonally and technically to fit the nature of the instruments, as the calls of the nightingale, quail and cuckoo in the Pastoral Symphony are suited to the

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flute, oboe and clarinet respectively? Is the descriptive element incorporated formally and motivally within the basic conditions of the piece? Are states or situations illustrated whose nature is opposed to that of music—as, for instance, expressing repose by slight movement, or silence by sounds, or abstract philosophy by concrete tones? Does the piece elaborate its ideas and material in a technique appropriate to its style? Are contrapuntal ideas accompanied in a quasi-contrapuntal manner, scarcely producing more than a harmonization? Is the natural phrasing of a homophonic melody confused by the addition of sophisticated counter-melodies, as often happens in popular music? Are dissonances which are not inherent in the tonal content added to simple folk-tunes?

Nor could the expert renounce an examination of the value of the thematic material. He would also have to question the inventiveness of a composer. Was he able to bring forth as much variety as unity and comprehensibility will tolerate and the stimulation of interest demands? Was he able to prove the necessity of the work—that it was forced upon him by an inner urge for creation? Has he been able to produce something which fills a gap in the knowledge and culture of mankind, or, if not that, which at least satisfies a desire for entertainment? In other words, does his product, through novelty, prove to be a desirable contribution? Is this novelty one of essential or subordinate qualities? If derived from essentials, is it of a nature like Beethoven’s dramatization of the elaboration, or comparable to the novelty of the structural, emotional descriptive qualities of Schubert’s songs? Or is it like Wagner’s entirely new way of building, expressing, harmonizing and orchestrating, thus revolutionizing music in all its aspects?

Has this novelty been produced through a new personality rather than through revolutionary change, through evolutionary developments rather than through frightening outbursts? Did this novelty come from a personality comparable to a Mendelssohn, a Schumann, a Gunder, a Debussy, etc.—artists whose ambition was not that of the reformer, though their originality was rich and distinct enough?

Though originality is inseparable from personality, there exists also a kind of originality which does not derive from profound personality. Products of such artists are often distinguished by a unique appearance which resembles true originality. Certainly there was inventiveness at work when the striking changes of some subordinate elements were accomplished for the first time. Subsequently, used consciously, they achieved an aspect of novelty not derived profoundly from
basic ideas. This is mannerism, not originality. The difference is that mannerism is originality in subordinate matters.

There are many, and even respectable, artists whose success and reputation are based on this minor kind of originality. Unfortunately, the tendency to arouse interest by technical peculiarities, which are simply added to the nothingness of an idea, is now more frequent than it was in former times. The moral air of such products is rather for success and publicity than for enriching mankind's thoughts.

Some values derive from causes or reasons to which influence on creation should not be credited. Creation to an artist should be as natural and inescapable as the growth of apples to an apple tree. Even if it tried to produce apples in response to the demands of a fashion or of the market, it could not. Thus artists who want to 'go back to a period' or who try to obey the laws of an obsolete aesthetic or of a novel one, who enjoy themselves in eclecticism or in the imitation of a style, alienate themselves from nature. The product shows it—no such product survives its time.

There is no essential difference between the criteria of this type of music and the aforementioned. Popular music speaks to the unsophisticated, to people who love the beauty of music but are not inclined to strengthen their minds. But what they like is not triviality or vulgarity or unoriginality, but a more comprehensible way of presentation. People who have not acquired the ability of drawing all the consequences of a problem at once must be treated with respect to their mental capacities; rapid solutions, leaps from assumptions to conclusions would endanger popularity.

This does not mean that in popular music such melodies, rhythms and harmonies as one might expect in higher music must necessarily be excluded. Of course, no such structural problems, no such developments and elaborations as one finds, for example, in Brahms' symphonies, no such contrapuntal combinations like those of Bach can be the object of a popular composer. Nevertheless, listening to popular American music, one is often surprised at what these composers venture with respect to traditional standards. However, for the sake of the popular understanding manifold repetitions, the application of only slight variations and well-employed, even if only conventional, connectives are provided.

It seems that friends of popular music have their own code for the evaluation of what they like or dislike. It is not obvious whether a technical or theoretical knowledge is required; probably instinct serves as judge. Certainly a well-functioning instinct can offer a basis for correct judgment.

But most of the aforementioned criteria for the evaluation of higher music are accessible only to the expert, and many of them to only to highly competent experts.

Though there is no doubt that every creator creates only to free himself from the high pressures of the urge to create, and though he thus creates in the first place for his own pleasure, every artist who delivers his works to the general public aims, at least unconsciously, to tell his audiences something of value to them.

Ambition or the desire for money stimulates creation only in the lower ranks of artists. 'Money! How can you expect to be paid for something which gives you so much pleasure?'

From the lives of truly great men it can be deduced that the urge for creation responds to an instinctive feeling of living only in order to deliver a message to mankind.

Just as obvious as that music is not created to please, is the fact that music does please; that it has an undeniably great appeal to people who 'know naught of the tablature'—who do not know the rules of the game.

On the other hand, to depend on the expert—and on those who usurp the role of expert—may prove disastrous. Wagner in his Beckmesser portrayed one such living expert who knew all of the tablature but failed miserably in applying his knowledge to 'what does not with your rules agree.' And when Hans Sachs confides more in those who 'know naught of the tablature', his confidence is justified.

It is a well known fact that already in the culture of even primordial peoples music's mysterious appeal to men adorns worship of the divinity, to sanctify cultish acts. With primitive peoples it is perhaps even rhythm or sound alone which casts enchantment. But even the culturally high-ranking Greeks ascribed mysterious effects to simple successions of tones, such as expressing virtues and their contrary. The Gregorian Chant does not profit as much from the meaning of the words as does the Protestant chorale; it lives on music alone.

Considering these facts, one might wonder whether the subsequent higher art forms were indispensable for religious ceremony. Whether or not art of a primitive or higher kind enhances the enchanting effect of music, one conclusion seems inescapable: there is a mystery.
My personal feeling is that music conveys a prophetic message revealing a higher form of life towards which mankind evolves. And it is because of this message that music appeals to men of all races and cultures.

Searching for criteria for the evaluation of music, it seems dangerous to ascribe this mysterious influence to all kinds of music regardless of their standard and value. It would be dangerous to admit that one who is a lover of music and sensitive to its charms has acquired the right and capacity to judge its values. How dangerous the consequences of such conclusions can be was recently proved.

The results of the voting for the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts did not include among the six chosen operas Pelleas, a Magic Flute, a Marriage of Figaro, a Mastersinger, an Eugene Onegin, a Fie Diavolo, a Barber of Seville, etc. DEMOCRATIC as it is, there is one decisive mistake in such voting. Not going so far as to offer only one candidate, political parties would not go so far as to offer forty-six candidates—the number of operas offered. In practical politics the choice of candidates is made by the leaders. This is perhaps similar to Schopenhauer’s demand that the evaluation of works of art can only be based on authority. Unfortunately he does not say who bestows authority nor how one can acquire it; nor whether it will remain uncontested, and what will happen if such an authority makes mistakes. Mistakes like his own, when he, disregarding Beethoven and Mozart, called Bellini’s Norma the greatest opera.

My accusation of Schopenhauer may be excused by offering myself to the same condemnation: I confess to be guilty of similar crimes. For a long time I had scorned the music of Gustav Mahler before learning to understand and admire it. I once said: ‘If what Roger Wotman is counterpoint, then mine is not.’ I was wrong—both were.

On the other hand, in favour of Sibelius and Shostakovich, I said something which did not require the knowledge of an expert. Every amateur, every music lover could have said: ‘I feel they have the breath of symphonists.’

Experts are also human—but this is not the fault of us composers!